

~ Can You Survive the Night? ~

by Greek Warrior

Disclaimers: This story is loosely based on the Fox Family channel show, 'Scariest Places on Earth'. No copywrite infringement was intended. I have no knowledge of how that show recruits or operates and this story isn't meant to imply that the show's production is in any way similar to this story. Characters may resemble certain people that prowled around ancient Greece but these aren't them. These are mine, all mine!

Language: Some bad words.

Sex: Please, oops sorry!! That's probably not what you wanted to know. Sex in the story, yes and it's between two people of the female persuasion but it's PG-13. You have been warned in advance. If you continue reading and this kind of thing isn't to your liking, don't blame me.

More 'covering my butt' disclaimers: The castle that I use in this story does exist. Very little of the history is accurate and no offence to any Campbell's or their ancestors is meant. There are numerous walking tours of the city of Edinburgh but I haven't been on them, so the one in the story is a fictitious company. Although the hauntings mentioned are based on true stories. See the notes at the end of the story.

Spelling Alert: I used the British spelling on some words.

Accent Alert: My, more than likely, bad attempt at a Scottish accent is contained throughout the story. I apologize in advance.

Email Address: You can contact me at XWPSScribe@aol.com but please be nice. Flamers will be pitied for all of about a minute, then ignored.

The Set-Up: Another hare-brained idea

I always thought I was a sensible person, levelheaded and fairly intelligent. I'm in my senior year at college, studying history and linguistics. Oh, I guess I should introduce myself; my name is Clay. Well, it's Margaret Clayton Fletcher, but I go by Clay, it drives my mom crazy. She wanted a daughter that was prim and proper and what she got was a tomboy who got into fights and took auto mechanics in school. But I digress.

Like I said, I'm a rather logical individual so when my friend Cheryl came to me not long ago wanting me to join her and three others trying to get on that TV show 'Survive the Night', you know the one that takes a group of people to a supposedly haunted place and wants them to stay overnight? Well, I thought she was loony tunes. Come to find out, she had already written the show and they had actually contacted her requesting a short profile on the people that would be included in her group. So Cheryl was recruiting the fifth and final member of her spook troupe.

"Oh come on, Clay, please." Cheryl pleaded.

I raised my eyebrows. "You're serious, aren't you?" We were sitting in a small bar and grill on the edge of campus.

"Completely." She took a swallow from her beer bottle and sat it on the table. "Look, Earl doesn't believe in supernatural stuff and he's agreed to go."

Earl's my age, twenty-one, even though he's a sophomore and touted to be the starting quarterback of our small college football team next year. He's your typical looking jock without the inflated ego. He's tall, just over six feet, and muscular with brown collar length curly hair. His eyes are brown and he's sporting a goatee that took him forever to get just right. His words not mine. Personally I never knew why guys wanted to let hair grow on their chins; it makes them look like billy goats.

"Why?" I asked as I leaned back in my chair and raked my fingers through my long black hair pushing it behind my shoulder. I had worn it loose today instead of in a braid and it was beginning to drive me crazy.

"Just to get a free vacation, he said. The show would pay for our plane tickets to wherever and our hotel rooms." Cheryl explained. "What could it hurt?"

"So we get free tickets to somewhere, that may or may not be somewhere I want to go and a couple of nights..."

"Five nights." She interrupted. "They spring for five nights in a four-star hotel after the tapings done."

"Okay, we get tickets and five nights free and all we have to do is make fools of ourselves on TV, right?" I pinned her with an icy glare from my blue eyes.

Cheryl fidgeted for a few minutes before saying, "If you're too scared to go, just admit it and I'll find someone else."

Well hell, that did it. Being called a scaredy-cat by my older brother when I was five for needing a night-light had instilled in me a need to prove that I was not scared of anything or anyone. Of course, I was more afraid of being made a fool of in front of millions of TV viewers, not of what we would, or more than likely, wouldn't find. "Oh all right, count me in. We probably won't get picked anyway."

Famous last words. Our little 'spook troupe' was chosen and trying to get into the...spirit of things, I even had t-shirts made that identified us as such. 'Spook Troupe' in large letters on the front with our names on the back.

I guess I should identify the members of Cheryl's little soiree. First off there's me, whom you already know. I'm tall, just a hair under six feet, with long black hair and blue eyes. Cheryl, my

best friend, who's about five feet six, stocky, has short red hair and hazel eyes. I've already introduced you to Earl. Then there's Russell. He's about five nine and chubby with straight above the collar blonde hair and dark blue eyes. He's shy and quiet unless he's talking about science. He's your standard geek without glasses or a pocket protector. Last, but not least, is Dawn. She's African-American, short at five four and skinny as a rail, with big brown eyes and a head full of long cornrows. I guess you could call us a real eclectic group.

Our Departure: We're off to see the wizard

The morning we were scheduled to leave finally came and we met at my apartment. Cheryl was the last to arrive, late as usual. She was born late and has been late ever since, according to her mother. The cameraman from the show had arrived at nine that morning even though we weren't scheduled to leave for the airport until noon. His explanation was that he needed to film everyone arriving and getting ready to go. Why they needed to show all that, I haven't a clue. Since I had yet to pack, I made sure to keep my unmentionables out of sight. I really didn't want the world to know I slept in silk boxers, I didn't think it was any of their business.

Cheryl, when she finally decided to grace us with her presence, no pun intended, well okay, just a little one, prattled on about hoping to see a ghost, while Earl laughed at her, assuring her that there was no such thing. It was the same argument that they had been having since we started this undertaking.

Russell was being more silent than normal, neither agreeing nor disagreeing on the existence of the supernatural. Instead stating he would need to analyze our experience, spoken like the true scientist he intended to become.

Dawn continued to warn Earl about making fun of the spirit world. "It might come back to bite you in the butt." Dawn cautioned. "I've seen things that would curl your hair tighter than it already is." She had her hands on her hips, staring up at her tall friend.

"Oh yeah." Earl continued to laugh. His newest hobby was seeing how long it took to aggravate the believers, as he dubbed Cheryl and Dawn. "I forget you're from New Orleans, home to ghosts and ghouls and all that Voodoo stuff." He wiggled his fingers in front of her face and did a halfway decent imitation of The Twilight Zone theme.

