**Jesus College crime story competition 2021**

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**How to Steal a Cambridge Cow in Ten Easy Steps**

**by Natan Maurer, undergraduate (2019)**

1. Be anxiously concerned about your fledgling social life within your new university town of Cambridge. Have no fear, engaging in a meaningless life of crime will imbue your first term with that verve it has been missing.

Your accomplice is key to the entire process. They need to be the kind of person who is up for some fun and absolutely unable to stop their plans running out of control.

2. Select your cow

Start walking to Sidgwick Site each morning. Cows are a topic of conversation, and the perfect distraction. They come in multiple colours, some of them make milk. Isn’t that interesting? Maybe you can launch into a discussion about cow anatomy. Ask your accomplice if they think the upper class Cambridge kids think London Broil is an actual part of the cow. If they respond that this seems a bit disingenuous given that you’re one of those upper class kids, laugh it off with one of your characteristic humorous quips. If that engages a full-blown existential crisis, you’re ready to select your cow.

Make sure it’s a beautiful cow, the kind you could stare into for hours as your brain dissolved into a chunky soup. Pick a cow lethargic enough that it won’t moo for help when your hands begin to push it towards your shared freedom from the shackles of societal expectation. But also one not too lethargic to the point where it will stay rooted in place with no attention paid to your grand plans to liberate it. The cows on the King’s College grounds will suffice. Like the massive chapel that casts its shadow long on those meadows, the cows are large, fairly ancient, and mean a lot to a small group of people and nothing to everybody else.

3. Prepare and purchase supplies

To steal a cow, you’ll need:

1. Something to cover your face with. Talk to the theatre people at the ADC Theatre, they’ve probably got some left over from that play nobody saw. If anyone asks, claim you’re about to perform a comedy sketch at the local synagogue.
2. A giant blanket. Maybe cut some holes so the cow can see. Decorate it with a big sign claiming that what looks like a cow is just a bunch of people in a giant cow *costume*. If anyone asks, claim you’re about to go perform a comedy sketch at the local synagogue
3. A punting boat. Go up to the most pretentious person in the entirety of Cambridge and ask if you can borrow their punting boat. If they start going about the mechanics of the stick thing, politely nod until the conversation ends or your bloodlust boils over and you hit them over the head – whichever comes first.
4. A CamCard.
5. A lighter.
6. An empty room in your college with a bed of hay to provide optimum cow comfort.

**Is it a Crime?**

**by Ella Curry, undergraduate (2019)**

We’ll call them [A] and [B].

They live a life of snatched, stolen kisses: in the deep shadow-arch of a closed shop’s eaves; in the chalk-smudged hollow of a crumbling church wall. Night after breathless night, they find each other, wraithlike wanderers of the stygian streets, and their hands collide, combine. Each meeting – illicit, unseen – is punctuated by bitten-off sentences and curtailed caresses, each heartbeat mangled to a sickened jolt at the suggestion of foreign footfall or voice *(such fleeting freedom…)* These are nights where the eyes of the law flutter sleepily – just enough. These are nights where their kisses are crimes in the dark.

In the daylight *(the white, sharp daylight)* they are unknown to each other; even a half-second glance, a flickering face, could give them away. In the daylight, they starch cottons or type notices or knead pastry and bread *(kneading, needing),* the normalcy aching, taunting, strange. [A] gazes from her peeling-paned window onto the barren expanse of King’s Parade; what used, only three years ago, to be a buzzing bustle of rattling bicycles and students in trailing scarves and bright coats, is now sombre and empty. King’s College Chapel sits on its grey haunches, towering and impassive, its bell silent, its gates barred.

With the closing of the Colleges came new razor-sharp laws. (man shall not lie with a man as he would with a woman, woman shall not lie with a woman as she would with a man; it is an abomination and they shall surely be put to death). It was as though, reflected [B], the Corpus Christi clock, in all its gaudy glory, had turned back its hands, torturously contorting the metallic, monstrous grasshopper’s legs into a backward march spanning centuries. She longed to smash its glass case, to take a brick from the burnt-out ruins of St Catherine’s College and beat it and beat it until she could reach in and wrench the city back to that day three years (a whole lifetime) ago.

