

During the 1832 cholera epidemic, Paolo is a gravedigger and 'remembrance man' whose job is to watch over selected graves at night for signs of the undead. He discovers a young woman who has been buried alive and is drawn into a terrifying story of revenge and insanity.

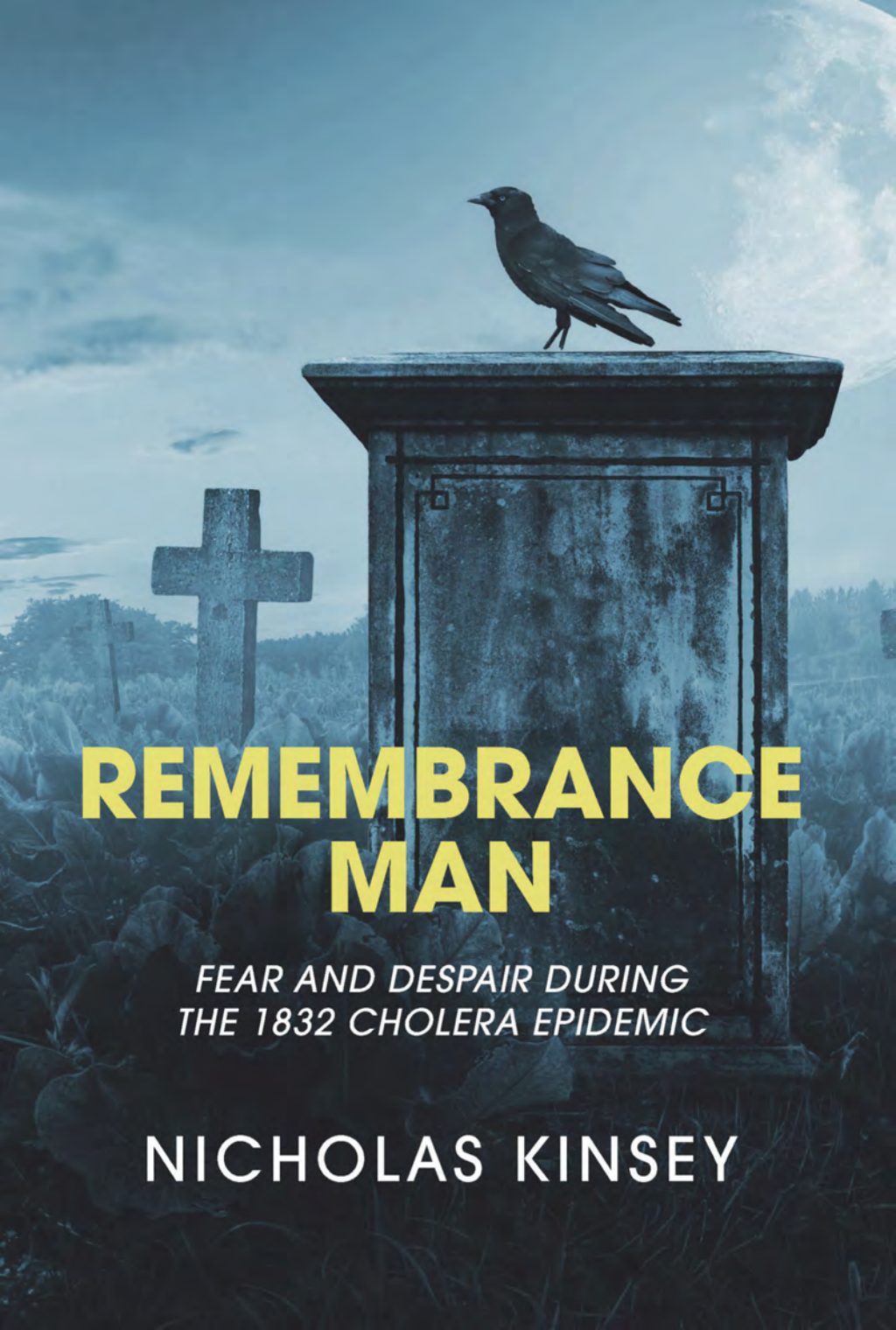
Remembrance Man

By Nicholas Kinsey

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REMEMBRANCE MAN

*FEAR AND DESPAIR DURING
THE 1832 CHOLERA EPIDEMIC*

NICHOLAS KINSEY

Remembrance Man

Fear and despair during
the 1832 cholera epidemic

BY

NICHOLAS KINSEY

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FOREWORD

I am a Canadian and British writer and director of film and television drama. I started work on a film version of this story back in 2003 and so it has been some 17 years now that I have been drawn to this fascinating story. This is a novel, not a work of history. Whenever the demands of the two have clashed, I have chosen to go with the former. I have nevertheless tried to make the fiction accord with the facts about the extraordinary events of the summer of 1832 when the cholera epidemic hit Western Ontario.