"I'm just saying that you should have more respect for the dead." Dawn stated, playfully slapping away his hands.

Earl turn to me when he was done irritating Dawn. "Come on, Clay, grace us with your oh so knowledgeable and expert opinion on all things hysterical...I mean historical. What do you really think we'll find?" He asked among the snickers of the others.

He had been constantly trying to force me to take one side or the other for the past two weeks. I sat my duffel bag down by the front door and turned back to face my fellow ghost chasers, making a big production of scholarly thinking. "I'm not sure." Which was the response he'd been getting from me since he'd started asking. "I will admit this." I grinned to myself as they stopped

what they were doing to listen to see if I was finally going to commit one way or the other. "I do believe that there are things...strange things, that happen that don't have a logical explanation. There are after all documented cases throughout history of unexplained occurrences of what could be paranormal activity." I paused and paced. "But I don't believe we'll run into a place that's full of Casper the friendly ghosts, either." I laughed at their groans and dodged a thrown pillow. "Gotcha."

The Flight: Somewhere over the rainbow

So, we're sitting on an airplane headed for Heathrow Airport, London, England with a connecting flight to Edinburgh, Scotland. Once there we'll spend the night before departing for our final destination, which we still don't know but I'm gonna hold out for a castle. What else would one expect in Scotland? Where our 'night of discovery', our host's words not mine, will take place, in a supposedly haunted place on Halloween night. I'm seriously considering getting my head examined when we get back home. At least the show sprung for Business Class instead of Economy seats, I don't think Earl and I could've lasted too long in the smaller space.

I've been sitting here watching movies, we each have our own personal TV, and I've come to realize why I don't fork over seven bucks to go to the theater anymore. If they're not rehashing the same love story over and over again, they're trying to see how many car chases can fit into two hours of film, I'll take a book any day. Oh well, maybe I'm just not seeing the good ones.

Day One in Edinburgh: Nothing ventured, nothing gained

After checking into our hotel, we had a late lunch/early dinner in the 'Merry Piper Pub' and then a tour of Edinburgh Castle, which our guide Colin from the show, told us was haunted. I didn't see any ghosts. The castle itself, I found to be very interesting. Sitting above the city on an outcropping of rock, the large grey structure seemed to grow out of the rock it was built upon. 'Man, if these walls could talk, the stories they could tell.' I thought as I walked throughout the castle.

As we browsed through the gift shop on the way out, Cheryl found some pamphlets that advertised walking tours through parts of the city. Of course the ones she took with her were the ones that mentioned ghosts and hauntings. One thing I did discover, Edinburgh has a classier class of sidewalk musicians. All the ones I saw were wearing kilts and playing the bagpipes. I told Earl that I'd buy him a kilt if he'd wear it to football practice next year. If looks could kill.

Night One in Edinburgh: By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes

It's night and we're off on some kind of ghost tour of the city. It's overcast and the moon is playing hide and seek with us behind the clouds, which makes it seem spookier and the breeze has kicked-up some, adding to the eerie feeling. We're in a group with about a dozen other people and our tour guide is dressed in period clothes, late 1800's I believe, complete with top hat, cane and long flowing black cape. He's already got a few people jumping at shadows just by the way he's dressed and we haven't even started.

"Hello and welcome ta Edinburgh. My name be Bruce and I'll be yer guide tonight as we visit the haunted and the macabre." He bowed deeply, tipping his hat.

"Hello, Bruce." A few of us said; others mumbled.

"Are ye ready ta meet the restless spirits that cling ta this mortal plane?" He asked as he mingled with us, looking each of us in the eye.

More mumbling, a few yes' and a 'bring 'em on' from Earl. I think he had a few beers in the pub before we got here, oh joy. And was it my imagination or was the air surrounding our guide slightly cooler?

Bruce paused in front of Earl longer than the rest of us. When he moved back to the front of the group he stated, "A word of caution ta the non-believers." He paused. "The spirits seem ta love ta gravitate towards the very souls that doubt their existence." He looked directly at each of us, then swept his arm with his cape attached, ala Dracula, in a beckoning gesture. "Aye then, follow me."

We stopped at the gateway to Edinburgh Castle, the castle itself being closed this time of night, and gathered around our guide.

"As ye can see the gates ta the castle are now closed, but that tis not enough ta keep some visitors out. Around the mid 1600's twas when the first known ghosts walked in the Castle. One night a colonel was roused from his sleep by a sentry who heard drums and marching troops approaching from the city. When the colonel reached the ramparts all was quiet. He ordered that the sentry be locked up on suspicion of being drunk. Taking over the watch, the colonel then heard the drums himself. They beat a staccato rhythm well known as the march of the southern English. Not a single English soldier appeared and, indeed, none was in Scotland. Mind ya, tis was one of the few times they weren't." Everyone laughed, recognizing the jab at the English and Scottish for their history of conflict. "Ever since then, the rhythmic beat of drums and marching feet have occasionally been heard in the Castle precincts."

He waited as we peered around to see if we could see or hear the ghostly soldiers marching around us.

"Now," Bruce stated loudly, which caused some to jump, "there's another drummer that makes rounds along the castle ramparts. No one knows just when or why his unnerving wandering started, nor who he was in life. Tis difficult ta identify him when he's got no head. But several people who have dared ta investigate the origin of the nocturnal sounds have seen his hideous, headless form marching and drumming."

Another pause, while we tilted our heads up and around, trying to see the headless spectre, before dutifully following our guide away from the ominous looking castle that seemed to loom over us as if it was showing it's disdain for us mere mortals.

"Yer standing along what's called the Royal Mile. And perhaps the most ancient of the city's phantoms tis the ghostly piper who marches along it. Or ta be more accurate, he marches below it. Ya see, according ta the story, the origins of which are lost in time, a group of builders who were strengthening the defences of Edinburgh Castle came across a tunnel that led down into the depths of Castle Rock, that the great castle stands on. The tunnel's sides were smooth and showed signs of having been finished by metal tools. Twas whispered that the tunnel was the work of fairies and best left alone."

At this point I could hear a few snickers come from behind me and I knew one was Earl. Fortunately our guide either didn't hear or chose to ignore them.

