



**WHATEVER WILL
BE WILL BE**

THE FUTURE'S NOT OURS TO SEE. QUÉ SERA SERA.

— ADRIAN DAWSON —

WHATEVER WILL BE, WILL BE

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When coupled with the letter; a vague attempt at explaining the seemingly inexplicable sent to a distant loved one, it was a picture which froze my heart. My breath stopped somewhere deep within my chest.

At first I had no idea what I should make of them, or indeed that day way back in '58 which they so vividly called to mind, but as the reality sank in I decided that now might just be a good time to kick back and take a break. I stacked two more boxes then retreated downstairs, poured myself a glass of the hard stuff, and sank deep into my favourite chair next to the flickering embers of a dwindling fire.

I had already been clearing boxes and papers for over three hours, my throat painfully dry from dust which swirled through the air like the distant thoughts provoked by every carton I opened.

It was all to be a surprise. Rachel, my wife of fifteen delightfully happy years, had taken Emily and Robyn to visit her sister Rose in Tampa for the week. A holiday for three whilst I, supposedly, dug my nails into some of the many files that had been backing up on my desk of late. In reality, there were no files. My desk was as up-to-date as I always liked my desk to be. No, my intention, whilst they were away, was to have the attic space cleared and swept by Tuesday evening, ready for the joiners who - if they were men of their word - would arrive at the crack of dawn on Wednesday. By the time I collected the girls from the airport at two o'clock the following Sunday (and, given the deteriorating weather conditions I was under pseudo-cordial instruction not to be late) the room would be complete. Our house, indeed our home (and one we had no desire to leave until our burgeoning flock were long flown) would no longer be a three bedroom residence. It would become a four; the extra attic room in which I had been working doubling both as a much needed guest room, and as ample office space for us both.

It was at the northern end of that dim space, pressed tight against the eaves, that I stumbled over the metal case. It had originally been a deep, serene shade of red, but most of the paintwork had long-since flaked away. The name of the owner, stencilled in stark white letters on the lid and still just about legible, was that of Joseph Durning; my grandfather.

It was around two feet wide, one deep, one high and very, very heavy. At my first attempt to lift it, it all but presented me with a hernia for my trouble. In the end I half-dragged and half pulled it to the clearer central area, then sat cross legged before it as though praying at an altar. There was only one small locking mechanism, an aged combination of pitted grey metal and creeping orange rust housed on the front panel of the lid, but it proved tricky to dislodge all the same. At a glance I had figured it would be an easy task to snap it open so I simply retrieved a screwdriver from my toolbox in the corner - a fiftieth present from the beautiful Emily - and, with the merest hint of brute force and ignorance, wedged the blade into the barrel and twisted. Nothing.

After a series of equally abortive attempts using a variety of tools I eventually succumbed to the ultimate in post-modernist brute force technology; the cast iron mallet. Three heavy strikes and the clasp came away completely, falling to the dusty floorboards in a shower of flaking metalwork. I placed the mallet down and slowly prized the lid open.

Inside, in pristine condition and wrapped in clear plastic, were a host of my grandfather's personal effects including an enlarged photograph of his wedding to my grandmother, the first Emily. How this box had found its way into our attic I have no idea, for I had always assumed that

when Emily had passed away, some four years after my grandfather himself (her heart had been breaking for every day of the time that had passed between) we had been through every memory which the pair had carried like warm breath through their lives. Seemingly not. Beneath the wedding photo was my grandfather's military ration book from the second world war, three medals (though I am unsure as to the circumstances which merited their issue), letters he received from my grandmother via the VFPO and many more smaller photographs of comrades and scenes to which he had been privy during his service. Some brought a warm smile to my face with their sense of sincerity and camaraderie, whilst others - especially those of villages whose borders they had entered a day or three too late to save the occupants - brought a sharp prickle to my skin. I will describe none of the latter to you, for they do not concern this particular story, but suffice for me to say that there are probably people you know, people within your own family perhaps, who have seen sights so dark that if you knew the full extent, you might wonder how it was that they had ever kept themselves sane and found so much as one full night of peaceful sleep ever again.

