

~ October: Part Two ~

by fingersmith (C) 2008

Personally, I would advise whoever reading this story to read the first part (October), as it would make this easier to follow.

Disclaimers: The characters in this tale are based on two lovely ladies from a well-known TV show. I had to borrow them again, although I did try to make them mine (I wish).

Sex / Violence: Erm ... yep - although no blood and gore (for either the sex or the violence - or is that obvious?).

If you liked this, let me know at fingersmith@hotmail.co.uk. If you didn't - sorry about that.

Thanks: To all those people who have written and given me support over the years - you are wonderful people. Thank you.

Well, I suppose I should put things into perspective for you, shouldn't I? Keep you informed of all the stuff we have all had to undertake to get to this stage in my tale, *shouldn't I?* But if you are fully aware of what has transpired before now, then I suppose you will skip this section entirely. But hang on. Some of the 'stuff' is new and I haven't had the opportunity to tell you of it before now. So, maybe you should bear with me just a little longer.

As you may be aware, I believe in ghosts. I never used to, but after the events of the Falstaff Experience, I seemed to have changed my mind. When an unseen hand tries to choke the life out of you, and you end up in a different place and time - yeah ... the rationalist in you kind of dissipates. And no, I hadn't been drinking ... snorting substances ... or even partaking in a drag of the whacky baccy. Nope. I hadn't even had a Red Bull. What had happened was without doubt the strangest and scariest experience I have ever undergone.

Imagine. One minute standing in a darkened room with all your workmates, and the next waking up four hundred years previously being pinned to a chair by a serial rapist you were married to. Christ! Even I don't believe it when it is written as a matter of fact as that and I was the one pinned to a chair.

Ok. Let's begin again. And this time don't judge before I get to the end - please? I know you are probably shaking your head by now and hovering the cursor over the exit button, but if you would just allow the suspension of disbelief to kick in for a while, then maybe you might see a shred of truth in what I am about to tell you. Or maybe not. But, the offer of a tale is here, and if you fancy hearing about something truly mind boggling, then you are more than welcome to stay for a little while longer.

Now. Where was I? Putting things into perspective, I think. Right. Are we set? Then let's get going, shall we?

Prologue

Two years ago it happened. Two long years since the night at the Falstaff Experience had changed everything in my life. Now don't get me wrong, it wasn't all bad ... most of the changing has been good, but I will tell you more about that part in a little while. What I need to tell you first is what happened.

I'm not going to ramble on and on and skirt around the events, I'm just going to list them so you can gain insight of what is to follow. October 31st 2006. A works night out at a haunted location. Things bumping and touching - things that no one could see. Cold spots. Light anomalies dancing in the darkness. Ouija boards that became distressed and ended up freaking most of the party out. Unseen childlike hands grabbing jeans, and giving the appearance of needing protection. Séances in pitch black rooms. Dark figures looming in front of me - stale breath hitting my nostrils and making me gag. Sounds quite scary, don't you think? It was ... but that isn't the worst of it. Not by a long shot. The worst bit came after all of that. And that's the bit that is the most interesting and also the most unbelievable.

It all centres around a man called Jack Day. Not a very nice man, if you check your history books. Look at the date October 31st 1594, if you don't believe me. That was the day he was found out to be not a very nice man - *and* it was the day he died. Or should I say the day he was murdered? I prefer the term 'brought to justice', but I will explain that in a little while. Jack Day was a serial rapist and murderer. Violent and sexually abusive, Day was never caught by the law. Over twenty women were raped by him, not to mention it was believed he killed six women also. Seven if you include the death of his daughter, Thelma.

No. He didn't rape and kill his daughter - she killed him, in fact. Stabbed him. In the back. To save her mother. Me, actually. Yes. I know you were squinting your eyes there and trying to understand what the fuck I am saying, but you read it right. I was married to Jack Day - but not in this lifetime. I have already mentioned that I awoke four hundred years in the past being pinned to a chair by my serial raping husband, haven't I? But by all accounts, Thelma didn't save me the first time around, and that was all to do with Themis.

Themis. The beautiful girl with the voice of a nightingale. The absorbing girl who no one else noticed on the night of the vigil ... well, almost no one. The woman who told me she had to come that evening as she couldn't rest if she didn't. And finally, the woman who had disappeared when I finally came around from my experience in Elizabethan England. Only Jen and I had seen her, heard her, spoken to her. Only Jen and I were the ones to experience the events in the past, along with the girl Themis who actually turned out to be the 'bringer of justice' to the cruel and heartless rapist, Jack Day - her father.

I've just read through what I have written and I'm surprised you are still here. It sounds as if I am an eleven year old with an English project to undergo ... 'Write a corny ghost story with totally unbelievable characters and plot.' But you see, they always say truth is stranger than fiction, and I can guarantee, what you are about to hear is definitely strange.

Ok. Instead of waffling on and on - the thing I said I wasn't going to do, I will just bloody well get on with it.

One last thing. After the evening of the Falstaff Experience, there hasn't been a day that has gone by that Jen and I haven't thought about how we could change the past. Again. The story you are about to read is about just that. All that you need to think about is ... were we successful at last? Did we bring about true justice? And, finally, did we bring Themis back into the future?

If you want to know ... read on.

Jen. Jennifer Darby. My woman. My reason to be cheesy. If you are not aware, Jen is my other half - literally. She is the woman I thought I hated, but in fact loved more than life itself. I know this to be true because Jack Day told me. No. That came out wrong. Once again, I will start again.

When I first met Jennifer Darby, loathing was the only emotion I could feel. I believed her to be arrogant, obnoxious, and damned right rude. It was the events at the Falstaff that changed my perspective of her. It wasn't a case of having the crap scared out of me that made me see her in a different light, it was just that I had the opportunity to see beyond what was right in front of me and see the person who lay underneath the mask. That is something we don't always get the chance to do, isn't it? We are programmed in this day and age to be so quick to judge people, that even if we do get the opportunity to spend time with the person we proclaim to dislike, we close our minds off to any chance of getting to know the person we are choosing to ignore. I put this down to our inability to allow ourselves to slow down, the lifestyle we feel we have to lead is always one that is frenetic and solitary. Well, not always, but I think you know what I'm trying to say. Even when we are with someone do we spend enough time just being with that someone?

Truthfully, that used to be me. I spent most of my time rushing here, there, and everywhere, that I missed life. I was either racing ahead trying to sort out the future, or looking behind me trying to understand what I had done wrong. But not now. Now I tend to focus on the present, unless I am looking at the past. When I say that, I don't mean the past like yesterday or last week. I mean *the* past ... my past life ... the life where I was not Libby, I was Elizabeth Day - wife to a killer and rapist, and mother to a girl who had died saving my life. Thelma, or Themis as I had known her. The reason I allowed myself to focus on my previous life was because I wanted to go back to that time ... wanted to go back and change it somehow. Thelma had been executed after killing her father, and I believed that in some way I could stop that happening. Although it had been two years since the evening at the Falstaff Experience, not a day had gone by that I hadn't thought of the young woman who had stepped into my life to save both me and Jen.

Now it was my turn to save her.

Chapter One

October. The 31st, actually. But this time it was 2008 instead of 2006. It was the night when the dead arise and witches roam the earth looking for tasty young virgins. And unlike 2006, I wasn't looking for a tasty young virgin anymore, as I had my woman to keep me both safe and warm at night. The bumps in the night were supposed to be louder on old Hallows Eve, and I can promise you that I am not writing this from a slant that will try to trick you into believing what I have to say.

I know what you are thinking. You are thinking, 'Why has she missed 2007? Why didn't she go back and fuck about with time last year?' That question is easily answered. I tried. We all tried. Me, Jen, Steve, Sharon ... most of the original people from the first time, and a few more besides. But, nothing. We mimicked everything we had done the year before, but it had petered out to a mere nothingness and we were all left standing in the dark, both literally and metaphorically. All I can put it down to is the absence of Themis. She had been the catalyst in the action before, and without her would we ever replicate the scene again? But that was the whole point of the vigil in the first place ... we were trying to get Themis back. This year I had made a point of going around the office and making sure all of the people who had been with us that first night would once again be there. I even invited the useless mediums too, as well as some decent ones.

Unlike last time, I wasn't waiting outside on my own for the huge wooden doors to open and allow me inside. This time I was already inside when the others arrived. Jen was with me, obviously, and so was Steve. Once again we had to wait for Sharon. I was nervous, which given the circumstances was a given. Who wouldn't be nervous? If things went according to plan I would be face to face with a serial rapist and killer, trying to stop him from throttling the life out of me, beating the crap out of Jen, or even stopping Thelma from either killing him or getting caught. If things didn't go to plan ... But, I didn't want to think about that side of the story. If I did, then would I ever get the bottle to actually do what I knew I had to do? I doubt it.

This would be the sixth time we had tried to go back in time, and part of me was beginning to believe that we would never be able to do it. However, I knew that I wouldn't give up trying, no matter how long it took. How could I? Themis had risked her life to save both mine and Jen's ... and she didn't even know why she was doing it.

Eight o'clock and we were all gathered in the dining room waiting to begin. I know people say that nothing happens until the 'witching hour', but I wasn't going to take any chances. There had been so much evidence of things happening in broad daylight that I didn't want to waste any time waiting about.

All in all there were fourteen of us who would be participating. Four mediums, Steve, Sharon, Jen, myself, and six people from work. Unfortunately some of the people who had been on the original vigil had either left the firm, or had just adamantly declined the offer of a free night out. Five of the six had been on the other evenings, but there was one guy, Simon, who had been on the original and was now free to do it again. He hadn't been with us when we had performed the séance, but he did remember being in our group when we had done the Ouija board. Simon was a good guy - dependable, and I was happy that he had decided that staying at home alone doing work on a Friday night wasn't as exciting as coming along with us. At least it would be an experience.

By the time it reached eight fifteen we were all gathered in the downstairs room waiting to re-enact the Ouija. As we stood around watching the mediums sort out the table and begin to bless it, Jen grabbed my hand and pulled me to her.

'You ok, honey?' Turning towards her I noticed that her expression told me she was feeling exactly the same way I was. Shit feared, if you were wondering. Not surprising really, considering all she had gone through when we had experienced it the first time around. 'It's not too late to back out you know.' I knew it wasn't, but that was the last thing going through my mind at that precise moment. Actually, it was nothing at all to do with what had happened, or what was to come. It was more of a memory of meeting her properly for the first time, the way I felt my defences slip and slide away from me and allow this woman to sneak underneath my skin. Pale blue eyes squinted, and then budded open in the darkness, and I knew what she was going to say next. 'I love you, Libby.' Seems rather random for her to say she loved me, don't you think? But I felt the words hit home in my chest and fill me with something that can only be described as a semblance of peace.

'I love you too, Jen.' Leaning over, she placed a gentle kiss on my forehead before returning her attention to what was happening at the table. Two of the mediums were waiting for us to touch hands so the 'show' could get underway. The other two stood behind us like some paranormal body guards. A sudden urge to giggle swept over me before I sucked in a breath and slipped my hands onto the cool wooden surface of the table.

The next thing to happen was the naffest question to be ever written down in relation to a ghost story. Believe me - it doesn't get any cornier than this.

'Is there anybody there?' See? Naff. More than naff ... more like downright laughable. Here we all were, ready to take on space, time, and a serial rapist, and the only thing we could muster was a line straight from the pages of Goosebumps. Even if there had been 'anybody there' they weren't admitting to it. Part of me didn't blame them, either. But I let the medium do his job, as he must have a slight clue what ghosts like or dislike ... or spirits, actually. But when we had been standing there for more than five minutes and the glass appeared to have been super glued to the table, I was beginning to think that maybe someone else should have a go. Unfortunately no one was willing to take the initiative, so it went from five minutes to ten ... then ten to fifteen. Then a thought popped into my head. Do you know what that thought was? I'll tell you. The thought was 'Fuck this'.

'Are you there, Jack?'

Just with that sentence the glass jumped once into the air, taking our fingers with it. Slam. The sound of the glass hitting solid wood made half the party jump and the other half gasp out an expletive. I was not worried now - there was no fear bubbling under my skin by this stage. All I wanted was this to be over, and if I had to wind him up in order for it to happen, then so be it.

'Still dead then?' It still amazes me the speed the glass made from the centre to the letter f, but I wasn't amazed when the glass spelled out 'FUCK YOU'. 'You tried that ... badly.' I let out a snigger before continuing. 'And if my memory serves me right, it was you who were fucked in

the end, wasn't it?' The glass began to circle madly on the table - faster and faster, until people were being forced to move their fingers from it. When the glass was free of fingers it still didn't slow down, it actually went faster ... until ... smash! It had lifted from the table and launched itself in my direction. If it hadn't been for Jen shoving me out of the way it would have hit me squarely in the face. Pity the medium behind me hadn't moved as quickly. The glass had smashed onto the wall just at the left of him and shards sprayed all over his head. Thankfully he was only bleeding a little bit. I know I should have stopped what we were doing and gone to his aid, but Jack was with us and I wanted to make sure he stayed.

'Quick. Get another glass.' The medium leading the Ouija tried to say that it would be wise if we waited for a little while, but that was something I wouldn't even consider. So, I repeated, 'Get another glass, ' paused, then added, 'please.'

Whilst we were waiting for Steve to bring us another glass, Jen pulled me to her, making sure I was looking at her.

'Are you sure you want to go through with this, Lib. Jack seems a little feisty tonight.' I knew she wasn't scared for herself, and that she was only concerned for my wellbeing, but I did feel a little annoyed at the suggestion. 'Don't be angry, honey.' How did she know I was angry? 'I can tell by the way your lips have disappeared.' Even in the half-light she knew me ... knew how I would look and act ... knew that I would be questioning how she could read my mind. I couldn't stay mad at her, as I knew she was only taking care of me.

Leaning forward, I kissed her tenderly, but before I could say anything I felt a thump in the centre of my back, throwing me forward and into her. The breath left my lungs in a whoosh and I could feel a sharp pain in my chest as I tried to suck air back in. Bastard Day. He was trying his damndest to make sure we called it a night and buggered off. There was no way I was going to back down now - his ass was definitely mine. I wanted to be the one who took him out this time, not Thelma ... I wanted the satisfaction of stopping him hurting all those women, especially Mary Bennett - the same Mary Bennett who happened to be Jen in 2008.

'Here we go.' Steve was back, and I was thankful that I didn't have to explain to Jen why I had launched myself into her, gasping out. Hopefully she might think it was because I just wanted to hug her, and if I didn't look at her for a while, then maybe I wouldn't know that she already knew something was wrong. Maybe. Until I felt, as well as heard, the whisper in my ear.

'He hit you, didn't he?'

'Shall we begin again?' My voice was chirpy, and didn't reflect the way I was feeling. For all my bravado, I was scared. What if I did succeed in stopping Jack Day? What if I had the same fate as Themis? What if Mary Bennett died? What if I never saw Jen again? Some huge questions, don't you think? But I was still willing to carry on. Some would say I was an idiot, and a huge part of me believed I was, too.

As soon as the glass hit the table it started to tap as if it were waiting for us all to get ready. Before I had a chance to say anything, Jen spoke. 'Is Thelma with you?' A murmur broke out

around us, as the people we worked with had heard of Themis, but not a Thelma. The glass began to circle slowly, as if Jack Day was taunting us. The only thing to do was taunt him right back.