"While the workmen gossiped a piper from the castle guard strode up and offered ta investigate. Some say he was a Huntly, others that he was a man of Clan Ranald. If he was a Highlander he should've known not ta interfere in fairy work. Well, the piper set off along the tunnel, playing his pipes with gusto. While above ground, the workmen and a crowd of curious townsfolk, silently listening, followed the shrill sound of the pipes as they moved downhill along the line of the Royal Mile. When they reached the spot now occupied by The Tron , the music suddenly stopped." We were leaning forward hanging on his every word. "The piper never re-emerged and the tunnel was hastily resealed. On quiet nights, however, the faint sound of bagpipes has been heard moving down from the Castle ta The Tron only ta cut off suddenly. Regrettably, in these days of late night motor traffic the pipes are rarely heard."

Our guide paused while several people stared down at the sidewalk as if waiting for the sound of the bagpipes. We moved a few blocks along High Street before our black clad guide gathered us around him again.

"Tis an equally ancient spectre which, when seen, tis greatly feared in the city, tis the Death Coach. So old is this terrifying spectre nobody knows for how many centuries raced along the Royal Mile. Moving up the hill at a gallop, pulled by black horses breathing fire and carrying a full load of passengers dressed in rich black clothing, the Death Coach must be a startling sight for those who happen ta glimpse the horrible apparition. However, the reason for the whole city fearing this ghoulish vision has nothing ta do with its appearance, though that is fearsome enough. The fear is because the coach is said ta bring bad luck ta Edinburgh. The Edinburgh Death Coach has been regularly reported before wars or devastating fires."

"So, Bruce, how come we haven't seen any of the ghosts?" Earl laughed.

Bruce gave Earl the evil eye until our macho athlete started to squirm. "Tis not a dog and pony show, lad. The spirits do not give a performance on command."

Muted laughter but this time directed at Earl who blushed and wisely decided to keep his mouth shut.

"We are now headed ta a place of unspeakable horror known as Mary King's Close."

We followed him down a street and through a doorway and into a warren of interconnecting rooms. He stopped and whorled around to face us, his cape billowing out around him. "Imagine, if ya can, tis the summer of 16 hundred and 45. A room such as this," he turned in a circle, his cape billowing out again, "would have been home ta a large family, with no running water or sanitation. Imagine the chamber pots, filled throughout the day, being emptied into the streets at 10 o'clock every night. The refuse was poured out the windows from the stories above and accumulated on the pathways below til the next day when twas swept away. Imagine the stench and the haven for vermin."

We entered another room that was a little larger than the last. "Much of the area that was Mary King's Close, burnt down in 17 hundred and 50 and twas built-into the new civic buildings, but enough remains ta lend a grim atmosphere. This room had been a local tavern. Much different from the pubs of modern Edinburgh. Ta gain entrance you had ta walk down a dark and filthy alleyway. The room had a low ceiling, lighted by tallow candles and heated by a roaring fire. All these factors lent ta the smoke filled room which was enough ta start yer eyes a watering, but add in the unwashed bodies packed tightly together and the sewage they brought in on their boots and ya have a real pleasant atmosphere." He grinned.

Several people held their noses, imagining the stench. We moved farther into the close. "So, in the summer of 16 hundred and 45 when Plague struck the city, spreading like a visitation from the bowels of Hell. The disease, the cause at the time unknown, raced through the streets. Indiscriminately striking down the old and young, rich and poor and nowhere was more badly hit than Mary King's Close. Desperate ta halt the disease, the city magistrates ordered The Close ta be blocked off. The wretched inhabitants were walled in with stores of food ta face their doom. And only when all trace of the plague had vanished were the pitiful survivors allowed ta emerge." Several people gasped and looked a little pale.

"Tis no wonder that some of the dead still linger here where their mortal bodies perished. The disembodied head of a man deeply ravaged by the plague has been seen ta float in mid-air. Also a phantom hand gripping a candle has been spied by some." We entered a room that had all sorts of children's toys gathered against the far wall. "People bring trinkets for the ghost of a little girl that has been seen in this room." He let us linger in the room where the little girl might have lived or died or both. I noticed one of the older ladies had tears in her eyes.

"In later years the flats of Mary King's Close were offered fer rent but only one man and his wife took up residence. Their maid fled in fear of her life when she claimed ta have heard mysterious noises and ta have seen a ghost."

We moved on to another room. "Another sighting tis of a woman that, according ta those that have seen her, tis clearly mad. She sits in the corner rockin back and forth and pulling at her hair. Tis not known if she was mad before she was sealed in or if watching the diseased and dying pushed her over the edge."

As we emerged back outside to clouds that looked like they could open up at any time. "Our last stop tonight tis a place called Greyfriar's Graveyard." Bruce began after walking several blocks. "In the 1820's the sale of dead bodies for dissection in Edinburgh's medical schools was almost a

commonplace event. Young medical students would wait for a funeral to take place and that same night, the cemetery deserted, they would dig up the body and carry it away to a waiting doctor. Greyfriars and other graveyards were favourite hunting grounds."

We entered the graveyard with its markers stained dark with age, some so old their chiseled names and dates were worn smooth by time and weather. Everyone seemed to be on edge. Even Earl's eyes darted around, refusing to linger or look too deeply into the shadows.

Bruce led us through an iron gate, complete with Intersanctum creaking, and gathered us around him. "This area here," he pointed to the area that surrounded us, "tis the Covenanters Prison also known as the Black Mausoleum, home to the famous MacKenzie Poltergeist."

I noticed that we all squeezed in a little closer together. An owl hooted from somewhere close and all of us jumped and a few screamed. Bruce had the courtesy not to laugh but did have a shit-eating grin on his bearded face. When we had settled our nerves and turned our attention back to our guide, he continued.

"The MacKenzie Poltergeist tis the best documented case of poltergeist activity in the last two centuries. Since emerging in early 19 hundred and 99 after George 'the bloody' MacKenzie's tomb had been disturbed, there have been more than 50 instances recorded, including fifteen separate people knocked unconscious. Take a few minutes to explore, I promise I won't leave without ya."

Some of us moved off in pairs to look at the tombs that were close by, others huddled together talking in low tones as if not wanting to draw attention to themselves.

Cheryl, who was exploring with me turned back to ask Bruce a question. "Hey, where'd he go?"