They sometimes even – impossibly – laugh about it; to love? A crime? Ridiculous! But each move they make is breathless, silent, nonetheless. The terror of their reality is not softened by disbelief: it doesn’t matter how certain you are that the nightmare isn’t real if you can’t wake up. The facts *(shattered shards of glinting glass)* remain, embedded, throbbing: to kiss is criminal; to be caught is to be killed. [B] smooths the downy hair on the back of [A]’s neck and winds a stray thread from [A]’s dress around her finger, stitching them together. She winds the thread so tightly that the tip of her finger goes purple *(Adonis’ blood-flower shade),* then blue-white and cold, the same snow-stung hue of her heart. [A] kisses [B]’s collarbone, her eyelid, the crown of her head, each kiss heavily weighted with tears.

**A Present for Christmas**

**by David Hanke, Emeritus Fellow**

Two venerable old Fellows of Jesus, were locked in a titanic death-struggle, each kept alive solely by a ferocious determination to outlive the other. They disliked each other with a burning intensity stoked over many years by having to sit next to each other at every single College meal. In 1976, when I first came to Jesus, the Fellows filed into Hall in order of seniority and sat down in that order for lunch and dinner, and every day one had the same neighbours either side. Shortly after my arrival, seating by precedence was dropped, mercifully - the last remnant of the old system is that we still stand in order of seniority in Chapel to welcome new Fellows.

Two ancients, suffering complementary losses of ability: one with an active body but failing mind, the other an active mind in a failing body. Whatever early slight ignited their bitter rivalry was lost in the mists of time. Dr Timmins had been an ardent connoisseur of beautiful young men, alongside his passion for athletics, and to this end a tireless proponent of a scheme to build a swimming pool in College to enable him to admire them the more easily. The Rev Green, finding no authority in sacred scripture for this particular indulgence, held worship of the body beautiful to be akin to idolatry. Also, there was the Affair of the Melon.

There is a greenhouse in the Fellows' Garden in which Dean Greene, the 'Green Dean', cultivated plants, a hobby with scriptural endorsement in the form of quite a few parables. His most spectacular success involved grafting a rare & exotic melon onto pumpkin rootstocks. Rev Greene was sent seed of the original strain of the finest variety of all: 'Petit Gris de Rennes', from the garden of the Bishop of Rennes and by grafting melon shoots onto the roots of pumpkin seedlings obtained vigorous, chunky vines that grew rapidly even in the cool of an English summer in the shady Fellows' Garden.

By October, there was a substantial 'Petit Gris' fruit cradled on the vine in a string bag and at the very pitch point of culmination: perfect ripeness, wafting out its famously intense perfume in clouds of sweet melony fragrance. Crossing Chapel Court, Rev Greene happened to notice Dr Timmins spectating a bevy of chaps punting a ball around by way of football practice - except it wasn't a ball; it was - unmistakably - a melon.

The Dean hurried to the greenhouse, where the string-bag was hanging slackly empty, then back to Chapel Court, by now also empty. Unwilling to risk an unpleasant scene over just a fruit, he took the matter no further officially but, it seems, the seed of enmity had been sown.

**Love in the Time of COVID**

**by Jean Bacon, Emeritus Fellow**

**Day 1: Saturday March 21st**

The undergraduates had all gone away by yesterday and the University closed all Departments. I scrambled to move all my papers into my room in college, where I'll live and work. The Department was eerily empty - espresso machine already switched off.

**Day 54: Wednesday May 13th**

Online lectures and supervisions are going well. The students are cloistered at home but coping so far. Networks seem to be holding up, to reach students worldwide. They are comfortable with the technology, and it's keeping everyone in touch.

**Day 86: Sunday June 14th**

Cold and rainy again - what a week. The Botanic Gardens are open again, but with a booking regime. The rain had cleared by late afternoon and it was good to walk there after so long.

**Day 177: Sunday September 13th**

It's been a long time since March - the isolation gets to you. It's excellent that yoga has started again, and I'll keep the walks going. It's been good to see the plantings in the Botanic Gardens evolve since June. I've never been there so often.

**Day 191: Sunday September 27th**

I did my usual walk in the Botanic Gardens, dressed for winter.

A surprise today: I bumped into Floren who is back in Cambridge after a US postdoc. When I heard he was coming back I was worried about having him as a colleague again, but now he's here, the bad feelings seem to have gone away - it's some years now.

