

Magenta Presents...  
The Yellow Necktie  
Written by Mason Ball

Magenta and Bernard framing  
Written by Lindsay Sharman

A Long Cat Media Production

(CREAKING DOOR)

M - Greetings, fans of the esoteric...

(LIGHTNING CRACK)

and welcome to...

(MAGENTA PRESENTS STING)

Whispered voice – Magenta Presents.

M - This episode, we are thrilled present a new and quite horrifying tale: The Yellow Necktie by Mason Ball.

But before all that, we recently invited the creators of Ghosted to our humble mansion, to interview them about the truth behind the haunted light house. And goodness me, what a talented and good-looking pair they were, and what a life-changing conversation we had! Such profound insights into the nature of existence itself! Such hilarious anecdotes! And of course we recorded the whole thing for you, our dear listener, so without further ado, here is--

B – (interrupts, whispers) Ummmmm. Magenta. Magenta.

M – Shhh Bernard! I'm trying to introduce the segment where we chat to the creators of Ghosted.

B – Yes, but sadly we can't play the recording of our chat with the creators of Ghosted.

M – Why not?

B – Because there's nothing on the tape.

M – What do you mean, there's nothing on the tape. Oh Bernard, did you forget to press record on the dictaphone?

B – No, no, I pressed record. And I checked the tape afterwards, it was all there. But when I went back to it this morning... it was blank. Someone... or something... had wiped the recording.

M – Something? What kind of something?

B – (grim) I don't know. I think... I think it's this house.

(LIGHT FITTING BZZZZS (like in Ghosted) )

B - Ever since we moved in... there's something not... quite... right...

(The radio comes on, playing GIVE US A SMILE LOVE. Bernard GASPS, Magenta SHRIEKS.)

M – Bloody hell! I almost shat a brick! I wish it wouldn't do that. Jesus Christ. Alexa, stop the music.

(doesn't stop, gets LOUDER MORE DISTORTED)

M - Alexa, I said: stop playing silly buggers right now or I'm going to--

(music off)

M- Thank you! I'm sorry, Bernard, what were you saying before?

B – I was just saying, because the house is haunted, the electrics are being very problematic.

M – I noticed!

B – Do you know, I think spirits and the undead and so forth might charge the particles in the air around them like a magnetic field around a magnet, or maybe they themselves exist as charged particles, who knows... but the upshot is, everything keeps flicking on and off, and it's very annoying.

M – Oh, why did we buy a haunted mansion on a bleak windswept moor.

B - Because it was cheap.

M – SO cheap. Here's a little tip for any house-hunting listeners: you would not believe how much money you can get taken off the asking price if the walls start to bleed during the survey.

B – Yes, that was good luck, wasn't it? And remember when the estate agent was showing us the bathroom, and the old woman with no face crawled out of the toilet? That was another 50K off, at least!

M – At least! I mean, I can't bring myself to exorcise her, after that! Seems a bit ungrateful, doesn't it. 50K! You know what; this house has at least 12 bathrooms, we can just brick that one up and leave her to it.

B – Good idea. We don't need 12 toilets anyway.

M - We've only got two bottoms.

B - Gosh, that leaves 11 toilets still to renovate. Do you think this place is a bit big for just us?

M – Mmm, as a renovation project, Magenta Manor does present a unique challenge.

B – It certainly does. What on earth are we going to do with the indoor chapel?

M – Turn it into a squash court?

B – But what about the servant's quarters, and the attic full of china dolls, and the basement and the

banqueting hall and--

M – Oh I love the banqueting hall! (to audience) We've parked our caravan right smack bang in the middle of it. The caravan's where we're living while we renovate.

B – That's right, and in fact, that's where we are right now this second. Safe inside our 1972 Sprite Musketeer; 14 foot of curvaceous moulded fibreglass. Mmmm!

M - It's very cosy but a little cramped of course, so when we have podcast guests staying overnight, we put them up in the East Wing, in the Red Rooms.

B – Yes, called as such because of the aforementioned –

B / M - ...bleeding walls.

M – Exactly. The Red Rooms have the best views onto the bleak windswept moors.

