



THE
STORY
REPUBLIC

Thirteen Jollifs & Other Stories

Tales of Liskeard, Looe & Polperro

THE OLD DARK LANE OF LOOE by Keith Sparrow

Billy Huntings' face was red. Which was understandable.

"You carried straight on!" Peter Hamley cried, his beer spilling over the edges of his glass as he shook with laughter. "Right on up the road! Hahaha!"

"It was bleddy funny, you have to admit!" said Davey Markham.

"Marchin' up the lane after everyone else turned right, bangin' that sodding drum like a clockwork monkey!"

"Well it ain't my fault I can't see over it!" said Billy. "I can't help being short!"

It was true, he couldn't help it if he was the shortest man in the Looe town band, with the biggest instrument. But why was it always him being a source of amusement? Truth be told, he was getting mighty fed up with it. His mind squirmed and wrestled with indignation, until he suddenly blurted out - "At least I'm not afraid of walking through Dark Lane after midnight!"

It was like somebody had pulled the plug on the jukebox. All at once the laughter stopped.

There was an awkward silence, and Billy almost regretted saying it, 'til Davey gently lowered his pint and said quietly "Tha's a bit unnecessary, that is."

"Yeah Billy, no need to go that far." agreed Peter.

Dark Lane had become a no-go area for the young men of Looe. Time was, it was known as a place for men off the boats to find a bit of company with the opposite sex. Especially after-dark, when the streets around were deserted and only seagulls kept an eye on who was doing what. Until the men started disappearing that is. No-one took much notice of the first, they just assumed he'd left in a hurry to go up country, and thought no more of it. But then there were two, then three...It was after the sixth disappearance that folk in Looe started muttering about dark doings and supernatural goings-on. Rumours began to spread of a beautiful maiden, who would appear in the Lane after midnight, luring young men into her embrace. Young men who were never seen again.

It cast a shadow on all the young men of Looe. It became a thing not to be mentioned in public, and a place to be avoided, especially after midnight.

Billy was committed now though, and felt a flush of triumph at their cowed expressions.

"True though, innit?" he continued. "You're all proper 'feared of Dark Lane."

"We all are. Tain't natural, what 'appened there." said Peter.

"Well I'm not. You lot are all daft. There's nothing there, it's just an old wives' tale, tha's all."

Davey looked across his pint at Billy, and narrowed his eyes. "You sayin' you'd go there then are you...after midnight?"

And that's how Billy Huntings, the shortest drummer in the Looe town band, found himself standing at the entrance of Dark Lane later that night, on the stroke of the witching hour.

The beery bravado he felt earlier had all but worn off, and he felt the sweat prickle his forehead.

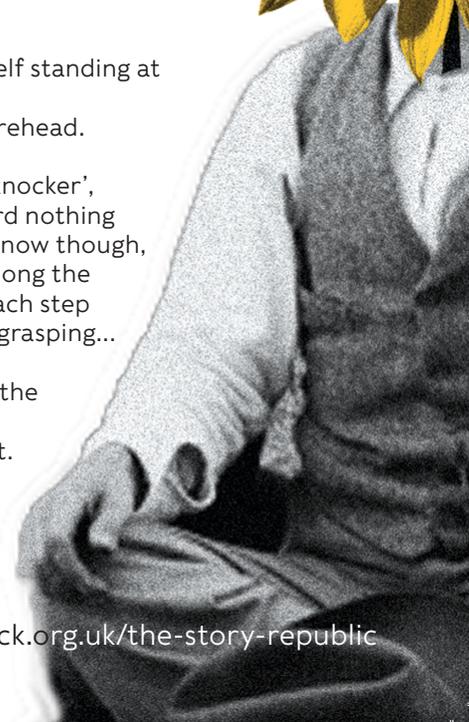
Christ, he could see why it got its name. It was dark as death in there... 'black as Noogit's knocker', as his gran would say. "Hello?" he said, tentatively. Then louder, "HELLOOOO!?". He heard nothing but the ring of his own voice bouncing back from the damp, dark bricks. No turning back now though, he'd never be able to show his face in the pub again. He inched forward, feeling his way along the damp brickwork. He could feel the ice-cold air worming its way into his lungs, and with each step he took, the darkness grew thicker, wrapping itself around him like a shroud, hungry and grasping...

Billy Hastings, the shortest drummer in the town band, was never seen again. The talk in the pub the next day was only of fishing, and football, and who's dating who.

And to this day, the young men of Looe still stay well away from Dark Lane after midnight.

And if you want my advice, so should you!

LOOE



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