

ENGLISH DETECTIVES

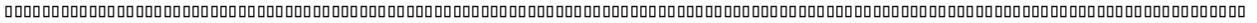
The last of the English Detective trio, 'Carpe Diem', is based on *Inspector Morse* as portrayed in the television series and not in the books. Funny how a filmed version can sometimes surpass the written word. However, bits and pieces have been drawn from the novels: the initials of Morse's one true love and at least one of Morse's nicknames, plus other facts about his life and career. This story is the most optimistic of the three.

CARPE DIEM
M. FAE GLASGOW

PALLID SUNLIGHT ON DARK DESK, the compulsory motes of dust doing the required dance upon the shafts of light, distant church bells tolling the languid hour from even more distant dreaming spires, a melodic thread of classical music carried through the open window by a zephyr of pleasant air and with it, the delicate faintness of aroma that marked the end of an English summer. Idyllic, really, but that wasn't quite what the man seated behind the desk called it. Boring was the word that sprang to his mind with all the resilience of a yo-yo. Boring, boring, boring. And to make matters worse, the pubs were open, and today was the day that one of his favourite watering holes began selling a brand new ale, one reputed to be the finest brew made since Shakespeare's day. Hyperbole of course, especially considering the kind of ale Shakespeare and his lot had available to them, but the mere thought of a new ale, carefully nurtured by hands that had sixty years of experience, made his mouth water and his backside hurt from being stuck here sitting too long. He wanted out. Capital O, U, T, out. And a good two hours ago at that.

But instead of skiving off the way he normally would (wonderful things, ongoing investigations and possible-witness interviews), he was still sitting here, one ear cocked for the longed-for sound of the Chief Constable's car pulling out of the car park like an unwelcome headmaster at the end of term. The Chief had been here over two hours already: surely it couldn't be long now before everything of any possible interest had been dutifully examined?

Sighing, regretting the fact that he currently inhabited the Chief's bad books, he licked his forefinger and turned another page, skimming the inelegant typing with half his attention, whilst the other half wondered what the hell had ever possessed him to become a policeman in the first place. Masochism, judging by the way today was going. He sighed again, managing this time to make it sound so truly long-suffering that even Lewis would have been moved to sympathy. But the office was empty apart from himself and those bloody dancing dust motes, so he simply kept on, licking his finger, turning a page, initialing the appropriate dotted line, placing it in his out tray, picking up the next waste of time, licking his finger, and trying very hard not to think about the ale this afternoon nor the opera tonight that he was missing—the same bloody opera, he might add, that he had



could pick this afternoon to get himself murdered and the Chief Constable could lay it at his doorstep with that disgustingly avuncular grin he had been known to inflict on his victims.

But, as yet unthought of by Morse, there were two things that could make life even more reprehensible, and they both happened together, in perfect unison if not in harmony. Some yobbo fed a fortune into the jukebox and a mindless thumping and wailing ensued, and even as the first off-key screech began, Lewis poked his head in round the door.

Morse tried very hard not to be there. In fact, he leant his head on his hand, face in shadow, turned half away from the door, pulling his paper up to hide any part of his face the shadow might have missed. When the scurrying, squabbling bus-run group came in, he thought he'd been saved, and leant back a bit and had a sip of his wonderful new ale and allowed a small nub of satisfaction to creep in over his dismay about his opera. But then, after a minute, when he looked up a little to read 6 across, he recognised something heaving to at the lip of his table: Lewis' ubiquitous grey suit.

"Suppose I should buy you one of your flaming orange squashes, then," he said, nowhere near gracious, really resenting that anyone should come here and spoil his self-pity. "Even better, you can buy me a decent pint as penance for turning up here like the proverbial bad penny."

"I'm not staying, sir," Lewis replied, managing to make that simple statement sound like a question. "I'm off to see the wife as soon as I'm finished here. Brought this...ahm...gentleman to see you. Says he's a friend of yours."

Morse looked up and his face went as prematurely white as his hair. "Jesus Christ!"

"Oh, and I thought I would be God at least by now."

"So you do know him, then, do you, sir?" Lewis was asking him, not that Morse was paying him the blindest bit of attention, his whole body turned now towards the tall man Lewis had brought in with him. Nothing about this man suggested why Morse should be so transfixed and with such a startled—

and startling—expression on his face. The man was the kind of person that other people would call a chap, or a fellow, but never a punter or a bloke, his only distinguishing feature the centuries of breeding that showed on every inch of him. This, obviously, was the kind of man whose family had been around for such a long time that there had been several spelling changes of the old family name and even more changes in the old family allegiances. He could even be labelled as debonair—but there was a touch too much impish liveliness to him for sincere suavity. Yet nothing else was remarkable, or even noticeable about this man. Until he smiled, and then his average eyes twinkled with a wickedly amused wit, and his cheek dimpled with his smile, and so much charm poured from him, he could have greased the palms of half the House of Commons and still have had enough left to bring world peace.

"Well, well, well," Morse's visitor was saying, "fancy meeting you here!" And coming from this man, even that old chestnut was made mildly funny by the man's genuine delight at seeing Morse. "Nice to see you again, Cody."

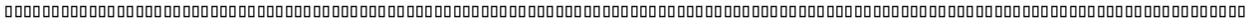
"Cody?" Lewis said, his voice seemingly stuck in that peculiar tone he used when questioning or puzzling. "Oh, I get it," he went on, now sounding as if he'd cracked the riddle of the Rosetta Stone, "Codey, as in Morse Code."