BONG BONG OF CREEPY CLOCK.

M - Oh! Is it that time already? Mason Ball will join us in the caravan any moment now, to read the very first short story of Magenta Presents.

B – Should we give him a little introduction?

M – Oh yes, we should.

(Ambient DRONE)

M – But what can one say about Mason; a man with many faces. The author of the novel *The 35 Timely and Untimely Deaths of Cumberland County*. The award-winning host of the double R Club in London. A creature performer on *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* and *The Last Jedi*. Never heard of them, I don't know. And of course, a dear friend of ours. Bernard and I first met him – and his wife – many years ago, at a key party.

B – Maybe you should explain what a key party is, darling.

M – I thought everyone knew what a key party is. Alright. (sexy, coy) A key party is when a group of consenting adults meet at someone's house; there are canapes and cocktails, and then, when the atmosphere is positively fizzing with expectation, each member of the party puts a key into a bowl.

(CHUCKLES)

B – Maybe you should explain what the keys do, my dear.

M – Really? Seems a little obvious, but if you insist. The keys are of mysterious origin and esoteric purpose. So it might be a key you dug up at a crossroads on a moonlit night, or a key handed down from generation to generation but what it unlocks, nobody knows, or a key to a door that disappears and reappears according to the movements of the stars, you know, fairly standard stuff. What was our key that night, Bernard, I forget?

B – It was a key that was also the box that it unlocked. A sort of two in one that nobody could figure out how to use.

M – Oh yes, that's right. Bit weird, wasn't it. We found it in that tomb didn't we? You know, the one we had to hide in when we were chased by the eh...

B – Oh yes...

M – But anyway, that's a story for another time. Back to the key party. So what happens is, the keys go in a bowl, and then one by one, each person closes their eyes, picks out a new key, and that's your key to do with what you will until the next key party.

B – And then everyone has sex with each other.

OMINOUS KNOCK on the caravan door.

M – Oh, that'll be Mason! It's time. And so, dear listeners...

B – Magenta Presents...

M – a short story by Mason Ball. The Yellow Necktie...

(EERIE MUSIC)

Mason - A man walked into a tailors. His first thought was that he didn't think that places like that existed anymore. All that dark timber, row on row of tiny shelves, wood-framed glass display cabinets strewn with points of light reflected in the polished jewels of tie pins and cufflinks. Those old-fashioned mannequins without heads, each neck terminating instead in a globular, polished wooden finial; memories of staircases in old houses, old films, the end of handrails.

Each mannequin wore an immaculate construction in wools, in worsted serges, in herringbone tweeds; gimlet-eyed brass buttons followed the customer about the room.

Outside, the shop had looked like a 1930s postcard, its name in red/orange neon against a black, vitreous marble: Abbott & Sons.

The door had knocked against a small bell as he entered, the shop interior beyond a dusky womb of pocket squares and button-braces, clothes brushes, ties, cravats, and the kind of measured quiet usually reserved only for libraries, or chapels.

Beyond the glass countertop, an old, grey, kempt and Brylcreemed gentleman appeared from a night-blue curtained portal. The old man was every inch a tailor: sans jacket, pale pearl pinstripe shirtsleeves and a navy waistcoat (buttoned), a dark patterned tie woven through with veins of burgundy; a tape measure hung about his shoulders. He smiled, perhaps a tiny bow of the head.

“Welcome, sir,” said the tailor.

The man smiled in reply, absentmindedly fingering a rack of flame-coloured cravats.

“If there's anything I can do to help you,” the old man went on, yet seemingly addressing the shop rather than the man himself, “please do not hesitate.”

“Thanks,” replied the man, “Just looking.”

The tailor smiled a smile that forced his eyes into narrow slots, yet he did not move. He stood stock still as the man browsed. A strangeness settled on the room, an awkwardness. The man fancied he could still hear the ring of the doorbell, distant, faded yet piercing, threaded quietly through the silence of the shop, the sound of the traffic from outside. People passed by the window.

