

Trubshaw's Choice

John Everett

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ISBN: 151480252X

ISBN-13: 978-1514802526

Choices are what define us

Immanuel Kant ... and many others

PREFACE

Everything here is pure invention. There is no connection between any name used and any real person.

Similarly there is no intention, in describing the school which is the setting of this story, to depict any real school, past or present.

Readers will find it helpful if they have already read Trubshaw's Ghost and particularly also Trubshaw's Folly. The narrative here follows straight on from the end of the latter book. It is possible, however, to read this story without having done so. This book is the third in the series.

My other books are to be found at the website <http://johneverettbooks.co.uk> and this site holds my email as well.

John Everett

(July 2015)

Chaplain

I had watched from a distance the naming ceremony that Trubshaw had led at the folly, much to my displeasure. It was bad enough that the school had a folly at the far end of our playing field that looked exactly like a Greek temple, except it had no roof, just columns. But the presumption of my pupil, for I was his form master, to want to dedicate it as a temple to Wisdom was a challenge I had opposed. My church was the place where all of the religious activities people had should take place. The Headmaster had given his permission, and so I had to accept his decision with as much grace as I could muster, but that did not make things any better. And to think that six evenings a week I gave this precocious boy extra private lessons in New Testament Greek in my vestry here. I decided to challenge him again at the next opportunity.

“So, Trubshaw, you have gone against my wishes after all.”

“Well, sir, the Headmaster was keen to raise the profile of the Socrates Club which always meets there.”

I paused to let him go on with his explanation.

“And it is dedicated to Hagia Sophia now.”

“So that is the name you have chosen, is it?”

“Yes, sir. Holy Wisdom. Following the example of the early Christians in Constantinople. They built a church there that was one of the most magnificent buildings of the ancient world.”

“So you don't see it as a pagan temple then?”

“No, sir. Just following the teachings of King Solomon in the Bible. He told us to love Wisdom.”

“I suppose if it has this biblical background it may not do much harm,” I said, beginning to accept that perhaps I had been wrong to oppose this young lad's enthusiasm for something essentially very worthwhile.

I knew that in the staff common room,

among my colleagues, I had been in a minority of one about this issue. There are four much older chaps who teach here, all too old to have been caught up in the war, whereas I had been an army chaplain till six years ago. I did sometimes feel a bit of an outsider, though the arrival of a ridiculously young chap as Games master lessened my isolation dramatically. He had no degree, and had not even been to university yet. No doubt the Headmaster had an eye on the economics of such an appointment, for surely his salary would be minuscule, and he did reduce the amount of unwelcome games activity for the rest of us.

And now the summer term was nearly over, and we could all look forward to a long summer break. Marsden I knew would spend his entirely in France, so that his French accent would be perfect in the classroom. I would have no difficulty finding a *locum* for parish work at this time of the year, which would ease the strain on my pocket.

Meanwhile Trubshaw must continue with his Greek. His father had kept him at home till he was eleven, supervising his education, if that is what it may be called. He simply gave him books to read. But the boy had taken to it like a duck to water. He even had taught himself Latin by reading the Latin translation of John's Gospel with only the aid of a dictionary and a grammar book. And now he was doing the same under my easy supervision (I dare not call it teaching) with the original Greek of Mark's Gospel. His questions were rarely about the grammar or syntax of what he was reading. He was more likely to ask a theological question, some of which actually set me thinking too. He kept me on my toes intellectually, and for this I was grateful. My four older colleagues all sat in our common room wrapped in their own thoughts, in an atmosphere polluted by their pipe smoking. A sad state of affairs when the best company I had here was a twelve year old boy.

I suppose I should not grumble.

Matron

Not many weeks to go till the end of the summer term, I was thinking. And tonight is bridge night, which I look forward to.

The social life in a school like this is very limited. The four old chaps on the staff each have their own cottage, which was once part of the manor estate, and assigned to the farm workers. So they escape from the main hall to their own abode at the end of the day. I have a room to myself in the main hall, as does Chaplain, and the new Games master, Easton. Mr. and Mrs. Walker, the Headmaster and his wife, have their own suite of rooms too. Easton, Chaplain and I rotate the duty of being responsible for the boys after they have gone to bed, and on Easton's duty night Chaplain and I join the Head and his wife for a few rubbers of bridge.

I do not much like the game, but it gives me a chance to listen to the latest gossip. It was here that I learnt about a minor conflict between the Head and Chaplain

about the folly. One of our Fourth Form boys had taken it into his head that its shape of columns made it an unfinished temple in the Greek style. He had started a sort of debating club which met there occasionally on a Sunday afternoon. And there was what looked like a small altar there too, provided by the boy's father. I could tell there was tension between the Head and Chaplain when either of them referred to it. They had even taken to calling it by a special name, Hagia Sophia, and the boy who had started it all off was regularly to be seen going out there, all on his own, to sit on the altar thing. Is he praying? Has he got some sort of religious mania which can only be practised in a pseudo Greek temple? I could understand the Chaplain's concerns, if so. But the Head was adamant in his support of the boy, and Chaplain seemed now to have accepted this. I wondered what had made the Head so supportive of the boy, but did not like to ask.

Bridge is a funny old game, and they need to make a rule that married couples

should never be partners in the game. We cut for partners every time we play. It is all right for me when my partner is Chaplain, as he never takes umbrage when I lead the wrong suit, or discard the wrong card. When the Head and Chaplain partner each other it becomes male versus female, so Mrs. Walker and I unite as friends against a common foe. But when the Head partners his wife the sparks almost visibly fly. Spoken criticism, which also should be outlawed, is uttered occasionally, and even worse are the unspoken sighs and frowns. Chaplain and I watch in amusement, our glances meeting each other as every evidence of mutual displeasure of the married couple comes to the surface.

I would not miss these evenings for the world.

Mrs. Walker

When I married Archibald I knew that I was letting myself in for a special kind of life. He had no choice, since he had inherited the school from his father. In fairness he had warned me:

“You will be marrying an institution as well as a person.”

I was too young to imagine the full extent of the situation I was opting into. I knew I would be a sort of secretary, and this did not worry me, as I had some of the skills that would be needed. They had taught me typewriting at my school.

But what I did not realise fully was the extent to which I would be required to be a business manager. The school is an asset, of course, and a means of earning one's living. And it was my job to ensure that we did just that. This meant writing the graded sequence of letters to parents who had 'forgotten' that fees were paid termly in advance. The first letter assumes that they had genuinely forgotten the requirement. A week later, if necessary, a much firmer

reminder, giving a week's notice that 'serious action' would be taken if the lapse persisted. Then Archie and I would discuss whether we really would actually send the boy concerned back to his parents, or should we offer some sort of bursary.

I remember once an editor friend at Secker and Warburg sent Archie a typescript of a long essay for him to review. It was about a school rather like ours, written by a journalist called Eric Blair, and it painted a horrifying picture of a couple just like us, called by a name too close for comfort: Mr. and Mrs. Wilkes. Archie gave it to me to read and I told him to advise the editor that the picture this essay painted was totally unrealistic, and that he could expect to be sued by the Wilkes if he published it. I remember the title, 'Such, such were the joys,' and I hope never to see it in print.

Archie is such a contrast to the Wilkes headmaster. The essay begins with him beating the eight-year-old Eric for wetting his bed. By contrast Archie tries as far as possible to avoid ever using corporal

punishment here. He will threaten it, and hopes that his bluff will never actually be called. It seems to work pretty well.

Of course the youngest boys, snatched from a loving home and dreadfully missing their mother, do sometimes wet their beds. Matron and I have talked about how to deal with this. Our answer is to ignore it as far as possible. The mattresses have a water proof cover, and Florence and Ivy, our two young helpers, simply remove the wet sheets and replace them with dry. Matron then tells me the name of the boy concerned, and we both become extra mothers briefly for the boy. It is the best we can do, and it usually works pretty well.

Becoming a surrogate mother is the part of my life that is two-edged. Archie and I cannot understand why we have never produced any children. We are happily married, but they just do not come. But we both have 'sons' aplenty, and this sort of makes up for it. It is difficult to know how to control the emotional attachment that inevitably springs up, especially when the boy is one whom one cannot help but

admire, and even wish they really were a son.

Trubshaw is just such a boy. He came here much later than most, at the age of eleven. His father is a don at Cambridge, and a good friend of Archie. He has some interesting views on education, which might fail easily on most boys, but seems to have worked especially well with this particular boy. Archie tells me he has the same intellect as his father, which explains everything.

When Trubshaw used his newly founded Socrates Club to expose one of the prefects as a bully, Archie was so pleased he made the folly where they met an officially recognised venue for this debating club, under the glorious name of Hagia Sophia. And now Trubshaw has a special place in our hearts, but of course we cannot reveal this to him by overt actions. We just keep a lookout for him, and observe his progress.

Wetherill

Thanks to my good Fourth Form friend Trubs I can resume my painting without fear of the School Bully spoiling my work. The light still lasts quite well in the evening before bedtime, and we are free then to do what we like.

I still paint the folly a lot, though it will take me some time to get used to the new name Trubs has given it. Now that there is a wooden altar installed there I often see Trubs going out all on his own and just sitting there. I am not quite sure how anyone can possibly be philosophical all on their own, but Trubs seems to manage it. When I ask him what he is doing there, sitting on the wooden pedestal, he just says he is thinking. No use asking him what about, as he just smiles by way of reply. Trubs is good at silence.

With not many weeks to go before the end of term I am dreading the holidays. My parents own a hotel on the front at Eastbourne, and summer is the peak time for guests. The hotel gets full, and yours

truly becomes a hotel porter. Unpaid, needless to say. What a contrast with the Easter hols which I spent with Trubs' family. His father is a very nice man, and started me off with my painting. And there is a lady called Mystery, who is the nearest Trubs has for a mother, because his real mother died giving birth to him. She is the housekeeper, being technically married herself. But her husband got left behind in Poland when the Germans invaded, and no one knows for certain whether he managed to survive the war. Mystery is not her real name, of course. Her real name is something Polish, and she changed it to Zakary when she arrived in England as a war refugee. I wish I could spend the hols with Trubs and his people, if they would have me, but my parents say they cannot do without me in the months of July and August.

So here I am, sitting on my tuck box and painting the folly, as I still call it in spite of what Trubs says it is called, and now I have to include in my picture my good friend, just sitting on the wooden pedestal. He has

his back to me, so getting him to look like what I can actually see is not so much of a challenge. I have not started on painting people yet. Buildings and trees and fields are as much as I can manage right now. I suppose I will have to try painting real people eventually, but not just yet.

Matron

I often wonder whether getting a post as Matron in a school like this was a wise career choice. I am sure that as a qualified nurse I could have done well in a hospital or medical practice. But I had had a quarrel many years ago with a superior in the hospital I was working in then, and impulsively felt inclined to look for something completely different. When I saw the advertisement for this post, which indicated that a nursing qualification would be an advantage, I thought I would give it a try. It solved the problem of where to live, and I was fed up with living at home by then. Of course the usual solution for a girl of my age then was to get married. How can I put this? I just did not fancy any man well enough to be hitched to him forever.

So here I am, a long time after that supposedly 'trial' decision, and now stuck with it. The job is so continuous that escape outside this closed community during term time is impossible for more than a few hours. And how can I relate to

middle-aged teachers, who are so set in their ways and used to being the one who gives orders all the time to their young wards? It changes their personalities, believe me.

Yes, I am really stuck with it. Single, and with no prospect of being otherwise. I am saving away as much money as I can for my retirement, with no prospect of any company when that fate arrives.

But there are compensations. No husband, but 'mother' to sixty young souls. And this is what keeps me going. Some of them, especially the younger ones, even call me Mum by mistake. Some of them actually welcome the loving hug they receive from me when tears fill their eyes and they are truly missing their real Mum.

I also have a management responsibility, making sure that the two local girls, Ivy and Florence, do their jobs properly. They do everything that needs doing: cleaning, laundry, bed-making, and suchlike for me, and everything in the kitchen when my jobs are done that Cook requires them to do: preparing vegetables and all the

immense amount of washing up that arrives when you are feeding a dozen adults and sixty boys.

Being a surrogate mother is a challenge. How to provide the emotional care the boys need without getting too emotionally attached myself. And I do get attached somewhat from time to time. Trubshaw is a case in point. He is such a sweet boy, and the Head has told me he has no mother. I have discovered from my colleagues that he is intellectually streets ahead of his peers, and it shows when he comes into contact with me. He is never lost for words, and always looks me straight in the eye. This is not at all common with boys of that age. They tend to find adults difficult to relate to. But Trubshaw is different. Totally relaxed in my company. No shyness, no stammering or stuttering, which is often what happens, especially when I am rebuking a boy for being dirty or dishevelled. I do not come across him very often, as he does not fall over and graze his knees as often as some do. But I do manage them all when they are going to bed in

their dormitories, or getting up in the morning, so I do see him every day.

It is his eyes you notice most. Bright blue which contrasts with his dark black hair. And long eyelashes, which some girls I know would envy. But it is not just what his eyes look like. If a person's eyes are the windows of their soul, this applies particularly to Trubshaw. They are so lively, so attentive to all around him. You could almost say that he speaks with his eyes, since one look can convey so much.

He has no mother. Is he looking to me to fulfil that role? I must admit, I rather hope so.

Mitchell

It will soon be the end of the summer term. At the end of each term the boys get a report sent to their parents. The autumn and spring terms end with a report that is very brief, with just subject grades and positions, and a word or two. But at the end of the summer term we are expected to write almost a short essay about each boy's progress and aptitude.

In my subjects, History and Geography, this is quite a challenge, and gives me hours of work. Each report is a full size page, and at the bottom there is space for the Headmaster to write his comments too. We keep a folder for each class, with all the report pages in, and these stay on the table in our staff common room. When all subject reports have been completed, the whole folder gets delivered to the Head for his comments. Thus we never see his comments on any boy, but he reads all ours.

The further worry is making a mistake. This means that the whole page will have to be rewritten. So we all take great care to

avoid this.

So I was puzzling quite how to write about the progress of my star pupil, Trubshaw. There is so much I could say about his enquiring mind, and sheer love of philosophy. When I came to do the Fourth Form reports I found that the comments for all the other subjects had already been written. According to Peale, Trubshaw's Maths is precocious, a comment more about the boy, I thought, than his mathematical ability, but I recalled how more than once Peale had found Trubshaw something of a challenge to deal with. Marsden states that Trubshaw's French accent is authentic, thanks to his trips to France. Easton has his Games as promising, and Chaplain reports that his Latin is impeccable, his Greek very commendable, and his Scripture thoughtful.

I wondered how well the Headmaster would be able to follow all this praise as I wrote:

His map work is tidy and painstaking. His understanding of the Ancient Greek period is full of good insights. He is a leader

of our classroom discussions of the issues raised by this period, and he has started a debating club in imitation of Socrates, which has succeeded beyond all expectation.

There was barely room for all this in the space allotted, but I was lucky in that these were comments across two subjects. I wish we could actually see the Headmaster's comments, but the reports go straight into the post after he has finished writing his. I felt confident that Trubshaw's father would be a happy man.

Headmaster

The pile of folders has arrived and now I have to write a report for every pupil. Then my wife, Betty, will put them all in envelopes and send them off to their parents by post.

I sometimes wonder if we could save the expense of all this postage, but since some parents are service people living abroad, we, that is Betty and I, decided it was best this way. I say 'we' because in all honesty my wife is a better business manager than I am. I talk over a lot of the issues we face running a school, and she helps me with most important decisions.

Most of my report writing is pretty routine, if rather time-consuming. I can usually get away with comments like 'good progress, make sure it continues' and other such encouraging banalities. On the prefect I had had to demote I wrote 'make sure you learn the lesson from this term's events.'

