

## Fool on the Hill

*Colonel M. is sitting on a deckchair centre-stage with blankets tucked around his shoulders. Around him is strewn a big sign saying 'welcome'; two lanterns; a camping stove, mugs etc.*

*It is **night**. All is quiet.*

*The sound of an engine in the sky can be heard gradually getting louder.*

*Colonel M. perks up.*

Col. M: Ah! They're coming.

*He sits up stiffly. The blanket falls away to reveal an old army dress uniform with many medals pinned to his chest. He picks up the lanterns and studies the sky.*

Col. M: You'll have to come lower. Too cloudy.

*The engine sounds louder; he places the welcome sign propped up against his feet and switches on the lanterns.*

Col. M: *(shouting)* I can't see you! *(He waves the lanterns)* you must come lower! It's too cloudy!

*The engine sounds fade away as the aeroplane passes overhead. Colonel Mallory stands forlornly still holding the lanterns and gradually lets his arms drop.*

Col. M: Too cloudy. *(Pause)* Couldn't see me, I expect.

*He switches off the lanterns and sits down.*

Col. M: *(positively)* They'll be back. *(Sniffs)* and I'll be right here - as promised.

*He wraps the blanket back around his shoulders and settles back, still watching.*

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*The lights fade up and birds sing. It is **early morning**.*

*Colonel M. is snoring away in his chair with the blanket in disarray around him. Farmer Molly Fletcher appears - a sturdy woman in her early sixties. She*

*stumps slowly by. She stops and stares at Colonel M. - not surprised, but slightly annoyed.*

*She whistles loudly for her dog (who is never seen).*

Farmer: Codger! Here boy! Come here! (*Whistles piercingly*)

*The Colonel stirs and coughs, then sees the farmer and grimaces at her.*

Farmer: Still here then?

Col. M: So you see.

Farmer: Not come yet, eh?

Col. M: They'll be here.

*Silence.*

*The Farmer whistles loudly. Colonel M. cringes, irritated.*

Farmer: Codger. Here boy! Time for milking. Come on, here boy!

*Farmer Molly takes a last look at Colonel M. and shrugs before moving off behind him, whistling at her dog.*

*The colonel waits until she's gone, then slowly, stiffly gets up and starts making a drink.*

*From behind him, out of sight, Farmer Molly's whistles can be heard, with the sound of cows' lowing getting louder. Col. M. with a backward glance tries to ignore the noise. As the noise grows louder there is also the sound of thundering hooves. As Colonel holds the kettle and cup quickly, they begin to rattle with the vibrations.*

*The sounds fade away.*

Col. M: Blast her. Perfectly good path round the other field. Does it deliberately, blast her.

*Sits back with his drink. The Postboy appears from back of audience; out of breath.*

Postboy: (*calls*) Letter for you, Colonel Mallory

Col M: (*pleased*) Ah! From Whitehall, no doubt. Take their time, what! (*Postboy arrives puffing and hands letter over*) Still - better late than ...(*looks at letter*) Blast.

Postboy: (*stands catching his breath*) Not what you hoped for?

Col. M: "You have won a million pounds in our lottery sweepstake." Junk mail!

Postboy: Yes. Most of what we deliver is junk these days.

Col. M: You came all the way up here just to deliver junk mail?

Postboy: It's my duty. Can't shirk from it - even if it is a right pain having to climb this stupid hill.

Col. M: Told you not to bother me with this rubbish. Only bring the proper post.

Postboy: I can't go picking and choosing what to deliver. I'd never hear the end of it. (*Sits down next to the colonel*) It's not like I want to deliver all this rubbish - oh no! Gone are the days of bringing good news from Auntie Flo; or congratulations on the new baby. It's all bills and rubbish. How d' you think it feels not to be wanted when you bring round the post. I blame the Internet. Anyway, just think what'd happen if I didn't bring it - and you'd have got the winning numbers? More than my life's worth. No, sir! (*Starts going off and carries on speaking even when gone*) I'm paid to do a job and I'll do it - no matter what a pain it is...

*Colonel Mallory sighs and throws the letter down. The sounds of the cows coming back are heard, with the farmer's whistles and shouts for her dog; and he holds on to the cup and kettle until they fade away.*

*It is quiet. Colonel picks up the letter out of boredom and starts to open it.*

Col. M: You have been selected to win up to a million pounds. You have definitely won a prize....hmmm.

*The farmer comes back on whistling for her dog. She looks at the colonel with smug satisfaction.*

Farmer: Just finished the milking.

