

M R . D I C T A P H O N E



G O R D O N L I S H

I'm telling you now so there will be no questions later.

The name was Rigamarole before it was Dictaphone. It was my grandfather, Morris Rigamarole, who effected the change. There is probably a word for name-change, but I don't know what it is – if, of course, there is one to be known. If there were one and if I knew it, I would use it. Interpellation? It sounds right, but you can't necessarily go by sound, can you? Or can you? No, not interpellation, I'm almost positive of that. No, I really do not think so – but perhaps, perhaps. If I had the energy to consult the big book behind my back, I'd make my way up from my seat, turn with care, and do it. Consult it. But no. I do not have the energy for so exhausting a task any more. Or, rather, the strength. For, behold, I appear to be in possession of energy enough for the undertaking at hand. Namely, the writing of, the recording of, my history. My years as the last of the Dictaphones. As for the Rigamaroles, they had their day. Two generations' worth. Or does one say one and a half? For inasmuch as it was my paternal grandfather (my grandfather on my father's side) who shed the name Rigamarole in favor of Dictaphone, yes, there were not – I'm counting, I am doing the arithmetic. No matter. No, there cannot be a half generation, can

there? It's not one of my strongpoints, arithmetic. Let us forgo further of any historiography of the kind. It is no great thing, the counting of generations. As has been said, "What's in a name?" Mark me, if this be true, then is not the generational perdurance of this or that name not also dismissible? I mean, if what's in a name, then what's in a number, true? You see what I am saying? So, anyway, prior to Rigamarole, the family name was Geebonee. Odd-looking, eh wot? I agree. It was doubtless this that convinced a prior Geebonee to take on, or to take for himself, the name Rigamarole, which sustained itself in the family line for one and a half generations. Or so my calculations would have had it had I carried them out to a sturdy conclusion. Time you were told, unless the writing thus far written has already done so. I am not at all handy with the practical sciences but am terribly able with the metaphysical ones. Words – and their extensions, relations, affiliations, not to mention their interiorities. Ideas and the like. I am terribly excellent at words. Were you to ask me a question having to do with words, I would have the answer for you not only with promptitude but with speed. Or haste, if you prefer. Alacrity! You see what I mean? This is my forte. Plus ideas. These are my fortes. Words and their consorting, or consortium with ideas. This is what I was born to be terribly excellent at. And with flare and flair too. I would have for you the right answer reposing in the right words if you were to put to me a question that solicited and so on. Or were so disposed to. Dispositive. This word is not, I must make all alacrity to tell you, my word. I cannot claim it, or lay claim to it. It is the word, leant upon rather, for my particular taste, far too often and far too greatly, by my best friend, Georgie. A lovely fellow, Georgie. Positively lovely. In every respect. Except, as I have already implied, if not said in so many words, in his tendency to make use of the word "dispositive" rather more often and with far too much stress than the case calls for. To my mind, that is. Still, a lovely chap. Also to my mind. Quite altogether nice, save for that singular regrettable tendency. To be sure, I imagine the word "tendency" is not the best way for me to cite the practice Georgie overuses. Later perhaps. We'll perhaps review the matter as to him (Georgie) later – when I have had time to catch a breather and consider the question in a calmer clime. At my leisure. Or at our leisure. In a leisurely state of mind. Just now, at the moment, as

