



# The King of Rain

## a novelette by Mark Chadbourn

### Foreword

"The King of Rain" was my attempt to do a traditional ghost story - but with a twist and a modern setting - as I've always enjoyed the work of MR James and Shirley Jackson. The inspiration came from a trek in the Peak District I did with a few old friends.

We hadn't seen each other for years, but in the strained atmosphere of the walk in harsh conditions a few unpleasant character traits and secret histories emerged. We haven't spoken since...

## The King of Rain

It was raining like it had been raining forever. Not the pregnant, silky drops of summer rain, nor the icy bullets of winter storm. It was inconsequential rain, nothing rain, ever-present in the background, a sheet of grey that dampened the spirits as much as it soaked through every item of clothing. All the greens and golds and browns were washed out of the landscape as we trudged relentlessly across the sheep-clipped grass through the gorse towards the looming high lands which lay heavy against the steel clouds. It wasn't the best time to be there, in that twilight zone after the dog days of summer when the world turned away from the light, but we'd agreed to do it for John, and although the thought was in all our heads, he made it plain there was no turning back.

"Hang on a minute." Gordon Broxtowe was wheezing like he smoked sixty a day while he leaned on the wooden staff he'd bought down in the village. Admittedly the climb had been steep so far, but we were still only fifteen minutes out of Edale and the worst part still lay ahead. I'd seen the High Peak walk John had mapped out and it looked treacherous.

"Come on, Gordon," Phil snapped in his usual irritable manner. "We've only got one weekend, for Christ's sake. I'd like to be home by Christmas."

Gordon gave *that* smile. You could tell he thought it was winning but it irritated the hell out of everybody else.

"The first rule of hill walking is to go at the speed of the slowest member, Phil." Gordon took off his silver-framed glasses and wiped the raindrops off them. It seemed pretty futile, but that was Gordon; he had an almost pathological urge to waste time, words, anything, like some circumlocutory barrister who was getting paid by the minute. The rain skidded off the bald dome at the front of his head and slicked the greasy, ginger curls at the back of his scalp before eventually rivuleting round to soak his beard. In the wan light his skin glowed a sickly white. It was hard to see what his wife had been attracted to - he couldn't even affirm *personality* in his defence.

Phil turned away from him, cursing under his breath, and John flashed

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