Col. M: So I heard. (*Farmer smiles*)

Farmer: Got your mail, eh?

Col. M: (*ignoring her*) Mmm.

Farmer: Bit of a cheek, if you ask me.

*Colonel ignores her.*

Farmer: (*louder*) Bit of a cheek, I think.

Col. M: (*crossly*) What now?

Farmer: Having your post redelivered here.

Col. M: Humph. (*Pretending to be interested in letter*)

Farmer: Not even your land, is it? (*Pause*) And that poor lad having to traipse up this hill nearly every morning to bring you your mail.

Col. M: Paid for it, isn't he?

Farmer: No extra for climbing this hill.

Col. M: When I was a lad...

Farmer: No you didn't!! So don't go telling me you did. Full of wind you are, George - always have been and always will be.

Col. M: Can't you see I'm busy. (*Farmer laughs*)

Farmer: How long is this going to carry on? I've told you - I need this land.

Col. M: They're coming soon. It'll not be long.

Farmer: How long have you been saying that, eh Colonel M.?

Col. M: (*stubbornly*) It'll not be long.

Farmer: (*more kindly*) It's nearly autumn, George. How will you cope with the cold nights then?

Col. M: They're coming soon, I tell you.

Farmer: Oh! I can't be doing with this. I want my hill top back. I'm having a mobile phone mast here and that's the end of it, George. You'd better be gone by then or they can bury you under it for all I care.

*The colonel ignores her. She looks at him, then turns away.*

Farmer: (*whistles*) Come boy! Codger! Come on!

*She goes off whistling for her dog.*

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*Lights show it is **midday**. The colonel is snoozing again. He has a handkerchief on his head with the corners tied.*

*Sound of a car hooting. Pause. Two more hoots. The colonel stirs but doesn't wake up.*

*Finally a woman arrives puffing and panting carrying two large carrier bags. She sees the colonel - pauses, putting her bags down to wipe her sweat away; then takes the bags over to his chair.*

Delivery woman (DW): Cor - it's alright for some, innit!

*The colonel snores away.*

D. W.: Hmm. Excuse me, luv!

Col. M.: Oh - er...oh.

D.W.: Are you - well you must be... it says here on the order - "Colonel Mallory - top of the hill; Upper Egdon". Well - you're the only person I've seen on top of the hill - so it must be you.

Col. M.: Ah good. Fresh supplies.

DW: What you want them delivered up here for is a mystery. Barking mad, I says when they gave me the instructions. Mad as a flea in a tornado.

*Colonel M squints into the sun at her.*

Col. M.: Where is Mrs. O'Reilly?

DW: Holiday. Gone to Skegness - worse luck for us left behind. I'm filling in for her. Supposed to be shelf-stacking - not climbing bloomin' Mount Everest here...

Col. M.: Everything in order, Madam?

DW: (*looking at the list*) Well - they didn't have no custard tarts, so I put in a battenburg. Thought you'd like that - most people do.

Col. M.: Well...

DW: Mind you - my Charlie - he's allergic to nuts; so of course he can't eat marzipan. It's a bugger at Christmas - can't have a Christmas cake without marzipan I always say - but then I usually swap my icing - I'm a bit partial to marzipan, you see. Oh well - here you are (*gives bags*). All 'present and correct' ha ha! you can mark it off yourself if you want. You'll have to keep the milk out of the sun if you don't want it to go off too quick.

*She passes the receipt, which he studies.*

Right well - best be off. (*starts to leave*) Oh - if you order next week - don't order on Wednesday - it's Mrs. O'Reilly's day off and I'll be covering. I don't want to do this trip again in a hurry. (*fading away*) Might as well do the London Marathon; it'd be a good sight easier. (*from off*) Tara then, luv.

Col. M: (*sighs with relief*) Dreadful woman.

*He unpacks things into a cool-bag and rucksack.*

Well - this should last me till they come. (*holds up corned beef*) Ah! Bully beef - can't do without that! Oh... where's the...

(*consults list*) Oh. Damn and blast! No tin opener!

*He shouts after her*

I specifically ordered a tin opener! A tin opener!! How am I supposed to ...? Stupid woman. Oh well - back to the old methods - trusty old knife I suppose. Ah - the Telegraph.

*He settles down to read.*

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*The lights fade to dusk. Farmer Molly Fletcher whistles from off and calls dog.*

Farmer (*Off*): Codger! Come boy!

Col. M: Here we go again.

Farmer: (*entering*) Oh! Had a delivery, have we? Saw the van down below. Nicely stocked with supplies, are you? Bet all this brings back the Army days, doesn't it?

