

GUY ADAMS

EVIL IS
CLOSER THAN
YOU THINK...

hands of the
ripper

HAMMER

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About the Book

He is raising the poker again and Anna bites her lower lip so hard she chokes a little in the blood that runs down her throat...

On a cold, wet night recently widowed psychology lecturer John Pritchard visits spiritualist Aida Golding with his son. Although wary something has driven him here. And he is drawn to a troubled young woman who is trying to contact her child. Something about her intrigues him and despite his doubts he continues to attend meetings.

One night at an intimate séance in Aida's house the lights go out and one of the group is brutally murdered. John has his suspicions but he can't prove anything. He senses that Aida has some hold over the girl and he offers her a place of refuge in his home. But the past haunts Anna in the most chilling of ways. And all too soon John realises he's made a terrible mistake...

About the Author

'Guy Adams is either barking mad or a genius, I haven't decided.' Mark Chadbourn

The author of the novels *The World House* and its sequel *Restoration*, Guy Adams gave up acting five years ago to become a full-time writer. This was silly, but thankfully he's kept busy, writing bestselling humour titles based on TV show *Life on Mars* or *Torchwood* novels *The House That Jack Built* and *The Men Who Sold The World*.

He has also written a pair of original Sherlock Holmes novels, *The Breath of God* and *The Army of Doctor Moreau* as well as a biography of actor Leonard Rossiter and an updated version of Neil Gaiman's *Don't Panic: Douglas Adams & The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and *Kronos*, a novelisation of the classic Hammer film, *Captain Kronos Vampire Hunter*.

His website is: www.guyadamsauthor.com

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HAMMER

AN EXCLUSIVE MIRA JOURNAL

Foreword

YOU GET THE impression the story is set around 1901, shortly after the death of Queen Victoria. More to the point, about 13 years after the hideous Whitechapel murders popularly ascribed to Jack the Ripper.

The protagonists are Dr John Pritchard, a well-heeled London psychiatrist, and a mentally disturbed 17-year-old orphan called Anna. With Pritchard taking Anna under his wing and making every effort to mould her into a well-adjusted young woman, it's hard to resist the idea that *Hands of the Ripper* is Hammer Film Productions' blood-spattered take on the Bernard Shaw play *Pygmalion*.

It was an ingenious notion, replacing Shaw's capricious phoneticist with a stiff-backed psychiatrist and his Cockney flower girl with a tragically conflicted teenage murderess. And it resulted - thanks, in large part, to moving performances from Eric Porter and Angharad Rees, plus a rhapsodic score by Christopher Gunning - in a film that is as much a warped weepie as a gruesome body-count thriller. But where did that ingenious notion originate?

Sadly, the genesis of *Hands of the Ripper* survives only sketchily in Hammer's records. The first reference to the project is in September 1970, when company minutes merely record the title and the name of the proposed screenwriter - Spencer Shew. The next reference is in December, when Peter Sasdy is hired as director. Then,

before you know it, it's January 1971 and the film is actually in production at Pinewood.

But, on release in October, the film disclosed an interesting detail in its opening credits. For the screen play was attributed to television writer L W (Lewis) Davidson, 'from an original story by Edward Spencer Shew'. Then, to muddy the waters yet further, Sphere Books brought out a 'novelisation' by Shew himself, gaudily decorated with a front-cover photo of Porter discovering Marjie Lawrence lying very dead in a blood-filled bathtub.

I use inverted commas around the word 'novelisation' because it's by no means clear that that's what the book actually was. For Shew's version differs from the film in many fundamental ways, suggesting that it may have been an as-yet-unpublished novel when submitted to Hammer, or perhaps even an epic-length 'treatment'. Pritchard, for a start, isn't a psychiatrist; he's a physiologist. (And he's Sir Giles, not plain Dr John.) What's more, the story is set in 1888 and deals in quite a lot of circumstantial detail with the Ripper murders themselves. In other words, Anna is not Jack the Ripper's daughter, struggling with her inherited homicidal compulsions. She actually *is* Jack the Ripper.

Clearly, then, profound changes were made in translating Shew's 'treatment' to the screen, and it has to be said that most of them were for the better. Shew's prose is often quirkily diverting, and his story certainly contains the germ of the *Pygmalion* parody referred to above. But the novel's credibility is severely compromised by the fact that Anna is possessed by not one, but two, departed souls.