'Did you like being caught by a woman, Jack?' Momentarily, the glass stopped and then proceeded to circle, but this time it seemed a little irregular. 'I know. What was it like to be married to a lesbian?' That did it. It wasn't just the glass that went crackers, the room's temperature plummeted and the atmosphere, although not exactly friendly beforehand, held an icy warning. I should have stopped, but what the hell. 'Couldn't you satisfy her, Jack? One little wo ...'

Bam! I met the floor without even realising I was losing my balance. Something, or should I say someone, forcefully shoved me in the chest making me fly backwards and scuttle across the wooden floorboards. Before I had a chance to react, the table where we had started the Ouija followed in my lack of footsteps. Quickly, I raised my hands as if my feeble limbs could block the force that was going to pound into me. Slamming my eyes closed, I readied myself for the impact. Then nothing. No pain ... no contact ... no being crushed by the weight of the wooden table.

Slowly, I opened my eyes to witness one of the most amazing sights I think I have ever seen in my life. The table was in front of me, the surface facing me, but that wasn't the amazing thing. The thing that made my eyes bulge slightly was the table wasn't touching the floor. It seemed to be suspended by a piece of invisible string, and seemed to be waiting. Someone behind it uttered, 'What the fuck?' And if I could have moved my mouth I think I would have said the same thing.

As the people began to move forward, the table appeared to be even more ethereal than I first thought. Seeing hands move around the suspended piece of furniture without encountering ropes, made it seem even more real somehow.

'How's it staying there?' Fuck knows. If I had seen a magician perform the same illusion I would have been looking for a rational answer. But considering I knew what could happen in this place, I began to accept it. The only thing that entered my mind was to question why it didn't hit its target. There was no way Jack Day would have stopped his attack ... not after I had purposely hit a raw nerve ... his manhood. The same bloke who had asked the question tried to pull the table backwards, but it wouldn't budge. 'It's stuck here.'

Tentatively, I got to my feet and made my way over. My backside was throbbing and my left leg seemed weak, but I knew it could have been a lot worse. If the force behind the table had his way, I would have left the place on a stretcher.

When I got to where everyone was gathering, I heard it. Although it was almost a whisper, and there were people talking, I heard it so bloody clearly it was as if the person was standing right next to me. It was only the one word, but that one word made me freeze to the spot.

'Mother.'

It was her. It was Thelma. I couldn't see her, and believe me I tried. My head whipped around to see where the voice had come from, but obviously there was no one there. When I turned back it seemed as if something broke. The table slammed down onto the floor making everyone scatter in different directions, including me. Jen was next to me in a flash, her arms around me and pulling me close.

'Jesus, Lib. Don't do that again.' Again, I felt a splurge of anger flood through me. If I wasn't mistaken, and I knew I wasn't, that was the reason we were here, wasn't it? 'I know you want to make sure Jack's here, but there's no need to wind him up.' I tried to pull away, but she held onto me. 'Don't be angry ... I'm just worried about you, that's all.' Lifting my head up, I looked straight into her face. The light from outside hit the right hand side of her giving her an unearthly quality. 'I don't know what I'd do if anything happened to you.' A twinkle lit her eyes, and I knew if I didn't say something quickly, this gorgeous woman in front of me would begin to cry.

'I'm not angry, Jen.' And I wasn't. Not now anyway. 'I promise I won't take any chances, ok?' She nodded before allowing a delightful smile to slip across her lips. 'Come on. Let's have a drink and a rest before we carry on.'

And that's what we did. The mediums closed the Ouija with a blessing, and we all made our way outside. It was weird, though. The atmosphere as we were leaving was a mixture of something dark and predatory but it had an element of security too. Maybe it was a mixture of father and daughter battling for rights to get to the mother. I just hoped that Thelma won.

When we arrived at the fireside, I felt a distinct loss of sorts. I had left the room with Steve, who had yammered on about the events of the evening, and I hadn't even thought about being separated from Jen ... until I realised she was no longer by my side. A surge of anxiety flared up, and I looked to where the tea and coffees were laid out. She wasn't there. Now I'm not the kind of person who is like a sticky bob when it comes to being with a partner, but you have to remember the unusual circumstances we were under. Flashes of the first time I had left the room over two years ago stewed in my head. Jack had tried to throttle the life out of me when we had made contact for the first time ... what was to say he wasn't doing just that to Jen?

'Excuse me, Steve. ' He was still talking as I nearly ran back to the room. I didn't even consider she wouldn't be there. And by the looks of the near darkness, she wasn't.

Stepping further into the room I realised too late that I was on my own. The door behind me slammed closed, and the atmosphere I had believed to be a mixture minutes before didn't hold the same quality once I was on my own. Turning, I knew I had to get out before something went wrong, as if it hadn't already gone wrong to start with. Grabbing the door handle, I attempted the yank the door open. I don't think I felt surprise when it didn't budge; I was too busy crapping myself. Panic didn't just creep up; it announced itself with a cry.

Hands grabbed my shoulders and began to tug me away from freedom, and desperately I gripped onto the metal handle. It was no use, as the presence behind me seemed to have more strength than I did, which was surprising considering how strong people get when they are frightened. I felt myself being thrown back before I slammed into the wall at the far end of the room. All air

left my lungs in a whoosh, and pain shot all the way down my back and even through the tops of my legs. I didn't seem to have the ability to hold myself up, and however much I tried, there was no way I could keep on standing.

As I hit the floor, I barely had the chance to feel the coldness before unseen hands once again grabbed the front of my top and lifted me to my feet. Fingers dug into my skin and I could feel the tell tale sensation of the skin grazing a little. Slam. The force slapped me backwards until I hit the wall again ... more pain ... another slam ... my teeth were beginning to clack together. Slam again ... and again ... and again ... until I was turned and thrust away. Once again I found myself on the floor, but this time I had the chance to turn myself over and try to crawl away before the unseen attacker was back. I felt a kick hit my backside and I flew forward, the length of my body meeting the floor. I didn't know how much more I could take of this ... and thankfully, I didn't have to find out.

The door flew back and the light from the lanterns outside flooded in. Lifting my head slightly, I looked towards the doorway. A figure stood there almost filling the space. Even with the light behind her I knew it was Jen. I wanted to shout out for her to go, as I thought she would be next on the menu for a battering, but the surge of tears gathering inside my throat stopped any words coming out. The next thing I knew she was down on her knees beside me, slender fingers brushing back my hair, caressing my face, soft words of comfort pouring like syrup from her mouth. I couldn't say anything. I was still trying to acclimatise to the fact I was no longer being used as a punch bag. Then Steve's voice came through, and Sharon's.

'We need to get her out of here.' And that's exactly what they did, although I don't remember it. As soon as I knew Jen was there to take care of me I blacked out. Not surprising really after all I had been through.

I don't know how long I had been out; I just knew that by the time I tentatively opened my eyes I was in the dining room lying on the sofa. Three sets of eyes were looking at me, but I focused mainly on the blue ones. Jen was right next to me, her hands gripping mine. All I could hear were the crackles coming from the open fire. I tried to lift myself up but a searing pain shot from my head down the length of my body making me grunt in agony.

'Don't move, honey.' Although Jen was only trying to help, it seemed as if I needed to get up and get going again. We didn't have a lot of time to do what we had come to do, and I didn't want to spend it doing bugger all. 'I know you want to get going again ...' How did she do that? Keep reading my mind, I mean. 'But a few minutes won't hurt.' Looking past her, I saw Steve and Sharon nod and look at each other before focusing their attention back onto me. 'What happened in there, Lib?' Fuck knows. What is amazing though is how Jen knew I needed her. 'I had a feeling that something was wrong ... and before I knew it I was standing in the doorway looking at you lying on the floor.'

'I was looking ...' I swallowed, as my mouth was dry. 'I was looking for you. Where did you go?' Sticky bob moment, I think.

Jen explained to me how her and a few others had stayed back to examine the table and then had gone inside the house to get her jumper from the lounge area. By all accounts she was only gone a matter of minutes before she felt she needed to get to me. It was almost like something led her back to the room.

Steve handed me a glass, and by the look of the amber liquid swirling inside it wasn't orange juice. He flicked his head back sharply as if to tell me to drink it, and I didn't hesitate in knocking it back. Jeez ... it was not like you see in the films, that I can guarantee. Actors give the impression it is like drinking coloured water, but I beg to differ. The liquid seemed to strip my throat and then progressively burn a hole inside my gut. However, it did the trick, and I felt I had the energy to move myself into a full sitting position. It was only when I tried to stand did I realise how bad I actually was.

'Maybe I should sit here for a little while longer, eh?' My legs and back groaned out a yes, and I flumped back onto the pillows. I wasn't giving up ... no ... I was thinking ... what could we do next? Whatever it was, I doubted I wanted to do it on my own. I was stupid, but not *that* stupid. Or maybe I was.

Chapter Two

It was over an hour later that I hobbled out of the room and joined the rest of the party. Word had got around by then that something had happened to me, and I was greeted by worried glances. Part of me was surprised they were all still there, as if I was only a volunteer, I doubt I would have stayed around to see if I would be next on the 'Get the crap kicked out of you by something invisible' list.

One of the new mediums, Diane, suggested that we all gather in the Tavern and hold a séance. Fear shot up and deliberated in my mouth before I heartily swallowed it back. That was the place where it had all kicked off originally ... the time when I had met Jack face to face ... the time when I came back from relieving the episode of yester year and faced the possibility of losing Jen. It was also the time when I had noticed Themis was missing. Even though every part of me ached, and I had bruises coming out all over me that would make a losing boxer self-conscious, I knew it had to be done.

Three minutes past eleven o'clock ... that was the time it was when we all joined hands and listened to the knob head ask 'Is there anybody there?' again. Why couldn't they come up with something more original? Something like 'Oi ... undead! Are you home?' But no. We had to do it all in the text book way ... and by the amount of fidgeting and whispering - the text book way that wasn't working. Even when I shouted out for Jack ... called him a twat ... mentioned him being married to a lezza, the works, still nothing. Had the lame invitation to join us put the spirits off? Considering we stood around for over half an hour, I can say yes to that. It was cold. I was cold. It was dark. I was bored. We all were bored and cold and fidgeting in the dark and the medium's voice was getting on my tits.

Steve clicked the lights on and we all blinked in the rat caught in the cellar kind of way. What the fuck was he doing? Didn't he know that ghosties didn't like light? And I'm joking ... I don't know if they liked it or not, there were none of the buggers around to ask.

'At this rate we'll stand around all night.' True, Steve, true. 'Maybe we should try the Ouija again?' It was an option, I guess, but one we had already tried, and unlike all the other times, we had actually made some sort of contact. But I didn't fancy going through all of that again - what was the point? All that had happened was I had the shit kicked out of me whilst people oooohed and aahhhed around me watching the table stand on its side. I'm no expert in the field of going back in time, or even anything to do with contacting the spirits, but even I knew that the séance had been the catalyst before.

Then Diane voiced an idea. Something that I doubt any of us would have thought of on our own ... a bloody good idea ... an idea that Jen didn't want to come into fruition ... and idea that should allow me to do what I needed to do. And do you know what that idea was? No? Ok ... I'll spill. The idea was hypnosis ... or I should use the term 'Regression', as that is what Diane had called it. The reason why Jen didn't like the idea was because the regression was only going to happen to me, thus leaving me in the hands of the infamous Jack Day - if it worked, of course. And there was me saying I wasn't stupid enough to do it on my own. Shows you just how much I know, doesn't it?

I had never been hypnotised before, and a smidgeon of me was doubtful that I could actually fall under the 'you are feeling very sleepy' line. It was almost as corny as the 'is there anybody there' line, and as I was stretched out on the mountain of cushions I had a hard time not laughing out loud. I think the only reason I didn't was because Jen was still annoyed at me for saying yes in the first place. She had tried to talk me out of it when Steve and a few others had gone down to collect something I could lie on, but I was no to be dissuaded. Whatever I had to do, I was willing to do - well, that's what I told her at any rate. And as I watched her beautiful red lips form into a line, I knew I had pissed her off big time. She hadn't even given me a kiss for luck. That's what bothered me the most, I think. Knowing that if I did regress ... did slip back in time ... did meet my husband of old and get into some sort of difficulty, that I hadn't told her I loved her and I was sorry for not listening.

Ok. Back to being regressed. If you have ever had the experience of being under the spell of hypnotism, then you will understand the feeling of being totally at the mercy of the voice and also being aware of everything that is going on around you. It seems that at any given moment you can stand up and just walk away from it all, but something is telling you that it would be best just to go along with it. Diane's voice was soft and warm, trustworthy in fact, and I knew that as long as I could hear her voice I would be fine. And I was ... for a while, at least. It was when her voice kept on disappearing on me that I should have done what I thought I could do - you know, the getting up and walking away part. But I didn't, and to be honest, I didn't even try.

I went through all the usual things ... the blank screen ... the appearance of words that were out of focus ... trying to read them ... being on my own in a place that should usually have hundreds of people in there ... even down to my eyelids feeling heavy. It was all there, and all working well. But the weird thing was when I actually made out the words on the screen ... the blurred words

that slowly came into focus ... the same words that actually spelled out my name - Elizabeth Sophie Armitage. I felt a flicker of surprise as I read it, but not as much as when the words began to change. Elizabeth was still the same, but the Sophie part disappeared. Now ... I don't know if it was my mind playing tricks on me, but my surname had completely disappeared too. Or should I say changed? Because I still had a surname, but this one was a lot shorter ... five letters shorter, in fact. Armitage had morphed into one word - one name ... Day. Elizabeth Day. The name I was known as over four hundred years previously. It was probably some subconscious thing, but it didn't stop that element of fear creeping in. In my head, I mentally shut my eyes so I couldn't see it.

'You are in a room.' I know. Give me some credit. 'It is afternoon.' How could I know when I had my eyes shut? 'You are sitting on the chair in front of the window and looking for someone.' Why would I be sitting and waiting? Was Jack still pinning me to the chair? Where was Thelma? Was Jen ok? 'You are anxious.' No shit. I was mentally four hundred years in the past, sitting in a room waiting for a bloke to come home and try to throttle the fucking life out of me. I think anxious was a little tame. 'Actually, you are excited not anxious.' I can't even comment on that one. Excited my ar ... 'She will be here in a moment ... she is coming to you.' She? Thelma? Jen? 'Mary is turning into the street now, and if you lean forward you will see her.' I could feel my body leaning forward but I wasn't too sure if it was in my head or if I were actually doing it.

Then it happened. I opened my eyes. Really opened my eyes. The images before me were so sharp it was like I was looking at life on an HD screen. The windows were dirty and small, but I could see outside into the street. People were milling about, pushing carts, handling livestock ... there was no sign of the street from earlier in the evening. And that was another thing. It wasn't evening. Daylight flooded in shooting rays across the room, dust dancing between the lines. I still couldn't see Mary, as there were too many people in view, but inside me I knew I had to go and warn her.

As I turned to make my way to the front door I noticed the room that I was in. A few pieces of furniture were surrounding me; the floor was bare except for a rug that stood pride of place in front of the open fire. Momentarily I stopped ... why was I rushing? It was only Mary coming ... we had plenty of time before Jack got home from work. He would never know.

What the fuck? Jack would kill us both. I had to tell her to get away and hide ... get away and not come back until I called for her. I also had to warn Thelma ... I didn't want her to repeat the actions of the last time I was here.

What actions? Thelma was working. She wouldn't be coming today ... today was Friday - she always missed Fridays because of the market tomorrow.