At the base of the box, however, was a letter from my grandfather to his dearly beloved wife. One which, it would appear, he had never garnered the courage to send. When I opened this letter out I found within it another photograph. One which, as I believe I mentioned earlier, stopped my breath cold. It had not been taken during the war; rather a long time before I guessed, and showed two teenagers, the elder bearing the unmistakably cheeky smile of my grandfather himself. Both young men were suitably relaxed, sitting casually on a low fence with open scrubland visible in a slightly blurred fashion behind. The picture was grainy, as befitted the photographic techniques of the day, and monochrome. The yellowing process had started, though the protective confines of the metal case had somehow managed to restrain it to a degree whereby the paper was nothing more than a light cream and the black of the inks had not faded beyond a very deep shade of brownish-grey.

Both men, my grandfather and his slightly younger friend, were smiling broadly. And why not, you might ask, when on this occasion they were not only sitting in the warm light of a summer sun, but also sharing between them a rare bottle of suds.

The reason this image cut into me as it did was not just what I read in the letter, or saw in the distinct exposure of the photograph, but what I had also heard from my grandfather's own lips those many years ago. He spoke very rarely of his time serving with the Allied forces, as I understand it, but one cold winter's evening - an evening not unlike the one on which I relay this tale to you - he had been sitting for me whilst my parents enjoyed a rare treat at the movies.

The night was 15th December 1958. I recall it as clearly as I do a deep layer of snow laying thick against the window, and I was but eight years old. The two of us, a full generation asunder, had spent the early part of the evening playing a series of childish games to keep me amused. After a few hours and, tiring as I was from a long day, we had retired to sit in the rippling orange glow of the fire. My grandfather turned on the radio - the 'wireless' as he called it back then - and we settled to listen to the latest melodies delivered by a young disc jockey by the name of Marty Freas. There was a new kid appearing on the block at the time, a young fellow by the name of Elvis Presley, of whom you may have heard, and I had hoped that I might just catch one of his songs. Televisions were still a luxury that many families, my own included, could ill afford and as yet neither I, nor any of my friends, knew with any degree of certainty whether or not this Elvis chap was indeed a coloured fellow.

It transpired he was, in fact, a white fellow. One of many surprises delivered to me during my youth.

To this day I do not recall whether or not they played any or all of his songs for I was too engrossed in the tale which followed. As we relaxed, early show tunes warming our hearts, I asked if my grandfather might tell me a story. I had a penchant for such.

‘What kind of story?’ he had asked, casually and with a soft-edged smile. I remember looking out through the frosted windows, seeing the bright moon sitting high in a starless sky and my mind turning to thoughts of werewolves, zombies and the like; exclusive residents of blue-lit nights.

‘A ghost story,’ I said excitedly, laying on the floor such that I faced his chair, my chin resting on my upturned palms.

‘I think you may be a little young for such tales,’ he said with a smile, sipping a large measure of whisky.

‘Pleeease Pappa-Joe,’ I said (for that was my pet name for him). ‘I won’t be scared. Honest I won’t.’

As I sit now, my own oversized measure of Tennessee’s finest sitting warm in my hand and looking into the glows of a similar fire, I remember not only speaking those words; but also believing them. Truly believing. Right up until the point at which he finished the story. From that point forth I did not sleep well for three nights straight.

‘Tell you what,’ he said, digging deep into the velour (and perhaps even his memory), ‘How about I tell you a story that might be a ghost story. Or it might not. That way, should your ma and pa come a-knocking on my door next week, screaming as to why I might have scared the colour right from your skin, I can deny that it was ever a ghost story at all; just that it was a strange tale recounted from my service days, nothing more. What do you say about that, young fellow?’

‘So it’s a true story?’ I asked excitedly.

He took a moment before he answered, and I would have sworn that his eyes left his body during that time and took themselves off to another place. ‘Indeed it is,’ he said eventually. ‘It is both true in every detail and chilling in every way.’ He tilted his head slightly, like an inquisitive yard dog, and smiled knowingly. ‘So... are you of a mind to hear it...?’

I think you can guess the answer to that question now, just as well as I knew it then. So I will cast my own mind back and relay the story I was told to you. And, to be sure that I miss nothing from my rendition, I will do so in his words.

In his own sweet, dry voice....

* * * * *

The boys and I were stationed in Europe; holed up in a tiny village by the name of Pics D’Etats. It was a truly beautiful place, sitting as it did like a watchful sentry high in the hills overlooking Andorra. There were twelve of us men in total, and I suppose we were a bit of a rag-tag bunch really, little more than a roving bunch of green misfits called upon merely for observational tasks. We had been in the village a little over a day, but had been walking non-stop for almost three prior to that so we were all still a little foot-sore. A report had been radioed through to our commanding officer that a German foot patrol of no more than four souls would likely be entering the self-same village within the next few days as part of Fritz’s reconnaissance mission. Our job was to take hold of these men, alive if at all possible, and find out what they knew; what dark roads their superiors might have been plotting to tread.