In the back of the shop, behind the night-blue curtain, a sudden sound broke the quiet, the sound of something falling, perhaps someone; another employee maybe, or a stack of shirt boxes pushed over by a draught. The tailor didn't move, stayed standing, facing into the shop, his smile lessened perhaps but still present. The quiet stretched out.

The man moved to a table display, an array of ties fanned out in a starburst design; stripes and checks, plaids and crests he didn't recognise or know the significance of. He picked up the only plain one on the table, studied it carefully. Plain in colour certainly, yet the weave of the fabric was fine and rich, and gave the colour a certain depth, a look of quality.

"What colour would say this was?" asked the man, "Lemon?"

The tailor slid from behind the counter and was at his side. "Certainly, sir. Lemon. Citron. A fine necktie. Wonderful depth of colour, exquisitely made."

The tailor turned the tie over as he spoke, revealing a soft-pink silk tip lining, diamond-shaped, on the reverse. "And if I'm not very much mistaken that particular item also falls within the purview of our sale."

"You have a sale on?" asked the man, glancing about the shop, "I didn't see any signs. In the window, or-"

"The owner, sir," interrupted the tailor, again the smile that closed his eyes, "does not favour gauche or ostentatious signage. Fifty percent off that beautiful necktie, sir."

The way the tailor looked at him as he spoke made him think that the tailor might be blind, or at least of limited eyesight, something out of focus, something that looked through him, ever so slightly to one side of him, rather than at him.

"Well it is a lovely tie," said the man.

"That it is, sir," said the tailor.

"I'll take it," said the man.

Back at home, the man kissed his wife hello, hung the lemon tie with the few others he had in his wardrobe, and went about his evening; he ate dinner with his family, did the dishes, put his son to bed, fell asleep in front of the television, brushed his teeth, climbed into bed with his wife and by morning he was dead.

His wife's screams woke his son.

The eventual coroner's report was inconclusive. Died in his sleep, everyone said. Had anyone thought to look for it, the yellow necktie would not have been found, for it had quite vanished.

(RAIN)

A man walked into a tailors. Truth was, he did so merely because it had started to rain and he had

forgotten his umbrella; or, more accurately, he had deliberately left his umbrella at home. Truth was, he hated carrying one, felt foolish somehow, ridiculous, perhaps even less masculine. He felt absurd thinking this way but what was he to do? You felt how you felt and that was that. And this shop in which he now found himself, this shop was nothing if not masculine, but not boorish or loud in its demeanour, no, it was as warm and comforting as it was austere, as reassuring as it was intimidating. Fixtures and fittings in that deepest brown that, as a child, he'd always called gravy-wood; the browniest brown. No doubt his grandfather would have felt at home in such a place, and there was a man who he would bet had never held an umbrella.

The man supposed he should at least buy something to justify his sheltering from the rain, but he wasn't sure he'd know where to start. Had that been a flash of lightning from outside?

An impeccably dressed old man stood behind the counter, a tape measure hung about his neck.

"Welcome, sir," said the old man.

"Hello."

"If there's anything I can do to help you," the old man went on, "please do not hesitate."

"Thanks," replied the man, adding, "this weather."

"Indeed, sir," said the old man, staring strangely. The man knew he'd have to buy something, if only because the old man's oddly disengaged stare unnerved him, and the headless mannequins had begun to make him feel uncomfortable.

"This weather," he repeated under his breath. A small, round table of neckties stood out in the shop's gloom, a fan of differing styles, colours and designs. He needed a new tie. Did he need a new tie? He picked up the plainest one among them and studied it.

"I could do with a new tie," he said. The old man's face creased in a smile that obscured his eyes. "What is this colour, mustard?"

It was yellow, and he felt pretentious for not simply referring to it as such. The old man glided soundlessly from behind the counter and was at his side.

"Certainly, sir. Mustard. Moutarde. A fine necktie. Wonderful depth of colour, exquisitely made," said the old man, adding "and half price today."

The shop bore down on the man. The old man's smile intensified, almost seemed to phosphoresce in the gloom. The rain seemed to be easing off and so the man quickly bought the tie and left.

