

~ October ~

by Fingersmith

Synopsis: Libby Armitage doesn't believe in things that go bump in the night. She also doesn't believe that Jennifer Darby and her have anything in common. But a night vigil at the Falstaff Experience is enough for her to doubt more than her sanity.

Disclaimers: This story contains two ladies that may resemble a couple from a well-known TV show - but I have made them mine a little ... grin. Thank you to all those great writers out there, and to all the people who have supported me in my writing. There is no way I can ever thank you enough. Especially to the one who dissects my stories and tells me to 'cut the crap'.

Sex and Violence: A little of both. A bit of a slap and a bit of a tickle in places. The tickling mainly comes from the above mentioned two ladies ... so if it is illegal for you to read it, or you are underage, you'd better not.

Language: Once again, my filthy mouth has run away with itself. But it is supposed to be a scary story ... Although I have tried to show a bit of loving too, because after all love is what makes the world go round, and it does make you swear too.

This story is set in Stratford upon Avon, and the Falstaff Experience does exist ... and is a creepy place. So if you're ever in England and fancy the life scared out of you, give them a try.

This story was meant to be in the Halloween Special, but I just couldn't seem to finish it in time. Better late than never, eh? Or maybe you have other ideas about that. Grin. Let me know what you think.

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Or if you want to check out my published works <blush> ... here's the link:

[LT Smith](#)

October. The 31st, actually. I know what you're thinking. I do! You're thinking 'ah crap ... it's another Halloween tale that will attempt <and fail miserably> to frighten the crap out of me.'

But. What if I was to tell you this is true? Not a story - but in fact - real? Would that make a difference? Probably not. You would just argue that is what everyone says. All right. I know that everything is fictionalised to a degree in order to call it a story - real events written from a certain slant to conjure images of bumps in the night. Yes. I also know that 'bumps' per se, aren't images as such - but they create an image, don't they? Sound imagery, which is definitely needed to make a scene fuller ...

I think I might have to convince you just a tad more. I will just tell you two more things about

that night. Number one, that night scared the living crap out of me. And finally, the most important bit ...

Do you honestly believe I would tell you that? And you still believe in ghosts? I bet you think you have a soul mate too, don't you? Funny how a few hours can change your mind on just about anything. Well, except George Bush.

Old Hallows Eve ... yadda yadda yadda. The night when <cue scary music> the dead arise ... and bwahah ha ha ha ... witches roam the earth looking for tasty young virgins. So am I, but mine's all year round. And the way my luck was going, I wouldn't find any. I was definitely turning amoebic ... not anaemic ... that's a vampire story, and this one is about many things, but definitely not about vampires. No. Amoebic - gaining the ability to reproduce without any help, which begs the question 'Are amoebas happy?' - At least they always get to sleep on the dry patch.

Carrying on my distorted view of life, I knew one thing, and that thing was deep down I had this longing for something else, and at the time I didn't even know what it was. So let's get back to the story at hand, shall we? Funny thing was, it all started as a dare - an office joke, if you will. Some bright spark decided it would be fun if we did something different for our work's night out ... for Christmas ... in October. I know! When argued with, he just muttered 'Well ... it would be different.' A definite hissing sound as my argument deflated.

After some deliberating and what not, we all decided just to go along with it to shut him up. The place we were visiting was called the Falstaff's Experience, and in the daytime was a living museum - but at night ... shall I make crass spooky noises? Nah. I think you get the message. It was renowned to be in the top three haunted places in Britain, but as I said, I was a sceptic.

Was.

There was a party of twelve of us going, half of which I had never spoken to, and truth be known, I didn't want to. To me, they seemed like a load of wankers. Actually half of them were wankers - the other half were tossers ... well ... nearly all of them. There were a couple of exceptions to the rule, granted, but there was one person that stood out more than the others as being a prime time wankeress. Jennifer Darby. The woman who thought she was the bee's knees and the cat's pjs. She was arrogant, rude and down right pig headed. The rule of three sums her up nicely, well, especially if we add another rule of three to balance it. She was also gorgeous, sexy and off limits, and every time we crossed paths, she would give me a cold look. Who ever thought blue eyes were appealing were nuts. They had nothing behind them - just ... erm ... blueness.

You could say I was bitter and twisted, but you would be wrong. I'm not twisted ... and the bitterness stems from the fact that every time I spoke to her she would answer me with a clipped tone and never make eye contact. I hate that. Need people to acknowledge that you are actually talking to them.

Anyway. If I carry on like this, I will never get the bloody story out. So here goes.

I wasn't the first to turn up; actually, I was about sixth, but who's counting. After saying the usual hellos and whatever, I stood and deliberated whether I should have worn Huggies or Pampers for the duration. Blood had failed to reach my fingertips and toes or anywhere for that matter. Heat was a thing of the past. Then I heard it. Her voice ... you know *hers* ... Jennifer Darby's. I was still surprised she had turned up at all - aloof was not just a word with her, it was a style. She made Howard Hughes look like a party animal - the 'it' boy for the century. Why she had decided to step off her self-imposed pedestal and mix with us mere commoners on our shindig was beyond me. She did not (Can I stress this enough? And why the fuck am I bothering?) socialise with us - spent her day in her office either on the phone or with a client. The only person who got to speak to her on a regular basis was Sharon, her secretary.

Now Sharon and me were mates - had been since we were thirteen. We were like peas from completely different pods - she was dark - I was blonde ... she had brown eyes, mine were green ... she was two steps lower than a skirting board, whereas I was five foot nine. The ultimate difference was she was straight - married to her first boyfriend. Happily married. I was single and as bent as a nine bob note. Unhappily single, to add the last bit of useless information.

Now the thing that surprised me even more than Darby turning up was the fact she was talking, making an attempt at conversation. And the thing that was even more surprising was she was directing it at me. I was so stunned I actually missed what she had said, the blood finding its way from hiding and rushing to my face leaving me glowing and desperately embarrassed.

Blue eyes squinted and swallowed me completely at that very moment; a gloved hand came out and touched my upper arm. 'I was only joking. Nothing in there can hurt us really.'

As she spoke, the huge wooden door opened and all eyes turned and waited. Instead of being saved by the proverbial bell, it was a man in his fifties sporting a leather hat, long grey hair and a grin that split his face.

'Welcome to the Falstaff Experience. Are we all here?' Everyone looked around, and started to mutter. Sharon was late, like usual, and she was the one person I needed at that precise moment.

'Just a few more to come,' Darby again. Years without a syllable, and now she was the regular chatterbox. She listed names, names I never thought she would even know. It made me feel even more apprehensive about what was to follow. I mean, if you don't even know what to expect from what you see everyday, how on earth were you supposed to cope with the presumed 'unexpected'?

Steve (longhaired hatted bloke with the smile) decided it would be best if we all went inside and settled ourselves around the fire to wait. My fingers and toes agreed, and as I was just about to step over the wooden plank that separated us from the outside world, I felt a hand cup my elbow and guide me over the threshold. I turned to thank my helper, but there was no one there. I could still feel the warmth of the hand, but ... there ... was ... no one.

'You ok, Libby?' She knew my name, and the shock of being fondled by something invisible paled in comparison to her knowing who I was. I nodded slowly, trying to rationalise the situation, and then I felt another hand on my other elbow ... like it was from the same person. I looked, but this time it was Darby's. Can you imagine what my face looked like? Can you? If you are stumped, I'll give you a clue. The eyebrows were furrowed, the eyes confused, mouth slightly open, and my tongue was poking out in contemplation. Yes. I looked simple.

'This way.' Steve was leading our band of reprobates down a dimly lit alleyway, and I took this as a cue to smile weakly and follow. To say I was unnerved is redundant. And not just about the invisible fondling I had received.

At the end of the alley was a glowing fire and benches where we could sit and wait. Refreshments were ready on a side table, and apart from the fact I was totally intimidated by the situation, it looked cosy. I sat down and put my gloved hands in front of the fire trying to retrieve the autumnal feeling I should have, not really feeling the heat. My mind was elsewhere and I was wishing my body were with it.

'Here you go.' Darby was standing next to me, a steaming cup held out. 'Thought you could do with a cuppa to warm you up.' Now. This was Jennifer Darby. Giving me a drink. She had gone to the table and gotten me a drink. On her own. You may be thinking 'What's the big deal?' but it was Jennifer Darby! She had people bringing her drinks, not the other way round. 'I didn't quite know how you took your tea, so I got one with milk and no sugar.' I cupped the ... erm ... cup and took a sip. It was perfect. Just the way I liked it.

The bench next to me moved as she sat down and wrapped her hands around her own drink, and for an awful moment I thought I would have to make conversation with her. But I was saved. A young girl came from the side door carrying an acoustic guitar and sat opposite me. She began to tune the instrument, her face wracked in concentration. With the glow from the fire, she looked almost ethereal. Long, dark blonde hair slinked over youthful shoulders and her face was captivating. Maybe it was the light - maybe it was the pit of my stomach that dared me to consume the image of her, but at least it took my attention off the woman seated to my left.

Her voice was like a nightingale and fit perfectly with the mood and atmosphere of the evening. Have you ever watched someone who was so wrapped up in what he or she were doing that you honestly believe that the world is no longer with them? Mesmerising. And also a welcome distraction. Everybody else chatted amongst themselves and didn't seem to notice her. It was so weird, but I was sure I had met her before, like a long time ago, but I couldn't have. She was barely twenty and I was thirty-eight. But it didn't change the fact she appeared strangely familiar, or should I say familial?

Snapping myself out of my trance, I turned to speak to Darby and she was just as transfixed. As I was about to turn away, blue eyes met mine. That feeling again. Like we had met a long time ago, not just at the office, but somewhere else. But this time the feeling was definitely more than

familial - it was so much more than that. I must have been staring, because she mouthed 'what?' and her face seemed to show concern.

'Erm ... I ...' What? Freaked yourself out? 'Just ... erm ...' That you are babbling? 'Who sings this song?' Nice save - almost flawless.

'Snow Patrol ... Chasing Cars. Love them.'

'So do I!' Yep. My voice was kind of shrill. I think it was nerves or something just as unsettling. 'Saw them in concert before the summer - Brixton.'

The smile she gave me completely changed everything I had previously thought about her. It was so warm and fulfilling and I felt myself smiling in response. Remember when I said she was gorgeous? Well, that paled in comparison when she smiled.

'So did I. Going to see them again in January ... you should see if you could get tickets. If not, I'll see - I've got good connections ...' and the most delightful little laugh escaped from her mouth. I had a feeling I wanted to lean closer for some strange reason, but I held myself back, actually leaned back if truth be known, and nodded.

'That would be great. I'd love to see them again.'

We became quiet once more and focused on the girl, who was now singing *Kiss the Rain*, and I felt a deep-seated longing race through me. I felt so alone at that moment, as if I had missed out on something and was regretting it. I can't explain it any better than that. From the corner of my eye, I began to absorb Jennifer Darby. God knows why. Two hours ago, I would have never given her a second thought ... but now thoughts of her were totally engaging. Her profile was perfect. Long dark hair was draping itself languidly over the shoulders of her leather jacket, her arms folded over one raised knee, her head was leaning to one side, and she was watching the girl with half-closed eyes.

'Libby!' Sharon had finally got her arse into gear and turned up. She had done well for her ... only half an hour late. The weight of her plonking herself down on the bench on the other side of Darby nearly catapulted me into the air and I gripped onto the woman's jacket in response. Her hand shot up and covered my own, steadying me, the feeling of safety enveloping me like a blanket.

'Hi Jen. See you've tagged on to Lib. She's a good old bird, although a grumpy git sometimes.' I raised my eyebrows and just gave her a look making her giggle like a twat.