PROLOGUE

*“...From the south to the north hath the Cholera come,
He came like a despot king;
He hath swept the earth with a conqueror’s step,
And the air with a spirit’s wing.
We shut him out with a girdle of ships,
And a guarded quarantine;
What ho! Now which of your watchers slept?
The Cholera’s past your line!
There’s a curse on the blessed sun and air,
What will ye do for breath?
For breath, which was once, but a word for life,
Is now but a word for death.
Wo for affection! when love must look
On each face, it loves with dread—
Kindred and friends—when a few brief hours
And the dearest may be the dead!
The months pass on, and the circle spreads
And the time is drawing nigh
When each street may have a darkened house
Or a coffin passing by...”*
“Christmas” by Letitia Elizabeth Landon,
Literary Gazette, January 27, 1832

Cholera was an ancient disease that had spread from the Indian subcontinent to Europe. ‘Cholera morbus’ was first described during an outbreak among British soldiers and their camp followers in Jessore, India in 1817. It appeared suddenly and spread rapidly. It had many nicknames: ‘King Cholera’ and the ‘Blue Death’ due to the bluish pallor of its victims. The disease swept through the cities of Europe claiming the lives of some 6,500 people in London and 20,000 in Paris during the summer of 1832. People were deathly afraid of cholera and fear spread faster than the disease itself.

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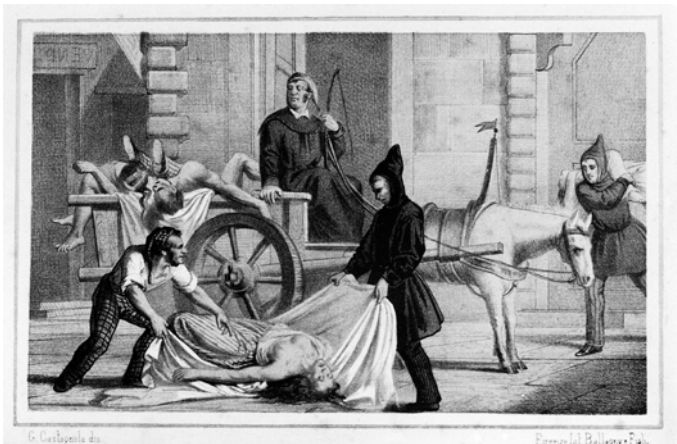
The German poet Heinrich Heine described the arrival of cholera in Paris: "On March 29th, the night of mi-careme, a masked ball was in progress. Suddenly, the merriest of the harlequins felt a chill in his legs, took off his mask, and to the amazement of all revealed a violet-blue face. Laughter died out, dancing ceased, and in a short while several carriage-loads of people were driven directly from the ball to the Hotel-Dieu, the main hospital, where they arrived in their fancy dress and promptly died. To prevent a panic among the patients, they were thrust into rude graves in their gaudy costumes... Soon the public halls were filled with dead bodies, sewed in sacks for want of coffins. Long lines of hearses stood in a queue outside Pere Lachaise. Everybody wore flannel bandages. The rich gathered up their belongings and fled the town."

The word cholera came from the Latin word 'choler' meaning diarrhea and from Greek word 'kholera' meaning 'bile'. The bacterium *Vibrio comma* is a comma-shaped, one-celled organism that is found in drinking water contaminated by the feces of an infected person or from contaminated fish and shellfish. It produces a toxin in the small intestine, which renders the wall of the stomach porous to water. Vomiting and massive purging of liquids result in de-hydration. Cholera can drain up to a litre of fluid from its victims every hour, mostly in the form of diarrhea. The victim suffers severe spasms and cramps, great thirst, and eventually kidney failure. A person in good health at daybreak can suddenly become violently ill, have their skin turn a ghastly bluish tint, become severely dehydrated and die within hours.

The movement of the disease across continents and countries was a mystery. It would not be until the late 19th

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century that scientists knew that cholera was caused by a bacillus carried in water and that proper sanitation could prevent the spread of the deadly disease. People were terrified by the horrific symptoms which seemed to afflict victims instantly. There was no known cure and the sense of panic among the population was palpable. A description in the London Gazette described the symptoms: "Sufferers appeared sharp and contracted, the eye sinks, the look is expressive of terror and wildness. The skin is deadly cold and often damp, the tongue always moist, often white and loaded, but flabby and chilled like a piece of dead flesh."



