

Trubshaw's Visitor

John Everett

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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 these stories, to depict any real school, past or present. Most of the places referred to in Cambridge are quite real, but the professorship assigned to the main character is fictitious.

This is the fourth book about Trubshaw, and I have faced a problem that is not to be avoided when books succeed each other as a series. There comes a time when it is just not practicable to weave into the story narrative lots of recapitulation of what has already been told, just for the benefit of new readers. So if you have already read Trubshaw's *Ghost*, *Folly*, and *Choice*, you can skip the rest of this preface, and just skim read the first chapter.

Trubshaw's father is a professor at Cambridge. His son was born in 1939, and his mother died in the process of giving birth to him. The father initially employed a

nurse to care for the baby. In 1941 he took on instead a resident housekeeper, a Mrs. Zakary, who had fled from Poland just days before the country was invaded. Professor Trubshaw decided that his son, Theo, was to be educated at home, solely through the process of reading books. At the age of eleven Theo was sent to a typical boys' preparatory school as a boarder. The first three books have depicted his activities there. Now we come to Cambridge, and the preparations Jack Trubshaw is making to marry his housekeeper, once it can be established that her original husband did not survive the war.

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

John Everett

(December 2015)

Miriam

Half term is over and Theo has gone back to school fully recovered from his bout of measles. I am reflecting on how important was his contribution to this household. Before his stay I was Mrs. Zakary, the housekeeper. Now I am Miriam, and the man I have till now addressed as 'Sir' I am now invited to address as Jack. Somehow we have moved to an understanding that as soon as we can legally assert that the man I had married in Poland before the war is actually dead, and I am therefore a widow and free to marry, that Jack and I will become man and wife. Given that I have looked after both Jack and his son for a decade, this will not be such a huge change. Jack is already calling me by my given name, Miriam, and I look forward to the day when Theo will call me Mum. Till now he has called me by the only name he could get his tongue round as a small child just learning to talk: Mrs. Zakary had become Mystery.

Jack and I communicate by signals as

well as words. He never formally asked me whether I would accept him as my husband. He simply asked me whether I would prefer a church wedding or a civil ceremony, once we could legally get married. We are waiting for the answer to his solicitor's letter to the Polish Embassy, in which we asked for official confirmation of the death of my husband. He had insisted that I leave Poland in August 1939, when we discovered that I was expecting our first child. He was determined to remain behind and fight the Nazis, if they invaded our country. Within days of my departure they had invaded, and after that I had heard nothing more from him. Then came the tragedy that my baby miscarried. I had been certain for many years now that my husband had also not survived those times, but I had taken no further action to seek official confirmation. Now the letter has been written.

My signal was to stop wearing my wedding ring. When Jack noticed this he said nothing, but simply took my left hand in his and kissed my empty ring finger.

Jack has always been like this: actions rather than words, and it takes a little getting used to. Theo is just the same. As they say, heredity comes out a lot in the children.

I had said that I would prefer a church wedding, and so we have started going to the church that Jack likes best. Jack either has not realised from my name that I am Jewish by birth, or has chosen not to say anything about it. Getting used to church services that are a complete novelty to me has not been all that difficult. The one big surprise, at the very first visit, was the seating: men and women were sitting together. That took some getting used to, but the lesson that in the sight of the Almighty we were somehow equal was very welcome. Some of the scriptures I was used to from my childhood are part of the service, and I am finding out more and more about the teaching of the man whom we Jews had counted as a self-styling prophet.

After a decade of very little personal conversation, Jack and I are beginning to

talk more directly. This has proved not as necessary as you might suppose. Having communicated more by signals all this time we are still relying on signals more than anything. But I did ask Jack about his work. This was very revealing. I had up till now simply known that he was a professor at Cambridge. But I had no idea what he was professor of, or even what being a professor at this ancient university meant. He explained that his professorship was the result of a gift to the university of an endowment by a well-wisher. This provides the stipend he receives, and how he conducts himself, whether by giving lectures or engaging in research, or both, is entirely up to him. His formal title is Professor of the Philosophy of Language, and he is the first holder of this professorship. He is perhaps too modest to claim this, but I suspect that the post was created specifically for him to occupy.

Jack is deeply thoughtful about communication. I am beginning to understand why he prefers signals to words. It is all part of his take on the

philosophy of language. How can we humans best communicate with each other? Words are so ambiguous, and so potentially misleading. We use entirely truthful statements to deceive each other, but actions are more trustworthy and somehow more real. I remember vividly how Jack determined how his son should be educated. We learn to speak as a child, I remember him saying, with no conscious effort. We just pick it up. Very young children in any bilingual community can even learn both languages they hear, and manage to understand and use both. So he applied these principles to Theo. He wrote the first books Theo used to learn to read for him. Everything was phonetically consistent. All the words used in Theo's early books had letters that never had more than one sound. So there was 'get' and 'gate' in his first book, but never 'giant'. There was 'cat' and 'cub' but never 'cell' or 'cello'. After lots of books with simple stories using only these sorts of words, more complex words were included, until eventually all the possible sounds of any

letter had been presented.

His mantra was always that learning was more useful than teaching. His son would learn how to learn. So young Theo had not been sent to school. He had simply been provided with books to read, and paper to write on. Jack's view on learning a dead language followed the same basic principle. Theo was given an ancient Latin text, a dictionary and a grammar book and left to get on with translating the whole text (it was the Latin translation made by Jerome of the Gospel of St. John) into English. I gather that at his school now Theo is doing much the same thing to learn Greek, except with a different gospel, that of St. Mark. This is what happens when your father spends all his time thinking about the philosophy of language. For living languages the answer is simple enough: every summer Jack and Theo go to France, to stay with a friend at the Sorbonne. Theo reads only French books when there, and speaks French all the time too.

Eventually, of course, Theo had to go off to school. He needs to learn how to be a

social animal as well as a thinker. So boarding school at the age of eleven, and Theo is getting lots from this experience, as far as we can tell.

And now we are waiting for the letter from the Polish Embassy that will open the door to the united family we three hope to become.

Jack

My two friends, Bill and Ted, and I continue to meet every Wednesday lunchtime at the Baron of Beef. I am never quite sure what we have in common. Bill is an astrophysicist and Ted a theologian. I suppose we are all more philosophical about our academic interests than most of our colleagues, and we also seem to have the same rather eccentric sense of humour. We lighten our more serious moments with questions that begin 'what is the difference between?' Bill's latest was 'what is the difference between Julius Caesar and Roger Bacon?'

After Ted and I had looked blank Bill put us out of our misery. "About eleven minutes. They both had a view about the time it takes for the earth to complete a whole year, and get back to the same spot relative to the sun. This is what our calendar is based on. Bacon had a much more accurate measurement than Caesar, and wanted the calendar changed. He wrote to the Pope about it, but it was several centuries before

the calendar was corrected from Caesar's error. He had been just over eleven minutes wrong, and Bacon had got it almost exactly right."

This set us to talking about scientific method.

"It is far worse for medical scientists than it is for us," said Bill. "We know that we will go on finding out more and more all the time. So we assume that some of what we think is true possibly isn't. But when they test the usefulness of drugs, they know that they need a control group, taking just a placebo, to counteract the possibility that people get better simply because they think they are going to, rather than because the drugs are making a real difference."

"Mind over matter," said Ted.

"I suppose a perfect experiment would be when no one knew they were part of an experiment," was my contribution.

"But that would raise moral issues," said Ted, always the theologian. "You could not carry out an experiment on people without their permission, could you?"

“How do we know that is not happening at present, anyway?” asked Bill. “Who knows what the government is up to, or mad scientists, if it comes to that?”

“Exactly,” said I. “An experiment that is being conducted on someone without their knowledge is by definition one that only the experimenter knows about.”

We all supped our beer thoughtfully at this point, not realising, certainly in my case, that we had sown a seed.

Ted

Our lunchtime conversations at the Baron of Beef tend to be very diverse. I had been reading about a UFO that someone had claimed to have seen, and there was a very convincing photo in the newspaper that reported it. So I asked Bill, who knows much more about this sort of thing than either Jack or I do, whether he thought that it was even possible for some sort of intelligent life from another planet to get to our planet.

“Impossible, in my view,” was his answer. “The distances are just too great for anything material to go that far. Have you any idea how far away even the nearest stars are?”

“I know it is measured in light-years,” said Jack.

“Actually we scientists measure distances like this in astronomical units. One AU is the distance from here to the sun.”

“So how far is that in terms of distances Jack and I might understand?”

“About 150 million kilometres, which is

about 93 million miles.”

“And the nearest star?”

“Somewhere around 550,000 AU.”

“I see what you mean,” said Jack.

I thought about this, and could immediately see that for some form of intelligent life to build a craft to cover distances like that would be a preposterous idea.

“So it would have to be from a planet in the solar system,” I mused.

“And we know that the planets here are the wrong sort for life as we know it to be sustained,” said Bill.

“Assuming we have found them all,” said Jack.

“Yes, that is the sort of thing we at the Cavendish Laboratory are working on. We are building a huge radio telescope on a bit of the old railway line that used to connect Cambridge with Bedford.”

“Are you hoping to listen into extra-terrestrial conversations?” I asked.

“Goodness, no. Everything, stars, planets, and suchlike, gives off radio waves. We can pick these up, if we build the right kind of

equipment. This is how we simply detect the existence of a star, and maybe any of its planet. Radio waves are as useful as the light waves that we can see through ordinary telescopes for just knowing what is there.”

“And I dare say,” I interposed, “that this is all a magnificent simplification for us poor laymen.”

Bill smiled and nodded.

“But supposing an intelligent being from somewhere out there could project itself in a non-material way?” I did not mean this seriously. I was just thinking aloud.

Jack picked up on this. “Then, assuming it could communicate at all, it would have an interesting language problem just trying to talk to us.”

This was typical of our lunchtime conversations. Jack sort of rounded it off with a joking challenge to Bill. “There's a problem for you to solve, Bill. You are the radio expert. Our non-material extra-terrestrial would have to use radio, would he not? You had better start designing one for him.”

Bill

As I walked back to my room in John's I thought about Jack's challenge. My main interest in radio was its use in my academic subject, astrophysics. But I also had read widely about a new phenomenon, so far only in the United States, of what they were calling Citizen Band radio.

The war had seen a lot of development in radio design and efficiency. Bombers guided to their targets by radio, and fighters guided by radio to shoot them down. There was the maritime use for sending out distress calls. It was a rapidly developing field. And in America there were lorry drivers now talking to each other over radio, warning of road blockages or fuel stations with no fuel. These two way radios had not yet properly arrived in this country, but I had obtained one for my own research purposes. They were getting smaller and smaller, and the antennae were getting simpler too.

At our next Baron of Beef session I told Jack and Ted all about this new kind of

radio.

“Could you build this kind of radio so that it looked like an ordinary radio that we all have in our living rooms to listen to the BBC?” asked Jack.

“I suppose I could. But why?” Jack had that thoughtful look on his face that we both knew meant something interesting was going on in his mind.

“Yes, why, Jack?” asked Ted, who like me had sensed that Jack's question was full of intent.

“You remember our thoughts about the perfect experiment. The one where the person being experimented on has no idea that there is an experiment taking place.”

Ted and I both nodded.

“Suppose we use Bill's magic radio to pretend we are a non-material extra-terrestrial talking to an unsuspecting human. The experiment would be to see if we can be sufficiently convincing so as to actually get away with it. Success would be that the person does not catch on that it is all a fraud.”

“It would all depend on the intelligence of

the person on the receiving end," Ted said.

"Yes, it would be a very subtle intelligence test," agreed Jack.

"It would test the intelligence, and cunning, of the experimenter too," I said.

"But, even if we thought this was a useful experiment, how would we choose the subject person to apply it too?" Ted asked.

Jack was silent for a moment.

"Let Bill first tell us whether he can build a two-way radio inside an ordinary one, then I will propose the subject"

I wondered if Ted was thinking along the same lines as me. Jack had often spoken about his son, and how his views on developing his son's thinking power had taken him down a very unusual route. Was Jack thinking that his own son might be put to the test?

It looks as though I had better see if I can actually make this thing.

Jack

Bill has asked me to spend some time in his rooms at John's. He wants me to be quite clear as to the precise nature of the equipment he has to make.

"It has to look exactly like an ordinary radio," I said, "but capable of transmitting as well as receiving. It must get all three BBC channels, and have a fourth channel which can receive stuff we send out, and also feed back any audible sounds it picks up."

"You mean you want a sort of talking radio?"

"Yes, a talking and listening radio."

"And we will be doing the talking, and the person we experiment on will reply so that we can hear those replies?"

"Exactly. And it will help a lot if we can record the whole conversation."

"Well recording will be the easy part, and I already have all the equipment for that here in my rooms." Bill pointed at his reel to reel recording equipment.

I nodded. "You seem to have plenty of

tape for this big box.”

Bill went into thinking mode.

“The problem with radio transmission, Jack, is the antenna.”

“Is that what I would call an aerial?”

“It is. And the good news is that I am on the top floor here, and with the college's permission I have a lead to the roof. I can put up a good antenna there. How far is the range you will need.”

“Not much more than a mile, I suppose.”

“From here to your house, you mean?”

I nodded. “I can see you have already guessed who will be the subject of our experiment.”

“So you will want all this completed by the beginning of the school's holidays?”

“If you can.”

Bill smiled, realising I had confirmed what he had already guessed. “I will buy a typical portable radio, as that has a built-in extending aerial, and then I will put in the extra circuits that I have got from America.”

“Send me the bill for all your costs,” I added. “It is only right that I should pay for

my son's Christmas present.”

“Right. It will just be the bill for the portable radio, as the transmit circuits will be recoverable when all this is over. I will have to find a radio with lots of space inside for the extras. That is the main challenge now.”

This is how we left it, and I had full confidence in Bill's technical ability. I was also pretty sure he was beginning to regard this as a very enjoyable experiment.

Ted

A week has elapsed since our last midday meeting, and Jack and I were both waiting for Bill to let us know if he really could build the sort of radio Jack wanted. So when Bill arrived we were glad that he had a happy look on his face.

“We will have to test it, of course, but I am fairly sure it will work,” he said.

“How will we test it?” Jack asked.

“You take it to your house and plug it in, in whatever room you intend for our actual experiment. Ted, you can either go with Jack or stay with me. Then, at a given time, I will start by transmitting a question from my rooms, and you, Jack, will speak an answer. At first from as far away in that room as you can, and then from closer. We need to test the efficiency of the microphone I have built in.”

“That seems fair enough,” said Jack.

“This is what I have designed,” continued Bill. “You plug it into a power socket, and this must be turned on all the time. When you turn the radio on it behaves like any

ordinary radio. You select the channels in the usual way, and it receives them and plays whatever gets transmitted. All this part of its functions are unchanged. The key is what happens when you turn the radio off, using the radio's on-off switch. I have made it look like a normal off result, with the light illuminating the channel dials going off. But what actually happens is that it converts the box to a full duplex short range Citizens Band type transmitter and receiver."

"Duplex?" I queried.

"Both ways," answered Jack, using his language knowledge rather than electronic knowledge, I guessed.

"Yes," confirmed Bill. "It has to use separate wavelengths for receiving and transmitting, but it manages to select them automatically."

"While looking as though it is just switched off?" I asked.

"Precisely."

"Well done, Bill," said Jack. "Let us hope it really does work."

So we agreed that I would stay with Bill

while Jack collected the radio from Bill's rooms and went home with it. To give him time to set everything up, we agreed that the equipment test would begin at exactly three o'clock.

Bill and I had quite a while to wait in his rooms, and this gave me an opportunity to tackle Bill on an aspect of the whole project that I had been thinking of.