I was just about to take the piss out of her hat when Steve stood in the centre; the girl stopped playing and rested her guitar at her side. It was at this moment that I realised that my hand was still firmly ensconced into Jennifer's. I think I can call her Jennifer now, as I was holding her hand - seems appropriate somehow. It felt like the most natural thing in the world; to be holding hands with her, I mean.

One thing I couldn't understand was - why hadn't she pulled away? Why was she holding it as if it would break? I just looked at her fingers, the way they seemed to spread over the back of my hand, almost protective, made me want to keep them there, but I knew I had to move them. Slowly, I pulled my hand away and instantly missed the warmth. Amazing. A full-blown fire couldn't warm them, but her hand made it feel like toast.

'Ok. Can I have everyone's attention?' Steve went on to tell of what the night held in store, and introduced us to the mediums that would be working alongside us. It sounded fun, to say the least. We were to start with an Ouija board, and we were going to be split into groups of six. I had an awful feeling I would be with the five wankers / tossers I spoke of earlier, but luckily I was with Sharon ... and Jen. Yes. I think Jen sounds even better, don't you? And she didn't belong to the group of six anymore - well, now that I had started to get to know her a little better, although the night was still young.

Funnily enough, the girl who had been playing the guitar seemed to tag onto our group. I was surprised because she hadn't been introduced as a medium and I knew for certain she didn't work at our place. No one said anything either, but the more the merrier, right? And maybe I could get to know her a little better as the evening went on, and find out where I knew her from.

The first activity we were introduced to came after a quick look around the inside of the museum, and I think I should put you in the picture just a little bit before we go for the 'is there anybody there?' scenario. As soon as we entered the building, I did not feel good. It was as if I was being watched, but I couldn't see anybody, and at this stage we had the lights on. Steve was explaining something to me, and I am definite someone tugged at my hair - not hard, but a tug. And I knew the tug was an awakening of sorts, but I didn't know what kind of sorts or else I would have run screaming never to return. Tentatively, I turned around and saw nothing but a brick wall, which did nothing to dispel the growing apprehension and the need to crap my pants. Badly.

Further along the tour, I received a dig in the kidneys, and instead of feeling unnerved, I felt annoyed. I wanted to tell the person to fuck off, go, and poke someone else. But, once again, there was no one. I think my imagination was getting carried away with me, you know, how it can when places are unfamiliar and you have set yourself up to expect something. It wasn't until we regrouped outside did I find out something that was strangely odd. Both Jen and I had experienced the exact same sensations, except Jen had a bruise in the small of her back. A tiny one, like the size of a tip of a finger, but a bruise nevertheless.

Apart from the shock of seeing the bruise, I was a little mesmerised by the smoothness of her back, and couldn't help just reaching out and stroking the marked spot with my finger. She made a soft moaning sound and I quickly apologised thinking that it must be tender. 'It doesn't hurt, though.' Her voice seemed a little strained and I reprimanded myself for being over familiar to the woman I had not long began to know. I think out of all that had happened my touching of Jen was the most surprising of all. I had never just 'stroked' someone for the sake of it. I was a person who thought that it was more polite to use your eyes than your fingers when 'looking' at something.

I was thankful when we were told the Ouija board session was about to commence, but in retrospect, I should have known better. This is where the evening really took off.

We gathered around the table in the first room we had seen, the room where the hair pulling has taken place. I was thinking that I should have tied my hair back - worn a hat - anything but to feel the sensation of someone touching something they shouldn't. Then I thought about touching Jen's back and blushed. It must be rubbing off. This place must be making people fondle each other when they shouldn't do. Thoughts of who had done it flashed through my head. Maybe it was an old hairdresser checking my ends. The thought made me grin and step forward to the table.

The medium opened the session with a blessing and told us we would be perfectly safe with him there. A couple of the people looked doubtful, but Jen was the first one to place the tip of her finger on the upturned glass.

'You game?' Her eyes sparkled; the same blue eyes I thought were bland and dead. How wrong I was. 'Come on, woman. Get your fingers moving.'

I leaned over and touched the glass, smiling at her as I did so. Before anyone else had the chance to touch it, the glass shot across the table to a J.

'You do that?' Both Jen and I said to each other at the same time. Then we both shook our heads and laughed. The glass just sat there looking forlorn.

'Must've been a fluke,' I muttered. But no sooner had the words left my mouth than the glass shot over to the D.

'I think we have a dyslexic ghost,' Sharon piped up from my right. 'What word begins with JD except Jack Daniels?' The strange thing was when Sharon said Jack, the glass vibrated. So I bit the bullet.

'Is your name Jack?' Wham. Right over to the other side and rotated on the word 'yes'. I could feel the excitement building in the room, most of it from Jen and me. I knew for a fact it wasn't me, and by the look on her face, it wasn't her either.

I looked over to the medium for support, but he just stood there. Waste of money he was. 'What should we do next?' I asked him, and I'm definite I saw a semi shrug before he licked his lips whilst he thought.

'By the looks of things, you have contacted Jack Day.' No shit. Worth every penny. 'He was a serial rapist. Sixteen hundreds.'

That shut me up. Trust me and my ability to find a serial raping spirit.

'Were you killed for your crimes?' Jen's voice drifted through my head, and then I felt the glass move suddenly from 'yes' to 'no'. 'How did you die?' The glass stayed put.

'It's better if you ask yes or no questions as it is quicker.' The medium had decided that he was with us after all.

'Ask him if he died in a fight.' Sharon sounded excited, but I felt nervous. This wasn't what I had signed up for. I mean, there was supposed to be twelve of us doing this, and I didn't like the thought of having a tete a tete with a criminal ... well, a known criminal. The glass didn't move, just vibrated under Jen's fingers and mine.

I swallowed rapidly, believing my eyelids to be attached to the thick lump forming in the back of my throat. 'Were you killed?'

Yes.

'By someone you knew?'

Swirl, and then ... Yes.

'How did you ...' I cut Sharon off, and thought of the next thing I wanted to say. It seemed as if the questions were forming themselves and I was only a vessel for them to be uttered. Funny thing was it seemed I also knew the answers ...

'Was it your daughter who killed you?' Not me this time, and not Jen. It was the girl who had been singing so beautifully outside. She had spent her time observing from her place at the back of the room, but had now stepped forward to place her hand on the table. She had a slight accent, but I couldn't place it - just knew it wasn't British. The words came out thick and full. 'She killed you to stop you killing again, didn't she?'

The glass rose slightly from the table and gave a semi slam onto the polished wooden surface making us all jump. Both mine and Jen's hand left it briefly, but it carried on moving in a slow circle, only to stop ...

Yes.

We all took time to look at each other. Well, you would wouldn't you. It's not everyday a glass moves on its own, unless it's on a boat and the boat is out at sea in a storm. Yes. I'm rambling again.

Simon, from accounts, piped up 'If I was his daughter, I would have killed him too if he went about raping women.' Well said, young man. But I doubt he had thought of the implications of actually killing someone - easier said than done. I, for one, couldn't squash a fly.

The young girl leaned over and placed her fingertip on the edge of the glass alongside Jen's and mine. 'But she didn't kill you for that did she? It was for what you did to her friend wasn't it?' I

am definite I felt the atmosphere change in the room. The air became ice cold and it seemed to scream out some kind of warning.

'I think we should close it now, and move on to something else.' The medium did not look happy, and to tell the truth, I didn't feel happy either. The glass was not moving - just vibrated as if it was gleaning energy from everywhere.

'But it's just getting interesting,' someone commented from the shadows. 'Let's at least find out why his daughter killed him. Ask why.' The young girl had just bloody asked that. Was he deaf?

Smash. The glass shattered underneath our fingertips, as if it had been dropped from a height onto concrete, but in fact, it hadn't left the surface.

'*Fuck!*' It was a joint effort - believe me. The expletive didn't just slip from my vulgar lips; it came from all of us.

That was the end of that. No glass ... no Ouija. I could feel wetness on my hand and looked to see if I had a cut from the shards, but all there seemed to be was blood - no cut - no splinter, just blood.

'Have you got a plaster?' Jen asked the medium, and I could see the blood on her fingers.

'Me too, if you can?' The young girl was hugging her hand close to her chest and I could faintly make out a line of blood slipping down her arm. That was the strange bit. Why did Jen and the girl both get cut and I didn't? My finger was on the glass too. If two of them were hurt, why miss me?

I looked at my hand in semi disbelief; subconsciously believing the answer was there. Obviously, it wasn't, so I followed the rest of them towards the exit.

Being at the back of a crowd of people was not always the best place to be, especially if you felt there was someone else behind you ... someone who shouldn't be there. As I reached the door, I heard it. Distinctly heard it. It wasn't my imagination; it was there.

'*Elizabeth.*' A man's voice ... a voice that I seemed I should remember somehow, but was forcing myself to forget. My spine tingled painfully and the air in front of my face stank of rotten vegetables. The sensation in my stomach turned from trepidation to nausea in a split second, and I wanted nothing more than to flee, but my feet had rooted themselves to the spot.

'*E ... li ... za ... beth.*' Still I couldn't move. The voice was next to my ear, and there was no one there. The smell was getting worse and I knew I was on the verge of passing out or vomiting. An icy chill slipped across my face as if unseen fingers were stroking the skin. Frantically, I brushed them away, only to have them caress my other cheek. Blood was pumping around my body in the attempt to move me into some form of action, but it was wasting its time. For the present time, I was going nowhere - not that I wanted to stay, but I just couldn't move.

The sensation of fingers moved from my face and toyed with my throat; they seemed to be sharper, more focused than when they touched my cheek, but by this stage I couldn't bring my hand out to do anything about it. Gradually, I felt the fingers tighten at the front around my windpipe, the air escaping my mouth in a rush. Slowly, precisely, the awareness of being choked became more apparent, and my hands decided it was time to take action. But how on earth do you remove something that isn't there? Panic invaded me; the feeling of becoming light-headed and dizzy through lack of oxygen overpowered me. Lights blinked and blinded, morphing into a multicoloured display that tangled and swept across the darkened room.

And that is the last thing I remember.

When I came around, there were anxious faces hovering in front of me. Initially I didn't recognise anyone, and once again panicked, trying to get up and away. But I did not have the strength. So I closed my eyes, waited, and then opened them slowly. Sharon, Jen, and Steve were huddled over me and I could see their lips moving but couldn't catch what they were saying. It may have been because they were all speaking at once, and it came out as a mass of phonetics.

I sat up sharply and flinched at the pain in my neck. Involuntarily, my hand rose up and stroked the tender flesh.

'You have a bruise there,' Jen said, and placed her fingers at the side of my Adam's apple. The feel of her fingers eased the ache. 'Actually. You have one here...' her thumb brushed the right side 'and three this side. Look.' They did. Their faces wrapped in thought. 'What happened in there?' I shrugged, unable to tell them, as, truth be known, I didn't know.

'Here. Drink this.' It was the young girl. She passed Jen a glass of water, who in turn passed it to me. Tentatively, I sipped the cooling liquid, the moisture welcome in my dry throat, and whilst I did so, I noticed the blue plaster on two of Jen's fingers. The strange thing was I couldn't see a plaster on her ... no blood either. I was sure I had seen blood coming down her arm ... definite of it. Even though the room had been badly lit ...

'I think I should take you home.' Jen looked at me in expectation, but I shook my head, expelling my imaginings with a good old-fashioned brain move. This place was fucked up. Big style. And so was my reason. I must have imagined it.

'I'll be fine ... give me a minute and I'll be ready.' Everyone looked from one to the other, and I knew they were doubtful of me being part of the investigation again. 'Honestly. I'll have a cuppa and then we'll get cracking again.'

