

**The**

**Search**

**For**

**Mister Lloyd**

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i Gwynn a Beryl



## CHAPTER ONE

*Graceland, Bangor*

**H**ello. Hi. I don't suppose you've seen Mister Lloyd? No. Course not. Silly me. Blue-bar wings? Green ring on his foot? No? OK. Thanks anyway. Excuse me. Hi. Sorry to disturb an' all that. My pigeon's gone missing. Seen him waddling about? Answers to the name of Mister Lloyd. Light grey feathers, dark underbelly. Racing type. Green ring, right foot. No? Yes? What? You think so? In which direction? Oh. Thank you, thank you so much.

I wish it began like this, but it doesn't.

Graceland was where he was kept. I'm standing there now, looking at the view from the loft and admiring the still water of the Menai Strait. Its perfect stillness, mirroring the trees that billow and burst onto the far bank, is deceptive; a delicate balance reached as two opposing tides collide. I think it is a little like me on that day when he never showed up, my stomach heaving and lurching but no one able to tell.

The sun had reached the horizon and, squinting through the spider-webbed window, I traced the silken lines up to the reddening sky. A small dot blossomed into a huge chequered banner: Taid's racing pigeons waving, heading home, weaving themselves triumphantly through the air and landing to their own applause while my grandfather cheered

and banged on the biscuit tin. The call of home. All had made it, except Mister Lloyd.

‘I’m afraid we’re out of time, Mostyn bach,’ said Taid, his harsh words sounding so gentle as the last clang of the biscuit tin fell silent in Graceland. ‘Best cut our losses, there’s a good lad.’

Even now I still like to sit here in Taid’s pigeon loft, looking out through the spider’s webs – my grandfather and I tried never to spoil them: *‘All that work.’* We live on the mainland between the bridge and the pier, overlooking this fine view. Ahead of us Menai Woods and the strait itself; beyond, the island and the so-called Millionaire’s Row – white marine residences jutting through the trees. We are not so wealthy, of course, but, facing west, as Taid would remind us daily, we had sunsets for which there was no price; each day the gift of a new canvas, the same view but always a different light.

The picture that evening was bleak. I’d been on the planet eleven years at this point and this was knock number two, the first being when Dad had left much in the same way three years earlier. Vanished. You see, Mister Lloyd had been a gift from Taid when Dad went – displacement therapy they call it – a very generous gift considering the thousands his bloodline was tipped to fetch at auction. From the moment I slipped the identity ring on his tiny leg when he was just ten days old, I was hooked. I suppose because my father had also disappeared, I was somehow placing all my hopes on Mister Lloyd.

‘Don’t frighten him,’ Taid warned. ‘Otherwise you won’t be friends for life.’

Quite a few years have passed since my tale took place,

this 'bloody-minded' search for Mister Lloyd. Bloody-minded was Mam's term for it. I can see why now, but at that age it was the only way. I wanted him home! My own homecoming a few years later saw me on a single-carriage train speeding along the north Wales coast. It struck me then I should tell my story as the lofty outline of Bangor flashed like a magic lantern through the leaves in the bright evening sun. The pink haze gave home a curiously grand appearance. Not quite like arriving in Manhattan, you understand, but when we pulled into Bangor station, where Mam was waiting with open arms, you had the impression of somewhere bigger.

I had been inter-railing from one city to the next with Lowri, Gareth and Tim – you'll meet them soon. I took in all the sights as per the itinerary, but I quietly carried out my own survey with a third eye, my pigeon eye, clocking the winged citizens of Europe. I checked for strays with their telltale green rings in the feral crowds, looking for the Mister Lloyds of this world, as I had done in London that year, and longing for a reunion. In snatched moments I had conjured memories and hurriedly, secretly, jotted down reminders in the travel journal my mother had bought me, together with the poster she'd stapled and folded to the inside, and a trigger to it all, the pin-prick to where the search began.

*Kitchen table, a few years earlier. Home, Bangor*

Missing. Lost. We sat in silence overlooking that same view, albeit from lower down the bank than Graceland and the scene double-framed through the glass hatch and the patio

door. The lilac tree needs cutting, I remember thinking, its white flowers long rusted and obscuring the last of the day's sun. It was a July when Mister Lloyd vanished, during his first international race. One he was meant to win. Like the others he set off from Belgium but four long days had gone by and no sign. I stared at the blank piece of paper, a would-be poster and my feeble attempt to bring him back. The words stopped short, waiting for a decision at the tip of the pen. Mam cut in.

'Mostyn, missing or lost, does it matter? Surely it's more important you get on with it?'