must be evident to you, everything is at sixes and sevens. One makes a start at the writing of a family history . . . no, erase that. My error. Entirely my error. And for shame, for shame – insofar as was it not an error with words? Well, yes, it was. But does it not, this error – with words, my God, with words – prove my point? For when one makes a start at the writing of one’s history, one undergoes a certain period of pressure. An episode of it. At all events, this is scarcely the occasion for us to look all that deeply into anything not central to our declared course onward, or ahead. You take my meaning? We must concentrate our attention. We must focus it. On the object, or, if you will, our objective. Do you see? To be sure, mentioning Georgie was a woeful, a wretched, an execrable mistake. Monstrous. Yes, Georgie is, indeed, a good friend, one of my better friends, a fellow more or less dear to me, an estimable chap, even, in a certain fashion, one might, in that fashion, say an inestimable person, but my life is my life. I like Georgie, really I do – but this book is devoted to the telling to you the tale of me. It’s my story, you might say. Yes, that’s good. My story. Perhaps the title should take firmer notice of this. We can review the matter, if you would find such a review interesting. Perhaps later. Perhaps when we’ve both had occasion to settle down a bit. Yes, later perhaps. When the pressure has eased, or been eased, or been reduced, or lessened. Mark you, I brought him up, I brought Georgie up, we took hold of his name, as it were, only to remark on his tendency to dwell upon the word “dispositive.” Prior to this, did we not dwell upon there being, or there not being, a word that might be made to replace the words “name change” with? Or, at any rate, words to that effect. I believe we did. Did not the word “interpellation” arise in the heat of that consideration? Or, if you will, context? I believe it did. Yes. I was making, was I not, mention of my dwindling strength. Yes. I was reporting to you, we might even say we are certain of this, apropos of the existence – behind me – of the big book. Yes, of course. It is a terrific book, its exhibiting, as it does, an incomparable compilation of words as to the meanings thereof, or a vast compilation of incomparable meanings as thereof to words – as well as, mark you, an equally vast repertoire of, how shall we say this, synonyms? Sayings of like intent. Ah, how like a bad penny! Intent. Good heavens. I cannot recite the precise saying, no, but the sense of it is,

the intent of the saying is, that such and such keeps turning up in the manner of a bad penny. Which is to say, as a bad – oh, you know, as a penny bent or a penny no longer terribly shiny – as one of those pennies forever to be found, the very penny, among the coins to be discovered reposing in one’s pocket. A moment, if you will. It’s entirely my fault. Getting a shade confused, am I? What set me on this course? Intent. The word “intent.” This is what happens. The very thing. It’s the pressure. Did you not just witness an instance of it? I let my thoughts wander ever so slightly and, by this irruption of momentary inattention, an instant of my letting, if you will, my guard down, if you will, I said “intent” and “tendency,” words an interval ago used and discarded, however long or less long ago words made altogetherly presentable use of and ever so gently, if roughly, discarded, when – all right, that’s quite enough of that. One grows unconcentrated. It’s been more than enough of it, focusless nattering. I am, in a word, confused. You talk, one talks, and then *wham*, or *blam*, or what-have-you, the resounding, it resounds, or, as is said, resonates. Terrible, terrible. You see what I’m saying? One is turned around. One is confounded. And hardly, scarcely, barely realizes it. Talking in circles. If you will. Or willn’t. What one is saying is in the grip of what one has said. You see what I am saying to you, don’t you? It’s a question of control. One has none of it. The words themselves, they have it all. Time one came to one’s senses and took this senselessness into account. I mean, whatever properties the word possesses take possession of the word to come. Did you get that? Fully? Thoroughly? Let us pause to make sure. For surely there is no reason for one to soldier on if one is made to march round-wise and round-wise and thus never in prospect of confronting the enemy, which is death. Or say I said the future, which is death. It is in this sense that there is no next. You do see what I am saying, don’t you? Personally, I find this, dare I say, mazelike. Like a maze? Dare I? It terrifically depressing, no? Discouraging? Deeply. Utterly. No, you know, progression, or progress. I mean to say that what one says jogs, or jiggles, what one has said, ensnaring one. Is this the gyre one’s heard one’s fellows make mention of? It jolly well could be, would you not say? One is trapped in the trap of the trap – lest one not speak. Are you taking all this in? The vertex, the vortex, the cortex, yes? No history. Just Geebonee onward to Rigamarole on-

ward to Dictaphone, or, otherwise – Dictaphone back to Rigamarole
back to Geebonee – and that’s it. Yes, yes, to be sure, of course,
there’s always recourse to one’s adverting to some perfectly work-
able Georgie perhaps but after that, *after that?* – then what!

Georgina?

Time for one to say oh jesus and quit.