A pain shot through my head and I gripped my hands to my temples. What was going on? Why couldn't I remember things properly? It was as if I was remembering both times ... the past mingling with the present ... but this was the present, wasn't it? I needed to sit down, but I knew I couldn't. This was not the time to go crazy ... I had to tell Mary ... Jen ... the woman who was knocking at my door that she couldn't be here - for some reason it was dangerous.

'Lizzy ... open up! It's me!' The voice was definitely Jen's, but why was she calling me Lizzy? 'I have to see you ... please!'

The next thing I knew, I was standing in the doorway looking into blue eyes. The same blue eyes that I had looked into for the last two years ... the same blue eyes that I believed I had known for all of my life, and longer.

'I know you said I shouldn't come here, but ... I ... I can't help myself.' The break in her voice indicated she was on the verge of crying. 'It's been nearly eight days, Lizzy.' There was no way I was going to let her stand in the street and cry, and not just because it broke my heart to see her do it. Anyone could see us ... and that anyone could be Jack, or one of his cronies. I had been avoiding her for over a week because he had hinted he knew something was going on between us, and there was no way I wanted him to get the evidence. God only knew what he would do. Therefore, I stood back and gestured for her to come inside.

Once the door was closed, Mary threw her arms around me and pulled me close to her, the scent of her seeping into my being creating an ache within my chest. Neither of us said anything ... there was no need to. We were complete - two halves joined again. Then a moment of clarity forced itself into the spotlight.

Pushing her back, I gripped the tops of her arms to make sure I had her attention. 'Jen ... erm ... Mary.' I watched her mouth move around the unfamiliar name of Jen and a certain sadness wash over her. 'Mary ... it is not safe here. Jack will kill you.' I paused. I had to think of a way of telling her without her believing I had fallen out of a tree and hit my head on every branch. 'He's the rapist ... the killer.' Blue eyes widened in shock before narrowing slightly.

'You are joking, Lizzy. He's a coward and we both know it.' Should I tell her what I knew? Even I didn't believe what was happening, never mind trying to convince someone else of it too. But how could I persuade her to run away ... hide ... not answer the door to anyone but me if I didn't? 'Jack Day is a worthless good for nothing, but he's not a killer.' Fuck. Looks as if it is back to Plan A.

'Mary ... I need to tell you something. Come on ... I think you need to be sitting down for this one.'

Obviously she didn't believe me. I don't blame her really, as I didn't do a very good job of telling her. Words like regression, séance, Ouija meant nothing to her. And when I told her I was actually Libby Armitage from the twenty first century I wasn't sure if she wanted to laugh or cry. However, she said the only thing that made any sense to the both of us.

'You are either trying to put me off because you want to stay with your husband ... or ...' she swallowed ... 'You are in love with Jen.'

'But you *are* Jen!' Fuckity fuck fuck fuck. *And* Mary! And she thought I was either a crack pot or I had completely lost the plot and wanted to stay with a serial rapist. I know they mean the same thing, but there is a slight difference to my mental state. 'I love you ... Mary.' Why I had to pause

over the name I don't know, because it didn't matter what her name was, she was still my everything.

Mary fell onto her knees in front of me, grabbing my hands with hers. 'Tell me you want me to leave and never see me again, and I will go. Tell me you don't love me more than Jack ... more than Jen and I will walk out of that door and never come back.' I could do the Jack part ... but the Jen ... who was Jen? What an unusual name. All I wanted was to be with this woman, and that was all I had been planning for months. I was going to leave Jack, but I had to do it the right way. Mary had money, as she had been left it by her parents, but everything I had belonged to him, even to the dress on my back. It wasn't as simple as moving away to a different place ... people didn't understand the way we felt about each other. Well, apart from Thelma. Even if she wasn't my daughter, I would have been proud to call her a friend.

It suddenly occurred to me that I hadn't answered her question, and when I looked into her eyes I could see a flicker of hopelessness ignite. She must have thought that I was considering her proposition - that was the only reason I could think that would warrant the lone tear trickling down her cheek. Words would not suffice at this moment in time ... words were weak and feeble. The only thing I could do to convince her that I loved her and only her, was to show her. Leaning forward I brushed my lips over hers. God ... they tasted divine. So I did it again, but this time a little more forcefully. Instantly, Mary returned my kiss, pushing me backwards and into the chair. Then she was over me, sitting on my lap and cupping my face in her hands, pulling me into her. The feel of her body so close to mine was making me crazy with want for her. Like usual. I could, and would, never get enough of this woman, however many life times we spent together.

My hands slipped up her back, stroking away all the tension that I knew she had been feeling since she had knocked on my door a short while ago. Thoughts of Jack coming home were leaving me, and I was losing all sense of reality again. I knew there was something I needed to do ... something I needed to say, but for the life of me I couldn't seem to remember what they were. All that mattered was the here and now ... nothing else. Whatever happened in the future, I knew that I would always have this woman in my life.

Mary's mouth was on my neck now, and she was uttering, 'I need you' onto my overheating skin. God, I needed her ... needed her so much. I knew it was wrong, knew I should have stuck to my guns for some reason or another, but I couldn't help myself.

Breaking away, I saw her lips move in the motion of leaving their target in mid kiss, her eyes budding open to reveal the same desire I had. 'Come.' Just the one word conveyed to her all the feelings racing through me, and I saw a small smile slide into place. Gracefully, Mary slipped off my knee and stood in front of me, her hand extended. Without expanding on the solitary word, she knew I meant for us to go upstairs. She knew I wanted to show her just how much I wanted her ... how much I had always wanted her. Even from the very first time we had met, we had both had a need to touch each other, like we were affirming all we felt.

As soon as my fingers tangled into hers, I felt the jolts race through me. Every time this happened, but it always took me by surprise. In one swift movement I was on my feet and in her

arms, where once again her lips claimed mine. It was as if the rest of the world faded away and all that was left was her and me, me and her. Nothing could stop this ... nothing had the right to stop this ... or judge this ... or say what we had was wrong. How could it be? Love could never be wrong, could it? Love was the ultimate goal in our lives, and to find someone who loved you back with as much verve and dedication ... now that is something we only ever dream about. But I had mine ... I had her, my dream, here in my arms, kissing me ... loving me as much as I loved her. There was no way I could stay with Jack ... no way. For once in my life I was going to do what I wanted instead of listening to my parents, my friends, and my family. They had convinced me that Jack would be a good husband, and he turned out to be anything but. Now it was my turn ... mine and Mary's .

Pulling away, I looked into her eyes, eyes that were full of us ... full of the thing we both wanted. 'I'll always be yours, Mary. Always.' Then I turned and led her upstairs.

Whatever the circumstances, it is always wrong to commit adultery in your marriage bed, but you see, at that moment in time I didn't care. I was planning on leaving Jack as soon as I could, and our marriage bed hadn't been used as such for a very long time. No excuse, really. He was still my husband, in name anyway. But I can only say that on reflection, as at the time I entered the bedroom with Mary, Jack was the last thing on my mind. However, I should say part of me did feel that I was cheating on someone. Strange, but true. But it was the woman I loved standing in front of me, lowering her dress, not someone else, so how could I be cheating? It was the woman I was willing to share the rest of my life with, not someone I had brought home for some afternoon fun. Our relationship had lasted nearly two years, although most of it was spent sneaking time with each other. No more, though. As from today I would be leaving Sheep Street and getting out of Stratford.

Mary was standing in front of me, glorious in her nakedness, her hair unpinned and caressing those perfect shoulders. Blue eyes were hooded, and she allowed them to drift up and down my body. I was still dressed, but not for long. I watched as my dress hit the wooden floor in my room, revealing bare legs. Her hands stroked the front of my bodice until her fingers looped themselves in the laces. Slowly, deliberately, the laces became loose ... the bodice became looser, and then the whole thing joined my dress on the floor. Sunlight slipped through the window and bathed our bodies with what appeared to be a blessing - almost like an affirmation of what we were doing was right. Even though we were in a situation where at any moment we could be caught, we didn't rush. I, for one, wanted to savour this moment forever.

'I love you, Lizzy.' Part of me was happy she had told me, but another part wondered why I felt so strange when she said my name. So, I did the only thing I thought was right ... I slipped close to her, my whole body coating the length of her and tilted my head up so she could kiss me. And she did. Not softly or reverently, but with a force that matched my own. Her hands snaked around my waist and slipped down to cup the cheeks of my backside. Wetness seemed to flood from within, readying me for what was to follow. My own hands slipped up her back and gripped onto her shoulders, as if I was trying to make sure she couldn't flee. Her mouth was close

to my ear as she whispered, 'Come away with me.' Pulling back I lifted one hand up so I could graze my fingers across her soft, wet lips.

'Try and stop me.'

The smile she gave me was little short of blinding, and before I knew what was happening, she had lifted me up and began to twirl me around as if I were a rag doll. Laughter bubbled up from within and burst into the air, and it was soon joined by the musical sound of her delight, followed by 'Today?' I nodded, and she twirled me again.

Thump. I landed on the bed and she was above me, her hair hanging loosely and tickling my face - a face that appeared to be lighter, brighter, and full of life. Fleeting, I thought I saw her face covered in bruises and those gorgeous lips split, but after blinking once, she was back to the unblemished woman of moments before. Weird, I know. Why would she look like that? What had made me see her injured? Could it be that part of me was worried that Jack would do this to her if he came home early? No. It couldn't be. Jack, as Mary so rightly said, was a coward. All his threats would soon amount to nothing when I left this place. There was no way he would ever find me again.

A hand came around to the back of my head and unclipped the clasp that was holding my hair in place. Mary ruffled her fingers through the blonde locks and deliberately placed some over my chest. A kiss followed her fingers ... then another kiss ... then a trickle of a tongue on my breast. A moan slipped from my lips, and I pushed myself up so she could deepen the contact. But Mary wasn't having any of it. Her mouth moved away as if it was taunting me, only to land on the other breast. Another kiss ... another flick of her tongue. My nipple was straining too, wanting nothing more than to be owned by this woman. Twinkling eyes looked into mine, and I watched as her mouth opened wider. The sensation of those lips encasing that pert nipple made me emit a cry into the afternoon air. A slight tug on the eager flesh made me jerk my hips up to gain contact with her.

Mary moved slightly, separating my legs with one of her own. Her thigh pressed against me, and I could feel my juices smearing itself over her skin. Another push, another jolt of want shot from me, but not just from the place where I knew I needed her to be. It came from my whole being - my entire body, mind and soul wanted this woman. Another push, joined with another tug on my nipple, made me spurt out a '*Please!*' into the October day. Her hands were stroking my sides, my waist, my thighs ... down to my knees and back to the vee of my innocence. But I wanted them to stop missing the point of my desire ... I wanted them to slip in between my legs and take what was so rightfully hers.

And then she did. Two fingers curled around and cupped my mound before they separated the folds and slinked their way along the trembling flesh. I was so wet ... so ready ... so hers. Then they pulled up and out again to trail across the downy hair covering me. Before I had a chance to complain, she was back, those two digits pressing a little harder now, making me buck against them. Once again, '*Please!*' slipped from my lips. I needed her. I wanted her. I believed totally that I would die of it if she didn't slip inside me. I could feel a finger toying at my entrance, slowly circling, and slowly gathering evidence of my love for her that I pushed once again

against her, delighting in the feel of that lone digit slipping a little inside. But it was not enough. No way near enough. I needed more - I needed it all.

Leaning back, Mary looked at my face before separating my legs even more. It felt as if she was devouring me with her eyes, and although the day was not warm, I could see a bead of sweat making its way down her throat. I wanted to lick it off, savour the divine taste of her in my mouth. But I didn't get the chance, as she decided this was the time she would slip that delectable digit deeply inside, and any thought of sitting up was wiped from my mind. Then she pulled back, waited, and then plunged inside me again and again and again. My hips were meeting her every thrust, but I still needed more ... still wanted her to take me with all she had. I didn't have to say anything, as just as the thought had entered my mind she pushed another finger inside. Momentarily, I felt the world slip away. I felt as if I was in another place and time ... like I was in a different room ... a different bed ... a different lifetime. But even though everything had changed, it was still Mary loving me. Images of being in a place where we could always be together, be accepted for who and what we were, made a smile split my face in two. Would it be like this when we left? When we lived without fear of Jack coming home and catching us? Yes. It had to be ... I could feel it. I knew that we would be able to live out our happiness together - knew it as surely as I knew I loved her.

A hand came and rested on my thigh, and with the sensation of her thrusting inside me, I thought it would only be a matter of moments before I tipped over into the blinding light that I knew would be waiting. Mary leaned over me, her breasts touching my stomach. With each push I could feel them sliding over my skin, and it made it even better somehow. Faster and faster ... deeper and deeper ... brushing, tugging, thrusting, taking ... the metronome of climax was increasing its tempo and I could barely keep to the rhythm. I could feel it ... I could taste it ... I knew it was coming ... I knew I was cumming ... I knew ...

'Yeeeeeeeeessssssss! Yeeeeesss! God!' The jolts raced from my core and dispersed around my body in an explosion. Nerve endings were screaming her name, as blood struggled to circulate. My heart gave the impression it had stopped inside my chest for a fleeting moment before thumping back into existence making me gasp. My hands were extended, as if I were trying to catch her in my grasp, but my fingers wouldn't co operate - they just spasmed in their own demented dance before my arms lost the ability to keep elevated. When they hit the mattress I felt a numbness wash over me ... I couldn't move ... neither my arms or my legs. It appeared that I had become almost paralysed in my orgasm, something that had never happened to me before. Mary's fingers were still inside me and part of me wanted her take them out, but another part wanted them to stay exactly where they were.

After what seemed like ages, I eventually opened my eyes. Blue eyes were looking into my own, and I felt a sense of peace wash over me. God, I loved this woman ... loved her with every fibre of my being. I wanted to tell her, but my mouth appeared to be dry and I had lost the ability to formulate words. Slipping her fingers from within, Mary started her way up my body, emitting cooling breaths along my overheated skin. It felt unbelievably glorious ... and when her lips met mine and moistened my once arid mouth, I knew that my world was perfect.

When she slipped her body up the length of my frame, and coated me in the blanket of her skin, I experienced the fullness of her. I didn't want this to stop ... didn't want to lose this feeling of completeness I had with her. Why I had waited nearly two years to leave Jack I will never really know. Maybe it's because loving someone of your own sex was not the done thing. Especially two women. How could women survive without a man to keep them? But that couldn't be an excuse, as Mary had money - we didn't have to worry about that. She also had a house, although that was a place where we could never live whilst Jack was in Stratford.

Soft lips tenderly kissed mine and I forgot about all my metal meanderings. I wanted to concentrate on the here and now, not what could or couldn't happen in the future. I had this gorgeous woman lying on top of me and I wanted to show her how much I loved her. Slipping my hands up the curve of her back, along the dip in her waist, I lifted her slightly before gently turning her so she was lying flat. Looking down at her face, I felt a lump gather in my throat. This woman was so beautiful ... so utterly delightfully beautiful that I don't think it was just because of emotion that I had a lump the size of a potato in my windpipe. I think it was air ... air that was expecting to be released into the atmosphere, but was too stunned by this vision in front of me to actually complete its mission. Dark hair fanned over the pillows making the whiteness of the material under her head seem brighter. Violet eyes digested me, and red lips seemed plumper ... and ready for me to kiss her again. Who am I to refuse?

