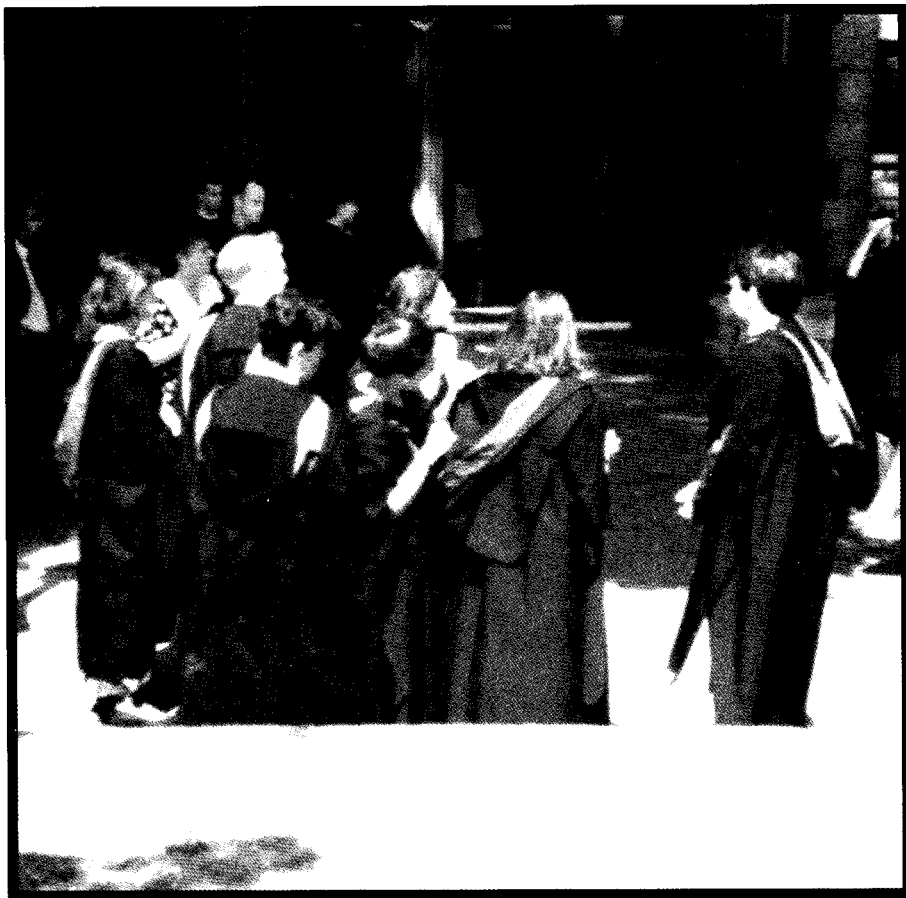


GUY'S

H O S P I T A L G A Z E T T E



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CONGRATULATIONS
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Modern Fairy Stories

The contact

James Snubbage used to play a silly game when he was younger, a game which put him in contact with the people of the world, and which was always discovered by his parents, no matter how discretely it was carried out.

Some readers will have guessed that the game involved the telephone, and was discovered by his parents because of the resultant bill! When his parents were out, James would slowly dial a random series of numbers until a dialling

tone could be heard. Often, no connection would be made, of course, but that was part of the gamble. Occasionally, however, his call was connected. In this way, he had heard many strange dialling tones, listening, if someone answered, for a few seconds to

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that person, perhaps speaking in a foreign tongue, before quickly saying hello and replacing the receiver. He was enchanted by the idea of chance, that someone in the world, before he even started dialling, would receive his call. He sometimes wondered who that person would be. Male or female? English-speaking or not? And what sort of voice? Before he had even been born, he felt his life had been destined to contact that person, albeit on a temporary basis.

And it was during a solitary session playing this game at his father’s desk, that James had a remarkable idea. Why didn’t he dial himself? He knew from when his parents had done this that the line should be engaged, but he was in a particularly hopeful mood, and still at that time in life when reality and the unknown are linked tenuously in the mind. So it was that he carefully, almost automatically, rang himself.

He was mildly surprised when he heard a dialling tone, but almost dropped the receiver when the call was answered.