Taid, being the silver surfer he was even then, had registered the numbered ring on [reportstraysonline.com](http://reportstraysonline.com). This would have been the Sunday, according to his records, a small Letts diary which has proved useful for dates and timeline here. But now it was a Thursday and no email had come through. I can't have been much company.

'Just try a few out!' Mam shouted, and seeing more blank sheets fan out, I wrote the first part of the story. Not a literary tour-de-force, perhaps, but I like to think of it as a pivotal piece of writing, nonetheless. Here's a copy:



# LOST

Light Grey and Dark Grey Blue-Bar Racing Pigeon.



Purple head. Green ring on right foot. Breed: Flying Tippler

(G1B07J43777)

Answers to the name of Mister Lloyd (in English or Welsh)  
if found please call Mostyn Price on 01248542865  
Or Log on to Report Strays Online

[www.reportstraysonline.com/misterlloyd](http://www.reportstraysonline.com/misterlloyd)

It needed a photo, of course, not that scribble above, but I held up the piece of paper for a closer inspection, scrutinizing it as an outsider, a passerby. You see, I'd rubbished missing posters in Hampstead, a posh part of London where we stayed one summer, not because I had no sympathy, but because I didn't see the point. And telling good folk you had lost a bird so often called a 'rat with wings' was tantamount to checking yourself into a loony bin.

'This'll make me a laughing stock.' Mam walked to the sink. 'Who, I ask you, is going to tell Mister Lloyd apart from all the millions of pigeons out there? Laughing. Stock.'

Mam didn't answer at first. She had her back to me but I could tell she was looking up at the darkening bank before she resumed the back-and-forth polishing of the new mixer tap handyman Maldwyn had installed earlier that day. 'Well, it might be a bit pie in the sky.'

The pain in the back of my throat was making my eyes water.

'Oh, that's it. You all think I'm mad! What is the point in you making me write this?'

The polishing stopped. 'Because, young man,' she said with her J-Cloth brandished in my direction, 'I'd like you to do something, if only for you to get it out of your system!'

'Oh ay, and I suppose you'd like me to snap out of it!' My fist landed on the unfinished piece of paper and swiped it aside. It flew off the table – we both watched – landing with quiet dignity on the quarry tiles.

'Snap Out of It': our family motto, the very utterance of which brought about some unintended truce. Mam walked over to the kitchen table, pointedly stepping over my

outburst, and sat down, staring. We did this now and again, the two of us looking out for a spasm, a quiver, maybe a tightening of the lip, anything that suggested the other was about to buckle. Mam won.

‘Hallelujah. It’s nice to see a smile back on your face.’

I nodded.

‘Look, I know *you* probably think that no one’s going to be able to tell him apart, but there are others like you and Taid who might.’

It was a reasoned argument but not much comfort when I considered Mister Lloyd could have been anywhere between Bangor High Street and Belgium. My stomach simmered. All I knew for certain was that life wasn’t going to be easy for Mam with me like this.

I considered my options. A mission to Belgium was unlikely, loath as I was to accept this. Yet sitting and waiting, with only a parish-style poster and an unresponsive online appeal, hardly felt like progress. For the last three years, through word and deed, I had devoted my love and affection to that bird, forging trust through his training, believing, like Taid, such reverence essential for a really outstanding performance. We had a connection but it had not been enough and I had failed. I looked down and caught sight of the white sheet of paper lying on the floor. I turned my gaze back up. ‘I can’t give up, Mam.’

‘I know, Mostyn bach,’ she said, throwing a coaster in the fruit bowl. ‘There’s not a day goes by—’ She flicked open a Sunday supplement and gave out a small laugh. ‘There was a time when not an hour went by.’

Three years earlier I too had lived through the hell. But at least I’d had Mister Lloyd to keep me going. True, Mam

had me to get her through but deep down I knew it unlikely I'd ever grasp the enormity of her loss, nor she mine. All we could do was try to understand. We didn't always succeed.

'Does it get better?'

'You just get better at it,' she suggested, purposelessly cradling pens in the curve of the magazine. 'Listen, cariad, it's not as if Mister Lloyd is a missing person.'

I didn't say anything.

'Just *try* and carry on. For me,' she pleaded, her soft cheek docked in the palm of her hand and pushing the folds of her skin. I saw Nain in her, her own mother. 'Go to school, sit this week out. It might make the waiting – well, less agonizing. Before you know it, it'll be the summer holidays and then—'

'We've got to go and find him!'

'Not without some clue as to where he is! I'm done with wild goose chases.'

'And I'm done with vanishing tricks.'

'Right.' Mam got up and walked to the door, gently side-stepping my pathetic effort. 'When you said Mister Lloyd was your Racing Pigeon—'

'Yes, racing – not some feral—'

'Don't you mean *is*, Mostyn bach?' she cut in, before walking into the dark of the hallway.