Though we waited five full days and nights, the German party never arrived. Plans change, I guess, or perhaps they had become wise to our presence, I could not say. What I do know is that the day after our arrival five of our men left the village to check out a different line of enquiry entirely

and only four came back truly alive. The fifth was not only dying before our eyes, but the shock and fear that was bringing about his demise had left his skin the dull grey of the laundry we brought to the village.

It has to be said that the man in question, a mere whipper-snapper by the name of Bobby Rayall, was not well favoured among the group, myself included. Back in the land of Sam he had been in and out of trouble since his early teens and he carried inside him a harsh attitude and an ability to instantly strip the cordiality from 'most any occasion. I guess that someone, somewhere had decided that the Army might just be the making of such a boy, though I suspect he might have had his own dirty hand in his calling. There was talk that at the age of sixteen Bobby Rayall had killed another boy, stabbed him clean through the heart with a knife in a quarrel over a girl, though the case against him had fallen clean apart when it came to trial through a lack of reliable witnesses. Though it was little more than hearsay, there was not one man among our company who did not suspect the story (or the boy's guilt) to be true, given that he had a look approaching death carved into his eyes. They were cold and flinty, which is why I myself suspected that he might have enrolled himself into Uncle Sam's finest, just to see if he might one day get to thrust a bayonet or three into yet more warm flesh, not caring if it were deserving or otherwise.

Well, Bobby and his four comrades set off down the hill on the tip-off that a train of caravans was heading through the valley. Gypsies, they said; travelling folk. Though such a movement was not uncommon in that area, it was also the kind of innocuous cover that might well have suited the needs of German troops had they taken it upon themselves to force a ride. The task of the five men sent was to simply search each of the vehicles in turn, as well as a deep questioning of the gypsies themselves to uncover any news of worth that they may have heard or seen on their travels.

When the men arrived at the wagon train, such as it was, it was resting up for the night against one of the many streams creasing the area. This was not just a band of travellers, it transpired, but a travelling carnival and freak show hailing from the cold Steppes of Russia. They had been touring the many villages located along France's south coast when they had learned of the German advancement toward the area and had decided, quite wisely I would be minded to add, that they should suspend their schedule and seek temporary refuge across the border in Spain.

There were seven brightly painted caravans in total and twenty-three souls; men, women, two small children and one or two for whom it seemed the Great Lord Above had yet to make up his mind. The acts with which they amazed the paying crowds ranged from the eating of fire to fortune-telling & palmistry. There was acrobatics and contortion, as well as a series of freakish creatures travelling in their midst too horrible to describe. One or two among the party spoke good English and they were not only pleased to see the visiting platoon, but also happy to serve them up with some freshly heated food and drink.

As they were checking out the vehicles and searching for German interlopers, one of the company happened across a long wooden caravan with only one small door located on its rear side. Other than that one entranceway, the entire structure was boarded up, possessed no windows, and bore a legend along its sides in red and yellow letters. As it was written in Russian and, as not one among the group spoke the tongue, a translation was requested. The eldest member of the troupe, a wizened old man, eventually spoke up...

'The Chamber of Memories.'

All were intrigued by the title so he commenced to deliver a well-rehearsed yet fractured explanation. Almost two hundred years previously, he imparted, some of the travellers' ancestors had been part of a peasant group who had laid siege to the mansion of a wealthy landowner. This man had taken a wife for himself whom many in the surrounding villages believed to be a witch.

From the day the two had exchanged their vows and she had taken residence within the mansion, the crop yields had gone into a rapid decline for which she, ultimately, was held to blame. It was said that this woman had borne a fixation with youth and had been mixing potions and calling spirits in order to keep her skin from ageing. It was those dark spirits, the people claimed, that had trampled the lands with oily feet of sin on their passage to the mansion. This sorceress was cursing them to a slow death, they decided, and must leave the area. It was to be she or them. As the landowner had no desire either to move away from his own lands, or to divorce his new wife, he refused to do anything to help the situation save for continual punishment of the citizens for their poor yields. Eventually slow starvation and tensions within the village began to grow too heavy for reasoned thought to bear fruit. One cold winter's night, they stormed the house bearing flaming torches, killing the man outright, along with his dark bride and some five servants.