Cholera arrived in Canada in the summer of 1832 in overcrowded ships where poor immigrants were forced to live in dreadful filth and squalor. The response to the onslaught of immigrants was to establish a quarantine station on Grosse Isle, thirty miles below Quebec City. It became the first landfall in Canada for numerous immigrants. Ships that had cases of cholera on board were quarantined for fifteen days. Passengers were taken ashore and were required to clean themselves and

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their personal belongings by health officers on the lookout for infection.

In 1831, some 50,000 immigrants had arrived by way of the St. Lawrence River and many more were expected the following year. By June 1832, more than 10,000 immigrants had landed in Quebec City and they jammed the houses and filled the sheds that had been built to lodge them. They spilled out over the beaches, the streets, and into the fields where they camped. The onslaught of sick immigrants strained the resources of Lower Canada almost to the breaking point.

The explosive nature of the cholera epidemic stunned the citizens of both Quebec and Montreal (population 28,000 and 27,000 respectively). In Quebec City, the death toll mounted rapidly and, after June 15, it was well over one hundred a day where it remained before starting to decline. In Montreal during the week of June 19, the death toll reached over one hundred and forty-nine per day and began to drop over the summer reaching a rate ranging from ten to forty a day.

It is hard to imagine today the gravity of the cholera epidemic back in those days. In Quebec and Montreal, a total of some 5,300 people died from cholera out of a population of 55,000. In New York City, there were 3,500 deaths from cholera during July and August out of a population of 250,000. So around 10% of the population of Lower Canada succumbed to the disease while only about 1.5% of New Yorkers did. Lord Aylmer wrote that the city had been hit "with a degree of violence far surpassing anything that has occurred in Europe and officers, now serving here, assert that even in India the

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disease was never so rapidly fatal or so universal in its seizures as during the first few days of its prevalence in this place."

Initially, it was thought that cholera was a disease of the lower classes since they were the ones who were hardest hit. Society soon discovered that the disease was also common among the upper classes. Health boards sprang up to provide advice to people who were cautioned to avoid over-exertion, anxiety and sudden changes in diet and to keep out of the night air. They were told to keep clean, wear flannel and have plenty of anti-cholera medicine on hand. The latter was a homemade brew of laudanum (opium) and brandy. Neither the message nor the medicine was of any help.

Schools and shops were closed while smoke from the smudge pots cast an ominous pall over every neighbourhood. Because cholera was contracted by ingesting water or food contaminated by cholera victims, quarantine alone could not hope to contain the disease. As it struck towns across Quebec, people fled up the St. Lawrence River carrying the disease with them into Upper Canada.



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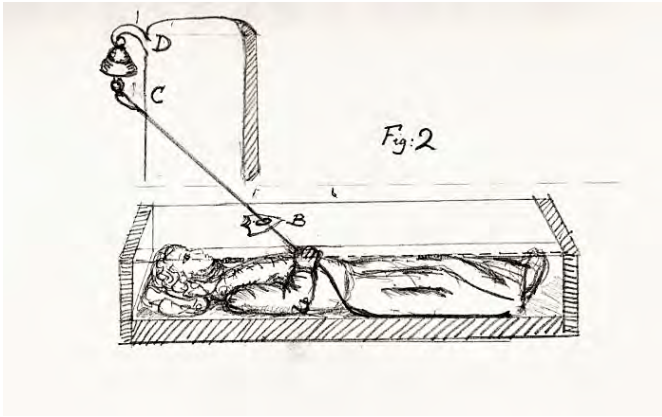
Towns like Kingston, York Township (Toronto) and Hamilton were soon under attack. It is estimated that cholera claimed the lives of 5-10% of the population in towns around Lake Ontario. Hamilton, like many small towns, was unprepared to defend itself against the cholera epidemic. At the time it was little more than a hamlet on the western shore of Lake Ontario with eight hundred citizens surrounded by farms. During the summer of 1832, the port received large waves of immigrants. The first case of cholera was a German immigrant who died on June 26. By August, the epidemic was killing up to sixteen people a day in the small community. Whole families were wiped out in one day from the disease, so people fled the towns going out into the countryside and taking the cholera bacteria with them.

At the time people had outdoor privies and water was taken from wells. Water sources became contaminated with the cholera bacteria which would get into clothing and find its way into drinking water. Family members turned against family members, friends against friends, and soon everyone was out for themselves. Cholera victims were simply abandoned on the roads by their families, and wagons were sent around to collect the bodies and bury them in cholera pits.