"I'm sure he's just hiding." Earl walked towards us. "Trying to scare us."

Several minutes ticked by then Bruce seemed to reappear in the exact same spot he'd been in. Making it seem as though he had been there all along.

"Nice trick." Earl whispered as we migrated back to our guide.

"So now," Bruce tilted his head, looking at each of us, "did ye experience anything... strange?"

Some murmurings and shoulders shrugging before one man spoke up. "It felt colder over by that tomb." He pointed over his shoulder.

"Tis a cold spot ye found." Bruce replied.

Others followed now that the trail had been blazed. "Liz got dizzy all of the sudden and had to sit down." A woman said and the lady standing beside her, Liz I guess, nodded in agreement.

"It felt like someone brushed by me when I stuck my head inside that empty tomb." Another stated and pointed to his left. "But there wasn't anyone near me."

"All those things and more have been reported by many people. Others have also reported scratches on their hands and other parts of their bodies. Many people have collapsed. Dead birds have been found in this section of the graveyard." Bruce explained. "Very strange occurrences, wouldn't ye say?"

Heads nodded in agreement. "Maybe we should go." Russell spoke up for the first time. "Before we wear out our welcome." Several others approved of his suggestion.

"Aye, maybe we should." Bruce consented.

Bruce walked the group back to our starting point and bid us a goodnight. One of the women tried to tip him, as is the custom if you enjoyed the tour.

"No need fer that, twas my great pleasure ta escort ye tonight." And tipped his hat.

I glanced back as the group began to disperse to find that our guide had disappeared. For some reason, I hadn't expected him to be there. I looked at my watch and noticed that it was well passed 11:00 pm, the tour was supposed to end around 10:00.

"You coming, Clay?" Dawn asked. The others had already entered the hotel.

"Yeah, I'm coming." She was waiting at the top of the steps for me. "What did you think of our guide?" I asked as we walked into the lobby.

Dawn thought for a minute and finally said, "As my grandmere would say, 'tres estrange'."

"Yes, I agree, very weird."

Morning, Day Two: T minus 12 hours and counting

We met in the hotel restaurant for breakfast, joining Colin and his friend Mr. MacTavish, who owns the company that runs the tour we took last night. After we placed our drink orders, we praised Mr. MacTavish for his tour and his ability to hire strangely bizarre guides.

He thanked us and looked at us curiously. "But I've never thought of Jackson as being strange."

"Uh, that wasn't his name." Cheryl stated. "It was Bruce."

Mr. MacTavish turned as white as the proverbial ghost but before we could question him, the waitress walked over to take our order. And his quick departure after we had ordered, left us to wonder why.

"We have everything ready for your big night." Colin clapped his hands and rubbed them together in an enthusiastic gesture. "We'll go over the equipment you'll be using when we arrive at the site. It's nothing complex, just a few things to help you out. Oh, do try to watch the language. The editor's hate it when they have to cut the audio track. But I know the bad words tend to come out when one's frightened. Any questions?"

I opened my mouth, I'd been trying unsuccessfully, to get our final destination from him, but he shook his finger at me.

"That I can answer, that is." I remained silent and so did the others. "Okay, we'll meet in front of the hotel at a quarter till four and don't worry about checking out, I'll do that." He stood up. "You have the rest of the day to yourselves, just remember you're going to be up all night, so you might want to get some rest. Have fun." He grinned and left us to finish our food.

Afternoon, Day Two: Follow the yellow brick road

By 4:00 pm we were in a van heading out of Edinburgh. Dawn and I were following the road signs, not that it did us any good, but we still hadn't been told where they were taking us and we were getting a little curious. The driver had turned north and crossed the Forth Road Bridge and the A90 turned into the M90. We let our curiosity go, knowing we would never figure it out as the van continued north along the Motorway.

Cheryl and Earl were having a friendly argument about last night's excursion and Dawn had drifted off to sleep. I was wide-awake since I had slept some this afternoon before we left. I looked over and noticed Russell seemed to be growing paler with each mile traveled. I moved into the seat next to him. "How you doing?" I asked.

"I, um, I'm kinda nervous." He admitted shyly. "I just hope I don't make a fool of myself. When people at school see it, they won't let me live it down."

"You're not any more nervous than the rest of us. And besides, you heard Bruce last night, the spirits tend to be attracted to the nonbelievers." I lowered my voice. "I bet Earl ends up being the one that goes screaming into the night." We both laughed. "You'll do fine."

Russell smiled. "You really think so?"

"Yeah, I do." I reassured him and hoped I was right. Not about Earl but about our shy friend. "Why did you agree to come? I mean if you're really worried about it?"

Russell looked down but not before I saw him blush. "Cheryl...um, she asked me...and I, um..."

"Couldn't say no." I supplied for him.

"Something like that, yeah."

"You like her, huh?"

He nodded his head. "You won't tell, will you?"

"I won't." I promised. "But you should. The worst-case scenario, she says no." He looked mortified so I decided to keep my mouth shut. At least I got his mind off tonight.

We stopped at the services, what we in the states called rest stops, to use the facilities and to get something to eat. Why does sitting in a car doing absolutely nothing, make you hungry? Must be boredom.

I was standing beside the van talking to Shawn, the driver, while waiting on the others. "What do you call the shaggy haired cows?" I asked trying to make small talk. "They're cute."

He looked at me for a long minute. "Those are Highland cattle, mum." He answered rather stiffly.

I guess telling him they reminded me of sheepdogs, except for the color, with horns and a thyroid condition wasn't a good idea. I was saved from sticking my foot any farther in my mouth when my traveling companions headed in our direction.

We didn't return to the Motorway, instead we headed in a southwesterly direction along the A977. The scenery along these smaller roads is absolutely wonderful. Oh, more sheep. I've decided that I really like the little wooly fuzz balls. I'm glad I don't eat lamp chops; I'd have to quit if I did.

We turned north, well I guess one can't really turn on a roundabout, on the B913 and are heading for a town called Dollar. I find that strange since the currency here is the pound. Okay that was stupid, I must be getting anxious.

The van passed through the town of Dollar and followed the brown road signs that advertised places of interest, down a single-track road towards Castle Campbell.

"Well at least we know where we're going." Dawn announced.