During a search of the property, and decorating the lady of the manor's ornate bedchamber, some of the invaders came across a series of strange mirrors which covered every spare inch of space along the deep red walls. Each of the mirrors had been cast in a remarkable way, one which no-one among them could understand. It seemed that if one were to stand before them, one would see one's own reflection not as it would appear now... but as it had once been.

There were ten mirrors in total, and each was remarkably true.

Those mirrors, the old man explained, were now ensconced within the Chamber of Memories.

Of course, there were many questions which followed. What was it that made the mirrors work as such? Was the glass warped in such a way that it might bend a man's image to give the apparition of youth? In what way did the mirrors differ and what would one see now if one were to take a look? Why indeed were there so many as ten of these mirrors? Were there differences to be found between them?

The old man fielded the questions adequately. It became apparent that he was well versed in telling this particular story. As he spoke, in broken English, more and more of the soldiers became convinced that his words were little more than marketing speak, delivered a great many times to a variety of eager crowds whose clammy hands were burning with the metal of francs, lira, roubles or pesetas.

Inside the caravan were ten chambers, he explained in a gravelly voice laced heavy with promise, each of which contained one of the mirrors. At five-year intervals, each would show a person how it was that they had once had been. Like a photograph of youth, he said, but in three dimensions. The first mirror would show how one had looked at the age of five; the second at ten and so on until one reached the age of fifty. It was these that the lady of the house, at age fifty-three, had used to maintain an illusion of youth, though only to herself.

'What if a person was twenty-six,' one of the troops had asked (for that was his own age he was quoting), 'and they stared into the mirror of thirty? Would they be able to see forward...? Would they see how it was that they had yet to be?'

The old man had smiled so wide that he had revealed a distinct lack of teeth far back in his mouth. Possibly so, he said, though it was not something that could ever... would ever... be allowed. Each of the chambers was separated from the others by a locked door and each who entered was handed a special key. None would be allowed passage without proof of age and none would be allowed to progress far enough to see their future, in case it might serve to change the path of their lives for dark ends. They would enter and see themselves at five, progressing upward in years only as far as the key would permit them.

Being quite taken with the story (as countless others before them might well have been) the soldiers had each decided to take a turn for themselves, even (despite the limited funds they carried) handing over money for the privilege. They craved the opportunity to put the man's wild story to the test. Each had proven their age to him, the others in the company offering firm verification, and each had received their special key with a skeptical slant creasing their faces. When they emerged, however, those same faces were full of awe and wonder. This, they told those who were itching to enter, had to be seen to be believed. The first man had taken a good hour afterward just to bring the rate of his heart and his breathing back within the realms of what is safe for a healthy life.

The last man to request a key was Bobby Rayall. Throughout the other men's pursuits he had stood back, his rifle held firm across his chest and a disbelieving snarl curling across his already harsh features. When the fourth man emerged, wide-eyed with wonder, Bobby had strutted his way slowly across to the bearded Russian. Unlike the others, however, he did not lay his rifle to the floor or hand it over to one of his colleagues for safekeeping. Instead he raised the barrel, the metal glistening in the afternoon sun, and pointed it directly at the reticence of the old man's face.

'Give me a key that will take me all the way through,' he snarled, teeth clenched.

Such a request quite took the others by surprise, and they turned on him, but he was not for swerving from his request. He held both his stance and his gun as firmly as his belief that this was merely some form of money-making trickery. One of the company reminded him that he should not peer into his own future, that it would be damaging to him in ways he might not be yet able to imagine, but he had brushed the comments aside like trash in the street. Without taking his eyes from the Russian, whose face remained unaffected, he informed the man that this was nothing more than a ruse with which he was concealing the enemy of mankind. There were Germans hiding out in that carriage, he said, he could feel it. They were sheltering in the latter chambers and the story of dark futures and secrets that should not be told were no more than weak lies delivered to prevent the team from performing the search for which they had been commissioned.

No-one in the team believed him, of course. Bobby Rayall wanted to see things which should not be seen, there was nothing more to his words than that. The dark glint in his eyes was telling them in strong terms, however, that he would be going nowhere until he had seen it.

The elderly Russian looked disappointed and for a moment made no attempt to hand over any such thing. It was only when Bobby's gun started pressing hard into his cheek and the safety catch was flicked away that he raised his hand and offered over a key. The key to all doors from five to fifty. The key that no man still swimming below that age should ever possess.

Bobby Rayall was nineteen years of age.