'We'll see.'

Minutes later, I was helped up and led to the open area with the benches, the fire burning low, but still creating a sense of safety. We all had a drink, the other group coming back to see what all the fuss was about. I could feel the life coming back into me and felt I was prepared to go

back inside.

Jen and Sharon were chatting near the table whilst I sat and waited, staring straight ahead into the fire.

'Do you mind if I join you?' The young girl was leaning over mimicking sitting down.

'Sure ... sit.'

Chattering voices surrounded us, but neither of us said anything. Just stared ahead into the fire. We must have been that way for five minutes - well long enough for me not to be able to stop my curiosity coming out. My mother always said I would get myself into trouble one day for not being able to keep my nose out and my mouth shut. Bless her.

'I hope you don't mind me asking, but ... who are you?' She chuckled, girlishly. Jeez ... I knew her from somewhere, but for the life of me, I couldn't place it. 'Have we met before?' The smile left her face briefly and she turned to face me fully.

'It depends.'

'On?'

'What you mean by "met before".' Huh? It was a simple question with no underlying meaning. I meant ... have we met? A simple yes or no would've sufficed.

'Like ... erm ... before tonight ... as in *before* now?'

'It depends.' What was she? A bloody psychologist? That's all I needed.

The thought 'fuck it' sprang to mind, so I stuck my hand out in greeting. 'Libby Armitage.'

'Libby as in short for Elizabeth?' The reminder of my full name being spoken aloud made the hairs at the back of my neck stand up to attention. No one, and that includes friends and family, ever called me Elizabeth, except if I was in the doghouse. I nodded, sharply, watching her eyes examine me, as if for the first time. 'I'm Themis.' She took my hand and I felt a spark of recognition race up my arm, but instead of pulling away, I just wanted to keep holding - as if I needed to do it so she would be safe, for some strange reason. I didn't even question her unusual name.

Her smile was so delicate, so innocent and charming, I felt myself being drawn into the situation. Her expression didn't look real; she didn't look real, if you know what I mean. My fingers finally released hers and I sat further back to watch her. 'Can I confide in you, Libby?' Confide? Strange terminology. 'I am not supposed to be here tonight, but I had to be, if you know what I mean?' Nope. Not a spark. 'Let me explain ... you might find it a little odd, but bear with me.'

Themis did explain, but didn't, if you know what I mean. She told of how she kept on having

dreams about the museum ... dreams that made her uneasy, kept her awake too many times. Dreams where she had once lived here many years ago, but something tragic had taken place. It all centred around Jack Day somehow, but she didn't know why. She just knew she had to be here tonight ... it was something she had to do, because other than that she would never be able to rest. And it was her final dream that convinced her that it was all down to her somehow.

'What happened in the final dream?' I couldn't resist - come on - I am female.

A sigh released itself from her throat, a sudden sadness that surprised me. 'It wasn't good. Someone was killed because I wasn't there to stop it.' Another sigh, sorrow apparent. 'And the thing is ... it is supposed to happen tonight.'

Talk about being freaked out. Completely irrational, I know, but you weren't the one that had something invisible squeezing the fuck out of your windpipe were you. No. So you can't comment. I was just hoping she didn't see the person who was supposed to die being me, but it's something you just don't ask though, isn't it. Well ... isn't it?

'Was it me?' Bugger. Sometimes my mouth was way ahead of my brain. In reality, I didn't really want to know if it was me, but then again, if it was me, maybe the dream had been broken, because something had tried to kill me but had failed. I know. I was being sucked into all of the happenings well and proper. Lack of oxygen to the brain, methinks.

'No ...' Themis looked around uneasily before continuing. 'It was the tall dark haired woman who is in our group.' The only tall dark haired woman in our group was Jen. Frantically, I looked for her. She was leaning against the beverages table, arms crossed, and staring intently at me. I watched as her eyebrows furrowed together, then she pushed herself forward and started making her way over. I couldn't tear my eyes away from her; she looked like a vision - so strong ... so beautiful ... so ... so ...

'Everything ok?' She leaned over me, taking me in with a look. 'More to the point ... are you ok?'

I nodded, as words failed me at that moment. The feeling of déjà vu was so strong, but it just wouldn't surface and make reality. It seemed as if it was happening now, but wasn't. Do you understand? I hope you do, because I didn't have a clue.

Steve stood in his usual spot and announced that the next part of our investigation was about to commence. We were to be seated on the stairs that led to the upper levels, as a ghostly spirit's presence was felt there.

'You don't have to do this.' Jen's hand landed on my shoulder as if to keep me seated. I stared deeply into her eyes before covering her hand with my own. After a quick look at Themis, I turned to gaze again.

'But you see, Jen. I do.' And that leads us on to part two.

The stairs were wooden and bloody cold. Thoughts of my mum's warnings about haemorrhoids flashed through my head, and I pulled my jumper more firmly around my backside. Better to be safe than sorry. We were seated one behind the other, Themis was in front of me, and Jen was right behind. It seemed as if I were a sandwich, but a safe sandwich at that. Sharon was right at the front whinging about someone being able to grab her and choke her like they had tried to do to me, but we told her to can it.

Thankfully, we had changed mediums by now and we were accompanied by a woman in her late forties. Janine. She seemed like a good old stick, and I felt a little more protected this time around.

'Right. What is going to happen is ... I will turn the lights out in a moment and ask you to perform some tasks.' Intrigued ... more like shitting my pants. I fumbled with my jumper again and pulled it down lower. Bollocks to the fact it was lamb's wool and would be forever out of shape - got to think of my butt.

Click.

She could've warned us. But no ... I take back all the 'I felt a little more protected this time around' - protected my ar ...

'As you can tell, I have turned the lights off.' Well done. What do you do as your next trick? Name the lottery numbers? For *last* week? 'What I would like you to do is hold out your right hand to the side of your body, so it is blocking the gap to the right.'

I couldn't see people move, but I could hear the rustle of coats and sense movement. So I did the same. With the movement, I also began to feel Jen's thighs near the tops of my arms. The heat coming off them was wonderful ... but I doubt that was the reason I was beginning to get quite hot. It's amazing how acute our senses become when it's dark. I could sense her behind me so strongly, smell her perfume, feel her breath on the back of my head ... most of which I would have been oblivious to in broad daylight.

'What happened here in the sixteen hundreds was a man was beaten, tortured, and hanged right above us.' A story, which I believe, you wouldn't tell you kids. Especially if they were in the bloody dark. 'His wife's spirit is felt to keep walking up these stairs looking for him.'

Whilst she was speaking, I felt a breeze pass by my hand. 'Did you feel that?' Jen said right in my ear. What? My spine tingle? 'The draught ... just then.' As she said it, another flow of cold air passed the back of my hand, as if someone had just walked past. Not good. I felt truly vulnerable, especially when I remembered what had happened not even an hour ago.

'What I want you to do now is when you feel the air touch your hand, say yes, and then we can gauge the movement.'

At this moment, I felt something touch my hair. Stroking. Caressing. But instead of feeling

frightened, I felt a longing spark up in my gut. I was as if gentle fingers were tangling themselves in my locks and soothing away all worry. They moved to my shoulders ... from left to right ... from right to left ... like it was one finger. I leaned backwards into the caress, the lone digit changed to a hand stroking ..., and I closed my eyes. The only person behind me was Jen and the sensation of her touching me seemed so right and needed, as if I had been waiting for this moment all of my life.

It was the sound of the person in front of Themis saying 'yes', then Jen, that brought me back to reality.

'Did you feel it?' Jen's lips were so close to my ear, the breath tantalising and promising me something I wanted so fucking much. I couldn't answer her; my brain had drifted to another dimension ... a dimension that showed me promise of love and fulfilment. A dimension which it was just her and me, and we were together ... loving each other, needing and wanting each other. Without a thought, I turned to where I knew her face was and brushed my lips across hers.

Unfortunately, Jen didn't respond. I felt her lips stiffen underneath my own and my eyes snapped open to blackness. I knew her face was still there, couldn't see it, just knew. I expected her to shout at me, get up, and storm out. I had kissed Jennifer Darby in the dark after knowing her for half an evening, and not even knowing if she was gay. All I can say is that it was a spur of the moment thing, although I would be lying. Ever since I had seen her, I had wanted to know what her lips tasted like.

Then I felt it. A soft brushing of lips as she reciprocated the kiss. So soft it made my heart ache with longing. I increased the pressure slightly, ignoring all the 'yeses' coming from the other people on the stairs, this time without Jen. Deeper and deeper ... I was falling into her, her mouth like a whirlpool pulling me under ... and I would willingly drown in her. A shy tongue begged entrance to my mouth, and I willingly gave permission. The feel of the wet, soft tip teasing my tongue was nearly my undoing. I wanted it to plunge and fill, but I didn't ... needed to acclimatise myself to the sensation of her tongue entering my mouth.

Her hands came to my face, cupping me closer as the need to fall into each other became too much. My left hand held the side of her head and her hair was like silk. Fingers worked on their own, trying to possess her, twining into her hair, pulling her into me.

God. I wanted her so much ... so much ... so *fucking* much. It seemed as if I had waited a lifetime to experience her again ... too many lifetimes. Electricity flooded through me and seeped into her, her own energy coming right back. The urge to push her back and love her was irrational, but I needed her - really needed to feel she was here with me again. The word 'again' kept on coming back to haunt me ... why *again*? Why did I feel being with this woman was the reason I was alive? What I had been ultimately searching for?

Her breathing was heavy, panting, wanting, mirroring my own, and even though we were in a room with quite a few other people, I didn't care. There was only her and me ... me and her ...

'As you can tell ...' Janine's voice interrupted us. Not that we could be interrupted so easily, but it

was the feeling of Themis turning round that stopped my devouring the woman seated right behind. But I didn't stop staring at the place where her face would be ... soft breaths intermingling, rasping pants warming our skin.

'I missed you.' Jen's voice was so low, but sounded different somehow, like it hadn't even come from her ... seemed like it came from the side ... must've been the lack of oxygen. I didn't quite understand what she meant by missed, but I felt the same way - and I also missed the feel of her mouth.

'The sensation you are experiencing is the movement of the woman's ghost passing you.' Who cared? At this moment in time there was only one woman I wanted to think about ... only one woman I wanted to feel. 'Lights on.'

The overwhelming blindness of lights being turned on did nothing to stop my knowledge of how beautiful she was. She was gazing down at me, her face mere inches away from mine. I could hear the people behind me getting up; feel the movement of Themis as she dislodged herself from between my legs, but all I wanted to do was to sit and stare into those wonderful eyes. My hand came up and stroked the contour of her face, and she nestled against the palm as if there was nowhere else in the world it should be.

'This is madness.' The words slipped unbidden from my mouth, but I meant it. How it could be that I had fallen for this woman in such a short space of time was beyond me. Before tonight, I didn't even like her ... thought she was obnoxious, but I had been so wrong. I wasn't the kind of person who would just rush headlong into a relationship - I had never done so in the past. All my previous relationships had been the kind I had to work at, and eventually give up with.

'If this is what madness feels like, commit me.' Jen's voice was so soft, but I didn't get chance to respond as Sharon was standing right next to us.

'You two need committing all right. Talk about corny.' She turned and stomped down the stairs.

We turned to each other, and the laugh that came out was long and loud. 'Looks as if we've been busted.'

There was to be a short break in between the vigil on the stairs and the highlight of the evening - the séance. So, I took this opportunity to nip to the ladies room. Everyone else has the same thought, so Steve said I could use the one inside the house.