"I think we are putting ourselves to the test, as well as a bright young twelve-year-old. I am not sure we can be convincing about a non-material extra-terrestrial. I think young Trubshaw will see through that as contrary to the laws of nature."

"Yes, I am pretty dubious too, But we are trying to humour Jack and his desire to test his son's intelligence."

"Knowing as we do from Jack's accounts as to how Theo is learning Latin and Greek by reading the gospels in their original languages, I think we will be more convincing if we look in that direction."

"So we need the input of a theologian, do we?"

"I am saying that I would like to be the

voice that speaks to Theo. It cannot be Jack, anyway, since Theo will spot straight away that the transmissions are only happening when his father is out of the house. So it has to be either you or me, Bill.”

“Thank you, Ted. I was beginning to dread that my contribution would have to be more than technical. And you will need me to be supervising the equipment, volume controls and all that. You are hereby appointed to be the Voice of a non-material being.”

The clock moved very slowly to the time we had set, so Bill busied himself getting everything ready. At exactly three o'clock Bill switched on his tape recorder and began. “Can you hear me?” he said into his hand-held microphone.

There was a very faint 'yes' in response.

“Are you near or far from the radio?” asked Bill into the microphone.

We heard a faint 'far' next.

“Stand next to the radio, please.”

“Is this close enough?” came through our speaker, and Bill and I gave each other a thumbs up signal.

“Jack, you are now loud and clear. It looks as though we have a satisfactory test. You can come back here and listen to the tape recording for yourself.”

“Well done, Bill, I am on my way.”

When Jack arrived he immediately agreed that I should be the Voice, understanding the reasons that Bill and I had discussed.

It looks as though I cannot avoid being the subject of a test just as challenging as the one Jack has planned for his son. The big difference was that I knew I was being tested, while the youngster did not. The perfect test, one you do not know is happening. Jack, as an educator, has a lot to answer for.

Miriam

Just a week to go and then my beloved Theo will be here for his Christmas holiday. Jack has installed a new radio in his bedroom, which he tells me is a special Christmas present which Theo can have from the very beginning of his holiday, rather than having to wait till the day itself.

Jack was looking very thoughtful when he told me this. I can tell when there is something going on in his mind, so I asked: "When you say special, Jack, is there something I need to know?"

"Yes, you do need to know, and it would be wrong if I did not share this with you. You know I have some very strong ideas about education, and that Theo has had the benefit of them. Now let me tell you about my ideas on testing."

He paused, so it gave me the chance to say: "Testing?"

"Testing is very important, and so far I have only used my assessment of the success of his learning through observing what he has achieved. But how can I test

his thinking skills? This is what I have been musing over. You see, the best sort of test is one where the subject has no knowledge that he is being tested. The radio is just such a test, and one to which I have given much thought.”

“So how he uses the radio is a sort of test?”

“Exactly.”

“I expect he will not just want to listen to programmes meant solely for children. He may try them out, but he may find them too juvenile for him.”

“Actually my planned test goes deeper than that. Obviously he will find 'Dick Barton, Special Agent' a bit trivial. But I am not just interested in what he chooses to listen to.”

“Jack, I don't follow,” I said.

“Miriam, I am not sure whether it will help if I tell you everything about my test. I will leave it up to you. Do you want to know everything?”

“Will it help Theo if I do?”

“Actually it may help Theo if you do not.”

“Then don't tell me. Then I can be truly a

part of the same test myself.”

“Very well, and I think you have made the right choice.”

Jack is so subtle, and he had certainly raised my curiosity about this 'special' radio. And there was another subject I wanted to tackle Jack on.

“Jack, I have been thinking about my proposed bridesmaid. I have never met her, and all I know is her name, Ivy, and that she works at Theo's school. Will she be on holiday herself when the school closes down?”

“I don't know for sure, but knowing Walker I doubt if she will be kept working during the school holiday.”

“I would like to meet her and get to know her better..”

I let Jack work out for himself what I was really suggesting.

“Of course, my dear, you must get to know her better. I shall invite her to stay with us while she is on holiday herself. I will write to her straight away. I have her address in Driffield. She may want to be with her own family for the actual day of Christmas, but

she can stay here for a while before then.”

This delighted me. I really did want to get to know Ivy properly, and there was so much we ladies need to talk about.

Ivy

The letter from Theo's father came as a complete surprise. He was offering to collect me at the very end of term when he came to collect Theo, and that I should stay with them in Cambridge for a while so as to get to know Miriam much better.

I knew I could arrange with Matron to be released in time for this on the last day of term. I would not need to tell her why. If she wanted to deduct some time from my wages I would not fight it. The problem, of course, was my parents. I had never been away from home on my own before. How could I explain it to them? I would try it with my mother first.

"Mum, I have something to tell you," I started tentatively. My tone of voice got her attention straight away. No doubt she was fearing the worst.

"I shall be going on holiday next week, on my own."

This was a bombshell enough, but I could see she was relieved it was nothing worse than that.

“Where?”

“Cambridge”

“Who with?”

“A family I know there.”

My mother was amazed at this revelation. “But we know no one in Cambridge,” was all she could think to say.

“It’s a family I got to know through the school.”

As my mother knew very little about my work at the school, especially about the total segregation of us assistant matrons, this did not strike her as totally impossible.

“How will you get there?” she asked.

“By car. I will be given a lift, and will be returned by car as well of course.”

“I am not sure what your father will say.”

“It will be all right, mother. They are a very respectable family. I am old enough now to work, and workers need holidays from time to time.” I certainly was now fighting for a principle of independence as an adult worker, even if I was only seventeen..

“I will leave it up to your father.”

I was so relieved that she had not said an

absolute No, and I knew I could persuade my father, so long as she had basically given in.

This turned out to be the case. He simply said: "It is up to your mother."

Parents are like this, neither saying Yes, and neither saying No. This way they could blame each other if anything went wrong.

So I wrote back a grateful thank-you letter, and determined to fix things with Matron the very next day.

Ted

We met at the Baron of Beef for the last time before Jack's son would be home for the holidays. Jack told us that the radio was installed in Theo's bedroom. He also told us that there would be a guest staying in his house for an unspecified time, which might complicate things a little, he said.

"We need to ensure that Theo is the only one who gets to be engaged in our test conversations. So that means when he alone in his bedroom," Jack said.

We looked at each other. I had not thought very much about timing, and it looked as though neither had Bill.

"That means," Jack went on, "either before he gets up in the morning, or after he goes to bed at night."

"Night would be better," I put in straight away, not fancying having to get up very early in the morning for this.

"I agree," said Bill, for probably the same reason. "What time does he go to bed?"

"Around 9 o'clock usually," said Jack, "and I have noticed he often reads for a long

time after that, if the light shining under the door is anything to go by.”

“Will your guest go to bed at that time too?” I asked.

“Probably not. She is effectively an adult, so we will not be able to enforce any time earlier than Miriam or I would choose. In fact I could ensure you are free with Theo till 10 o'clock, by engaging her in conversation.”

“Then it looks as though our window of opportunity will be around 9:15 to 9:45,” I said. “Are we all happy with that?”

Jack and Bill both nodded.

“We will tape the whole thing,” said Bill, “then on the next day we three can all listen to that tape in my room at lunchtime and review the outcome, and discuss tactics.”

“I will collect Theo on Saturday, so let us go for next Monday as Day One,” said Jack.

I felt a slight thrill as we now had everything in place for what would prove to be a very interesting experiment.

Ivy

Last Saturday of term, and I had persuaded Matron to let me go home after lunch washing-up. I had told her I needed to get ready for a holiday journey, without telling her anything more.

Getting ready was a milestone in my life. I have no suitcase of my own and the family suitcase, though rarely used, is old and tattered. What to pack? How long should I plan for, since the invitation had been very open ended? Then a horrifying thought. Suppose I stayed on till Christmas Day itself. They would give me presents. How could I give them presents? So I raided my piggy bank, and decided to take with me all the spare money in my possession. Three pounds, six shillings and fourpence halfpenny. And the pounds were all in ten shilling notes.

So all the underwear I had, my Sunday best dress, then my everyday warm stuff, and the suitcase was full.

Even a journey by car would be a novelty, as we always used the bus, or the train for

a really long journey. And what a lovely car it was when it turned up. I had seen glimpses of Theo's dad already when he had delivered or collected him in the drive in front of the school. Florence and I always looked out of the dormitory windows at such times.

I was ready as soon as the car drew up outside our door. Theo's father spoke briefly with my parents. I gave my mother a quick goodbye kiss and dashed out of the door with my suitcase.

He reached out to take it from me. "I am delighted to meet you, Ivy," he said. "I suggest you sit in the back seat with Theo, and I will put your suitcase on the front seat."

I simply smiled, saying nothing. I realised I did not know what to call him. A question for Theo, in due course. As we drove off I turned to Theo, and said simply: "Thank you."

He knew what I meant. I was thanking him as the prime mover of my being now a visitor to his home and family. In typical Trubshaw manner, as I was to find out after

more time with them, he said nothing. I think he too was not quite sure how to have a conversation with me. Was I a grown up person in his mind, or an older teenager? Was I his generation, or his parent's? Then I realised that that was a question that applied to his father too. Was I an adult guest, or Theo's friend?

I was not used to people who were comfortable with silence. All the people I knew would have to chatter, pointing out things as we passed them, anything to avoid just sitting and enjoying the scenery. Here were two people of a different sort, and I just fitted in with their style of life.

Cambridge lies in flat countryside, so our first view was of towers. As we passed through the centre it was like a journey back in time, with many stone buildings of another era. Then out on a wide main road, and a left turn into the drive of a large house.

And what a house! The front door was in the middle of the house, with, to judge by the windows, large rooms on either side. A detached house, not like the one we lived in.

And a garage by the side of the house as well. Already, I had been transferred to a different world.

Now standing at the door, having obviously been keeping a lookout for our arrival, was the lady whose name I knew to be Miriam. She came quickly out and as I opened my door to get out, she came straight to me, and with a hug said: "Ivy, at last." It was a lovely welcome. She then opened the other door and took my suitcase, while Theo and his father attended to his luggage from the boot.

"I'll show you to your room, Ivy," said Miriam. What a lovely room it was too, with a fire burning merrily in the small grate. There was a huge wardrobe and a chest of drawers that would swallow my meagre clothing provision.

"The bathroom is the door at the end of the landing," said Miriam, as I paused not knowing what to do next.

"What should I call Theo's dad?" I asked, knowing this was the question uppermost in my mind, although there were lots of other questions too.

“I suggest ‘Professor’ until he offers any other name to you. I am Miriam, and Theo is Theo, and you will be Ivy to all of us.”

This was my first introduction to a very relaxed family, and I immediately felt at ease. Yes, it would be an education after the simple farmworker's cottage in Drifffield, but it was an education I welcomed. A fire actually alight in my bedroom was the first novelty. I was pretty sure there would be many more differences I would have to assimilate.

Miriam

I could somehow sense that being in a house like this was a big novelty for Ivy, and so I was determined to do my best to put her at ease. I knew Jack would be having the same thoughts to.

So as I left her to unpack I invited her to come down to the kitchen as soon as she had finished for a cup of tea. As I brewed the tea I put out a nice cake on the table. Theo soon found his way down here too, and Jack had gone off in the car somewhere.

“We will have a proper meal at about 7 o'clock,” I said, “and this will keep us going till then.”

Ivy, bless her, offered to help with getting the meal ready. “I do a lot of kitchen work at the school, you know,” she added.

This was perfect. It would give me some time alone with her, and by joining in like this she would soon feel at home here.

When Jack came back in good time for dinner he proposed that we have this meal in the dining room to make it a more

formal welcome to our guest. That solved a problem as I had not known for sure where we would eat. Since he wanted this first meal to be a formal one, I prepared everything accordingly. Theo would have his usual tumbler for water, but the rest of us would have wine glasses. Jack would choose the wine, of course.

Ivy and I set the table together, and she asked about the wine glasses. "Please feel free to have some wine, even if you are not used to it. It will make you feel more part of the family," I said.

The meal was an important part of making Ivy feel at home, and the one glass of wine she had obviously had a very relaxing effect on her. We talked a lot about the school, her work there, and her life at home. She was very sensible and made no disparaging remarks about any of the staff, or any other critical comments. But in spite of her tactful reticence it was very obvious that she wanted to make something better of her working life.

After the meal Theo and Jack went off to the lounge, and Ivy and I to the kitchen to

do the washing up. We were enacting the very segregation between men and women that she had already hinted at during our mealtime conversations.

When we joined the 'men' after doing our chores Jack announced: "Tomorrow morning we will all go to church together. I am sure you will want to see the church where we hope you will be bridesmaid in due course, Ivy."

"I would love that," she replied. "My family attend church on a Sunday usually too."

The next barrier to cross was bedtime. When the grandfather clock in the hall struck the hour of 9 o'clock, Jack looked at Theo and said: "Off you go, lad. Your bedtime as usual. Sleep well. Ivy and I will spend some time in the library together now so that she can see what there is that might suit her reading tastes."

This wonderfully answered the question as to whether Ivy was an adult or a youngster with a fixed bedtime. I could see the look of gratitude on her face. She and Jack spent quite a while in his library, which was his study too, chatting away. I

popped my head round the door before they had finished to say that I was going to bed now, and left them to make their own way upstairs when they wanted to. I felt that there was little more we could have done to make Ivy feel at home with us, and I trusted Jack to let her know when breakfast would happen tomorrow.

Ivy

It is so obvious that the Trubshaws are going out of their way to make my feel comfortable. After breakfast, with me in my Sunday dress, we trooped out to catch a bus into town. Professor Trubshaw had explained that it was virtually impossible to find a place to park a car in central Cambridge.

The church, which is apparently called the Round Church, was amazing. The front really was round, and I was told originally that was all there was to it. By now it had had extensions added at the side and end, but the arches were pure rounded Norman in style.

The service was what I was used to at home in Driffield, but I noticed an odd thing. Miriam seemed a little unsure of when to stand and when to kneel or sit, as though church was something of a novelty for her. At one point, during the reading of a passage from the gospels, she looked genuinely surprised. She took in a sharp intake of breath. I thought that maybe

when I had the chance to speak to her alone again I would ask her about it.

The weather was relatively fine for December, so at the professor's suggestion we decided to walk back to the house. We crossed the river, and I noticed a vast array of punts moored on the river.

A slow roast had been cooking all morning, so our midday Sunday dinner was not difficult to get ready. No wine this time, so I guessed that the wine we had yesterday was because it was something of a welcome meal for me.

After the meal we all seemed to be settling down to read our books. I had already chosen one from the 'library'. It all seemed so leisurely and peaceful. Then after tea, we started playing cards, and I was introduced to rummy.

"Later we must play whist, which has a little more skill involved than rummy," said Theo's father.

Once again, as the clock struck 9 o'clock, Theo went off to bed without even being told to, and I knew it was all right for me to stay up even longer.

Miriam said that tomorrow she and I would go into the shopping centre of the city. "We must start thinking about what you will wear as my bridesmaid," she said.

So I went off to bed with great contentment in my heart. My new life was beginning.

Miriam

Jack and I had started going to church every Sunday morning once we had agreed on our mutual plan to marry each other. Jack is the sort of person who does not ask questions very often, so I still did not know whether he had yet realised that by birth and upbringing I was actually Jewish. He had not asked me anything about my religious beliefs, merely whether I wanted to get married in church. And I had said yes, at least partly because I thought that was what he wanted. So we had needed to connect to a local church, and I did not mind getting used to services there.