"Clay was right, it's a castle." Russell stated.

"Of course that's not much of a stretch, we are in Scotland." Cheryl teased as she leaned over the back of her seat, looking at Russell, who blushed and looked down.

Poor guy, maybe he can impress Cheryl tonight.

Night, Day Two: Que sera, sera

It was ten after eight and pitch black, another cloudy night; at least it was still dry. Shawn drove the van through a gate, into a field and stopped by a large tent. Inside we found several tables setup. One with refreshments and two containing video cameras and other odd looking pieces of equipment.

"Get something to eat and drink if you'd like and we'll go over tonight in a few minutes." Colin said, then headed in the direction of two people standing towards the back of the tent.

I grabbed a bottle of water and sat down with Cheryl while the others browsed the food. "You ready for this?" I asked.

"Yeah." The word came out as a big sigh. "I just really, really want to find or see something. I believe...spirits, ghosts or whatever you want to call them, exist, as you have figured out by now. But I want to be able, when people laugh at me, to say, I've seen them and I know they're real."

"Why is it so important to you?" I asked as I leaned forward, curiously.

"When I was little, I loved to read ghost stories. My mama kept telling me I was wasting my time, 'reading that trash'. And my older brother and sister kept scaring the bejeebers out of me. They'd hid in my room, waiting until I turned the light out and got in bed, then jump out at me or make noises that had me running to mama, crying. She finally made me stop reading them. Of course she never knew I'd go down to the library and read them there." Cheryl grinned.

"Older siblings are a bitch, aren't they?" I laughed.

Colin joined us at the table; bring with him one of the two people that had been at the back of the tent. "This is Malcolm and he's going to explain to you the equipment that's set up in the castle and the stuff you'll be using."

"Hi folks, how you doing so far?" Malcolm asked as he pulled out a chair and sat.

"Great, fine, nervous, anxious and good." Were the responses.

"Glad to hear it. Don't worry about tonight, you'll do fine." He directed the last part to Russell who had said nervous. "Now, what we've done in the castle is to set up low light cameras and microphones in the rooms and hallways where you'll be investigating in order to film and to make sure you're all right."

"We'll be on camera the entire time we're in there?" Earl asked. "You'll see what we see?"

"Yes, well as long as it shows up on the cameras. Some things might not want to be filmed." He grinned. "In addition to our cameras, you'll be carrying video cameras with an extended battery pack that runs the camera and the light mounted to it. This is the only light that you'll be carrying so the camera has to stay on record the entire time, otherwise you're without light." He paused making sure we all nodded our heads in understanding.

"The next most important piece of equipment is this." He held up what looked like a mini radio. "This is the way you stay in touch with each other. The castle has five floors; including the dungeon and the inside walls are thick stone. The other equipment that you'll be using are these

three things. This one is a thermometer; it'll give you a constant reading within about a five-foot square area around you."

"It'll tell us if we've really found a cold spot or if it's just our imagination." Cheryl stated.

"Exactly." Malcolm said. "This device will measure the magnetic energies that surround you. Some paranormal investigators believe that spirits give off a magnetic energy field and this meter will register them. This last piece of equipment is a thermal camera; it will register different degrees of heat. If I were to point it at one of you now, it would show you as red. The deeper the red the higher the heat, yellow would mean barely warm. Any more questions on the equipment?"

Everybody shook their heads. "Great. I'll show you how to operate this stuff closer to time to go. It's all been checked out so we know it's operational."

When Malcolm left, Colin sat up resting his arms on the table. "Just to let you know, you'll head to the castle at 11:00 and there'll be someone there to meet you. Also, just in case you're wondering, once you start your investigations, no one but the five of you will be inside the castle. Anything you hear or see or feel will not be manufactured by any of us, it will come from your imagination or from who or whatever has remained in the castle from times past."

Colin lock eyes with each of us in turn and either he's a very good liar or he's telling the truth. Now Russell wasn't the only nervous one in the group.

Night, Day Two: Double, double toil and trouble; Fire burn and cauldron bubble

We've been outfitted with all the equipment and Colin and Malcolm have pointed us towards the castle. The road we're walking down is narrow and winding and by some unspoken agreement we are traveling it in silence. Unfortunately I keep humming the funeral march to myself. When we emerge from the last curve in the road we see a large, at least to us, castle. We stopped and looked at each other before heading for the huge bonfire that beckoned us.

"Welcome ta Castle Campbell or Castle Gloom as it was initially named." It was the woman Malcolm had been talking to when we first got here. "My name is Anora and I'm here ta tell ye a little about the castle you're going ta be spending the night in. The castle was acquired by the Campbell's through marriage and in 1489 the name was changed to Castle Campbell. And like many of the castles of the area it too has a bloody past."

"The 2nd Earl, Fergus, was said ta have been a nasty tempered man and when he captured a warring party from a rival clan, he locked them in the dungeon and left them ta slowly starve ta death. Even now the caretaker swears ta hear them moaning and begging for help from the dungeon." She paused, looking each of us in the eye as we shifted from foot to foot, nervously.

"The 3rd Earl, John, was reported ta be something of a scoundrel and tis said that he fathered 14 children by different women most of them being servants in the castle. His wife seemed ta have

taken exception ta this and poisoned him ta death. Tis said that he never learned his lesson and is still chasing any woman that sets foot in what was his bedchamber."

Men! 500 years and some of them still haven't evolved. I kept my thoughts to myself and turned my attention back to Anora, but Cheryl and Dawn were looking at me and grinning. They knew the last guy that thought I'd be an easy conquest got a knee where it hurt. I guess they were wondering if the ghost had met its match.

"The 5th Earl, Douglas, now he was truly a cruel and evil man. He had his brother, the 4th Earl, killed before a son was born ta him; in order ta ensure his rise to power in the clan. He then forced his brother's widow ta marry him. She died not long after giving birth ta his son. No one's ever known if Douglas was responsible for her death or not. But perhaps the cruelest story associated with Douglas, was what happened ta his niece."

For some reason with the mention of the niece, my body tensed and I could feel the anger boiling in my blood. I took a couple of deep breaths feeling the tension lessen. Wonder where that came from?