When I came to Trubshaw I was at a complete loss. Fortunately I know Professor Trubshaw quite well, and count him as a

friend. I know also that he is deeply suspicious of 'teaching' and says that 'learning' is what counts. He was so set in his ways on this topic that his son was kept at home and simply supplied with books to read, till he reached the age of eleven. I decided to talk over with Betty what I should write.

"How well do you know Trubshaw?" I began by asking.

"More than you might think. Matron and Chaplain both talk about him a lot."

"You know why he did not come here till he was eleven?"

"Yes, his father has some radical ideas about education. Apparently he does not believe in teaching, which is a bit odd since he is paid to do just that at Cambridge University."

"Well all the teachers here think he is very smart, with hints from some that he is almost too smart. So what will the professor think of teachers' comments, I wonder?"

"Why not do something really novel? Get Trubshaw's father to ask his son to

write a report on each of the teachers. That would give him something to think about with regard to the teaching process.”

“I have never done anything like that before.”

“There is a first time for everything.”

Betty is very persuasive, and so in the box for my report on Trubshaw I wrote:

The above remarks by my colleagues need no further comment from me. I wonder what sort of a report your son would give on each of his teachers, and whether he has benefitted from his time here thus far. Is teaching such a bad thing?

As I folded the paper and put it in the envelope I wondered whether the professor would take my question literally. To receive a report about my school from a boy would certainly be interesting.

Newberry

The last lesson of the term for the Fourth Form was always the same for me. I introduced the concept of the Holiday Task. Needless to say there were groans when I announced this.

“Boys, you know how important it is for you to read books, and the holiday is the best time for you to establish the habit in your lives.”

I had their attention now.

“During the holidays I task you with reading two books by the same author. He intended them to be read by young people. The author is Lewis Carroll, and the books you are to read are 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland' and 'Through the Looking Glass.’”

There were one or two smiles, and I suspect that these were from boys who had already read the books.

“These books are full of fantasy and rather odd poetry, as well as some subtle humour. On the first day of next term you will write an essay for me during class

time. The purpose of the essay will be to convince me that you have actually read the books. In addition to a summary of the contents you are to write an appreciation of the books. Why have they become so popular? Did you enjoy reading, and, if so, why? Now, boys, any questions?"

"What if we have not got these books at home, sir?" asked Wetherill.

"They are almost certainly available from your nearest public library, or your parents might be willing to buy you a copy of each."

At the end of the lesson I accosted Trubshaw.

"Have you read these books before, Trubshaw?"

"Yes, sir, when I was about seven years old."

"I thought so. The Headmaster has encouraged us to make sure we stretch you fully in every subject. So I task you to find out what you can about Lewis Carroll, and then read the books again in the light of what you have read. I am sure your father with his access to the university library will

be able to find you what you need for this task.”

“Thank you, sir.”

As ever Trubshaw seemed delighted at being given extra tasks.

Mystery

Very soon Theo will be back home here for the long summer break. We saw him at Easter with his friend Soapy, and it amazed me how quickly he was growing up. After the whole summer term away from me I expected I would notice a similar change again.

Theo was just two years old when I became part of the Trubshaw household. The events of 1939 are still very vivid in my mind. My husband taught at Warsaw University and in August it was clear that I was bearing our first child. My husband had been watching the rise of Hitler's Germany very closely, and when the Nazis signed a peace pact with Stalin he could foresee what would happen next. So he insisted, for the sake of our child, that I escape to England before it was too late. From his academic contacts he knew someone in Cambridge as a friend, and said I should go there. Needless to say I did not want to be separated from him, but he insisted that our child's interests came first.

I could return when the war ended, if there was to be a war, or when the crisis was over, if war could be averted.

So I made the difficult journey, and found myself in Cambridge. Just in time, as it happened. The invasion of Poland was swift and brutal. The last I heard of my husband was a message saying he was going into the forests to fight the enemy from there.

In 1945 Poland was an occupied country, under the control of the Russian backed Communists. If there had been any word from my husband to summon me home I would have gone back straight away. But no word came.

Meanwhile, soon after I arrived in Cambridge, I miscarried. The child I had left my home country to protect was not a survivor after all. I do not need to spell out my grief, do I?

I managed to keep body and soul together with lowly tasks like washing up in a small, until in 1941 my husband's friend found me the perfect job. Another member of the university was looking for a resident

housekeeper. This is how I came to find my rescuer, and his then two-year-old son. His wife had died giving birth to Theo, and now Theo no longer needed a nurse, and his father needed a housekeeper.

So I have known Theo since he was two. At that age he could not easily get his tongue round my name, Mrs. Zakary, and settled on Mystery as the best he could do. The name seemed so apt that somehow it stuck.

I helped Theo learn to read, even though my English was far from perfect, and the Professor, as I now always call him, set about his education regime for Theo. Theo must learn how to learn. That was his mantra. And that is what has made Theo who he now is. The Professor actually wrote the first books Theo used to learn to read from. He had a theory on this subject too. The words in his first book were all phonetically simple. Once you knew the sound of a given letter you could read the word. But English is far more complex than that, of course. So all the words in the first few books avoid any complexities. Every 'c'

and every 'g' sounded the same, because words that might sound differently were simply avoided. No complex couples either, of course, like 'gh'. Then, gradually, more difficult words were included, until finally ordinary books could be used.

My English came on leaps and bounds by this method, and at bedtime Theo would read me a story, until he was tired enough to fall asleep.

My child, had he or she survived to be born, would have been almost exactly the same age as Theo. So Theodore was a 'gift from God' for me too. I am sure I do not need to explain how motherly I felt towards him, especially after it was clear that the chances of my husband having survived the war were effectively zero.

So Theo progressed with his home education, a journey of continual discovery, with myself as something of a bystander. He even managed to learn Latin, which his father said was the most important language for anyone to learn besides their own, by using one Latin text, and a grammar book and a dictionary. The text

was the translation made by Jerome in the fourth century of the original Greek of the Gospel of St. John.

The Prof and I eventually discussed the sending of Theo away to a boarding school. We both could see that he needed the company of other boys if he was to become a fully rounded adult. So at eleven off he went.

“We will give it a year,” the professor had said, “and then decide if this is the best thing for him.”

So here we are, with a year at his prep school completed, and a decision to be made.

Professor Trubshaw

The drive from Cambridge to my son's school is a fairly easy one, and I made it with the contents of his report, which had arrived by post, very much in the forefront of my mind. I would let him read it as soon as we got home.

I remembered how I felt when he was just struggling to learn how to read. He seemed to desire knowledge and there was no difficulty in getting him to want to read books. Just the reverse. The difficulty was in getting him to put books down. So how could I best satisfy his hunger, his appetite, for knowledge. I explained to our newly appointed housekeeper, what my ideas were. Would she mind being his guardian, and, to a certain extent, mentor? He would not go to school. Not yet anyway. I remembered how dull and frustrating my own schooldays had been, and I wanted to spare him that.

My position in the university made it possible to access any book he might need, as our library is one of the three that has

by statute to receive a copy of every book ever published in this country. The 1944 Education Act had made it compulsory for parents to arrange the education of their children, and for Local Authorities to provide free state schools for parents to send their children to. But the act was very specific that education could either be at a school, 'or otherwise.' Home education was permitted by law, and I thought that the 'or otherwise' option would be the right one for my son.

I knew, of course, that there would be a lot he would miss out on if he never went to school; all the rough and tumble of lively boys, all the organised games, so the plan had been from the beginning that he should go to school at the right age. As he grew towards eleven that seemed about right, and I had said to him: "After a year we will review how things are working out. It will be your choice whether to stay on or not."

I knew Archie Walker pretty well, and was happy that he would be able to provide a good environment for my son to learn

how to live with others, and develop all the social skills a fully rounded adult needs.

So pretty soon Theo and I would sit down and talk things over, and by the end of the holidays he would have made his choice.

Mystery

You don't realise how much you miss someone until they return, and you are reminded of why you enjoy their company so much. And now we would have Theo in our company for eight weeks or so. I had prepared a rather special lunch for him on the day the Prof collected him.

"Gosh," he said, "I had almost forgotten what real food tastes like."

Could you ask for a better compliment than that?

The Prof picked up on this and said: "Well, my son, you have an important choice to make over the next few weeks. Is school the right place for you? And there is much more to that than the quality of the food."

"I know," Theo replied.

"When the meal is over I will give you your report to read. You should note what the Headmaster has said."

The Prof had already given me the report to read, and I had been quite surprised at the suggestion made in it that

Theo should write a report about each of his teachers. I was looking forward to reading these reports, if the Prof would be kind enough to let me. I expected he would, and as it turned out he did. I felt it a great honour to be so included in these transactions between a father and his son.

Theo went into the library after the meal and armed with pen and paper wrote:

French – Mr. Marsden

This is the most useful subject for me, as Mr. Marsden speaks continually in French, and I cannot get this experience other than when we go on holiday to France. We read aloud French books and plays, and our pronunciation is corrected. When he wants to know if we have understood any sentence he asks us a question in French about it, and we have to answer in French. If he let us, I would be the first and possibly only boy to answer, but he is very wise. Going round the class in order of where we are sitting he insists that every boy gives an answer. Sometimes he asks very simple questions, and more or less everyone can answer these. Sometimes

he asks rather difficult questions, and I am often the only boy who can answer these. We do very little written work, but when we do it is an essay in French on some easy topic, with usually most of the words we need to use being in the book we are reading.

When Theo had finished writing this report he passed it to his father. "Is this the sort of report you want, Dad?"

"Perfect," said the Prof, and passed the report for me to read. It was obvious immediately that a school teacher could provide something that Theo could never get studying all on his own.

"Carry on, Theo, and show me each report as you finish it."

This is how the afternoon continued, and I was privileged to read every report. I felt I was beginning to get a better idea of what a school was to a young boy of Theo's age.

Mathematics – Mr. Peale

We do geometry, arithmetic and algebra. We have done properties of triangles, squares, and rectangles in geometry. I have

learnt nothing new that I had not already picked up from Euclid. Mental arithmetic does not stretch me, though it does most of the other boys, so it is right for Mr. Peale to teach in the way he does. We have been solving simultaneous equations, and once you learn the substitution method there is no mental challenge here at all. I do not think it is Mr. Peale's fault, as he has to teach this stuff, but for me these lessons are the most boring and least stretching.

I felt rather sorry for Mr. Peale when I read these comments. The Prof went very thoughtful on reading it too. "We must find some ways of taking you beyond the very narrow syllabus that is needed for the Common Entrance examination. I will give the matter some thought."

The next report was one Theo spent quite a bit of time thinking about before he started writing.

Scripture, Latin, and Greek - the Chaplain

We have been reading the Old Testament books of Samuel and Kings, mostly David and Solomon. These have

been stimulating, and the Chaplain tries hard to make the stories interesting. Most of the boys just switch off, but I have gained a great deal from them. The level that the boys are at in Latin is far lower than where I got to, but since I had never done translation from English to Latin before, there is some value for me. But I am not sure of the value of trying to write in Latin, which I will never bother with in real life. But there are a lot of Latin texts it would be good to have the time to read. It is very good of the Chaplain to give his time up for me to learn to read New Testament Greek, and I am very grateful for his kindness.

The Prof read this with no comment, and so did I. There was an underlying thought that Theo had held back from writing all that he might have done. It was typical of the Prof that he gave no hint of these thoughts.

I was wondering about the order that Theo was choosing when writing these reports on his teachers, and I suspected that he was saving the best, or the most

difficult to write, till the last.

English – Mr. Newberry

We have studied some interesting poetry, and I have learnt a lot when reading these. There is so much poetry in the world, so it is rather revealing to notice what poems our teacher chooses for us to study. We are sometimes asked to read a book and comment on it. I enjoyed reading 'The Turn of the Screw', but am not at all sure about the holiday task we have been given, which is to read 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland' and 'Through the Looking Glass.' I read both of these children's books when I was very young, so am not sure of the benefit to the other boys of reading these books. But I am to find out what I can about the author, Lewis Carroll, and then to read the books again.

“I will help you with your holiday task, my boy” was the Prof's response. “The books become a lot more interesting when you research into their author. I will look out some books about him for you, and you may view his books in a new light when I do.”

The next report was written very quickly.

Games – Mr. Easton

Without the school I would never have learnt how to play rugby and cricket. Fortunately I enjoy both of these, though my best friend hates them both. Mr. Easton does quite well for one so young. He is more like an elder brother to most of us, but I suppose that is no bad thing.

Then, after much thought:

History, and Geography – Mr. Mitchell

History has been an inspiration to me and made it possible for me to understand what my role in life is to be, namely a philosopher. Mr. Mitchell was very kind to support my establishment of a debating club, even though I could see he was not entirely convinced that it was a good thing, or even that it would work. This has been the most important event in my life so far, and I owe so much to him for his support.

We both could see that there was no doubt in Theo's mind about whether school was a good thing in his life. I noticed that the Prof did not press Theo for a decision

straight away, because he was pretty sure he already knew what it was. We both knew that Theo's choice would be to continue with his prep school for at least another year, and probably on after that to whatever senior school the Prof would choose for him.

“Are you going to show these reports to the Headmaster, Dad?” Theo asked.

“No, I think not, but I will tell him that you wrote them, and that I found them very helpful. And there is another letter from school which you must read, but that will be enough school stuff for one day, and we will look at it on another occasion.”

I knew what was in this letter. It was from the Chaplain, and Theo would have to make yet another choice.

Professor Trubshaw

I am now in a real quandary. The other letter I would need to discuss with my son was from the Chaplain. It read:

Dear Parent,

It is the custom of this school to offer boys who enter the Fifth Form here, their penultimate year when most are twelve years old, a chance to be Confirmed into adult membership of the Church of England. The preparation follows the Catechism, as presented in the Book of Common Prayer. The service of Confirmation is taken by our bishop during the Spring term, and parents and godparents are invited to attend.

The choice of Catechism preparation is entirely voluntary, and it would help me if you could send a written decision regarding this with your son when he returns in September.

Yours faithfully,

[illegible signature]

Chaplain

The quandary I was in was not a trivial one. The Chaplain had understandably assumed that all his pupils were already christened. Theo was an exception. The letter carried me back to the tragic days of Theo's birth and the fact that his mother never recovered from the trauma of what had been an unusually difficult birth. What with her actually dying, and all the difficulty of engaging a nurse to care for a new-born baby, all the usual events surrounding the birth of a boy went by the board. In short, I never got around to arranging any christening. As the months and years rolled by, this seemed to matter less and less, and as with many things that we put off, this detail got put off indefinitely. So I would have to explain all this to Theo, and he would have to make yet another choice.

So the day after the report writing I showed him the letter from the Chaplain and explained that, as far as the Church of England was concerned, my son was still a pagan.

“Can a person be Confirmed without a

previous Baptism in the Church of England?" he asked.

"No. As far as I understand things, if you want to be Confirmed you will have to have a Baptism first. I believe there is a service in the Book of Common Prayer called 'The Ministration of Baptism to such as are of Riper Years and Able to Answer for Themselves.'"

I had looked this up, needless to say, and wanted to give the exact wording, especially as it was so beautifully archaic.

"Dad, you have done me a great favour. If I had been able to tell you what I wanted when I was too young to talk even, this is what I would have chosen. Such an important thing as this is far better done, as far as I am concerned, when I am," and now he recited, "able to answer for myself."

I smiled.

"So please tell the Chaplain 'yes' to the Catechism thing, and please buy me a copy of this lovely old-fashioned book called the Book of Common Prayer. I want to read this Catechism thing too."

"With pleasure. And do you want me to

tell the Chaplain everything?"

"No, please don't. I may not like this Catechism, and so may decide not to be Confirmed. After all, now that I am of riper years, and able to answer for myself, it will be my choice."