Col. M: None of your damn business.

Farmer: Oh dear. Touched a bit of a raw nerve there I see. Still, a bit of nostalgia never did anyone any harm, eh?

Col. M: Humph.

Farmer: Not talkative tonight? Oh well - cows are calling. Come on Codger! Where has that dog got to? Codger! (*Whistles*) Here boy! Come on now!

*After a minute of quiet, the colonel looks around suspiciously. In the distance cows can be heard far away.*

Col. M: (*triumphantly*) Said there was another path down the south field. Ah! (*He contentedly gets back to reading the paper*) Hmm. All this fighting about pay. Endless squabbles. No point. Absolutely no point. Just a matter of time. Fools. Fools the damned lot of them! (*He reads quietly*) Peace and quiet. That's what a man needs before his Watch. All these giggling women - can't be doing with 'em.

*Suddenly the roar of cows going past with thundering hooves is heard. The colonel jumps and nearly falls out of his chair. He glares into the distance, the folds up his newspaper and gets the lanterns and sign out. In military style:*

Col. M: Time - precisely twenty hundred hours. Watch begins. Clear night - no clouds. Preparations complete. All is ready.

*He begins to pace up and down. The farmer enters, calling her dog.*

Farmer: (*cheekily*) Caught you by surprise that time, didn't I? Eh ?

Col. M: Don't know what you're talking about, woman.

Farmer: You now - took them round a different way - caught you off your guard.

Col. M: A soldier is never off his guard, madam. A soldier off his guard is a disgrace to the regiment and to the Queen.

Farmer: Oh George - don't be so prigging stuck up! I bet you jumped a mile on a nice quiet night like this. Come on, lighten up a bit. I thought I'd sit and chat for a bit tonight. Keep you company.

Col. M: (*slightly less frosty*) I do not need company - I'm on duty.

Farmer: Duty? Since when?

Col. M: Since twenty-hundred precisely.

Farmer: Oh George! I still can't understand what you're doing up here at all.

Col. M: Doing my duty, madam.

Farmer: What duty - to whom? And will you stop 'madam'ing and 'woman'ing me. It's very offensive; Call me Molly, won't you. It's not like we haven't known each other all our lives.

Col. M: All your life - not all mine.

Farmer: (*Sighs*) Always so pedantic.

Col. M: Precision is the art of accuracy.

Farmer: Did they teach you that in the Army all those years ago?

Col. M: An old soldier never forgets.

Farmer: I thought it was 'an old soldier never dies'!

Col. M: humph you're disturbing my duty.

Farmer: (*gets up*) Oh well - keep your lonely duty then. If you insist on waiting for them to come - I've only one thing to say to you -

*She pauses and waits. He tries not to be interested, but in the end can't resist.*

Col. M: For heaven's sake - what?!

Farmer: (*Cheerily*) What do you want - burial or cremation?! (*laughs*) come on, Codger! Let's leave him to his aliens. (*she laughs and turns away; then calls back to him:*) That's if the mobile phone people don't decide to carry you off first - or the loony bin for that matter!! (*She goes off laughing*)

Col. M: You'll see! You'll see! You won't be laughing when I'm gone. When we've all gone. You might laugh now - but duty is duty and I will NOT desert my post. No - I will not desert, no matter what weakness the body shows. A soldier's duty.... Duty.

*He paces, scanning the sky.*

I just wish I knew *when*. That bit of the message wasn't clear.

*It's dark now. Sounds of an engine as before. He perks up and fetches his lanterns and sign, propping the sign on his chair.*

Thank God! I was really starting to wonder... Here I am! (*waves lantern*) All is ready! I've written to tell them you're coming. I've told no-one else. Just as you told me.

*The sound is closer now.*

They're going right over me. Wait! Wait! How can you not see me?! I'm right where we agreed!

*Lights flash over him and away. He runs after it and falls.*

No! They didn't see me! (*He sobs once*) I'm here as you ordered! I've not deserted! I'm right here!! Come back!!

*He pulls himself together slowly. He rubs his ankle.*  
Damnable rabbit holes.

*He hobbles back to his chair and pulls the blanket around his shoulders.*

They'll be back. They'll come back. I've kept to my duty.

