

Nevermore

by Jamie Marriott

The train rocked gently as it trundled over along the tracks through the moors on its way north to Scotland. I was seated alone in a first-class compartment, with the gentle sway of the train making my eyes close now and again as its rocking produced fatigue. The lights of the carriage casting the only light out over the otherwise dark bleak moors, producing eerie shadows that teased the mind with spectres of the unknown. The steam engine whistled; clouds of blue-white smoke billowed past the window causing the moors to appear an even more devilish.

I thought I'd only closed my eyes for a few minutes, but the noise of the engine letting off steam and the brakes squealing as they brought the locomotive to a halt soon dragged me back to the land of awareness. *Surely we hadn't reached Inverness yet?*

I glanced at my pocket watch; the time was 11:30pm. We weren't due to reach the station until 1:30am. I again looked out the window and saw that we had indeed stopped at a station, but where? As far as I was aware there were no stops on the route. However, we had stopped and the station outside was lit up with old oil burning lanterns.

I left my compartment expecting to find other passages as bemused as I, however as I walked along the corridor I came across no other. Finding to my utter surprise that the train was completely deserted, I decided my only course of action was to exit the train and check out the station. Perhaps the other passengers had alighted and were seeking sustenance in the station restaurant.

Stepping down from the carriage, I walked along the concrete platform. The station was reasonably well kept, there was no litter anywhere, and the flower-boxes under each window were full with

brightly coloured blooms while hanging baskets with trailing bunches of red, blue, white and yellow dangled from the station roof.

The strangest thing though was there were no people, everyone had vanished. No passengers, no train engineers, no busmen, not even any station attendants. I was alone. After checking a couple of doors and finding them locked I continued on along the platform where I saw a nameplate. The station was called, Nevermore.

I have to say I had not heard of a village called Nevermore being located anywhere on the moors, come to that I'd never heard of any place called Nevermore. Finding the station void of any life, I walked towards the stairway at the side of the building which led to the outside.

"Evening sir," a voice called from behind me.

I turn to see a black uniformed stationmaster standing a few feet away.

"Good evening. I thought I was alone here," I answered and added, "Where is everyone?"

"There's a problem with the track a few miles up. Everyone has gone into the village for the night. You can get there by going down the steps and the first house on the right is a bed and breakfast. Mrs Cransworth will give you a bed for the night."

I looked back towards the steps, returned to look at the stationmaster to find he was no longer there. I remember thinking at the time, *strange!*

I had no other course of action to take, I could walk down to the bed and breakfast or wait on the platform or train until the repair work was complete. I decided a comfortable bed would be more

appropriate and thus descended the stairway.

Once outside the station there was a single track road, obviously leading to Nevermore. After several minutes of walking I saw the edge of the village, with a large red roofed house on the right, this I presumed was Mrs Cranworth's B&B.

On reaching the large green door to Mrs Cranworth's, I clasped the heavy iron knocker which was in the shape of a lion's head and tapped as gentle as possible. The door opened and an old white-haired, rather plumpish lady greeted me with a smile.

"Mrs Cransworth?"

"Yes sir, that be me," she replied in a broad Yorkshire accent.

"Banister, Roger Banister. The stationmaster said..."

"Yes, yes, we have room come in sir."

"I do apologise, it is such an ungodly hour."

"No need sir. If you will follow me I'll show you your room."

The little old lady led me up a flight of stairs, along a small corridor and opened a door on her left. She turned on the light as I entered.

"I hope this is suitable sir, we have so many guests this evening," Mrs Cransworth stated almost apologetically.

"This will do just fine thank you. How much?"

"Oh we can sort that out tomorrow sir, you need to get some sleep now, goodnight sir."

With that, Mrs Cransworth exited and closed the door behind her. As I was feeling quite tired I undressed, climbed into the very comfortable double bed and before long was in the land of dreams.

I awoke to the sound of Mrs Cransworth delivering a cup of tea and some toast.

“Morin' sir, I thrust you had a good sleep?”

“Indeed I did Mrs Cransworth. Do you know when I will be able to continue my journey?”

“No sir, although I'd expect it to be at least a few more hours. It's a lovely morning, perhaps you could take a walk round the village, and it's at its most beautiful at this time of the year.”

“That is a thought Mrs Cransworth, and one I shall ponder upon.”

She left both the tea and toast on the bedside cabinet and left so I could get up and ready for my departure. Having downed the tea and toast, washed and dressed, I took Mrs Cransworth's advice and headed out into Nevermore.

It was a brisk, bright morning, with no cloud in the sky. The village of Nevermore turned out to be a quaint, typical English village full of thatched roofed cottages, and blossoming tree-lined roads, something I found rather odd considering the time of year was autumn and not spring. As I passed a row of cottages, several owners were tending their front gardens, all bidding me a fine day as I passed.

I continued to walk passing the local public house and down through the village square where I saw several children playing in the central park on swings and slides. As I casually strolled passed, all the children stopped and just stared at me as if I was some kind of

strange being invading their existence. I remember thinking at the time, *no school?*

There was something about this village in the middle of nowhere I just couldn't put my finger on. It played on my mind as to why I had never heard of Nevermore as I had frequented this same route on several occasions and couldn't remember ever passing through such a quaint picturesque village train station.

I stopped walking and checked my pocket watch; the time was 10:25am. I decided to go check with the stationmaster to see if there was any news on the train's departure. So back through the village I returned and up past Mrs Cransworth's establishment, up the steps and onto the platform. There was the train still as it was last night. I looked around the station and again no one to be found. I was quite befuddled over this as it was a bright Wednesday morning, and surely there would have been some travellers waiting to leave or even another locomotive due in.

I sat myself down on the wooden bench just outside the ticket office, and just looked around. Not a soul was anywhere to be seen.