One of them is Franz Liszt, no less, making Anna something of a piano prodigy. The other is a notional serial killer who terrorised Liverpool back in the 1820s, a murder spree reproduced in London by Anna. The book, therefore, is divided into two sections - 'Hands Beneficent' and 'Hands Malevolent'. Maybe Hammer were worried about the Shew version's similarity to Maurice Renard's classic

1920 novel *The Hands of Orlac*, which had already been filmed three times.

Shew was for many years a crime correspondent for the *Daily Express*, and was also the author of two highly regarded true crime collections published in the early 1960s. Among other things, these books revealed his uninhibited approach to subtitles. The first, *A Companion to Murder*, was subtitled so: 'A Dictionary of Death by Poison, Death by Shooting, Death by Suffocation and Drowning, Death by the Strangler's Hand 1900-1950.'

That should be quite enough to be going on with, you might think, but Shew was only getting started. For the next volume, *A Second Companion to Murder*, he really went for broke with a truly staggering litany: 'A Dictionary of Death by the Knife, the Dagger, the Razor, the Axe, the Chopper, the Chisel; Death by the Iron File, the Marline Spike, the Hammer, the Poker, the Bottle; Death by the Jemmy, the Spanner, the Tyre Lever, the Iron Bar, the Starting Handle; Death by the Sandbag, the Sash Weight, the Mallet, the Half-Brick, the Stick, the Stone; Death by the Fire Tongs, the Butt End of a Revolver, the Metal Chair, etc. 1900-1950.' Commendably, Shew's publishers managed to squeeze this astounding recital, not just onto the title page, but even onto the front cover.

Shew, then, was intrigued by the more imaginative, not to say baroque, forms of murder, which makes his version of *Hands of the Ripper* all the more surprising. For, ghastly though the real Ripper's murders were, they featured none of the startling variations in weaponry so scrupulously catalogued in Shew's subtitles. Oddly enough, the killings in the film version of *Hands of the Ripper* are much more in Shew's outré line, picking up the murderous poker specified in Shew's list but adding such nasty innovations as a pair of lorgnettes, a handful of hat-pins, and a truly novel conjunction of a broken hand-mirror and a full-length cheval glass.

And now, four decades later, *Hands of the Ripper* has been given a new and exciting makeover by the estimable Guy Adams. Radical, too. Apart from any thing else, the story is updated to the present day - which, of course, brings with it a whole new Ripper. It just goes to show that Spencer Shew got hold, however shakily, of a truly durable idea all those years ago. To see how that idea works out in the 21st century, just read on...

Jonathan Rigby

Jonathan Rigby is the author of *English Gothic: A Century of Horror Cinema*, *American Gothic: Sixty Years of Horror Cinema* and *Studies in Terror: Landmarks of Horror Cinema*.

Prologue

An Overture of Night Music

FIRELIGHT GLITTERS LIKE exploding stars against the metal bars of her cot. Anna extends a finger, trying to catch the light and own it. It escapes her but she laughs anyway.

The shouting of her parents seems to come from far away when she focuses on the light. As if it's not in the same room at all. As if it comes from somewhere so perfectly elsewhere that it could never possibly harm her.

Sometimes the cot feels like a cage. She has outgrown it now but Daddy likes her to be kept inside it when he is home. It makes her think of the pictures of the lions and tigers that she sees in the picture books Mummy lets her read. One day, she thinks, she may even roar like them. She may even roar as loud as Daddy.

He is roaring now, burning as brightly as the fire in the grate.

No, she thinks, not quite. And returns her gaze to the sparkle on the cot bars.

She doesn't see the first spray of blood that spits against the cheap wallpaper. She only becomes aware that Mummy's broken when she drops to her knees in front of the cot, a bloody, cupped palm held to her face. This is not unusual. Daddy often has to help both of them shut their mouths. Daddy is clever like that; he knows how to make silence happen. He also knows how to make the world fill with noise. It's the latter he seems to be doing now because

it's not just Mummy's screaming that threatens to tear her attention away from the glittering beauty of the firelight. There is the building sound of sirens, 'Night Music' her daddy often calls it as he looks out of the window and watches the police cars and fire engines as they drive past.

'The natives are getting restless,' he'd often say, 'the jungle is alive with them!'

Anna is sometimes confused by this. She has seen pictures of jungle and it doesn't look like the grey concrete world outside their front door. The jungle is a wild place, full of colour and brilliant, beautiful animals.