Returning home, already running late, the man threw the tie he hadn't really wanted on an armchair, hurriedly changed clothes and headed out for dinner. Home again, past midnight, he stumbled through his night-time regime, mumbling about the evening's disappointing date, drank half a pint of water and passed out on the bed, shirt half undone, snoring. Morning found him dead.

It took a week for his body to be found, by his brother, the only other person with a key. The eventual coroner's report was inconclusive. In the subsequent compiling of, and selling on, of the man's belongings, no yellow tie appeared on the inventory.

A planarian is one of many flatworms of the traditional class Turbellaria. Planarians move by

beating cilia on the ventral dermis, allowing them to glide along on a film of mucus. Some also may move by undulations of the whole body, by the contractions of muscles built into the body membrane. Well, a necktie moves much like a flatworm.

A man walked into a tailors. He was lost and had been walking in circles for what felt like hours. He hadn't quite understood exactly what kind of shop it was until he'd walked inside and stood there, the bell still ringing about the antiquated stillness of the place, among the fabrics, across the wooden floors, ricocheting softly between the headless mannequins.

The room was old-fashioned, quaint even, the words burnt sienna came and went. It was like a scene from an old photograph, like a museum diorama of sorts, sepia almost, bizarrely anachronistic and yet also familiar somehow. He stood there, a creased scrap of blue paper in hand.

"Hello?" he tried.

After a short pause an old tailor emerged sharply through a dark curtain behind the counter.

"Welcome, sir," said the tailor, inclining his head in greeting.

"Hello, sorry to bother you," the man held out the scrap of blue paper, "I was wondering if you could tell me where-"

"You're lost," interrupted the tailor.

"I'm afraid so," said the man.

"May I see?"

The tailor circled the counter and took a few steps towards him, his hands lightly touching fixtures and fittings as he went, at which point he stopped, hand outstretched.

"May I see?" he repeated.

The man wasn't quite sure if the tailor was quite looking at him. He handed him the piece of paper and the tailor looked at it intently, or at least appeared to.

"Yes, sir. You need to go out of the door, turn left, take the third street on your right and you cannot miss it."

"Really?"

"Yes, sir. One is easily lost around here. Old streets around here. A veritable maze. Circuitous."

The man went through the directions in his head: turn left, third street on the right.

"Thank you."

"Not at all."

The tiniest of bows. The man turned to leave and in so doing, collided with a low table of neckties, scattering them across the polished floorboards.

"I'm sorry, clumsy of me," said the man, embarrassed, hurriedly picking up the ties, righting the table.

"Not at all, sir, not at all. Accidents happen," said the tailor, though he made no move to help, but instead stood there, staring ahead, hands clasped at his waist.

"I'm afraid I've ruined your display," said the man.

"Not at all."

There was a pause. The man was standing there in the dimness, holding a yellow necktie. Still the tailor did not move. Eventually the man spoke.

"I'm sorry but- What- What colour would you say this tie is? Canary, is it?"

And the tailor was beside him.

"Canary indeed, sir. Canari," and then quietly, almost inaudibly, "canari dans la mine de charbon."

"This is-" the man was still studying the tie, oddly fixated, "this tie is really quite-"

"Half price today," said the tailor.

Once home, the man showed the yellow necktie to his wife, who mocked him gently. When was the last time he'd worn a suit, let alone a tie? She asked. She had a point, and they both laughed as he told the story of his day, of becoming unaccountably lost, of the strange shop, of the unnerving tailor, and of the purchase of the tie. That night, before bed, he coiled the yellow necktie carefully and put in in his sock drawer.

That night he had a terrible dream.

In the dream he found himself lost in a dreadful place of absolute darkness, that is, and this thought occurred to him in the dream, he was either in a place of absolute darkness, or he had gone utterly blind. He reached out in the dream, yet felt nothing and saw nothing. The blackness fell on him like a thick blanket and he began to find it difficult to breathe, and then he began to find it difficult to move, limbs numb and unresponsive in all that thick inky nothingness, and as he sank further down into that place of darkness and of suffocation, further and further and down and down, as he felt himself try to cry out yet found himself unable to do so, and in growing anxiety and in mounting fright he woke and it was morning.