The taste of her mouth seemed as if it was the very first time I had ever tasted her and I wanted more. A lot more. I wanted to taste all of her ... every hair ... every freckle ... every pore that covered that divine body. I wanted to taste her from the outside in, the inside out. And so I began ... Firstly, I kissed her throat ... licked her delectable throat ... glorified in the moans she let escape. So, I moved down, my tongue trailing over silken skin ... smooth shoulders ... defined collarbones that dipped and rose with ease. My hands were touching her body, kneading the supple skin ... feeling the muscles underneath my fingertips flex and ripple with every movement.

Gradually, I lowered my body so it was against her. God. To feel that skin touching mine was enough to send me over the edge again, but now was not the time for my own greed - showing her how much I loved her was the priority. Moving lower, I trailed my tongue along the curve of her breast. A moan broke out above my head making me move over to the other side of her chest and repeat the action. Pert nipples strained into the air, the dark orbs collecting around them puckering in anticipation. As I said before, I wanted to taste all of her, and here was an offering I couldn't refuse.

Opening my mouth, I hovered over the gift in front of me. I couldn't decide which one I needed to take first - they were both so beautiful. But the decision was taken out of my hands, as Mary lifted her body towards my lips and pushed one against me. I didn't close around it straight away ... I wanted to savour it. However, my tongue didn't want to wait, and surreptitiously swiped across the firm flesh. This time a gasp, and with that gasp I felt a jolt of excitement shoot through me. Another swipe followed quickly by my mouth closing around the bud, which then developed into a suck. It was as if I could feel it quivering inside me and once again I experienced a spark fly throughout. Part of me wanted to bury my face into her and stay there, but the greater part of

me wanted to finish what I had started. Switching from one breast to the other, I once again delighted in the feel of the mixture of softness and solidity greeting me.

Nevertheless, I had more to do, further to go on my journey. And this was one journey I couldn't wait to take.

Lips glided over sleek skin, licking all the beads of sweat that were gathering there. I had wanted to taste that ever since I had seen one glide down her throat when she was making love to me, and now I had my chance to drink as much as she would allow. Further and further down I went, collecting and gathering, licking and sucking. Further and further down until I reached the soft downy hair guarding the place where I needed to be. Slipping my hands to her hips I pushed back, lifting this offering towards me. Glistening wetness sparkled from beneath the hair, and as I moved one hand down and around her thigh, I allowed this moisture to open up in front of my eyes. What a sight ... what a mouth-watering vision. It was like a rose, the lips like petals and covered in dew. And like with all roses, I felt myself leaning in and inhaling the very essence of her. Perfect. Absolutely perfect. It was the scent I had always dreamed a woman should have, and all I needed to do now was taste ...

The combination of the smell and the taste seemed to explode inside me, and instead of gently stroking those petals with the tip of my tongue, I found myself pushing my whole mouth against her as if I couldn't get enough. And I couldn't get enough of her. Each kiss on that wonderful flower incited more kisses, more licks and pushes. And with every lick and push and kiss, Mary would release a gasp that told me I was doing something right. It wasn't as if I planned each stroke; it wasn't as if I purposefully set out to make her hips jerk, her gasps become stronger - but that's what happened. With each push, gasp, lick, jerk, kiss, moan I felt I wanted to repeat it all over again, keep on repeating it for always. But as you see, that was not to be. Her hips were jerking faster, her fingers were in my hair and pulling me in harder, pressing my tongue deeper into her, and then she stiffened ... and I knew that it was here.

A cry left her mouth and ricocheted around the room, inside my head, and throughout my body. This only urged me to delve deeper, suck harder, consume the very core of her, all the while attempting to hold her hips in place as they once again spasmed. If I thought the taste of her moments before was nectar, now it was unbelievably divine. Another cry, another flood of ambrosia, another attempt to keep her safe by holding her and loving her the best I knew how. Sweat coated her thighs, coated my body, coated everything that belonged to us at that exquisite moment in time as she thrashed out her second cumming on my tongue, my lips, my face.

And then she began to slow ... began to ebb into some kind of smooth circling ... began to twirl her hips in a leisurely dance as I once again absorbed all that was my woman.

One more taste and I moved away from her soaked rose, luxuriating in the knowledge that all the moisture collected there was a mingling of both her and me. Unhurriedly, I made my way back up her body, stealing kisses from burning skin along the way. Blue eyes watched my every movement, glistening with unshed tears. What was wrong? Had I hurt her? Had my loving her been too rough? A sob broke free from her, her lips trembling as they tried to contain the next one I could see gathering in her rapidly moving throat.

'What's wrong, my love?' Mary shook her head and attempted to smile, but this proved to be her undoing. Her bottom lip caved and the sob tore out into freedom, quickly followed by two thick tears that raced silently down her face only to sit, wavering, on her chin. I was above her, concern radiating from every pore. 'Have I hurt you? Tell me. *Please!*' Swollen red lips moved mutely and the more she tried to speak, the more the tears fell. Lifting my hand up, I trailed my fingers down the side of her face and tried to gather the tears that trickled there.

'You ...' One word. A word that could lead to anything. Did she regret it? Did she want to back out of our plan to flee? 'Make me so happy.' And with these words, she lifted slightly and captured my mouth with hers. I could feel all the love she had for me pour from her, and I took it all as if she was feeding me. The kiss was passionate and deep, but as soon as we stopped I had to add to what she said.

'And you have made this life one worth living.' I made sure she was looking straight into my eyes as I said this as I wanted her to see that I meant every word. The next thing I did was kiss her. Not passionately like before, but softly, tenderly ... kissed her in a way that would attest to the swell of feelings I had for this woman. And the best thing was she kissed me back in exactly the same way.

Lying down next to her, I placed my head upon her chest and listened to the beat of her heart. The rhythm was so strong and steady; I could feel my eyes closing. I believe it was the very first time in my life I can honestly say I felt at peace.

Chapter Three

I don't know how long I slept for, but what I did know that was when I opened my eyes it was because of panic. The warmth of the body I had been holding seemed to evaporate and the chill of the October air hit my bare skin. The heart that had swollen with love and passion had now switched to alarm. I could hear her voice saying my name in a harsh whisper, and as my eyes flew open and I saw Mary hurriedly throwing on her clothes. Where was she going? Why did she have such an expression torturing her face? Why was she gesturing for me to get up? Then I heard it, and if I thought I was scared before, that was nothing to how I was feeling now.

'*Elizabeth?*' Jack. Fuck. Jack was back and downstairs. Mary paused in her dressing and looked over to me. If he came upstairs ... if he caught us ... God. This was not good ... not good at all. My head seemed to burr again, and I was finding it difficult to think straight. The only thing I could think of was 'Not now' but I wasn't sure what that meant.

Nimble, I leapt off the bed and grabbed Mary's hand. Just as she was about to speak, I shushed her. If he heard her voice, or any voice, he would come charging up the stairs and see me standing here naked.

'Elizabeth?' His voice was getting louder, as if he was getting closer. Frantically, I looked around the room for somewhere to hide. The only place I could see was the bed, or underneath it I should say.

'Quick. Under there.' Mary just stood there. Didn't she understand? Jack was coming. Footsteps began to pound on the wooden stairs towards our room and it would be the matter of seconds before he barged in. '*Under ... the bed.*' It came out as a hiss, and I knew the panic was showing in every action as well as my voice.

'I'm not leaving you with him.' The look on her face told me that she wouldn't either.

'Come.' Dragging her, I dropped to my knees and scrambled underneath the bed to be shortly followed by Mary. We only just made it. The cover fell down at the side of the bed entrapping the both of us as the bedroom door flew back and Jack's voice boomed out into the apparently empty room.

'Where the fuck are you?' I knew he was standing in the doorway. I also knew that it would be a matter of seconds before he spotted the unmade bed and my clothes that I could see at the side of the bed. Heavy boots clomped inside the room and stopped again and I heard another curse leave his mouth. Thumping footsteps moved closer and came to a stop at the side of the bed. I could see the dirty leather of his work shoes standing, as if on their own, inches away from where I was lying. If he were to bend down and move the blanket away from the bed he would see his naked wife underneath and her lover next to her. And then ... fuck. I didn't even want to begin to think of what would happen next.

I knew he was bending down ... knew it as well as I knew he would bend down when I had hoped that he wouldn't. Thin, dirty hands appeared next to me ... the same thin, dirty hands that had struck me so many times. God only knew what those hands would do now. I didn't care about me, but I did care what he would do to Mary. If he lay one finger on her ...

Anger flared up inside. There was no way I would ever let him hurt one hair on her head - I would kill him ... *kill* him. I felt myself move, as if to climb from under the bed and confront him there and then, but Mary grabbed my arm making me turn to her. One shake of her head made me come back to my senses. How on earth could I ever beat a man? Especially one who didn't care what he did in order to always appear strong and in control?

Whether I would have continued and tried to face up to my estranged husband, I'll never know, because at that precise moment I heard a scream that turned my blood cold. The scream didn't come from Mary ... it came from Jack. It wasn't a cry of pain, or surprise, it was a shriek of fury. I felt myself move backwards and into Mary, and her arms gathered around my waist as she pulled me to her. Blinking rapidly, I absorbed the next outburst which was accompanied by swearing and threats. My dress was missing. It had been on the floor when I came under the bed, but now it had gone. A tearing sound joined the next yell, which was soon followed by a thudding sound as Jack started to bounce around the room ripping my dress apart.

'I'll fucking kill you ... fuck...ing ... kill ... you.' Jack left the room and thumped down the stairs. Another slam as the front door nearly came off its hinges. Then silence. And more silence. Then more silence.

Coldness made it difficult for me to move, but I knew that time was running out for us. We had to go, and we had to go now. If he came back and saw Mary here it would be the end for us. Scrambling from underneath the bed, I lowered my hand to help her out. She was barely on her feet when I began talking wildly about her going and I would follow as soon as I had sorted everything out.

'I'm not leaving you here with him, Lizzy. We are in this together.' She was trying to grab me ... trying to reason, but I kept on moving away and repeating she had to leave. Why couldn't she see it was for her own good? I didn't want to stay here on my own and meet the man who would probably kill me. He would kill her too, and I couldn't let that happen.

Pain swam into my head making me double over. What was happening? I tried to reach out for Mary, but everything was blurring. I could hear her panicked voice asking if I was ok, but I couldn't muster the words to describe what was happening. Maybe it was because I didn't know. Looking down at myself one thought crept into my head. Why was I naked? Then more. Where was I? Why was the floor bare? My eyes lifted slightly, and I saw a bed I didn't recognise. Another bolt of pain shot through my head made me clamp my eyes closed and hope when I opened them everything would start to make sense.

Warm hands slipped onto my back, and even though I didn't know who they belonged to, I wasn't scared. Those hands wouldn't hurt me. Slowly, I opened my eyes and lifted my head to be greeted by Jen's face at the side of me. I say Jen's, but it wasn't - and it was - and I know I'm not making any sense to anyone, especially to myself.

'Lizzy?' It was Jen's voice, but why was she calling me Lizzy? She never usually called me that - well, apart from earlier. 'Are you ok?' Pulling me to her, I felt my arms wrap around her. I wanted her to make me feel better, to explain to me why I was in a room I didn't know and questioning a change in the abbreviation to my name. 'We should go together. Leave now and not come back.' Why leave? Why the sound of panic? 'Jack will be'

As soon as I heard his name it all came flooding back. I knew damn well why I was here, although the being naked bit still escaped me. I had to make sure that Mary was safe, and that way Jen would be safe too. All I needed to do was convince her to go somewhere safe and then I could notify the Sheriff of Jack's penchant for abusing women - if they would believe me, that is. Sixteenth century England was not the women's lib period.

Licking my lips, I attempted to tell her again she had to go. 'Mary ... it's not safe here. Jack will kill you.'

'He will kill the both of us if he comes back. I'm not leaving you here.' Mary cupped my face and brought my gaze to hers. 'Especially now he knows we have just made love in his bed.'

Shit. Shit. SHIT. We made love? Here? Me and Mary? What would Jen think? Mores to the point ... what was *I* thinking? And add another snippet to my internal monologue ... Why couldn't I remember making love to her?

Turning sharply, I took in the evidence surrounding me in the room. Unmade bed ... me naked ... ripped clothes all around ... the smell of sex in the air ... Fuck. I had. I had cheated on Jen with ... erm ... Jen? Or ... *Mary*?

'Come. Get dressed.' Mary had pushed me away from her, holding me at arm's length. 'Now Lizzy. And then you are leaving with me. You don't need to take anything.' I suppose I could take her to the Sheriff's office with me, and then at least I would know that Jack hadn't got his grubby hands on her.

Pulling away, I lifted the lid to the chest at the foot of the bed and grabbed a dress. Less than five minutes later we were on our way out of the door and racing along the bustling street. At least we would be safe with all these people about. Jack wouldn't have the guts to attack us in front of witnesses - he was too much of a coward for that. He got his kicks from attacking lone women.

Fifteen minutes later we arrived outside the Sheriff's building. I don't know why I told her to wait outside ... honestly. If I could take it back I would ... I swear I would. But you see, I'm an idiot. Mary didn't want to stay outside on her own and looked around in panic when I suggested it.

'You'll be fine. As soon as I've done this we can get out of here.' I knew I had to convince her more, so I pulled her to me. I couldn't tell her the reason why I couldn't take her inside, mainly because I didn't know. I just knew that maybe if I went in on my own I could convince them to go around and see the man for himself ... maybe give him a bit of a slap whilst interrogating him. But if two women went in, they might assume we had it in for my husband. 'I need you to keep a look out. If Jack comes you can warn me.' Mary moved her head to one side and looked as if she was thinking it through.

'That's a good idea. I'll wait here.' The smile she gave me made my heart ache inside my chest. It felt as if I were standing with Jen. In a weird way, I was. And one of the reasons I was standing in the street in the sixteenth century was because I had to make sure this woman would be waiting for me back in two thousand and eight. Now all I had to do was to go inside the building and convince the people inside that my husband was the rapist.

Leaving her standing there made my heart ache again, and I wanted to pull her to me and never let her go. But ... I had to go ... I had to move inside and get the ball rolling. I had to make sure that history didn't repeat itself ... that Thelma didn't get executed for saving my life ... that Mary wasn't beaten ... wasn't raped ... and that I would be there to stop all of this and get Themis back in the process.

That gave me the momentum to go. The sooner I got in, told them what I knew, the sooner I could get back outside.

But that wasn't to be. The Sheriff wasn't there. And trying to convince the people there that Jack Day was the man that had been terrorising all the women in Stratford was not the easiest of feats, especially when I told them I was his wife.

'You'd be surprised how many women have been in here saying their husbands are the rapist.' Stuff the reason I had for leaving Mary outside. Then I heard one of the men snigger in the background. 'If we followed all of them, we wouldn't have time to catch all the real villains, now would we?' Did he mean that raping a woman wasn't really classed as a crime? Nah ... he couldn't mean that, could he? 'If you ask me, those women were asking for it.' Fuck. He *did* mean that. 'And there is no evidence to prove they were all committed by the same person.' How could I tell him that I knew for definite that Jack was the man they wanted? I couldn't tell them the story I had tried to tell Mary - she loved me, or Lizzy, and even she thought I'd been thwacked over the head. Repeatedly.

His grin was beginning to piss me off, and I wanted to smack him in the face. However, by the looks of the judicial system I would probably be put in the stocks, or maybe worse. Hitting a bloke would more than likely carry a heftier punishment than raping women. I tried again to convince him to just look into it, but he cut me off.