Mummy is holding up her hands, showing Daddy that she understands, showing him that she will be quiet now. Her words come jumbled up with bubbles, because her nose is bleeding so badly. Like the Little Mermaid singing under the sea. Daddy's not sure he believes Mummy's promises, Anna can tell, he's pacing up and down, circling Mummy like ...

(A tiger in the jungle?)

The Night Music is getting louder and it seems to be driving Daddy mad. Normally he likes the noise it makes, sings along with it in front of the window, howling at the glass. Tonight it makes him twitch and shout. He is scratching at himself, tearing at his shirt as if he is covered in small insects. He reminds Anna of the cat they had for a short while, the way it used to scratch, kicking at itself with its hind leg. Daddy didn't like it doing that, that's why he made it go away.

Daddy walks over to the fireplace and reaches for the poker. Anna is pleased, she thinks that he is going to make the fire burn even brighter now, make the light dance more brilliantly than ever before. He is not. For Daddy, the fire has never burned brighter.

He carries the poker over to Mummy and beats at her with it. Perhaps she is full of coals, thinks Anna, perhaps she needs to be made better, encouraged into heat. It

doesn't seem to be working. It's making her cry out again and Anna knows that is never a good idea and wishes she could tell her mummy to shut up as she'll only make Daddy angry with all that noise. But Anna doesn't say a word, Anna just wants to be invisible behind the bars of her cot. She watches the fire, choosing its warm orange over Mummy's deep red. She listens to the crackling of the flames rather than the pop and brittle snap of Mummy as Daddy hits her again and again with the poker.

The Night Music is almost deafening now. Anna thinks that Daddy may have brought it to their home by his singing, for she can hear the sound of feet on the stairs, then fists on the door. The noise scares her at first but then, out of the corner of her eye, she notices that Daddy has stopped beating Mummy and that scares her more. Daddy doesn't look quite empty yet. He has that, quivering, excited look of a man who still has lessons to give. Anna knows that look and usually it means that it's her turn.

Someone is shouting outside the door but Anna can't hear the words, she's too busy staring at her daddy. Watching as he lifts the poker (which is dripping on the carpet and if it stains, oh dear, that will only make him angrier still).

'Daddy?' she asks, because she's never seen him look this angry and she is scared. Scared that she won't be able to please him, scared that she won't be able to say the right things to make him stop. He doesn't look like he's even in the same room, painted red, eyes empty, he is walking towards her but is so removed that she doesn't think she will be able to stop him doing anything.

The banging on the front door gets heavier. Anna thinks that if they hit the wood any harder they'll break it and then what will Daddy say? She stares at the firelight on the bars of her cot, tries to fill her head with that and nothing else. But then she sees her father reflected in the metal, stretched thin, like a smear of red paint. He is raising the

poker again and Anna bites her lower lip so hard she chokes a little in the blood that runs down her throat.

The door bursts open.

One

In the Rain with the Dead

JOHN PRITCHARD LOOKED into his son's eyes and tried to ignore what he saw in them. There is nothing more embarrassing than being pitied by one's child.

'I know, I know,' he insisted, 'the whole thing's a con. Still, you've got to admit it could be interesting.'

'A bunch of OAPs trying to chat to the gaps in their address book? Fascinating.'

Michael Pritchard stirred his tea, encouraging it to cool down. Always in such a hurry, thought his father.

'These things aren't like that,' John said, 'they're all white teeth and peroxide highlights these days. Talking to the dead is a glamorous business.'

'I doubt Derek Acorah makes many public appearances round here,' observed Michael, looking down his nose at the dreary terraced houses through the rain-streaked window. 'This place isn't exactly the Ivy, is it?'

John had to defer to his son's opinion, never having set foot inside the place. The small cafe they were sat in had an atmosphere as insipid as their teas. The surly Greek man behind the counter seemed to have begrudged them even that. He belonged to that select group within the service industry that has realised that all would be fine if only the customers could just be removed from the equation. In his hands he wound a tea towel like a Thuggee scarf. The tea towel had once been printed with the Welsh flag, now the

dragon was hidden beneath brown stains and every now and then the man used it to whip at his Formica counter. Perhaps, thought John, the fixtures got unruly unless he kept them on a tight leash.

'It has a charm,' he said.