I had been in there for no longer than it needed to have a tinkle, and I heard a soft tapping sound on the outside door.

'Won't be a minute.' Some people just never learn.

'Tap. Tap. Tap.'

'I said ... I *won't* be a *minute!*'

'Tap. Tap. Tap.'

Annoyed, I pulled the door back to reveal Jen standing there, leaning on the doorjamb, and looking all the world like a feast laid on just for me.

'Can I come inside for a minute? We need to talk.'

Shit. This is where she tells me it was a heat of the moment thing.

'Sure.'

No sooner had the door clicked behind her, than she was kissing me with such fervour I felt my insides drop down and pool between my legs. Hot wet kisses, a warm hard mouth, a toned body pressed against me ... and pressing harder as she pushed me to the wall. My hands gripped her hair, and I wanted nothing more than to be consumed by her ... to be eaten alive and gladly. I felt my thighs part as her right one jammed in between, the pressure pushing against the wetness that waited for her touch.

'God. God. God.' Each word escaped her mouth as she kissed me, the lips moving from my mouth to my cheek to my throat and lower. The sensation crashing through me was tantamount to torture. I wanted her so fucking much ... so goddamn fucking much ... I didn't care who knew ... didn't care where I was ... just cared it was with her.

My hips lifted to meet hers, pushing ... pushing ... pushing, as she pushed into me. Hands were frantic to acquaint themselves to skin; fingers dared each other to slip inside clothes and bury themselves - alleviating pent up craving for the ultimate connection.

'Libby ... Libby ... let me touch you ... *Please* ... let me touch you.' I grabbed her hand and placed it over my crotch, hoping she would feel how much I wanted her ... the heat coming from me was unbearable. Her eyes looked down my body and landed on her cupped hand ... then they traced back to my face.

'I want you to. *Please*. I *need* you to.' The words were clambering to get out of my mouth, as I had never felt a need so strong in my life. Blue eyes looked downwards again, as if they were taking me in - taking the situation in. Honestly. I have never ever done anything like this in my life before now. I wasn't the type of girl just to sleep with anyone at anytime ... no. I had to know them - feel I could trust them - be in a setting where I felt was the normal proper way to make love with someone. But I felt all those things with her. I felt I had known her all my life; I trusted her without question - I don't know how, I just did. And as for the setting ...

I felt the zip to my jeans slowly begin to slip down, shortly followed by the waist of my jeans ... hot breath coated my stomach, and expectation was rife. My jeans stopped about a quarter of the way down my thighs, and I felt and heard her breathe me in, shortly followed by a gentle breeze

that whipped between my legs and spiralled around my body. I looked down into her face, a face full of enrapture, skin so smooth ... eyes so blue. It seemed as if she was ethereal, as she had a faint blurring around the edges to her normally chiselled features.

Pushing myself closer, the need for her touch blinding me to everything else, I released a moan as a gentle tongue flicked the tip of my centre. My hands gripped her head and pulled her closer, making the contact delectably sweeter.

'BANG! BANG! BANG!'

Jen pulled her face away leaving me feeling exposed and ready to combust.

'Oi! You two. We're all bloody waiting for you to get your arses into gear. Put a spark on.' Trust Sharon to be actually concerned about being on time for a change. There was definitely no such thing as justice in this life.

I should have felt embarrassed. I should have felt I had let this situation get too far too quickly ... but all I felt was disappointed that it hadn't continued - that we had been interrupted. A fleeting sensation sailed through my body ... it was as if I had been with her many times before, and this time was a reaffirmation of what we had both had and lost.

I looked down at Jen, who was on her knees, her hands gripping my backside. The longing was apparent. Her eyes were darker blue than I had ever seen them; her lips were moist ... full and red. I stroked the side of her face with the backs of my fingers, turning my hand around to cup her cheek. All I could see was honesty. This was no fling for her. She was feeling the same things I was, however crazy they seemed.

One last kiss landed on the hair that protected my innocence, and then I felt her pulling my jeans back into place, fumbling with the zipper ... then the button. Everything was completed in silence, as if the sounds of our voices would break the spell. And what a spell it was. At the beginning of the evening, I had been disappointed that Jen was going to be tagging along with us, but now ... the evening would never have been the same. It's amazing how a few hours and change of scenery can alter your view about someone.

Before we opened the door, we kissed again. And it was wonderful ... I had even forgotten that she had asked if we could have a talk - not something I was worried about. But in retrospect, it would have helped a damn sight more if I had. Or then again, maybe it wouldn't have made a jot of difference.

The séance was to be conducted in the room at the back of the building, once known as the tavern. It did not feel good in there ... not good in the slightest. Even with the lights on, it made your skin feel as if something was crawling over it. As for the feeling of being watched ... that was a given here. It was a place where even the mediums said they felt unnerved. A good start, don't you think?

Standing in a circle holding hands, the lights off and our guards certainly up, we readied ourselves for the next stage. A blessing from both the mediums, and then silence. I had Themis holding my left hand, and Jen was gripping my right. Or was I gripping her hand? Whatever ... gripping was taking place.

'Is there anybody there?' How cliché? 'Any spirits who would like to make contact with us?' At that moment the only spirit I wanted to make contact with was a glass of gin - in my hand - then my mouth. Maybe two ...

Silence. And it went on and on for what seemed to be an age and I felt myself nodding off, even though I was standing up. Have you ever experienced the feeling that someone is behind you and then looked to find there is nobody there? Have I asked you that before? Never mind. You get the drift. Well, at this moment I could feel someone behind me, but I didn't feel threatened ... more like protective.

It felt as if there were small hands holding on to the back of my jeans, like a child hiding.

'Is that you, Lucy?' Huh? We didn't have anyone called Lucy with us, so why was the med ... 'Come out, honey. No one will hurt you. Your father isn't here.' The fingers seemed to grip tighter at the mention of 'father', like the presence was afraid of the thought of it.

The medium started to explain how a child had been killed in the lower levels of the house after a fire. She was a pickpocket, and used to come into the tavern and steal from the drunks. It turned out that she was the main provider for her family, and after she was so badly injured from the fire, she hid, as she was too scared to go home. Her father came looking for her but never found her. He was dying from consumption and died a couple of weeks later, never knowing what happened to his little girl.

I heard Sharon murmur 'Awww ... bless her cotton socks,' and I had to smile. Trust Sharon to be sucked into the story. But whilst I was smiling, I felt small hands moving around to the front of my jeans and begin to tug at the pockets. Little bugger. She was trying to nick whatever I had in there ... which was a shame really, as I only had about three quid. You could just about get a Big Mac with that - definitely not enough to feed a family.

Slam. The sound of the downstairs door nearly made me crap my pants again, and I felt and heard the rest of the group jump - with me right alongside them.

'Don't worry Lucy ... he can't hurt you now.' The presence was hiding in front of me, and I could feel vibrations racing through my legs as if the person there was shaking. 'There you are ... you are with the lady at the top of the stairs.' Bugger. The medium could see me ... could see the thing that was gripping onto me as if her life depended on it. I was the 'lady' at the top of the stairs ... the stairs that led to the door that had banged open. This was not good. Whoever had come in looking for Lucy would have to get past me first - a thought I didn't want to have - an experience I could do without.

But nothing came gliding up the stairs - thankfully. Images were playing havoc with my sensibilities by this stage, and the sooner I left this room the better.

'Can you see the light there ... on the floor?' A man's voice from across the room brought me back to the here and now. 'Like a sphere ... an orb ... a *something*. Over there.' As if we could see where he was pointing - it was jet black in the room. 'In the corner - near the barrels.'

I turned to face where I believed the barrels to be, and spotted a light dancing on the floor. The feeling of the presence that had been holding me disappeared, and it felt as if a weight had been lifted.

As I bent over, Themis' and Jen's hand still fully ensconced in my own, I felt something grabbing my backside. Involuntarily, my hips shot forward and I made a cry.

'What is it?'

'Some git just grabbed me.' My voice was decidedly on the high side and I think everyone knew I wasn't pissing about. The thing I knew for certain at that point was that it was neither Jen nor Themis who had done the grabbing, as they had their hands in mine - and the grab came from someone, or something, directly behind me.

'Ah ... Jack.' The medium's voice sounded a little concerned, which obviously didn't fill me with a feeling of safety. 'Why don't you come into the room more so we can all see you?' Or not.

The air inside the room changed dramatically, and the temperature, believe it or not, dropped even more. Janine began to explain who Jack Day was, and hearing it the second time round did not make me feel any better. Actually - it was worse, because she decided that being in the dark, completely helplessly blind, was the time to describe what he had done. In detail. She could've applied for a job on CSI. But to be truthful, I couldn't really concentrate on what she was saying. Maybe it was the fact that I could sense someone standing in front of me ... see an outline ... feel and smell stagnant breath hitting the top of my head. The memory of what had happened in the room downstairs came to the forefront and made me want to flee.

'Lib?' Jen's mouth was close to my ear, and her breath mingled with the breath coming from in front of me. 'Can you feel someone in front of you?' Initially I nodded, fear making rational thought disappear for a moment. When I realised she couldn't see me, I forced up a yes from somewhere deep inside. The word jammed in my throat for a second, and even though it was a whisper it seemed to bounce around the room and come right back to me. 'Thought so. I can see a figure bending over you.'

That's all I needed. Affirmation I wasn't losing the plot. And it wasn't a good thing, because I would have preferred to think I *was* losing the plot, and then I would have had an excuse to leave. My stomach decided it was actually with me, but it too wanted to leave, preferably through my mouth. Not good.

It must have been fear that made me begin to feel as if my surroundings were fading into some

sort of multicoloured haze ... and if I had ever fainted before in my life, apart from the incident earlier, I would imagine that it was just about to happen. The air was being sucked from me ... reality was leaving ... the blackness was now purple ... green ... yellow ... pink ... and then black.

Then white.

Then light and life and smells and sunshine. And I was sitting in a chair and wondering what the hell had happened. Sitting in a chair in the same room I had blacked out in. But it was different. There was furniture surrounding me that I didn't recognise from when we did our walk around earlier. Where we had been standing was a wooden dinner table ... the wood was not varnished, and it looked as if someone had beaten it with a hammer. Nice. Would look lovely in ...

What am I doing? I was in a situation that seemed real yet decidedly unreal and I was thinking how a table would look in my dining room. But it seemed right ... that I should be here and thinking household things. And where the fuck was everyone else?

I attempted to get up ... have a look about, but it seemed as if I had a weight at the back of my shoulders holding me down. And that's when a seed of panic sneaked in. I know ... the realisation that I was in a place I recognised, yet didn't ... the fact I was on my own when minutes ago I was surrounded by at least eight others and now wasn't, didn't really get to me. But the knowledge that I couldn't get out of the seat freaked me out. Irrational? You betcha.

'Glad to see you're awake.' I recognised the voice immediately and I felt a chill race through me as if I'd been injected. I knew instantly the reason why I couldn't get up. Because someone was holding me down. And that someone was Jack Day. I knew that if I turned around I would see him standing behind me with his hands on my shoulders ... knew I would get the stench of his breath in my face ... knew that this was one fucked up situation to be in.

'Been waiting ages, sweetheart ... glad I didn't kill you straight away ...' my neck began to ache '... only wanted to shake some fucking life into you.' I was beginning to have difficulty swallowing and stroked my throat. 'Bruises will go ... that's if I don't throttle you again.' His laugh made me want to vomit, mainly out of fear. I have never heard a laugh so unlike a laugh in my life. There was no humour there ... nothing but hatred, and the worst thing was, the hatred was directed right at me. 'Told you if you went with her again I'd get you both.'

Get us both? Her? I didn't know what he was talking about.