'So as I've said ... the Sheriff isn't here.' Was that a dismissal? Was he in fact telling me I didn't have a leg to stand on when it came down to it? 'You should run along now and get home.' Yes to the previous two questions. Wanker. He even had the audacity to gesture with his hands that I should scuttle off. Opening my mouth, I went to speak again, but once again, he gestured. What was the point in trying to convince him? Maybe I could ask Mary where else the Sheriff might be at this time in the day, and then persuade him to go and look for himself. It was a step in the right direction anyway.

I turned to leave, but stopped. I couldn't just go without having one more go at it. The man was beginning to check through his drawer by now and I stood and waited for him to stop. I would have still been waiting if the same bloke who had sniggered hadn't told him he still had a visitor.

'If the Sheriff comes back can you tell him to go to the Jack Day's house on Sheep Street?' His expression gave the impression of boredom and annoyance. The urge to smack him came back stronger. 'It might be worth his while ...' I paused for effect. 'There are quite a few things there that might be of interest to him.' Then I left, leaving the man asking thin air what these interesting items were. If I had read them right, they wouldn't come out if they thought I was just a bitter wife trying to get her husband banged up, but they might make a visit if they thought there was something in it for them. Stolen goods, for example. Greed was a motivating factor whatever time period. I just hoped I was right.

Now to try and set a trap for my... or should I say Elizabeth Day's estranged husband? All I had to do was get Mary and get gone.

Chapter Four

Outside the building I couldn't see Mary anywhere. I needed to convince her that we had to get back to my house and wait for Jack and the Sheriff, but she was nowhere to be seen. It wasn't as if we were surrounded by loads of people as we were before - the place was nearly empty. Why would she go when she knew I would worry about her?

Then panic hit. Hard. Where was she? Frantically I began to run in one direction, only to change my mind and run in another. Fuck. What if Jack had her? What if he had taken her back to her house to repeat the actions I couldn't stop the previous time I had been here? And Thelma? Where was she? I needed her to find Mary's house. I didn't know where to go or what to do. If I went back to Sheep Street I could be too late. What if the Sheriff didn't come? What if Thelma ended up killing Jack? What if she didn't and he killed me? Then Mary would surely die. Did that also mean we would die in the twenty first century too? It was a mixture of fear, alarm and terror welling up and out of me that made me stop. Not because I was trying to control it: it was more of being too overwhelmed to actually move. Sweat was beginning to form a layer all over my body, and coldness enveloped me. Breathing was beginning to become a problem too, as I had the urge to gulp down huge pockets of air but in fact I was panting wildly. The more I panted, the more distressed I became. I knew I was hyperventilating, but there was no such thing as a paper bag in the sixteenth century.

Falling to my knees, I knew it would only be a matter of time before I blacked out and wasted even more time than I had already. Lifting my hands up I covered my mouth and nostrils, forcing them to close tightly around and rid as many gaps as possible. Inside my chest my heart was banging uncontrollably against my ribcage, and with each frantic breath I felt the pain of its strain echo inside me. The effect of my hands forced the breath back into my mouth, and slowly I could feel some semblance of calmness and control return. People were just walking past me, as they must have thought I was drunk. I probably would have done the same thing, as I must've looked a sight.

I knew I would have difficulty walking for a few minutes, as my arms and legs were still shaking from all the effort of the attack. Therefore I took the opportunity to think through what I was going to do next. Somehow I had to find my way to Mary's home, as going back to my house was definitely out of the question now. Furtively I looked towards the door of the Sheriff's office. If anyone in there saw me kneeling on the floor, there would be no chance they would investigate anything I had said - probably put me in the category of 'Head Case - Ignore'. Hoisting myself up on one leg, I gave the impression I was tying my shoe lace, but was in fact still trying to work out my next plan of action. Flashes of the route I had taken with Thelma the last time I was here flitted in and out of my head. It was no good - I couldn't remember where she lived. The last time I had been here I had been distraught and only considered what I would find when I got there. And I was following Thelma.

Once again I wished I knew where I could find Thelma, but that too was a no go. The only thing I could do was to go back to Sheep Street and make my way the best I knew how. But I had to do it quickly.

All the way back I admonished myself. Why hadn't I thought of the tiny detail of where Mary lived when I had been doing my research? Had I seen it? Did the location of Mary Bennett's

house lie somewhere in my befuddled brain? No ... I'd remember, wouldn't I? Wouldn't I? Looks like a no.

When I reached the top of Sheep Street I knew I had to turn back around and take stock of my location. This was the way I had come with Thelma, I was sure of it. Moving forward, I ran to the end of the road and stopped again. There had to be something I could recognise ... something that would alert me that I had been here before. All I could remember from the last time was the foul smells that clogged my throat and the deafening sound of the carriages - the roads still appeared to mish-mash together. But there had to be something I could latch onto. Although the previous time I had thought everything looked so different, I had also thought there was a familiarity too. Now all I had to do was conjure up those familiarities from before and get to Mary before Jack did the things he had done to her the last time.

With that thought I felt my breath catch again. Not now. I couldn't do with another panic attack, another fit of hyperventilating. This was not the time. Swallowing hard, I focused my attention on the junction in front of me. One step at a time. That's what I had to do. One step ... one street ... one memory to invoke, before doing it all over again. What else could I do?

Slowly I looked around, silently praying for some sign to guide me. All the buildings looked foreign. Why hadn't any of them stood out before? Had I gone the wrong way? Taking a step towards the road to my right, I felt a sensation race through me informing me this wasn't the way to go. So, I stepped back, waited, and then moved to the left. Yes. That felt right. Don't ask me how I knew that, I just felt it, like something, or someone, was leading me. Moving forward, the sensation became stronger. This was the right way - I was sure of it. Then I reached the next junction ... the next decision ... the next sensation that led me to the right this time. And on and on and on ... and still I didn't recognise anything, although my legs seemed to give the impression they had walked this way a thousand times. What if I was imagining it all? What if the feeling inside me was the hope I was going the right way? I would never find her at this rate.

And then I saw it. The building I remembered from the previous time I was here. The building I had seen just as I realised the reason why people were staring at us. Thelma's hands and arms had been covered in blood then, but hopefully she wouldn't have to go through all that again.

As I was running towards the house, I thought of the broken girl I had seen before. The way she had fallen into a heap on the floor, the look of lost innocence and despair washing over her. She knew what would happen even then. She knew that it didn't matter that her father had tried to kill her mother ... the law wasn't very keen on women using self-defence or protecting someone else. It wasn't just the thought of stabbing an abusive father that had made her crumble, made her stagger and almost fall, made her grab my skirt like a child will do. When I had told her he had deserved to die, her mouth had opened and closed ... opened and closed. She wasn't trying to deny or accept that, she had been trying to tell me that she would be executed for this, and only been able to ask why I called her Themis. Justice. That's what she called it. And what kind of justice had her mother given her? Made her leave the scene of the crime coated in blood and lead her to where Mary lived, that's what kind. If I hadn't done that, then no one would have seen her covered in blood. But if I hadn't ...

And on that final thought I reached the house. Should I just go in through the front door? However I didn't get the opportunity to stand there deliberating, as I heard a smashing sound coming from inside. That did it. Before I had a chance to worry about what Jack would do to me, I was inside the house. Crashing noises were coming from the front room, and I knew what was happening in there. This is the place where he had beaten and raped her.

Then I heard a scream, but it wasn't from Mary.

'*You cunt!*' Jack's voice didn't appear to be the kind of voice you heard from a person who thought he was in control. '*Get off me you filthy whore!*'

Racing through into the room I saw Mary on her knees in front of Jack. Her face was battered and bleeding, but there was a look of quiet fury there. Her hands were gripping his groin like she was cracking walnuts, and Jack's face was near purple. A thin filthy hand reached out and grabbed the candlestick from the table, and I knew what he was going to do before she spotted it.

As I screamed '*No!*' the candlestick sliced through the air. Mary tried to dodge it, but part of the base hit her at the side of the face. Initially, her expression showed one of surprise, partly because of the impact, and partly because just before her eyes closed she spotted me standing there. When her body slumped, her hands released their grip. For a moment the room became deathly quiet. I wanted to race over to her and see how she was, but I also wanted to beat the fucking crap out of the evil bastard who had now turned his attention on me. A laugh broke out of his mouth; a laugh that was so unlike a laugh. There was no humour there ... nothing but hatred. 'Told you if you went with her again I'd get you both.' Another laugh. 'Thought I wouldn't find out, didn't you? Thought I was stupid.' He made a move towards me, but stopped. 'I'd tell you to ask her if I'm an idiot, but I think you're a little too late.'

Wait a minute. I'd gone through all this before, hadn't I? The first time I had come back ... we had this conversation, hadn't we?

I took a deep breath and asked the question I was supposed to.

'What have you done to her?'

He didn't answer straight away ... just leaned towards me to give the impression he was looking directly into my face, the smile nothing short of evil. 'The question is, dear wife, what haven't I done to her?' He was still the same evil fucker ... wiry ... dirty ... and his hair was still thick with grease. A long sharp face with quick dark eyes ... nothing new there then. Even the scratches on his face and neck were there, although there was no sign of bruising as yet. 'I'm happy you came when you did. I like an audience.' A thin slobbering tongue poked out from thin lips and swiped across them, leaving a sticky line across the bottom one. Jack's eyes flickered over my breasts and then he licked his lips again. 'Then you'll know what you're going to get next.'

Smack. The punch I threw landed directly in the centre of his face echoing the sound of a delectable crunch as I broke his nose. Jumping back, Jack grabbed his face with one hand whilst wildly waving the other around as if to ward me off. Blood was pissing out from between his

fingers, and I knew I had to continue at this precise moment, as when he recovered he would beat the living crap out of me. Scooping up the candlestick he had dropped onto the floor, I swiped it across the arm he was brandishing around. Another scream, so I hit him again, this time hitting him on the fingers.

'You ... you ... *fucking*' He couldn't get the words out, and I hoped it was because of pain, but I knew it was anger. I went to hit him again, but this time he sharply moved his hand away from his face to expose the thick red mass that had gathered behind his hand and he caught the end of the candlestick. A sneer ripped across his face, showing red teeth as the blood swam inside his mouth. Tug. He pulled the candlestick towards him, but I didn't let go. Another tug pulled me closer to him, until I yanked my arm back. The last time we had fought, he had swatted me away like I was an insect, but I put that down to surprise. This time I wasn't surprised: I knew what an evil bastard this man was. And I was ready for him.

Then a grin. 'Come on, Elizabeth. You know you want it.' To punch his lights out, yes. 'Maybe we could all enjoy it.' Dark eyes sparkled, as if he had just had a fantastic idea. However, that was his downfall, you see. He had more than likely thought of having a threesome and then turned to see if Mary had woken up yet. At that point, I slammed his arm onto the beam across the back of the chair, eliciting a hoot of pain from him, but also the release of the weapon from his hands. Well, both our hands, actually. It appeared to move as if it was in slow motion. I watched, helplessly, as the metal separated from our grip, and the candle. Thunk. It hit the floor and rolled away to the corner of the room. Now it was just him and me. At least I had the use of both my ar...

The pain shot through me, as his hand made contact with the side of my face. My teeth rattled inside my mouth, and the agony of one smack made me feel nauseous. Staggering to the side, Jack didn't give me the opportunity to regain balance. Thud. Another hit, and I felt myself moving unceremoniously to the floor. Bare wood was coming up to meet me, and there was nothing I could do about it. Fleeting, I remembered the incident in the room before I had been regressed when he had beaten the shit out of me.

Just like before, hands grabbed my shoulders and pulled me backwards. Frantically, I kicked out, and felt a warped sense of happiness as I felt my foot make contact with something soft. By the sound he made I knew I had kicked him in the balls, and this gave me enough time to scuttle away on my hands and knees to the side of the room where I thought the stick had landed. Unfortunately, Jack had second guessed me, and was once again trying to grab hold of my skirt, stopping me finding something to thwack him with. Unfortunately Jack reached the candlestick before I did, and kicked it to the other side of the room. Turning over onto my back, I kicked out again ... and again ... and again ... whilst moving backwards and away from him. Jack was grabbing, slapping, and kicking me back and I was feeling more like a cornered rat.

Frenetically, I chanced to look at his face. Blood was still streaming from his nose and dripping from his chin onto the floor. His features were contorted in rage, and with each lunge he made at me, he would emit a cry of attack and anger. How on earth could I beat this man? He was unstoppable. And even if I had the opportunity to escape, there was still Mary to consider. She couldn't get up and run, and there was no way I was leaving her here to die. This was it. This was

what was supposed to happen. I wasn't supposed to stop Jack ... wasn't supposed to change history. What had I been thinking?

Yes. What had I been thinking? And more to the point, why had I been thinking instead of reacting to the situation? I was cornered. Jack had seen a window of opportunity and pinned me in the corner before exacting out his pound of flesh.

Looking up at him, he seemed huge, although I knew he was in reality a weedy little fucker. A strong one, though, but weedy all the same. We were both panting, as breathing was a problem. It was a case of pain, anger, exertion and fear; although I think the last one was just me.

Leaning over me, I felt even smaller, and physically shrunk back as if I believed the wall would save me. Jack wiped his face and looked at the blood before giving me his full attention. 'Wish you had that much fire in bed ... then maybe I wouldn't have to share my talents with all those other women.' A shaky laugh escaped. '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.' The smell coming from him made my eyes water. 'And after I've done you, I'm going to fuck her whilst you watch.'

I didn't look away ... I couldn't. I was too busy being repulsed to look away. There was one thing I wasn't going to do, and that was to sit here and not fight him - even if I had to do it with words. But the strange thing was, the words coming out of my mouth seemed as if they had been spoken before.

'If you're so good at it, then why did you have to rape them?' He flinched and then backed it up with a snarl before grinning at me, exposing the clotting blood in his mouth that was mingling with spit. 'And why did I have to sleep with a woman? You certainly weren't man enough for me.' I saw his hand pull back and I knew he was going to punch me, but something stopped him.

'Or me.' Huh? 'Although, you've never had the pleasure.' Jack spun around to see who was speaking, but I knew even before I saw her. It was Jen. No, I'm not wrong on this. It was Jen. Just by the way she was standing I knew it was her and not Mary. The confident stance ... the glint of the predator in her eye ... definitely Jen. I looked to the floor and fully expected to see Mary still sprawled out, but there was no one there. Focusing back on Jen I noticed she was wearing the same outfit as Mary had been wearing. 'Sorry I took so long, honey.'

Jack turned so he could get us both in his view before spluttering, '*H ... h ... honey!*' I knew he was going to blow, but this time I wasn't scared. '*Took so long!*' As soon as the words left his mouth he charged straight at her. A side step from Jen made Jack nearly crash into the wall behind. Spinning around, his face was both ashen and scarlet, the blood looking brown by this stage. 'You are going to regret that, lady.' It was almost a snarl. Fists were balling up and shoulders pumped with anger, but he didn't move straight away.

Jen grinned at him, then at me, and then back at him again. There was no sign of bruising on her beautiful face. She looked fresh, alert, and also deadly, as the smile only increased an aura of danger around her.

'Me? Regret? Ahh ...' a fake sigh. 'I think you are mistaking me for someone who gives a shit.' That did it. Jack charged at her, his hands waving wildly. Deftly, Jen grabbed one fist, then the other, and just held him in place. I knew she was crushing his fingers into his palms; it must have been the sweat appearing on his forehead that gave it away. 'As for being a lady ...' Smack. Jen head butted him straight in the face making him fall to his knees. 'I'm no lady.'