'No,' Michael replied, 'it really doesn't.' He took a sip of his tea and the expression he wore on his face indicated that he regretted it. He checked his watch.

'What time is it?' his father asked.

'Ten past, still another twenty minutes.'

'Sorry, shouldn't have got here so early, you have better things to do ...'

This was true but Michael was sensitive enough to deny it. 'Who was to know? We could have spent hours looking for the place.'

'We'd have been better getting a taxi, it's just habit ...'

'We'll get a cab back, doesn't matter.'

This pitter-patter of politeness and muted affection was mirrored by the rain outside and their conversation faltered as both watched a woman with pram and shopping bags struggle through the pool of light shed from the cafe window. The bemused face of a toddler was pressed against the plastic rain cover of the pram, like vacuum-packed meat from a supermarket fridge. Somewhere there was the hiss of a bus's hydraulic doors and a giggling group of teenage girls moved past, having been discharged out into the inhospitable night. One of them turned towards the window and pulled a face.

'What you looking at?' she shouted, stumbling as if unable to walk in a straight line while being watched by strangers.

There was a brittle flutter of laughter before they were swallowed by the dark. The pool of light in front of the two men was once again empty.

Michael took another sip of tea, having not quite learned his lesson.

There was the slosh of a car carving its way through the dirty water in the road.

'What time is it now?' asked John.

Michael sighed and checked. 'Quarter past.'

'Christ, time moves slower in Bowes Park.'

'That's Enfield Council for you.'

John smiled, trying to pretend his state of mind was nothing other than casual amusement.

His son knew him better but let it pass. 'Where did you say Ray heard about this woman?' he asked.

Ray was the IT technician at St. Ludovic's, the university where John lectured. He in psychology. Ray haunted the outside spaces of the campus, even during the hours he was supposed to be off-shift, a stolid, doughy figure trailing cotton-thin lines of smoke from perpetual roll-up cigarettes.

'She's the shit,' he had announced to John a couple of days earlier, passing him a piece of paper, 'the veritable bollocks.'

'You don't sound like a student,' John told him, with a gentle smile, 'your vernacular is as contrived as a dad at a disco.'

'They're not called discos,' Ray replied, 'not for decades, old man.'

'I am old,' John admitted, unfolding the paper with one hand and putting on his reading glasses with the other. 'So are you, getting older with each word, in fact. What is this?'

The flyer was cheaply produced, a childish drawing of stars interspersed with squiggles that John eventually deciphered as astrological symbols. In the midst of this scattershot attempt at artistry was a chunk of text in comic sans font: 'Death is Not the End' it insisted. 'Let Aida "Granny" Golding Show You!'

'Got it from one of the students,' said Ray.

'Not an English major, I hope, not with that many capitals.'

'No, the student didn't make it,' explained Ray, 'he just passed it on. That guy that thinks he's attending Woodstock.'

'That could be the entire student body.'

'No, you know him, long hair, all beiges and browns, stinks of pot and poor taste.'

John knew immediately who Ray meant. 'Shaun Vedder.'

'Shaun Vedder. He picked it up when he was doing interviews for some coursework. One of those pitiful wastes of time you old fools like to set them. Anything to get them out from under your feet.'

'That's it exactly. We care not one jot for their education.' John looked at the flyer again. 'And why are you giving it to me?'

'Because I know you're interested in that sort of thing and, by all accounts, she's good at what she does.'

'Talking to the dead?'

'Well, I wouldn't know about that, but according to young Vedder people make a fuss over her. She's an open secret, the real thing, not like all these showy gits on cable telly, a proper medium working out of North London. So whatever it is she's doing she's doing it right.'

'You can tell by the quality of her advertising.'

'All part of it though, ain't it? She's paranormal retro chic!'

'She's a dab hand with a pack of crayons, for sure.'

And with that he shoved the piece of paper away in his pocket where it would have stayed were it not for the fact that he couldn't stop dreaming about Jane. And not just dreaming ...

'He got it from one of the students,' he said to Michael, aware that his mind had been wandering. 'They picked it up as part of the parapsychology coursework.'

'They do parapsychology?'

'It's best to get it out of their systems early on. Once we have thoroughly denied the existence of spooks we can

move on to why people like to believe otherwise.'

'And have you moved on?'

John smiled and finished his tea.

'How's Laura?' John asked as they made their way out into the rain. Enquiring after his son's girlfriend was the surest way he knew to get the conversation back on track.