There were sometimes readings from the scriptures I had become used to many years ago, and sometimes the psalms of David were sung or chanted. All moderately familiar territory for me. It was the stories about Jesus and the letters of the early Christian leaders that were novel. I usually let them waft over my head, being more concerned to get used to the pattern of things, when to sit, when to kneel, when to

stand.

But this Sunday had been different, even more so because I was sitting next to Ivy, and I am sure she noticed my reactions. It came when there was a reading about something Jesus did. The only thing I can now remember is that the reading was taken from the Gospel of Mark. No doubt we were told which chapter, but I have no recollection of that, just the name Mark.

Why did it matter? Well, expecting the usual sort of Jesus story I had half switched off my attention, when I was brought back to full attention by two names I was not expecting from a story about Jesus: Moses and Elijah. These were names I knew. The giver of the Law to our nation, and one of the greatest prophets of our nation. And here they were mixed up in a story about Jesus. What was going on? If only I had listened properly, but the moment was gone.

When we got back to the house I was determined to read the whole story again and find out. I knew nothing about the Bible that Christians use, and was rather

too embarrassed to ask Jack to borrow a copy from his library. And then I remembered how Theo was studying Greek by making his own translation of the Gospel of Mark from the original language it had been written in into English. So I sought him out.

“Theo, my dear, I understand you are translating the Gospel of Mark into English. Have you by any chance got that with you?”

“Yes, I brought the exercise book back with me from school, thinking I might carry on doing some during the holidays.”

“May I borrow it to read for myself?”

“Of course, but I am only just about half way through. Somewhere in chapter seven, I think.”

“No matter,” I said. “That may be enough.”

“I hope my handwriting will be neat enough for you to read easily.”

“I am sure it will be.”

Theo went upstairs to his room and came down with his exercise book, and gave it to me. As is his nature, inherited no doubt from Jack, he did not ask me why I wanted

to read his work. He just handed it over with a smile. Now I could read up to chapter seven of Mark's book, in the hope of finding out what it said about Moses and Elijah.

Ted

Today is the day. At Jack's suggestion we met at lunchtime in Bill's rooms for a final discussion. He confirmed that Theo had slipped into a nightly habit of going up to his room at 9 o'clock, so our timing plans were spot on. We agreed that we would run the recording tape throughout this evening's session and that Jack would listen to it first thing tomorrow, and then we would agree further tactics.

I did not realise how involved I had become in what was essentially a Jack-inspired plan, but I could think of little else for the rest of the day. I had an overall plan, but knew I would have to be responsive to unpredictable reactions from Theo. He had been portrayed to me as very bright. So this would be a test of me almost as much as a test of him.

I was in Bill's rooms in good time and at ten past nine Bill started the tapes and we listened for signs that the room where the radio sat was occupied. There was a plonk as something fell on the floor, and that was

enough for me.

I pick up my microphone and asked: "Can you hear me?"

We waited, and for a minute there was no response from the other end. So I tried again. "Can you hear me?"

Faint, but clear, came the answer "Who are you?"

This was a question I had expected. My reply was: "I am a Visitor." I had decided on this after a lot of thought, intending that the claims of my identity should be progressive, and not all rushed out in one go.

A long pause as this was obviously being digested. Then came the next question: "What is your name?"

This was going more or less as I had hoped. So I replied: "My name is Visitor."

This prompted the question I had wanted to be asked: "What are you?"

"I am a Visitor. I have no body, so I must use radio waves to talk to you."

This was the crunch point. Would Theo accept the idea that was at the very heart of this whole experiment?

“What do you mean by 'no body'?”

“I am a non-physical being. You have a body, so you are a human being. I have no body, and at this stage in my life I am a Visitor.”

“Tell me more.”

“You are a boy. As you progress you will become a man. I am at a stage similar to being a boy, amongst those of us with no bodies.”

Again something of a pause as Theo was obviously beginning to understand the implications of all this. I realised that the next question might reveal whether the bait was being swallowed.

“What is the next stage for you after Visitor?”

“I hope to progress to Protector and then, eventually, if possible, to Messenger.”

More thinking time for Theo. I knew from Jack that he was learning Greek. If he knew the Greek for messenger he would have a lot to think about.

“I need to think about this.”

I decided that this was enough for a first session, and so brought things to a

conclusion. "May I speak to you again tomorrow at about the same time?"

Just two or three seconds pause this time. "You may."

I rounded things off now with a polite "Sleep well."

Bill did not stop the tape straight away in case there was anything further to come from Theo. I switched off the microphone so that there would be no further unintended transmission from us. After ten minutes of silence Bill switched the tape off as well.

"Jack will definitely like this," said Bill. He patted me on the back. "Crafty fellow."

Jack

I am told that patience is a virtue, and I confess I was aware of lacking it as I went to bed that night, knowing I would have to wait till tomorrow to find out what I so wanted to know.

After breakfast I hastened to Bill's rooms in St John's College. Ted was already there with Bill, and neither said anything apart from Bill's 'just listen' as he turned on his tape recorder.

By the time we got to Ted's use of 'Messenger' I realised how he had transformed my original idea of a non-physical space traveller. "Bill, have you any idea what the Greek for messenger is?" I asked.

"No. tell me."

"It is 'angelos' which gets transliterated into angel in English, but would be messenger if we translated it literally."

"So Ted is pretending to be a sort of junior angel is he?"

"Exactly," I said. "And somehow I think that might turn out to be more convincing

than an extra-terrestrial alien for Theo. I am sure he knows enough Greek by now to work out Ted's subtleties."

Now Bill understood. "So Protector would equate to a guardian angel, but what about Visitor. Is that biblical too, Ted?"

"No that is invented by yours truly, and that is the bit that I expect Theo will latch on to. I can predict that this is where his line of questioning will tend to. I am going to have to invent a whole raft of stuff about something which I reckon we humans are probably not intended to know anything about."

I knew that this was in safe hands, and was so glad that a theologian with imagination was part of our group. I was even looking forward to Ted's inventions myself.

Ivy

Monday was a lovely day, spent mostly in the company of Miriam. We went round lots of ladies clothing shops to think about how we could wear matching gear when the great day came. She talked about her life in Poland, till she managed to leave just in time. I talked about my humble life in Drifffield, my schooling, and my current job at Theo's school. I found out that she is Jewish by birth, but not very religious about it and willing to fit in with Jack's religion, not that Jack is very religious himself. He is more simply aware of his background as an Englishman in the middle of the twentieth century.

Tuesday morning breakfast was interesting, as when Theo joined us in the kitchen he looked quite distracted. He was clearly beset with something on his mind. I asked him about it.

"Is it so obvious?" was all he said. Then he added: "I have lots of research to do in Dad's study."

So Miriam and I left him to it, and Jack

had already gone off to work. I knew it would not be right to ask Theo what he needed to research. He would tell me when he was ready to. I was beginning to get to know him well enough to realise that.

More out of curiosity than the need for a new book myself I did go into his father's study (more like a library really for the number of books stored on all the walls bar the window and the door). I saw that Theo had consulted the Hasting's Dictionary of the Bible, and the encyclopedia entries for electronics and radio. I could not for the life of me see the connection between these varied topics, but determined to keep my peace about it all.

So what with sharing the housework with Miriam, which I enjoyed doing, and some quiet reading of my own, the day passed well enough.

We played some more cards in the evening, all four of us, till Theo went to bed at his usual time.

Ted

I had spent most of the day trying to anticipate what questions I might be asked in my next encounter with Theo. Would he call my bluff straight away? Would he seem to have accepted the basic premiss of what we had offered him? I was pretty sure it would not be easy to get everything right. The ultimate test, when you have no idea in advance what the questions will be, and have to respond straight away.

Bill had everything ready when I got to his rooms, and we started off exactly as we had done yesterday. Bill set the tape recorder going first, then we listened for a while after 9 o'clock, and then I switched on the microphone: "Can you hear me?"

This time there was no delay, and the answer 'Yes' came back immediately.

"Do you have any questions?" This seemed the best opening move from me.

"Yes. Why do you need a radio to talk to me?"

Bill and I had talked a fair bit about the science of radio communications, and so I

was fairly well prepared for this question.

“I have no body, so no eyes, no ears, and no mouth. Radio waves are non-physical, like me. They can pass through walls, unlike light waves which cannot. I can generate radio waves by an act of will, and so I can use the loudspeaker of your radio to make audible words.”

This was an answer I had more or less practised. It was the weakest part of our fiction, of course, but we had hoped it might suffice.

“If you have no ears, how can you hear me?”

This was the nub of it, and again I had an answer that I had thought through and which the three of us hoped might be convincing.

“I am not hearing your sound waves, I am reading your mind, and that is how I know what your questions and answers are.”

“If you are reading my mind why do you need me to say anything?”

“My mind reading is very imperfect. You may have experienced this yourself. You know a person's mood without them saying

anything. It is the same for me, only more so. When you convert your general mood into specific words I can read those mind waves behind the words you utter. So I need you to actually say the words for the mind waves to become specific.”

There was a pause, while he obviously digested this explanation.

“You said yesterday that you are a Visitor. You mentioned Protectors and Messengers too. Please tell me more about being a Visitor.”

It seems he has accepted the fundamental issue, and Bill smiled when he heard this.

“We no body people are part of the universe, just like you body people are. We are allowed to relate to you humans, so long as we do it respectfully. I have visited you to get to know you better. You can send me away if you want to.”

“I want to know more about you, and beings like you, but I need more time to think about this. It is a huge surprise, you know. You can talk to me again tomorrow at the same time.”

“I will. And sleep well.”

As before I switched off the microphone and Bill kept the receiver and recorder going for a while, but Theo did nothing more audible to us.

“Has he bought into the whole thing?” I asked Bill.

“Not sure,” replied Bill. We need to hear what Jack thinks too, and we will know that tomorrow morning when he listens to all this.

Ivy

So far, while staying here, I have seen very little of Theo. After church on Sunday he spent most of the time in his father's study, and on Monday Miriam and I spent most of the day together going round shops. On Tuesday I noticed that Theo once more disappeared into the study, obviously intent on research. But I had no idea what for, even though I had spotted what books he had used.

For the second day running, on Wednesday he came down to breakfast with a very preoccupied appearance. I was determined to get to know what he was worried about. "Theo, you look really worried about something. Have you had a bad dream?"

"No, not a bad dream. More like a bad reality," was his answer.

"Want to share?"

He thought for a moment, and then said: "Yes, that may help. Let us go into the study after breakfast."

Miriam looked up hearing this, rightly

concluding that she was not included. Theo realised that this was her reaction, and so said to her: "Hope you don't mind."

"Fine by me," said Miriam, with a bit of an edge to her voice.

In the study, with the door closed, Theo began: "It is obviously my father, but I cannot work out why."

I waited, knowing he would realise that this was not very specific."

"This must go no further, not to my father and so not to Mystery either." I knew he still thought of Miriam by the name he had called her from his earliest days when she had looked after him as the professor's housekeeper."

"What precisely?" I ventured quietly.

"He has given me a radio as an early Christmas present. It looks and works like an ordinary radio, except that when I am on my own at bedtime it starts talking to me, even though it has been turned off."

"Gosh."

"And it cannot be my father doing the talking because he is downstairs with you two when it happens. So he has an

accomplice.”

“So why all this?”

“That is the question I am asking myself. This accomplice has said he is a Visitor with no body, some immaterial non-physical being from out there somewhere.”

“Perhaps it is some sort of joke.”

“My father does not do jokes.”

“Then a test?”

“Yes, much more likely. It would be an intelligence test. That fits in with what my father thinks about education. I remember him saying once that the best test is one that is not recognised as a test. Well done, Ivy. You have hit the nail on the head.”

“So what will you do?”

Theo paused, thinking. “He is right, of course. The best test is one that is not recognised as a test. I will turn the tables and test him.”

Ted

Jack joined us early Wednesday morning and, as before, listened to the tape recording without saying anything until it was finished.”

“So,” Bill asked, “has he caught on or is he still accepting everything on face value?”

“Too early to tell,” replied Jack. “Don't you agree, Ted?”

I knew I would have to give an opinion, so I said: “He is still asking questions about the mechanics of all this. Why I need a radio, and why he needs to talk aloud if I can read his mind. If he stops asking questions like that it will mean he has bought into our fiction and wants to use the benefit of it.”

“Good point,” said Bill.

“Either way,” said Jack, “it will be useful to discover the questions he actually asks. In my view questions are more informative than answers. They reveal more truthfully what is in a person's mind. So just finding out the questions he wants answered will be a very useful exercise.”

“His questions will put me on the spot rather more thoroughly too,” I said.

“Yes, Ted. Absolutely right. Questions with no notice, and no chance to prevaricate. Perfect testing.” Jack smiled, and I began to realise that his experiment in testing, while it might be an interesting academic exercise, was now going to be a test of me rather than his son. Jack is a wily fellow.

“Remember, Ted, my son now describes himself as a philosopher,” was Jack's parting comment. “This is going to be very revealing.”

Miriam

Theo's behaviour had been a little odd, I thought, and then I remembered what Jack had told me about the radio that he had given Theo for his Christmas present. Or rather what Jack had not told me about it, but had warned me that it might be best if I knew nothing.

So the process, whatever it is, had begun, and now Theo needed to talk things over with our visitor, Ivy. I really like the girl, and am so grateful to have female company right here in the house I live in.

She has talked to me privately about her own home circumstances, and how she sees no real prospect of living the kind of life she wants to live. It is not just the fact that, for example, her mother's cooking is done on an old coal burning range while here I have a modern gas cooker. She deep down wants a job that will give her self-respect, a job where she can use real skills and feel truly fulfilled as a person.

Knowing Jack as I do, I am certain he will see this as a challenge to himself

personally. He has already hinted to me that he is sure that somehow or other he will be able to provide Ivy with a rescue route from rural isolation to something far better. Jack is that sort of person. Everything he does is for the benefit of someone else. Even this mysterious radio thing, whatever it is, will be for someone's benefit. Theo's, no doubt, and, for all I know, someone else's maybe. And I will get to know everything when it is right for me to know.

Ted

Another day, another attempt to be a convincing Visitor. I am glad it is holiday time and I have no responsibilities towards my pupils, as I now seem to spend my waking hours thinking about how a real Visitor would use the supposed opportunity to relate to an intelligent twelve-year-old human. I am trying to think of topics that might interest him, and about which my knowledge as a theologian might give me useful insights. Perhaps, after all, it would have been better to stick to Jack's original idea of an alien space traveller from a distant planet. This evening, once again, I will be put to the test.

Bill had everything ready and we started as usual with my opening sally: "Can you hear me?"

"Yes."

"Have you a question for me?"

"I have. How have you learnt to speak English? I cannot believe that English is the language of the universe."

A bombshell of a question, and one I had

not prepared for. I temporised. "You are right. English is a hard language to learn, and we Visitors learn it the same way you do, by listening."

"Does that mean you can listen without a radio?"

Oh dear, he is so close to unmasking the vulnerable part of our fiction.

"As I told you before, we can read the waves in your mind, and that includes the words you use when your thoughts become explicit through saying them aloud."

"So what language do you use when you communicate with fellow Visitors?"

Another tricky question, but I remembered some long conversations Bill and I had had with Jack. Language is Jack's academic subject. After all he is Professor of the Philosophy of Language. So I dragged up some of the ideas Jack had proposed to us. "We use pure language."

"Pure language?"

"Would you like me to explain?"

"I certainly would."

"Well think of a very ordinary word, like 'book'. The English word sound very like the

German word for the same thing, while the French word for a book is obviously taken from the Latin word, and sounds totally different. But behind all the possible words, in all the possible languages you humans use, there is a basic idea of bookness. Pure language has no words, just ideas.”

This was pure Jack on language, by the way, and I could only hope it sounded convincing.