As he dressed, when he opened his sock drawer, he noticed that the tie was gone. He looked and he looked. He asked his wife had she moved it? She had not. The tie appeared to have simply vanished. As he put on his coat to leave for work, the creased scrap of blue paper fell from his pocket and he picked it up; it was blank. He turned it over. Blank on both sides, no address, not a mark on it and no sign that any mark or address had ever been written there.

That lunchtime saw him back at Abbott & Sons, his intention to replace the tie. He felt a little ridiculous as his wife had been right, when did he ever wear a tie? But it had been quite a tie, and who knew, maybe he'd become the sort of man who wore ties. Again, the odd familiarity of the shop's interior, the wood and the dimness and the mannequins and the fabrics, but above all that, as if a higher note sung in a choir of old refrains, of old-fashioned reassurances and charms: a sensation of escalating panic and of foreboding.



“Hello?” he tried, though his voice cracked a little in his throat, “Hello?”

Nothing stirred. The man crossed to the table display of ties and there, among the stripes and the plaids, the diamond patterns, the embroidery and busy designs, a plain yellow necktie. For no reason he could quite put his finger on, he was suddenly convinced that it was in fact the same yellow tie that he'd bought the day before, that he'd rolled up and placed in his sock drawer, and that that very morning had been missing. The same tie. He picked it up, turned it over in his hands. It was impossible, and yet-

“The same tie,” he whispered to the empty shop.

“It is indeed,” said the tailor, suddenly beside him, “the very same tie.”

The man recoiled, backing away from the old man and into a rack of cravats.

“The same- tie?” he said again. The tailor stooped to pick up the tie where the man had dropped it, carefully folding it as he did so.

“Yes,” said the tailor emphatically, almost aggressively.

“I don't understand,” said the man. The tailor studied him, smiled. “I don't-”

“Think of it as a yellow ribbon of sorts.”

“What-”

“Or a canary ribbon, if you prefer.”

“I don't-”

“Welcome home,” said the tailor, staring through him, “we have waited so long, our search fruitless for so long. So many contenders who were not you.”

“Contenders?” asked the man, head swimming.

“Contenders, yes. Unwitting applicants you might say. Fear not, they have been removed.”

The man had a fleeting memory of lying in bed the night before, the sensation of something moving slowly up his body, of wriggling horribly into his mouth, there curling into a ball, fidgeting for a time, leeching the moisture from his tongue, crawling down into his throat, choking him, feeling about inside him, investigatorial, insistent, before crawling back out between his teeth, over his chin, down his body, over the side of the bed and away into the dark house and into the night.

“I don't understand,” said the man.

“O I think you do,” replied the tailor.

“I- I came into this shop yesterday-”

“You returned home to this shop yesterday.”

“Returned,” echoed the man.

“Returned,” repeated the tailor, “don’t you remember me? This place? Did it not seem familiar? This was your home.” The man placed his head in his hands. “This is your home,” said the tailor.

“I don’t understand I don’t understand I don’t understand. I know who I am.”

“Do you indeed?”

“I have a home. I have a wife.” The tailor’s mouth buckled, almost a sneer.

“You are an imposter, a pretender, and what self-respecting husband would want his wife to be married to such a creature?”

“I know who I am.”

“Your escape was... unfortunate,” went on the tailor, “but you’ve had your fun. You’ve had your jollies. It’s time to come home now, son,” the tailor gestured about the shop, “your brothers have missed you so.”

The mannequins stood and stared, without eyes, without faces.

“Son?” asked the man weakly, through growing tears and closing throat. The tailor beckoned to the man.

“Now let’s get you behind the curtain to the stockroom and get that head off.”

(MAGENTA PRESENTS music)

M – You have been listening to Mason Ball reading his story, *The Yellow Necktie*. To find more of Mason's work, including his novels, short story collections, fairytales, poetry and more, visit [Masonball.co.uk](http://Masonball.co.uk). See you soon fans, of the esoteric.

Whispered voice – Magenta presents.