Mystery

Theo was very quiet for a day or two, reading a lot. He had asked for a book about Lewis Carroll to help him with his holiday task of reading his two books, 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland' and 'Through the Looking Glass'.

Theo does not talk very often; he is mostly very thoughtful. But he had obviously got a lot on his mind, and with his father out most days till the evening he decided to include me in his thinking.

"Dad had given me this book about Lewis Carroll," he began.

"Yes." I just needed to encourage him to carry on with his thoughts.

"It was written by his nephew, pretty soon after Lewis Carroll died. So he knew him pretty well, but there is lots in this book that has opened my eyes to who Lewis Carroll actually was."

"Who was he, or should it be 'what' was he?"

"The 'who' is simple. He was the Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, and

he was a student and then a lecturer at Christ Church, Oxford. His subject was Mathematics, which makes him much more interesting to me. He even wrote scholarly books about Euclid, and I shall ask Dad to get them for me to read. He got ordained because that was something he had to do to be a lecturer at Christ Church. He did not preach very often, perhaps, according to his nephew, because he had a stammer. All this is very straight forward, and does not puzzle me at all."

"So what does puzzle you?"

"Well, he never got married, and his closest friendships seem to have been with young girls, much too young to be prospective partners in marriage. And he took lots of photographs of them too. He was very keen as a photographer, which was in its infancy in those days."

"Was there a real Alice then?"

"Yes, she was the middle daughter of three of the Dean of Christ Church, who was his sort of boss as far as I can tell."

"How old was she?"

"She was eight when he first began on

his Alice story. They were rowing on the river at Oxford, and he told her this magic story about a girl called Alice who goes underground into a fantasy world. I am sure you know the story.”

“So what is the puzzle?”

“You tell me, please, is it all right for a grown man to have such a lot of close relationships with young girls? And he took lots of pictures of them, sometimes with very little clothing on.”

This was rather difficult for me to respond to. I knew nothing about the man, and had never seen any of the pictures. I had to find an answer that would do.

“Perhaps being unmarried, and so having no children of his own, he felt very much like a father to them.”

“I suppose that explains it,” said Theo, but I could tell from his tone of voice that the answer had not fully satisfied him. But he went back to his reading as though the matter was settled, even though we both knew it was not.

How could I explain it otherwise? The whole thing was so like my relationship

with him, but with the genders reversed. Here am I, effectively unmarried, and bound into a loving relationship with a boy who is simply the son of my employer. Was it so very different with Dodgson and the daughter of his 'employer'?

How complex creatures we humans are, and who is fit to judge our motives and our actions?

Mystery

I am now all alone in this lovely house. As is their habit, Theo and the Prof are off to France for several weeks. The Prof has a friend who works in the university of Paris, the Sorbonne, and they get to stay there. The hospitality is returned from time to time here as well.

During the holiday I have the option of going away myself, or staying here. I am left enough money on top of my salary to feed myself, and the gardener also works his usual two days a week here, so I have a bit of company. Coming from another country I have no friends here, and quite frankly I prefer the relaxation of familiar surroundings to going off to a hotel somewhere.

It is a joy to observe Theo developing. I can see from the books left out in the library that he is very interested in Mathematics. In addition to a book by C. L. Dodgson called 'Euclid and his Modern Rivals' there are lots of other mathematical mysteries. He has an open page with

numbers arranged in a triangle, one number at the top, then two immediately below, then three, and so on. The heading on this page was 'Pascal's Triangle' and I could begin to see the pattern's logic when I looked at it carefully.

He takes no English books away with him when he goes to France on holiday. When I asked him about this he explained: "When I am in France I read French books. Dad says that this is the best way to learn a language. You need to learn to hear it, speak it, and read it. And there are lots of French books in the house we stay in when we are in Paris."

So the house is now quiet and empty. Though it is never noisy when it is full. The two people I look after are so at peace with themselves and each other. And, yes, you have guessed, I would so much rather be more than a housekeeper here. Dare I hope ever to be a wife and a mother too?

Headmaster

Towards the end of the holidays the postman delivers several letters every day. Most are just the advance payment by cheque of the next term's fees with a simple covering letter. Sometimes the letter is more than a formality, as in the case of the one that came from Professor Trubshaw:

My dear Walker,

Herewith my cheque for next term. It is our joint decision that Theo continues his education at your school. I carried out your suggestion and Theo has written a report on each of your staff. I have kept these, and if you would like me to, will forward them.

Please also find enclosed a formal note accepting the Chaplain's kind offer to use the Prayer Book Catechism to instruct my son in preparation for his possible Confirmation. Please pass this on to the Chaplain.

Yours truly,

Trubshaw

Oh dear, what a difficult decision for me now, and after some careful thought I decided that I did not want to read what a twelve-year-old boy thought about my colleagues. So I wrote a brief thank-you but no-thank-you letter to my good friend the professor. It was sufficient to know that his son was going to continue here. Knowing the professor as I did, where actions were all that mattered to him, and words were used very sparsely, it was a compliment that his son was to continue to be my pupil. I was perfectly satisfied with that, and wanted no more detail. I also had no desire to pry into my colleagues, most of whose foibles I was already well aware of. It took several days, though, for the nagging curiosity about what had been said about me, if I had been included in these reports, to subside.

Headmaster

The term for me always begins with the staff meeting which I convene in the staff common room. As ever I stand with my back to the fireplace (we do not light fires till October) facing my colleagues, each seated in his customary place in the two armchairs and one settee that face the fireplace. Easton, the junior, brings an upright chair from round the table in the window alcove to join the group.

“Gentlemen, I am happy to report that our First Form intake is complete, and so you, Easton, will have a dozen new eight-year-olds to take care of. Last year I showed you the ropes, so this year that will not be necessary.”

Easton nodded. The system was that each member of staff was form master to a particular age group, so that as they grew older the boys passed through the care of a different master each year. This was a policy that prevented any bad relationships from being perpetuated, and the boys needed a change as well as the masters.

“All our leavers have gone on to their first choice senior schools, which is an excellent measure of our success.”

This was a very important statement for me to be able to make. Any school like mine is effectively a business: the parents are customers, and unless we deliver what they want they will look elsewhere. The senior staff here knew this, so preparation for the Common Entrance examination, which determined whether any boy satisfied the academic requirements of the school they wished to go on to, really mattered. Some boys were prepared for scholarships, and this aspect was the cream to go on top of the cake. Last year there had been no prospects, but every one of us knew that young Trubshaw, who would now be in the Fifth Form, and so just a year and half away from this decisive moment, was a very real contender for such an honour.

So my silence on the subject of scholarships was significant, and I followed it with:

“We all know that our most likely

scholarship potential will now go into the Fifth Form and be your ward, Mitchell. He has already shown great initiative with the Socrates Club, and I want him stretched and supported to the utmost. Please, all of you, prepare plans for this, and let me know in due course what you have in mind. Chaplain, I am already aware of the extra Greek classes you are giving him, and so I would hope that he will be extended in all the other subjects too.”

There were nods all round at this, although I noticed an absence of such a nod from Peale, our Maths teacher, but rather a furrowed brow.

“All right with this, Peale?”

“I will ask him what he would like to do. He is more likely to have a better idea than I have.”

This was rather revealing, I thought, but decided to leave it at that.

Mitchell

The first class period of the new school year, and I warmly greeted the boys that last year I had taught History and Geography to as Fourth Formers. Now I would see them briefly every day after assembly to make a formal note of presence in the register we kept, and to be available for any questions they might have about school life. Needless to say, it was Trubshaw who first asked me for a private conversation.

“Sir, what are the arrangements going to be for the Socrates Club? I know there is a rule about every club needing to have a prefect present to supervise things, but last year's prefect, Fairbrother, has left, of course, and I do not know any of this year's prefects. Could you make the arrangement for me, please?”

Knowing how much value the Head placed on the way the Socrates Club seemed to be solving problems for him, I simply said: “Leave it to me, Trubshaw.”

Although the lad was only twelve and

only therefore in the Fifth Form, I thought he was quite mature and sensible enough to run the thing himself. I was pretty sure that that was the reality last term in any case. How could I get the Head to see that this was the best course to follow?

I asked the Head for some time to discuss the matter with him.

“Headmaster, there is a rule that every school club must have a prefect in charge to make sure that all is well when they meet. Trubshaw has raised the question with me about the Socrates Club, which I know you support.”

“Indeed I do. So what is your concern?”

“Well I think it would be perfectly safe for Trubshaw to run the thing himself. And there is always the possibility that an unsympathetic prefect might spoil things for him.”

“But Trubshaw is too young to be made a prefect, though I am sure that next year he will be top of my list for such a responsibility.”

“Can we waive the rule about prefects, then?”

“That will create an unwelcome precedent.”

I decided at this point to remain silent, and let the Head grope for a solution. He soon came up with one.

“I know what. I will create a new category of prefects: Trubshaw can be made the first ever deputy-prefect. This will not include the privilege of wearing long trousers, or use of the prefects' room, but will include having oversight of school clubs.”

“Brilliant, Headmaster!”

It is always good policy for grown men who have to work together to pay each other compliments from time to time.

There was another pause for thought. Then the Head continued: “He must have some insignia, of course. I have some pin-on badges that I used to award for some reason. Forget what it was now. Anyway he can wear one of those on his lapel to signify his status. It is a nice shield shape in blue.”

“Will you make the announcement in assembly, then, Headmaster?”

“Certainly, but send the boy to me first, so that I can explain his responsibilities. He needs to be the first to hear about this new post, of course.”

So, at the next opportunity I told Trubshaw what had been decided.

“Thank you very much, sir.”

“Go and see the Headmaster after supper this evening, and he will give you a badge to wear, and explain everything to you.”

“Gosh, sir, that is wonderful.”

I rather got the impression that Trubshaw thought that it was I who had engineered this solution on his behalf. No need to correct that impression, I thought. No harm done.

Wetherill

A new term, and now we are Fifth Formers. The Headmaster in the first assembly of term made the usual welcoming speech that he makes every year, and I switched off as I always do on these occasions.

Then he managed to capture my attention with the name of my good friend, my only friend, Trubshaw.

"I have decided," he was saying, "to appoint a new post of deputy-prefect, and Trubshaw will be the first holder of this honour. A deputy-prefect will wear the usual short trousers, and not be entitled to use the prefects' room, but will wear a blue shield badge to signify his status. He will have the responsibility of supervising clubs, and in Trubshaw's case this will be the Socrates Club."

We all looked at Trubshaw, who simply brought a slight smile to his face.

"The Socrates Club will continue to meet in what we used to call the Folly and which is now designated as Hagia Sophia, which

is Greek for Holy Wisdom. The meetings are open to all pupils, and will take place there, weather permitting, every Sunday after lunch.”

It will be pretty cold by the end of term, I was thinking.

“Unless there is an announcement on Saturday of any special topic for debate, the occasion will be an opportunity for any topic to be discussed.”

The Headmaster paused, and looked up from his notes.

“I think you should all know that this club has my full support, and I hope that you boys will continue to experience the way democratic discussion and opinion sharing can play an important part in your education.”

I could not help notice that a frown came on the brow of our Chaplain as he heard this comment, and I remembered the opposition he had shown last term when Trubs had challenged him about the naming of the old Folly.

After the assembly we gathered round Trubs and offered him our congratulations

on his appointment. It is not often the school swat is a popular person. But Trubs was just that, in spite of being a boffin.

“Chaplain looked pretty cheesed off, I thought,” was my comment.

“Yes,” said Trubs, “and I reckon it will be pretty interesting to see how our Confirmation classes go this term. Are we all down for it?”

We all knew our parents had had the letter explaining that this is what we all were offered now we were Fifth Formers, and there were nods all round. So we were all going to have these classes, which were scheduled to take place in the chapel after breakfast and before the morning service every Sunday.

With Trubs there, I was thinking, perhaps these classes might be quite interesting after all.

Newberry

It was all my own fault, of course, giving last year's Fourth Form books to read as a holiday task. And now it is the first lesson of the new academic year, and I will have a dozen long, and mostly identical, essays to read summarising the narrative of 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland' and 'Through the Looking Glass'.

And it has just got worse. As I settled the boys down with their essay writing, there was Trubshaw holding his exercise book.

"Sir, I hope you don't mind, but I have already written my essay, the one you suggested I write, about the real Lewis Carroll."

So now I will have an extra long essay to read through, rather than one which would have the time limit of a single lesson in which to write it. And I remembered giving him this extra task, in a moment of enthusiasm, to encourage this specially gifted scholar to use his powers for deep research.

"This is what I was hoping for," I managed to say, with an attempted smile on my face.

"Thank you, sir. Shall I write the narrative summary like all the others now?"

"Yes. Do so."

As the boy would have to use the exercise book in which his other essay was already written, I did not even have the opportunity to read his long essay on the 'real' Lewis Carroll. Oh dear, this evening would be a long one, reading through eleven ordinary, boring, essays and two more, very likely to be, interesting ones.

Later that day I opened his book first, and found the page where his first essay was written:

The Real Lewis Carroll

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson was born in 1832 the eldest son of a clergyman in the north of England. He had lots of brothers and sisters. Like me he was educated at home till the age of eleven, then at Richmond Grammar School, and finally Rugby School, before going on to Christ Church in Oxford, where he spent the rest

of his life, first as a student, then as a lecturer. He died in 1898.

His subject was Mathematics, and he wrote several scholarly books on his favourite subject. I have managed to read his 'Euclid and his Modern Rivals' and two other interesting books: 'The Alphabet Cipher', which tells you how to send messages in a code which no other person can understand; and 'The Game of Logic', which like the previously mentioned book was obviously intended for readers of my age.

His career as a lecturer in Mathematics at Christ Church required him to be ordained into the Church of England and remain unmarried. So at the age of 22 he was ordained Deacon, but managed to persuade his boss, the Dean of Christ Church, not to insist that he go on to be ordained Priest a year later. There are theories about this, the most obvious being that he had a speech defect, and did not want to have to preach very often.

He was very friendly with the Dean and his family. Dean Liddell had several

children, and the three girls that figure large in Dodgson's life are Lorina, Alice and Edith. Alice was three years younger than Lorina and two years older than Edith. One day, when Alice was eight, the three girls were being rowed along the river at Oxford by Dodgson and a friend of his, and asked Dodgson to tell them a story. This he did, and afterwards wrote it all out by hand as 'Alice's Adventures Under Ground' and gave it as a gift to Alice. It was a beautiful book with Dodgson's own drawings illustrating it. This was in 1864. A year later the book was expanded and renamed to its present title, with even better illustrations by a professional artist called John Tenniel. His publisher was offered several names for it to be published under, and chose Lewis (from Dodgson's middle name) Carroll (from the Latin for Charles).

The book was a great success, so there was demand for a sequel, called 'Through the Looking Glass', which was published six years later, with the same artist's drawings.

Dodgson had many interests outside his work as a Mathematics lecturer. He was a

very keen photographer, at a time when the science of making photographs was in its infancy. He also enjoyed writing poetry, and published a volume of poems, called Phantasmagoria. My favourite poem in this book combines these two interests, and is called 'Hiawatha's Photographing', which is a lovely parody of Longfellow's 'The Song of Hiawatha'. He also wrote a long nonsense poem, 'The Hunting of the Snark', which, to be honest, I did not enjoy very much. But I did like the Jabberwocky poem, which like many other poems, are to be found in his Alice books.

My father found me several books about Lewis Carroll from the University Library. The first was actually written by Dodgson's nephew, and is a straight forward biography with lots of references to the letters Dodgson wrote to people, and also to his diaries. There is however a bit of a problem about the diaries, which is highlighted by later writers about Dodgson. There are many pages that have been removed, presumably by those close to him, after his death. What were they trying to

hide?

