

GOOD GUYS, BAD GUYS

When I was a young boy, possibly seven or eight years old, my dad used to say, "Simon, remember, in this life the good guys always wear white hats and the bad guys, black".

I respected the wisdom of my father's words but, as I grew older I was curious to know what rules applied to those men who did not wear hats.

And so, with this in mind I resolved that one day I would ask him. Unfortunately, before we discussed the matter he had left us.

Us!Just me, mum, and a canary who uncannily refused to sing, following dad's departure.

Mum told everyone that dad had left to build a new life for us all and that as soon as he was established we would join him.

She spoke in impassioned tones, of tea clippers, the Klondike gold rush and those vast farmlands of Australia.

She sprinkled dad with the glory of those early pioneers.

She refused to acknowledge the simultaneous disappearance of Barbara, from the corner shop

We were hurt and confused, but somehow loved him still.

Briefly, about my father

He was handsome, he was charismatic, he was a dreamer.

Possibly Barbara's disappearance was no more than a coincidence.

Possibly he did envisage a wonderful future for the three of us.

Whatever, life continued and as time passed we kind of, resigned ourselves to the fact that we may never see dad again.

Mum was an attractive lady but rejected all suitors until, several years after dad left, she agreed to accompany Michael to the cinema. Michael my step father, who loves mum to bits and has always treated me as if I were his natural son

The one obvious concession to dad's memory was keeping his piano when we moved into our new home.

I couldn't play very well and so rarely sat at it, but it best personified dad.

Sometimes I would lovingly stroke it with a duster and at other times I wanted to take an axe to it.

I'm sure mum felt the same.

My life like most others, evolved in an eventful but not spectacular way. I married a wonderful lady. Elizabeth.

She worked for a London fashion house, and we were so happy together until she died two years ago, of breast cancer.

We have a daughter, Susan.

She is beautiful, she is charismatic and whenever she visits her paternal grandmother and sits at the old walnut upright to play, my mother and I cannot disguise our wistful expressions.

Susan is a free spirit. She travels the world. I occasionally receive a post card or surprise phone call from her, but somehow I just know she'll always be safe.

In conclusion, I would like to mention something that happened recently

I was in the high street, and to be honest I was feeling lonely and a little melancholy and, almost as if I were acting not of my own volition, I wandered into a travel agents.

Well, in a nutshell, I booked a week in a small Spanish harbour town, and was pleasantly surprised when I arrived to see a place exactly as promised.

That first evening I wandered down to the harbour front to choose one of the recommended restaurants, and was sipping a glass of wine, gazing out at the Mediterranean, when I heard a voice that sounded eerily familiar.

And sure enough, at a table some little way from mine, was my father.

He was in company, and from the expressions of his party he was charming and amusing, as ever.

I watched him for some little while but wasn't sure, considering all things, and the years that had passed, if I should approach him.

Anyway, after a few moments longer, I left enough to cover the meal that would arrive in my absence, and quietly made my way home

Well, I couldn't tell if, in spite of everything, dad was really a good guy or a bad guy....

If only he had been wearing a hat.....