"She had been sickly as a child and therefore not considered a good marriage prospect and remained single at the age of nineteen, an old maid in the olden days. That was when the Earl caught her in a compromising position with a lover. In the Earl's eyes the girl had lost what little worth she had and he was so enraged that he ordered the young man hanged. Grizela was so devastated that she refused ta ever leave her room again. She died, some say of a broken heart, a few months after her lover was murdered. Later residents of the castle say they have seen her sitting by the window in her room, staring out at the spot where the tree used ta stand and weeping for her lover."

"Fortunately, Douglas got a taste of his own cruelty. In 1645, his own son sealed him up in a small room as payment for the merciless treatment he showed his own kin. Now if you will follow me we will enter the castle and start you on your journey."

We followed Anora into what is known as the Great Hall. Following her instructions we formed a circle and joined hands. She told us that this was our last chance to change our minds and asked each of us if we were sure we wanted to continue. We answered yes albeit shakily.

"Very well then." She stated as she joined hands with us and closed the circle. "Tis appropriate that you attempt this task on this night, October 31st, the beginning of Samhain, when the veils between the worlds of humans and spirits is at its thinnest. I ask ye all ta repeat this chant after me.

And so it is, we gather here,

Ta ask the spirits, from far and near.

Come join us here, we invite,

Come join us here, within this night.

Welcome thee from the other side,

On this night our two worlds coincide.

Restless spirits we embrace,

Allow us, within this place.

When the chant was finished, we were blindfolded and led to five separate locations within the castle. We had been instructed to count to 50 after our guides left, before taking the blind-fold off.

I counted, rather quickly I admit. When the blind-fold came off and my eyes adjusted, the light from the video camera showed me a rectangular room, probably 10 feet by 15 feet. I glanced around at the stonewalls and floor before I opened the envelope I had been given and began reading out-loud; we had been told to talk out loud so our feelings could be recorded.

"You are in the dungeon where a rival clan of the Campbells were imprisoned and left to starve.' Oh wonderful, just how I wanted to spend the night." I shivered, looked around again and reached for the mike on my shoulder. "Hey, anybody out there?"

"I'm here." It was Cheryl. "I'm in the daughters bedroom. It's still furnished and everything. There's even a chair by the window."

"I'm in the scoundrel's bedroom." Earl said. "It's furnished too. A bed, a couple of chairs and a whatcha call it? A thing where you hang clothes?"

I started to be a smart-ass and say closet but Dawn answered first. "An armoire." She said. "I'm in the room where the 5th Earl was entombed. It's way creepy, let me tell you. All that's here is a chair with a small table beside it and the room has a little slit of a window that I can barely reach if I stand on my tip-toes."

"I'm in the room where Douglas' brother was killed." Russell said. "It's a chapel. It's got pews and a kind of podium. Where are you, Clay?"

"In the bloody dungeon. It's dank and dark and there's shackles attached to the walls with stains around them and I so don't want to know what they are. I've got to climb back up the ladder to get out." I was a little confused by my use of the word 'bloody'. I knew it was a British expression but I had never before used it.

"I suggest we find each other and try to learn the layout of the castle, then go from there." Cheryl said.

"Sounds like a plan." Shrugging off my puzzlement, I agreed and so did the others. I walked to the base of the ladder and looked up, it wasn't all that far to the trapdoor and I knew it was sturdy since I'd climb down it to get in here. "I just hope I'm not locked in here and have to wait for them to find me." I stated as I started my climb. About halfway up the ladder I felt, more than saw or heard, something.

I stopped; holding on to the ladder with one arm hooked around a rung, and lifted the camera. I slowly panned it around, throwing light into the four dark corners. "I don't see anything." I stated when I remembered I was supposed to be narrating. "But something made the hair on the back of my neck stand up."

I continued my climb and breathed a sigh of relief when the door gave way and I hauled myself onto the floor of the room above. "Looks like it might have been a guardroom. It's got metal grates on the floor that look about two feet square that look down on the dungeon below. I guess that's how they kept an eye on their prisoners." The only way out of this room was the stone stairs so I started up them only to stop in mid-step at the muffled sound of a scream. "What's wrong?" I asked into my mike.

"It was Cheryl." Earl said.

"Cheryl, are you all right?" Russell asked, his voice sounding very worried.

"Sorry, guys, I'm okay." Cheryl answered.

"What happened?" Dawn asked.

"One of the doors on the armoire swung open and it startled me." She explained. "I'm sure it's just warped...or something"

"You sound disappointed." I commented as I resumed my climb to freedom.

"Well, maybe just a little." Cheryl said sheepishly.

"Stay there, Cheryl. Russell said, commandingly. "I'm on my way to find you."

We made it back to our starting place in a relatively short period of time, it only seemed like forever. We turned towards a TV monitor as Anora's voice greeted us. "I see ya all made it back. Go now and take readings from different areas in the castle with the equipment we've left for ya. Ye may go alone or in groups, whichever makes ya feel more comfortable."

"Come on, Cheryl, why don't we go take temperature readings?" Russell surprisingly spoke up as he protectively clasped her hand. "We can start in the chapel and work our way up." Cheryl agreed and followed.

"Why don't you grab the thermal camera and I'll show you that spooky little room." Dawn said. "Earl, you want to go with us or by yourself?"

Earl picked up the last piece of equipment. "I think I'll head for Cheryl's moving furniture and see what I can see."

I wasn't positive, but I think Earl was beginning to get a little more nervous than he was letting on. I didn't know if he was trying to be brave going by himself or if he just didn't want to possibly act foolish in front of someone.

"Were you scared all by your lonesome in the dungeon?" Dawn asked as we climbed the main staircase, following behind Earl.

"I wasn't real happy about it, no. I wouldn't want to go back down there alone." I admitted. "What about you? Can you sense anything?"

"I'm not in tune with the hereafter like my grandmere. If she was here she could tell us if there were any spirits still in this place." Dawn replied and shivered.

We had only been inside a little over an hour and already the place was getting to us. As we entered the small room I asked, "Wonder how long he was in here before he died?"

"Depends on whether or not he had food and water." Dawn replied as she moved the camera around the room. "Christ, would you look at that."

"What?" I turned to see her pointing the thermal camera at the chair sitting beside the small table.