During these dark days, stories spread about reopening coffins in which the dead had apparently come back to life only to die from suffocation. No one wanted to bury a loved one who might still be alive. Corpses were often placed in public viewing mortuaries to avoid premature burial and to provide morbid entertainment for onlookers. After putrefaction had set in, the bodies were removed for burial and families could be sure the person had died.

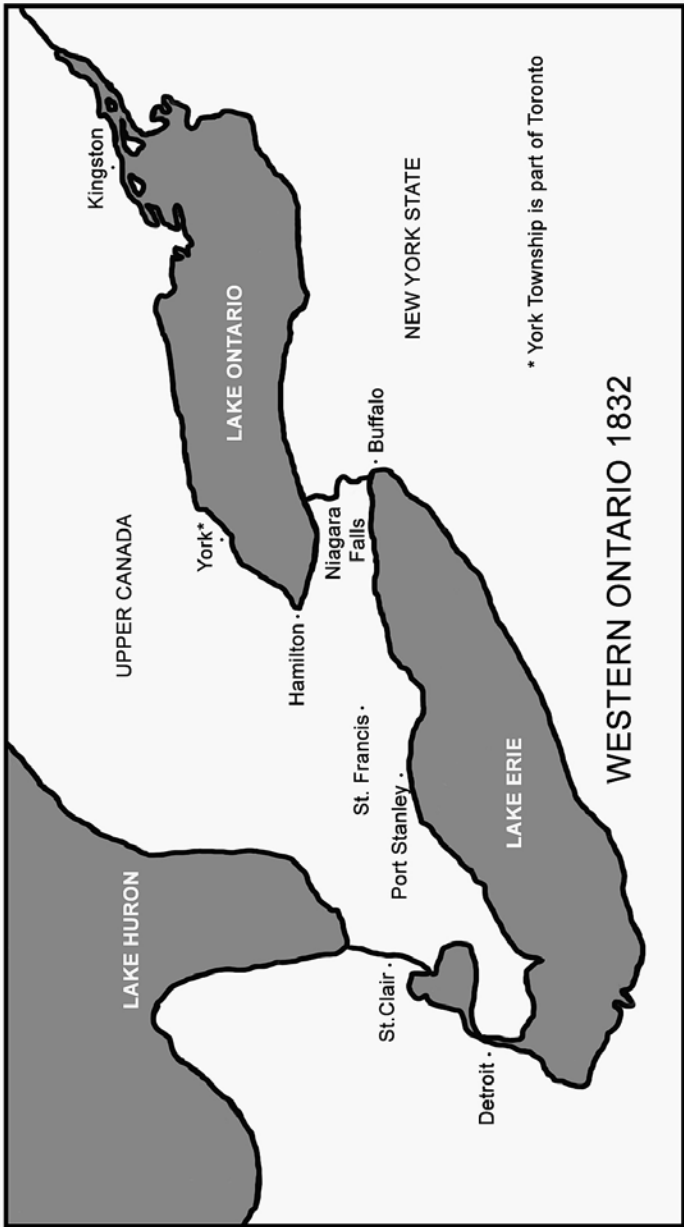
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The fear of being buried alive was so great in the 19th century that families would install 'burial reeds' in coffins with long tubes to the surface, allowing the dead to call for help. Safety coffins were invented with bells installed at the surface so that the dead person could pull on a string to ring the bell to call for help.



Cemeteries hired *remembrance men* to watch over graves to reassure families that their loved ones had stayed peacefully dead and to rescue them if they ever came back to life.

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One

August 1832

*I'm coming, I'm coming the scourge of mankind,
I float on the waters, I ride on the wind,
Great hunger and squalor prepare my dread way,
In the homes of the wretched my sceptre I sway,
In filthy, damp alleys and courts I reign,
O'er the dark stagnant pool and putrid drain.
"Cholera" by James Withers, 1853*

A two-wheel buggy rolled through the long grassy prairie east of a large manor house near St. Francis in Western Ontario. As he approached the estate, the man in a buckskin coat and cap drove along the rutted track that joined the hedgerow perimeter. The manor house sat at the centre of a vast estate belonging to the Grenville family. Loyalists after the American War of Independence, the family had acquired the manor and land some fifty years earlier and it had been passed down from father to son. The rich loamy soil was perfect for farming and, with a creek running through it, the Grenville estate had flourished ever since.

The man spied a young woman in a bonnet and a dirty white apron picking beans in the vegetable garden on the other

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side of the hedgerow. He stopped the buggy and stepped down. He carefully picked up a baby boy wrapped in a blue blanket and snuck through the hedgerow with the child under his arm. He put the child down gently in a row of cabbages, kissing his forehead and wiping away his tears with a handkerchief before returning to the wagon.