It is obvious that there are questions to be asked about Dodgson's relationship with Alice and other girls of the age she was when Dodgson first wrote about a girl called Alice. Perhaps when I am older I will understand enough about people to know what these questions are, and what the possible answers are too.

What an essay! After feeling grumpy about having so much marking to do, I now felt that my life as a teacher was, perhaps, after all, worthwhile.

I was expecting his essay summarising the two books to be very similar to those the other boys would write, since it was simply intended to be a shortened version of the narrative of the books. So I decided to read it last, after all the others. Once again, though, I was in for a surprise.

Newberry

After reading eleven very ordinary summaries of the two Lewis Carroll Alice books, I turned again to Trubshaw's exercise book. I suppose I should have expected something a bit different from the others I had already read.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

Alice is bored and, following a rabbit who is in a hurry into his rabbit hole, finds herself in a strange underground place. She drinks potions that change her size, and ends up swimming in a sea of her own tears. She meets people who Alice knows in real life: Dodo is Dodgson, of course, the Duck is Canon Duckworth, who was the other person in the rowing boat when the story was first told, and her sisters Lorina (Lory) and Edith (Eaglet). One wonders who the Caterpillar is, whom Alice meets next; perhaps a heavy-smoking college friend. She meets a Cheshire cat, and it is interesting that Dodgson was appointed as official curator of the college cat. The tea party she encounters has characters who

may also be people Dodgson knew from Oxford: a Mad Hatter, a March Hare, and a Dormouse who falls asleep. Dodgson often played croquet on the Dean's lawn with his children, so a croquet match is something the real Alice would understand. No doubt Alice and Dodgson had often played card games too, so characters who appear as cards in a pack of cards are not surprising in this make-believe world. And it all ends when Alice wakes up and realises that it was all a dream.

Through the Looking Glass

Alice has another dream in which she climbs through the mirror in her living room into another fantasy world. Here we are in the framework of chess pieces rather than playing cards, with the Red Queen being the main character and Alice being like a pawn who must progress to the far rank of the chess-board to be promoted to a queen herself. She meets Tweedledum and Tweedledee, who, like Humpty Dumpty, are nursery rhyme characters Alice would know well. She also meets the White Queen, and more characters from nursery

rhymes, the Lion and the Unicorn. Another chess character is the White Knight. What I liked most about this book were the poems, especially the Jabberwocky, the Walrus and the Carpenter, and 'You are Old, Father William', which is a parody of a poem, which would be well-known by children then, of 'The Old Man's Comforts and How He Gained Them'. I also noticed that all the older women depicted by Dodgson in both stories, such as the Queen of Hearts and the Red Queen, are rather unpleasant people. I wonder if Mrs Liddell, Alice's mother, had any influence in this. Or perhaps Alice's governess, for in real life she had one? Or perhaps both?

It was a good job, I was thinking, that Trubshaw had only one lesson in which to write these summaries. What sort of an essay would I be reading if he had had longer?

Ivy

Have you ever thought what it might be like to be a sixteen year old girl in a remote village? First, the only choice you have of boyfriends are the local youths. It may not be the same in all the villages like mine, but here it is awful. They are uncouth, with only the prospect of being farm labourers, so they have no cultural aspirations at all. I am sure you can imagine what range of conversations they might have.

If it were not for the school, my chances of getting any sort of job locally would be zero. Yes, there is a pub here, but the barmaid there is the landlord's wife, and in any case this is not a job for a lifetime for someone like me.

You've guessed. My only escape is marriage, and raising a family, but how on earth can I find a man I would want to spend the rest of my life with?

And as for the job I have, my impressive title of 'assistant matron' might sound good to anyone who did not know the reality, but it is hugely misleading. It boils down to

being a skivvy. I do whatever Matron or Cook tells me to do. Florence, the other 'assistant matron', and I both know we are lucky to have a job at all. Every day during term time, apart from Sunday, we cycle the two miles from the village to the school, and do what we are told to do. There is all the laundry, all the beds to check for the telltale patches of damp from the poor younger boys whose nervousness and unhappiness makes them wet their beds, and the cleaning and dusting, until we turn up in the kitchen for all the jobs Cook has for us. We peel potatoes, cut up carrots and cabbages, and all the other things like that. Then there is the washing up, and at the end of the day mixing up the oats and water for the porridge which stands there overnight.

We have been strictly forbidden to have any contact with the male staff, and especially with the boys. Florence meets with Arthur's son, Bill, when she can, and I leave her to it. I have set my sights higher than that. Arthur is Cook's husband, and does all the gardening, lawn-mowing, and

any other handyman job that turns up, and Bill helps him, as and when required.

I think a lot about the boys here. They are obviously from good families, otherwise they could not afford the fees. The older ones are just three or four years younger than me, so when I am twenty they will be sixteen or seventeen, and when I am twenty-four they will be grown men. What I really want is to be able to start a friendship that we could continue till then. The only way, of course, will be to be pen-pals.

You may think this plan is a pretty desperate one, but if you can think of a better one for a girl like me, you are smarter than I am.

The road from the village to the school passes along the games field. There is a hedge between the road and the field. At the far end of the field, about 300 yards from the main school building, the hall, there is an old folly. It looks a bit like a Greek temple, but with nothing but the columns. I was thinking my usual thoughts about my future when one evening, as I was

cycling home, I noticed a solitary boy sitting there on what looked like a bench. He was just sitting there, all on his own. So I stopped cycling, put my bike down, and went over to the hedge. I am just tall enough to see over it.

“Hi there,” I called out.

The boy looked up, and saw where I was.

“Can we talk?” I asked.

He came over towards me.

“Are you one of the assistant matrons at the school?”

“Yes, my name is Ivy.”

“I am afraid we are not allowed to talk with any of the lady staff, except Matron, of course.”

“Why not?”

“Good question. I will have to think about that.”

“All right. Just tell me why you sit here all on your own.”

“Well, I am a philosopher, so I spend a lot of time thinking, and here is a special 'thinking place' as far as I am concerned.”

This seemed pretty odd to me, and I

would have preferred him to be a bit older, of course, but at least I had found an interesting person. None of the village boys would ever suppose that 'thinking' was a possible way to spend their time.

"If we walk to the very end of the field we will find a gate, and that will make it easier for us to talk."

"It is against the rules for me, and won't you be putting your job at risk too?"

"We would be effectively out of sight from the school because of those trees," I said, pointing to the clump of trees that stood at the very end of the games field.

Again, I could see uncertainty all over his face. There was the natural wish to obey the school rules fighting with the curiosity of what it might be like to have a conversation with a girl like me.

"Are you on your way home from work? Is that why you are here?"

"Yes."

"Give me some time to think this over. I need to be back in school now anyway for supper. But I will be here the same time again tomorrow probably, unless it rains,

and I will have thought things over enough by then to know what is the right thing to do.”

“Fair enough. Bye for now.”

And off I cycled wondering whether I had done enough to start something that might end up interestingly.

Wetherill

Being in the Fifth Form might sound rather grand, but all it means is we are a year older, and have reached the age of twelve. The one extra you do notice, though, is that is now time for us to be Confirmed.

Believe it or not I actually quite like church. My parents run a hotel on the sea-front at Eastbourne. Yours truly is an unpaid hotel servant during the holidays, so the search for escapes began when I was much younger. Sunday is one of the busiest days for any hotel, and you may have guessed already how I found an escape. Quite near the front in Eastbourne is Holy Trinity Church, and they have a choir. You don't have to be a particularly good singer, but just good enough not to be a nuisance. I think it is numbers they want of clean faced youngsters like me to be put into choir robes and make a fine show. So I have a good escape every Sunday, and this will last until my voice breaks.

So when my Dad got the letter about the Confirmation classes we can join in the

Fifth Form I said that as a choirboy this was a must for me.

The classes are to be taken by the Chaplain, needless to say, every Sunday, for half-an-hour after breakfast and before the usual Sunday morning service. Asking around I have found out that everyone in the Fifth Form has signed up for the classes. I rather expected these classes to be simple enough; we would listen to what we were told we had to believe, and nod in assent from time to time. I had not included in this view the Trubshaw factor.

At the first class the Chaplain began by issuing us each a copy of a very small book, with very small print, called the Book of Common Prayer. I had seen this book dozens of times at Holy Trinity, but usually in big enough print for us choirboys to read easily.

Trubshaw started straight off with a question:

“Sir, I have been studying this book at home, and the language seems very old fashioned. When was it actually written?”

You could see that the Chaplain was a

bit worried about having to start answering questions when he would much rather have a monologue. He frowned.

“Good question, Trubshaw.” I have noticed that this is what people say when the question is not one they actually like. “It was published in 1662.”

Gosh, I was thinking. Nearly three hundred years ago.

“Now turn to page 289,” he announced, and you will see that the part we are going to study is called the Catechism.”

We all fumbled our way to the right page, and Chappers read aloud the first line, which was a question: “What is your name?” I read the next line and saw that the answer was supposed to be 'N or M'. That's a pretty daft name, I thought, but he explained that this was where we would answer with the name or names we had actually been given when we were baptised.

The next paragraph was really rather good, and I could see that there would soon be some interesting questions from Trubshaw. Here was a reference to 'the

devil and all his works' and, even more potentially interesting 'the sinful lusts of the flesh.'

Just as I expected Trubshaw piped up with: "Sir, please could you explain what these actually are?"

It is quite amazing how grown-ups can witter on with lots of words but without actually saying anything. I suppose clergymen become especially skilled in this respect, through regular practice. We listened carefully, hoping for something explicit, but all we got were generalities. Very disappointing, and without looking at his watch Chappers eventually announced that time was up and we would continue next Sunday. So we all trooped out, but with the expectation that once again our good scout Trubs would be asking all the right, that is to say, embarrassing, questions.

Ivy

We have had a few rainy days since I last spoke to the mysterious boy sitting all on his own at the end of the games field. But now I have found him again as I cycled past, and I called out to him again, and pointed towards the gate that was effectively out of sight from the school.

He wandered down as before and we stood either side of the gate. He was the first to speak:

“I have decided that it would be against the school rules for me to meet you like this, and you are probably risking your job in doing so.”

“Just tell me your name, then.”

“It is Trubshaw.”

“No. what is your first name.”

“We only use surnames here, but if you really want to know, you will find out soon enough. I have left a letter for you.”

This was great news.

“Where?”

“If you come into this field when it is dark enough for it to be safe for you not to

be caught, and go to the Greek temple, there you will find a sort of a bench. At one end there is a flat stone, and under it a letter for you. Even if it rains, the bench will shelter it quite well. If you want to, you can leave letters for me there too."

It was immediately obvious to me why he had done this. Any letters the boys send out are put in a posting box in the hall. The masters will probably not open any of them before they are taken to the Royal Mail real postbox in the village, but they will certainly see the address they are being sent to. And any incoming letters will have a postmark showing where they have come from. What a smart boy, I thought. We can become pen-pals quite safely this way.

"Now I must go."

"Many thanks," was my reply. "You will get an answer from me pretty soon, I promise."

The boy went off looking a bit pleased with himself, and I determined to come out here again this evening to collect the first letter from him. I was impatient to know what he had said in his letter, and it was

obvious from his taking so much care over the delivery method that he was going to be a serious pen-pal.

Although it was dusk when I cycled to the field that evening, I had no difficulty in finding the letter. It took a lot of self-control not to open it and try to read it straight away. But I knew it would be better to wait till I got home. Having put away my cycle in the shed in the garden I went up to my room. I noticed straight away that there was no name on the envelope. He was certainly being cautious, and I supposed he was not totally sure who might find the letter. He kept up the caution inside too. The letter read:

To my secret friend,

I am not sure what you want to know about me, or even why you want us to be friends. But I hope we can rely on this method of writing to each other. I have very little experience of friendship at all. I am an only child, and I have only been at any school at all for a year, because my father decided I would learn better if I studied on my own at home. Also my

mother died giving birth to me, so the only female person I know well is the kind lady who is my father's resident housekeeper.

I am beginning to discover what friendship is all about. My best friend here is another boy in the same form as me. He is no good at games, so all the other boys make fun of him all the time. But I like him. He is not a show-off, and he is always kind to people. He looked after me when I was a new boy here, and now I try to look after him. I have stayed at his place, and he at mine. This was during the Christmas and Easter holidays.. I suppose we are both a bit lonely, and our friendship helps us out a lot.

I have no idea at all what it might be like to have a friend like you, or even why you might want to have a friend like me.

With best wishes,

Theo.

I read the letter through twice, thinking about what it revealed about the writer. No bragging. No list of all his virtues. He even talked almost as much about other people as himself. And still very cautious, with not even a hint of the gender of the person he

was writing to. He was even ready to admit he did not know very much about friendship at all. I remembered how he had described himself as a philosopher, which might have seemed a bit pretentious for a boy of his age, but somehow, now I had read his letter where he openly wondered what friendship was, seemed to be a good self-description.

He would know I had got the letter, because the next time he visited the temple place he would see that the letter had been taken. I decided that I need not hurry with a reply. More to the point, I had to decide if I really did want a friend like him.

Chaplain

Another Sunday, and so another confirmation class straight after breakfast. What had always been in the past a purely routine affair, with the text of the Catechism in the Book of Common Prayer providing the entire content, which I could more or less sleep-walk through, was now going to be an interesting challenge. I was not sure whether having Trubshaw in the class was good news or bad news.

The next part of the Catechism was the Creed. All very straightforward, you might suppose, But with Trubshaw to consider I decided to be a bit more informative, Perhaps I could anticipate his predictable questions. So I told the boys that there were in fact three Creeds. There was the Apostles' Creed, which was the shortest, and was the one we were looking at now. Then there were two other longer ones, which were formulated later, when the all the bishops met at a special council to agree exactly how to define the relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I

could actually see Trubshaw nodding as I said all this. I now read the Creed aloud, and we all just sat there thinking about it.

One of the boys asked: "Do we have to learn this Creed off by heart, sir?"

"No," I replied, "because you will always have your Prayer Book available when the Creed is recited as part of a service."

Then Trubshaw put his hand up and I nodded for him to speak.

"May I make a comment about this Creed, sir?"

"Certainly."

"Please, sir, what worries me is what they left out."

Oh dear, here we go again, I thought.

"There are only two human beings named in the Creed: Mary and Pontius Pilate. Why is that? Surely there were more important people than the Roman governor of Judea at the time. Like Peter and Paul, for instance."

What on earth could I say to that? Before I had gathered my thoughts for an answer Trubshaw went on further.

"The other thing, sir, is why they said

nothing about what Jesus did when he was here on earth. We get that he was born, and the next thing is that he died. No mention of the healings, the casting out of demons, and raising people from the dead. I think these are pretty important, don't you, sir?"

I was flabbergasted. Of course he was right, and I could not find a good answer for why these elements were left out. I temporised.

"Good point, Trubshaw. I will think about this, but it is not our job to rewrite the Prayer Book, is it?"

The whole class had sensed my embarrassment and were smiling at each other. I knew what they were thinking. Trubshaw has won yet another verbal battle with a teacher. Once more I had to decide quickly that the class was over. I was torn between cursing the presence of such a mind and delighting in the stimulus he was giving to my own faith.

Ivy

It did not take me very long to decide that I was really curious to learn more about Theo. So I took some care with my response. Since he had described himself as a philosopher. I thought I could find a way into his mind.

Dear Theo

Thank you for writing to me, and I think this method of getting letters to each other will be safe for both of us.

The very fact that we are having to be careful is at the very heart of my awareness of the difference life's lottery has awarded us. You are male. I am female. You will have all the best educational opportunities open to you. Think how many judges are men, how many doctors, how many barristers. I could go on with a very long list.

And here you are in a school where all the pupils are male, all the teachers are male, and all the people in subservient positions are female, if you don't count Arthur and Bill.

Every day, when I clean out the room the teachers use to smoke in, I collect the out-of-date newspaper. It has a front page full of boxed advertisements and messages, but inside it gives me a picture of the world outside my sleepy village.