Things had come to a head when I found a tracking app on my mobile phone. That led to an unpleasant break up; I almost feared for my life. Then there was the Lectureship competition. I was very relieved when he went to the US.

Back to 2020, it was surprisingly good to meet up today.

A friendship might be possible. I didn't sense any awkwardness over my Lectureship and his new Research Fellowship.

**Day 197: Sunday October 4th**

Rain forecast all day but it cleared enough for my usual afternoon walk in the Botanic Gardens. I met Floren again. I suppose it's the same day, same time, as last week so not too surprising. We had another pleasant chat. My research project would benefit from a new angle, coming from his US experience. Perhaps another publication on my project would come from it.

**Day 218: Sunday October 25th**

It's good to get out for a walk in the sunshine - vitamin D levels are decreasing at this time of year, so we should make the most of it when we can. Met up with Floren as usual. We’ve made good progress on the paper. It’s essentially about my project, with a new angle from his US work. I should be first author, but I’m uneasy about suggesting it.

**Day 225: Sunday November 1st**

We only have a few days before the new lockdown starts on November 5th. Floren is coming round to go through some of the key data. He’s put himself as first author on it. I must insist.

But it’s good to have some human contact. I have a bottle of Prosecco left from a student party. That sounds like him on the stairs...

**A Murder of Crow Witnesses**

**by James McCarthy, partner of the Master**

It was the bloody chopped heart that enticed them down from the trees.

Edgar came first, landing a few feet away before strutting in to snatch a piece. Nala was second, claiming the choicest morsel for herself. Recent fledglings Boris and Bela descended next but kept further away, eager for food but nervous of the woman. Finally, Karlova swooped in. One of last year’s brood, she had stuck around to help her parents raise Bela and Boris. Karlova landed closest to Dr Jane Watts and deliberately placed the item in her beak down in front of the zoologist. Dr Watts smiled when she saw the offering but stayed upright, not reaching for it yet. However, she tossed an extra large scoopful of pig’s heart Karlova’s way.

This dawn ritual had been playing out for a year now in this pocket of woodland several miles southwest of Cambridge. The treats Jane brought varied: different kinds of nuts, dried or fresh fruit. But once a week she liked to offer these carrion crows their favourite food: animal offal. Watching their delight on this fateful morning, Jane felt that deeper spiritual connection which comes when humans and animals interact closely.

It was Nala who noticed the man first, with Edgar following her stare into the deeper shadows. Then Jane heard his soft movements. Turning, she saw him aim a double-barrelled shotgun at her. Ignoring her pleas, he squeezed both triggers. Shot tore through Jane’s face, body and legs. She dropped, terribly injured. As four crows flew off in alarm, Jane realised that one lay dead beside her. “Karlova...” Meanwhile, the man reloaded, stepped over Jane and...

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Detective Sergeant Shane O’Donald was, above all, a details man. Others in CID respected and resented him in equal measure for his desire to tally every last loose end. It was partly why they nicknamed him “Awkward”, though his initials DS SOD suggested it too: awkward sod from the murder squad.

Built like a rock, O’Donald had working class smarts that would gnaw away at incongruous or unusual details that didn’t fit any comfortable narrative some lesser talented detective might be peddling. And so it was that one detail would pique DS SOD’s curiosity when he arrived at this murder scene shortly after the uniforms finished taping it off.

A dog walker had chanced across Dr Watts’ body an hour after the shooting. The murderer hadn’t even attempted to move or hide her. Moreover, a lone used shotgun cartridge had been left nearby.

Had the perpetrator panicked and fled? O’Donald thought not. The fact the shooter had reloaded and discharged again from closer range didn’t smell like panic to Shane.

However, it was neither the cartridge nor unhidden body nor rapid arrest of a suspect that lingered in O’Donald’s mind when he finally attempted sleep twenty hours later. No, it was the sight of four crows huddled round that dead crow near Dr Watts’ body. Because, for all the world it seemed to Shane, those imposing black birds were mourning it.

**Stranger than Fiction**

**by Lisa Rowe, staff**

“Liz, Lizzy, Elizabeth, Betty, wake up, dear. Bless, let me sit you up, you’ve squashed down a bit. That’s it—just help me a bit, lovely. Now, the choice today is Chicken and Celery or Tomato and Basil – either of those take your fancy?”