With her back to the road, Gerty never noticed the man until the child cried out as she was collecting her basket loaded with green beans for the return to the house. She stood up and looked around before spotting the child near the hedgerow.

Gerty was an eighteen-year-old scullery maid and servant in the Grenville kitchen. She approached the child warily, looking around for a parent, but seeing no one. She peered at the child with his pale bluish complexion and his eyes lit up at the sight of her.

“What are you doing here, little man?”

Gerty smiled at the baby who looked dehydrated and feverish. She leaned down and picked him up in his blanket.

“You poor thing. Where’s your mama, child?”

She looked at the empty track beyond the hedgerow, before turning around and heading back to the main house.

In the summer kitchen, the sight of the sick child created alarm among the cooking staff. Gerty had laid the baby on a bench near the entrance and was surrounded by several servant girls eager to get a look at the child. She touched the lips of the boy with the ladle from the water bucket just as the cook arrived, holding a kitchen knife. The cook shrieked at the sight of the baby.

“That child’s sick. Get him out of here,” she yelled. “He’s carrying something.”

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"But matron, I couldn't leave him in the field," Gerty replied. "We must look after him."

"No, you don't. If Missus Grenville gets wind of this, we'll all be sent home."

"We can hide 'im in the barn, no one will be the wiser. Please, matron."

"Get him outta here, Gerty, 'fore Baxter or the girls come waltzing into my kitchen."

Gerty wrapped the child in the blue blanket and ran out the back door. The cook collected the ladle and dumped it in the pail of fresh water before returning to the stove.

Two

The following morning, Gerty collected the pail of slops and carried it out to the pigs. She looked sad and exhausted after a long night. She returned to the kitchen where the butler and the lady's maid were waiting for her. The kitchen staff looked sheepish as they assembled in front of Baxter and Miss Millie.

"Gerty, what were you thinking?" asked Miss Millie.

"I'm sorry, miss," Gerty said as she tried to fight back tears and failed. What else could I do?"

"You should have warned us, my dear, and not taken it upon yourself to bring the blue death into this house."

The little boy had died during the night. Gerty and the other scullery maids had worked feverishly to save the child, but the truth of it was they'd had no idea how to save him.

"The child is dead, so we must bury it as soon as possible," said Baxter. "I don't want Madam Lucille and the girls to know about this, so please keep your mouths shut."

"How could they leave a child like that in the field, sir?" asked Gerty. "He was just a baby. I don't understand."

"Fear, Gerty. People are fleeing the cholera. They are abandoning the sick everywhere," said Baxter.

"Where's the cook?" asked Miss Millie. "We need to get on with the breakfast serving."

"I haven't seen her, miss," Gerty replied.

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Miss Millie turned to the other maids, but they were already shaking their heads. Miss Millie fixed one of them with an imperious stare.

“Go down and knock on her door,” she ordered.

The girl ran off, clattering down the stairs.

“Gerty, go fetch the child and bring it to the back pasture,” said Baxter. “I’ll have Smiley join you there and dig the grave.”

“Will we have a ceremony, sir?” Gerty asked.

“No, we must keep this quiet. We must forget this ever happened.”

“But sir, every child deserves a Christian burial,” said Miss Millie, who was a very religious woman.

Baxter shot her a sidelong glance but said nothing. They all waited in an uncomfortable silence until the maid returned and breathlessly announced that the cook was not feeling well.

“She was fine yesterday, sir,” said Miss Millie. “Maybe she’s just starting a cold.”

“How is she?” Baxter asked the maid.

“She’s vomiting, sir. She looks very pale.”

There was a collective gasp in the room. The kitchen staff were fearful of any symptoms that might lead to a cholera death. It was happening all around the country, and word travelled fast. A seemingly healthy person could suddenly fall ill and die from the blue death within hours.

Baxter noticed the furtive glances around the room and knew that the young and impressionable maids, flighty at best, were already gauging the others for signs of illness. Baxter tried to quell the fear with a few words of comfort.

“Look,” he said, trying to convey an assurance he did not feel, “it may be nothing at all. Let’s get on with the breakfast schedule. We’ll talk later.”

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Lucille Grenville, the matriarch of the family, had to be told immediately. There was no way to hide a sick cook from her eagle eye. A flustered servant girl was about to enter the dining room with Lucille's hard-boiled egg and toast when Baxter stopped her in the hall with a stern look and took the breakfast tray from her.

