

The Boot Fair

My first trip to a boot fair was to prove memorable

I was an avid antique, charity, and junk shop addict. I loved rummaging around in these often musky shops in the hope of finding a bargain or better still a treasure. I particularly loved old prints and paintings. One member of the creative writing group had mentioned boot sales a few weeks before and hey presto I noticed one was scheduled in a nearby farm the next day. So, I decided to go in the hope of finding a bargain although from what I'd heard I wasn't likely to find a treasure.

I spent nearly the whole day rummaging through various car boots and several vans and even a few trailers. It was mildly exhilarating but after a few hours of trudging around I began to tire and as dusk was approaching it started to drizzle. So, I made my way back to my car, parked in the very corner of the farmer's field. Just as I was about to get in I saw an old blue Jaguar car ahead, parked by a hedge almost out of sight but I could see its boot was open. I was perplexed because it wasn't in the sales pitch area but in the car park. Back in the early 1960s I used to own an ice blue Mark 11, 3.4 Jaguar, so intrigued I made my way across to check it out. As I got nearer, I saw an old grey bearded man with a stoop standing in the drizzle next to the car. I said hi I used to own a car just like this do you mind if I look at it. I could see immediately it was an ice blue Mark 11, 3.4 Jaguar. He didn't even acknowledge me but inclined his head towards the boot.

Before I looked in the boot I excitedly told him that the car was the same colour and even had the same spoked wheels and red leather upholstery which I could see through the back window. Could it be the same one? I'd forgotten the registration number but it ended with a C just like this one. He just shrugged. Surprised by his offhand taciturn manner and realising he wasn't going to let me check out the

car I turned to the boot. Bizarrely there was just one thing in it. An old framed oil painting depicting a Manor House in a landscaped garden. I wasn't crazy about the painting but the house looked familiar and I liked the gilt frame, so asked him how much. He held his hand up spreading all five digits. I handed him a £5 note which he took with his pale cold wet hand without saying word. I rushed back to my car but when I turned the lights on I noticed the Jaguar had disappeared. I hadn't seen it drive past or heard a thing!

When I got home I examined the painting and was surprised to see there was a figure of a grey haired old man in corner by a tree. He was standing with something of a stoop and looking in the direction of the house. Anyway, I did like the frame and was drawn to the picture,so I hung it on the wall to the right of the fireplace. Somehow the house looked familiar and that's when I realised it was Barford Manor a house that had been deserted for years only 10 miles from where I lived. The next day when I looked at the painting a chill ran down my spine. The figure of the man had moved! It was no longer by the tree but half way across the lawn towards the arched front door. I felt a tinge of terror like in a nightmare. Was I dreaming? I took the painting off the wall and put it face down in the utility room not sure what to do with it. I was really spooked.

The next day not wishing to frighten myself I resolved not to look at it and get rid of it as soon as possible. But curiosity got the better of me and eventually in the evening after a stiff drink I sneaked a look. The hairs on the back of my neck pricked up and I could feel goosebumps all over as I saw the man was opening the front door. I quickly turned it face down again as if that would make it go away. I was terrified and phoned a friend from the creative writing group but he just laughed commenting that I did have a lively imagination.

It was a week later that the local paper ran the story. There had been a fire at Barford Manor and the body of an old man was found in the house. There was no ID but they found a £5 note in his pocket. An

immaculate blue Jaguar car registration BLG 249C was in the drive but incredibly there was no engine in it.

OMG I had to know and on turning the painting over I saw the burnt out façade of Barford Manor.