If I had deigned to respond, I would have said *I have dined at High Table on duckling with quince jam, minted Jersey potatoes, and Charlotte Rousse with Raspberry and Cornish Cream jellies, and a citrus Sauterne – so, no, thank you, neither ‘take my fancy’.*

“Okey-dokey, karaoke, ha ha, I’ll choose; I think you’d love the Tomato, it’s scrummy, I’ll bring that.”

I despise Sue, and I know she devours my leftovers, I hear her skip to the drawer to get a clean spoon, followed by slurp slurp slurp. She always chooses something for me that is to her taste.

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“Good morning Liz, a nice cup of Rosie Lee, and your perky pills. Did you sleep well?” Sue hunched over “Oh! These cramps won’t let up, I must stop the veg and get back on the carbs, ha ha. Now today, your choice is Cream of Leek or Mexican Bean… let’s say the Cream of Leek, a bit more normal than the other.”

Fifteen minutes after lunched was served, as Sue departed with my untouched soup, I picked up my notepad and started to write. I’d prepared the title previously: ‘A little of what you fancy…’ and my tale was now nearing its end. The weaving of the narrative so simple.

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“Good morning Betty, a lovely cup of English breakfast, and your popping pills, did you have a good night?” and without pausing for a reply, “My tummy trouble continues. I‘m off to the Doc’s next Tues. If he tells me I’m off the carbs I don’t think I’ll cope. Rather have bread and butter than a tidy tummy if you know what I mean, ha ha. Anyhoo, the lunch menu…”

I continued writing.

“Lamb and Mint, or Sweet potato and Herb? Lamb and Mint it is.” And then, without uttering another word, Sue just slowly crumpled to the floor before me, no sound, just a slump, the menu fluttering after her like a piece of her soul caught unawares and rushing to catch up.

“Help” I hoarsely whispered “Help” pressing the call button attached to the bed.

**The Jewel Scarabs**

**by Hannah Charlotte Copley, postgraduate (2019)**

I remembered the first time I met Grantha, a couple of days into my time working for the Cambridge Zoology Museum, and she showed me a red variant of *Chrysina beraudi,* a vibrant beetle from Costa Rica. She told me about the ancient Egyptian beliefs about scarab beetles. The Egyptian god Khepera was believed to push the setting sun along the sky, and was a representation of the heavenly order.

After that first time, I often asked Grantha to show me her collection of Scarab beetles, standing with her in the small specimen room where they were kept, the doors left shut to preserve the humidity. I am a slight man, shorter than her by half an inch, with a boyish face despite being in my mid thirties (and no facial hair, which has been a longstanding objection of mine). She was a physically dominating presence, aged fifty-three.

Over time, she trusted me more, and would lend me the key—understanding the draw of these jewels of the animal kingdom and believing that gazing at them would bring an inner peace I deserved, burdened as I was with both poverty and relationship problems. Unlike me she was a rather spiritual woman, and viewed some kind of divine role that we had as custodians of these creations by a deity or deities. Little did she know that I had already by that time been contacted by Mr K.

I never knew from where Mr K came, nor who he represented, but his offers became more than I could resist. I started small, exchanging a rare golden species (*C. cupreomarginata*) from 1904 for a more common golden variant, and passing it on in exchange for cash. I later experimented with varieties of paint on the plainer green species, and found I was able to recreate nearly any species patterning with startling precision. Within six months a third of the collection was replaced, some for me to keep (such as the divine blush variant of *Chrysina aurigans* with its golden body and deep red patches on the abdomen), but most to be passed on to Mr K, for higher and higher prices or tip offs each time.

Throughout this time, Grantha was getting more and more irritable. I had cancelled on her for the past two Fridays in a row. She started to ring me in the evenings to “talk about work”, but it came to a head when she rang me at midnight, demanding I come and see her right then, stating that someone had been meddling with the specimens. I realised something was seriously amiss. I offered to meet her early the next morning, in the archives, at 7am to investigate it together.

What a pity that the very same day she fell to her accidental death.

**My Night**

**by Leonie Mayk, partner of a postgraduate**

The moment she leaves Cloister Court I’m right behind her.

I’m so close now that I can smell her unique, earthy scent. It makes my heart pound faster in my chest and my blood race—it makes my belly rumble. But I restrain myself, one last time, to wait for the perfect moment.