Lucille was seated alone in the room at the head of a long table. She was a small, thin woman with grey hair who had lost her husband to the typhus epidemic four years earlier. She had run the farm and estate alone since her husband's death. She was an energetic forty-year-old with an imposing presence, who would not tolerate disrespect, real or imagined.

"Well?" she asked, raising an eyebrow when she saw Baxter enter with the tray. He went to the head of the table and whispered in her deaf ear.

"We have a problem, ma'am."

"Please repeat that, Baxter," said Lucille, as she picked up a spoon to crack the egg. "I didn't catch it."

"The cook, ma'am. She's sick."

"What do you mean, sick?"

"She's vomiting, ma'am."

Lucille jerked upright in her chair, dropping the spoon and the sudden motion caused the egg to roll off the table and hit the floor.

"You don't mean?"

"We don't know for sure, ma'am," Baxter said hastily as he leaned down to pick up the egg. "She was fine yesterday."

"We can't have this, Baxter," said Lucille with a trace of fear crossing her face. "We need to get her out of the house immediately, send her home."

"Yes, ma'am."

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"Put her in a wagon and get someone to drive her back to the town."

Baxter bowed silently, wiped the egg clean and deposited it in the silver egg cup in front of Lucille.

"Thank you," said Lucille as Baxter hurried out of the room.

"Why so glum, mother?"

Lucille started at the sound of her daughter's voice. She hadn't heard Emily come into the room and sit down at the table. Emily was a blonde girl of eighteen years of age, who was now looking at her mother with concern in her eyes.

"The cook is sick. She's vomiting," Lucille told her.

The seriousness suddenly dawned on the young woman who looked stricken with fear, whether it was for her own family or the cook, or both, it was hard to tell. Emily took after her mother. She was a bright girl, a quick study, whose only fault, in her mother's view, was to wear her heart on her sleeve.

"Are you sure, mother?" Emily could hardly bring herself to ask. "Are you sure it's cholera?"

"It doesn't matter, we can't take the chance."

"But mother, if she's sick, we can't send her home."

"We can and we will," said Lucille, her voice brooking no argument. She saw the look in her daughter's eyes and gently patted her hand. "Emily, her family can look after her. We cannot have the sickness in this house. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, mother."

In the oppressive silence that followed, the servant girl brought in a breakfast tray for Emily with a bowl of porridge, toast and juice. She put it down in front of Emily and started to fill the water glasses on the table.

Three

The rolling prairies extended as far as the eye could see. On a hill to the east, a man on a white horse appeared in the midday sun. He was followed by two men in a wagon that rattled over the rough track, rolling down the hill towards a sharecropper's sod house near a creek hidden in a copse of pine trees. The house appeared to be folded into the prairie grassland, its back wall dug into the ground and its roof covered with grass.

A woman appeared in the doorway holding an old flintlock musket. Her short hair was uncombed and dirty, as was her ill-fitting brown shirt and skirt. She crossed her arms as she watched the men make their approach.

Constable John Riley led the way. He sat his horse well, with the assurance of a man who had spent a lifetime in the saddle. He looked like a wizened old cowboy in a John Bull hat and brown waistcoat with a collarless shirt. Young Paolo Morelli in a brown tweed cap drove the wagon sitting next to his uncle Vito in shirtsleeves, smoking a clay pipe.

A naked five-year-old boy with a runny nose, grabbed his distraught mother's hand as they watched the men approach. The woman ignored the boy's hand and raised the musket to her shoulder. She would need both hands to shoot. She cocked the hammer and looked down the sights. She held her breath

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and carefully pulled the trigger. The boom and crack of the ball as it whizzed over the heads of the men in the wagon caused instant panic. The constable struggled to calm his mount, and Paolo had to lean back hard to stop the team of horses from bolting. The men were taken by surprise and had not expected to be shot at. The constable ordered the men in the wagon to stay put.

"Ma'am, don't shoot. We've come for the body," yelled Riley, advancing on his horse.

The boy whimpered in fear, but his mother ignored him. She busied herself reloading the musket, opening the flash pan and reaching into her shirt pocket for another paper cartridge containing powder and ball.

"You ain't comin' in 'ere," she yelled at the constable. "He ain't dead yet."

"Not what we've been hearing, ma'am."

"You comin' any closer, I'm gonna shoot you."

"Please, ma'am. Put down that gun right this minute or I'll have to take it away from you."

The little boy in the doorway started to cry as the constable negotiated with the woman.

"Go back inside, child."

The boy continued to whimper as the woman finished loading the musket and raised it to her shoulder.

"You go on outta 'ere. You ain't got no bizness 'round 'ere."

"We've come for the body, ma'am."

"You go on home now or I be shootin'."

