

DOUBLE VISION

"Three o'clock then?"

"Fine. I'll see you at the house".

"Right. Good morning".

Paul Fraser opened the glass-panelled door, nodded to the man and left the estate agents office. He carelessly slammed the door and shouldered his way down the street.

"Yes" he thought, "This may just be the house I'm looking for".

He had first seen the advertisement in his Sunday paper:

Gentleman's desirable residence
4 Rec. 7Bed. Usl.Offices
Access to slipway. ½ acre
On shores of Loch Long
Sole agents Henderson & Henderson , Dunoon

He decided to follow it up.

Fraser, a wealthy man, was dark haired and good looking had it not been for a somewhat large nose. His eyes were dark and penetrating; the eyes of someone who had worked hard and seen the eventual rise to fortune. They were now the eyes that wanted rest - rest from the hustle of the world of commerce. Here was his chance - this charming house by the quiet loch.

Mr Henderson had been very enthusiastic about it, and Paul was looking forward with some excitement to viewing the place.

Making his way to the car, he paused for a moment at the harbour side. He looked at the dark blue water; the sunlight glinting on the surface of the waves; gulls wheeling lazily on the warm breeze and in the distance, purple mountains topped by a few white puffs of cloud scudding in the upper air. He surveyed the scene with real pleasure, and took a deep breath – "This is the place for me".

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At three o'clock that day Paul Fraser stopped his car at the entrance to a drive where a bright new signboard indicated that this was Glenfinart House. A surprisingly ornate entrance gate blocked his way, so leaving his car outside, he went on foot by the small wicket gate. He walked briskly up the drive, as in the warmth of the car he had not noticed the slight change in the weather. He looked back over the loch; the opposite shore was obscured by a sea-haar.

Each side of the drive was lined with magnificent rhododendrons, which blocked a view of the house, and stretching away up the hillside were plantations of young fir trees interspersed with the bright green of new bracken.

Turning a bend, he suddenly came upon a fall of water, tumbling down from the hillside into a pool, and then away into the ground. With all the trees and shrubs surrounding the fall the noise was deafening; the water thundering

down, almost mesmerising him. “A personal and private waterfall” he gloated, “and not mentioned in the advertisement”.

Looking up from the fall he turned to see the house before him. It was hardly as he had pictured it. For a moment he was astounded – “The architect must have had dreams of grandeur” – pepper pot turrets, a curiously decorative entrance porch, balconies and mullioned windows.

He walked up to the entrance and with some surprise noticed the weather beaten sombre grey walls and thought they looked older than the agent had implied. He looked at the heavy oak door with the great rusty handle. He touched the door to feel the grain of the wood and it swung open. Deciding that Henderson must have arrived before him and gone inside, Fraser went in.

The open door revealed a large square hall, the walls adorned with huge mirrors and blackened paintings. Long corridors lead off the hall into extensive rooms, which gave Fraser a feeling of eerie apprehension conjuring thoughts of headless pipers patrolling the passages in the hours of darkness.

“Come away in”. From behind him came a reedy voice, and as Fraser pivoted himself with fright he came face to face with a wizened old man. He had little brown eyes like a spaniel and rather receding grey hair. Fraser was somewhat taken aback by the man’s appearance, especially as his attire bordered on the eccentric. His clothes looked as if they had been handed down through many generations.

“Why er, yes”, Fraser replied. “I was supposed to meet a Mr Henderson who was going to show me around”.

“A’ha. Well I’m the caretaker Jamie Moffat, and I usually show people the house”. And with an urgency in his voice he whispered “Follow me”. Despite his years the caretaker stumped purposefully towards the main curved staircase. Fraser having no time to inquire further was obliged to follow.

As he passed down the hall of mirrors he could see himself multiplied infinite times. Suddenly out of the corner of his eye he thought he saw the reflection of a bright and airy room, but on turning round there was only the grey, sombre hall that he had entered. He had no time to think about this, however, as the old man’s footsteps echoed away up the staircase. Fraser bounded up in pursuit, but at the top a hand shot out to stop him. Moffat’s arm was cold and surprisingly forceful. “We’ll start at the top and work down,” croaked Moffat. Off he marched again, this time working his way up a tiny stone spiral staircase, which had an extremely precarious handrail. At the top Moffat unlocked the door and ushered Fraser outside. They looked out between the turrets at the pleasant landscape.

“It’s a fine open view down to the Loch, is it not?” said Moffat. Fraser looked with some astonishment, as all he could see on the hillside was a large plantation of fir trees. The sun came out for a brief moment and the shadow of the house was cast on the ground. The silhouette had changed subtly from the expected crenelated towers to the outline of a mansard roof.

Moffat led Fraser on a frantic chase through what seemed like hundreds of bedrooms, bathrooms, attics, more bedrooms and endless corridors. At the end of one staircase there was a large grandfather clock, which showed the time was four-thirty. Fraser not only felt as if he had been there for hours, but that the caretaker had some peculiar reason for keeping

him in the building. He seemed so insistent and determined to show Fraser every nook and cranny of the place. Paul was lead into the long lounge, which overlooked the spacious garden. The room was draped in thick red curtaining and panelled in oak. The ceiling was very ornate too, painted in blue, red and gold, from flowers to fleur-de-lys. Moffat mumbled something about the big house parties, which were held there by the laird only a few years ago, but now, he, Jamie Moffat had the place to himself.

The library at the far end of the hall had a large curved window overlooking the hills. Above the carved stone fireplace was a coat of arms and although blackened with age Fraser could just decipher the motto:

“RESURGAM” (I will arise)

Although footsore, weary and uneasy Fraser still followed Moffat through gloomy kitchens, mouldering larders, dingy sculleries, still rooms and stables.

By this time Fraser could stand it no longer. He had seen too much for his liking – in fact the stifling atmosphere was giving him a feeling of acute claustrophobia. He made a hurried excuse to Moffat, strode out of the house as fast as he could, stumbled back down the drive past the waterfall towards his car.

Nearing the gate he was brought out of his daze by the sight of Henderson striding up the driveway.

“Ah”, said Henderson. “On the dot I see”, and looking at his watch he said that he hoped he hadn’t kept Mr Fraser waiting. Paul looked at his watch; it showed three o’clock.

His heart jumped, and angrily, to try and cover his panic he said, “Now look here Henderson! Your idea of a desirable residence is certainly not mine. I’ve just been shown round your rambling old mansion by a senile caretaker who calls himself Jamie Moffat. I liked neither him nor the house and I certainly do not like my time wasted with false information”.

With a strange look on his face Henderson stared at Fraser. Slowly and decisively he spoke.

“The present house is only five years old. The original Glenfinart House was burnt to the ground about thirty years ago. Jamie Moffat died in that fire”.

Marjorie and Elizabeth Butler 1966