The next stop she takes is right next to the horse's raised right front leg. A slight breeze ruffles her light brown hair and I stop in the shadows, not wanting her to realize she’s being followed before being close enough to her to pounce. While she’s busy examining the stalks of grass right next to her feet, I finally have the chance to make my move. She’s out there in the open with no place to run, no place to hide and there’s no one around to warn her of my presence. I leave the shadow of the gateway leading into First Court and crouch low to the ground. My steps are so silent that not even I can make out the faintest crunch of broken grass stalks under my feet.

I’m only a few steps away now. Motionless she stands next to the horse, her gaze ensnared by something on the far side of the court, oblivious to my approach. All I can see is her. Her inviting body and her tantalizing smell. There’s no room for anything else in my head, not now, not moments before I finally get to have her. I no longer feel the wind in my hair, nor the chill in the air around me.

The distinct sound of steps drawing near makes my head snap up and my stomach plummet. Sure enough, two girls are coming our way, right down the Chimney. I freeze in place. This can’t be happening. For a split second I squint my eyes, wishing for them to disappear. This was supposed to be*the* night, *my* night!

“Shh, quiet.” Her whispered words tear through the morning’s quiet like booming thunder and make me flinch. Is that girl being serious? Nothing about her “shh” is even remotely quiet! She stops the other girl with a hand to her shoulder.

“Look, isn’t she pretty?”

Pretty? More like pretty hungry if you ask me, which brings me back to my task at hand. But when I refocus on my intended prey, I find the delicious little creature gone. Disappointment weighs down on me heavily but is soon replaced by anger tinged with a tiny bit of disbelief when the other girl’s answering whisper trails after my retreating form.

“Oh yes, that she is, I absolutely *adore* foxes.”

**The Fisherman**

**by Will Jones, undergraduate (2018)**

The fisherman was a long way from home, relatively speaking. Normally he resided, every so often giving his nominal occupation a half-hearted go, in the rowing stretch of the river, not far beyond Midsummer Common. Tonight he had ambled through town, at length returning to the riverbank on the far side of the central colleges, and was now heading into the leafy countryside that will eventually take walkers or punters on to Grantchester meadows.

He had set upon the prospect of treating himself, this fine night, to a murder. Won’t be many students around downriver, he reckoned: fewer to target means fewer to witness.

Just as he crept around a bend in the river, he heard splashing, and, looking over, made out, in the partial light, a punt pulling up on the far bank. There was a girl sitting in the bow. ‘Are you sure this is far enough away?’ she asked whoever was up on the till, a young man by the look of it.

The commotion of the boy balancing his way over to his date, trying to rest the pole where it wouldn’t fall off and attempting to grab what seemed like a great deal of clattering items on route, provided the perfect aural cover for the fisherman to slip into the water and begin his crossing. The temperature was of little surprise to someone very much familiar with Cam-dipping for a variety of purposes over the years. His only concern was that another punt might pass through as he swam. In this regard, he was lucky.

By now, the young man was sat, leaning on the bow, and the lady had crawled forward to grab something, before turning back to join her boyfriend. Had she happened to look up carefully from her bag, she would likely have seen a pair of wide eyes peering over the stern, his pale fingers slimily clasping the edges.

Here too was luck on the murderer’s side. Deciding to wait until they settled before boarding, he let himself sink down into the muddy dark water for a moment, his ears submerged. After a drowsy minute, he pulled himself slowly back up. The fisherman heard what seemed to be moaning; he stifled a chuckle at the notion that his victims might die in ecstasy. As he gained height, preparing to push himself up and run along the deck, he squinted over at the couple, and noticed that the girl, on top, was in fact holding her hand over the boy’s mouth, her body weight holding him down. From her other hand glinted light.

The fisherman stopped mid-mount, his legs suspended, dangling in the water. Most giddily did he realise that it was in his power to stop what was about to happen. He saw the young man in the bow briefly struggle to free himself – and might those terrified eyes have caught sight of him in that moment? – only for the girl’s other arm to strike forward into his midriff, and then again, and again. As the boy’s grunting and the girl’s thrusting continued, the witness grinned in the moonlight. As the groaning stuttered to a stop, he slipped back into the river, and paused. He was in no rush.