'She's fine. In fact, we're thinking of getting a place together.'

'Oh yes?' This was good news, something happy to focus on as they made their way along the pavement. The rain had filled the irregular surface, forcing them to step over puddles like children playing hopscotch. *One, two, buckle my shoe*, rattled around John's head as he listened to his son list the benefits of cohabiting with the woman he loved.

'Of course,' said Michael, 'there's a part of Laura that would prefer to remain where she is. I mean, she knows her house. You should see her move around it, you'd never know ...'

You'd never know she was blind, John thought, silently finishing his son's sentence. Michael didn't like to describe Laura in potentially negative terms, didn't like to put anything into words that might define her as being different from anyone else. Partly this was down to Laura herself, blind since very young she refused either sympathy or concession.

'I can't imagine Laura being afraid to learn her way around somewhere new,' John said, 'in fact I can't imagine her being afraid of anything much.'

Michael smiled. 'True enough.'

They came to a junction and ahead of them, bathed in the sickly orange of a large security light, was the Queen's Road Community Centre.

'And lo, the Albert Hall,' said Michael, wiping water from his face as they waited for a break in the traffic so they could cross.

A lorry cut its way through the semi-flooded road, an emission-blackened teddy bear strapped to its radiator like soggy road kill. Father and son had to step back to avoid a soaking. The lorry had no more knowledge of them as it sailed away into the dark than a whale might in an ocean of little fish.

'Much more of this,' John said, 'and I'll need a medium to talk to you let alone ...' The joke soured in his mouth, bravado turned to painful awkwardness.

'Let alone Mum,' said Michael. 'Yeah ... Let's not discuss that, all right?'

'I miss her just as much as you do,' out loud it sounded like one-upmanship, and he hadn't meant it to. Michael knew how much he had loved Jane.

They caught their break in the traffic and ran across the wet road, kicking up great splashes as they landed on the waterlogged safety of the other pavement. Neither of them stopped running, taking outrageous leaps across the puddles in the community centre car park until they finally found the shelter of the covered porch.

'No need to run,' said an old man smoking in the doorway, 'the dead aren't going anywhere.' He sliced off the hot tip of his roll-up using a long and yellow thumbnail and put the remains in the pocket of his jacket to finish off later. Giving himself a nod of pride at a job well done he shuffled inside the hall, leaving a trail of muddy footprints, like dance instructions, in his wake.

'Two is it?' asked a young man sat behind a fold-out table. He flexed a book of pink raffle tickets in his hands as if warming them up.

'Yes please.' John had his wallet ready, the least he could do was cover the price of Michael's ticket, then at least it need cost him only his time.

'That'll be twenty pounds please,' said the young man, rather defensively as if anticipating an argument over price. Perhaps it was the disapproving look on Michael's

face, he wasn't one to hide his feelings and he sighed as his father paid. He gets that from his mother, John thought, she was never shy about showing displeasure either. Many was the rude waiter or belligerent telemarketer that had discovered that for themselves over the years.

'Sit wherever you like,' said the young man, giving his raffle tickets another vicious throttling. 'But stick to the cardboard.'

John wondered what the man was talking about but as they passed into the main hall it soon became obvious: flattened cardboard boxes had been laid out as impromptu matting to soak up the wet from people's feet. There was also a leaking roof to contend with. Dotted throughout were chains of water droplets, dripping musically into strategically placed saucepans. The effect was that of an enthusiastic, if tone deaf, orchestra of children with toy drums.

'Charming,' said Michael as they filed along a row of plastic chairs near the back. They sat down and waited for the evening's demonstration to begin.

The hall was half full, with more and more coming in as the start time approached. One by one they ambled in, shaking off the rainwater and then making their way to a seat, taking stretched steps from one patch of cardboard to the next, reminding John of children playing pirates.

'Have you seen her before, dear?' asked an elderly lady to John's right. She had that flatulent smugness that ladies of a certain age were prone to, inflating her face and nodding at every opportunity for proving herself right in conversation.

'No,' John admitted, 'though I hear she's good.'

'None better, if you ask me.' She gestured vaguely around the hall. 'Most of this lot follow her around, seeing most of the demonstrations. Never been here before. Mind you,' she glanced at a nearby saucepan of rainwater, 'I dare say I won't come again either.'