“So you are saying that when I think of a book it does not matter to you what actual word I use, but you can read the idea from my mind waves?”

“Correct.”

“But to learn English, you must be able to hear what sounds I make that correspond to the idea you can read in my mind.”

“Oh, yes, I see what you mean. I do not need a radio for that, as the sounds are not material. They are waves of a certain wavelength, and I can detect them in a non-material way. But I do need the radio to make the sound waves you can hear, unless I transform myself into a physical being.”

“You mean you could in theory do that?”

“Not as a Visitor, but as a Messenger I could. But I have not yet progressed as far as being a Messenger.”

“So, let me see if I have got this right. A Messenger can transform himself into something physical, with a body and vocal chords and a tongue and everything else you need to make the right sounds.”

“That is about it.”

“Like the Messenger who was sent to tell a certain young lady that she going to have a son, even though she had no husband?”

So he had made the connection, and it did seem to begin to look like he was swallowing our fiction.

“Well done. Spot on.”

“And the Messengers who gave a message to certain shepherds out on the hills?”

“Another good example.”

There was now a long pause. I did not want to hurry him or interrupt his thinking, so said nothing.

Eventually he dismissed me, effectively, with: “You may talk to me again tomorrow.”

Ivy

I could tell when Theo came down for breakfast that he was completely relaxed about the radio messages. He simply said: "We are making progress."

Of course I really wanted to know what was the content of these bedtime conversations, and so I suggested we talk again in the library after breakfast.

Theo came straight to the point. "At first the mysterious voice defined himself as a Visitor, an immaterial, non-physical being. He also referred to similar beings called Protectors and Messengers. It helps if you know some Greek."

"Which I do not."

"At school I have been reading the Greek of Mark's Gospel with the Chaplain, and the word angel comes in the first chapter. The Greek 'angelos', if you translate it into English, simply means messenger. I think part of the test has been to see how quickly I cottoned on to this."

"Which you did, of course."

"Yes, that was not really difficult. Now the

voice is getting quite specific about it, and has brought this aspect out into the open. I think he will claim that a Visitor is a sort of junior angel, an angel in training, as it were.”

“How credible is that?” I asked.

“Slightly credible, I suppose. My next step will be to get him to go into much more detail about angels generally. I am going to go back to the Hastings Dictionary of the Bible on the shelves right here and mug up on angels, so that I can be as well informed as possible. It will help me get a better idea of what sort of background my father's accomplice has.”

“It looks as though you are rather enjoying this mental duel.”

“I certainly am, and I can already detect my father's role in all this. My Visitor, as he still calls himself, has been coached about language, which is my father's speciality. He told me about Pure Language.”

“What is that?”

“Language without words, basically. Just the idea behind any word we use. This Visitor of mine claims he can read the

ideas in my mind, regardless of the words I might use to express them. This is Pure Language, he claims. So that means that Impure Language is any idea represented by an English word, or a French one, or one in any of the myriad of languages we humans use.”

I thought about this. “I suppose this makes some sort of sense, you know.”

“I agree. It is an idea I rather like, and I might explore this with him a bit further. But first I must bone up on angels.”

I got the hint, and left him to it, as he took down this thick reference book from the shelves. Theo likes reading.

Ivy

After my conversation with Theo I returned to the kitchen and found Miriam there with the Professor.

“Ah, Ivy,” he said. “Miriam and I have been thinking what we can do for you to make this something of a holiday. Would you like to me meet for lunch, and after that I will take you somewhere?”

“Oh, yes, please.”

“Good. Here are your directions. We meet at the Baron of Beef. You will remember our trip to the Round Church on Sunday. Well, the Baron of Beef is very close to it, and we walked past it on the way home. It is between the Round Church and the bridge over the river, and on the same side of the road as the Round Church.”

“I am sure I will find it.”

“There is a choice between walking in from here, which takes about 30 minutes, or catching the bus. Miriam will tell you where the bus stop is.”

“I will walk in for choice,” I replied.

“Very good. Say around 12:30 then?”

So I idled my time away for the rest of the morning till midday then set off. Finding the pub was easy, and as it was out of term time there were not all that many people there. I soon spotted the Professor right at the back, and noticed there were two men with him.

“Allow me to introduce my friends, Ivy. This is Bill,” he said pointing to a tall man, “and this is Ted.”

“Hello,” I said. My shyness was rather evident, so the Professor explained: “We all three work here at the university. Bill works at the Cavendish Laboratory and calls himself an astro-physicist.”

“And Ted works round the corner at the Divinity School,” intervened the other man himself, “and pretends to be a theologian.”

These men were so kind to a country girl like me that I was a bit overwhelmed, and did not know what to say.

Ted filled the gap for me. “Jack insists we come prepared with a joke. It has to begin with ‘What is the difference between . . .’ and I think it is Bill’s turn today.”

Bill looked suitably surprised. He was not

expecting this, I thought. He said he would provide his contribution after we had organised our sandwiches and drinks.

“Just lemonade for me,” I said knowing that I was still a few months shorts of my eighteenth birthday and therefore strictly speaking not allowed alcohol.

We ate and drank a little while, with merely trivial conversation.

Bill eventually rose to the challenge given by Ted. “This is an old one,” he said. “What is the difference between a cat and a comma?”

The three men looked at me to see if I knew the answer. I was not used to this kind of conversation, so could contribute nothing. I rather suspected that the three men had heard this one before, and had given me an opportunity to join in. But I said nothing, so Bill provided the answer: “One has claws at the end of its paws, and the other has a pause at the end of its clause.” The men chuckled, and I did my best to sound amused too.

When we had finished eating and drinking, the Professor (even thought I now

knew he was called Jack by his friends, I could not bring myself to call him that yet in my mind) invited me to join him walking to our next destination. We turned left out of the Baron of Beef, so away from the home, and veered right where the road forked. This brought us past the most imposing gateway I have ever seen.

“St John's College. Rather a fine entrance I have always thought. The arms are those of Lady Margaret Beaufort, the mother of Henry VII, who founded the college. The chapel is Victorian, though, and was designed by the same architect who designed St Pancras station in London. Some say he got the plans muddled.”

It was so lovely to be in the company of a man who was chatty, and with an obvious sense of humour. We carried on past more buildings that were obviously colleges, and I was beginning to think I had never seen anything quite so impressive until we came to another huge building. It look more like a cathedral than anything, but I was told it was just another college chapel.

“I will take you inside there one day. The

ceiling is a masterpiece.”

How could a ceiling be the most impressive part of a building? My mind was being overwhelmed by visual images that I was just not accustomed to, having never seen anything like these buildings before.

Eventually we came to another imposing building, with steps leading up to a columned portico.

“I am a trustee of this museum and art gallery, and want to show you what goes on in here.”

The doorkeeper welcome us with a very polite “Good afternoon, Professor,” and we sailed in to the entrance hall.

“We will take a proper look around here at some future date, but I actually want to show you parts that visitors do not get to see.”

We went to a door marked 'Private', but it was not locked and so we went in unopposed.

“Follow me.”

Down the corridor to another door, this one unmarked. As we went in the first

thing I noticed was the smell.

“This is where we restore paintings that we are given or are lent to us, that have suffered the ravages of time.”

There were three people, each working on a painting at a bench littered with all sorts of bottles and cloths and paintbrushes.

“This is where the real skill is,” he said, “and even an apprentice restorer has several years of training before they are allowed to touch a painting on their own.”

It was then that it began to dawn on me that he was sizing me up. I had said so much about the lack of opportunity for any decent sort of work where I lived in a remote rural village. It now occurred to me that he was trying to find out if this was the sort of work I might be interested in.

He went up to the oldest of the three workers, a man dressed in a white lab coat that was full of paint stains, and asked him: “Would you mind if my friend, Ivy, watched you working for a little while? You might explain to her what you are doing.”

For the next hour I had an object lesson in how to remove grime from an old oil

painting. What solvents to use, and how to ensure that the painting was not harmed in any way in the attempt to restore it to its original condition. This was truly fascinating. The professor had vanished somewhere during this time, and I had not even noticed his departure, being so absorbed in the work I was observing.

Eventually he came back. "Seen enough?" he asked.

"Yes, thank you."

"We sometimes have a vacancy for a trainee apprentice restorer, so you now have the beginnings of an idea of what sort of work goes on here."

I was tempted to say how much I would like to do this sort of work, but I hesitated to say too much straight away. He sensed that I was holding back any comment, and restrained himself from asking any direct question. I was getting more and more used to the Trubshaw way of saying little, but meaning a lot.

Miriam

With Jack and Ivy off goodness knows where, and Theo with his head in a book in the library, I now had a chance to read Theo's translation of St Mark's Gospel.

There was no detail about the birth and childhood of Jesus, but started straight away with the beginning of his ministry. Lots of very simple stories, healing mostly, and collecting followers. Somehow the man Jesus was beginning to become real to me. In some ways so ordinary, and in other ways so different. Lots too about the Jewish way of life, with all its rules, some of which Jesus challenged. His enemies it turned out were not the occupying Romans, which you might have expected, but the leaders of his own religion. Mark emphasised how Jesus was the predicted one, and at the very beginning there was a voice from heaven saying that Jesus was God's son. I had been taught as a child that Jesus was just a prophet. Now I was reading the story for myself I could begin to understand that the claims Christians made went much deeper

than this.

As I read on I became more and more captivated. The accounts of each incident had very little embellishment. They were very matter of fact. I was beginning to wonder how much this was Theo's style of writing, and how much it was true to the original. I quickly realised that I could not escape from actually reading a published translation, in case Theo was getting things wrong.

After a couple or so of chapters, with no mention of the two names I was looking for, Moses and Elijah, I decided to put the book down for the time being. I could only digest so much in one go, and had so much to think about already.

Later in the day, when Ivy returned with Jack, she and I sat down over a cup of tea (see how English I have become!) and she told me about her lunch with Bill and Ted and the visit to the art gallery.

I could see how Jack was laying the foundation of a potential career for Ivy that would give her an escape from rural isolation. How typical of Jack, I thought.

Ivy

Miriam and I talked over my trip to the art gallery at some length. There was so much that I knew nothing about. What is the position of a trustee? What sort of career prospects would there be if I got trained as an art restorer? Miriam said she knew little more than I did, but it was obvious to both of us that a possible career in this direction would give me far more scope for an enriched life than staying at Driffield for the rest of my life.

During the evening meal, with the four of us gathered together round the large kitchen table, I had the opportunity to ask the questions I wanted to ask. The Professor opened up the topic by asking my impressions of the day.

“Well, sir,” and I had slipped into deference mode without realising it, “it has been a steep learning curve for me. It was very kind of you to introduce me to your friends, and then to take me to the art gallery.”

I paused, and no one interrupted my thinking.

“I understand you are a trustee, and I do not really know what that means.”

“The Fitzwilliam is a charitable institution, founded by a gift and supported by donations from wealthy people. Sometimes we get whole collections of paintings and other objects. A charitable institution is run by trustees, who appoint other trustees when vacancies arise. Our responsibility is basically to run the whole establishment.”

I nodded. He and others like him were the bosses. So far so simple.

Noting my pause, he went on: “I expect you are wondering how I was asked to be a trustee. Well, it was when I offered a course in my role as Professor of the Philosophy of Language on ‘Art as language.’”

This was beginning to go over my head of course. Something perhaps I could discuss with Theo, who would probably understand this.

“And the skills an art restorer needs?” I ventured as my next question.

“Very much in demand. Not only art galleries but also art dealers. Any painting by an old master can be worth millions,

and very often all they need is to be professionally cleaned. The skill is pretty rare, but a really competent restorer would be able to find work anywhere in this country, or in the whole world, come to that.”

My mind was beginning to reel.

The Professor could tell how my eyes were being opened, and went on: “There is no vacancy for a trainee restorer right now, but if one occurs, would you be interested?”

“Gosh, sir, yes indeed.”

“Then we will wait and see what happens.”

What a prospect! To learn a skill that I could take anywhere. What a privilege, I was thinking, to be connected, however tenuously, to a family like this.

Ivy

After the meal, with the Professor insisting it was his turn to help in the kitchen, Theo and I were left alone. He seemed very glad of the opportunity to ask me a few questions about my day.

“Tell me more about my father's friends, please, Ivy.”

“This was in the Baron of Beef, and I understand they are both going to be part of the hoped-for wedding ceremony. One will be best man and the other will give away the bride.”

“No, tell me what you learnt about them. What do they do in the university?”

“One is called Bill, and he describes himself as an astro-physicist. The other is called Ted, and he does theology. I think Bill does research in his subject, and I am not sure what Ted does in his. All three seemed more interested in telling each other jokes, which I thought a bit odd. None of them talked about their academic subjects at all.”

“Very interesting,” mused Theo. “That is

very helpful information, Ivy.”

“In what way?” I asked.

“I think astro-physicists know a lot about radios, and that would explain one part of the mystery.”

“You mean the rather odd radio you have got in your room?”

“Exactly.”

“And Ted?”

“The theologian. That explains what we are talking about, and it is massively useful to know where he is getting his information from. Now that I know this background, I will be able to focus the questions I need to ask.”

I was not quite sure how my information had helped him, but I recognised the glint in his eyes as something typical of the way Theo's mind worked. He seemed very happy with these new revelations.

Ted

Another evening, another conversation with a twelve-year-old.

I remembered how this all began: we were talking about the perfect test; it would be one where the subject of the test did not know he was being tested. Jack devised this test, saying it would test the intelligence of his son as nothing else could. And I, and Bill, agreed to be the actual means by which the test could operate. So here I am again, having researched as much as I can of the area of the non-physical beings in the universe, very fully aware that this is more a test of me than of Theo. I will get no warning of the questions he will ask, and once more I have to agree with Jack that questions are more revealing than answers.

So here we go. Bill has got all his equipment set up, and the recording we make of the whole session started. And I begin as I have done before with: "Can you hear me?"

Theo was obviously entirely ready

himself, because his 'yes' answer was immediate.

"Do you have any questions for me?" I asked.

"How old are you?" came straight away, so obviously this was a prepared question. And what a question? I knew immediately that he was taking me into territory which would be all guesswork for me.

"Well," I temporised, "you are twelve years old, but you measure time in a physical way. You have days, because you punctuate these with periods of sleep. You have weeks, to organise your work and play. You have years, because you notice the change in seasons, and you are measuring the physical things, like your planets rotation on its axis and run its sun."

All this we both knew, and now I had to begin with my guesswork. "We non-physical beings do not think of these physical things as a measure of time."

I paused, not really sure where to take this pretty obvious stuff.

"So how do you measure time?" He would not let me off lightly.

“Time is always a measure of change, isn't it?” A question to give me more time to think.

“Agreed.”

“Well the change I am aware of is the change in myself.” A start at least. I carried on: “You are twelve years old. Your body has changed a lot since you were a newborn baby, and you will be very well aware of those changes, and you know there are more changes to come. But these are all physical changes, aren't they. You will also be aware of a growing knowledge of the world about you, and you are very keen to learn more and more about the world about you.”

“Sure”

“Well, then, imagine a being with no body, no physical changes to notice. All I can notice is the growth of knowledge. We begin, as non-physicals, just noticing, just observing, just watching. When I first began talking to you I described myself as a Visitor. Remember?”

“Yes, I remember that well.”

“I told you it was my name. If you want

something more specific, I can only say that right now I am Theo's Visitor. But before that I might have called myself a Watcher, or a Spectator, or an Observer, or a Witness. Unfortunately this is a problem of language, because there is only one word for all these four English words in Pure Language."

"But you seem to have forgotten my question: how old are you?"