"Look for yourself." Dawn said with a startled look. "I want to see if you see the same thing." Dawn said as she handed me the camera and backed away.

I looked through the camera, pointing it towards the same spot as Dawn had. I guess I was seeing the same thing, a reddish blob that indicated a heat source in the vague outline of a person. Shit, shit, shit. I lowered the camera and took a deep breath. Slowly I moved towards the chair and stretched out my hand.

"I don't think you can feel a ghost." Dawn said nervously.

"Not trying to." I placed my hand on the seat of the wooden chair and on it's arms.

"Then what are you doing?" She asked shakily.

"Trying to see if the chair's giving off heat."

Dawn waited not too patiently. "Well?"

I backed away quickly. "It's not hot. It's actually colder than the rest of the room."

"Okay, I'm outta here." Dawn turned and left with me right behind her. As we stood in the hall trying to decide what to do next, we heard the sound of a heavy door slamming and we both jumped.

Just as we were reaching for our mikes we heard Earl. "Hey, who locked me in? It's not funny by the way."

"We're still downstairs." Cheryl's voice crackled through our communication devices.

"Are you still in the daughter's bedroom?" I asked.

"Yes." Earl replied. "And if Cheryl and Russell are downstairs, it must've been you and Dawn."

"We're one floor above you, Earl." Dawn stated. "And we wouldn't pull a trick like that anyway."

"Okay, okay. Just get me out of here." He pleaded.

"On our way." I assured him as we started down a smaller back staircase.

"It won't budge." Dawn insisted as she pushed against the thick wooden door.

"Hurry up." Earl yelled.

"Here." I handed Dawn both cameras. "Let me try." I put my shoulder to the door and pushed. The door opened so easily that I stumbled into the room. I raised an eyebrow at my companion.

"I swear it wouldn't open before." Dawn said as she looked at the door as if it were haunted.

"Thanks, guys." Earl looked a little sheepishly. "I was getting kinda, ah...claustrophobic in there." He ducked his head and moved past us into the hallway, probably hoping we didn't see his blush.

I jerked my head around and looked into the room when I thought I saw movement out of the corner of my eye. Must have been just a shadow, I stared for a minute or two then rejoined my two companions in the hall.

"Dawn was just telling me about what the two of you found in the small room. Let's go back up there, I'd like to see." Earl suggested.

"I think it's a good idea to stay together. I don't think anybody should be alone." Dawn agreed.

We spent the remainder of the night exploring the castle from top to bottom and the hours passed surprisingly quickly. Other than one instance of Cheryl feeling, as she put it, like hands were groping her in the bedroom of John the scoundrel or as Cheryl called him, the fornicating fool, nothing else happened. Well, nothing else but some changes in temperature, a few hot and cold spots and an area or two where the magnetic energy registered almost off the meter. That last

happened in the dungeon according to Russell and Cheryl. We also, at different times, heard footsteps where no one was supposed to be. We were now gathered back in the great hall and Anora joined us once again.

"Ya have done well." She stated. "Now tis time once again ta return ta separate areas and recite a chant and perform a ritual that will strengthen the veil between the two worlds and keep the spirits from attaching themselves ta ya and following when ya leave this place."

"Do we have to go back to the same place we started from?" Dawn asked. "Because I'm not going back to that room where that guy was sealed in."

"I'll go there." Cheryl volunteered, leaving her starting point up for grabs.

"Don't expect me to go back in the daughters bedroom." Earl told Cheryl. "I'm the one that got locked in there, after all."

"Tis no need ta return ta the same starting place." Anora assured us.

"I'll go to the daughter's room." I offered because I sure wasn't going back into that damn dungeon. Grizela's room was the one place in the castle I felt drawn to.

Cheryl headed for the chapel, Dawn the scoundrel's bedroom, and Russell volunteered for Dawn's original starting place, which left the dungeon for Earl. Anora handed us a small pouch and envelope as we made our way out of the great hall and towards our agreed upon locations. We were told to wait until each of us had arrived at our destinations, cease all communication between us, and then we were to spend 15 minutes meditating on the spirits, which was supposed to draw them to us, then read our instructions and perform the ritual.

Cheryl and I were the first ones to reach our rooms and had to wait for the okay from the others. I sat down on the edge of the bed, I figured I'd at least be comfortable while I contemplated the spirits, and closed my eyes. Almost immediately I felt the mattress shift as if someone else had also sat down. I gulped, trying to moisten a suddenly arid throat and debated on opening my eyes.

When I scrounged up enough courage and opened them, I jumped up and backed away from the bed until the wall stopped me. I was staring at two people, one a woman with long blonde hair that flowed down her back and even though I wasn't close enough to see the color of her eyes, I instantly knew they were the same color of the most precious of emeralds. I could see her lips turn up to form a smile that could light up an entire city and found myself smiling in response.

Without conscious thought, I knew that this was Grizela and her lover. I pulled my paralyzed gaze away from her to the other figure and noticed the long black hair. A second later, I also realized that Grizela's lover was female.

"Love me, Margaret. I have missed ya so." I heard Grizela say. Whether I heard this with my ears or mind I don't know.

"Aye, as I have missed ya. But the Earl bein' here, tis hard ta be with ya." Margaret said as she caressed Grizela's cheek and then leaned down to kiss her.

It was then that I noticed that Margaret looked like me. Looked exactly like me, in fact, we could have been twins. I watched like a voyeur as the two women undressed each other. I don't think I could've looked away even if the castle collapsed around me. It was like I was watching myself make love. Maybe I was for all I knew. I continued to watch as they climaxed together and then settled down beside one another, wrapped in each other's arms.

I then found my head turning towards the door, without any conscious direction on my part; several seconds before it was flung open and a man marched in. He was shorter than me, the present day me anyway, and had a head full of shocking red hair that stood out in wide disarray with a beard to match. He bellowed his outrage at his niece and drew his arm back, which was holding a nasty looking leather whip. Before the whip landed I, the past me that is, covered Grizela so she wouldn't be hurt. I, back to the living me, jumped as it struck Margaret's back. I actually felt the sting of the leather as it made contact with Margaret.