He was only on his knees a matter of moments before his body caved in completely. Slumping to the floor, Jen released his fists. Instantly both hands covered his face as his nose had started to pump blood once again. Leaning down, Jen gripped the front of his shirt and hoisted him back up to his feet; his hands didn't shift from the shield he made over his nose. All I could see were his eyes ... those once dark and quick eyes that were now filled with panic. It gave me a sick satisfaction to see the man who had reigned terror into the lives of so many finally be the one who felt what it was like to be on the receiving end.

Pulling him closer so his ear was next to her mouth, she growled, 'Want to know what it feels like to be completely helpless?' A shake. 'Want to experience humiliation ... violation ... excruciating pain?' With the last word, Jen stood on his foot and twisted the boot hard into his toes. 'Want to know what it's like to be a victim?' A slap resounded off his face, making Jack grunt in pain as his own hand banged against his broken nose. Then another slap, which made his head shoot to the side and bounce back up to face her again. 'Well ... you've come to the right place.'

Panic surged up my throat. What was she going to do? It was enough, wasn't it? All we had to do was to tie him up and get the Sheriff, didn't we? That was it. Get him arrested and stop Thelma getting executed - that *was* the plan, wasn't it? This wasn't what we had come back to do.

With that thought, I began to stand, but as I got to my feet, Jen shoved Jack back to the floor. 'You see, Jack. You hurt my woman ... you upset me. Got it?' I'm sure he wanted to answer her, but like me he was having difficulty processing what was going on.

'Jen?' She didn't turn to look at me, just held up her hand as if asking me to be quiet for a moment, like she was working out a problem.

'And when I get upset ...' She kicked out, making a resounding contact with his thigh, which echoed around the room along with the cry he emitted. 'I take it out on the person who did it.' She kicked him again, her foot landing in the same spot. Down he went, a half strangled cry coming from his mouth as he hit the floor like a sack of potatoes.

'Jen?' This time she didn't acknowledge me. Her focus was fully on the man crouching on the ground trying to decide if he should cover his face or check his leg. This wasn't Jen. Jen wasn't into violence or punishment. This woman was the epitome of anger and revenge - not at all like the woman I knew.

'Get the fuck up.' Cool, clear, and crisp.

Jack mumbled, '*Please ... stop.*' I could hear the tears in his voice, and watched in morbid fascination as he rubbed his leg and avoided eye contact.

'Is that what all those women you raped begged from you?' Slap. Jen backhanded him across the face making him slide uncontrollably across the floor. He curled himself up into a ball and allowed the tears to fall freely, a mewling yelping noise coming from the bundle of clothes I could see. As she approached him, I found the momentum to move. At this rate she would kill him and where would that leave us? Jen going to the hangman instead of Thelma, that's where.

'*Enough!*' I grabbed her shoulder and spun her around. 'Enough. He's had enough.'

'But ...'

'No buts ...' I gentled my voice, 'That's enough, baby.' Pulling her to me, I felt the woman I loved slip effortlessly into my arms. I could feel all the rage she had melting away as I gently stroked her back and whispered tender words into her ear. It was over. We had caught Jack without harming Thelma, and I felt a sense of peace finally wash over me. Well, until a noise from behind her alerted me that all was not right.

Looking over her shoulder, I saw Jack spring to his feet, the candlestick in his hand. It seemed as if time slowed down for those few seconds, and I opened my mouth to warn her but I felt sluggish and out of sync. Jen's head also turned and I watched as her eyes widened. I wanted to speed up the scene, race to the final conclusion, but I couldn't.

'*Halt! Hold your hand!*' The voice didn't belong to any of us. It was a male voice, and not Jack's. I saw him flit his eyes behind us but still keep on moving, brandishing the weapon as he came. Jen gripped hold of me, and I fully expected to hear the clunking sound as the metal holder made contact with the side of her head. But no. Instead, Jen lifted and swung me out of the way, making us pirouette in a staccato rhythm. Jack's hand innocently brushed past my face, but the force of it made it complete its full cycle. The crunching sound of metal on bone ricocheted around the room, and Jack, as they say, was hoisted by his own petard. A scream released itself, and thankfully it belonged to the squirming writhing mess that was now on the floor.

Booted footsteps surrounded and passed us, and a blur of uniform engulfed the room. Turning my head I saw a man standing in the doorway. I knew his face from somewhere, but I couldn't place him. By the way he was acting, and throwing orders around, I knew it was the Sheriff, but one thing puzzled me. How did he know where to find us?

'*Mother!*'

Emotions raced through me. There, standing to the side of the man in the doorway was Thelma, or Themis I should say. But it was so different to the last time I had seen her. This time there was no blood coating the front of her, no blood drying on her arms. Here stood the innocent girl with no crime to haunt her face. All that was there was a mixture of panic and relief. I had to go and see if what I was seeing was true, and that the woman who was standing there waiting for me to make a move was, in fact, real and not just me wanting her to be there.

As I was turning, something extraordinary happened. I know you are thinking that all the events leading to this moment have been anything but realistic, but this was even weirder. The arms I had felt around me seemed to feel different somehow. They didn't seem as strong ... didn't seem as much like Jen's as they had. To top it off, when I looked into the face of Jen, it was different too. Blurry. Out of focus. Her mouth was moving, but the words were hitting air in muted abandon. The shape of her body was changing also ... not as firm ... not as dominating.

'Jen?' The word I uttered seemed as if it had been slowed down, like a cassette tape chewing up.

The face in front of me was coming back into focus again, but this time there were bruises scattered all over it - the same kind of bruises I had seen the last time I had been here. Why had Mary reappeared and I was still here? Once again I felt panic slipping up and over me. What if I was stranded here in the sixteenth century? What if because I had come back and changed the events of the past and this was it? I had to stay here?

'Lizzy?' Mary's voice broke through, but it didn't stop me wanting to go into panic mode. I loved Jen ... and this wasn't Jen. I know I slept with this woman, she had told me so, but if I had been in my right mind I wouldn't have. She may look like her, sound like her, even smell like her, but she wasn't *her* ... wasn't the woman I had given my heart to. This was the woman who belonged to Elizabeth Day not Libby Armitage. They were meant to be together, live out their lives together, share their past, present, and future together. And more to the point, if I was Libby, where was Lizzy? Was she in the twentieth century wondering where she was and what the hell was going on?

'Mother?' Thelma said the word again. The same word I was beginning to believe I would be hearing for the rest of my life.

Springing away from Mary, I turned to face the woman who believed I was her mother. Mary's expression showed one of hurt, but then understanding. She thought I was moving away to speak to my daughter. Truth is I couldn't seem to move once I had become separated. I could hear Jack shouting in the background as the officers were trying to get him up and out of the door, but I couldn't even shift my focus to the place where I knew he would be struggling like a crazed man.

'Lizzy?' Once again I looked at Mary. 'Are you feeling all right?' No. I wasn't feeling all right. Far from it actually. 'What is it? Are you hurt?' Mary moved towards me as if to take me into her arms, and I knew I couldn't just shy away from the contact. As she moved, so did Thelma and I was feeling as if I was being suffocated. Why, I don't know. If there was any place I could be when not with the woman I loved, it would be with these two women.

But I loved Jen. I wanted Jen. I needed to know she was ok, and being here in a place I didn't belong wasn't the way I wanted my life to pan out.

Then it happened. The contact. The feeling of two different hands making a connection with me. And just as it happened I heard Jack yell and panicked voices shouting for him to stop. I turned and saw everything begin to slow down, as if I was on seeing the world gradually come to a standstill. Jack was moving closer, his arms raised ... his expression one of fury and hatred. He

was coming straight at us, jaggedly, his body moving in spasms like when you flick through a stack of photographs. A glint of metal caught my attention ... the sparkle of a blade raised and ready to get his pound of flesh. How had he got that? He hadn't had a knife before, or else he would have used it, wouldn't he?

Instinctively, I wanted to push both Mary and Thelma out of the way, but it didn't seem as if I had the strength. It seemed that none of us could move, for some reason or another, and we were standing there like sitting ducks. Had they noticed? Was it just me who had seen the danger? They must have realised - the cry should have warned them. So why weren't we stopping him? Why was the room full of men trying to arrest him and he was lunging towards our side like a man possessed? I didn't know for sure who he was aiming his wrath at, but I had the distinct impression that it was me he was going for. Or Elizabeth.

The effort it took for me to step forward was unimaginable. It seemed as if I had lead weights strapped to my ankles, but there was no way I could stand there and let anyone else get hurt. Even though the main reason I had come back was to stop death, I didn't even consider that I might be the sacrifice needed to make everything balance once again. And *once again*, I didn't consider it. If I had to die, then so be it.

As my foot hit the floor the world around me seemed to expand, then shrink, and then expand again. Colours whirled and mixed in front of me, and I shook my head in attempt to clear it, but found it made it even worse. Sounds were becoming shrill and seemed to rip through my body ... smells were hitting my senses like sledgehammers ... but my vision ... my vision was totally fucked up. Brightness danced and cavorted with the colour, and pain seared through my brain and raced down my spine leaving me defenceless.

I knew I was falling ... knew it before the thud on the ground. Had Jack stabbed me? Was I injured? Were all the sensations I had experienced because I was lying in a mass of my own blood and waiting to see the light ... the bright light that was in my eyes right at that very moment? Voices surrounded me. I could hear concern for my welfare but I couldn't respond. I should have felt panic, but I couldn't. I was numb - physically and emotionally.

'Is she all right?' A male voice that sounded very much like that of the Sheriff broke through all the chaos racing around my head. Valiantly I tried to open my eyes. I needed to know everyone was ok ... that Jack hadn't attacked Mary and Thelma ... that it was only me injured. It was so hard ... so damned hard just to peel back my eyelids and see for myself.

Fingertips touched my face, and I knew they didn't belong to the person who had spoken. They were gentle, warm, feminine. And as they cupped my cheek I finally managed to open my eyes. There in front of me was Mary ... but not Mary. This woman looked like her, especially those blue eyes that were so close to my face, but it wasn't her.

Pulling my head back, I needed to take in the scene more fully. Standing around me were faces I remembered ... Steve and Sharon ... people from work ... the mediums ... Jen. The room was the room I remember from the twenty first century, and not the front room of Mary Bennett's house.

I wanted to feel relief, but I couldn't. I had left the drama unfolding from four hundred years previously without knowing what happened and a part of me believed I had failed.

'Libby?' Her voice was like nectar, and so was the sound of my name. I was back with her at last and hopefully Lizzy was back with Mary. A smile slipped onto my face shortly followed by the sensation of my insides lifting as she smiled back at me with that beautiful crooked smile she had. Leaning forward slightly, Jen closed the gap and pressed her lips against mine. I had come home, and I don't just mean the year. Snaking my arms around her neck I pulled her closer to me. To feel her close when I had thought I would never see her again was nothing short of bliss. I didn't care that the room was full of people watching our display - all I cared about was claiming her as mine again.

A cough sounded from behind, shortly followed by someone saying, 'She looks ok to me.' I recognised the voice, but not from earlier in our evening. I want to say it was the Sheriff I could hear, but that would be impossible. Wouldn't it?

Breaking off the kiss, I looked past Jen's head at the people behind. Most of them were engaged in small talk, probably to stop themselves staring at the public display of affection. But it wasn't the Sheriff who had spoken. It was Simon. The very same Simon who had an uncanny resemblance to the man I had seen from the past. The Sheriff, if you were wondering. What the fuck? I knew I had thought I recognised him from somewhere when he had stood in the doorway, but I never in a million years thought it was from my time.

Then it hit me. All the times we had tried to do this before, it had never worked ... I had never been able to replicate the events of the very first time I had gone back in time. The reason? Easy. Simon hadn't been able to come on the previous attempts, but I had never given that a thought. I believed that as long as Jen and I were there, everything else would fall into place. I hadn't even thought that Simon had been the only one who had actually heard Themis when she had asked a question, especially when no one else had remembered she had been there.

Then another thing hit me. Themis. Themis should be here shouldn't she? If everything had worked out the way we wanted it to, then she should be standing there with the others.

Sitting up sharply, I tried to see past all the people, but the other side of the room was too dark to see things properly. When I attempted to sit up, my head whirled in defiance and I felt myself falling backwards. Jen's hands grabbed my arms and held me steady, her expression showing worry.

'Just lie still for a little while, ok?' But I couldn't. I had to see if Themis was there. 'Libby ... she's ... she's not back.' Scrunching up my face in confusion, I opened my mouth to speak, but she shushed me. 'I don't know, Lib ... I don't know.' I felt my whole body sag. Had it all been for nothing? We had done this so we could get Themis back, and that hadn't happened. Looks like I had answered my own question. It had all been for nothing after all.

Steve crouched next to me and I knew he was waiting for my attention. Turning towards him I thought I could see the same disappointment reflected in his eyes as the one I was feeling. What

could I say? I was the one who had insisted that we keep on doing this until Themis was returned to her rightful place ... until the events of the past had been changed and Thelma had escaped execution. So what had gone wrong? Why wasn't she here? Was it because she hadn't felt the need to come in the first place?

'We need to check.' Jen opened her mouth again, and I was sure she was going to tell me she had already checked, and Themis wasn't there, but that's not what I meant. 'No ... not here. I mean the history.' I knew I wouldn't have to explain to Jen, but I would to the rest of them. 'We need to see if anything has happened. See if Jack Day got his just desserts.'

'What do you mean, check?' Steve looked at me, confusion evident. 'Check what?' Was he taking the piss?

'Check if the past has changed, obviously.' Even though my tone of voice told him I wasn't joking, his face indicated that he thought it was me who was the piss taker and not the other way around. 'Jack Day?' Steve shrugged as if the name rang a bell but it wasn't very important. 'Elizabeth Day?' Blank expression. 'Thelma Day?'

As soon as I mentioned her name his face broke into a smile. Looks like Thelma jogged his memory. But why didn't he know about Jack? The Falstaff Experience had made its name on being the place where people came to have the shit scared out of them by his spirit ... and to remember his daughter but not the psycho serial rapist?

'Ah ... I see you've read our leaflet.' What the fuck? I turned to Jen who shrugged her shoulders as if to say 'Beats me.' I looked at the other people in the room, but they were looking right back at me as if I had smacked my head on something extremely hard. Steve chuckled - yes - *chuckled*. 'Thelma ... the wife of the Sheriff.' I shot a look at Simon, who by this stage was making his way down the stairs. 'Are you ok? You seem a little out of it.' A little out of it! That was an understatement. This was not what I was expecting when I opened my eyes. Not by a long shot. I had thought that Steve, Jen, and everyone else for that matter, would be dying to tell me what had happened whilst I was fighting for mine, Jen's and Thelma's life four hundred years ago. But no. They were more concerned about going outside, probably for a crafty fag. And why did Steve not really remember Jack - the evil fucker who had tried to punch my lights out on more than one occasion?

It seemed as if an age had passed before Jen spoke. 'Have you seen us before tonight?' A simple question and it should have been a stupid question if things were going to go my way. I did feel a sense of relief when Steve laughed. Had he been winding us up? Or was he waiting for the others to leave before he went into detail?

'Of course I have.' Thank fuck for that. 'You first came here a couple of years ago.' Once again ... thank fu ... 'And I'm glad you wanted to come again. At least tonight has been a little more exciting for you.' A little more exciting? 'At least you had the chance to meet our resident spirit. William Shreve doesn't always appear.'

Who the hell was William Shreve? I thought the resident spirit was Jack.