"No, this is the foundation for my answer. In terms of the observing and learning that I have done, I would say that I am about the same age as you. So my answer is that I am the equivalent of twelve human years old, in knowledge, in understanding, in experience of what matters. Very young really, and very much aware of how much more I need to learn to become my true self."

Now it was Theo's turn to be silent and obviously thoughtfully digesting all this.

Eventually he said: "Thank you. That has given me a lot to think about. You may talk to me tomorrow. I must sleep now, being a mere human."

Ivy

I really am beginning to enjoy my holiday here. Breakfast is a help-yourself occasion, and I am happy to have Weetabix, toast and marmalade, and tea. There is no set time, and sometimes the Professor is up and gone before the rest of us.

After breakfast we all do what we want. Miriam often stays in the kitchen, quietly doing what needs to be done. She mends clothes that need mending, washes what needs washing, irons what needs ironing, and so on. Theo moves to the library and his head is soon in a book. I too have joined him, and am reading some of the art books that his father has left out for me. How I would love to have the opportunity to move away from my rural isolation into a job that requires real skills.

The Professor has left out a book that is obviously not meant for me, called 'The Screwtape Letters'. Theo looks it over, reading the description on the cover, and smiles. He obviously understands why his father has left this book out for him to

notice. A typical Trubshaw trait this, actions with no words: no 'here's a book I recommend you read', just leaving it on the desk as an option to be considered.

Around the middle of the morning I leave the library, and Theo, and wander back to the kitchen. Miriam is ironing, and I offer to make us both some tea. We soon start talking about the family we are getting to know, quite well in my case, and to know deeply well in Miriam's.

I learn about the infant Theo, whom she has cared for since he was weaned. I also learn about his father, and his passion for understanding language, especially language without words.

"It took a lot of getting used to," said Miriam. "I had to learn all the signs he uses to understand his preferences, and the subtle way he says thank-you, usually with a smile or a nod."

"I am beginning to notice this too," I replied. "There were books for me to read on his desk, and one for Theo too."

"Theo loves reading. He learnt his alphabet in no time at all, and the Professor

made books specially for him, so that could learn to read more or less all on his own.”

“And you were more like a mother to him than many mothers, since he was home all day, every day, till he was eleven.”

“Yes, I think I know Theo very well, and he is such a kind boy. I have never seen him do an unkind thing, though obviously he has had very little opportunity to do so. I wonder how he gets on with the other boys, now he had to mix with his own age group.”

“What I overhear from Matron is that he is well liked, No, perhaps 'liked' is the wrong word, apart from one boy. But respected, yes. The teachers are wary and cautious, because he knows so much more than his fellow pupils. But he never causes any trouble. And the headmaster really cares for him, and certainly understands how good he is for the school.”

At this point I told Miriam all about how Theo had organised a debate, which I had smuggled myself into dressed in their uniform. “And the headmaster had accidentally found out about it, but took no

action. He could have expelled Theo, and given me the sack. But all he did was let Theo know that he knew, and that it must not happen again.”

This led us to chatting on about the school and the menial tasks I had to perform, in spite of the magnificent title of 'assistant matron'.

“I think the Professor has some idea of what he may be able to do for you.”

“I know, hence the art books, and I am doing my homework in the library at his silent invitation.”

Jack

After hearing the latest recording of Ted's conversation with my son I suggested we meet for lunch at the Baron of Beef.

When we were settled with our beer and sandwiches, Ted began with the obvious question: "Has Theo figured out what is really happening, Jack?"

"I cannot be absolutely certain, but I am pretty sure he has."

"What makes you think that?" asked Bill.

"We have a meeting of minds most of the time. So when he said, 'Thank you, Dad, for the radio. It is absolutely marvellous.' I took that as confirmation that he really knew that we had somehow fixed up the radio to be more than an ordinary radio."

"When will he tell you definitely what he really thinks about the radio?" asked Ted.

"When he is ready to."

"So this test is to go on?" Ted again, and I could see that the whole affair was becoming a major issue for him.

"If you are happy to, Ted. I think we can safely say that this is now a much wider

sort of test than we originally devised. It is no longer how smart he is. I think it is now an examination of the kind of questions he wants answered, on the assumption that he really is talking to a good spirit. Questions are always the most revealing thing a person ever utters.”

Ted was silent for a while, so I went on: “I can see you are a bit worried about the deception aspect of all this. Rest assured. I am pretty sure he has never been actually deceived. I think it is more likely that you have raised his curiosity substantially, and that he will be actually disappointed if we bring this to an end before he asks us to.”

“Very well. It is me that is being tested now, and I accept the challenge.”

I smiled. “Good, and I have a confession to make. Be prepared. I have given him a book to read: Lewis's 'Screwtape Letters'.”

Bill, who is no theologian, asked: “What is that about?”

“Supposed letters from a senior tempter to a junior tempter.”

“I know it well,” said Ted. “So I can now expect questions about the other side of the

spiritual battlefield. How did you explain to Theo the reason for giving him the book to read?”

“No explanation. That is not the way we communicate. I just left the book on my desk in the room he uses for his own reading. He will take it as an invitation to read it. In many ways it rather gives away that I know what you and Theo have been talking about. But I reckon he knows that already anyway.”

Miriam

Ever since that church service when I heard mention of Moses and Elijah I have been reading through Theo's exercise book, where he has written down the translation he is making of the original Greek of Mark's Gospel.

This has really taken me back to my own childhood upbringing in my Jewish family in Poland. When I escaped from the Nazi invasion, and began to realise that all my family were probably killed by their policy against the Jews, I had let slip all my thoughts about the God I had been brought up to believe in. In England, as a cook and housekeeper, I could hardly follow the diet customs of my people, and I did not bother to find a synagogue where I might worship. I expect there is one in Cambridge, but somehow it did not seem to matter any more.

It is only the prospect of a church wedding that has got me back to going to church. The differences are not huge. The scriptures are given a prominence that I

am used to, and even some of the scriptures are ones I am used to.

So when I am free from immediate tasks in the kitchen I get out Theo's exercise book and read a bit more of Mark's Gospel, knowing that eventually I will get to the passage I am looking for.

As a child I was taught that Jesus claimed to be a prophet, but that the rulers of our people at the time decided he was making blasphemous claims, and we Jews were still to wait for the true Messiah that God had promised to send us.

After a dozen years of not having anything to do with religion I suppose I was able to read these stories about Jesus without too many predetermined ideas. The stories were very simple, with Jesus collecting followers and going round his native land healing people. That was as far as I had got when Theo came into my kitchen and, seeing what I was reading, asked how I was getting on.

"I have not yet got to the story that involves Moses and Elijah," I replied. "But I am finding it all very . . . interesting." I could

not think of a better word.

Theo, very typically, knew I had more to ask about, and so said nothing.

“One thing I cannot make out is all these references to evil spirits.”

“Yes, it does not seem to chime in with our experience of life, does it?”

“So what are we to make of it?” I asked.

Theo thought for a few moments, then said: “I know someone I can ask, I think. Leave it with me.”

I had no idea who he meant or how he would ask, but I knew enough about the Trubshaw methods to simply leave it to him.

Ted

With the memory of Jack's letting us know that he had lent Theo Lewis's book about an older tempter advising a younger tempter about how best to do harm to humans, I was preparing myself mentally for this evening's session with Theo. The more I thought about it the more I felt out of my depth. This was an area that was very rarely focused on by theologians, and the scriptural references were so sparse with information. Even the terminology was inconsistent. And I would be asked questions, I was sure, that would put me in a quandary. I would either have to give answers that I had no idea were true, or would have to find a way of avoiding any answers at all. I was beginning to wish Jack had never started this whole thing, and that I had never volunteered the direction we had taken. Far better, with hindsight, that we had stuck to his suggestion of an alien from another planet. That at least was fiction from start to finish, whereas my idea had some semblance of possible realities.

But we were stuck with it now, as Bill once again prepared all the equipment and got the recording started.

“Can you hear me, Theo?” My usual opener and straight away the answer came back that he could.

“Have you any questions for me?”

“I have,” came the reply.

I said nothing and waited for the first question with some trepidation.

“Are you a good spirit?”

This simple but deep question made me realise that I was in for the interrogation I feared most. Then the answer I should give came to me: “I try to be.”

Now it was Theo's turn to pause and think how best to continue.

“Do you mean it would be possible for you to be a bad spirit?”

The crux of the matter, and identified by this smart young mind straight away. Already it took me beyond what I could regard as safe territory, with evidence from scripture about the reality of the world I had claimed to belong to.

“We spirits are quite like you humans. We

have to make choices. Your choices are sometimes a lot easier to make, because of the restrictions imposed by the bodies you live in. Sometimes simply being tired limits the harm you can do to each other. Sometimes you do something different from what you want to do because of the pressure of other people's opinions."

I had no idea whether this was helping answer the question, so I finally did the natural thing and escaped into a discussion of meanings: "A lot depends on what you mean by good and bad, of course."

"I know what I mean by good," came Theo's answer, "because we humans have been given rules. Ten to be precise. We are not to worship idols, and we are not to harm each other. You perhaps know about these ten rules."

"Yes, I know about them."

This, at least was a safe territory to be in.

"Have you spirits also been given a set of rules?"

Oh dear, this takes me into imagination world, into territory where I was out of my depth. Before I could summon up the

courage to invent an answer, Theo saved me the trouble.

“I suppose you do not need rules, because you experience reality in a different way from us humans.”

“Indeed we do.” I had no idea where Theo was going with this, so my answer was an invitation for him to continue.

“I mean we are in a bit of a fog about everything spiritual,” he continued. “We are not sure if the spiritual world you live in even exists. Our world is so mundane, so ordinary. We get cold so we put on more clothes. We get hungry so we eat stuff. We get tired so we go to bed. We do all these sort of things without ever thinking about good and bad.”

“You are right.” I was quick to respond at last. “All your physical limitations really do limit the extent to which good and bad comes into your thoughts. And also you must remember that I am only a visitor, still learning about what it means to be a non-physical being.”

“Have you met any evil spirits yet?”

I am sure he knew what he was doing,

using the word evil now instead of bad. He had moved into scriptural terminology, and I am sure it was deliberate.

To avoid being drawn any deeper, I found the easy way out. The obvious blessings of ignorance opened up the way.

“No,” I answered.

Did this let me off the hook? Apparently not.

“But you think it possible that there might be such beings?”

“I suppose there might be,” I answered.

“Very well. I will ask no more on this subject right now, and I am actually quite tired too, so we can call it a day.”

I was so relieved. “Good night, Theo. Sleep well.”

“I cannot say the same to a being that does not need sleep,” came the immediate reply, “so I will wish you happy thoughts, dear visitor.”

He laid so much stress on this last word that I was sure he had never been taken in at all by our subterfuges. Jack was right after all.

Ivy

I got up at my usual time and was quite surprised to find myself alone in the kitchen for breakfast. Miriam was obviously going about her household tasks elsewhere, and I supposed that perhaps Theo was in the library. After my cereal and tea that is where I found him, with a large reference work open.

"I am researching in Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible again," he explained.

This, for Theo, was as good as an invitation to have a conversation with him, so I duly asked: "What about?"

"It is all to do with my so-called visitor, who claims to be a sort-of trainee angel. I told you about the radio, didn't I?"

"Yes, I remember that."

"And you discovered that one of my father's friends is a theologian, hence the angel stuff, and another is a radio expert, among other things. What was the theologian's name?"

"I only heard his first name, which is Ted."

"Well I really need Ted's help. You see

there is a problem when you are translating Mark's Gospel from Greek into English, which, as you know, I am doing at school. One keeps coming up against a diminutive of the word '*daimon*' which is hard to translate. In fact some English translations avoided the problem by just substituting our letters, so giving us the word 'demon'.

"I see." Meaning, of course, that I didn't.

"And then instead of demon in some stories, one gets 'unclean spirit', when this obviously means the same thing, whatever it is."

"Does that help?"

"Only a bit, because one English translation uses 'devil' for 'demon', and that leads us into thinking about Satan, and the personified enemy of all that is good."

"What does your dictionary say?"

"Very little that is actually helpful. You see, I really do want a real theologian to unravel all this terminology for me. And I have got to go on pretending to believe that Ted really is a trainee angel. So it is difficult to find the best way to get him to answer my questions. The questions I really

want to ask, I mean.”

I nodded, but said nothing.

“Of course it is always possible that he really does not know the answers either. In fact none of us humans may even know. Perhaps it may be best if we do not know. This is hardly a pleasant thing to be thinking about.”

“Yes, it is not an obvious casual topic for conversation.”

“And then Dad wades in with a book for me to read, all about so-called tempters, who may be just a polite way of referring to evil spirits. This proves that he is party to Bill and Ted's pretences, of course.”

“It does rather.”

“So I am in a quandary. I want to chat with Ted, directly, not pretending anything. But if I suggest that, it means showing that I have spotted their deceptions, and that would rather spoil the game they are playing.”

“You would prefer them to bring the game to an end?”

“I certainly would. But I am prepared to wait. The game is all rather fun.”

Although Theo was saying it was fun, I could tell from his tone of voice and body language that he still had concerns.

“But . . .”

“Yes, there is a but.”

I waited for him to explain.

“If the fiction that Ted has created has a possible reality behind it, then I am not sure I like it. Are there really lots of non-physical beings out there who can tap into my mind? Whether to help me or to entice me to do bad things, it seems an unfair intrusion. They are uninvited visitors.”

He pointed at me now, and pointing was something I had not seen Theo do before.

“You are a visitor. You observe us. You see the house we live in and the way we conduct ourselves. Perhaps you are comparing our house with yours. You have met my father, and you have interacted with him for several days now. Perhaps you are comparing him with your own father, and making judgments between these two men. Perhaps the same between Miriam, as you are allowed to call her, and your own mother. All this is fine for one simple

reason.”

“Because I am an invited visitor.”

“Exactly. Invited. But Ted's imagined visitor is not invited. Ted claims his visitor can read the thoughts of my mind. That is a horrible intrusion. C S Lewis's tempters can apparently not only read people's minds but can also put thoughts into their minds and influence them to do the things the tempter wants them to do.”

“I have not actually read that book. What is it called?”

“The Screwtape Letters.”

“Oh yes, I remember seeing it.”

“Well you can read it if you want to, as I have finished reading it now. But you may not like it.”

“Does Ted say that a good visitor could influence you to do good things?”

“He has not done so yet, but that is a good question and worth putting to him.”

“And Ted's visitor is a sort of trainee angel, you said. Surely there are angels in the Bible and we never see that as a problem, do we?”

“There are certainly angels, and think

about the Christmas story. This is our Christmas holiday, and the day itself is almost upon us. Where would the Christmas story be without angels?"

Theo went over to the mantelpiece where already there were several Christmas cards on display. He picked up one which showed the Angel Gabriel making his famous announcement to Mary. He waved it at me. "Hello, Ivy. You are in great favour, and something very interesting is going to happen to you."

It sounded so funny, the way Theo said this. He picked up another, and again mimicked the event: "Hello, shepherds. Pop over to Bethlehem. Something worth seeing there."

He seemed to be enjoying this parody, and I chuckled.

"It seems we cannot have Christmas without angels, so perhaps I am wrong to be upset about angels," he said thoughtfully

The idea came into my mind about prayer, so I said: "Sometimes in church, when we are praying, the vicar asks us to pray for those we know who are in need. So we pray

silently, just in our minds. I have never thought about this before, but we are assuming those silent thoughts, the people we conjure up in our minds who need help, we assume that the message is getting through. We assume our thoughts can transmit something in a way that actually matters.”

“You are absolutely right. I had never seen it that way. We do think our thoughts are a real communication, or else why bother to pray in silence? Thank you, Ivy, for being my theological helper.”