The others watched anxiously as Bobby entered the caravan. One by one, in measured intervals, they heard the sound of doors opening within. One, two, three... If he had been a sensible man, one not prone to such acts of greed, then the sound of the fourth door should have been his last, but it wasn't. Less than a minute after it was opened came the sound of the fifth door, one which two of the older men had already stepped through quite legitimately.

Silence.

Suddenly there was a piercing scream from deep within the caravan. In days gone by, one of the company gathered that day had been not three feet from a man who had suffered the loss of both legs in a mine explosion. Another had worked in a factory in which a man had lost a hand to a gear mechanism and a third had once trained as a doctor and seen over twenty women in various states of pre-epidural labour. Not one of them had heard a scream quite as awful as this, they said. It punched hard into their chests and there were some amongst them who claimed for months

afterwards that they had actually seen the scream tearing up the dusty Spanish landscape around them and carrying it away like the blast from an explosion. Then came the sound of a violent struggle from within; a man failing in the fight against his fear, and the series of clatters that suggested he was almost breaking down the doors in his desperate bid to escape.

When the door to the caravan itself burst open, young Bobby Rayall positively fell outward, landing on the floor in a crumpled heap. He was jabbering wildly and kicking his feet against the dust, yet none of his words made sense. After he lay there a clear while, blubbing like a child with tears streaming from his cold eyes, he settled into a monotonous repetition of just three barely audible words: 'Danny was there... Danny was there.'

Bobby Rayall had to be carried back to the village in a makeshift stretcher that night. Each of the other men dutifully took turns, though I guess that they were ultimately loathe to do so. There was certainly no way he could have walked; it seemed as if both his strength and the very lifeblood of his body had been sucked away by what he had seen. All the way he just kept repeating those same three words; 'Danny was there... Danny was there' delivered in increasingly pitiful childish tones.

By the time the party of men reached the sanctuary of the village, the others crowding around with concern and asking harsh questions, Bobby Rayall was in a real bad way. His face was the grey-blue shade of a man already dead and his breathing had slowed to almost imperceptible levels. We found him a bed in one of the local houses and fed him some hot soup.

By morning he was dead.

Three days later, given the absence of any advancing German personnel, we left the village to take up another post some thirty miles to the west. The day before we had all attended a makeshift funeral presided over by the local vicar (who did not speak or understand so much as a word of English). Many were no doubt wondering exactly what it was that had come to pass in that room that day, what it was that he might have seen. Many also wondered who this man might be who was known as 'Danny'.

I knew better than all the rest. That very morning I had woken early and, whilst stretching my legs in the main street of the village (if it could be granted such a grand title), I had caught sight of the local in whose house young Bobby had met his end. As we walked and looked out across the hills he told me that, in the middle of the night preceding the young man's death, he had entered the room both to check on his condition and to lay a fresh glass of water beside his bed. In truth, he had doubted that young Bobby would find the strength to take it, but he had brought it in anyway. As he had stepped close to the bed he had heard the boy taking a deep, staggered breath and had leaned close.

Suddenly young Bobby had grabbed the man's arm and opened his eyes; perhaps the final time he had ever done so. With a fear embedded within those blackened orbs that the local said he prayed he never saw in the eyes of another, he had pulled his temporary nursemaid close and started to whisper into his ear.

He told him exactly what he had seen in that room.

And, more importantly, what he hadn't.

In the first room young Bobby had been astounded to see that the mirrors did indeed possess a magical quality for which he was unable to find rational explanation - just as the others had described. In the perfectly flat surface he had seen a small child; a five year old that he could not deny was his younger self: a bright lock of blonde hair and wide, innocent eyes. That, he said, had been the year before his parents had divorced. As the mirrors progressed he could see the evil building within him (even he could not deny it no longer, he confessed) until eventually he had

reached the fourth door. He said that he was so excited by this time, knowing that the magic of the mirrors was indeed a truth and that he would soon see the first of his future selves standing before him, that his heart was flapping like the wings of a bird held firm in a snare.

He opened the door and stepped inside.

When he closed that door and turned to see his reflection he noticed something very disturbing indeed. It was not that he had seen something that he did not expect to see – rather that he did not see something that had been expected.

The mirror was as empty as the room itself; his reflection nowhere to be found.