"Mornin' sir, lovely day."

I looked to my left and the stationmaster was standing there.

"Ah stationmaster, do you have any news on when the train will be able to depart? I do have to continue my journey."

"Hmm, well that be quite difficult to say sir, what with the track bein' torn up in last nights storm."

Did he say storm?

"Storm? I didn't hear or see any storm last night; there are no signs

of any rain and such.”

“Oh there was a storm sir, the sky was filled with lightening and it bucketed down for several hours. I don't quite know how you managed to miss it sir.”

I looked down at the bone-dry concrete platform, no signs of any rain whatsoever. I looked back up at the stationmaster, but found he was no longer there. Then the strangest thing occurred. I looked to my left and just along the bench sat a young woman dressed in what only can be described as Victorian refinery. I had not seen or heard her approach and take the seat, and why would this young lady be wearing such antiquated clothing.

“Good morning,” I greeted.

The woman looked at me, stuck her nose into the air in a very prissy manner and turned away. I was quite shocked at her ignorance and turned away only to return my eyes back to find she had vanished without trace. I know I'm not the fastest of people but even I being that close should have at least heard her leave. Something was definitely wrong in Nevermore.

I again checked my pocket watch, which read 10:25am, it had stopped, yet the second hand was still moving and ticking. I glanced up at the big black and white Roman numeral clock hanging from the station roof and it too read 10:25am, yet I knew it has been a minimum of ten, maybe fifteen minutes since I last looked at my pocket watch. Another thing hit me; I had yet to see anyone else from the train. I decided to head back to Mrs Cransworth's to see if I could get some answers.

Retracing my steps, I soon arrived back at the old red roofed house and entered whilst calling, “Mrs Cransworth?”

To my utter shock this young woman appeared.

“Yes sir can I help you?”

“I wish to speak with Mrs Cransworth.”

“Yes sir, I'm Mrs Cransworth.”

“My apologies, I need to speak with the proprietor, you mother perhaps.”

“Unlikely sir, my mother passed away several years ago.”

“Your grandmother then?”

“Sir, I am the only Mrs Cransworth, and I am the proprietor,” she responded.

“But the lady who showed me to my room last night...”

“I beg your pardon sir, but you didn't stay here last night. All my rooms have been taken for weeks.”

I didn't know what to say to the woman. Either I was completely losing my mind or I did stay at this house until this morning.

“If you are looking for somewhere to stay, I can suggest the Crab and Anchor public house down the road. I believe they have some vacancies,” the young woman suggested.

“Thank you, thank you,” was all I could bring myself to reply as I made my way back out onto the street.

I stood outside just staring ahead; I was in a quandary as to what I should do. Obviously Nevermore was not all that it appeared, taking

everything that had happened convinced me of this fact, but what to do?

I checked my pocket watch once again and found that time had not moved one second from that 10:25am position. Was I then stuck in Nevermore for the rest of my life, caught in some kind of time paradox, unable to return to my normal life? No this wasn't going to be the way of things I decided right there and then.

Bracing myself I took a stroll down to the Crab and Anchor pub. As I neared the entrance, I looked over at the park area and there were the children, only now they were not playing or running but all standing staring at me. I watched them for a while, none of them took their eyes from me, and they just stared with blankness like they were statues.

I could hear voices coming from inside the pub. I pushed the door open and stepped in and everyone stopped talking. There was total silence as those there looked at me the stranger.

“Can anyone tell me what is going on here?” I politely inquired.

They just looked at me with a blank expression. What I did notice and caused me to stagger back some was the beer the bartender was pouring had frozen mid-pour, half in the glass and half out of the bottle. The silence was suddenly interrupted by the loud chime of the clock on the wall.

“You must go back to the train now.”

I turned in the direction of the voice behind me to see a small girl. I looked at her and she looked at me and reiterated. “You must return to the train.”

“Must I?”

“Yes.”

“Why is it important I leave now?” I had to know what was going on in Nevermore.

“Because the clock has chimed,” she answered.

“And the clock has significance?” I said as I glanced back at the large ornate timepiece.

“You must return before the sixth strike or forever here will you remain,” the young girl warned.

I was taken aback by her words for a few moments, then managed to spit out, “Oh I see.”

The young girl took my hand and we walked out into the sunlight. We walked back up towards the train station hand in hand, and I noted her little hand was ice cold.

“Can you tell me about this village?” I asked while walking.

She stopped in her tracks, pulled her hand from mine and looked at me.

“You know already,” she answered in a convinced manner.

“Am I dead?” the question had been bothering me ever since these strange things started to happen.

“No, not yet anyway, but you will be if you don't return to the train,” the girl answered, grabbed my hand and pulled me onward.

As the girl dragged me up the stairs to the platform, the

stationmaster stood there waving us on, "Quickly, quickly, it's almost time."

I rushed to the train door, opened it climbed in and closed the door. I stood there looking out of the window and heard the station clock chime, the sixth chime. What happened next I still do not believe. The train lurched as it crept forward resuming its journey. I grabbed hold of the handrail to stop myself from falling and out the windows the little girl and stationmaster faded, I mean to say they vanished from existence. When they had disappeared, the platform, station and entire village of Nevermore became translucent and by the time the train had pulled out, Nevermore was no more.

I checked my pocket watch and the time was 10:30am precisely. I walked back to my first class compartment, passing several other compartments filled with passengers, none of whom seemed the slightest worried about the occurrence. For the remainder of the journey I remained alone in my carriage, contemplating on the events of the morning. I even asked the guard about Nevermore when he came round to check tickets, he hadn't a clue as to what I was talking about, and had said that the train had only stopped due to a fallen tree for about fifteen minutes before resuming.

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