



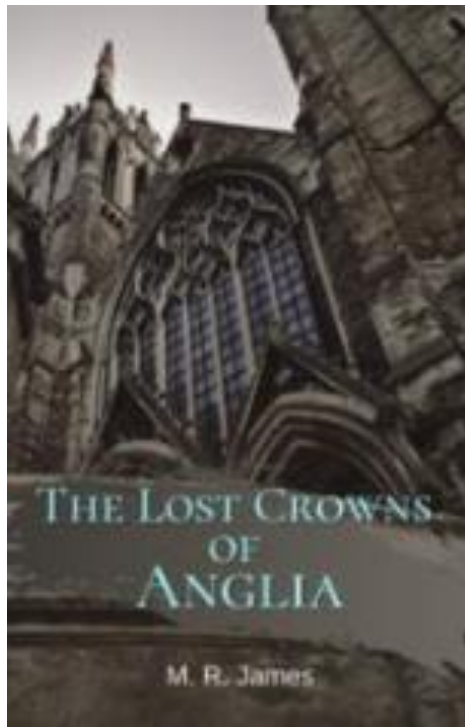
# Learn English Through Stories

A1 Stories

Elementary Level

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## The Lost Crowns of Anglia

Seaburgh is a small town by the sea on the east coast of England. This part of England is called East Anglia. I went to Seaburgh for a holiday in 1919 with my friend, Henry Long.

There were few visitors in Seaburgh that year. There was only one other visitor in our hotel. His name was Paxton. Paxton was a tall, thin young man. He looked worried and unhappy.

One evening, when Henry and I were sitting in the hotel lounge, Paxton came up to us.

'Excuse me,' said Paxton, 'I must speak to somebody. Something strange has happened to me. I'd like to talk to someone about it. May I talk to you?'

'Of course,' I said. 'Please sit down and tell us about it.'

'A few days ago,' Paxton said, 'I went for a walk to Freston. Freston is a village about five miles from here. I took my camera with me. The church at Freston has an unusual door. I wanted to photograph it. There are three wooden crowns on the door.'

The village priest came out of the church. I asked him about the three crowns on the door. The priest told me a strange story.

'Many years ago,' said Paxton, 'Anglia was a kingdom. The last king of Anglia died over a thousand years ago. When he died, his three crowns disappeared. The people believed that the crowns were magic. They believed that the crowns were buried in different places. The crowns guarded the coast against enemies from across the sea.'

'About three hundred years ago, one of the crowns was found. It was secretly sold - no one knows what happened to it after that.'

'What about the other two crowns?' asked Henry.

'The second crown was washed into the sea. It was never found again.'

'What about the third crown?' I asked Paxton. 'Was it ever found?'

'I'll tell you about that,' answered Paxton. 'There was a family here called Ager. The people believed that the Agers were guardians of the third crown. The last Ager died a year ago, in 1918. He had no children. I found his grave in the churchyard - I wrote down what was written on the gravestone.'

WILLIAM AGER

Died

21th December 1918

Aged

28 years

'Later, I went to the bookshop in Freston. By chance, I found an old book dated 1740. Inside it were some lines of poetry:

'Nathaniel Ager is my name,  
I own the hill above the sand,  
All Ager's duty is the same:  
To guard the crown that guards the land.  
When I am dead and in my grave,  
And all my bones are rotten,  
My sons shall keep my name alive:  
It shall not be forgotten.'

'I bought the book and walked back towards Seaburgh. I found the house where William Ager had lived. The house is half-way between Freston and Seaburgh.

'Above the house is a small hill. There is a circle of trees on top. I knew that this was the place!'

'The place for what?' I asked. Henry and I were becoming tired of this long story.

'The place where the crown was buried,' said Paxton.

'And did you find this crown?' I asked in a tired voice.

Paxton's answer surprised us both.

'I have it in my room,' he said. 'Come and see it, then you'll believe me.'

Henry and I did not believe him. We thought that Paxton was not telling the truth. But we stood up and followed him.

Paxton led us to his room. He opened a suitcase. Inside the suitcase was something wrapped in newspapers. He unwrapped the newspapers. There was a crown!

The crown was made of silver. It was a circle of metal with four jewels. I put out my hand to touch it.

'Don't touch it!' Paxton cried and held the crown away from us.

'Why not?' I asked in surprise. 'We won't take it from you!'

'I'm sorry,' said Paxton. 'It's because...'

He looked round the room in a strange way. 'Since I took the crown, I haven't been alone.'

'You haven't been alone?' Henry said. 'What do you mean?'

Then Paxton told us more of his story.

'After I'd been to Ager's house, I came back here. I got a spade and a lantern. When it was dark, I went back to the hill above the house. I started to dig a hole at the top of the hill, in the centre of the circle of trees.'