"Your man is dead, ma'am. Nothing's gonna change that. Are you going to let us see him?"

The woman fired a second round above the head of the constable who had lost all patience and charged forward on his horse, pushing the woman to the ground and causing the little

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boy to run into the hut, wailing. He quickly dismounted and grabbed the musket away from the woman.

All the fight had gone out of her. She was waif-thin with dark hair and fine features. She wrapped her arms around herself and glared at the constable. There was something dignified and refined in the woman's defiance, in spite of her dire circumstances.

The Morellis entered the hut, pulling bandanas over their noses. They found the dead husband lying on a bedsheet in a dark corner of the one-room hut as the boy continued to sob nearby.

"Your sister Rebecca came by, ma'am. She's worried about you."

"My sister, she don't know nothin'."

"You're putting your child at risk, ma'am, keeping a blue death in here."

The constable entered the hut and picked up the little boy, trying to distract him as the men collected his father's body. The smell of putrefaction was overpowering as Vito and Paolo quickly hauled the man in the sheet out the door while the distraught woman looked on. They carried the body over to the wagon and dumped it unceremoniously in the back.

In the doorway the child grasped the constable's moustache and pulled on it, eliciting a smile from the lawman.

"You have a wonderful boy here, ma'am. Why don't you collect your things and come with us? Your sister is asking for you."

"I ain't goin' nowhere," said the woman, glaring at the constable. "This is my land, now get the hell off my property."

"I'm sorry you feel that way, ma'am."

Constable Riley put down the child and realized that he had just removed any hope of survival on the prairie for this

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woman. Without her man, there was no way she could farm this land alone. She was just too stubborn to listen to reason, thought the constable. He would certainly have a talk later with the sister about bringing them both to town.

“My condolences, ma’am. He’ll be buried in the cemetery in St. Francis. Good day.”

He donned his hat to the woman and climbed on his horse. The woman and boy watched in silence as the men departed.

OTHER BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR

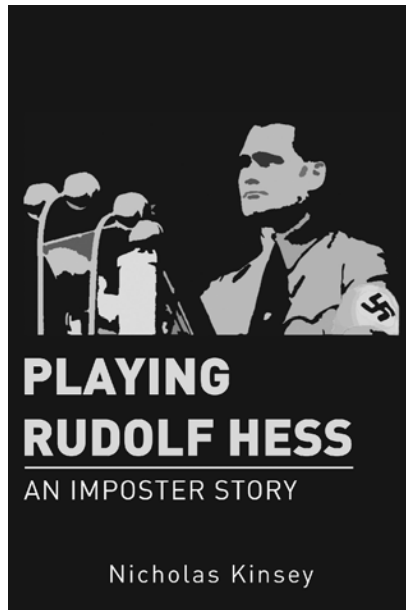
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www.nicholaskinsey.com



PLAYING RUDOLF HESS

by Nicholas Kinsey

One of the greatest mysteries of WWII

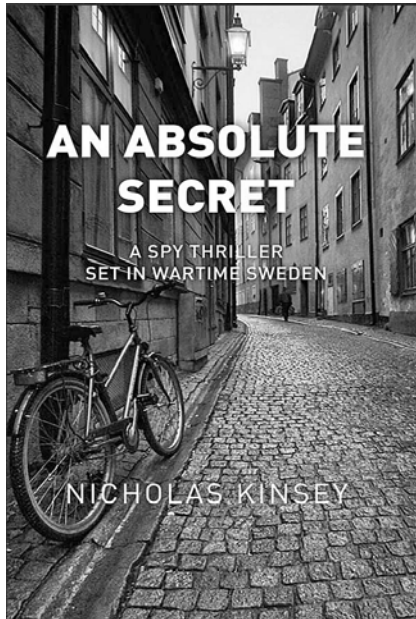
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ISBN: 978-0-9952921-0-9

After parachuting into Scotland in 1941, the German Reichsminister Rudolf Hess is revealed to be an imposter. MI5 puts together a team of intelligence officers led by Paul Cummings and his German wife Claudia to investigate the Hess double. They are sent to Camp Z where Hess is being held in relative comfort following Churchill's orders. The team soon starts to uncover the imposter's secrets involving the shadowy Herr Oberst and his secret training by the SS. But the British government decides to bury the truth and it is only in 1973 that a British doctor confronts the imposter during a medical examination in Berlin and discovers the truth.