Neither of the other two men even glanced at him. "Well, I shall be off home to the wife and the kiddies then, shall I, sir?"

No answer.

"You know, get off home, leave, like, if that's all right with you, sir?" Morse didn't even let on whether or not he'd heard. So, Lewis thought to himself, this strange man turns up out of old Morse's past and he's so fascinated he can't even tell me if he wants help or what! "I'll get going then," he tried again, so that his conscience would let him enjoy his eggs and chips in peace. "Taking them all to the cinema tonight. To see the new Walt Disney film. Well, it's not new, not really, but it's new to the kids, them not having seen it before..."

It was when he trailed off like that that



“Compared to what? Compared to the fact that unlike me, poor sod that I am, you knew you’d never have to work for a living? Or compared to that wonderful, lifelong romance you convinced me we were having?” He was proud that he managed to say that at all, but prouder still that he hadn’t looked up to see the satisfying moment when the barb drew blood.

“Isn’t it a lifelong romance, Pagan?”

He managed a sound of perfect disbelief, although the words plummeted to the pit of his stomach and his stupid emotions went leaping off in ecstasy.

“If it isn’t, then why do we both still love each other?” Symington was asking him, painfully, clearly, with utter honesty. “Why was it all still there the second we laid eyes on each other again today? Hmm? Go on, you were always exceptional at finding answers—and you’d probably do a better job of it than you are of that crossword!”

That almost—almost—got him, but he knew Symie, oh, how he knew the man. Right up until the moment the bastard had walked out on him to go back to Mater and Pater, he had known him. And a challenge like that from Symington to Morse should have had the latter staring at him in defiance to prove that he didn’t give a damn any more. Which would, of course, have been his downfall. They both knew perfectly well that Morse had never once been able to resist Symie when that expression of helpless longing was turned to bear on him. Morse, with a further sinking in his stomach that had nothing to do with the four pints of real ale he’d just sunk himself, was beginning to feel the path under his feet grow decidedly slippery, and all because of the remembered promise of what had been the happiest time he had ever known.

But he wasn’t going to give in, he told himself, refolding his paper to the letters page, abandoning his cherished and sadly disfigured crossword to its ignoble grave of incompleteness. He wasn’t going to give in, he wasn’t going to go through all that again. Absolutely not, not under any conditions. He reminded himself that it was thanks to his affair with Symie, his enrapturement with

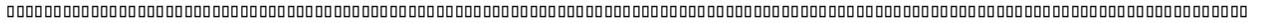
the man, that he had lost his College and ultimately, his chosen career. Did he really want, the cross of boredom duly taken into consideration, to lose this second choice of career? To need to start all over again, and at his age? Because they might no longer throw you out of the police for being queer and it might no longer stop your promotion chances dead in their tracks—and all due praise going to John Major for what little encouragement towards equality he had given—but they did still throw you out for not doing your job at all. Which is what he was afraid he would end up doing, if Symie came back into his world, with enough love for Morse to throw himself into it completely and enough money on Symington’s side to make the mundanity of work a mere indulgence that wasted time better spent with each other.

No. He liked this life of his, even if it were far from perfect. At least it was his own and independent of anyone else’s whims and needs. And even if he were willing to give it all up for love—oh, yes, definitely, absolutely, immediately! a traitor inside him screamed—then he why the hell would he want to do it with the man who had walked out on him before and left him in tatters? Even if Symie had changed, for whatever reason, and was ready to make a go of it this time... There was still the minor detail of the real world to deal with, and he really didn’t want to have to deal with colleagues asking him what queers actually did in bed and all the other, more major crap that he’d have to put up with. For if he and Symie ended up together again, he’d come out. He wasn’t going to waste half the time skulking around in the dark and pretending. Christ, for starters, he was too old!

And then there was the question of whether or not Symie even wanted anything beyond a fling, and whether or not this bastion of true-blue Toryism would dream of coming out at all. Or if Symie was going to conduct every last bit of their lives in public like this, without so much as a thought for what such public discussion of private homosexuality could do to a career policeman.

Fear faced off with hope, and fear won.

“This is my final word on all this and your so-kind offers to dine,” he said, grating the



to live alone, change his selfish habits after so many years of thinking about no-one but himself? And if miracle came true, what the hell about the real world of work and money and the reactions of neighbours and friends and colleagues? And what about— And what about the old axiom, he thought to himself, lying in the happiness of this bed, remembering the languid, halcyon days of his youth that had been ripped from him by a single abuse of love: *abusus non tollit usum*. Should he allow one abuse to forfeit himself all further use of this love? Or should—

Tomorrow, he thought, stopping the vicious circle dead and staring instead at the sleeping face of the one person he had loved and never stopped loving, he'd deal with all that tomorrow. There'd be time enough to-

morrow for the questions and the doubts and the fears. Today—*carpe diem*. That would be his new motto: enjoy the present day, and, to finish the rest of the quote, trust the least possible to the future. He was going to do precisely that, allow himself to enjoy this, to gambol in it like a child locked in a sweetie shop, inundating himself with sensation and with all the things he'd wanted for so long but had never been able to afford before. The probable problems...They could wait until tomorrow. *Carpe diem*, he repeated, hugging Symie closer and beginning to wake him with roving kisses and strolling hands, smiling to himself as he heard his own name whispered and a firming of desire pressing into his thigh, and love conquers all: they'd manage. He'd bloody-well see to it!