'778-1275,' came the reply, 'James Snubbage speaking.'

That incident had ended James's time-killing game, nearly five years earlier, and now had re-entered his thoughts during the long holiday with little to do that separates A-levels from the start of University. He was starting at Guy's Hospital (sorry, UMDS or UMDSKs or whatever) a few days later, at the end of September, and wondered if he might try to ring 'home' again...

James dialled 7-7-8-1 and then slowed. He thought 'What if?' After a short pause, he continued, dialling 2 and then 7, and, after a moment's hesitation, 5. Almost immediately there was a reply.

'Hello, 778-1275.' The voice was that of a young man, undoubtedly of a similar age to James.

Shakily, James asked: 'I-Is that James, James Snubbage?'

'Yes, that's right,' came the reply.

'Uh, I know this may sound a little daft, but I am James Snubbage. So how can you be?'

'Look, I don't know who you are, but this is a very immature joke, and I don't appreciate it. I'm starting at University soon, and I'm trying to get everything sorted ready for leaving home. Goodbye,' the voice continued.

'No, wait,' James implored, 'I'm serious. Do you live at 16 Woolteridge Gardens, Sydenham?'

'Anyone can use a telephone directory, friend, although we are -er- actually ex-directory. I don't suppose you have any way of proving who you are?' the voice asked.

'Wait a second, you have a burglar alarm, I bet,' James challenged.

'Yes.'

'Well, don't you hide its keys behind the silver clock on the mantelpiece?'

'How the Hell do you know that?' the voice demanded.

'I don't know. Do you?'

The conversation continued in this vein for a few minutes before both were finally convinced that either they were the victims of a staggering coincidence, or were the participants in an equally staggering phenomenon.

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It transpired that James's 'double' was starting at Keele University in Staffordshire to study Law, at about the same time as James was starting at Guy's. James thought 'Why the difference?'

The voice made a comment.

'I propose that we exist in parallel Universes, and that somehow a break has occurred in the fabrics of these co-habiting realities. I really see no alternative. I remember reading about it...'

James interrupted. 'I don't suppose you can remember a call about five years ago when the line went dead, soon after you lifted the receiver? It was when I first contacted you.'

'Funnily enough,' the voice replied, 'I had a similar experience at about the same time. Thought it was quite peculiar. Put it out of my mind, though. I mean, think of how many strange notions and experiences children leave behind as they mature, and simply forget.'

'What puzzles me, James,' said James, 'is how, when we seem to be identical in lifestyle and person in every other way, we are embarking on different

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careers? Surely, this means there are some differences between the twin realities we seem to occupy?'

James and his counterpart built up, in their respective homes, a sizeable telephone bill in the days before leaving for University, discussing how their 'worlds' differed, and both decided not to tell anyone about the occurrence, at least for the moment. In fact, both seemed to agree on most issues, but perhaps that was to be expected.

What James did not expect, however, was the mind-blowing news that his other-world counterpart had to tell. In the other dimension it transpired that Germany had won the Second World War. James pieced together what his alter-ego said into a sequence of events leading to this eventuality. Apparently, instead of invading Russia in the infamous Operation Barbarossa (June 22nd 1941), Hitler decided to invade Britain and consolidate his position first. Thus, instead of calling off the Luftwaffe on October 12th 1940, Hitler pursued the Battle of Britain to a German victory. Later, however, when Hitler came to invade Russia, he found his infantry pushed back by massive American forces.

The end result of the Second World War, then, had been a Superpower truce between Germany and much of Europe on the one hand, and America and Russia in an alliance on the other. However, life under the Reich had not been too unpleasant - once Hitler had died of a heart attack soon after the war (type A personality and all that), and more liberal leaders had replaced him. And now Britain was the economic powerhouse of Europe, buying up German companies and causing much economic insecurity. Such had been the determination of the British to once again feel proud, helped by the gradual liberalisation of the Western Block...

James had many questions, as did his identical counterpart, and so it was no surprise that both had surprisingly frequent trips home from University, and always seemed to be on the phone!

So, in conclusion, if you receive a strange telephone call where the line instantly goes dead, bear in mind that it might be an adolescent joker, or else...

John S Gilbody