“Makes history come alive like a thriller”

“Must read, forgotten WWII story”



AN ABSOLUTE SECRET

by Nicholas Kinsey

A spy thriller set in wartime Sweden

A Cinegrafica / Booklocker paperback and ebook, 2017

ISBN 978-0-9952921-2-3

A spy thriller set in wartime Sweden when Stockholm was a bourse for foreign intelligence and German war booty. British SIS officer Peter Faye is sent to Stockholm in 1943 to spy on German Intelligence Officer Karl-Heinz Kramer. With the help of his assistant, Faye recruits an Austrian maid working for the Kramer household who manages to sneak out secret documents held by Kramer in a locked drawer. The documents are so sensitive that they cause a commotion in London. With the help of Swedish journalist Anders Berger, Faye discovers a network of Soviet moles working in British Intelligence. The novel is richly evocative, skilfully paced and a real page-turner. Kinsey's meticulously crafted second novel is based on true wartime stories with their heroes and villains.

“Great war time spy thriller”



SHIPWRECKED LIVES

by Nicholas Kinsey

A novel about the *Empress of Ireland* disaster

A Cinegrafica / Booklocker paperback and ebook, 2018

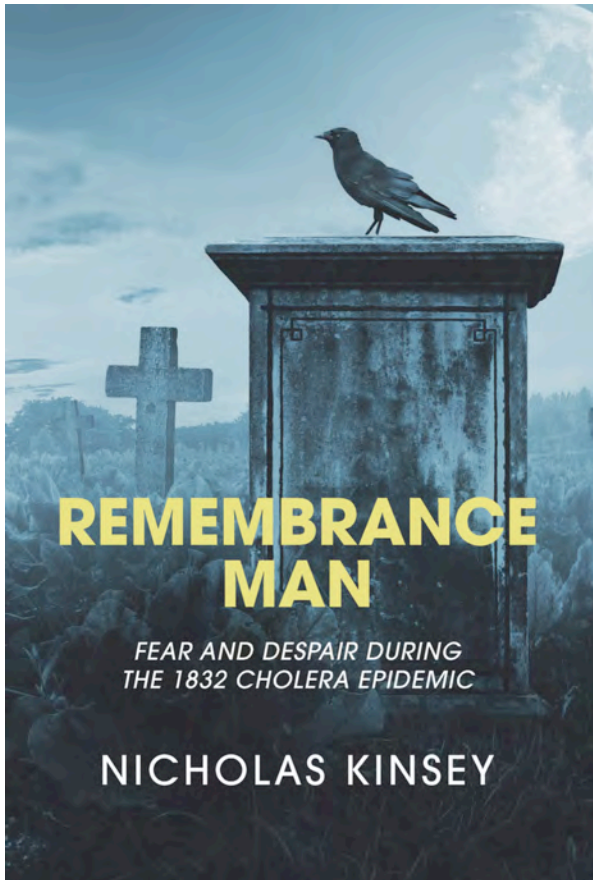
ISBN 978-0-9952921-4-7

The *Empress of Ireland* passenger liner collided with the Norwegian collier *Storstad* in the St. Lawrence River on a foggy night in May 1914, sinking in 14 minutes and claiming the lives of 1,012 people. This is the story of the survivors and the government inquiry into Canada's worst maritime disaster. It is based on the actual testimony of witnesses at the *Commission of Inquiry*, which was presided over by Lord Mersey, the gruff and opinionated British jurist and politician. Lord Mersey had led the investigation into the *Titanic* and the later *Lusitania* disasters, but was sorely tested by the *Empress* Inquiry. It tells the story of the ruined captain of the passenger liner, the woman who survived the disaster and tried unsuccessfully to claim the body of her disfigured son, the Rimouski fisherman whose job was to search the debris field for the bodies of the victims, the Norwegians who were quickly condemned by the press, the shysters and wagon-chasers who fraudulently claimed insurance policies on next of kin, and the government inquiry which pitted a multinational transport industry giant against a tiny Norwegian coal-hauling firm.

“An historical novel that is impossible to put down”

“From the very first lines, Kinsey skilfully crafts his novel. We are drawn into the lives of the individuals on the *Empress*, passengers confused and frightened when loud blasts of the ship’s whistle sound and the ship begins to list, then rapidly sink. He weaves the story between the disaster itself and what follows with the survivors in a courtroom as lawyers and witnesses try to unravel the cause of the collision... Kinsey has written a historical novel that is impossible to put down. I found that the transitions from survivor story to courtroom events held my interest from start to finish.”

Rosalie Grosch, www.norwegianamerican.com



During the 1832 cholera epidemic, Paolo is a gravedigger and 'remembrance man' whose job is to watch over selected graves at night for signs of the undead. He discovers a young woman who has been buried alive and is drawn into a terrifying story of revenge and insanity.

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