'William Shreve?' Thankfully Jen had the ability to ask the question I just couldn't say. I was too stunned to speak.

'Sheriff Shreve. The man who this house is named after.' Steve began to stand up. 'Look. I think you've had a bit of a knock. You went down like a bag of spanners earlier.' The only way I could describe his body language would be with the word uncomfortable. 'Would you like me to get a doctor?' I just shook my head. 'Fancy a cuppa, then?' He attempted a smile, but it seemed weak. Maybe he was worried that I was going to sue him.

Jen once again answered him. 'That would be lovely.' She gave him one of her fantastic smiles, and I knew what she was going to say next. 'Would you mind if I had a bit of time with Libby ... just to make sure she's ok?'

'Sure ... sure.' I think he was relieved, as this gave him the perfect opportunity to escape from what he believed to be a fucked up situation.

As soon as he left the room, Jen turned to me, a huge grin splitting her face.

'Why on earth are you grinning? No one remembers fuck all.' A laugh came rushing out of her, and at that point I wanted to shake her. 'Jen! Will you stop fucking about? This is not funny.' When she started laughing even harder until tears were rolling down her cheeks, I thought I was going to lose it big time. All I could do was stare at her, because if I had attempted to shake her I think it would have taken a few people to get me off her.

'Sorry, love.' More laughter. More glaring from me. 'But don't you see?' No. No I didn't. 'We've done it.' Leaning forward, Jen pulled me into her and held me close. 'We've done it.' Done what? Made everyone we worked with, and more besides, think we are crack pots?

Then it struck me. And God, it felt good. If Steve and the others couldn't remember Jack Day, couldn't remember the events of the previous times, then we had done it. We had changed the past. Why I had never thought of it before that moment is beyond me. In retrospect it was so simple. When I first came to, after all what had happened, the thought of the present having changed never entered my head. Well, it did ... as I wanted Themis to be there, but I didn't think other factors would change also.

With that thought, I started laughing too. Well, until I remembered that the reason we had done all this was still nowhere to be seen.

'What about Themis?' That stopped the smile on Jen's face, too. 'Why isn't she here?'

Minutes later, we were on our way to the dining room. Maybe Steve could help us understand a little more, because obviously, everyone else's perspective of the last two visits was decidedly different to what both Jen and I knew to have happened.

Chapter Five

Part of me still believed when I reached the dining room everyone would laugh and say they were only pulling my leg. But that wasn't the case. If it had been then I could honestly say that I knew a bunch of wankers. However, when Jen and I reached the room, the only people there were Sharon and Steve.

It wasn't until Steve placed the leaflet advertising the Falstaff Experience did some semblance of understanding begin to sink in more fully. Underneath the heading something else had been added. Shreve's House.

'William Shreve was the Sheriff in Stratford at the time Jack Day was about.' Steve explained. I still didn't get the connection. Call me thick, but remember I had been through quite a lot. 'He lived here.' And? I should think quite a few people have lived in this place. 'Let me make it clearer.' Thank God for that. 'Here. Read this.' He opened the leaflet and pointed to a section on the inside page.

Sheriff Shreve of Stratford

William Shreve (Sheriff of Stratford 1593 - 1621) made his name when he caught and brought to trial the infamous Stratford rapist, Jack Day. After the trial and execution, Shreve married Day's only daughter, Thelma Day.

Shreve lived in this house from 1595 and continued to seek justice until he retired as Sheriff to become Mayor in 1521.

And on and on and on the leaflet babbled about what a fantastic man Shreve was, how many kids he had, and then on and on and on and on some more. It was the final paragraph that got my attention once again.

Shreve's spirit has been seen at The Falstaff Experience, but only appears as a guiding presence. For some reason, he only seems to materialize when there is injustice, or someone needs protecting.

It was the word 'injustice' that stood out from it all. That was the reason why Jen and I had done what we had done in the first place ... the injustice of Thelma's execution ... the blight on her name ... the fact that Jack Day had never had his just desserts. But ... that had all changed now, hadn't it? The leaflet seemed to signify that Day was brought to trial, that Thelma had got married and had children. Jesus! This was becoming more and more like Total Recall. What was the truth?

Looking up I saw Jen smiling at me. She knew what had really happened, although my fucked up brain couldn't understand why it seemed it was only her and me that could. However, if there was one person who I wanted to know the same as me, it definitely would be her. Turning, I looked firstly at Steve, who was waiting for me to say something, then at Sharon, who was trying her damndest not to demand I tell her why I was acting like a lunatic.

Part of me wanted to open up and tell them both the truth like I had done the last time I had been here, but last time I had a reason to. I could remember the same things as they did when I woke up, for one. I needed to establish what had happened in their version of events before I could even consider blurting out what would appear to be a whacked out story.

'This might sound weird ...' although not as weird as what I was initially going to say, 'but could you tell me what happened up there?'

Steve gave me a ready smile, whereas Sharon looked even more concerned.

'Do you want me to call a doctor, Lib? You were out for quite a while, you know?' Actually, no, I didn't know how long I'd been out for, or what preceded the time warp. 'It must have been at least five minutes.' Five minutes! I had done all that in five minutes! It had seemed like hours when I had been running around in the streets of sixteenth century Stratford. 'See? You've gone white again.' She moved closer and leaned over me, her warm breath hitting my cool cheek. 'You hit the floor hard, you know. Almost like you had been pushed.' Steve coughed behind her making her turn to him, 'I'm not blaming you, ok? But it did seem as if someone shoved her over.'

That was the problem, you see? This time no one had shoved me - I had been sitting on something soft and comfortable when I had been regressed. As for Jack, he hadn't even appeared straight away.

'Maybe I should call for the doctor. Five minutes unconscious is a long time after all.' Steve moved as if to leave, but then turned back. 'And it wouldn't hurt for you to be checked over too. You fainted at one point.' Steve had directed this to Jen, who like me, was open mouthed and staring at the now retreating figure.

'You *were* there. I knew it was you ... *knew* it.' Jen's expression seemed confused, and her mouth was working wildly as if she were trying to form the words that just wouldn't come. 'Mary Bennett's house ... you kicked the shit out of Jack.' I could hear Sharon repeating what I was saying, and I knew she thought I was batty, but I didn't care. I'd known Sharon for years, and if she didn't know I was nuttier than a fruitcake by now ... 'You do remember don't you? Fighting?' Still more mouth moving, still the human echo from Sharon.

Grabbing her hand, I pulled her to my level so I could look into those wonderful blue eyes. 'Jen. You came back with me ... you came back to *save* me.' Leaning forward, I brushed my lips over hers.

'I ... I ... remember seeing you lying on the cushions, seeing you distressed ... feeling so helpless.' Jen gulped and I saw her throat bob up and down. 'I don't know what happened really, as it all felt like a dream ... like I was slipping inside your head, or something.'

'Is someone going to tell me what the hell is going on?' Sharon sounded well and truly pissed off by this stage.

'And me too.' Steve was back, and I wasn't sure how long he had been standing in the doorway. Jen and I looked at each other, and I saw a small nod come from her as if she was giving me the go ahead to blab out all the events leading up to this moment. 'The doctor will be here in twenty minutes ...'

'Can we wait until he's looked us over? Then you might believe what we have to say if he has already told you I'm not crazy.'

Well, it seemed like the right thing to do after all. At least it gave us time to get ourselves sorted out, you know, allow Jen and I to discuss our experiences before we had to tell the other two. Maybe in the process make some sense of it myself. Although I think I would need a damn sight more than twenty minutes.

The doctor gave both Jen and I the all clear, saying that it might have been the excitement of the evening, lack of oxygen, or tiredness that made us flake out the way we had. After he left, Steve and Sharon sat down with us to listen to our tale. The others had decided to carry on with the vigil, as for all they knew that was the reason they were there in the first place.

It was strange to watch the reactions of the two people as I told them the reason why Jen and I had been there that evening. I could tell they didn't believe a word that slithered out of my lips - and I also knew that if it had have been me sitting in their place, I wouldn't have believed it either. Part of me did hope that they might have remembered Themis from the previous time, but no. Not a spark of recognition. I was going to continue and mention about her being the girl with the guitar, but if they couldn't remember her being in the séance, and then me demanding to know where she had disappeared to, I doubted they would remember that she had been singing round the camp fire. At this point I remembered Simon - would he remember her? I hadn't had the opportunity to ask him before, as I had only recognised him when I had woken up from what appeared to be a fainting episode. I hadn't seen him since and thought he that he would more than likely be enjoying the evening back with the others. There would be time to ask him later, though.

It was when I mentioned Mary Bennett that events took a different turn. Steve gave us one of those wonderful spontaneous laughs he had before repeating the name of Elizabeth's lover. I stopped my story and waited for him to continue, but he seemed happy enough to sit there.

'You've heard her name before, I see?' He nodded. Why are men so dense? 'Where? And, more to the point, when?' I fully expected him to say I had been shouting it out from my pseudo coma from earlier, but he even surprised me.

'From the glass cabinet upstairs.' Both Jen and I leaned closer. He leaned back. I didn't blame him, if the way I was feeling was reflected on my face. 'The book ... upstairs.'

'What book?' Jen and I said it together.

'The ... the book ... Mary Bennett's book.'

I don't think he had even finished the sentence before Jen and I were on our way back upstairs, through the Tavern, right through the middle of a séance, and into the room at the back which housed all the museum showcases. As we searched we could hear all the other people saying delightful epithets of 'for fuck's sake'.

It wasn't me who found it, it was Jen. Considering how dark it was in the room, I'm still surprised she saw it, but then again, I was beginning to believe the emotion of surprise was overrated.

'The door won't open.' Jen was tugging at the glass that separated us from the small brown book lying on a dark piece of what appeared to be velvet.

A jangle came from behind us, and I turned to see Steve and Sharon standing there, a set of keys dangling from his fingertips. 'I think you might need these.'

As you may guess, Steve didn't open the cabinet and hand the book straight over to us. I don't blame him either. For all he knew we were in fact the nutcases he thought we might have been and either destroyed the piece of the house's history or done a runner laughing hysterically into the night. So, it wasn't until we were back downstairs in the dining room that we were allowed to open it and look into the past ... the past Jen and I had been a party to.

Tentatively, Steve handed over the book. The title made my stomach ache with longing to read what was inside, although I knew enough already to write a book of my own.

The Trial and Execution of Jack Day by Mary Bennett

'See if she mentions anything.' Jen's voice came out excited, and I looked at her before answering.

'That's not vague at all, honey.' Her eyebrows dipped in confusion, so I continued. '*Anything?* Care to be more specific?' A nervous laugh bubbled out of her making her appear to be childlike. God. I loved this woman.

Opening the book, the smell of it made my eyes sting initially, but I continued to plough my way through. The first few chapters were putting things into perspective, as far as I could tell. Information and facts from the reign of terror Jack held over the people of Stratford, the names of his victims, how the officials had no idea who it could be, and how helpless they felt. Not as helpless as the women he attacked, that was for sure. The women who survived the trauma couldn't seem to put a face to the culprit, as he always attacked them from behind, covered their eyes with either a piece of cloth or a hessian bag, and they always ended up unconscious. People were getting antsy ... obviously, and demanded the previous Sheriff to step down and make way for new blood. William Shreve took over and made catching the rapist his number one priority.

'We know all this.' I pushed the book away from me, my eyes smarting from reading so quickly and from something that had not seen fresh air since God knows when. 'What's the point of wasting our time reading it all out?' Jen sighed and stretched her hand out to take the book.

'I know, Lib. But remember why you got so excited in the first place when you realised there was a book here.' I couldn't remember. All I knew was the book was regurgitating all the information we already knew, and it was the same information that anyone could get from Google if they could be arsed to look for it. 'It must mention something.' Blue eyes shot up and stopped me ribbing her about the vagueness. 'I mean ... something about how he was caught ... about Thelma ... about you, even.'

'Me? Why would she mention me?' Then it dawned on me. I had tried to tell Mary about Jack being the killer ... mentioned about the regression and all the other words she didn't understand. Maybe she could have put that bit in the book, although I doubted that her publisher would've thought time travel was the genre of the day. Would she mention the part when I had confessed and told her I was Libby Armitage from the twenty first century? Would they have allowed her to write a book from the mental institution? They let the poet John Clare, so why not her? And why am I once again having an inner monologue? And who gives a fuck about John Clare at this moment in time?

'It mentions Elizabeth Day ...'

Snapping out of my mental meanderings I saw Jen, Steve and Sharon with their heads over the book, their faces deep in thought. Why they were interested in the name Elizabeth Day was beyond me. It was his wife! She was bound to be mentioned at some time or another, and not only because Mary was sleeping with her.

As I opened my mouth to highlight this gem, I was stopped short.

'Here we go.' Jen leaned back and allowed the other two to lean forward and look at the page in the book. Then they both looked at me ... then back at the book before standing straight and looking at me again. I felt like a monkey in the zoo who has just realised there are people staring at him.

'What?' Did I have a monkey booger on my face? No one said a word ... two were looking at my green Gilbert that must have been hanging from my nostril, whilst the other sat and grinned. Furtively, I swiped the back of my hand over my nose before asking again. 'What?'

Pushing the book forward, Jen's slender index finger pointed at a place on the page. Two words stood out as if magnified.

Libby Armitage.

'That's my name.' Yes. I sounded like a two year old, or a very bad imitation of a two year old. So, I went for gold. 'That's my name.' Well done. Bravo. Kudos. And a flying congratulations to me for being so fucking obvious.

'Read it all, Lib.' Jen's tone reeked of amusement, but I knew it wasn't because her girlfriend had regressed to infancy.

Tentatively, I refocused on the book, my heart was hammering inside my chest, and I was sure everyone in the room could hear it - or see my top bouncing outwards as if it contained a midget on speed.

'... but it became apparent that Day's wife, Elizabeth, had information the Sheriff couldn't ignore. After I visited her on Friday afternoon, October thirty first, as was my usual past time each week, I became concerned with her lack of rationality. I had known Elizabeth for a long period of time and had never seen her so distressed. The poor woman was agitated and rapidly declining in health. At one point she even told me she wasn't Elizabeth Day; her name was Libby Armitage and came from another time. Having a good knowledge of Elizabeth's life, I knew not of anyone who had a name as such, and this gave me even more cause for concern.

When I had arrived, Elizabeth gripped the tops of my arms and indicated it was not safe to be on the premises, declaring Jack would kill me as he was the rapist and the killer of Stratford. Many women of this time had accused someone they knew to be the unknown attacker, mainly out of vengeance or spite. However, I knew Elizabeth to be an honest woman, one who would never accuse another person of a bad deed unless she had the evidence to support her claims.

Therefore, if not only for the sake of Elizabeth's mental state, we left the premises almost immediately ...'

At this point I looked up at Jen, whose eyes were fixed on my face. Bugger. And not just because my name was here in black and white. It was more of a case of knowing I had made love with Mary Bennett after I had tried to convince her I was not who she believed I was - if that makes any sense whatsoever.

'Tell me, Libby.' Shit! She knew and was waiting for my admission. 'Is that what happened?' Crap. She knew there was more to the tale than Mary Bennett was letting on. I know, and you know, that Mary couldn't have written 'and then I took her upstairs for mind blowing sex', but the words '*almost immediately*' screamed out something else happened before they went to spill their guts.

Wait a minute! I know, and you know, again, that at the time of all this going down, I was both Elizabeth and myself. The things I did with Mary as Elizabeth were clear to me now, but that's exactly what they were - things I did as Elizabeth Day and not Elizabeth Armitage. I reacted and acted as both these women who were, by some strange worm hole in time, thrust together in a mish mash of personality and personal assignment. In a nutshell: I would tell her later.