'Thought I wouldn't find out, didn't you? Thought I was stupid.' That laugh again. 'I'd tell you to ask her if I'm an idiot, but I think you're a little too late.' For what? Late for ... 'and by the time they find her, she'll be dead anyway.'

The only face I could conjure was Jen's ... why Jen's I don't know, but it seemed apt somehow that I should see her. Then I remembered Themis' story ... the one where she said that Jen ...

Fuck. Fuck. FUCK.

Swallowing rapidly now, ignoring the pain, I tried to get some semblance of moisture into my mouth so I could ask the question that I wasn't too sure if I wanted the answer to.

'What have you done to her?'

He didn't answer straight away ... just leaned over to look directly into my face, the smile nothing short of evil. 'The question is, dear wife, what haven't I done to her?'

It was as if a stone had been forced into my mouth and pushed down my throat to hit my stomach with a bang. I had been married to this bastard. This bastard who raped and killed women ... Images of Jen fighting him off were screaming inside my head and there was nothing I could do ... nothing I could do ... nothing ...

The rest of my body was numb. Just my stomach was alert. Even my eyes refused to cry, although I knew they wanted to flood. I felt completely useless.

At this point, he pushed me forward and walked in front of me so I could see him fully for the first time. The look of him didn't disappoint. He looked an evil fucker ... wiry ... dirty ... and laughing in his sick way. His hair was shoulder length and dirty ... his face long and sharp, with a chin that could wrinkle pickles out of a jar ... the eyes quick and dark. The epitome of the person you never want to be left alone with. Unfortunately I was. And I knew for a fact this man was a serial rapist when he was alive. And that was the point wasn't it ... when he was alive. But to tell you the truth, he looked pretty much alive to me at that moment. Regrettably. Scratches were on the side of his cheek and down his neck, accompanied by a couple of bruises.

'She didn't want to at first ... had to give her a bit of a slap ...' he stroked the place where the scratches were, 'but when I was fucking her hard, she *loved* it. Begged for more, she did.' He started making gyrating movements with his hips like he was fucking her there in front of me, his arms pumping, and then one lifting as if he was holding someone's throat.

That did it. I jumped out of the chair and ran straight at him, punching him round the head ... kicking him ... scratching ... trying to hurt him ... but not caring about him at all. He just laughed after each punch I delivered, swatting me away like an insect whilst laughing. Then I caught him at the end of his nose and he let out a cry and backhanded me across the face, making me fall to the floor. The pain ripped through my cheek, nose, and mouth and I could feel the moisture trickling from my nostrils to curve along my swelling lip.

He wiped his face and checked for bleeding before giving me his full attention. 'Wish you had that much fire in bed ... then maybe I wouldn't have had to share my talents with all those other women.' A grin. 'Maybe if I forced my attentions on you instead of playing the dutiful husband, you wouldn't have felt the need to fuck a woman.' He leaned over me, the smell making my eyes sting. 'As I told her, all you need is a good seeing to. I think she agreed near the end.'

I didn't look away ... stared right back into those glinting eyes and tilted my chin up in defiance. All I wanted to do was run ... find Jen ... and run, but I didn't.

'If you are so good at it, then why did you have to rape them?' He flinched, fleetingly, and then grinned more fully. 'And why did I have to sleep with a woman? You certainly weren't man enough for me.' No sooner had the words come out than his hands were on my throat, words of hatred tumbling from gritted teeth.

I could feel the life leaving me ... but it wasn't the past life, it was now. I knew if I didn't fight him off, I wouldn't wake up out of this dreamscape or whatever it was. But I couldn't. I clawed at his hands, trying to rip them away, but they just squeezed tighter. It felt as if I was underwater and drowning ... I was losing strength and there was no way I could stop this.

And then ... nothing. His hands just held my neck, nothing behind it. His face reappeared in front of my now returning vision and he seemed stunned. I couldn't gauge what had happened until he slumped towards me, his hands scraping past my neck, landing next to me, his rank body unmoving.

Behind him was Themis ... her face in shock ... mouth agape, her eyes wide and fearful. I wanted to speak, but couldn't. It wasn't the pain in my throat that stopped me; it was so much more ... so fucking much more. My eyes travelled down to her outstretched hands ... the same hands, which were holding a bloodied knife. I couldn't grasp the implication ... couldn't rationalise the fact that this young innocent girl had stabbed Jack Day in the back.

Then her voice ... that sweet voice ... the voice of the bewildered, uttered one word.

'Mother.'

Mother.

Mother. Themis had called me mother, and I knew that was right. Deep down I knew she was calling me by my rightful name. Knew that ever since I had met her there had been some sort of connection that I couldn't quite place, but now I knew. By some weird turn of events, this girl was, or had been, my daughter ... the 'daughter' who had killed her father.

Clunk. The sound of the knife hitting the floor brought me back to the here and now, and I scrambled forward to get to her. I gripped onto her hands, those shaking hands that were smeared with blood, and pulled her down to me. The quivering coming from her was tortuous ... and the only thing I could do was to hold onto her, comfort her ... although how do you comfort a girl who has just killed her own father?

The feel of her mouth opening and closing on my neck made my heart ache ... the feel of the wetness coming from her eyes made me want to turn back time and stop her having to do what she had to do. She had committed murder for me - to save me - to stop Jack Day taking another life.

Another life. As in ... another. As in ... Jen. We had to find Jen. He had said 'by the time they find her, she'll be dead anyway' meaning he hadn't killed her outright. She was alive somewhere,

but only God knew where. A sense of panic invaded me, as I knew I had to do something now in order to set things right, but I didn't have a clue about what. I didn't know where he would have taken her - or even where she lived ... did I? There had been no mention of Jack Day's wife ... and definitely no mention of her having a mistress in the evening's talks. The only reason why I knew someone thing would happen was through Themis ...

The same Themis who was now in my arms. The same Themis who knew that Jack had killed Jen, and was here to stop it. But this wasn't the same girl. This was the actual girl from all that time ago. I know. Not rational ... not believable ... just a figment ... just a dream ... a nightmare that I just couldn't wake up from. I must've nodded off and banged my head when we were performing the séance ...

'I ... *killed* ... him.' The sound of her voice breaking over my skin brought me back. For whatever unbelievable reason this was happening and I was here, and there was a dead serial rapist sprawled out behind me ...if he was dead at all. And that was a thing I had to check.

Pulling her hands from around me, I eased her backwards to lean on the table leg. 'I'm just here ...' I had to push her hands away from me to stop her grabbing onto my skirt ... a skirt that had been transformed from jeans not that long ago ... the same jeans that had witnessed Jen worshipping ... 'It'll be alright sweetheart ... I'm just here.'

She slumped against the wood, soft sobbing sounds breaking from her, the blood tainting her youthful hands and leaving me wishing I had been the one with the knife. But I could do nothing about that ... couldn't stop what had happened ... it was fated to happen from the minute I stepped through the doorway and felt the hand on my arm.

Turning around I saw the dishevelled body of the person who had terrorised women his whole life. How on earth had it come to pass that I had married him? I was still apprehensive about him being dead, so I jabbed my foot out and kicked his boot. His leg rocked from side to side, giving the impression of being totally lifeless. But I didn't trust that ... I had seen too many horror films in my life to be tricked by a rocking foot. I kicked harder. The leg moved heavily away from me. I was still not convinced.

So, I moved to the side of him, kicking the bloodied knife to one side, as it had fallen near his hand. How many times have you seen that at the movies? You know, seen the dead person lying on the floor, and the hero believing them to be dead ... until ... Bam. A hand round the throat and a fight until one of them cops their lot. This was not going to happen to me. Fuck that.

Using the toe of my boot, I scooped underneath the chest area of the man on the floor and lifted it slightly, the weight of him heavy and pulling at my calf muscles. Inside I was churning, acids bubbling and bursting in my stomach, and I could feel the sweat gather on my top lip. One shove and he was over, slumping to the ground with a thud, joining my stomach in the action. His face still held the stunned look and a dribble of blood trickled from the right hand corner of his mouth. Eyes stared straight ahead and I knew for certain that there was no way Jack Day was getting back up.

Behind me came a soft wailing sound, as the reality sank in even further to Themis. I wanted to comfort her, wanted to tell her she had done the right thing, but I also wanted to find out where Jen was.

Crouching down next to her, I placed my fingers gently underneath her chin. A shaking hand gripped onto my wrist, and I placed my other hand over it. 'Come on, Themis ... it's fine ... come on.' The wailing changed into sobbing, and I could feel motherly instincts rise and bite, a sensation I had never experienced before.

Confused eyes looked at me, so I repeated myself and added how he had deserved to die. Her mouth opened and closed ... opened and closed ... her eyes showing puzzlement. Then her voice, so small and innocent 'Why Themis?' I misunderstood what she was saying, thought she was questioning her part in the events ... thought she was losing what little rationality she had left. Then she repeated it. 'Why *Themis*? Why the Goddess of justice?' Huh? Goddess of what? Justice? What on earth was she talking about? 'That wasn't ... *justice* ... that was ... *murder*. I ... I ... killed him.'

I knelt in front of her, making sure I had eye contact. Eye contact from frightened eyes that were red and swollen. 'Look. You didn't kill him ... no listen ... you stopped him.' She tried to deny it but I stopped her. 'You stopped him killing me ... stopped him raping women ... and Themis ...' I swallowed audibly at this point. 'You can stop him killing again.' Her eyes flicked to his body and then back to mine, the expression said it all. She had stopped him, or she thought she had.

'You have to take me to Jen.'

'Jen?'

Shit. I'd forgotten she wouldn't know her by that name. 'Listen, love, mother's friend ... mother's *special* friend.' She looked at me blankly. This was not going how I wanted it to. 'Tall ... dark hair ...' still a blank expression. Inside I was beginning to panic, as I felt the same trepidation as I had earlier ... I knew if Jen died now, she would die back in the twenty first century. But she didn't know her ... didn't know her, and I would lose her again. There was only one thing to say ... 'You know ... blue eyes ...'

Light overrode the darkness of her face, and I knew she knew whom I meant. 'Mary.' One word ... one name, but I knew she meant Jen ... *knew* it. 'She won't be here ... she knows better.'

If I hadn't felt so panicked and motherly, I would have shaken her. But what good would it do? I opted for the calm and caring approach.

'I know she wouldn't come here ...' and I gestured to the body lying behind me. 'She wouldn't risk it with that bastard here.' I stopped talking and looked deeply into her eyes ... the same brown eyes I had seen earlier in the evening, just before my world had been tipped over into something from the Twilight Zone. 'Honey. Think. Where do you think Mary would be?' Those eyes filled with thought, yet still looked haunted. 'It's really important ... your ... erm ... your ...' I couldn't say father ... no way. 'Him.' And nodded to Jack Day. 'He has done something to

her and we have to move fast.'

We had wasted enough time as it was. God knows how long ago he had done what he did, and it must've been fifteen minutes since he had tried to throttle me.

'She could be at home.' And she started crying again. I stroked her face with the backs of my fingers, wanting Themis to continue with other suggestions.

But I didn't know where she lived. The only one who could help me with that was sitting in a heap in front of me.

'You have to show me, love ... show me where Mary lives.' She looked up at me, confused. Well, she would be really, wouldn't she? She would automatically assume I would know where 'mother's special friend' lived. There was no way I was going to try to explain what had happened ... firstly, she wouldn't believe me. Secondly, I didn't believe it myself - so why would she?

It took a while longer to convince her we needed to move now ... Needed to move quickly ... Needed to find Jen before ... and I can't finish that sentence.