I know from overhearing things Matron says that your father is a professor at Cambridge University. All the colleges are men only or women only. There are lots of colleges for men, but only two for women, and the larger of these is situated miles from the centre of Cambridge. I think it is much the same sort of thing at Oxford.

Half of the human population is female.

So here is a philosophical question for you: is this right? Why should women be given so little opportunity to advance themselves? Is not growing up surrounded only by the company of males going to perpetuate this division?

With best wishes,

Ivy

I wondered what he would make of this when I sneaked through the gate on the way to my work at school and carefully

placed my letter under the stone. I reckoned it was safe enough to do this at an hour when surely no one would be looking out across the field. The very fact that I had to be secretive like this raised the level of my annoyance at the difference of status between us.

Wetherill

We are very strongly encouraged to write home to our parents once a week, on Sundays. There is a box in the main hall where we post the letters, and on Monday morning they all get taken down to the nearby village where there is a proper posting box.

I do not think anyone actually opens our letters to check what we might be saying about the school. But if you go two Sundays without sending anything you are asked by your Form Master about it. So obviously they check on the addresses on the envelopes.

Incoming letters are delivered to the school as a block, and then each Form Master gets the ones for the boys in his form, and they are handed out each afternoon by him to the boy in the afternoon form period. So everyone knows who is receiving letters.

Although I have nothing to say to my parents, I write every Sunday, and usually have a return letter Wednesday or

Thursday. This is probably true for most of us, and I cannot help noticing how my friend Trubshaw's letters seem to take a long time for him to read. I have also noticed that his letters from home are always on a pale blue paper.

I am not a nosy person, but I could not help notice him reading a letter which was on white paper. He seemed to be reading it very thoughtfully. Knowing Trubs as I do, I made no reference to it, even though I was desperate to know who else was writing to him apart from his father.

We were in the games room. It was raining, so Trubs had not gone off, as he usually does, to the Hagia Sophia. We were in a corner of the games room, and no one was close enough to hear us.

“Soapy, we need to talk.”

Trubs often starts a conversation like this, and I settle back to listen to him being philosophical. He usually loses me in the complexity of his thinking, but he is good company and so I pretend to be understanding him. This time there was no need for pretence.

“What do you think about girls?”

This caught me unawares.

“Well, actually, I don't think about them at all.”

“Precisely.”

Good grief. What sort of a conversation is this? Having nothing to say I waited for him to explain.

“You have made my point perfectly,” he went on.

He had lost me by now. What point? But I said nothing.

“Here we are, at a school which is supposed to prepare us for eventual adulthood, and we have no contact with females of our own age.”

“Does this matter?” I asked.

“There you go again, just proving my point. We are so detached from the world of females that we don't even notice we are detached.”

“You are right. And we have been expressly forbidden to have any contact with the two assistant matrons, who are not all that older than us.”

“Segregation. Quite intentional and

deliberate. So the question is: why? What is it they do not want us to find out? These are questions for the Socrates Club.”

“Could be,” I said, knowing he had already made up his mind.

“But I must do some preparation first.”

What preparation, I thought. But I realised there would be no point in asking Trubs about this. I can tell when he has gone into his shell of inner thoughts just by the look on his face. He was planning something in his own private, philosophical, world. I would find out eventually anyway by what he actually did.

Chaplain

After the previous Catechism sessions I was beginning both to enjoy and to fear what would happen in them. It was a pleasant change to have discussion, but there was the uncertainty as to whether the questions would be embarrassing.

After the Creed came two sections, defining one's duty to God and to one's neighbour. There was nothing controversial in either of these, although I noticed for the first time how archaic the language was.

It was comforting to read out the words 'to submit myself to all my governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters, and to order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters.'

I looked in the direction of Trubshaw to see if there would any comment here. "Do you have any question at this point, Trubshaw?"

"Actually, no, sir."

Then we got on to some more good moral instructions: 'to learn and labour truly to get my own living, and to do my

duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call me.'

This time I could see a frown on Trubshaw's brow. "Come on, Trubshaw, you look a bit perplexed."

"Well, sir I was just thinking. Are girls allowed to be confirmed?"

"Yes, of course."

"So girls should be trained to earn their own living too.?"

"Ah, well, many of them will not need to, because when they get married their duty will be to manage their household, and the bring up their children."

"Is that why so few of them have any college to go to at university, or any chance of doing well in the main professions?"

I could see where he was going with this line of discussion, but it occurred to me to wonder why he was suddenly so interested in the life opportunities of girls. This was very unusual for a boy of his age.

"This is the way things are ordered in our society."

"But, is it right, sir?"

Once again I was not sure how to

answer a question posed by this annoying boy. And once again I declared that time had defeated us.

Ivy

It was difficult to know when there would be a letter from Theo for me, and as I cycled home from work every day my hopes were raised. I checked our private post box every time, and it was several days before the next letter was there. It read:

Dear Ivy,

You have given me a lot to think about, and on a subject that it had never occurred to me before to think about. This very fact makes me realise how my upbringing and inbuilt assumptions need to be questioned.

I run a sort of debating club here, called the Socrates Club. It meets on a Sunday after lunch, at about 2 o'clock in what you think of as the Folly, and which we now call Hagia Sophia. This means Holy Wisdom.

I have decided that the next time we meet we will discuss the issues you have raised. I will prepare a notice which the Headmaster will read out at our Saturday assembly. I have been trying to find the best way to describe what we should talk

about. So far I am thinking of it being 'The Pros and Cons of single sex education.' The other possibility is to put it as a question: "Why should girls not be allowed in a school like this?"

Do you have any views on the way the topic should be announced? Please let me know. Also, when we have agreed the title for our debate, please let me have a written contribution from you which I will read out during the debate. It is a shame you will not be able to be with us in person, but this will be an opportunity for you to be heard by my fellow pupils.

With best wishes,

Theo.

I was both pleased and annoyed when I had read his letter. Pleased that he was responding in a very positive way to what I had written to him, and annoyed because of the very restrictions that would prevent me from giving my views personally.

This set me thinking. Why should I not join the boys for the debate? Sunday was the day we assistant matrons did not work at the school. The staff all tried to take off

as much time as possible too, so no one would be prowling round a distant edge of the playing field. If I could blend in somehow, I would be able to join them from the gate I used to pick up the messages from Theo.

Blend in? Florence and I did all the laundry. We had access to all the clothes lockers where all the boys' clothing was kept. So 'borrowing' a grey shirt, a pair of grey shorts, socks, and a school tie, would present very little problem. Some of the older boys were almost as big as myself, so I should be able to get items that fitted me. It was a massive risk, and I would get the sack if I got caught, but I judged it would be worth it. The suffragettes who won us the vote had taken far greater risks.

So that evening I wrote out my reply to Theo.

Dear Theo,

I think your first title (the Pros and Cons one) is the best. The second question could be dismissed as being impractical, while the other title makes it far more general.

As for writing out something for you to

read out, I have decided on a better solution. I will attend the debate too. I will sneak in from my gate unobtrusively, and at the distance we will be from where any teachers might be, so long as there are enough of you, I am sure I will not be spotted.

So go ahead as you have already planned, and, weather permitting, we will be together this coming Sunday afternoon.

Do not worry about me. I am aware of the risk I am taking, and I think it worthwhile.

All the best,

Ivy

I posted this on the way to school the next morning. Only time will tell whether this will result in the end of my job, and all that that will mean for me.

Wetherill

Saturday morning is always the time when any notices about the Socrates Club are given out by the Headmaster at the end of our morning assembly. The weather seems to be set fine for the weekend, and so it was no surprise that there was a notice. But what was surprising was the announced subject for debate. It was 'the Pros and Cons of single sex education'.

The Headmaster managed to keep his own thoughts on this topic to himself, but added that the topic was chosen by the secretary of the club, which we all knew was Trubshaw. I think he wanted us to realise that he would not have chosen anything like this.

His apparent disapproval would ensure that there would be a very good turnout, even if only to find out what Trubs was up to.

Saturdays are also days when we are likely to have a rugby match against another school like ours. I have decided that now I am in the Fifth Form I must

safeguard myself against this ridiculous sport, and I have come up with a grand solution. I went up to Easy (as we call our young sports master Mr. Easton) and volunteered to be touch judge for the First XV. This rather took him by surprise, as one of the major creeds of any schoolboy is never to volunteer for anything. The touch judge is a vital part of the game, running the side touch line to adjudicate on whether the ball has gone off the field of play and whose side will get to throw it in to line-out. He even carries a nice flag with the school colours. When we play a match against another school, each side will provide a touch judge. Being touch judge is the one way to ensure that I do not actually have to play in the team. Easy accepted my offer, and so now I am guaranteed a safe passage every Saturday.

Ivy

It was the Saturday before the potentially fateful day of the debate after Sunday lunch. Everyone, including Matron was out watching the school first XV play rugby against a rival prep school. I was supposed to be dusting the dormitories before I went home. The perfect opportunity for me to hatch my plan.

When I turned up tomorrow I had to be not noticeable from a distance among all the other boys. I am not all that tall, about as tall as the tallest of the boys, and I had decided I would try to look as nearly like them as possible. All the boys' clothes were kept in a small locker for each of them, and after laundry the clothes were all stored there. Each item of clothing has a name tag sewed into it, and each locker had the boy's name on it. I knew which were the biggest boys from their clothes.

So I went round and collected a pair of calf length grey socks, a school tie from Matron's collection of spares, then the largest grey shirt I could find, and the

largest pair of grey shorts. Taking off my blue housecoat (Matron wanted us to look a bit like her by way of uniform as so-called 'assistant matrons'), I tried both of these on. The shirt was tight across my chest, needless to say, and the shorts were even tighter across my sit-upon. But I could wear them easily. So long as the weather on Sunday was not too cold, this would do. Most of the boys would be wearing a grey pullover, but some of them might be in exactly the same kit as me. On Sundays blazers were only required for church.

I quickly took these items off and put my housecoat back on, putting my 'borrowed' clothing in my carrying bag which would go over my shoulder on the way home.

No one would notice any missing clothes till much later, and these would be returned to the lockers on Monday, which was our regular laundry day anyway. So me putting stuff into lockers was routine for that day and would not seem unusual, even if Matron was around.

But would I get away with wearing them

on the school field tomorrow?

Wetherill

We lads never expected the Confirmation classes to be anything other than a bore. Or, to put it more bluntly, a chore. Religion is one of those things that boys of my age take for granted as part of the regime at school of which we are the prisoners. A bit like smelly toilets and awful food, compared with what we have at home.

Actually, with me, religion was a bit more important. It gave me freedom from the hotel, where I was an unpaid servant, every Sunday, and I found the rituals and the total predicability of everything rather comforting. The prayers were always the same, always in language nobody actually uses every day, so that you did not have to think what they actually meant. The sermons were only of interest to us choirboys because we had a sweepstake on how long any would be. We chipped in a penny, the head choirboy noted our guesses in his notebook, used his posh watch to time them, and the winner with the closest

guess took the full amount collected. This made those of us who had watches particularly attentive, especially when you could tell that the sermon was nearly over. Our chap at Eastbourne nearly always said something like 'to sum up' near the end, and always had 'Amen' as his last word, so that timing could be exact. I sometimes wondered if he actually knew about our sweepstake, as he tended to turn round and look at us in the choir stalls behind the pulpit when he said his concluding 'Amen'.

But Confirmation classes with Trubshaw present were a different kettle of fish. He seemed to mind what it all actually meant, rather to the surprise of Chappers who was obviously not used to this.

We had got to what we all recited every day in chapel, the Lord's Prayer, and Chappers had told us that we needed to be able to recite this from memory, which, by constant repetition, we could anyway. He had not even bothered to ask if any of us had any questions, till Trubshaw put his hand up.

"Please, sir, I have a question."

Chapper's sigh was audible. "Yes, Trubshaw."

"Well, sir, we are to pray that God will not lead us into temptation. Would He do so if we forgot to ask Him not to?"

It had never occurred to me that this was something that could possibly happen, and quite obviously it had not occurred to Chappers either. He opened his mouth but said nothing. He frowned, either in annoyance or in puzzlement, I could not tell which.

"I am sure God would never deliberately lead us to do wrong," he said eventually, and you could see that he knew he had not really answered the question. Trubshaw knew that too, but rather kindly said nothing further.

I asked Trubs about this later, and he said that it was possible that because we were dealing with so much old-fashioned lingo it might be that the meaning of words had changed a bit. He would look up the original Greek word, he said. My eyes glazed over at this, as I knew I was out of

my depth at this point. Trubs would no doubt reveal all his knowledge to me in due course.

Ivy

Today is the day when my fate may be sealed by losing my job at the school. My parents insist that I go to the village church in the morning, since we go as a family, but I am left to my own devices for the rest of the day. In fact, since my father rather likes an afternoon snooze on a Sunday, if I go out on my bicycle for the afternoon there is no objection at all.

The problem, of course, was getting out of the village and on to the road to the school in a boy's uniform. I had first thought of wearing a raincoat on top of everything, but that would be very odd on a fine sunny day, which we were having right now. So the only answer was a bit cumbersome. I dressed in the grey socks, which I rolled right down to look like ankle socks. Then I put on the grey shirt and shorts over my usual underwear, with the school tie in the shorts pocket. Then I put on a long skirt and a long-sleeved pullover on top of all that. The skirt and pullover would come off as soon as I got to the gate

of the school field and go into my bike's haversack. Then on with the tie, and up with the socks.

This was the plan, and although I got a bit warm in the execution of it, it worked perfectly. When I arrived I had to wait awhile till there were enough boys in the 'Hagia Sophia', as I now knew to call it, for me to mingle safely. Eventually I did my clothes change act, and walked boldly toward them, leaving my bike inside the gate and the gate closed.

I must confess my heart was beating slightly faster than usual.

Wetherill

Trubs and I were the first to set off for the Hagia Sophia for the Socrates Club debate, and I noticed that he seemed a little on edge. This was unusual, as he is normally the calmest of all the people I know. Soon we were followed by some other boys, and this seemed to relax him a little. I put it all down to his concern that there would be enough boys for the debate to be successful.

Gradually the folly (I still found its new name difficult to adjust to) filled up and I was assuming Trubshaw would get us all started off. For some reason which I could not understand, he kept looking away from the school toward the copse of trees beyond the folly. What was he doing that for, I wondered, and looked in the same direction myself.

You can imagine my surprise when someone in our usual school uniform emerged from this copse, walking boldly towards us. There was something slightly odd about the shape of this 'boy' I thought,

until I recognised who it was: Ivy, one of our assistant matrons, dressed perfectly like one of us.

Trubshaw took over at this point.

“Boys, I want you to gather round near the pedestal so that our guest will not be recognised from a distance. There may be a master looking out of the window from the school to see how we are getting on.”

We all complied, and Ivy was soon surrounded by us boys. I do not think I was the only one who found the way she filled her shirt and shorts rather, well, . . . I don't know how to explain it.

Trubshaw now mounted the pedestal, and formally announced that the Socrates Club was now in session.

“We are here today to discuss the Pros and Cons of single sex education. I have invited Ivy to join us so that we can hear the point of view of someone affected by the fact that schools like ours only offer places to boys. She, as you know, is forbidden from having any contact with us, and we from having any contact with her. The fact that she has boldly come to join

us in our discussions is to remain a complete secret. No one is to divulge this to any master, or any grown up at all, especially parents. Are we all agreed?"

There was a universal 'yes' to this.

"We will first hear the views of those who think it right that we should be segregated in this way, and then I will ask Ivy to put her point of view. As usual any speaker must mount the pedestal to speak, but we will allow Ivy to speak from the floor, as it were, so that she does not get too prominently displayed to any viewer from the school."