This made me feel so proud, as I always esteemed Theo's intellect as being far superior to my own.

“Perhaps our thoughts are as real as our spoken words, in the world of spiritual beings,” he went on. “Perhaps I should not mind if a visitor like Ted wants me to believe in can hear my unspoken thoughts just as if I were saying them aloud. This will take a lot of getting used to.”

With that Theo closed his big fat book and went over to the shelves with it to get a different book to read. I picked up my

history of art book too, and we both settled down to read for a while. I was still brimming with pride at the compliment Theo had given me. Odd, to mind so much what a boy five or six years younger than me thought about me, If only Theo were my own age. I would smother him with kisses.

Ted

Jack had joined us in Bill's rooms to listen to last night's session with Theo just before lunch, and after he had heard it all we went for our usual lunch together. What had once been a weekly get-together was now becoming a daily event. Theo's 'visitor' had now taken over my life, and I was glad it was not in term time.

"Are you happy to carry on, Ted," Jack asked me, "or shall I bring this to an end?" Jack had obviously sensed my unease.

I was in two minds. Part of me desperately wanted it to end, as I was very unwilling to be a deliberate deceiver. But the idea of pretending to be some sort of angel had been mine. Jack had proposed an alien from another planet. The other part of me was curious to find out what the next questions would be. So in a way I was enjoying the interplay of my mind with Theo's.

"Has Theo seen through our deception?" I asked.

"I am pretty sure he has," Jack replied.

“So this is now a game?”

“No, still an experiment. But we are not now trying to measure my son's intelligence, but rather his theological insights.”

“This is the part that is so demanding.”

“We will stop if you want to, then.”

I thought hard and curiosity won the day.

“No, let us continue,” I managed to say.

“Good,” said Jack. “I think there will be a resolution soon any way. Could both of you manage to join my family for Christmas dinner?”

This was rather nice. Bill and I both live in college and Christmas is very flat in any institution. I looked at Bill. He nodded, and so did I.

“That is very decent of you, Jack,” said Bill.

“Great,” said I. I could see what Jack meant by this bringing a resolution. We would both come face to face with Theo. I was sure he would recognise my voice, and it would be interesting to see how he dealt with that. And I really did want to meet him, and converse with this youngster, with

no need for pretence and deception.

So that evening, at the usual time and in the usual way, I began with my usual question: "Can you hear me?"

"Yes," came Theo's immediate response. He was obviously ready and waiting.

"Have you a question for me?"

"Indeed I have. I want to talk about Pure Language."

"Go on."

"You have said the we humans think our thoughts in Pure Language, but express our ideas in the words of the language we learnt from our parents."

"True."

"If I give you a word in another language than English, will you be able to translate it into Pure Language, and then tell me what the best English equivalent is?"

Wow. This was a stunner. Where is this going?

"I may be able to, but I cannot promise."

"The word I am thinking of is Greek, from about two thousand years ago."

That was a relief. I was going to get something from the original language of

the New Testament obviously, and that should be right up my street. "Tell me the word," I prompted, avoiding any promise.

"The word is *daimon*. I will spell it for you: *delta, alpha, iota, mu, omega, nu.*"

It is not often you meet a twelve-year-old who knows the Greek alphabet, is it? And I had to think quickly. I could give him an immediate answer, of course, but I wanted to think this through. I needed to explore why he wanted this word explained. He would already have looked it up in his own dictionary, as I knew he was translating Mark's Gospel. And I knew the word came in Mark's Gospel too. So I temporised: "I think it will be best if I consult about this."

"Do you have a mentor, then?"

Oh dear, the Lewis Screwtape mentor of a younger tempter sprang straight to mind. But if I was to get time I needed a mentor myself obviously.

"There are ways I can find things out, but they are very difficult to explain." That at least was true. Very difficult to explain.

I could sense that Theo wanted to challenge this, as there was quite a pause

before he finally said: "Till tomorrow, then."

Miriam

It is the Saturday before Christmas, which this year falls on a Tuesday. And now Jack has planted a bomb at my feet. We are going, for the first time, to have what he calls a 'proper' Christmas. All the time I have been here as his housekeeper we have made virtually nothing of Christmas, which is fine when there was just him, and a growing boy, and me. But now we have a visitor, who he presumes will be used to a traditional Christmas. And, as if that were not enough, he proposes to invite two more guests for a full Christmas dinner.

"There are a couple of chaps, close friends of mine, who will otherwise be on their own. They are both bachelors, and Christmas alone in college will be very dismal," he blithely announced. "So do you think you could cope with a traditional roast turkey and all the trimmings, for six?"

Six! I ask you.

Of course I agreed, though I had no idea from my own upbringing in a Jewish family in Poland what a traditional English family

did at Christmas.

Thank goodness I had Ivy to guide me. What a gem she is. She explained everything to me and so we drew up a shopping list and went off to get everything.

“The turkey can hang in the larder,” she explained, “but we must get it today. We will buy mince pies ready made, and the cake too. At home I make the Christmas pudding myself always, so I know what we need for that. We need decent brandy as well as a good wine for the guests.”

Thus began my education into what an English Christmas amounted to.

Jack told me more about his friends. They are Ted and Bill. One is to be best man when Jack and I eventually get married, and the other will 'give me away'. So Jack wanted them to become more acquainted with us as a family, and with Ivy lined up to be my bridesmaid it all made a lot of sense for us to be together on an occasion like this.

So Ivy and I went off to the shops to get everything we would need. In any Jewish

family there are formal occasions to mark important parts of our heritage. I was now going to learn how Christians celebrated the event that no Jewish family can understand. How could the Creator of the whole universe become a baby? I decided to suspend my disbelief. I did so want to be part of the family that contained the man I so admired, and the boy whom I really did love as much as any mother could.

Ted

I spent the whole day researching the word Theo had asked about. My Greek dictionary was rather disappointing, but it led me back to the classical period and before. It seems that *daimon* had developed in meaning over the thousand years or so from the Homeric period through till the first century. Originally it was almost interchangeable with the word 'god'. But the emphasis was on the power of a god, and for the Greeks the gods were everywhere. Then the Greek philosophers like Plato began to isolate the idea of *daimon* as being simply power of a supernatural kind. It was interesting that when Latin used the word it did not translate it but simply gave it the equivalent Latin letters, hence *daemon*, and from it the English did the same, with 'demon'.

This gave me the hint that no one really knew what to do with the word. The Greeks even thought of good demons as well as evil demons, and the more philosophical of them could worship anything so long as it

was the spiritual power inherent in what it was they were worshipping. Socrates even believed he was inspired by a divine force, a *daimonion*, which is a diminutive form of the basic word. He thought of it as an inner voice, which guided him.

The New Testament also uses the word in its diminutive form. I next checked out all the English translations of the word, looking only in Mark's Gospel. It was obvious that there was a problem, for the best translations simply used 'demon', but the translation nearly everyone uses still, the one authorised by King James, foolishly used 'devil' instead. But the context showed that in the original the phrase 'evil spirit' was interchangeable with 'demon'.

As I did all this research it occurred to me that Jack's concept of Pure Language, which I had now insinuated into my conversations with Theo, was very useful. Every time you tried to find a good English word for *daimonion* you failed, because of the overtones of approval or disapproval which you could not escape. 'Devil' certainly would never do these days. One

really needed a neutral word, and there simply was not one.

You can imagine that I was not very confident as the time drew near for me to go to Bill's room for my evening chat with Theo.

After the usual preliminaries Theo, as I expected, asked me: "Have you any guidance about my word?"

"Theo, I cannot give you a simple answer. There is a meaning in Pure Language, of course, but there is no single word in your language that would convey the right meaning."

I could sense that he was disappointed, but struggled to continue: "In Mark's Gospel the diminutive form is used, *daimonion*, as I am sure you know. If you use the word that your Bible uses, it is 'devil', but that is a very misleading translation. This is the trouble with words. In the twentieth century no one really knows what the people meant by that word in 1611, when the Authorised Version was published. And now you are a translator of Mark's Gospel, and you want to know which twentieth

century word will be best.”

“That’s right. I do,” he chimed in.

“Well I must ask, have you heard of Socrates?”

“Of course. We have done some Greek history at school, and Socrates is my hero. He has helped me understand that I too must become a philosopher.”

“Well Socrates believed he was guided by a *daimonion*. When he defended himself against the charges that were levelled at him, he spoke of a guiding voice, and the word he used was *daimonion*. He said this voice never told him what to do, but often told him of things he should not do.”

“Wow!”

This obviously delighted Theo.

“Trouble was, his accusers thought Socrates was trying to invent a new god. So that did him no good at all.”

“Silly people.”

“So the word has a range of meanings in English from god or divine force to spiritual power, or even a spiritual power with a mind of its own.”

I paused, to let this sink in.

“Another thing, the Greeks even believed in good *daimonia* and bad *daimonia*.”

“Golly. So Socrates believed he was guided by a good one, of course.”

“That is a fair conclusion.”

“And the ones Mark tells us Jesus opposed were bad ones, needless to say.”

“I am sure that is right.”

Another pause, as I let all this sink into Theo's mind. Then the bombshell.

“Are you a good *daimonion*?”

This floored me. But Theo was thinking in a perfectly logical way. If I was presenting myself as a non-physical spiritual being, albeit still in the classroom, so to speak, then how else could I describe myself?

I answered with a single word: “Good.”

“I thought so,” he answered, and his tone of voice implied that he said this with a smile on his face. “Well I know the English word I shall use in my translation of Mark's Gospel.”

“What is that?”

“Spirit,” he replied. “That is the nearest single word from what you have told me.”

I thought about this too. “I think you are

right, for the context will show that the descriptive 'evil' is implied, and so people will not be confused."

"Bedtime now for me. Good night, good spirit." And I could actually hear his chuckle this time.

Miriam

I do not know where I would be without Ivy. Her help in buying all the food we were going to need for a traditional English Christmas was invaluable. She also checked out all the cooking books there were, which had been there when I arrived ten years ago. She made sure that there was guidance about quantities for the Christmas pudding, and she had advised me to buy mince pies and a Christmas cake ready-made. She also knew what the ingredients were for making the stuffing that would go inside the turkey, which was now hanging in our larder.

When we got back from our shopping there was Jack with something quite unexpected. A Christmas tree. We had never had one before, as we had never taken Christmas at all seriously as a trio of Theo, Jack, and me. And not only a tree, which Jack had put in a plant pot next to the fire in our living room, but decorations to hang on it as well. I am glad he was taking responsibility for all this, as I had no

idea what would be right. As far as I knew just a few cards on the mantelpiece was enough to mark the occasion.

“This is going to be a special Christmas,” Jack was saying. “I have a good friend who is a Fellow at King’s College, and he is going to save four places for us on Christmas Eve, so that we can all go to the service as his guests.”

“What service is that?” I asked.

“A very special service, but I won’t spoil it for you by telling you any more right now.”

How typical of Jack, I thought. Always deciding whether words were the best form of communication.

“I am just letting you know that we will use the Monday afternoon service as our only visit to a church this Christmas, so you will have all of Sunday free for whatever you and Ivy need to do. And you will be free for all of Tuesday, when the six of us will celebrate with your best culinary endeavours.”

Culinary endeavours, indeed. Thank goodness for Ivy!

Ivy

Theo's father had told us that we would be going to church tomorrow rather than today, even though it was Sunday, because there was a special service on. So we were all quite free this Sunday before Christmas, and I decided to join Theo in the library.

"How are you getting on with your radio contact?" I asked, curious to know more about the voice that was communicating with Theo every night at his bedtime.

"Very well, and I have had a good answer to an important question. So I am now more interested in the mechanics of the whole thing."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, our evening conversations can only take place when I have turned the radio off. Obviously if it was on and tuned in to a channel, all I would get would be that channel. At nine in the evening on the Home Service that would be the news."

"So you have to turn the radio off to avoid getting an ordinary broadcast?"

"Precisely. But just turning off the radio

using its built-in off switch does not stop it working the way Bill wants it to work. Bill must be very clever at this sort of thing, because the lights go off, and it looks just as if it was really off. But for the transmitter to work that he is using it obviously is not properly off.”

“Yes,” I said. Theo was being very logical.

“So tonight I am going to experiment, and as well as using the usual off switch I am going to disconnect the lead that connects to the power point as well.”

“That should disable it completely, I would have thought.”

“That is my thinking too. But it needs to be tested. Bill may be even smarter than we think. We shall see.”

I nodded in agreement.

“And I have waited till now to try this test because I was really enjoying having all my questions answered. But the last session was so helpful that I am not sure what my next questions need to be.”

“And we will be meeting Ted and Bill on Tuesday anyway.”

“Yes. I think this is Dad's way of bringing

the whole thing to a natural end. He must realise that I will recognise Ted's voice when we meet face to face. This is going to be a fascinating meeting I think. You have already met them both, so you will know better than me."

"They are nice people. I am sure you will like them."

"I am certainly looking forward to meeting them."

Theo now went over to the desk in the window bay and started getting several sheets of paper ready.

"Excuse me, please, Ivy," he said in his very polite voice, "but I have a task to complete."

I could take a hint, and left saying: "I am sure Miriam could use some help in the kitchen."

Ted

Another day, and another period of thinking through what I might get asked tonight. An examination when you have no idea what the questions will be is quite usual for academics like me. But an examination when you do not know what the syllabus is, is quite another matter. We had got as far as good and evil spirits last time, so I had to prepare for an extension from there probably. Spiritual warfare, perhaps. And then the phrase 'war in heaven' came to mind. The archangel winning, and the fallen angels expelled.

I tried to imagine what a twelve-year-old would make of this, and then I thought of the question he might ask: "What sort of weapons do angels use? Being non-material they cannot use guns or bows and arrows, can they?"

As soon as this question came to mind I realised that I did not have a clue how to answer it. Thank goodness I had presented myself as a trainee angel. This made it possible for me to excuse my own

ignorance. So that was the plan, but I was not satisfied with it, needless to say.

When I turned up to Bill's rooms he could see the anxiety in my demeanour. "Is there a problem?" he asked.

"I hope not," I replied.

He busied himself getting the recorder started and the other equipment working. He was looking at a dial whose function I had no idea of.

"Oh dear. The monkey. He has really and truly switched himself off."

"What do you mean?"

"Well," Bill explained, "to get his end of things working, our special receiver and the transmitter built into the radio that he uses to speak to us, he simply needs for his radio not to be switched on for normal use. But we do need the power supply. And it looks to me as though he has disconnected the radio from that."

"So no session tonight?"

"I am afraid not."

"Why has he done this, do you think? Does he want to put a stop to everything completely?"

“That is possible, of course, but knowing his natural curiosity he may just be wanting to work out the mechanics of the whole process. This is his test of the way the radio works. I hope he does not start taking the radio to pieces, as there is some very expensive kit in there.”

I could understand Bill's concerns, and I hoped he did not notice the relief I was showing.

“Nothing more for me then tonight?”

Bill nodded, still looking at his dial. “I will keep this on for a little while, just in case he reconnects the power. When we next see Jack we can get him to check the boy's room to find out if the power has been restored.”

I returned to my rooms, with a lighter heart than earlier. Thank goodness for a boy's curiosity.

Miriam

Having spent most of Sunday in the kitchen with Ivy getting ready for our special Christmas day dinner for six, it was a relief when Monday came to realise we were well prepared for tomorrow. Jack had been carefully doing the decorations, and the house now looked quite different.

Jack had told us that we would all four go into the centre of Cambridge by bus, and that we had to be in good time for the service, as it was very popular, and only with reserved seats would we even get in. I still had no idea what the service would be like.