I coughed to clear both my throat and my head. 'Near enough.' I saw a twinkle in her eyes and knew as sure as eggs are eggs, Jen knew already. Maybe it was because I was glowing like a bolisha beacon - or could it have been the telltale line of sweat gathering on my top lip?

'Let's get this straight.' Thankfully, Steve interjected and saved me having to explain my time travelling tryst with the author of the manky book lying in front of us. 'Are you saying that the woman Mary Bennett is talking about was you?' Put it that way, yes. I nodded. 'That tonight you went back in time and changed history?' I nodded again. 'Ok.' Steve lifted his hand and swept it through his hair. 'I think I need a drink. A stiff one.'

I think we all needed a stiff one. Or maybe two. The evening had given us all more than what we had expected, and sitting down nursing a drink whilst explaining everything both Jen and I had experienced seemed like the way to move forward. Although when I say everything, I didn't mean *everything*. Some things are better left private, don't you think? Well, for now.

By the end of our tale there were only two things I still couldn't understand. Firstly, why hadn't Themis reappeared? Secondly ... even though our tale sounded fantastical, Steve and Sharon seemed to be convinced. I don't know whether it was because of the book, or the fact they had been told by someone from the medical profession that I was not suffering from mad cow's disease.

It was only when Karen from accounts appeared at the doorway did we realise we had totally left the other people out of the evening's activities. There was no way I could tell all those people too, and not just because I thought they would think I was crazy. It was late and we were all knackered, for starters. Maybe one day I would try to tell them - maybe on the next work's outing after consuming vats of alcohol. Then after they had taken the piss for the remainder of the night, they would forget. Come to think of it, maybe I wouldn't bother telling them after all.

It wasn't long after that we were all arranging to leave. Everyone seemed excited about what they had experienced, but it all paled in comparison to what I knew to have really happened. Gathering at the door, people started to say their farewells, and one by one people left. In no time at all there were only the four of us once again. Just as I turned to speak to Steve, I heard a familiar voice from behind me. When I say familiar, I wasn't going to say Jen's or Sharon's. It was more familiar than that. In fact, it was my own.

All the hairs on my arms stood to attention. What the fuck? How on earth could I be hearing my own voice from behind me? Part of me wanted to turn around, but the more mortal part of me refused point blank.

'Elizabeth.' The voice again. But still I refused to turn. The other three stopped chatting and looked at me. Jen's face contorted in question, and I knew she was going to ask me what was wrong. 'Here. I'm here.'

'I know you're ...' Jen stopped mid sentence and stared at my mouth. I could see the realisation dawn on her that the voice she had heard was not coming from me. Looking behind me I watched as her eyes widened in shock, shortly to be followed by audible gasps from all of them. 'Lib. Lib. Turn. Lib turn around.'

It was so hard to do. So bloody hard just to swivel one leg and face the opposite direction. I knew what I would see even before I saw it, or should I say saw her? Her, as in me. Her, as in the woman I knew I used to be. Her, as in Elizabeth Day.

In the darkness near the doorway there seemed to be an ethereal glow emanating from the place where I met Mary Bennett in a previous lifetime ... a previous lifetime which in fact had only been a matter of a couple of hours before. The shimmering light seemed to tighten, and the shape of a woman began to appear. After everything that had happened to me in the last two years, I believe this was the weirdest, but it was wonderful too. The face of the shape was becoming more defined and it felt as if I was seeing a reflection of myself through fog. Jen was standing right behind me, and I felt the warmth of her hand on my shoulder. At least that meant I wasn't dreaming it.

Green eyes. She had green eyes. And those very same green eyes were looking straight at me. Although I would say this woman could have been my twin, she looked more pure than I could have ever looked. The expression on her face seemed to emanate a virtuousness that seemed almost angelic. Seeing her standing there seemed to put everything into some kind of perspective. This woman had been married to one of the country's most evil and cruel men. How on earth did she survive? How on earth did she keep that wonderful sense of virtue and goodness that cloaked her when she had been witness to such wickedness?

Stretching out her hand, it appeared as if she wanted to touch me, but before I had the chance to move she uttered two words. 'Thank you.' I can still remember the sight of her smile as she began to fade away, but the smile was only half aimed at me. Part of that smile was also aimed at Jen - I'm sure of it. However, it was the way Elizabeth turned her head before she finally evaporated that made my heart clench. I knew that she was turning towards someone else ... turning that amazing smile she had onto someone she really loved. And although I hadn't actually seen Mary Bennett, I knew she was there in the background waiting for the woman she loved just as much to come back to her.

For the first time in two years I felt light. I felt free. I felt that the world had actually started moving forward in the right direction ... that everything was in its rightful place.

'You ok?' Jen's voice trickled into my head and made me want to turn back and into the arms of the woman I loved just as much as Elizabeth loved Mary Bennett. So I did. You don't blame me, do you?

You don't need me to tell you about the conversation after the appearance of Elizabeth Day, do you? Thought not. I should imagine you are more than capable of filling in the blanks at this part of the tale. Let's just say that the appearance of the woman from the past put some weight to mine and Jen's story.

Sharon's car was parked, badly, right outside the building, so it wasn't long before Jen and I were on our own with a promise to speak to her and Steve again sometime over the weekend.

Thoughts were whirling inside my head as her car pulled out of the space and tore down the quiet street. It seemed strange to see Sheep Street now, as the last time I had seen it there weren't cars parked along the kerb, weren't shop lights flashing their wares, weren't anything but bad smells, people and animals. It was so quiet now, and so different. Even though I hadn't experienced life at night time in the sixteenth century, I fully believed it would still hold that rowdiness from the day time.

Walking along, I slipped my arm through Jen's and rested my head against her. It seemed so natural to be here, seemed so natural to express how I felt about her in public. I couldn't begin to imagine what life must've been like for people in a time where being 'different' could hold such hatred. I know that life is not perfect, and I also know there are people still in the world today who hate others who do not conform to what they deem to be 'natural'. But I also know that slowly and surely the world is moving forward. More people are not so quick to judge the lifestyle choices of others. Hopefully I will be alive to see a world that can accept everyone for what they are and who they love. And hopefully I will also be young enough to fully appreciate it.

As we moved along, I felt a soft kiss on the top of my head and couldn't resist looking up into the face of the woman I hoped I would spend the rest of my life with. A half smile hung on her lips, which soon blossomed into one of those crooked ones that I loved the most. My heart expanded and pushed my rib cage into some kind of submission, and I felt the sigh leave my lungs and hit the autumn night.

A laugh came from the other side of the road, and I glanced over to where a pub was letting people leave through the side door. It never occurred to me to move my arm away from Jen's, never occurred to me that leaning my head on her shoulder was the wrong thing to do. Amazing how times change, isn't it? And it's only been two paragraphs.

From the other side of the road there was more laughter, and the sound of it made me smile in return. I felt good. I felt as if the night had given us nearly everything we had ever hoped it would. Here I was, with my woman, walking arm in arm and dreaming of our future together. What more could a girl ask for?

'Hey!' A male voice shouted to us, and lazily I stopped and turned to see what was happening. Jen's arm became tighter in mine, and for a split second a jolt of nervousness shot through me. 'Libby! Jen! Wait!' The man who had shouted turned his back to us as if he was talking to someone, before turning around and running over to our side of the street.

As he passed under the light I could see it was Simon. What was he still doing here? He left the Falstaff house over forty five minutes before. However, I didn't get the chance to think through anything else, as before I knew it, he was standing in front of us grinning stupidly. 'Did you have a good night?' I tried to reply, but he cut me off. 'Sorry I didn't get to stick around, but I was meeting my girlfriend.' Girlfriend? Simon had never had a girlfriend, well, in all the time I had known him. 'She was playing with her band at The Rose.' He gestured to the pub across the road. I could see his chest puff out with pride. Bless. 'I know it's late ... but I'd like you to meet her.' His eyebrows were nearly in his hair, and I could feel the expectation hover between us. It was

adorable how young he looked standing there waiting for either Jen or I to say we would love to meet his girl.

'That would be lovely, Simon.' Jen had taken the initiative; as I was too busy feeling all motherly. I was having difficulty stopping myself from ruffling his hair before giving him a spit wash. Instead, I pulled Jen closer and hugged her arm into me. Simon turned as if to leave, and I took the opportunity to lift my face up to Jen's and brush my lips over hers. When I looked back to where Simon had been standing, he was still there. I could just make out some words he was saying and realised his girlfriend had got fed up waiting for him to collect her.

'Lib. Jen. This is my girlfriend, Therese.' He stepped back to reveal the woman standing behind him. If it hadn't been for the fact my jaw had thumped onto my chest, and my eyes were on stalks, I would have said the only obvious thing I could've said.

'That's not Therese.'

But, you see, I couldn't. I couldn't do anything but stare, as I had completely lost the ability to formulate any kind of rational thought or word. I heard Jen grunt from next to me, and I couldn't even tear my eyes away to see if she was as stunned as I was.

'Hello again.' Again? But ... 'Although I doubt you remember me.' Fuck that. Of course I remembered her. How on earth could I forget? 'I was at the last vigil you did.' She gave a small laugh, and pulled Simon to her. 'That's where we met, actually. I was the in-house entertainment.' The slight accent was still there, but I couldn't even ask where she came from. I was too scared she would say 'Your imagination.'

A cough came from the side of me, and Jen jiggled me slightly, as if she was trying to get both of us out of our stupor.

'Yes ...erm ... yes ... you were the singer, right?'

'Singer.' I sounded, as well as looked, like an idiot.

'Playing the guitar.'

'Guitar.' At this rate Therese, or formally known as Themis, would think Jen was my carer and I was on my way back to the mental institution after my day release.

'At least someone was listening.' She gave out a delightful laugh, and I felt my heart crack just a little. Then I remembered I had asked Steve and Sharon about her, and I opened my mouth as if to speak but found there were still no words ready to come out. 'You two were the only two ...' a cough came from next to her, and she turned slightly to play push Simon, 'Ok ... and you too.' Simon grinned stupidly - again. 'As I was saying, you two, *and* Simon, were the only ones who actually listened.' At this point, she pulled him closer to her, the love she felt written all over her face.

Part of me wanted to run back, hammer on the door, and ask Steve if he remembered the singer from two years previously, but I think that would have drummed home the point that Therese thought I was the village idiot. Straightening my back, I knew I had to do something ... and that something would have to show her I was capable of sentences over one word. 'I thought you were wonderful.' Turning, I decided it was time I brought my other half into the conversation. Jen was still staring at her, so I prodded her stomach with my finger. 'Didn't you, Jen? She was wonderful, wasn't she?'

'Yes. Wonderful.'

'Wonderful, yes.' I was nodding frantically by now, and had to physically rein myself in from repeating wonderful again.

Both Simon and Therese were staring at us with amusement, you know like teenagers do when you are trying to talk to them about text messaging and computers. And the reason why they do that is because they are being polite to the old folk. Jen and me, to be precise.

'Wonderful.' Bugger. It slipped out.

Thankfully, Jen saved me from my repetitive tics and asked a very good question. 'So ... how long have you two been seeing each other?'

They looked at each other and grinned again, and then Simon squeezed her to him. 'Actually ... it is two years ago today.' He looked adoring at her before continuing. 'After Therese did her set, she had to go onto another gig. I asked if I could go with her.' Therese blushed furiously. 'And the rest, as they say, is history.'

Yes. It is Simon. History.

It wasn't long after that Jen and I said goodnight to the couple, swearing to come and see her perform in the near future. How could we not? Here, in the twenty first century, was the woman who had been the reason Jen and me had decided to have another crack at trying to change the past. By the looks of it, we had changed it quite significantly, and for the better. If we wanted to get technical, she was the reason why Jen and me had spoken in the first place. If it hadn't been for Therese singing Chasing Cars, would we have ever got past the 'I hate you' stage? I wanted to talk to Jen about it ... talk about meeting Themis, I mean Therese, when we both thought that was it, but I knew there would be plenty of time to talk about the past when we got home.

Silently, we walked arm in arm back to where we had parked the car, and it wasn't until we were seated and buckled up did Jen speak.

'So.' I turned to face her, and I saw those blue eyes twinkling with amusement. 'Tell me what you thought about Mary.'

Bugger.

Ok. I'm nearly done. ' *Thank God!*' I hear you cry. But I can't leave without giving you my two cents worth, can I? All this and not even a thought for the day? Never. I'm just too gobby for that, and after all I have been through to get to this point, and you too, I think I would be cheating you if I didn't go on for a little while longer and get my 'thoughts' out into the open.

So. Here goes. This is what I think. You may not agree, but as I said - it's what *I* think.

Firstly, it is amazing to think how our past shapes our future, isn't it? How history can determine what and who you are? However, so many people live in the past and fail to see that it's there as a guide only, not something to live by. When we think of the holocaust, do we think 'That seems like a thing to do'? Definitely not. We look at those kinds of atrocious happenings and pray to God they are never repeated. When we remember all the people who have died fighting wars, died protecting the freedom of others, do we think 'That seems like a good cause'? That is a difficult question to answer. Some people will say it is a worthwhile reason, whereas others will adamantly refuse to acknowledge that war can bring nothing but pain, terror and heartbreak. Looking back in history, do we rejoice in the slave trade? Do we clap and say bravo to acts of terrorism? Do we dance and sing and gloat when we think of the suffering of people throughout the world through government tyranny - through ignorance of other people's religion? No.

But, consider this. History, as they say, boils down to three things; blood, politics, and religion - although, we could mention the toilets - people are always fascinated with toilets. But that is history as a subject, and although we can learn from that, we need to bring it home a little. We can't go back into the past and change what has happened, however much we wish we could. We can't take back the harshly spoken word, or the cruel comment flung out in anger. Nevertheless, there are things we can do. We can recognize the world we live in, the time we are living, the people who are living it with us, for a start. We can be aware of the people we love, the people who make us who we are today. We can show them, tell them, that they matter, that they are important to us ... that we love and admire them, and not rely on their memory to remind them - the history of the relationship you have with them to inform them they are your everything.

You see, our history comes from our present ... our present and past shapes our future ... our future is something we can mould and nurture, just as we hang onto and nurture those old faded photographs. If you don't know where you've been, how can you know where you are going? Fortunately, I was one of the lucky ones. I had the opportunity to go back and do the impossible. And with my own eyes I have seen the changes I've made to more than Therese's life. Jack Day got his just desserts, I got my woman, Lizzy got Mary, and even Therese got Simon, although it was the Sheriff in a previous life. However, we don't usually get the chance to change the past, but we have the opportunity to shape our future through what we do today.

Personally, I think that's the most important thing, don't you?

The End

I hope you liked this story, and if you did you drop me a line at fingersmith@hotmail.co.uk. If you want to check out my printed work, then you can find details at www.pdpublishing.com - you'll find me under L T Smith. No, I don't mean *under* LT Smith ... that would be impossible. Grin.

Thank you for reading. And I think this may be the last first person narrative you get for a while. I'm considering writing in the third person for a change, as I'm sure you must be fed up with my style by now.

Finally - I would like to clarify the change of the names here. Jen/Mary - Elizabeth/ Libby = they changed over the course of the four hundred years. Thelma/Themis/Therese - her name changed three times because 'Themis' means goddess of justice, and considering it was Jen and Libby who saved the day, I thought a name change would be in order.