Outside the house everything looked so different, yet strangely familiar. The shops opposite were gone. Cars were non-existent. Smells hit me ... foul smells clogging the back of my throat. Dirt wafted through the air from the street as carriages were pushed or pulled along. The noise was almost deafening too. At first I froze at the sight, and it was only the feeling of my arm being tugged that made me move again.

I had lived in Stratford for years. Thought I knew it like the back of my hand, but I didn't have a clue where we were going. The roads I remembered were not there. No street signs or road signs ... just junctions that mish mashed together. Themis didn't stop, just kept on turning to look at me and check I was still there. People were beginning to give us funny looks, and initially I didn't understand why. It wasn't until Themis pointed to a building at the far end of the street indicating that's where we were headed, that I spotted what they were looking at.

Blood. All over her hands. Up her arms and stained. Fear gripped me. What if someone stopped us and wanted to know why she had blood all over her? Fuck. We would never get to Jen in time. As soon as the thought came into my head, I began to panic. We had wasted too much time as it was, and at this rate, we would definitely be too late.

Thankfully, no one did stop us, and we found ourselves standing in the front room of her house. A front room that looked as if a hurricane had come in and taken hold of all the furniture. Chairs were tipped over, the table was pushed skew whiff to one side, and broken ornaments littered the floor. But it stood empty. She wasn't there. I know it sounds unreasonable, but I expected her to be in the room, maybe tied to a chair ... anything but the echoing silence resounding around making me feel useless.

I turned to speak to Themis, but she wasn't there. I could hear her upstairs, boots banging around on the wooden floor, until they made their way back down again. She stood in front of me, her

face telling me without words that Jen wasn't there either.

'Where now? Where else could she be?' My voice belied the panic charging inside me, as it came out soft and steady, sounding almost wistful. I knew she was thinking ... knew I should just let her do that, as she was the only one here who could find Jen. Uselessness washed over me again, and then it turned to anger. 'For fuck's sake, Themis ... think quicker!'

She shrugged in a way that showed she was trying, her shoulders tight and clumsy.

'Themis!'

'Stop calling me that. My name is Thelma.' A flash of anger appeared briefly on her face before she became the innocent peaceful looking girl I knew. So youthful. So haunted. So wasting my time. 'I know. Come.' And she quickly turned and made her way towards the door, me following sharply on her heels.

Just as we were about to leave I had a sensation, well more like a voice entering my head. It felt like my name being muttered over and over again, changing from Elizabeth to Libby, the intonation wavering between despair and longing to love and fulfilment. My hand was gripping the door handle, but I froze, trying to listen more closely. Was it in my head? Was it another hallucination? Or was I actually hearing the voice?

I stepped back and turned into the house again, as I knew deep inside me, deep inside my soul, that Jen was here. She was in this house somewhere. I knew that if I looked hard enough I would find her.

Slowly, I paced along the short hallway, the feeling of closing the gap between her and me becoming stronger, almost like the game where you say 'You're getting warmer ... warmer ... a lot warmer ... beginning to boil ...'. And then I found myself standing in front of a small door bolted from the outside. Gingerly, I grabbed the cold metal and instantly felt something wet on my hand. Pulling it away, I looked at my fingers. Red, a darkish brownish red ... the colour of drying blood. Instinctively, I knew it belonged to her. This situation was getting worse by the second. The feeling inside my chest joined the voice in my head, and I felt light-headed.

Gripping the bolt, I pulled it back sharply, the feeling of the metal grating down my spine and echoing around the vacuous space inside. Themis was behind me, as I could feel her presence close and her breath on the nape of my neck.

The door opened with a creak to reveal a dark, dank blackness, the only thing visible was the top three steps. Automatically, I stretched my hand out to look for a light switch, the moisture on the walls slipping along my palm.

'Here.' I turned to see Thelma holding a lighted candle towards me and felt foolish that I had been looking for electricity three hundred years before it had been invented.

With growing trepidation, we descended, the light from the candle informing me that the candles

I had seen illuminate so brightly in all those films were actually a false representation, as I could barely see two feet in front of me. The cellar was filled with tea chests and barrels, and there was a table sat in the middle of the room with two candles waiting to be lighted. Which I did, and they helped me acclimatise myself to the dimness.

She wasn't there, but I could feel her. Wasn't there, but I could sense her. It wasn't the fact that the lighting was poor; there was just nowhere for her to be. Nowhere for her to hide. It was just a jumble of mess ... except ... one part seemed to be organised mess. A stack of crates had been placed in the corner, and in front of them was a chest of sorts. It seemed too neat, in comparison to the rest of the place, to fit in, as they seemed to be precariously high when there was enough room for them to be closer to the ground.

I looked towards Thelma, but she was already staring at me, one of the candles from the table gripped between her hands. As I watched, she turned her head and looked at the stack and then back to me. 'That's not usually like that.' That was all the inspiration I needed to get me moving. I shoved the candle into her hands, the wax dripping maniacally down the stick, leaving her juggling two, and made my way over to the pile. The first ones seemed quite light, but as I got nearer to the back they became heavier and heavier and heavier ... until I saw the thing I was hoping to see. A door. A small door. A small door with a bolt safely pulled into its bed. The same bolt I tore back with a satisfying crunch before gripping the latch and pulling the wooden lump backwards.

Pitch black. Absolutely positively, pitch black. But the strange thing was is I knew where she was. I didn't need a light ... didn't need anything but to be with her ... to get to her. I even bent over at the exact place I should, my hands landing on soft flesh. I felt the connection, not just the physical, but also something far deeper, as my hands slipped up what was to be her midsection to her throat. Frantic fingers searched trying to locate her pulse. I didn't know if it was panic that made my blood pulsate in the tips of my fingers and I quickly pulled my hands away and rubbed them before trying again. This time there was nothing ... I could only hear and sense the beat of my own heart pounding within my chest.

I had to see if she was breathing. Had to know that the coolness underneath my fingertips was just because of her being in the cupboard in the cellar for far too long or if it was ... I can't say it.

Cupping my hand around her head, I lifted her up, gently, believing that if I were to make a sudden move she would break. I eased myself to the ground and crouched next to her, resting her head on my lap. Thelma came through the door with the light and I saw the face of Jen for the first time. Beaten. Bruised. Bloody. And apart from that, she was deathly pale too, her lips a pale pink instead of the plump red I had kissed earlier in the evening.

The sob tore out of my throat and I valiantly tried to stop the tears cascading down my face, but to no avail. I could feel my world breaking into tiny pieces. There was no doubt about it. She was dead. I was too late. She was dead ... dead. And I was left sitting there with my past and future in tatters. Aside from the ultimate desperation, I felt anger. Anger at a man who thought he had the right to take a life ... to abuse and rape and kill. A man who lay dead on the floor of the house I had grown to hate.

'Mother?' How could I tell Thelma, or even Themis, that I had failed? How could I look into those eyes and tell her she had killed for nothing? Saving me seemed such a waste of time now. What on earth had I to live for? 'Her eyelid just moved.'

I couldn't register what she was saying. Couldn't rationalise what the words actually meant. There could be no way her eyelid moved ... she had no pulse ... no colour.

'There ... again ... her eyelid moved.' This time I saw it for myself. Just a twitch ... just a flicker, but movement all the same. Just as I felt some spark of hope, I also heard noises coming from upstairs. Heavy boots ... many heavy boots, as if people were searching for something. Maybe they were searching for us, as we had been given a few startled looks as we had ran down the street - the woman and the girl covered in blood.

'Jen ... Mary ... *please* ... open your eyes ... *please* ...' I was trying to get her to move by this stage, but she seemed lifeless in my arms. I pulled her closer, shaking her a little, hoping to bring her back somehow. But nothing. The sound of people was getting closer and I could hear them making their way down the stairs into the cellar. 'Come on ... come on ... *come on!*' The shaking had become frantic, and I could feel the presence of people entering the small cupboard space I was in. Hands gripped my shoulders and tried to pull me away, but there was no way I was leaving her ... no way ... I was leaving her.

Frantically I held on, pulling her body closer into me, the smell of her seeping into me ... absorbing itself through my nose, my mouth ... my skin. She still felt warm when I held her close ... still felt as if she was with me. The more they pulled, the harder I held onto her. I knew I was crying uncontrollably ... knew that I wasn't making any sense ... knew that I just couldn't let her go. Spit was running down my face and falling onto her skin, joining the mix of tears and blood - our bodily fluids melting together making us one again. I could barely see her through the tears, barely recognise her, and it wasn't because she had been beaten, because ... the bruises didn't seem as vibrant as when I had first seen them.

'Come away, Libby ... let her go ...' A man's voice was cajoling me, wanting me to release this prize I held in my arms.

'No!' He tried again. 'Fuck you!' I didn't care. Fuck them all. There was nothing they could do to me that could override the pain I was feeling deep inside. Nothing. I know I had only really known her for one evening, but it was far more than that. It seemed as if I had known her all my life ... even before. Seemed as if I had been waiting for her ...

'Let me take care of her.'

'*Leave us the fuck alone!*' I tried to lash out, tried to make him stop trying to take me away from her, but he was insistent. I screwed my eyes tightly together and gritted my teeth in anger and frustration, as another hand landed on my arm. This one felt different ... not as forceful - more coaxing. I turned my head slightly and saw through my tears a slender hand on my arm. It was the ring that made me open my eyes more widely. A thin gold band with a trickle of diamonds

across the top. I knew it. Knew like the back of her hand.

The only person I knew to wear a ring like that was Sharon. Sharon. My Sharon. Sharon who was always late ... but she wasn't here. Was she? She couldn't have been. Sharon was back in the twenty first century and had no place here. I gripped even tighter onto Jen. Then the male voice again ... and this time there was a hint of recognition about that too sparking about inside my head. It sounded like Steve ... but there was an edge to it ... a weirdness that belied rhyme and reason. It seemed as if the voice was filtering down a tunnel and landing in the centre of my brain. I didn't trust anything or anyone. I had too much to back up my insecurity; the evening's events had put paid to that.

But I wasn't listening to what they were saying, the words coming out as a jumble and mixing loudly in my head, just words ... words ... individual words that made little sense on their own. Words that wanted me to let go ... let them take care of her. But how could I let go? She belonged here in my arms. All I wanted to do was to take care of her, but I knew she was gone ... gone ... gone...

And then the fight left me. I couldn't hold onto her anymore. I felt weak ... drained ... empty inside. I had lost her again just as I'd found her. What was the point of holding onto her? I had let her die; I had allowed enough time to pass so she would die. The only one to blame here was me - not Jack - me.

Hands guided my shoulders backwards ... more hands lifted her away from me. I felt someone try to take me into a hug and I didn't resist, just fell into it like an empty sack. Tears spilled over my cheeks and met the ones that had started earlier. I could feel them cracking their way down the dried and stiff flesh, marking me with my grief. A sob came through from the inner sanctum of my chest to reverberate off soft flesh, the soft flesh of the person who was holding me closely.

Time stood still, yet raced. I was drowning in to the arms of someone and sinking deeper into misery. Clouded thoughts swam with images of what had happened ... the images of her lying in my arms, the bruising to her face and body ... evidence of the raping and beating she had sustained from the man I had married. I could picture the scene so vividly, and my heart broke all over again, tears flowing freely and smearing themselves in woollen material.

It seemed like forever until the world began to slip into some sense of normality. The fuzziness in my head dissipated and made my senses acute ... everything around me seemed stark, sharp, and so much louder than they had been. It was as if my world had become a high budget movie - Panasonic ... Dolby digital ... Technicolor. Real life but with a splash of the surreal for good measure. And this was all viewed from one eye that had sneaked open and digested the world, or should I say scene.