This all seemed very reasonable, and one or two boys got up to speak.

One very young boy got up and said: "I don't want girls in this school; it is bad enough having a sister to put up with at home."

Another said: "We would have to have separate changing rooms if there were girls here, and girls can't play rugby, can they?"

There was a succession of comments like this, all assuming that the discussion was about whether there would be girls at

our school.

When everyone with this kind of viewpoint had had their say, Trubs got on the pedestal again and said: "I think we may be missing the point. This is not about our school, but about a much wider issue. Let us hear what Ivy has to say."

Ivy came to the front now, and stood at the foot of the pedestal, and said: "Trubshaw is right. There is a much wider issue. You boys take it for granted that you will be well educated, and then go on to do important jobs with all the skills you have learnt. You will be the officers in the armed forces, the barristers and judges in our courts, the councillors and members of parliament in our governing bodies, the bosses in our factories, the accountants, the doctors and dentists for our health, while we women will serve in shops, type your letters, and do all the cleaning and other menial jobs. That is if get to have jobs at all, as many of us will be expected to get married, have children, and be just housewives.."

She paused, as we took all this in. "What

is it about women that makes for this division? Are we not as potentially skilled as men when it comes to leading and managing, debating and decision making?"

Again she paused to let this sink in.

"It is the fact of single sex schools that preserves this fiction. Boys are trained for one set of skills, and girls for another. At my school I was taught typing, needlework, and cookery, while on the other side of a big wall there were boys being taught metalwork and woodwork. Each school had its own view of what men should do in their working life, and what women should do. Give me a hammer and I can bash any nail as hard as any man, Give me a saw and I can fashion wood as well as any man. Men can be taught to type, and cook, and sew, but they are not. So the division of school activity lays the foundation for us women and you men for the rest of our lives."

We liked being called men, of course, and we were all beginning to see things as Ivy saw them.

Trubs got up as we all thought about

what Ivy had said. "You see, chaps, there is a wider issue. Now it is obvious that there is nothing we fellows can do about this. But perhaps when we are old enough to influence the way our society develops, we can at least remember what we have heard here today."

There were a few nods at this, and a few frowns as we tried to understand where this left us all. Plenty to think about was my verdict.

"Now I think it will help if a few of us stroll towards the end of the field to help Ivy blend in rather as she makes her way back," added Trubs, ever the planner. I and a few other joined him, knowing we had been privileged to have heard for the first time in our lives a feminine point of view.

Headmaster

I remembered the old adage, 'be careful what you wish for,' and thought that a new one should be added: 'be careful what you try to find out.'

You see, I was curious, nothing more than curious, as to whether there would be a good turnout for Trubshaw's debate about single sex education. So, foolishly as it turned out, I went to the top floor, to a dormitory that overlooked our playing field to see. And just in case I might need them I took my binoculars with me, the ones I use at the races, though I very rarely go.

Yes, there was a good number of boys, which I could have well seen without the binoculars, but I looked through them anyway. And, you've guessed, I saw a rather tall boy whose face was not familiar to me, as a boy, but was entirely familiar to me as an assistant matron. I thought the uniform she was wearing rather suited her, but banished that thought straight away.

Now I had a problem. There were not all that many young ladies in our nearby

village of Driffield who were at all suitable to work here. Although the job requires no skills at all worth speaking of, they do occasionally come into contact with parents so they need a certain amount of social poise. And that is not easily found in a rural community. In theory I should sack her, for she had broken an absolute rule about contact with our male society, young and adult. If Matron found out she would be on her way without a moment's delay.

'Typical', I also thought, that Trubshaw had managed to arrange a female to present the other side of his debate. By rights I should expel him too, and that I could not contemplate: the brightest boy we had ever had, or were ever likely to have, and a clear certainty for a prestigious scholarship to a top school.

But I could not allow the occasion to be repeated. I somehow had to stop it without letting on that I knew it had happened. This would be a demanding exercise in subtle communication, and could not be delayed. So I had a word with Trubshaw at teatime, asking him to favour me with a

visit to my study after the meal. I did my best to make it casual, mentioning 'a report about your discussions.'

It was no accident that my binoculars were on my desk, as a silent, wordless, message.

"So how did your debate go?" I asked when he had entered my study.

He is a sharp lad, and I saw him glance at the binoculars, but carefully not let his eyes linger on them.

"Fine, thank you, sir."

"I suppose the majority are happy with a boys-only school."

"Yes, sir."

And now for the crucial question. "Was the opposite case put well?"

He paused, and took another glance at the binoculars. "Yes, sir, I would say so."

"You will be careful, Trubshaw, not to get anyone into trouble, won't you?"

He looked me in the eyes. The message had been received and understood.

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

Not trusting myself to say any more I nodded towards the door as a signal that

our conversation was over. He gave me a parting smile as he turned to leave.

Job done, I thought.

Wetherill

I was waiting for Trubs to finish his visit to the Head's study, and quite soon he came down the stairs. He had a worried look on his face.

"We need to go for a stroll, so we can talk."

So we sauntered off, casually, towards the playing field.

"He knows," Trubs said, as soon as we were out of earshot.

"Knows what?" I asked.

"That Ivy was there."

"Gosh . . . How?"

"He took his binoculars to where he could scrutinise our gathering, and that would have been enough to spot who Ivy was, in spite of being in our uniform."

"So is she in trouble?"

"No, I don't think so"

"So what did he say?"

"Nothing, really." Trubs paused. "But everything actually. A warning without words."

"I am not sure I understand," was all I

could say.

“It’s hard to explain. He made sure I knew that he knew, but also that he was going to do nothing about it, and that it had better not happen again.”

“And all this without words?”

“Yes, actually.”

“You have lost me, Trubs.”

“I suppose he knew I could read all the signs, which meant that he did not have to use words. The physical sign was that his binoculars were there on his desk, and everything else was simply wordless communication.”

“So you can read minds?”

“Sort of. This was easy. Sometimes it is more subtle. You sort of inwardly know that a person is cross, or happy, or sad. Surely you have those moments too?”

“Well I can tell when my mother is cross because she shouts at me. Like that, do you mean?”

“But when there are no words, or any other outward sign?”

“No, I don’t have moments like that at all.”

"Hmmm. Interesting. I thought everyone could read the signs I can read. I often get the inner knowledge of someone else's real thoughts. The things they don't say. It is often rather embarrassing. They are saying one thing, but I know what they are really thinking."

"You can read their minds?"

"No. Not exactly. Not in any detail. But I can sense their emotional state. That passes to me by some means or other, and I dare say I am just a bit more aware than most people of their body language and other minute indications. It is actually a bit of a nuisance sometimes. Sometimes I would prefer not to know."

"You realise, Trubs, don't you, that you are not like other people?"

"You think so?"

"I know so."

"Well, be that as it may. I have got to let Ivy know how things stand. So I must get a letter to her."

"How will you do that?"

"Best you don't know, Soapy."

And with that he marched off back to

the school building. I knew when it was best to let him do his thing. If he did not want me to know, obviously it was best if I did not know.

Ivy

I made my way back to the gate where my bike was with a good feeling in my mind. Obviously there was nothing these young fellows could do, but perhaps one day one or two of them might as adults be in a position to do something useful.

It did not take me long to put on my extra clothes to look like myself again, and I cycled back home without any mishap and got to my room to take off all the uniform stuff and put it in my bag read to take back to school tomorrow.

On the way to school on Monday I decided to stop off at our letterbox and see if Theo had written to me. Yes, as expected, there was a letter under our stone under the pedestal.

Dear Ivy,

Be sure to put back the uniform items as soon as you can. The Head has a pair of binoculars, and he used them yesterday afternoon, and he knows!!!!

The good news is that it looks as though he is going to do nothing. He must value

you more than you realise. Just keep Matron sweet so that this can pass over quietly.

And thank you for coming yesterday. You put the case so well that I am sure that, although we boys will not admit it, your words have sunk deep into our minds and may one day bear fruit.

But we must now be extra careful, even to the point that we should use this letterbox only in emergencies. I can check for letters easily enough, as I regularly visit the Hagia Sophia just for a time to be alone with my thoughts. But you take a huge risk in doing so. To let you know whether I have left a note for you, if I do so I will put a cryptic message under my pillow. That way you will not have to take any risks to check whether there is a letter when there won't be one.

Yours,

Theo.

Typical of Theo, I thought, when I had got over the shock of having been discovered. He must have been reading spy books, or else he was simply rather smart.

The latter, probably. I put the letter carefully in my bag, so he would know I had read it, and resolved to put back all the clothing I had borrowed as soon as I possibly could. Since Monday was laundry day I would in any case by moving all round the clothes lockers quite naturally. And so it proved. Matron busied herself in the room she calls her office, and I got it done without any fuss or drama.

Chaplain

I have never had so much trouble with Confirmation classes before. We read the Catechism aloud, and the boys all nod and off they go. No fret. But a Confirmation class with Trubshaw in it is a different kettle of fish. After the Lord's Prayer, which we did a week ago, the next bit is about the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. I decided I had better read the text carefully and prepare myself for the mental onslaught I could expect.

The writers of the Catechism should have known better than to use the format of questions and answers. It might have done well for the schoolboys of the seventeenth century, but it was bad news for me. Here was the actual question of the Catechism:

Why then are infants baptised when by reason of their tender age they cannot perform the promises [to forsake sin and to have faith]?

Not a bad question, obviously, and the Catechism gives a very feeble answer, I

thought. It says that they promise them by their sureties, meaning their parents and godparents. I wish they had not put it quite like that. It would be much better if it said that the parents and godparents make these promises which they have the choice to confirm when they are old enough to do so.

You can imagine the surprise the boys had when I put it just like that. Here was Chappers criticising the holy words of the Prayer Book he was supposed to revere.

It was perhaps a pity that I actually used the word 'choice'. Trubshaw picked up on this.

“Does this mean we have a choice, sir?”

There was no avoiding it. “Yes, it does.”

My answer was left hanging in the air. The Catechism said they were bound to perform the promises, using exactly those words, and I was saying they had a choice. The silence that followed my answer was deafening. Fortunately we could move on to the second sacrament, and there was nothing difficult about the words here, about the bread and the wine being the

outward parts, or symbols, as it translated the word 'sacrament' for them.

This section was the last of the Catechism, and I could truthfully report to the bishop that my boys had all been taken through it thoroughly. I would still have to take them through the service of Confirmation, but I always left that until much nearer the time when they would actually be confirmed.

"When will we be confirmed, sir?" asked one of the boys, not Trubshaw.

"We always arrange this for the Spring term, near to Easter."

"So we have lots of time before we have to make our choice, then?" This from Trubshaw, of course.

That wretched word. I wished I had never used. So I simply nodded and let them know that the session was over.

Matron

One of the challenges of being the only person responsible for the health of a lot of boys in a boarding school is what to do when they get ill. We have a small room with two beds in it which we call the Sick Bay. Fortunately we do not often have to use it, but every now and then we do.

And it was Trubshaw who was the first to need it this term. He came to me after breakfast with a runny nose and watery eyes, complaining of a very bad headache and feeling awful. When I took his temperature I knew straight away that this was more than just a cold. His fever was very serious, with a temperature of nearly a hundred and four.

I suspected measles straight away, although this would not be confirmed for a day or two until the rash appeared. With my nursing experience I knew what I must do, and took him straight away to the Sick Bay, got him into his pyjamas and closed the curtains. He was complaining that the bright light hurt his eyes, which was

another classic symptom of measles.

I then went and reported everything to the Headmaster, who agreed to phone for the doctor. When he came he agreed with me, and said he would visit again if and when the rash appeared.

Now I had a problem. The boy was obviously very ill with a serious illness and would need to be carefully monitored, in case he got worse, especially with his breathing. I called Ivy and Florence to my office.

“Have either of you ever had measles?” I asked.

Ivy was quick to respond. “Yes, Matron, I had it when I was quite young.” Florence said nothing.

“Ivy, one of the boys has got very ill, and I suspect it is measles. If you have already had measles you have built up an immunity and cannot get it again. So I am going to ask you to spend time with him, to make sure there are no complications. Are you willing to help me with this?”

“Yes, certainly, Matron.”

“You don't need to actually do anything,

except perhaps put a wet flannel on his brow if that seems to help manage his fever. Just be with him, but come straight to me if he seems to have any difficulty with his breathing.”

With this I took Ivy off to the Sick Bay, There was chair between the beds, and I left her there with my patient.

Ivy

I could not believe my good fortune when I saw who the boy was. Obviously I was not glad that he was suffering, but the chance to be with him on my own seemed to be a gift from Heaven.

He was obviously very unwell, and I could see how much perspiration there was on his brow. Armed with my damp flannel, I applied this gently to his brow, and he opened his eyes and simply smiled, saying nothing.

It was rather relaxing, compared with the usual turmoil of my job, to be just sitting next to someone, in case they needed anything. At lunchtime Matron came in with a bowl of broth, and a large glass of water.

“We must keep his fluids up,” she said. “See if you can get him to take any of this broth, and if not make sure he drinks some water. Both even.”

I got my patient sitting up in bed and succeeded in getting some broth down him, giving it to him myself using a spoon. After

this he nestled down again in bed and went fast asleep.

Matron came up and sent me off to get my own lunch in the kitchen. Telling me to come back again as soon as I had eaten my own meal. And so the day went on, with occasional visits from Matron until it was time for me to go home.

“Will he be all right?” I asked as I was leaving.

“Yes, Mrs. Walker and I will look after him between now and tomorrow morning, and you will take over again as soon as you get here tomorrow.”

I cycled home with mixed feelings: concern for my new friend, and joy at the prospect of prolonged contact with him.

Mrs. Walker

Matron and I had agreed to combine our resources in looking after our patient during the hours when Ivy was not at work. We agreed that the first 24 hours were the most critical, and then we would see how he progressed.

Matron had taken the early evening and I took over from her around midnight. Our small Sick Bay had two beds with a chair in between. It was no great hardship to lie down on the second bed, and I confess that I soon fell asleep. He did not seem to need anything and was obviously asleep most of the time himself.

As dawn came we were both aware of each other, but he had his eyes closed.

"How are you feeling?" I asked.

"Very weak, actually, and for some reason I cannot open my eyes."

I rushed off to fetch Matron.

She came back with me armed with a small dish filled with warm water, and some cotton wool.

"Conjunctivitis," she explained. "Quite a

typical symptom for measles early on. What you and I experience as sleeper when we wake up becomes so profuse in these cases that it prevents the eyelids from opening. It is relatively simple to dissolve it all with warm water.

She applied the wet cotton wool carefully, and very soon Trubshaw could open his eyes.

“Thank you,” he said. “I was wondering if I was going blind.”

“No need to fear that,” encouraged Matron. “It was just a natural part of what your body is going through.”

He smiled, obviously reassured.

“Now all you need is rest, and lots of liquid. I will fetch you a mug of Bovril.”

Thus ended the first night of Trubshaw's illness.

Matron

The conjunctivitis made me sure that the boy had measles, and that as soon as the rash appeared on his face I would ask the doctor to pay us another visit for confirmation. From my nursing training I knew that there was no cure for measles, and that we just had to let the illness run its course, while caring for the patient as best we could.

We were lucky that Ivy had already had measles and so could be part of the caring team. She seemed perfectly happy to just sit with him, and it was Florence who was the grumpy one, because all the extra work fell on her: one person doing what normally two did. Ivy even volunteered to come in on Sunday to help out, but I said that as this was the third day we would be able to manage without her. Trubshaw's fever was now much reduced, and he was no longer in critical danger.

Come Monday and the rash appeared, first on his face, and then later on his chest and tummy. The doctor visited and told us

officially what we already knew. He recommended total bed rest and that we carry on monitoring everything.