The size of the building was so impressive. "Are you sure this is just a college chapel?" I asked Jack. "It looks more like a cathedral."

"Yes, it is simply the chapel of King's College, but it is a showpiece of Tudor architecture. When we get inside you will see the best example of fan vaulting in the ceiling."

When we presented ourselves we were

met my Jack's friend, who was a Fellow of this college. I was a bit puzzled by the title 'Fellow', as my English is still not perfect, and asked Jack about this quietly after our introductions.

"It simply means he is on the permanent teaching staff of the college. This is his home as well as his job, effectively. He eats here, he sleeps here, and he works here."

Inside the building was one long rectangle, and we were shown through, under the organ, to our places. There were lots of extra seats for us guests, as well as the stalls where the choir would eventually sit. This was so different from the much smaller church we had begun to go to every Sunday.

The organ was playing as the chapel filled up, and then there was silence as the service was about to begin.

From a distant place, out of sight from where we were there began a boy's voice, singing solo, about 'royal David's city'. 'Is this going to be a Jewish service?' I was thinking, as the first reading was from the Law of Moses. Then another song which

the whole choir sang, and then another reading from the Law of Moses.

I could begin to understand now why Jack had been so cagey about what kind of a service we would be going to. And now another reading, this time from one of the prophets I knew so well from my Jewish memories. Then another reading from the same prophet. The readings were all pointing to some important future event that God was promising.

Then came the first reading that I was not familiar with, although it mentioned an angel. This angel had been familiar to me from another prophet, and he had a Hebrew name that means 'God is my strength'. The reading told how this angel had gone to a young unmarried lady called Mary and told her she would bare a child who would be the saviour. This I knew from my upbringing was the central issue between Jews and Christians. Was Mary's child the promised saviour? My mind was somewhat in a whirl as the songs and readings went on. The story of the birth, the proclamation by more angels to some nearby shepherds,

the visit of astronomers from a distant part who also were guided to the new-born baby to honour him. These narratives had a certain quiet compulsion for me. The surroundings were so beautiful, the choir so impressive in their red robes with white surplices, the music so haunting, it all seemed so hard to dismiss.

The final reading made it clear what my husband-to-be, and the child I had seen grow up for a decade, believed in: that the eternal creator, through whom everything had been made, had taken on humanity and had lived for a while among us two thousand years ago. I saw the adoration on Ivy's face, and the devotion on Theo's. They too had never before been to a service like this.

From this point of time onwards, I knew, I could not remain indifferent. It reminded me of the passage that I still had not found from a reading I had heard weeks ago, and which should be in Theo's exercise book, the reading that mentioned Moses and Elijah. I resolved to find it as soon as I could. Somewhere there is an answer.

Ted

As I looked at the relatively few Christmas cards on my mantelpiece, and the absence of any other decorations, I realised how much I was looking forward to being with Jack and his family tomorrow. Jack's 'perfect test' has brought the three of us much closer together, and now I really did want to meet his son face to face.

Lunch at the Baron of Beef seemed a good idea, and, as I half expected, Bill was there, but not Jack.

"Bad news, I am afraid," was how Bill greeted me.

I raised my eyebrows, interrogatively.

"The boy has reconnected himself. Sometime this morning. I checked before setting off here."

"That means we could, in theory, have a final session tonight."

"Looks like it."

So over lunch we agreed that I would turn up at Bill's rooms at the usual nine o'clock time and see if Theo responded.

With everything switched on and ready I

began with my usual 'can you hear me?' and got an affirmative answer, dashing my hopes that we might not need this final session. So I launched in: "Do you have a question for me?"

"I do. Still about demons. This is the question: reading Mark's Gospel you get a reference to demons more or less every other chapter in the first half of the book. Yet my chaplain has never mentioned them. All the readings we get in chapel never mention them. My father had never mentioned them. They never turn up in the BBC news. If I had not read Mark's Gospel I would have no idea they existed. Angels come a lot in the Christmas story, but why does no one talk about demons and angels at all today?"

As ever this boy has hit the nail on the head. He asked exactly the same question I had asked myself in these past few days. I had to temporise, so began: "We good spirits are not allowed to materialise except under very special circumstances. We just keep strictly in the background."

"So you really should not have contacted

me?"

"Possibly. Remember I am just a trainee angel, and I may have got things wrong. We always act with love, and never do harm."

"But you should not reveal yourselves openly, is that it?"

"Yes, that is one way of putting it."

"And what about evil *daimonia*?"

The crunch question.

"Their power has been limited."

I gave that answer with no obvious pause, knowing it was the only answer I could give.

"Does that mean we can all go on living our lives as if the spiritual world did not exist?"

"Yes, I think that is the best approach. Any attempt to dabble in the spirit world is wrong and dangerous."

"But when we pray we are contacting the world you live in, aren't we?"

"You pray to God, not spirits. He hears you, and that is what you need to concentrate on, not how He hears you."

"My real trouble is that I do ask these questions. I have been born with an

enquiring mind. Must I suppress all this?"

"Just use your enquiring mind wisely, is all I can say."

"I think that is a good definition of a true philosopher: someone who uses his enquiring mind wisely, like Socrates."

I nodded, and then, realising that all this was a radio conversation simply said: "Yes."

"By the way, I have decided on a name for you. You have said your name is 'visitor' and that really is not enough, as names go. Do you want to know the name I have given you?"

"Yes, of course."

"It is 'theologically educating *daimonion*.'"

"That is a good name. Describes me quite perfectly," I said without thinking. Then it hit me. Look at what the initial letters were of these three words. My real name.

Before I could respond to this revelation he brought our conversation to an end with a cheery "Looking forward to tomorrow. Good night for now."

Bill, who always keeps perfectly silent while monitoring his equipment for sound levels and perfect wavelength tuning, broke

his self-imposed silence with a hearty chuckle. He too had worked out the acronym that young Theo had created. Bill switched everything off quickly so that we could safely talk.

“How long has he known, Ted?”

“Your guess is as good as mine. It's a good question for tomorrow.”

I walked back to my rooms with this question buzzing in my mind. How long has he known?

Ivy

The big day at last, and I was determined to spend all my time helping Miriam in the kitchen. We were both up earlier than usual.

There was the turkey to roast in the oven, and the need to add the sausages and roast potatoes at the right time so that everything was fully cooked at the same time. I had a lot of kitchen experience, both at home and helping Cook at Theo's school. I did what I could getting the sprouts ready and making sure the Christmas pudding went into its boiling water in good time too.

Thus we worked away happily together all morning, chatting about the whole process of cooking most of the time.

I have no idea what Jack and Theo were doing during all this time, and I expect they were both in the library as usual.

Eventually I heard the door bell ring, and it was Theo who went to open it, as I heard his treble voice welcoming our dinner guests. They went into the living room together, and this was the signal for me to set the table in the dining, where I found

Jack helping there too. He helped me with the table place arrangements, and even produced half a dozen crackers to go at each place. The table was a good size for six, and he explained that Miriam and he would sit at the two end places, with myself next to Miriam nearest the door to the kitchen, 'for obvious reasons' as he politely put it.

"Let us know when you are ready, please, Ivy," he said. "I will join Theo with our guests in the other room, and offer them some sherry. Not Theo, of course, the sherry that is."

When I went into the kitchen Miriam answered my unspoken question: "Tell them about fifteen minutes."

So I went into the living room with that message, and overheard Jack suggesting to Theo that he address our two guests as Uncle Ted and Uncle Bill. "Although they are not my actual brothers, they are very close friends, so 'uncle' is the most suitable form to use."

How typical of Theo's father, I thought, to be so careful about words and names. And

so, for me, back to the kitchen as Miriam was beginning to load all the mountains of food we had prepared into the dishes and servers.

“Tell them it's all ready, please,” said Miriam at last.”

Bill

Ted and I had agreed to join up together so that we both arrived at the same time. It was quite a crisp day and the walk to Jack's house was pleasant enough. We spent most of the time speculating about how the 'perfect test' that Jack had devised would unravel. How would we handle the conversation? Ted told me not to worry. "The boy will direct the conversation, or Jack will. We just need to let it flow as they decide."

When we rang the bell it was only a short wait. Someone had obviously been looking out for our arrival. A young boy, who we knew was Theo, opened the door for us. He was still young enough for short trousers, and had on a smart shirt and pullover, and even what looked like his school tie. Rather formal, I thought, but it was a proper meal we were about to share.

"Please come in," he said politely. "We will go into the living room if you will follow me."

We did so and it was all rather unnatural

at first, with Theo obviously not sure how to make casual conversation with perfect strangers. Or at least two grown men who were supposed to be perfect strangers.

We were invited to sit down and after a rather uncomfortable silence which none of us seemed to know how to break, Jack came in and introduced us as Uncle Bill and Uncle Ted, with the explanation you would expect.

“Uncle Bill here,” he said indicating me, is an astro-physicist, and Uncle Ted is a theologian.”

Jack had obviously worked out that Theo would need to know who was who in the drama we had played out every evening. Theo seemed to take the hint, and he spoke straight away to me.

“Uncle Bill, do you know anything about radios?”

“A little,” I replied.

“Well, Dad has given me wonderful radio as a Christmas present this year, but it seems to be a bit unusual.”

“In what way?” I asked.

Before I could answer Jack interrupted:

“Forgive me, gentlemen, I have not offered you any sherry. What sort would you like?”

We both asked for a dry sherry.

“Will Tio Pepe do?”

“Perfect,” I said.

“Yes, please,” Ted. Said.

And with Jack busying himself with the sherry and employing Theo to deliver it to us, the question I had asked got forgotten, which I rather think was Jack's plan, as he forced the discussion into the comparative merits of sweet and dry sherry.

And then Ivy came in and told us that dinner was served, and would we please follow her into the dining room.

Ted had been right. Theo had already started the process of unravelling the tricks we had played on him, and Jack had intervened to delay the process. I could understand why too when we entered the dining room and saw all the magnificent ingredients of a Christmas meal I am unlikely ever to forget. Jack did not want the meal to be spoilt by too much serious talking. We had the whole day ahead of us.

Jack

We gathered round the table, and I asked Ted to say grace for us. He did a lovely thing, and asked us all to stand and hold hands together round the table. At the end of his grace he thanked God for 'the bond of love and friendship which bind us together.' I could see how much this phrase affected Miriam. She was almost in tears.

Carving a turkey takes your whole attention as you make sure each person has the right mix of breast and dark meat. The bird was beautifully tender to the knife.

I also went round with the bottle I had chosen of fine Bordeaux, serving everyone but Theo, who had his private supply of lemonade. We all tucked in to a fine meal, with the only conversation being compliments to the cook. Miriam insisted that Ivy had done more than she had to get things right.

Miriam and Ivy cleared the main course when we had finished, after my hungry son had asked for and received seconds. The

pudding was decorated with a small sprig of holly and I managed to pour brandy on it at the last moment and set it alight, as custom demands.

Even Theo seemed full enough, and said so in exactly those words when he had finished. I corrected him: "Theo, one does not say 'I am full up' at the end of a meal. In polite circles one says 'I have had an elegant sufficiency.'"

Everyone smiled at this feeble attempt at humour, and I thought the moment right for a bit of formality.

"As you know we are gathered as the group that hopes to be present at the service which will join together me and my beloved as man and wife. We have the happy couple, the bridesmaid, the best man, and the man who will give away the bride."

As I paused to let this sink in, it was Bill who asked: "Which of us is to be best man and which to stand in as Miriam's father?"

I realised that I had not thought through this detail yet. I looked at Miriam. "You choose, my dear."

“But I hardly know Bill and Ted.”

This was true enough, and there was an awkward pause. How could I appear to differentiate two friends so that one of them was designated 'best' man?

Theo saved us. “Why not do it by numbers? Mathematically.”

I looked at him with raised eyebrows.

“The one who stands in for the father needs to be the older of the two.”

How simple. How obvious. I looked at Bill and he said: “Born 1905.” I looked then at Ted, and he simply said: “Bill is older than me.”

So that settled the matter, and I nodded a silent 'well done' in the direction of my son. He smiled a 'thank you' back to me.

I now busied myself further going round with some port, and filling everyone's small port glass. I even, sacrilege I know, poured a very small amount on top of Theo's lemonade. I then stood and said, solemnly: “A toast.” I paused for them all to stand. “To the best wedding a man could hope for. Let us drink to the wedding.”

They all echoed: “To the wedding.”

Ivy

I have never seen happiness as a family quite like this, with Miriam often close to tears of joy. We busied ourselves in the kitchen, and there was certainly lots to do. I did the washing up, putting the plates to dry in a wooden rack above the sink, while Miriam sorted out the remnants of all the food which would reappear for several days in various guises, I was sure.

I was not sure what the habit of this family was with regard to Christmas presents, and I had noticed one or two well wrapped parcels at the foot of the fir tree set up by the fireplace in the living room. I was to find out when Miriam and I returned to the dining room after our chores. The men had been talking about the Carol Service we had attended at King's College Chapel.

As soon as we were back at the now empty table, Theo stood up and looked at his father. "May I, Dad?" He received a nod as permission. He adopted a very formal voice and said: "As any boy of my age

knows, there are no funds for expensive presents at this time of the year, and so I have made them myself.”

I remembered the time in the library when he had busied himself with a pen and several large sheets of paper. And now he brought these out, all rolled up like scrolls and tied round the middle to hold them as such with nice red tape.

“These are certificates which I have drawn up in your honour. I will give them to you and ask you to read them aloud and then keep them, as a present from me. You can frame them even if you want to, but I did not have the resources for this.”

“Ivy first.” And he gave me my scroll.

I undid the tape, and even as I started to unroll it I could see that in the top corners were elaborate decorations. The two lines drawing the top and side margins enclosed a decorated pattern of leaves, just like a really official document. When I had it fully unfolded I could see the bottom corners were just the same. The labour involved was far more precious than money spent.

“Read it out please, Ivy,” he said.

The writing was all in separate lines, so I paused to indicate where the lines were formed. "This is to certify that . . . Ivy . . . has been promoted from the rank of . . . visitor . . . to the rank of . . . honorary sister . . . dated this 25th day of December . . . in the year of our Lord 1951."

I could hardly keep myself from crying, as the others all joined in a round of applause.

Now it was Ted's turn and his certificate awarded him the title of 'most imaginative theologian of 1951' I knew at once that Theo was referring to the evening talks over the radio which he had told me just a little about.

It was no surprise, then, when Bill read out his certificate awarding him the title of 'best radio mechanic of 1951'.

Then Theo handed his father the scroll, and Jack blushed to read out that he was 'the best father of 1951'.

The final scroll was given to Miriam, and as soon as she opened it she rushed out of the room in tears. I went after her, to console her, and to share her joy. My guess at its contents were confirmed. She was

simply 'the best mother of 1951' and I could understand her emotions. They were same as mine. Total joy. But hers were on a different scale from mine, I supposed. It was a long time before she was able control herself, and by this time the men were in the dining room with their port and Theo.

Jack

After Miriam's departure with Ivy following close on her heels I suggested that the four of us repair to the living room, and I realised that the time had come for a frank discussion about the test we had subjected my son to.

I think Theo knew this was coming, for as we sat down he looked in my direction, with an inviting look on his face.

"Theo, we owe you an apology," I began.

He shook his head as if disagreeing but was wise enough just to listen.

"It all began when the three of us were talking very generally about testing. We came to the conclusion that the best kind of test would be when the examinee had no idea that they were being tested."

Bill and Ted nodded at this.

"It was then my idea that you should be the subject of a test, not knowing that it was a test."

"Excuse me, Dad, but what were you testing?"

"Your intelligence, my son."

“I see.”

“The test was: would you fall for the deception or would you spot it as a deception?”