*Lights dim. Spotlight up on Farmer Molly Fletcher at home and on the telephone down-right.*

Farmer: Look Sam, I'm really worried about him. (*pause*) No - it's not just the phone mast business. I'm really worried about his sanity. He's old. The nights are getting cold. It's like he's reliving some part of his past; only he's fifty years older now. (*silence*) I know - 'old soldiers never die - they simply fade away!' - well I don't want any fading away on my hill top!! (*pause*) Eviction? (*pause*) I wouldn't like it to come to that. (*pause*) Well - I suppose you're right. It may be what he needs. I just wish he would open up to me. You know what a crusty old thing he is. (*pause*) What - call Gerald? Don't like to really. Wouldn't it be strange? (*pause*) It might do, mightn't it? He could be my solicitor, I suppose. I'll give it a go. Could kill two birds ... oh - unfortunate expression. Thanks dear. Love you.

*She holds the phone thoughtfully as the lights go down.*

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*Lights back up on Colonel Mallory. It is **day-time**. Colonel is snoozing. An equally elderly man with military bearing walks steadily on, using a smart-looking stick. He sees the colonel and pauses.*

Gerald: George. George old man.

- Col. M: Eh? What? Yes sir! On duty, sir!
- Gerald: At ease, you old prune!
- Col. M: Oh it's you. What are you doing here?
- Gerald: Thought I'd go for a stroll on a fine day like this - and who do I bump into but an old Army chum.
- Col. M: Come to mock me like all the others, have you?
- Gerald: Frankly, my dear George - I'd heard you were dead. Then I heard stories of this mad old man that sounded suspiciously like you living in the wild waiting for aliens to come to earth, so I thought I'd better check the rumours for myself.
- Col. M: You thought I was dead, eh? Is that what they're saying.
- Gerald: Well you did leave home rather suddenly. Not a word to anyone. And then your post stopped.
- Col. M: Got it redelivered.
- Gerald: You must admit. It's all very strange. People think the worst.
- Col. M: People can think whatever they like. Silly brainless bunch anyway - wandering round carrying on with life as usual as if nothing is about to happen.
- Gerald: I wouldn't be surprised if someone didn't send round the 'funny van' to fetch you. Think about it. (*Pause.*) How are you living up here?
- Col. M: As we were trained to do.
- Gerald: George - that was more than fifty years ago.
- Col. M: Doesn't seem like it -
- Gerald: No - it seems a lifetime away.
- Col. M: - seems like yesterday.

*They pause, wrapped in their thoughts*

- Gerald: Not many of us left now.
- Col. M: No.

- Gerald: Not many of us left then, either.  
*Colonel is uncomfortable with the memories. He turns away.*
- Col. M: Want a drink?
- Gerald: Can you manage one - sounds delightful. (*As the colonel prepares the drinks*) you really haven't lost the knack, have you?
- Col. M: Never have. Always fended for myself.
- Gerald: Not like me. Went soft I suppose after de-mob, with Molly to do everything for me -
- Col. M: That's why I stayed in the Army.
- Gerald: - then Rita. (*pause*), Joanne, (*pause*) and now Caroline. Funny you never married. Thought you had a girl once - never understood what happened.
- Col. M: Better off on my own.
- Gerald: So I see!
- They sit and drink*
- Gerald: Molly needs you off this land, you know.
- Col. M: So that's why you came.
- Gerald: I came as a friend ... and a solicitor.
- Col. M: I see.
- Gerald: Molly wanted it to be done in friendship - no animosity - for old time's sake.
- Col. M: Old time's sake.
- Pause*
- Gerald: You know, old man. Times are changing.
- Col. M: More than you realise. For old time's sake, Gerald, I can't leave.
- Gerald: I don't understand. For Molly...

Col. M: It's not about Molly. I have a duty to perform - and I won't desert it.

Gerald: Duty? Desertion? You're not in the Army now?!

Col. M: I have my orders.

Gerald: Look George - come down with me.

Col. M: I'm not leaving - bring the police if you have to, but I'm not deserting my post.

Gerald: For old time's sake?

Col. M: For old time's sake.

*They look at each other*

Gerald: I'll go and tell Molly, then.

Col. M: Do.

*Gerald sighs and gets up to go.*

Gerald: It brings back memories - seeing you like this, in uniform.

*They shake hands*

We had some good times.

*He leaves*

Col. M: **You** did, Gerald. You did.

*He settles back in his chair.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Lights change to **morning**. Sounds of cows lowing and the Farmer calling her dog. Colonel Mallory is still sleeping. He wakes sharply.*

Col. M: Good Lord! Is that the time?

Farmer: (*entering*) Slept in, have you duck?

Col. M: Was that coming or going?

Farmer: What? The cows? Been and squeezed 'em dry. Done now till night.

Col. M: Can't believe it. Slept through it all.

Farmer: Maybe you're just going deaf!