Steve was crouched down next to Jen, her body curling slightly from the position they had put her in. I knew where Sharon was, I was holding onto her, or should I say, she was gripping onto me. I couldn't understand why nobody was speaking. Everything was completed in agonising silence, and I could hear the floorboards groaning under the weight of the situation. The thudding coming from Sharon's chest seemed as if it was being performed on a drum. The light from the

light bulb seemed so fake in comparison to the candle light I had used before when I had found her.

I pushed myself away from Sharon and tried to get back to her. I needed to feel her in my arms again, even if it was for one last time. Needed to hold her against my chest, hold her hand, tangle my fingers in hers again, tell her I loved her, and the weird thing was it felt as if I had done all these things so many times before. It wasn't a question of knowing her for only one night - it was so much more than that. I knew I wasn't being rational, but the evening had not given me much time to be rational about anything.

They didn't stand a chance in stopping me. Before they knew it I had my hands cupping her face and my lips on hers pushing my mouth against hers. Her lips still held some warmth and the feeling of hope raced along inside my chest and lit around my heart. For a split second, I believed she was still alive; I just needed that you know ... just something.

Then I felt it. A slight movement of her mouth underneath mine. Not from me, as I was only holding my lips against hers believing I would hurt her if I did anything else. But it was a definite movement. And again. And again ... again ... and then the lips slightly parted and I felt air race past my mouth and into hers. In shock, I pulled back, my eyes wide and staring. Her chest was lifting upwards as she sucked in the breath more deeply, the cough escaping her nearly immediately. Blindly, she spluttered and retched and clawed her way into a sitting position, her hands lashing outwards. But they weren't trying to harm. They weren't fighting in their lashing. They were searching for something. Her hands gripped onto my jacket front and stopped. Blue eyes shot open and stared into my own, exacting a sort of something from me. I couldn't seem to tear my eyes away, but for some unknown reason I nodded, and then she relaxed, the tension I had felt racing down her arms dissipating. Jen lay back down again, but then partly raised herself whilst still holding onto my coat.

'What happened?' Her voice was cracked and dry, as if she had been without water for too long. 'Why am I on the floor?' She looked at her hands, her fingers especially, the ones which were gripping onto the material of my jacket. Hands unlocked and sprang backwards to be gathered at her sides. It seemed as if she was surprised at what had happened, and at where her hands should or shouldn't be.

'You fainted.' Steve's voice was quietly in control, but Jen wasn't having any of it.

'Bollocks. I have never fainted before in my life, and I'm definite I didn't then.' She snorted in disbelief, the characteristics of her face becoming hard and different to the woman I had got to know throughout the night. 'I must have tripped over in the bloody dark or something.'

The room went quiet again, and Jen shifted nervously. 'Or I was pushed.'

Nothing. No one said a word. I wanted to tell her what had happened, ask her if she could remember anything about what she thought might just be a dream. But she didn't seem like the same person. Defensive, almost. She appeared to be more like the woman I had known from the office rather than Jen. She seemed cold, and her facial expression was becoming definitely

sneering.

'Look you.' Sharon was standing over Jen by this stage. 'Don't start giving it the big I am, Darby. You fainted. End of.' I sucked in my breath expecting Jen to explode at Sharon's outburst, but she looked even more stunned than she had when she had first woken up. 'You're not at work now, and no one will believe you are the cold hearted bitch you pretend to be at work after tonight.' Still no movement.

The scene was almost a tableau. Everyone was still, like a living photograph. That was until Jen turned to face me, her eyes flashing once, the expression expectant. She swallowed deeply and then licked her lips. 'You.' She swallowed again and shifted her body into a sitting position, all the while keeping my eye contact. 'You ... were there. In the cellar ... you were there.' The hardened expression evaporated as she said these words, and her face softened as she looked at me. A shaky hand stretched out and beckoned me forward, and I reached out and grabbed her fingers. Heat and life travelled up my arm and landed straight in my heart, and I smiled for the first time in too long. She was back with me. And not just in body, but her soul too.

I squatted down next to her, cupped her face with my free hand, and pulled her to look at me. My lips met hers in greeting, just a soft kiss, just a gentle brushing to tell her that nothing had been a dream, either before or after. Her fingers gripped mine, and her other hand snaked around my waist and up my back as she deepened the kiss. I didn't care that others were there. Didn't care that this had been the most traumatising and exhilarating night of my life. All I cared about was that she was here ... she was alive ... and she was mine.

A soft cough came from behind us, and I knew it was Sharon trying to bring me back to earth again. Tenderly, I broke off the kiss and my heart skipped for joy as I watched her mouth still search for mine. Eyelids opened to reveal blue eyes so full of everything I had always wanted them to be filled with. Love. Understanding. Trust and completeness. I felt the same emotions race from the unlocked part in my chest and appear on my face.

'How do you feel?' They were the only words I could say, although I wanted to say so much, but even I knew it was too soon. A soft sigh escaped her mouth and she shifted herself as if she was trying to get comfortable.

'Been better. What on earth happened? One minute we were standing in a circle and I felt you stagger forward.' The backs of her fingers stroked the side of my face and I leaned into the caress. 'And when I went towards you ... bam. All I can say is that I smelled dank earth, like in an old room or something.'

I looked over my shoulder and at the rest of the group. I knew what I was about to say would either make them freak, or at the worst, laugh. But, it had to be said.

It was amazing that no one laughed. More amazing that no one interrupted. And astounding that after I had regaled my tale of the unbelievable, people were nodding as if it was the most natural thing in the world to step through space and time and witness the murder of a serial rapist and the near death of Jen. I believe part of me wanted them to doubt what I was saying; so then I could

eventually doubt it myself. But when I looked into Jen's eyes all I saw was certainty. Even though she couldn't remember, I could tell by the look on her face she knew as much as I did that this was the truth.

Themis would know. Themis was there. I turned to look for her, but she wasn't in the room. 'Where's Themis?' All faces looked blank. 'You know, the young girl who was with us earlier?' Still blank. 'The singer ... playing the guitar?'

Steve stepped towards me, his face concerned. 'What girl playing the guitar?'

'When we came in there was a young girl here. She sang, and then tagged onto our group.' Jen mumbled that she knew whom I was talking about, but no one else did ... they just looked at me as if I had finally lost the plot. 'She took part in the séance and the Ouija board ...' Sharon and Steve shook their heads and looked at each other.

'Don't remember anyone singing. And as for anyone tagging along ... there was only your work group here. It was a private party.' I couldn't understand it. She had told me that she had wrangled her way into the night's events because she kept on having bad dreams.

'But she held my hand at the séance. This one.' I held up my left hand and showed everyone, as if I would suddenly see Themis' hand holding onto it.

'I was holding your left hand.' Tony, a bloke from accounts piped up.

'But you can't have been. I distinctly remember it was Themis holding it.' I turned to Jen, who was nodding in agreement, but when I turned to face the others, they were all shaking their heads and mumbling that it was Tony. How could they believe I had gone back four hundred years, witnessed a murder, yet not even believe me when I told them another woman had been here with us? A woman they had all sat and watched singing? Fuck knows.

'I think we should all get a drink and calm down a little.' Steve leaned towards me and placed his hand on my arm. Initially I wanted to pull away and continue fighting my corner, but when I looked into his eyes, I knew that he wasn't disregarding what I was saying ... just implying we all needed time to adjust. To a lot of things.

After a few minutes, we found ourselves in Steve's dining room. Well, when I say we, I mean Jen, Steve, Sharon and I. He had ushered the rest of them to get refreshments from the buffet table at the far end of the house whilst we were treated to a warm fire and brandy. The fiery liquid raced down my throat and I coughed a couple of times, as I was unused to the liquor. Jen was huddled next to me, and she still seemed pale. Not surprising really, considering all she had been through - well, both of us really.

'I think I should tell you the whole story.' Steve came and sat in the armchair in front of us, glass ensconced in his hand. 'About what happened ... Jack Day's murder and what followed on from that.' I leaned forward towards him, expecting to have some rationality presented ... expecting him to tell me that I had witnessed was all part and parcel of the Falstaff Experience. 'I think it

will help you adjust a little better ... and explain about the girl you thought you saw.'

'But I did see her ... and so did Jen.' I turned to Jen, who was nodding. 'We spoke to her ... she asked questions at the Ouija ... joined in with the vigil on the stairs ... played the guitar ... sang ... Jesus. She was more real than most of the people I work with.' I attempted to get up, as I felt I was being wronged in some way ... like he doubted her existence but Jen stopped me.

'I know what you *thought* you saw ...' I tried to interrupt again, but he held his hand up to stop me continuing. 'And if you give me a few minutes I will explain how that was impossible.' I shrugged, as I felt that was the only thing I could do, then I felt Jen's fingers search out my own and grip them in a comforting way. At that moment I felt the night's activities drain from me, and weakness take its place.

'Go on.' Just two words, as that seemed all I could muster. I was spent. Tired from everything that had happened, yet it was more than that. It seemed as if a semblance of peace had washed over me, and all since Jen had slipped her fingers in mine.

And then his tale began. A tale set in 1594 in a place full of fear for the females of Stratford. This fear all boiled down to one man. Jack Day. The count of his victims surpassed twenty, but there may have been more ... some women were just too scared to step forward. Some things never change. At first it was rape ... but the attacks became more violent the longer he remained undetected. Eventually he killed his first woman ... Cynthia Meadows, a nineteen-year-old serving woman from the Garrick Tavern. Then another ... Joyce Metcalf ... twenty-three ... mother of four. Both of them had been strangled and their beaten bodies dumped. At this point, I raised my hands to my sore neck and rubbed the tender skin. Jesus. To die like that ... made my blood run cold.

The total deaths they believe he accrued totalled six, but that didn't include the death of his own daughter.

'He didn't kill his own daughter ... She killed him.' I couldn't resist interrupting, as I had seen with my own eyes the actual death of the bastard. Themis, or Thelma, had killed him, not the other way around.

'Yes ... she did. After she witnessed him kill her mother.'

'But.' I hadn't died. She had arrived before it was too late and saved me. I felt faint and leaned forward to put my head between my legs, the blood leaving my face and collecting in my swirling gut. I could feel Jen's hand stroke my back, trying to soothe me. Even though the touch from her was comforting, it still didn't stop the feeling of nausea seeping through every pore. I was still finding it difficult to withdraw from the events I had observed ... the blending of the two worlds, the two lives, mine, Day's wife's, seemed to run concurrently, and I didn't know who I was supposed to be anymore. One thing I did know was if it wasn't for the arrival of Thelma, I would be dead now ... just like the woman from the past. I couldn't understand why Themis hadn't told me when I had asked her if I was going to die. All she had said was that it would be Jen ...

'He killed his wife because he found out she had a lover. Mary Bennett. He had already beaten and left Mary for dead before he came home to confront his wife.'

'How on earth could he judge after all he had done?'

Steve shrugged his shoulders. 'Day wasn't into women being of any importance ... thought of them as chattel, like many of the men of his time.' He placed his now empty glass on the table and leaned back into his chair. I looked at Jen and Sharon, both of which said nothing, but their expressions saying everything.

'Thelma was arrested and charged with murder.'

'But she had tried to save me.' I couldn't believe what I was hearing, and the worse thing was I knew what was coming next. England in the sixteen hundreds was not a place where justice was served appropriately. You acted in self-defence; you were still going against God.

Steve's voice was drifting into my head as I conjured up images of the poor young girl being dragged away and put in the cells ... more images of them treating her like dirt, all mixed with the words from the proprietor of the museum.