Bill now came in. “The radio stuff was at my initiative. In many ways I was testing whether the thing would work at all. I had been reading about how American truck drivers were using two-way radio to talk to each other about road conditions and things like that.”

I looked at Ted, thinking he might want to add the next part. “We had been talking about inter-planetary travel,” he said. “We had asked our astro-physicist whether it was possible for the earth to have such a visitor. The answer was that they would have to make themselves immaterial, as material objects just could not travel that far. So your father had suggested we try that: an immaterial visitor from outer space, to see if you would swallow it or spot it for the deception it was. And then it was my idea, exclusively my idea as I did not consult the others, to pretend to be a junior angel. Blame it on my theology.”

Now it was my turn to take over.

“So, son, when did you spot the fraud?”

Theo took a moment or two before he replied. “I thought the radio was a bit fishy from the very beginning. I decided to play along as if I had no qualms, to see where the whole thing would go.”

I nodded in encouragement. This was just as I had expected.

“Then it became a matter of seeing where Uncle Ted would go with his idea of being a sort of trainee angel. As soon as he used the word messenger I had cottoned on to that concept. And I still have lots of questions left on the subject, by the way, Uncle Ted.”

“What about the radio?” I asked.

“Yes, I eventually worked out the switching, so that being apparently turned off meant that the two-way transmissions were enabled. I put this to the test by turning the thing off properly by disconnecting it one night.”

“We noticed,” said Bill. “And may I have the radio back for a day or two. The circuits in there are very expensive, and no

use to you now. I will give the thing back to you when I have finished restoring it to its original state. It is a very good radio on its own."

"Take it with you when you leave," said Theo, "and, yes, I would like it back. It was an excellent present."

"It is yours now, my son," I quickly added, "as soon as Bill has done his stuff."

Then Theo asked me: "Was it a good test?"

I had rather expected him to ask whether he had passed the test, but I think he knew the answer to that.

"An excellent test, my son," I replied. "Did we pass the test?"

"Uncle Bill did, for sure. It nearly fooled me." Then he paused and looked at Ted. "Uncle Ted . . . I am not so sure. You have not yet answered all the questions I want to ask. And these are not test questions either. I really want to know the answers. Not like in an examination. I want to know the truth. So can we write to each other, Uncle Ted, when I get back to school?"

"Of course," Ted replied. "So long as your

father agrees.”

I nodded my agreement. “It looks as though you have a new pupil, Ted.”

And at this point the ladies rejoined us.

Ted

It was Ivy coming into the room that answered the question that had been in my mind for some minutes now. How had this smart little fellow discovered my name? The discovery which he had revealed in the very last thing he had said to me over the radio yesterday evening. Now, seeing Ivy, I remembered that she had already met us both, Bill and me, when she had joined us in the Baron of Beef, and Jack had told her our names and our academic occupations. And that meant that Ivy must have known at least something about my nocturnal conversations with Theo.

“Tell me, Ivy, if you will, how much you have learnt about the radio and Theo's bedtime conversations?”

“Very little really, just that they were happening every night around nine o'clock, and that Theo was a bit puzzled by them.”

“I expect he will tell you the full story in due course, now that it is all out in the open.”

“It is some story too,” said Theo. “Uncle

Ted is a very imaginative theologian, but he is going to be my tutor in these matters now, so I am very happy about everything.”

I was glad to hear this, and I was beginning to find my thoughts rushing ahead. Here was a topic worthy of proper research. Here was the subject for a whole book to be written. We academics stand or fall in our careers by our publishing record. Apart from actual teaching and lecture giving, we are paid enough to give us time to devote to research. And the result of such research is published for all to read, if it is good enough. The big unanswered question was a crucial one. How do immaterial beings fight or wage war? What weapons can they use if they and everything associated with them is non-physical? Yes, Theo has just given me a topic to get my teeth into. I am really looking forward to getting more penetrating questions from a smart twelve-year-old.

Eventually Bill and I had to leave the house and go back to our rooms. We chatted about the Trubshaw household as

we walked back to the centre of Cambridge, both of us very happy, and Bill carrying the radio he had doctored.

Miriam

The big day is over, and Ivy and I are free from hosting duties with the departure of our two dinner party guests. It has been such an emotional day for me, with the certificate I now possess from my darling boy. I do think of him as 'my' boy well and truly now. How wonderful that he thinks of me as his mother.

In the background of my mind, amid all this emotion, is the issue of religion. When it became clear that Jack would like us to be married in church, I was quite willing to go along to that church and take part in the services. To be honest, it was really only so as to avoid making Jack feel uncomfortable. God and I have not been on speaking terms since I fled from my home country, and lost my baby. I know it is not right to blame God for the loss of everything I have held dear, and I should be grateful that I am now a valued member of a loving family.

But the service of readings and songs has brought the issue back again and I cannot

drive it out of my mind. I recall the reading I heard in the Round Church some long while ago that mentioned the names Moses and Elijah. The only thing I knew for certain was that it came from Mark's Gospel, and I had begun to read Theo's translation of that book, hoping to find the passage. His work is unfinished, and I now sat down to read it through, as far as it went. This was in bed, late at night, quite free from distraction. I got to the end of what had worked on, chapter seven, and still no sign of my two names.

So now I am going to talk to Theo about what to do next.

At breakfast I asked him if we could have some time together in the library, and off we went. I explained the problem.

"No mention of Moses and Elijah, up to the point you have got to, Theo."

"Not a problem. It must be in the rest of the book somewhere."

"Then how can we find it?"

"We will use the Bible Dad keeps here," he said, going over to the bookshelf he knew well enough. "And we will not take a lot of

time reading through the rest of the book. We will use a short cut.”

“What is that?”

He took out another book. “It is called a concordance, put together by a chap called Cruden. It is a bit like a dictionary. Every word in the Bible is listed alphabetically, and every occurrence of that word is shown.”

He was leafing through, and when he got to the word Moses he scanned the entries.

“Here we are. It comes in chapter nine.”

So he now opened the Bible up and after a while began reading. This time I was listening properly. The story told of Jesus taking just three of his followers up a mountain. When they were all on their own the appearance of Jesus changed, white as snow it, said, and with Jesus were two men suddenly, Elias and Moses. I knew Elias was just another name for Elijah. They were simply talking with Jesus, it said. Peter and the other two followers were rather afraid at all this, and Peter suggested making three tents (the old word for tents was a strange one – tabernacles), and there was a

rather nice comment by the writer that he did not know what to say. Then they were all covered by a cloud, and out of the cloud came a voice. 'This is my beloved son, listen to him.' Then the two figures that had been with Jesus were no longer there, and as Jesus and his three followers walked down the mountain Jesus told them not to tell anyone about this incident until, and this bit shocked me, 'after he had risen from the dead.'

I could now understand the message of this passage. The two representatives of my Jewish faith, Moses and Elijah, the Law and the Prophets, had been superseded by the Son. And the message to me was to listen to the Son.

Then a truly odd thing happened. I knew that this was not what the story meant. I knew it perfectly well. But the words 'this is my beloved son, listen to him' had been read aloud by the boy I considered now to be *my* beloved son. Was I to listen to Theo? Was that the message for me?

"Has God ever spoken to you, Theo?" I asked.

He paused for thought.

“Not audibly, of course. I don't think God works like that these days. But I remember reading from John's Gospel a sentence which simply said 'you have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.' I took this as a message which applied to me. I really do think that God has chosen me, but I am too young to know what for yet. I simply try to be a good schoolboy, and not make too much of a nuisance of myself at home.” He said this with a smile on his face.

I had to say something now. Without thinking I said: “That is enough for me. I am going to believe in your God now, Theo.”

He frowned. Perhaps this was too much responsibility to be put on the shoulders of a twelve-year-old.

Before we could continue with our conversation, Ivy came into the room, and the spell was broken. But my mind was set now, and thinking a silent 'thank you, God', I said: “Stuff to do in the kitchen,” and went out. God and I were on speaking terms again.

Ivy

I could sense that I had interrupted something pretty important, but I was so full of my own news that I gave it no more thought "Look at this, Theo."

I showed him my Christmas present from Jack.

"It is a lovely art book. But it is not filled with pages of photographs of old paintings like most art books you get. It is all about how they drew and painted. I have only just skimmed through it so far, but it is a mine of information. What they drew or painted on. Sometimes wood as well as canvas. What they drew with: charcoal mostly. And how they made their own paints."

We went over to the desk so that we could look at the book together. I rattled on in my excitement. "I had never thought about this before, but it is obvious once you start to be logical. Today an artist goes to a shop and just buys his stuff, out of a tube mostly. But then, in the days of the great masters, they had to grind and mix all sorts of stuff."

“Yes, no artists' shops then,” said Theo, probably just to encourage me.

“You see what this means, don't you, Theo? It means that your father wants me to start learning to become an art restorer. He is going to try to get me a post at his art museum, where he is a trustee. I will need to know all this, so that an old picture that needs restoring can use exactly the same paints that the original picture had, made in exactly the same way as the old artist made his paints.”

“Of course,” said Theo, politely.

“This matters so much to me, Theo. This is my escape route from a dead-end job at a crummy little school. Oops, no offence meant. It is probably a very good school, but it is certainly not a very good job.”

“It is not such a bad school.” Again he was just helping me keep going.

“And it is all down to you, Theo. Do you realise that? Without you suggesting that I be Miriam's bridesmaid, where would I be?”

“You were the only person I could think of,” was his quiet reply.

“But you did think of it.”

“Well, I liked the way you were brave and came to our meeting.”

“Do you like me, Theo?”

A rash question, and as soon as I said those words I knew straight away that he would not understand what was really behind them.

“I gave you a certificate, didn't I? Won't that do?”

I was going too far, well beyond his young mind could travel.

“You did, and thank you, honorary brother,” I said and gave him a peck on the cheek, as I gathered up my precious book and left the room in an embarrassed hurry.

Miriam

It is now the second day after Christmas and the house is strangely quiet. Jack is in the library and has asked to be left alone, so Theo and Ivy are reading their books in the living room, while I am looking at the food leftovers and wondering how to make them appetising. The kitchen door was open, so I could hear a letter being delivered through the flap of our front door.

When I went to fetch it, it was lying face down so that I could see the sender's details on the back of the envelope. This letter was from Jack's solicitors' firm. My heart leapt. Could it be what we have been waiting for this long?

I took it straight into the library.

"Is this it?" I asked Jack.

He opened it and read with a growing smile on his face. Then he passed it to me to read.

Dear Professor Trubshaw.

We have received a reply from the Polish Embassy, and I will hold on to this for safe

keeping, with your approval.

The essence of their reply is that they have no evidence that the man we enquired about actually survived the turbulent period from 1939 to 1945, and that given his ethnic origins they believe that we can assume he did not survive.

So I offer you my professional legal opinion that you have good grounds for supposing your housekeeper to be a widow and therefore free legally to marry again.

Yours faithfully,

I did not bother to read any further. This was it. Jack was standing next to me by now, and although he is not a very tactile person, and nor, come to think of it, am I, we hugged each other in an embrace of pure joy.

“Fetch Theo and Ivy. We must share this.”

Theo smiled after he had read the letter and gave me a big hug too. Jack passed the letter to Ivy, and Ivy beamed her happiness and said simply: “So I really will be a bridesmaid. Yippee.”

“This is only the beginning, mind,” said

Jack. "Miriam and I will present ourselves to the vicar of the Round Church for a consultation. We will have to ask him if he is prepared to marry us, after we have shown him this letter. There may be other formalities, such as having to go on the electoral role of the Round Church, as we do not live within its parish boundaries. He may even require us to take a course of instruction about the marriage vows we will be making. You never know with clergymen."

He paused.

"Then there will be three weeks during which at each Sunday service he will read out the banns of marriage, to see if anyone knows of any 'cause or just impediment why these two persons may not be joined together in holy matrimony', or some such words like that."

I had hoped for something quicker than this, of course.

"When, Jack?" I asked.

"The most optimistic date would be the half term holiday next year at Theo's school. Given Ivy's job there that would be

the least complicated, and would make it possible for Theo to be present too.”

This seemed an age into the future but I could see that it made sense. Jack is so practical.

Ivy

We were all chatting away together when the phone rang, and straight away I had a sudden premonition about who the caller would be.

When the professor had collected me from my home to bring me here for a stay over Christmas, he and my parents had left it open as to how long I was to stay. I had hoped it would be for the whole holiday, and that I would return in the same trip that would bring Theo back to school after the New Year. But the professor had given my parents his telephone number so that they could get in touch with me if they needed to. We have not got a telephone ourselves, of course, nothing like that in our humble cottage. But there is a public call box in our village.

Then I heard the words I was dreading.

“It's for you, Ivy.”

I went into the hall and took the telephone from his hands.

“Ivy, it's me.”

I recognised my mother's voice straight

away.

“Hello, Mum.”

“Your father wants you to come home now.”

No ‘Happy Christmas’, no ‘how are you?’, just a typical transfer of blame away from herself, who made all the real decisions in our household, to my father.”

“But . . . “

“We are both missing you. And you should be with us at a time like this.”

This was an argument I could not hope to win, so I tried a delaying tactic.

“I am not sure when the professor will be free to bring me back.”

“Then ask him. I will ring back again in ten minutes when you know the answer.”

The line went dead, and I put the phone down.

I went back into the living room, for I had been left alone in the hall for the sake of my privacy. I looked at Theo's father.

“They want me back.”

“Then back you shall have to go. This afternoon if you like, or tomorrow morning. Both are possible for me at this time of the

year.”

“I suppose so.”

I knew he would not do anything against my parents' wishes.

“Could we make it tomorrow, so that I can have plenty of time to get ready?”

It was a feeble reason, and we both knew it was.

“Very well, tomorrow morning. That will suit me quite well, and I will fill the car with petrol this afternoon, and make sure that everything is ready for the journey.”

When the phone rang again he pointed to me to take the call.

“Well?”

My mother was being typically curt as she always was when she was stressed.

“The professor will get the car ready this afternoon, and bring me back tomorrow morning.”

My mother's sigh was audible even over the telephone.

“Good. See you tomorrow then, and mind you say 'thank you' properly.”

Once again I was listening to the noise the telephone makes when the caller at the

other end has put the phone down.

I went back into the living room, and Miriam beamed at me. "It has been such a joy getting to know you," she said. "I am so fortunate to have such a lovely bridesmaid."

I could see that Miriam was near to tears again. It seems that happiness affects her this way. And I was near to tears too, for the opposite reason. I had so enjoyed being with this loving family, and I did not want the time to end. But I knew my duty too, and so resolved to make the best of it.

Ivy

The rest of the day passed as if nothing except the good news from the solicitor had happened. I am sure that none of the other three knew how deeply I wanted to stay with them for ever. I tried to drown these unhappy thoughts by putting my head in all the art books I could find on the shelves of the library, while the others were clearly thinking only about their good news.

It occurred to me that I was being very selfish, and so kept myself to myself through the rest of the day as best I could.

The professor went out to have the garage check the car and fill it with petrol. I helped Miriam in the kitchen, and attended to my packing and so the day was somehow filled. As I packed I made quite sure that my certificate from Theo was put safely inside my art materials book.

I knew where my future lay. I simply trusted that there would eventually be a vacancy for a trainee art restorer at the Fitzwilliam Museum, and that I would get the job. In all my spare time now I would

focus on making myself a suitable person to fill that vacancy. I knew also that I would be back here again, as bridesmaid to Miriam when her great day came, which would be several weeks away only.

The prospect of tomorrow's return to the reality of my own family, and my drab life as an assistant matron, reminded me that, whatever my new certificate said. I was really only a visitor here.