'The weather is particularly bad, there's flooding in some parts of the country according to the news.'

'That's as maybe but you've got to have some standards. We like it when she does Islington, they have a better class of hall in Islington.'

'We?'

'My dear Henry,' she waved at the air as if to disengage a cobweb from her cheek. 'He doesn't just turn up at any old venue, don't imagine he'll lower himself to attending this place.'

It took John a moment to realise Henry was dead. 'He was your ...?'

'Husband,' she replied with some force perhaps to rebuke the suggestion that their relationship might have been lacking in any Christian formality. 'Passed these four years now. Not that I have had a chance to miss him. I speak to him more now than I did when he was alive. You needed a loudhailer and a sharp stick to get him to the dinner table before the cancer had him; I barely get a moment's peace these days. Rattling the door handles, setting the light fittings swinging ... then there's Islington, of course, Henry does love the hall at Islington.'

John risked a glance towards his son but Michael was either ignoring the conversation or distracted by his own thoughts, staring at the stage and tapping at his lower lip with his forefinger.

'There's another one,' said Henry's widow, regaining John's attention.

'Another one?'

She nodded towards a young woman sitting down two rows in front of them. 'Always turns up,' she explained, 'cot death.'

John couldn't think what he would want to say to that, but the elderly woman was happy to fill the silence. 'Always gets a message too,' she continued, puffing up her cheeks as if holding in her words, but there was no such luck. 'I'm

at a loss as to how. I mean, it was only a baby. She should get on with her life. Girls today are far too sensitive. Mind you, this lot laps it up.'

The fact that she considered herself somehow apart from the rest of the audience hardly surprised John, her kind never felt any other way.

'I'm sure she appreciates the comfort,' he said, watching as the young girl tugged at her cheap skirt and tried to get comfortable on the flat plastic seat. He realised he was staring when his elderly companion spoke again. 'I suppose the men like her too,' she said, giving him a look of disapproval, 'she's that type.'

John couldn't help but wonder what type that was supposed to be. Attractive? She was certainly that but his attention had been drawn by something else. She reminded him of his wife. It wasn't anything so simple as looks. True, they were both blond but otherwise there could be little to compare them. Jane had been tall, perpetually thin - though never so horrifyingly skin and bone as she appeared to him now, whenever he imagined catching sight of her, as if the tumour had continued to do its worst even into the afterlife. This girl was of an average height and slightly chubby. He couldn't call her fat - even had he been insensitive enough to do so - but she had the sort of overall thickness that some people are born with, as if their whole body is wrapped in an extra layer. The similarities were in her mannerisms more than her appearance, he decided, the way she shifted in her seat, constantly looking around. A slightly childish impatience. Jane had never been able to bear waiting for things, to the point where she had always been late for appointments rather than endure it. That quirk had driven him up the wall when she had been alive but seemed charming now she was gone. We forgive the dead everything. There was something else too, he decided, something so elusive as to be beyond him. Like a face in a

crowd that triggers recognition. Something about this girl was all too familiar.

The lights were turned off to a gentle discomfited murmur from the audience. John supposed this was intended to replicate the dimming of theatre lights. As it was, from the snatches of conversation around him, most people seemed convinced the rain had blown the fuse. A single spotlight proved them wrong, pointing at the centre of the small stage where the young man who had been selling tickets could just be seen escaping after having placed a chair there.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' the young man announced into a radio mic, 'please welcome the incomparable abilities of Mrs Aida Golding.'

There was warm applause and out of the corner of his eye John saw Michael shake his head.

'Like bad theatre,' the young man mumbled and John found he couldn't disagree. Events like this would always fall victim to their practitioners' innate inability to play things 'straight'. Any hint of the theatrical and the verisimilitude took a pounding. At least the medium herself was a step in the right direction. She was the very epitome of the homely grandmother, wrapped up in an old-fashioned combination of tweed skirt and woollen pullover that made her look about ten years older than she probably was.

'Good evening, my loves,' she said, her voice as twee as her costume, 'thank you for coming out on this inhospitable night. Over the next hour or so let's see if we can't banish the weather with the warmth of our hearts.'

John didn't have to check whether his son squirmed at that sentiment, he knew him well enough.

'We don't need to worry what the skies throw at us,' she continued, 'we're strong enough to face the worst of it, aren't we?'

There was a general murmur of assent, nothing as solid or confident as words. John had the absurd sensation of