Who was Sebastian?

We often read in novels how a seemingly respectable person or family has some terrible secret which has been concealed from strangers for years.

The English language possesses a vivid saying to describe this sort of situation.

The terrible secret is called 'a skeleton in the cupboard'.

At some dramatic moment in the story, the terrible secret becomes known and a reputation is ruined.

The reader's hair stands on end when he reads in the final pages of the novel that the heroine, a dear old lady who had always been so kind to everybody, had, in her youth, poisoned every one of her five husbands.

It is all very well for such things to occur in fiction.

To varying degrees, we all have secrets which we do not want even our closest friends to learn, but few of us have skeletons in the cupboard.

The only person I know who has a skeleton in the cupboard is George Carlton, and he is very proud of the fact.

George studied medicine in his youth.

Instead of becoming a doctor, however, he became a successful writer of detective stories.

I once spent an uncomfortable weekend, which I shall never forget at his house.

George showed me to the guestroom, which, he said, was rarely used.

He told me to unpack my things and then come down to dinner.

After I had stacked my shirts and underclothes in two empty drawers, I decided to hang one of the two suits I had brought with me in the cupboard.

I opened the cupboard door and then stood in front of it, petrified.

A skeleton was dangling before my eyes.

The sudden movement of the door made it sway slightly, and it gave me the impression that it was about to leap out at me.

Dropping my suit, I dashed downstairs to tell George.

This was worse than 'a terrible secret'; this was a real skeleton!

But George was unsympathetic.

“Oh, that,” he said with a smile as if he were talking about an old friend. “That's Sebastian. You forget that I was a medical student once upon a time.”

The writer started to unpack and put his shirts and underclothes into drawers, and then decided to hang a suit in the cupboard.

He opened the cupboard and stood petrified: there, dangling in front of him, was a skeleton.

It was swaying and ready to leap out at him.

He dropped his suit and dashed downstairs to tell George.

George was unsympathetic and told the writer it was Sebastian, a skeleton he had when he was a medical student.

Now that George had explained about the skeleton, I felt better, but I still didn't want to sleep in the room with a skeleton hanging in the cupboard.

I asked George to remove him, but he refused.

'There's nowhere else to put him, said George, 'so he'll have to stay.

I couldn't disagree of course, but the moment I lay down to sleep, I knew it was going to be an uncomfortable night.

In the end, I decided that I would take Sebastian somewhere for the night and bring him back up to my room early in the morning.

So I took him out of the cupboard and walked around the house with him, trying to find somewhere to put him.

George's maid was just going to bed as I walked along the landing.

She saw Sebastian apparently walking around, screamed, and fainted.

She had obviously woken Carlton, who appeared from his bedroom and, when the girl had regained consciousness, explained everything to her.

He accused me of being stupid and sent me and Sebastian back to 'our' room, where I hung him up in the cupboard again.

Imagine my surprise when I picked up one of Carlton's detective stories two years later.

There I was, with Sebastian the skeleton, as the main character in one of his stories for the whole world to read.

Still, he didn't use my real name, so I should be glad of that!

We frequently eat at that restaurant.

He rarely gets up before 11 o'clock.

She always catches the 8 o'clock bus to work.

They never get up early on Sundays.

She taught me to speak English.

He allowed us to park behind his house.

We invited 50 people to the barbecue, but very few came, only 5 in fact.

The next time we had a barbecue, quite a few people came--about 45.

When everybody had finished eating, there was very little (food) left.

There's a little meat left if you'd like some.

She made me do some extra exercises for homework.

The other teacher often lets me hand in my assignments late.

In what respect does fact differ from fiction concerning the secrets that people keep to themselves? They are rarely so terrible as to ruin our reputations if revealed.

Before opening the cupboard door, the writer had put his shirts and his underwear in a couple of drawers.

What was the most frightening thing about the writer's experience? The sight of a skeleton hanging in the cupboard.

“Have you forgotten that I was a medical student once upon a time?”

The guestroom, which, he said, was little used.