A few moments later, however, the seconds ticking to the beat of his blood, what he did see was Danny; the teenager he had killed in that fight many years long passed. Slowly his form stepped from shadows supposedly contained behind him, his face peeling into the light as though stepping into the world from a lost dimension. And now, crying into the local's face, Bobby said intones tinged with fear and inevitability that he could no longer escape the truth; not when he had travelled half-way across the world and it was still able to locate his hidden fears in the most remote of corners. There was no reflection of Bobby Rayall in that mirror, he said, because Bobby Rayall – this young man laid bare on the sheets before him – held no future. He had known in that instant that he was going to die and there would be no score year on which he could later reflect. All that was to be seen in the glass, he said, was Danny. Laughing. His eyes were creased, staring right into him and the sound of hysterics was filling his head and bouncing around the inner confines of his skull.

Danny had come to claim him, he said. Come to take him away. He was here now; standing silently in the darkened corners of the poorly-lit the room. And he was smiling. Wickedly.

Bobby Rayall closed his eyes and the truth of the matter is... he never opened them again.

‘How about I tell you a story that might be a ghost story,’ he had said. ‘Or it might not.’

For many long years I believed this to be the only true ghost story I had ever heard. I believed that a man had been punished by the spirit of the man whose life he had taken; and ultimately claimed by the devil himself.

Until I saw that picture in the attic. Until I read those words.

The picture had been of my grandfather, perhaps at eighteen or nineteen years of age, sitting casually with an unnamed friend. Except that it wasn't a friend. Not just a friend at any rate. Written on the back of the photograph, in my grandfather's own inimitable script, were the words: ‘Daniel and me, Idaho, August 1936. How I miss you, dear brother.’

I had never been aware that my grandfather had possessed a brother; nor that the boy had been killed as a teenager - knifed in a fight with some young punk. Nor did not know that my grandfather's favourite picture of that beloved brother, irreplaceable since his death, had been carried about his person for a good many years, occupying his pocket like the hand of a young companion. Indeed that picture, an image of Danny laughing wildly at some off-camera moment, had remained in one of his many pockets right until he was stationed with the forces in France. According to the letter he wrote to my grandmother (but never managed to send), he had not even noticed that the picture was missing many long days after Bobby Rayall's death. The graveness of the circumstances, it seemed, had taken over his thoughts until the group of men were many miles from that village and it was too late for him to attempt to retrieve it. His best guess, he wrote, was

that he had lost it somewhere within that gypsy caravan when, as a twenty six year old soldier, he had been the fourth man to enter.

He did not tell me at the time, though it was clear in the text of the note, that he had been one of the five sent to investigate the traveling caravans. He did not tell me, nor would I ever discover, what he had thought when seeing his younger self in the mirrors – if indeed he truly had. All I ever found out of my grandfather's part in this tale, in guilt-ridden tones which never found their way to my late grandmother, was that he had been the last man to enter that fourth room before the unfortunate Bobby Rayall.

Whether or not Bobby Rayall would have lived to a ripe old age had he not chosen to enter that room, or whether his image would have been waiting – like the falling tree in the woods – had he not chosen to see it for himself, I don't know. Whether or not his image was ever missing in that mirror at all is also still very much a mystery. There is no hard evidence either way. All I know for certain is that Bobby Rayall very probably saw a photograph of the boy he killed. That might have brought a chill to his heart and, with it, so many dark memories; so much guilt and fear within what remained of his soul, that his image was there all along, but he simply chose not to see it.

From the expression of black horror on his face before he had died, however, described to me in no shortage of detail by my grandfather, my guess is that Bobby Rayall's fate was already set. And so, if he were not to live to twenty, how best could the mirror show him the truth of that? My guess is that his eyes were open wide enough that day, but there was simply no image there for him to see. No image at all.

I recall that, until my grandfather finished his tale, the room now feeling so much smaller than when he had commenced, I had been paying no heed to the radio - the 'wireless' as he called it. Elvis might well have come along and sung fifteen or twenty of his songs and I would have heard not one of them. In the silence that followed the tale, however, Marty Freas had selected a number written by Jay Livingston and Ray Evans for Alfred Hitchcock's 1956 remake of his 1934 film: 'The Man Who Knew Too Much'. The film starred Doris Day with Jimmy Stewart and, as if the title were not ironic enough, the words of that song stayed with me clear as any haunting memory.

Right until this very day.

And yet I recall Miss Day singing the song with a sense of whimsy; the heightened tone subtly informing the listener that only by accepting the gift of the present can one open it and find the optimism of the unknown.

The one true gift; that of potential.

'Que sera, sera, whatever will be, will be; the future's not ours to see. Que sera, sera.'