'As I was digging,' Paxton went on, 'I was sure someone was watching me. Once, I thought I saw someone. But I wasn't sure. The person was always behind me.'

'Once, I felt someone pulling my coat. But then I found the crown. At that moment, I heard a terrible cry behind me.'

'Who cried out?' I asked.

'I couldn't see anyone,' Paxton answered. 'But I think I know.' He pointed to a book on a table beside the bed. 'Every time I come back to my room the old book is open.'

I looked at the table. The old book was open at the first page. I saw the name - William Ager 1890.

'So you think that William Ager is following you?' I said. 'But William Ager is dead.'

'It's the ghost of William Ager,' said Paxton. 'He won't leave me alone. He wants the crown, but he isn't strong enough to take it from me.'

'And what will you do with the crown?' I asked.

'I'm going to put it back,' said Paxton.

'If you put it back, will William Ager's ghost leave you alone?' I asked.

'I don't know,' said Paxton. 'But I must try.'

I saw that Paxton was very, very frightened.

‘Then we shall help you put it back tonight,’ I said.

As I spoke, a shadow moved in the room. Paxton saw it and looked terrified.

That night, as we left the hotel together, I spoke to the hotel porter.

‘It’s a warm night,’ I said. ‘We’re going for a walk. We may be back very late.’

‘I’ll wait for you, sir,’ said the porter. ‘I won’t lock the front door until you return. The other gentleman isn’t staying in the hotel, is he?’

‘What other gentleman?’ I asked.

‘The gentleman who’s with Mr Paxton,’ said the porter.

‘No,’ I replied quickly. I did not tell the others what the porter had said. But I had seen it too. When the three of us were together, I thought I saw another person in the room with us.

It took us half an hour to walk to William Ager’s house. The road went along beside the beach. The beach was a lonely place at night.

We saw the hill above the beach. The sea was calm. The moon was shining behind the trees on the hill.

We climbed to the top of the hill. We had forgotten to bring a spade. Paxton did not care. He began to dig with his hands.

As soon as he had dug the hole, Paxton put the crown in it. He covered the crown with earth.

‘It’s back,’ he said in a loud voice. ‘Will you leave me in peace now, William Ager?’

We heard nothing. But Paxton turned to us and said, ‘William Ager says - "Never!"’

We took Paxton back to the hotel. He walked in silence, looking down at the ground.

‘Don’t worry,’ I said. ‘Everything will be all right tomorrow. We’ll put you on a train to London. As soon as you are on the train you will forget all about this.’

‘He’ll never let me go,’ Paxton said.

The next morning, Henry knocked on my door before seven o’clock.

‘Let’s go and have breakfast,’ he said. ‘Then we’ll take Paxton to the railway station.’

I got dressed and went downstairs. Henry was waiting for me.

'Have you seen Paxton?' I asked Henry.

'He's not in his room,' he said. 'I thought he was with you!'

We went quickly to the porter.

'Have you seen Mr Paxton this morning?' I asked.

'Yes, sir,' said the porter. 'He went out a couple of minutes ago. In fact, I thought he was with you, sir.'

'With me?' I asked in surprise.

'Yes, sir,' the porter said. 'I thought you were outside the hotel, calling for him. It looked like you, sir. But I was reading the paper.'

'Something strange happened at Freston yesterday.'

'What happened?' I asked.

'A grave was opened at the church,' the porter said. 'The body's disappeared.'

'Whose grave was opened?' I asked.

'A man who used to live here,' the porter replied. 'A strange man, called William Ager.'

Henry and I ran outside. Paxton was on the beach. He was walking quickly and waving to someone. We could not see who he was waving to. There was a thick mist coming from the sea.

As we ran after Paxton, the mist became thicker. In a few seconds, we could not see Paxton. But we saw his footprints in the wet sand. The marks of his shoes were clear.

There were other marks in the sand. They were made by someone who was not wearing shoes. The marks were strange. They were the shape of feet. But they were feet without flesh - only bone.

We called Paxton's name. We thought we heard Paxton call our names. Then we heard a long and horrible scream. I shall never forget the sound of that scream in the mist.

We stopped. We were afraid. We did not want to meet the creature that Paxton had met. We both knew that Paxton was dead.

We walked forward slowly. A few yards away, we found Paxton's body. His mouth was full of sand and stones. His neck was broken.

We heard a strange laugh in the mist. It was not the laugh of a living man. Henry and I were terribly afraid.

The police asked us a lot of questions. They never found out who murdered poor Mr Paxton. Henry and I did not tell the police what we knew. They would not have believed us.

Henry and I did not go back to look for the crown of Anglia. The crown is safe. We did not want to meet the ghost of the guardian - William Ager.

- THE END -