I decided that Ivy would continue to keep him company during her working hours, and to feed him at meal times and to help him to the toilet when he needed help. He still found the bright light a difficulty, so there was less chance for him to spend any waking hours reading. Knowing Trubshaw as I did, I now saw boredom as perhaps the most distressing thing for him. So Ivy keeping him company was a good thing, even if he did not really now need continuous care. I also agreed that Mrs. Walker should keep him company in the evenings. I could see that she wanted to spend time with him. She had got very involved emotionally in his care, and seemed rather worried about his welfare. She behaved just like a mother would.

Mrs. Walker

By Monday evening our patient was obviously on the mend, even though bright light hurt his eyes and the rash on his face was rather unsightly.

When I went into his room with some bread and milk for his supper, he smiled his thanks to me.

“Everyone is looking after me wonderfully well,” he said.

“You have been very ill and it will be days before you can get up again.”

“This is the first time in my life I have been properly ill. Never before at home.”

“Tell me about home.”

“Well, there is my father who teaches at the university, and Mrs. Zakary, who looks after us both. She is a refugee from Poland. She escaped just before the country was invaded by Hitler, and her husband is almost certainly dead. He stayed behind to fight in the woods, and has not been heard of for ten years and more.”

“How do you get on with Mrs. Zakary?”

“When I was young I could not get my

tongue round her name, and called her Mystery instead. And the name has sort of stuck, and I still call her Mystery. I think she rather likes that.”

“You said nothing about your mother.”

“She died giving birth to me, or very soon after. So I have no mother.”

I let the word 'mother' hang in the air and wondered if he would say any more on that topic.

“I suppose that Mystery and people like you are the nearest I have got to a mother,” he said at last.

Another pause, with me deliberately leading him on by saying nothing.

“Of course, not having a mother means I have no idea what I am missing. I have no idea what having a mother would be like. Unless, of course, being looked after by you and Matron and Ivy is what it would be like.”

“But we are only looking after you because you are very poorly,” I said. “A mother would look after you all the time, in sickness and in health.”

“When I am not ill, do I still need looking

after?"

"Of course you do."

I could see this answer puzzled him a little.

"Is this the only thing grown-up women are good for? Looking after children?"

Now he had hit my sore spot.

"I help my husband run this school, and there is a lot of office and management work involved in that. It leaves him free to concentrate on educating you boys."

"But you have time to be a bit of a mother to us all."

"Indeed." I took up his bowl, now that he had finished his bread and milk. "And now I must be off."

This boy was far too perceptive. He somehow knew the deep frustration I felt that my husband and I had not managed to produce any children of our own. I wished I could spend more time talking to him, but if I did I was sure this would bring to the surface things that it was easier to hold deep down in my mind. Better safe than sorry, I said to myself, as I made my way to the kitchen.

Ivy

With Trubshaw beginning to mend Matron has decided that he does not need full time monitoring any longer. I am not therefore to stay with him all the time, but now I am to help him with his meals, and check on him every now and then, to make sure he keeps drinking plenty of fluids and to help him get to the toilet when he needs that.

This meant that I spent much less time with him, but it also meant that when I was with him he was fully alert and in a mood for lots of conversation. He wanted to talk about his home situation. He told me all about his surrogate mother, Mystery, and how he had learnt everything by being taught at home, or rather simply studying on his own at home. I let him talk freely for a while, and this seemed to help him unwind.

The most important thing I wanted to know, as you can imagine, was how my forbidden visit to the boys' debate on that Sunday afternoon had been discovered.

“The Headmaster asked me to see him, and there on his desk was a pair of binoculars. He never said anything directly, but I knew, almost as surely from what he did not say, that he had seen you and had recognised who you were. I suppose if he had been explicit he would have had to dismiss you and expel me, and it seems he does not want to do either of those things.”

“Gosh,” was all I could say in reply. But I let the idea sink in that perhaps I was more valued than I realised.

Trubshaw continued: “I find it interesting that we humans can communicate very well without actually using words.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“I don't know about you, but I can sense what people are actually thinking, even when they are silent, or their words are saying something else. I was explaining this to Soapy, Wetherill, my friend, just the other day, before I got ill.’

“Do you mean you can read people's minds?”

“No, not exactly that. I suppose you could say I am sensitive to their moods, or

their emotions.”

“Moods? Emotions? What do you mean?”

“At its simplest I can tell when people are angry, or sad, or longing for something, or jealous about something, or anxious, or worried about something.”

“I see.”

“I suppose quite a lot of emotions like these are conveyed by body language. It shows on their faces, grumpy looks, brows frowning, eyes narrowing, that sort of thing. Shoulders shrugging, fists clenching, even something as simple as whether they look you in the eyes or not.”

“Do you think you have a sort of special gift in this department?”

“Possibly, but maybe I’m just a little more sensitive than most people. Soapy said he did not have anything like this himself. Perhaps he just takes a lot less notice of other people than I do.”

“Can you give me an example?”

“Well, take Mrs. Walker. It is obvious she is all hung up about not having produced any children. She looked at me in a

particular way, and I could see she was thinking 'I wish this boy was my son!'

I hardly knew what to say to this.

"Of course there is no way to test these insights, and I might just be fooling myself," he said.

"What are your 'insights' into Matron?" I asked.

"Yes, I thought you might ask that. She is a bit like Mrs. Walker, in that her job gives her lots of surrogate sons to care for. But she has not married, so she knows real sons are not a possibility. So the sense of loss is less strong in her."

"How does she relate to you?"

"Very caring, wanting me to get well, and this care is part of her whole outlook on life as a nurse. So very real compassion, but alongside that professional pride."

Dare I ask the obvious next question? It seems I dare: "And what about me?"

"Are you sure you want to know?"

"Yes."

"And you promise not to throw that water over me when I tell you."

"I promise."

“You want me for your boyfriend, but you know I am too young for that.”

Good grief. How absolutely spot on. I marvelled at his insight.

“May I go on?”

“Of course.”

“You are very ambitious and you want to be in a much better job than the one you are in now, and you do not know how to escape from the very narrow range of opportunities that you judge are ever going to be available to you. This is not a special insight, by the way. I learnt all this from what you said when you joined in our debate at the Hagia Sophia.”

“Was it that obvious?”

“Yes, it was. And I shall always remember you, and if, when I am a lot older, I can help you I certainly will.”

I wanted to kiss him there and then, and only just managed to restrain myself.

“Thank you,” was in the end all I said, and then excused myself, fearing that Matron might wonder why I was spending so much time with our patient.

Mrs. Walker

Evening again. And I told Matron I would keep our patient company for a while. To be honest, I found myself actually enjoying his company. He was reading as I walked in, a sure sign that he was getting better.

“May I join you?” I asked.

“Of course, Mrs. Walker.”

He laid the book down, keeping his thumb in between the pages to mark where he had got to.

“What is your book about?”

“A middle ages mathematician called Fibonacci. My Dad got it for me to read, and with all the hustle of school life I have not had a chance to read it till now.”

“So your illness has had some benefits, then?”

“Yes, actually.”

“And what did this Fibonacci fellow do that makes him so interesting.”

Trubshaw smiled. I think he had guessed that I had no real interest in medieval mathematicians, and was just

being polite. He obviously decided to humour me.

“He made the leap from the old Roman numerals, which used letters, like I, V, X, L, and so on, and introduced what we now call Arabic numerals, although really they came from India.”

“I never knew that,” was all I could say, and managed to say it in what I hoped sounded an encouraging way.

“This made a huge difference to merchants and bankers, because it made accounting so much easier.”

I just nodded.

“We take all that for granted now, of course, but the thing everyone associates with his name now is the Fibonacci Series.”

He paused. So I asked: “And what is that?”

“It starts with 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13 and you get the next number in the series by adding the last two numbers together, so the next number is 8 plus 13, which is 21.”

He could see that he had lost me, and so quickly said: “But I mustn't bore you with my interests.”

He was obviously looking for a topic that might interest me, so he asked: "Do you have any children of your own, Mrs. Walker?"

I am fairly sure he knew the answer to this, and was just looking for something to talk about that involved me rather than him.

"No, actually. None."

Thank goodness he did not pursue with the obvious 'why not?' but instead asked: "Did you ever consider adopting a girl or a boy?"

Now that was a good question. Deeply personal, but with the innocence of youth he did not realise how close to the bone he was cutting.

"My husband and I find that all the children we have to look after here are quite enough. You, and sixty or so others, are our extended family."

"I have been thinking about adoption just recently."

"Really."

"Yes. But I do not know if it is possible."

"What?"

“A parent can adopt a child, but can a child adopt a parent?”

The penny had finally dropped. “You mean, can you adopt a mother, don't you?”

“Yes, you guessed.”

I paused. How best to answer this? I could hardly shatter his dreams.

“You could, but it would involve a bit of a complication.”

“How?”

“If your father were to marry your Mystery, she would become your mother. Well technically your stepmother, but that would make everything more or less what you want, if I am judging your thoughts correctly.”

“That is exactly what I want.”

“But this requires actions from two other people”

“I am pretty sure I know what one of them wants, and I will have to work out the best way to talk about this to the other person.”

“Your father?”

“Precisely. It will be half term soon and a week at home. I think I will not put this off

any further.”

“Matron and I were thinking that you could be allowed to go home very soon, to finish recuperating at home. Do you fancy going home a bit early?”

“Oh, yes, please.”

“I will talk to the Headmaster. We will need to make sure you know what work to do at home, so that you don't miss out on your school work. But I think I will be able to persuade him.”

Tears of gratitude came into his eyes, and I decided that this was a good moment to leave him to his thoughts, and to Fibonacci, whoever he was.

Mystery

I had been very worried when we learnt that Theo had measles, and was being looked after by Matron at the school. It was not very reassuring to be told that he was too ill to be moved.

Now we were told he was well enough to travel, and that he could recuperate better at home than at school.

I got his room ready, aired all the bedding, and lit a fire to make sure that room was warm enough for him, even though the weather had not yet turned cold at all.

It was so good to see him again, and with half term coming soon it would be two weeks before he would have to return to school. I could see that his rash had not yet faded, and he certainly looked very weak. Bed rest was all the doctor had ordered, I was told, and plenty of liquid in his diet.

He was soon settled in, and was already asking for books to read, which I took to be a good sign.

“Just tell me whatever you need, Theo,” I

said, "and I will get it for you."

He smiled. "There is one good thing about being ill, you know," he said. "You get lots of care and attention. There are three people who all want to be my mother: Matron, Mrs. Walker, and . . ." He paused. He looked up at me, and I knew what he wanted me to say.

"Me?"

"Of course."

I did not know what to say. He had seen into my heart, as perhaps only the young can. I had lost my baby, and, as far as I knew, my husband too. I had cared for Theo since he was very young as if he were my own son. And now here he was needing the kind of care that a mother, and only a mother, could best give.

"You are right. You are like a son to me." What more could I say?

"I wonder . . ." Again he paused, obviously unsure how to continue. Then he summoned the courage he needed, and asked: "Do you think your husband is still alive?"

This was the leading question that had

never truly left my mind. Twelve years had passed since I left Poland to escape the Nazi invasion, at his insistence, to save the unborn baby in my womb. His plan was to stay and resist. After the war we learnt what the Nazis had done to all the Polish resisters, and I was certain my husband was no longer alive. The reason he had asked this question was obvious. I chose my words very carefully.

“I gave up hope for him years ago, Theo. But there are some questions only your father can answer, not me.”

He was smart enough to realise what I was saying. If the matter uppermost in his mind was what I thought it was, only he and his father could talk about it.

“I understand,” he said. “Leave it to me.”

Professor Trubshaw

I had collected my son from the school by car, with him on the back seat wrapped in a blanket and looking rather weak.. When we got home I carried him up to his bedroom, which was wonderfully warm with the fire lit, and I let my housekeeper, Mrs. Zakary, take over. I knew he was in very capable hands. At bedtime, when I went up to say goodnight to him, he was already asleep.

The next day was a usual day for me at the university, but when I got home I went up to his room to see how he was getting on. He was sitting up in bed reading a book.

“Dad, have got got a moment?”

“All the time you need, son.”

“I have been thinking about something, and I bet you know the answer.”

“Yes?”

“How long is it after someone has disappeared before they can be presumed dead?”

What a question! Just like that, no preface, no apology, a straight question. My

first thought was how well he was developing, all my training of his mind coming out.

I knew the answer, of course.

“Our common law requires that seven years have elapsed since the person was last seen, and also that attempts to find the person have been made and were unsuccessful.”

Teaching by example. A straight question gets a straight answer.

The answer seemed to please him. “And how could we make enquiries about someone if they lived in a foreign country?”

“We would consult the embassy of that country, which would almost certainly be in London.”

“And could anyone make that enquiry? Not just a relative, I mean.”

“I don't see why not.”

“Thank you, Dad, that is very useful information.”

How smart my son is. A few questions, and he has conveyed a mountain of information to me. He even managed to avoid mentioning Poland, or my

housekeeper, or anything specific. But wordlessly he had conveyed so much. He was telling me that it was high time I married her. Little did he realise that actually it had become increasingly obvious to me that I wanted the good lady to be a permanent part of my life, and a true mother to my son, but had no idea how to broach the subject with her. Did she really still have a faint hope that her husband was still alive?

Theo was right. I could put this off no longer. Bite the bullet. Do it.

Mystery

When my boss came down from Theo's room he had a very serious look on his face. We were in the kitchen, which is where we usually ate together of an evening. I was busy straining some vegetables for our meal, and had a plate ready to take up to Theo as well.

"Mrs. Zakary, I need to ask you something very personal."

I nodded. Thank goodness Theo and I had had our conversation. It made me mentally prepared. He had spoken to his father, and I remembered his parting words 'leave it to me'.

"Have you considered writing to the Polish Embassy in London to find out what they know about your husband, whether he survived the war?"

"Would they know the answer?" I asked.

"They might, and they might not. But some sort of answer, even a negative 'we do not know' answer, would give us something."

"Yes, it would. You are right. I do need to

know with more certainty.”

“Please give me all the details you can: his full name, your address where you lived, all the details you can about his work at the university, its name even.”

“Will you make the enquiry for me?”

“I will instruct my solicitor, and, with your permission, he will make the enquiry on your behalf. Coming from a solicitor will make it more formal, and his reply to me will also be more formal.”

“I understand.”

“I really do need to have more certain knowledge before I can . . . ” and then his voice trailed off.

“Of course, sir.”

“Actually I would prefer you to call me by my first name, Jack.”

“Happy to oblige, Jack.”

We had at last crossed a boundary. My heart was leaping in my breast.

Wetherill

Half term over, thank goodness. I had missed my friend Trubshaw, after he was whisked off to the Sick Bay, and then to his home, before half term when I would not see him anyway. Somehow school seems better when he is around, which I did not realise until he was not around. The lessons were more boring, and he is a sort of guardian for me. I get picked on more when he is not there. He does not actually do anything to protect me, but he looks hard at anyone who starts slagging me off, and this tends to make them stop.

So when we were together on the first day back I asked him how he was.

“Fine, actually. Fully recovered. How was your half term in Eastbourne?”

“Dreadful,” I replied. “The usual unpaid porter work in my parents’ hotel. Mum shouting at me most of the time, and very little chance of escaping. Does your Mum shout at you much? Oops, I forgot. You have no Mum.”

He smiled when I said this, as if he

knew something I did not know.

So I carried on, as is my custom, and said: "They say you can choose your friends, but are stuck with your family. Well I wish I could choose my mother, especially."

"Soapy, I understand, and I am the exception to the rule about choosing, as I am in the middle of the process."

"Choosing your mother?"

"Exactly."

"Gosh. You cannot be serious."

"I am actually. I am helping my Dad realise that the lady who has looked after me for as long as I can remember is really part of our family, and he needs to recognise this by marrying her."

