

MAY GOD HAVE MERCY

They say I confessed. I s'pose I did. Don't really know if I done it. Chopped Georges' head with the adze, that is. I don't remember doin' it, y' see.

Why would I kill poor Georgie. He mostly treated me kind. But they say I done it. They keeps askin', 'Why? Why? Why?' How do I know why when I don't even know if? They keeps on an' on about it, till I'm so weary...

...I'm home with Ma. She's knittin' me a scarf. Red like the blood oozin' from George's head when he comes at me askin', 'Why'? I try to stop Ma seein' him. But she knows already an wraps the scarf around my neck. To stop it stretchin' too much, she says. But George rips it away and his hands close around my neck so tight I can't even scream...

I jump up, fightin' him off, till I remember he's not there. I see him again, lyin' dead with his brains spewin out, an' that adze all bloody. I don't remember pickin' up any adze.

I ran outside spewing me guts up when I saw that. Got spew on my clothes. Was there blood there too? Musta washed it off. Maybe I jumped in the river to wash the spew off. Or the blood. Or to drown myself. I don't know.

Nothin' make's sense since I come here. Packed in the ship's belly for months with them other lads. All scared shitless. Well, we did shit ourselves sometimes, an' spewed with the sea sickness, too. The ship musta stunk.

We all dreamed of the trip ending, thinkin' it'd be like the country back home. Green fields an' daffodils, an' birds singin' in the trees. But it's nothin' like home, this place. All white sand blowin' in your eyes, an' hardly a blade of green grass anywhere. They put us in this big round jail, though they said we wasn't convicts. Then Mr Pollard came, who was

to be my master, an' took me to work on his farm. It's not much of a farm. Just a cottage an' barn out in the bush with no village near.

At home it were springtime, but here autumn soon turned to winter, with rain and wild winds that tore down trees. There's lots of trees. Scruffy, straggly things with ghosts livin' among them. I keep seein' them. They look like the black men that work for Ma Pollard. They can seem a bit like ghosts, too. When they come steppin' out of the trees so quiet on their bare feet.

I see them real ghosts when I close my eyes... *Some got bullet-holes in them that you can see right through or their heads all chopped like dead George ... one of them changes into him, an' he's comin' for me...* I still feel his icy fingers clutchin' my neck when I wake up shiverin'.

It's cold in this stone jail. Must be stinkin' hot in summer. That first Christmas it were so hot I thought the old devil were comin' t' get us, but George said Christmas was always hot here. I'm glad we didn't get snow. I got bloody awful chilblains at Christmastime back home. Not havin' any boots. Till I nicked some.

Da' worked but only got pennies. Just enough to keep us alive. Nothin' left t' buy clothes. That's when I decided t' do some real thievin'. But I weren't quick an' nimble enough for pickin' pockets. So I got caught an' ended up sent out here. Better than gettin' hung like some of my mates. I s'pose it didn't matter, though. I'm goin' to the rope anyway.

I s'pose hangin' is quick. If the geezer knows his job. But why would they hang my poor carcase up in chains for them crows t' feed on. Mr Schoales says they won't do that, but I heard the judge, an' that's what he said.

I know I can't get inta heaven. But the parson, Mr King has been doin' a lot of prayin an' he promised t' pray for me when it happens. So maybe God mightn't send me t' fry in hell.

But Mr King says I can't get buried in the churchyard. That holy ground God's rescued from this heathen soil ain't for the likes of me. They'll just toss me down a hole in the sandhills for the worms to eat.

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