I continued to watch, helplessly, as Grizela pleaded with her uncle to stop. When I tried to move to intervene when he slapped Grizela and dragged Margaret from the room, I found my feet glued to the floor then all of a sudden my feet were free and I stumbled. As I righted myself I noticed that the scene had changed. Grizela was sitting in a high-backed wooden chair that was beside the window. She sat perfectly still with her hands folded in her lap, her feet flat on the floor and her eyes staring out the opening.

I moved forward, knowing what I would see and not wanting to. But I couldn't stop. It was like a force beyond my control was making me relive this. Yes, relive. By now I knew I had been Grizela's lover in that long ago time. I followed her line of sight and saw the body hanging from the tree. The tree that in the present time, was no longer there. I felt the tears run down my cheeks. I cried not for my past self but for the pain and anguish that my lover had to go through on her own.

As I blinked and wiped my eyes, the scene had yet again changed. There was glass now covering the window and it was now nighttime once again. I turned when I felt a hand on my shoulder and saw Grizela looking at me. I opened my mouth but was stopped by very warm and very solid fingers.

"Ya told me ta wait fer ya, promised ta come back for me and ya did. I have waited so long, Margaret." She reached up and placed her lips where her fingers had been.

I wrapped my arms around her and deepened the kiss. My mouth left hers when I felt lightheaded, I needed to breath whether she did or not. "I'm sorry." I stated.

"Why, love?"

"For leaving you, for taking so long for me to find my way back, for not protecting you from your uncle." I looked into her eyes and found myself drowning in the love I saw staring back.

"Twas not yer choice ta leave me, Margaret. And yer here now, no matter how much time tis passed and ya did protect me with yer body and yer love," she replied, smiling the smile that made me weak in the knees. "The others, they called ya Clay, tis that yer name now?"

"Y...yes." I stammered. "My middle name is Clayton, but my first name is Margaret."

"Well, Margaret Clayton, my thanks ta ya for breaking the cycle of my torment."

She started moving back away from me and growing transparent. "Wait. Grizela, don't leave me." I begged.

She held up her hand to stop my following her. "We shall be together again. Tis my promise ta ya, love."

"I love you, Grizela." I said as she disappeared from sight. My legs collapsed under me and I sat down on the floor. I sat there crying until I heard Cheryl's voice.

"Hey, Clay, we're all done. How about you?" The crackly voice came over the two-way radio.

I took a deep breath and wiped my eyes. "Uh, yeah, I'm done." I looked around for the pouch and envelope and saw them on the bed where I'd left them untouched.

"You okay?" Russell questioned. "You sound a little...funny."

I cleared my throat. "Yeah, sure. Why wouldn't I be?"

"Well, we're all downstairs waiting on you and Anora said the people keeping an eye on us told her that your camera and the camera in the room you're in quit working." Dawn explained.

"I'm on my way down." I replied. I looked around one last time at the room where I had found the love of my life, 350 years ago and now. "Goodbye, Grizela, my love."

Five Days Later: Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all

The five of us met at Heathrow Airport. While they had chosen to spend their extra days in London, I had opted for a B & B in the town of Dollar so I could stay close to the castle. And each day I paid the admission and spent all the time I could in Grizela's bedroom even though I never saw her again.

They looked at me curiously as I sat down at our gate. I knew that I had a distressed look about me but other than asking me if I was okay, they let me alone. The morning after our night in Castle Campbell they had questioned me, knowing something strange had happen to me in that room, they had tried to get me to tell them what it was but I had stuck to my story that nothing had happen. They didn't press me, knowing that I would tell them when I was ready and not before.

We boarded the plane and I took the odd seat, letting Cheryl and Russell, Dawn and Earl sit together. I fastened my seatbelt, closed my eyes and leaned my head against the small window. About 10 minutes later, I was aware of someone sitting beside me, but didn't acknowledge them.

The silence continued until they started the push back from the gate. "Hello." I heard the voice with the slight Scottish accent. "I guess we're going ta be mates. My name's Laren, Laren Campbell but you can call me Ren."

I opened my eyes and turned to face the over enthusiastic woman. I was stunned; I was staring at my love. Her hair was shorter and she was dressed in modern cloths, but I knew it was Grizela. "How did...are you real?" I stuttered.

"Yes, I'm alive." She whispered as she discreetly kissed my hand. "I promised ya, we'd be together once again."

I didn't know how and I didn't care. I was most certainly not going to question it, as long as we would be together for this and the rest of our lifetimes.

Epilogue

"Are ya finished telling our story?" Ren was leaning against the doorframe. I nodded my head and closed my notebook. "Ya know; there's not a living soul that's going ta believe ya." She walked behind my chair and rested her arms on my shoulders.

I leaned my head back against her chest. "But it ought to get me a good grade in your class." Ren was teaching a creative writing class at the college I had graduated from and where I also taught. It was a continuing education night class and I had taken it because I didn't want to be separated from her for even one night. I stood and wrapped my arms around her. "I also thought it was time for the others to read it and see what they thought." The 'spook troupe' got together on Halloween each year to remember our adventure. Cheryl and Russell had married a year after our adventure and were still together three years later. Dawn had moved back to New Orleans to be with her grandmere but came back each year. Earl married last year and now brings his wife and brand new baby with him. And of course Laren comes with me. "You know, you have still never told me how you talked the 'powers that be' into giving you back your life. Not to mention how you managed to get a birth certificate or passport or drivers licenses or a teaching certificate."

"Tomorrow is our anniversary." Laren said changing the subject. "Why don't we start the celebration a little early?" She coaxed as she wrapped her arms around my neck and her legs around my waist.

Oh hell, who in their right mind would choose to talk when they could be making love to the most beautiful creature on earth? Not me. I chuckled as I carried my love up the stairs to our bedroom. "I think you could persuade me, love."

The End or beginning, depending on how you look at it

Notes: The base info about the ghosts of Edinburgh Castle and The Royal Mile were taken from: Haunted Edinburgh; A Pitkin Guide, text written by Rupert Matthews. Some of the info for Mary King's Close was found on the about.com site. If you would like to read about any of these things, try a search on Google. Also, I believe the only tour that goes into The Black Mausoleum is the City of the Dead Tour. You can find info on it at www.blackhart.uk.com and Scariest Places on Earth also did a show about it.

Thanks for reading and I hope your Halloween isn't quite as eventful as the 'spook troupes' was.

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