"Tell me more"

"It was being ill that made me think about it. There was Matron first, then Mrs. Walker, then my Mystery, all looking after me just like a mother would. I could see it in their eyes. They wanted, all three of them, to really be my mother. That's what I thought anyway. It was not a difficult choice to make. Matron is out. She will

never get married. Mrs. Walker is already married, and I love Mystery just like as if she really were my mother.”

“But what did you actually do?” I asked.

“I asked the important question of my Dad, and he took the hint.”

Trubshaw then explained it all to me, and the question about being sure someone who you thought was dead could be presumed to be dead. If Mrs. Zakary really was a widow, she was free to marry again, he explained.

“So what is happening?”

“Mystery told me about how my father was going to find proof that the man she was married to in 1939 never actually survived the war in their country, in Poland that is.”

“And how will that happen?”

Trubs then told me about the solicitor, the letter to the Polish Embassy, and that when they had an official answer his Dad would take the next step.

“But when he pops the question, how do you know she will say Yes.?”

“Take it from me, Soapy. I know. I

overheard her using my father's first name instead of the usual 'sir' when she speaks to him. He must have asked her to. He is a bit like me, my father. Does not say much, but what he does say matters immensely.”

“How long before they will know the answer from the embassy?”

“Ages, I expect. We will all have to be patient.”

Trubs looked very happy, so I got the idea in my mind that Trubs is probably very good at patient.

Jack Trubshaw

It is quite typical in Cambridge for small groups of friends to meet in a pub at a particular time and day every week. In my case I meet with Bill (full name William) and Ted (Edward), and am known to them as Jack rather than my actual given name of John. So giving my name as Jack to my housekeeper was an admission into my circle of close friends. I doubt if she truly understood the significance of this highly nuanced choice of name.

I was immediately invited to address her as Miriam, again something not previously done. We were both laying down a new foundation for a friendship which I think we both knew could only end in matrimony.

My next meeting with Bill and Ted at the Baron of Beef would be an interesting one. Our conversations were rarely on personal matters, but rather we made jokes and from time to time discussed the more philosophical sides of our differing academic interests. I remember once I had asked Bill, who describes himself as an

astrophysicist, what was the difference between an astronomer and an astrophysicist. He had thought for a few moments, and then replied 'imagination.' This had started the habit of posing to each other questions that began 'what is the difference between . . .', and then the challenge was to come up with a witty answer.

We meet at the Baron of Beef because it is just opposite North Court of St John's College, where Bill has his rooms, and just round the corner from the Divinity School, where Ted does most of his work. It is also the right side of the city for my homeward journeys to Huntingdon Road.

We meet for lunch every Wednesday during term time. You can perhaps imagine why I broke the usual custom of not talking about purely personal matters. The way the future was opening up for me was too much in the forefront of my mind not to share it with my good friends. So I told them about the instructions I had given to my solicitor, and what I hoped the outcome would be.

“Why have you waited so long?” asked Ted, and before I had time to answer Bill asked: “What prompted you?”

It was easier to answer the second question. “My son, Theo, actually.”

“Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings,” quoted Ted.

“He is no longer a babe,” I responded. “All of twelve years old, and far too smart for his own good, perhaps, though I am proud of him for it.”

Neither Bill nor Ted have any children, so I do not often mention Theo in our chatting.

“What a lad,” said Bill, “to be telling his father when to get on with marriage.”

So I had to describe how my housekeeper had been a surrogate mother ever since my son had no longer needed a nurse. I told them about her refugee status too.

“Well you certainly have waited a long time, but it is understandable if there was even a remote possibility that she was still actually married,” said Ted, who realised that his question had been answered. “But

good for Theo in prompting you to get started on doing the obvious.”

“How long do you think it will take to get an answer from your solicitor?”

“Possibly months rather than weeks.”

“You will invite us to the wedding, won't you?” This from Ted, who added: “Can I possibly recommend a church?”

This raised a question in my mind: church or a civil ceremony at the Registry Office?

“You realise a church service would be more splendid, and might be easier to escape the rigours of officialdom,” said Ted.

“The paperwork of identifying Miriam, do you mean?”

“Exactly. Establish yourselves as regular worshippers, get on the electoral role, and no further questions will be asked.”

“Good thinking,” I responded. I must admit that church going was another of my lapses, alongside not getting my son christened when he was young. “So where do you recommend?” I asked.

“The Round Church is but fifty yards from here,” interposed Bill.

“Just the one I was thinking of,” said Ted.

“Nice and convenient for a stroll down here to the Baron of Beef for a quiet drink or two afterwards,” added Bill.

It was odd to be planning details of my wedding when I was still not sure that it would even be legally possible. But I realised that Miriam would have no relatives to attend, so something very quiet would be ideal. I could ask one of my friends to be my best man, and the other to give the bride away.

Deep down I was hoping this was not all too premature.

Miriam

I am not familiar with family customs in England, but in Poland, and especially in my community, it is usual for the man to propose formally to the woman he hopes to marry. It seems here, unless I am mistaken, that simply moving to calling each other by our first names is sufficient.

I came to this conclusion when Jack asked me a quite different question than I expected. He first had asked me: "Do you honestly believe your husband is still alive?"

I had told him truthfully that I was certain he had not survived the Nazi occupation. He seemed to have a blind spot about one matter. Even though I had told him my first name, Miriam, he did not catch on that it is a Jewish name. When we learnt how the policy of the Nazi occupiers was to eliminate all Jewish people in what they termed the final solution, it was obvious that it would have been a miracle for my husband to have survived. And with no indication that he had, I was completely

certain that I was a widow, and had been for many years.

Jack's question that I mentioned was this: "Once we know formally, would you like a church wedding or a Registry Office one?"

I had to make a quick decision. The easy one would have been to opt for a civil ceremony. But a church wedding was much more attractive to me. What about my Jewish background? How would that fit in with a Christian service?

Over the years of being integrated into an English family I had lost touch with my Jewishness. In Poland the community had been all-embracing, with every aspect of life dominated by our customs, and living side by side with lots of other Jewish families. It was not just my husband who would have been caught up in the Nazi drive for a 'final solution', but all the rest of my family. My parents and a sister were gone, as were my grandparents. For a decade or so I had lived with no one to be Jewish with. Gradually the special days had passed without notice, and the diet rules

could hardly be kept when I was the cook for a typical English man and his son. At first this was simply a survival technique; be like them to ensure that I remained employed. Eventually I realised that my Jewishness had really come not to matter any more. To be honest, it was quite a relief to be free of what had almost been stifling at the time. So I gave the answer that I hoped would be the one that Jack would prefer.

“Let us get married in church, if that is what you would like too,” I said.

Jack smiled. I think I had given the right answer.

“We will need to establish a connection with a church, then,” he said. “That means we will have to start going to church every Sunday.”

“Fine by me,” I replied. I was actually rather curious as to how this would differ from the synagogue services I remembered from years ago.

So off we went next Sunday morning to a most beautiful building.

“This is the second oldest building in the

city," Jack proudly proclaimed. "Norman architecture, and originally all round, with not a square angle to be seen."

What surprised me was how full it was with students. The service even had psalms in it that would have not been amiss in the services I had been used to in Poland. I felt strangely comfortable, and was glad that once we had established ourselves as members of this church we would be able to make our vows here.

Later that day, after that first service, I asked if I could see the form of the service to be used when we got married. Jack produced a book which was called 'The Book of Common Prayer'. Together we found a page that said 'The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony'.

We read it through together. The reasons given for marriage were beautifully expressed, and the vows were very clear and ones I was willing to make. Then we came to a question: 'Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?'

Jack said he would ask a friend of his to stand in at this point, and would also

arrange for a good friend of his to be his best man.

“And a bridesmaid?” I asked. “Do English weddings have a female to support the bride?”

“Yes, usually.”

“Do you know of anyone who might be suitable. I certainly don't”

“Not really.”

“I know. Let us ask Theo if he knows any young lady. If he doesn't, then we will manage without.”

Jack thought for a while. “I will surprise him with a visit. It is quite usual for a father to turn up on a Saturday to watch the school play rugby. I think he needs to know what we plan, anyway.”

Since Theo had really been the spark that set this fire alight, it seemed right that he should play a part in it too.

Jack Trubshaw

I had phoned Walker to make sure that the school had a home game this weekend, which fortunately they had. He suggested I call in for tea after the match, but I declined his invitation, saying I needed to spend some time with my son.

Theo was actually a rather diminutive full-back in the match. He still has another year here, but it seems they need anyone who is any good at the game to take part. It was good to see him making tackles, often on boys far bigger than him.

I talked to Easton after the match, and he said that my son was a fine player, and knew that tackling an opponent round his calves made size immaterial.

“That is why I play him at full-back: last line of defence,” he said.

When my lad appeared from the changing room, hair glistening from his shower, I suggested we go for a stroll. So we walked over towards the pseudo Greek temple, which I remembered to call the Hagia Sophia, which pleased him.

"Theo, I have some important news for you," I began.

"Well done, Dad."

He obviously had no trouble guessing what I was about to say.

"The lady you call Mystery has agreed to marry me," I said. "But we have to wait until it is absolutely definite that her husband did not survive the war."

"So I will soon have a proper mother?"

"Indeed."

"That is marvellous. I am so glad."

"And she needs your help. We plan to marry in church, and it will really be right if she has a bridesmaid to make the whole thing complete. Do you know any young lady who would be suitable?"

"So, yet another choice for me to make."

"Does Wetherill have a sister, for instance?"

"He has never mentioned one."

"Who then might do?"

"Actually I do know a young lady, but it is very unofficial. Forbidden even."

He then went on to tell me all about Ivy, and how she had dressed up as a boy in

their uniform clothes and spoken at their debate about single sex schools. He told me about their letter exchanging, and how she had sat with him when he was ill and so knew quite a lot about his home situation. He said he would write to her and ask if she would be willing to be Mystery's bridesmaid.

“That sounds a fine solution, if she is willing. There will be lots of arrangements to sort out in due course, but I will see to that.”

As I drove home later I realised that I was really looking forward to meeting this spirited young lady. So I hoped she would say Yes.

Ivy

Florence and I have, among our many duties, the job of changing the boys' bedding when the sheets are due for the laundry. Florence took me a bit by surprise when she said: "Ivy, look what I have found in one of the beds. It's a note on the back of what looks like an envelope. Just the back of the envelope. No name or address to be seen."

Mildly curious I asked: "What does it say?"

"It says 'look in the usual place'."

"Whose bed was it in?"

"I don't know who sleeps where."

Then the penny dropped. I knew who it was from and what it meant.

"Forget it. Meaningless boy stuff. But better not show it to Matron though, as she might think the wrong thing."

"Agreed," said Florence. "I'll just ditch it."

That evening, on the way home, I crept through the gate at the bottom of the field and went to the bench in the folly, and, sure enough, there was a letter. I picked it up,

and hurried home to read it. The contents took me totally by surprise.

Dear Ivy,

You will remember everything I told you about the lady who has looked after me since I was a babe in arms. I call her Mystery. Well, my Dad is going to marry her, and she needs a bridesmaid. We do not yet know when the wedding will take place as there are some legal issues about whether her original husband is still alive. The chance of this is so slim they are assuming not, but need a confirmation from the Polish embassy. This is why there is a delay.

Please tell me whether you are willing to be her bridesmaid, and I will let my father know your answer. It may seem difficult for you, but he will arrange all the transport and other practical issues.

Yours,

Theo.

My first thought was not whether I should say Yes or No, but how I could explain it all to my parents. Should I ask their permission, even? And then I decided

that if I was old enough to go out to work I was certainly old enough to make decisions like this on my own. I would tell them when I knew the date, and they would just have to put up with it.

So I wrote my answer in a brief note, ready to be put under the stone on the way to the school tomorrow. I even wrote out my full name and address in Drifffield, so that Theo's father could write directly to me when the time came.

This has been the happiest day of my life so far. At last something was happening to me that would take me away from the narrow prison of my life in this remote village.

Chaplain

Every evening, Monday to Saturday, for half an hour, I continued to receive Trubshaw into my vestry in the chapel for his New Testament Greek lesson. It must have seemed to my colleagues that I was being unusually kind and truly devoted to my profession to be giving all this extra time of mine to a pupil. Actually it was neither of these. Much rather I saw it as an escape from the smoke filled staff common room into a province of my own, with no need to explain why. The boy was a pleasure to be with. He worked away at his translation of St. Mark's Gospel from the original Greek to his own language, with only a grammar book and a dictionary to help him. This is how he had learnt Latin, I knew. His father had simply given him a copy of the Latin translation of St. John's Gospel, together with a grammar book and a dictionary, and thus he had taught himself Latin. This I knew perfectly well, for my two teaching subjects were Latin as well as Scripture.

He rarely asked me for help, and as far as I knew did not refer to the usual English of the Authorised Version which we used in church. He left the exercise book behind in my vestry in which he was developing his translation, and it was a joy to review his progress from time to time. His translation was always literal, making a word for word exchange wherever possible. There are some words in Greek that really have no equivalent in English, being used for emphasis or explanation, and he did these rather neatly too.

His questions, when he had them, were always more theological than linguistic. These too I welcomed, and they often caused me to think about things I had never thought about before. He made me feel that my calling to a clerical life had been worthwhile. Not many parsons get so often asked questions like those that Trubshaw asked.

It was soon after I had finished taking the fifth form boys through the Catechism, in preparation for their Confirmation, that he used his time with me for a conversation

which really took my breath away.

“Please, sir, may I ask you a question about the Confirmation service? Could we look at the actual words of the service?”

“Certainly, my boy,” I said, reaching for a prayer book.

We found the place, and he pointed to the question the bishop asks:

Do you here, in the presence of God, and of this Congregation, renew the solemn promise and vow that was made in your name at your Baptism; ratifying and confirming the same in your own person, and acknowledging yourselves bound to believe and to do all those things, which your Godfathers and Godmothers then undertook for you?

He read the words aloud to me, and said: “Do you remember you said we had a choice. We could either confirm those vows or not, now that we are old enough to make up our own minds.”

“Yes, that is exactly what I said.”

“Well, sir, I have a problem”

“What problem?”

“This has never happened to me. I was

not baptised as a baby, so no vows have ever been made which I could confirm.”

“But I assumed, since your father gave permission for you to be prepared for your Confirmation . . .”

“Yes, sir, he realised that his actions, or rather omission of actions, might be a problem. But he did not want me to miss out on the class, and I wanted to find out everything too.”

“The rules of the Church of England are very clear. You cannot be confirmed unless you have first been baptised.”

He then rather surprised me. He reached for the prayer book and turned back a few pages. “I have read this,” he said, pointing to the page on which the title was ‘The Ministration of Baptism to such as are of Riper Years and are able to Answer for Themselves’.

“Is this the service I need?”

“It is.”

“Does it need a bishop to do it?”

“No this can be performed by anyone who is ordained.”

“Such as you, sir?”

“Indeed, such as me.”

He paused, obviously looking for a good way to express his next question.

“Do you think I am ready to make the vows in this service?”

“Well that is for you to decide. That is your choice.”

He smiled. “All this emphasis on ‘choice’. I keep on having to make choices. It is wrong, you know, sir.”

“Wrong?”

“In my case, yes, sir, wrong. The choices are not made *by* me but *about* me. Take the disciples I have been reading about in Mark. They did not choose, did they? They were men who simply found Jesus walking up to them and saying ‘Follow me’. I read when I was studying St. John’s Gospel that Jesus was quite explicit about this. He actually said ‘You did not choose me, but I chose you.’ Those very words. And when I read them, a few years ago, I felt that these words were being said to me, too.”

I was flabbergasted. Such a definitive experience, one that surpassed my own in my pathway to being ordained.

What could I say? Here was a youth more fit to make vows than perhaps I was. My answer was simply: "Yes, it would seem the choice has already been made."