'They knew it was Day ... the way he had killed his wife ... the body of Mary ... all had the classic markings of him. But Thelma had still taken the law in her own hands ... served justice by her own hands. And she stabbed him in the back, which went even more against her.' I held my hand up to stop him talking. I didn't want to here anymore; I knew enough.

The room was quiet all except the crackling of the flames from the fire. All I could think about was the broken girl I had seen on the floor ... the way she had been disorientated ... the look of horror at the knowledge of what she had done. I hadn't even thought about the consequences of her actions; all I had thought about was saving Jen ...

I remembered the sound of footsteps when we had been in the cellar... like soldiers coming to get us. I could remember the panic I was feeling that I couldn't save Mary, and not even a thought for the girl standing right behind me covered in blood. Finally, the fact that when I came back from that awful moment, Themis was no longer with us.

'Did they hang her?' Sharon was the one to break the silence, and I turned to face her. She was ashen.

'Yes. Just over two months later, they hanged her in the market square. Hundreds of people came out to witness it, but the records state that not a sound was heard as they pulled the lever.'

Inside my head, I heard the crack of her neck breaking. A sob tore itself out of my mouth and bounced around the room. Jen circled her arms around my waist and pulled me into her, as I cried unrestrainedly. Themis had stopped Jack killing me; stopped Jack from killing Jen ... but couldn't stop the law from exacting a pound of flesh. It seemed as if they had to punish someone

for the heinous crimes committed in Stratford, and because they couldn't get Jack, they got the next best thing. His daughter. I thought of what Themis had told me when we had talked earlier: *it was something she had to do, because other than that she would never be able to rest.* Little did I know then she meant it literally, as in rest in peace. And as I lay in Jen's arms, I thought of how people had reacted around her. Memories of how people ignored her when she sang; disregarded her questions at the Ouija board and even asked the same ones. The fact she had been bleeding after the smashing of the glass and then didn't need a plaster. It made sense now, even though I had noticed it, I hadn't, if you know what I mean?

'Where is she buried?' What else to say? I felt a need to visit her grave ... just to see for myself.

Steve cleared his throat before speaking. 'She is buried in the graveyard alongside her mother, even though it was unusual to bury a convict in consecrated ground, they allowed it. Jack's grave is outside the church grounds for obvious reasons.' Everyone nodded at this, knowing that he deserved to burn in hell for what he had done. 'Elizabeth Day was buried three days after Jack killed her and Thelma wasn't allowed to go to the funeral as she was in prison. Mary was buried on the other side of the graveyard.' To hear my name mentioned ... well, the Elizabeth part, made the hairs on my neck stand up. It was such a weird feeling to know that the dead person they were talking about was you a couple of hours previously.

Then it hit me. Mary and Elizabeth were not buried together, and another bout of sadness washed over me. They felt so right together ... like they were part of the same being and they were separated. No wonder there was so much unrest.

'If you wait until dawn I'll show you the graves ... it's the least I could do.' Steve leaned over and patted my knee, and although the gesture could be deemed to be patronising, I didn't take it that way. 'Why don't you three get some rest and I'll wake you up when it's time to go? I'll just bid farewell to the others and grab a couple of hours myself.'

After Steve had supplied us all with blankets and pillows, he left us to get settled. Sharon opted for Steve's armchair, turning it towards the fire to get the most of the heat, whilst Jen and I curled up on the sofa. It was wonderful to be in her arms ... I felt protected ... something that I welcomed at that moment. Not surprising after the night's events. The heat coming from our bodies felt like I was in a cocoon of warmth, and that added to the satisfaction of being with her made slipping off to sleep easy. I remember just as I was drifting under the blanket of Morpheus' spell, I felt the tenderest of kisses brush against my forehead. Perfect.

Dawn broke. Grey, cold, and uninviting, making me want to snuggle deeper into Jen and stay there for longer. But Steve was up and about, making coffee and toast to line our stomachs and liven us for the morning at the cemetery, although that seemed like a paradox.

In less than half an hour, we were on our way across town. To see the roads lined with parked cars, traffic lights and the full blast of the twenty first century was a little of a culture shock. I didn't even think about it until we had stepped through the doorway from the museum and into

Sheep Street, and then the juxtaposition of then and now made itself apparent. Images of scuttling down the narrow dirt filled streets with a young girl covered in blood sat in the forefront of my head, and sadness once again enveloped me.

When we arrived at the graveyard, Sharon pulled me to one side.

'Lib ... I'm getting off.' The expression on my face begged the reason why. 'This is a personal time ... you know ... you and Jen. I'll call later, ok?' She smiled a tender smile before hugging me close to her. 'Take care of you, and take care of her ...' She nodded in Jen's direction, 'because for all her obnoxiousness, she's a pussy cat underneath ... and thinks a lot of you.'

'Does she?'

Sharon laughed and hugged me again. 'Just look at her.' And I did. She was leaning on the wooden gate leading into the churchyard, her body slouched yet taut, her elbows propping her up; her eyes half closed but devouring everything; long dark hair loosely draped over her shoulders ... breathtaking. 'See? She's eyeing you up ... trying to look cool, but I can tell you one thing. She is shitting her pants that you will not want to see her again.'

'How on earth ...'

Another laugh. 'Believe me ... she's wanted you forever.'

I was still stunned when Sharon had gone. Just stood there, mouth slightly open, arms hanging loosely at my sides and a thousand questions racing through my mind. What the fuck? She's wanted me forever? She had barely said two words to me in all the time we had worked in the same place until last night. And why hadn't Sharon told me before? She knew I was miserably single. Then it came to me. Every time Sharon had mentioned her boss, I had pulled a face and spent ages saying what a wanker Darby was. No wonder she had kept her mouth shut.

Snapping myself out of my reverie, I focused on the place I had last remembered Jen to be and found she wasn't there. Huh? Why had she bugged off and left me considering she had wanted me forever?

'Penny for your thoughts.' Her voice came from behind me and trickled all the way into my ear, down my spine, and sat in the pit of my stomach waiting to go further. I turned and looked into her eyes ... those blue eyes that had begun to mean more to me than I ever thought possible. Eyes that were looking at me in question, almost waiting ... patiently waiting at that. Leaning closer, I could feel the short breaths leaving her mouth and hitting my face, and all it took was another inch before I felt those breaths escape inside my mouth. Lips like velvet; warm, wet, and opening to allow my tongue to gingerly enter inside. A kiss that told her more than not to worry ... not to fear I was going anywhere. I was hers for as long as she wanted me; because I knew I would want her forever.

The kiss was delectably sweet and deep and full of promise, but hearing a short cough from somewhere behind us I knew it was time to lay the past to rest. Or as I thought.

We held hands as we walked into the churchyard, following Steve through the labyrinth of gravestones. Even surrounded by so much death, I felt contented. It was if I had been in limbo until this moment, but I hadn't even realised I had been. It's amazing that you don't know you are missing the vital ingredient of your life until you find it ... God knows what it feels like to lose it again. Thoughts of Elizabeth Day realising that Mary was dead flashed through my mind. Poor woman. To find love and have it so cruelly ripped away must've been torture for her - I had felt her grief last night. Maybe it was a blessing that she died too ... or did they live? I was confused about the outcome, as I had survived and so had Mary in the events last night. But Steve had told me that both Mary and Elizabeth had been killed by Jack ... even knew where there were buried ...

'That's weird.' Steve's voice broke my thoughts and I watched as he stood in front of a single grave. 'It's changed.'

Jen and I stood either side of him and looked at the worn gravestone in front of us.

Thelma Day
Aged 23 years
Born March 29th 1571
Died January 31st 1595

Beloved daughter of
Elizabeth Day
Aged 67
Born March 10th 1551
Died July 8th 1618

'The date has changed for Elizabeth's death. She should have died October 31st 1594, shouldn't she?' I was incredulous. Elizabeth had survived after all ... and outlived her daughter by twenty-three years. So Themis had saved her ... saved me, in fact.

'That's not it ... well, not just it.' Steve bent forward and moved the grass aside from the base of the stone. 'This has been added.'

'Special friend' of
Mary Anne Bennett
Aged 64
Born September 16th 1554
Died August 2nd 1618

May they all Rest in Peace

'Bloody hell!' Well, what would you say? I couldn't believe it, although to tell you the truth I had never seen the graves beforehand so I couldn't tell you in all honesty if what they said had changed or not. The only thing I can vouch is that I felt it. I know. Having a feeling about

something is completely different from actually witnessing it for real ... but I knew it to be true. I knew that the events of the previous evening had changed the past in some way of another, however irrational that may seem. The only sad part was the fact Thelma had not escaped her fate ... she had still died at the tender age of twenty-three. She had saved both her mother and her 'special friend', but didn't have the time to save herself, and I had done nothing to help her.

And as if unbidden, the words left my mouth. 'We have to do it again ... we have to save her too.' I felt embarrassed as soon as I'd said them, as I was sure both Steve and Jen would think I was nuts ... as even I felt I was nuts at that precise moment, a feeling I was growing accustomed to in the last twelve hours.

'It's not as simple as that ... Last night was a first for all of us, and I doubt we would be able to replicate it.' At least Steve hadn't laughed outright ... actually considered my suggestion. We'll have to ask people who know about such things.' Thoughts of the mediums from the previous night didn't fill me with much hope. They were useless to say the least, and I doubted they would have the experience or knowledge to do something as big scale as changing the past ... they could barely keep an Ouija board going. Hark at me and my changing the past! I was definitely getting tickets on myself. 'But we won't know until we try, will we?'

No, we wouldn't. And that's what we are going to do next. It won't come easy. As we didn't have a clue where to start, but we had to try. Jen, Steve and I. There will be a lot of research to do, but I didn't mind that. It is now the beginning of January and we are going to try again on the 31st just to see if we can stop the events that took place over four hundred years ago ... and if that doesn't work, then we would wait until October 31st and relive it all again. We have contacted some of the country's leading parapsychologists, mediums and spiritualists to help us ... at least they didn't think we were nuts straight away. Themis the Goddess of Justice would have all of us helping her to actually find the justice she sought at last, and if we failed, we always have next year. Nothing was going to stop me making the past right.

As for Jen and I ... well, it is all new but not, if you know what I mean. After the events of the Falstaff Experience, we began to get to know each other on an everyday level, instead of the wacky world of things that go bump in the night. It was wonderful getting to know the real woman ... wonderful knowing that she felt the same way about me as I did about her. Our relationship had grown in strength and every moment without her was painful. I know I see her every day at work, and every night afterwards, but it never seems like enough. It was too early to move in together, although I know that's what we both want. But I wanted to take things slow ... make up for trying to jump her bones as soon as I saw her, I think.

The first time I told her I loved her, she cried. And when I continued, and told her I was in love with her, she held me so tightly I could barely breathe. In between the sobs, she gushed over and over again 'I love you, Lib ... I love you, Lib ...' What more could a woman want? The only thing a woman in her right mind could ever want. Someone to love her as much as she loved them ... all the rest is circumstantial.

So. To go back to the beginning and my rhetorical question ... What if I was to tell you this is true? Not a story - but in fact - real? Would that make a difference? Well, does it? I've told you nearly everything I can remember, and it's completely up to you whether you believe me or not. In fact, it doesn't really matter if you do ... the most important thing is I believe it ... and so does my woman.

And finally. Do you still believe in ghosts? I do. And as for soul mates ... I've found mine even though I didn't even know I was looking. The past does shape our present, and there's no better present than a future with the woman I love. Even though I had to wait nearly four hundred years to have her again.

It is funny how a few hours can change your mind on just about anything ... except George Bush. Nothing could change my mind about him.

Ever.

The End ... for now

Let me know what you thought of this story, and if you think it deserves a sequel - or even something different.

[Fingersmith](#)

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