

A Harvest To Forget

It must have been the long hours the labourers spent in the fields, and the way they swilled down scrumpo like it was water that made them do odd things. Judson Phatt was the labourer I remember best. He was a big strapping lad with an anvil-shaped head and a huge birthmark shaped like a winged maggot on his back. He never wore a shirt whatever the weather, and walked with a limp ever since he'd blown off part of his foot after using a loaded shotgun as a crutch in an amateur production of *Treasure Island*.

Judson had spent the whole evening in The Twitching Pig, a dingy and dirty Inn frequented by layabouts, bitter old men with pipes and anyone who had little money and no sense of smell. By throwing-out time he was roaring drunk and full of mischief. He broke into the storeroom of the ironmongers shop, stole some turpentine and headed up the hill to Widow Minger's farm. Having cornered half a dozen woolers, he threw turps on them and set them alight. The commotion brought out half the village, including me and my mate Tommy, who had been up a tree opposite Lily Titman's bedroom window.

After the woolers were finally chased down and put out, Judson was found fast asleep behind the War Memorial. He was made to work off the damage he'd caused; he had to repaint the ironmonger's soffits and Widow Minger had him up at her farm every night for a month. He also had to carry all the produce into the church for the big harvest festival display on his own.

The service itself was a bit special that year. The church was packed, and Reverend Toucher had surpassed himself with a wonderful sermon on how Moses would have enjoyed boiled parsnips and probably had a glass eye. After the harvest hymn, the Reverend asked the winner of the 'Guess the Weight of the Biggest Sausage' competition to collect the prize, which was a large corn dolly with a cut-out photograph of the King for a face.

Big Mrs Doodle from the bakery was the lucky one, and she hauled herself out of her pew and waddled slowly down the aisle to the front. She bent to pick up the dolly and let out the loudest bumparp I have heard from that day to this. It echoed round the altar and bounced off the ancient stone walls for what seemed like an eternity. There was then a moment of perfect silence, before Old Albert spat out his false teeth and howled with laughter.

The whole congregation collapsed into a helpless mass of merriment, until the Reverend screamed from the pulpit, 'GOD DOESN'T FIND FARTING FUNNY!' This

did absolutely nothing to help, and me and Tommy took advantage of the pandemonium to cram our pockets with eggs from one of the display baskets, most of the contents of the collection plate and a mirkin we found on the floor.

Poor Mrs Doodle was too embarrassed to ever go to church again. She spent her Sundays sobbing behind the counter in the bakery, flicking raisins about and marking the sign of the cross on the window with flour. The Reverend had to save her soul by partaking of her enormous baps twice a week.