'Is,' I echoed. Of course! Hurriedly I retrieved the poster and wiped it clean with my sleeve. There it was, my little flyer and, yes, it definitely needed a picture. I opened Mam's laptop in the dining room, called up the web and scrolled down Favourites. Keen to print off the same photograph as we had used for the online bulletin, one of Taid's and the most handsome of my Flying Tippler, I signed in to Report

Strays Online with my username, The Winged Athlete, and password. We had specified in the site's settings that we were to be notified of any progress by email, but I was glad of any excuse. There it was: my page and said image.

Naturally I'd hoped to find good news greeting me but I had put on a face that was ready for bad. I clicked on Mister Lloyd's page, scanned the main bulk; all seemed in order. I scrolled down to the visitor counter and saw it was up to ninety-seven. I was impressed. A browse to the right showed me nine users had recommended the page to other sites and four had liked it with a thumbs-up, but there was still no news. Ping! A new window burst onto the screen, making me sit back. Someone had left me a Track, someone going by the name Misterlloydfanclub.

Mister Lloyd didn't have a fan club. Up to this point I'd believed I was his only fan. Who was it claiming his name? This being cyber-world, it could be genuine concern or a cruel prank. My eyes darted to the door then up to the ceiling, Mam pottering upstairs, ruling herself out. Looking back to the screen, I swallowed hard and clicked on the profile. Blank image and no info. Nothing except a green dot telling me they were online. What a fool – my image bandied to a screen elsewhere and users laughing at my world. Dry mouthed, I clicked on Send Message and had just begun to type *Hello there* when the page refreshed itself and the green dot turned red.

'Drat,' I cursed at the screen. 'I was sending you a message!'

Misterlloydfanclub had gone offline. My fingers tapped nervously at the mouse.

Someone was watching my progress.

## II

### *Trafalgar Square, London*

**C**ome quickly, fly with me. We will do the introductions in due course but for now let's fly in to see him, take a closer look. There, do you see? Oh, he must be so dizzy with all those lights, squatting on his perch. Yes, it's definitely Mister Lloyd plumped on that ledge. His appearance does suggest to the casual passer-by that he is comfortable in his new home. An expert eye, one such as Mos— *Mos... tyn*, am I right? Yes, an expert eye such as Mostyn's, for example, would see beyond this veil. Look how bewildered Mister Lloyd is, thin and worn out. He fears the trauma of the journey that brought him here has eroded his sense of home. This is the worst aspect of the domestic pigeon going missing; I have seen it countless times. No, don't worry, we won't frighten him. We can't frighten him. We are invisible to him and we are here to observe only but I promise I will translate as much as I can; after all, I am an interpreter – of sorts. Yes, yes, introductions later and, yes, we will go back to that point where he began his journey. I'll take you there; it is my job, you see, but for now we are in London, Trafalgar Square, in fact, for this is the strange world where he has landed.

It's noisy, isn't it? Nothing we can do, I'm afraid. And no, it's not cold as such, but it is draughty where he is perched. No roof, no box, no seeds and no Mostyn. (I'm getting the hang of his name now.) Anyway, look at Mister Lloyd; how the memory of Graceland must pound him on that Portland stone ledge as he contemplates his new fate as the Accidental Quitter. Dorian called him that – you will meet him – his new so-called friend. Dorian is also a pigeon, a feral one, and I've decided on that name for him. I'm rather pleased with it! But, yes, back to Mister Lloyd, who is wondering how he ended up here and whether this is his life from now on. Dorian has no answer, of course; he just told him he was a quitter and scarpered straight for some chips; he was late for an appointment down in Soho or some such place. Soho is a meaningless name to Mister Lloyd, of course, but I am the go-between for you – the translator – to give you an idea of where they are and how they're feeling. I can tell you life in the capital is proving hard for Mister Lloyd. Let's face it, we all have feelings, don't we?

He looks down at the hustling humans. This is what you are to him but there is one amongst you who is different, much more dear. Mostyn. He's looking for Mostyn. Peculiar name, isn't it? Very north Wales, but that's why I've brought you here to see him: to connect. They are connected. I'm not sure if we can bring them together, mind. That is up to Mister Lloyd and Mostyn. It is their determination that, we hope, will do that, and we cannot interfere in the minds and the will of others.

**We are here to observe. All we can do is follow Mister Lloyd until we know he is somewhere safe. But be warned; once that is the case, my job here will be done and I will have to fly off to the next pigeon fancier that calls on me. At that point you will need to put your trust in fate.**

**They're obsessives, you know, these fanciers.**