

Echoes
An Almanac of
Ghost Stories

By
Neil Wesson

Contents

A Ghost of a Life
A Lament for Eilean Mor
A Long Awaited Landing
A Message from the Grave
An Experimental Haunting
Ballard of the Piper
Bus Station Blues
Cries From the Deep
Curtain Call
Drawing on Innocence
Here be Monsters
Subterranean Menace
Temporal Line Works
Terminal
Death at Blackfriars
The Baker Street Irregulars
The Beachcomber
The Brake Van
The Chimes at Midnight
The Division Bell
The Drummer Boys' Ghost
The Erroneous Judgement
The Ghosts of Christmas Past
The God Forsaken Rock
The Lighthouse Keeper
The Phantom of High Street
The Radio Operator
The Saint Stevens Day Hunt
The Signalman's Ghost
The Stairway
The Tomb of Lord Holderness
The Undiscovered Country
The Waiting Room
The Walled Up Room
Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
Where's Bob

Brough Shorts:
Blackburns' Ghost
The Nightshift
Bakers Dozen

Other Works by Neil Wesson

A Collection of Ghost Stories
The Bell Rock Mystery

All Published via LULU.com

All Characters and situations in this publication are entirely fictional
and resemble no actual events in the present, past or future.

For Kirsty, Sam & Jacob.

I would like to thank

Sue Baker

For her help in the production on this work

“The world is full enough, no ghosts need apply.”

Sherlock Holmes
The Sussex Vampire

A Ghost of a Life

Raymond Vincent was a quiet, reserved and private man. It was not surprising after the life he had led. He kept his emotional barriers constantly in place and not letting anyone see his innermost feelings or indeed share his private thoughts was paramount to him.

At the vulnerable age of seventeen he had lost his elderly father to liver failure. He had been a man who had lived life to the extreme, work hard, play hard was his motto. He had drunk heavily most of his life and then at sixty he had paid the ultimate price. A kind and loving father always, Raymond had missed his guiding hand in life.

This event had changed Raymond's life indescribably and from the moment of his father's death, his life was no longer his own. His time was divided between his work as a computer aided design engineer and the welfare of his ageing mother. Any spare time he had was dedicated to her and the running of the house.

All the usual trappings of youth never caught hold of him; as far as he was concerned they never existed. Ten years later following the death of his mother he made the biggest and hardest decision of his life and moved into a house closer to his place of work. Leaving his old home behind, he began a new life in his new abode.

Life for him did not change as much as he had expected. His working life was back into the normal routine, starting at seven thirty in the morning and leaving at five thirty in the evening. Home life was also in a familiar cycle. Monday and Tuesday were dedicated to washing and ironing while Wednesday night was housework night. He had normally finished his domestic chores by nine o'clock so the rest of the night was his own. The evening meal was normally a simple affair; pasta, a selection of vegetables all covered in some kind of cook-in sauce. Recently though he had paused at the freezer section of his local supermarket and made a remarkable discovery, microwave meals. Starting with a cheese and pasta dish, not wanting to be too adventurous, he took it home and put it in the microwave eagerly anticipating trying the meal that was now slowly turning in the cardboard tray.

Sitting with a tray on his knee he tried the piping hot meal. Why had he been cooking with pans for all these years when he could just press a couple of buttons? The next week in the supermarket he

realised that a whole new world had been opened up to him. Piling his trolley high with curries, chillies and a whole Sunday dinner he made his way to the till.

Raymond's nights consisted of a little television and a lot of reading. He was not a fan of soap operas or reality shows, so generally he turned off the set around seven thirty.

Ray sat in his living room reading; the clocks had gone back several weeks previously and the nights were drawing in fast; what's more Christmas was looming. This would be the first without either of his parents and the thought of spending the festive season alone had not crossed his mind until now. As an attempt to try to enter into the spirit of the season he decided to read the Dickens novel 'A Christmas Carol.'

He was soon engrossed in the tale of the miserly old man. As he read of Scrooge and his meeting with the ghosts of his old partners, Ray had the uneasy feeling that he was being watched. The feeling was so intense that he dare not look up from his book until the feeling had passed.

The following night as he read of the first ghost's visit to Scrooge, he had that same uneasy feeling. The old, well worn saying sprang to mind but in this instant it really did feel as though someone had walked across his grave. He buried himself in his book but as the chapter came to an end he could bear it no longer. Slowly he looked up and across the room.

Sitting on the settee under the window, curtains now closed, was a slightly unnatural looking man. He was older and greyer than Ray, but bore a strange likeness to him.

Ray stared at the ghostly figure for several minutes. Somehow he knew it to be a phantom; was it a trick of his mind. Had he fallen asleep while reading the ghostly tale and he was manifesting this illusion in his mind?

Each night the spectre returned sitting in the same spot saying and doing nothing and each night Ray said nothing to the visitor. He never tried to communicate with the phantom at all; was it out of fear? No he was enjoying having the company; the house seemed warmer with another presence.

It was a strange thing to have a ghost occupying one's living room. It was not the sort of thing he could bring up at the coffee machine at work; he would be laughed out of the building for just bringing up the subject. His colleagues' minds were mostly closed on such subjects as this, so he learned to live with it.

Christmas was now only a few days away and as he put the finished Dickens novel down on the arm of the settee he looked across at the phantom. The two glasses of wine consumed had taken effect now; so with a large dose of Dutch courage he spoke to the ghost, "Who are you?" he asked in a slightly slurred voice.

The spirit seemed to pause for a moment before looking at Ray. Then it spoke, although the lips on its cold white face did not move. The voice Ray could hear speaking to him was inside his head, is this how all ghosts communicated?

The voice was chilling, but warm and friendly all at once, "I am yourself Raymond Vincent." it said.

Ray was starting to feel dizzy, the effects of the wine were taking hold, "Sorry?" he said not believing what he was hearing. The spirit replied, "I am your own ghost and here to help you." The words held Ray's attention and he was desperate for more knowledge, "If you follow the path you currently walk you will die in ten years time. You will die alone in this very room, in this very chair where I now sit."

Ray was paralysed, how could he reply to such a statement. 'Hang on' he thought I don't even know if this spectre is real or just a figment of my imagination. Was he dreaming; substituting himself into the role of Scrooge?

It seemed real enough; dreams always do until you wake up that is. Why not go along with it, "How?"

"How?" the spectre started at him wearing a hard expression.

"Yes, how?" Ray no more believed in ghosts than he did aliens or the theory of Atlantis.

"You die of boredom."

"What?"

"You are leading a senseless life." The ghost told him in a friendly sincere voice. "You work and read, work and read. There is more to life than this. As in the book you have just finished reading,

you have a chance to change your ways. Once you have done that I will no longer exist here, I will cease to be.” “But ghost,” this was difficult, how did he address the phantom. The phantom of his older self. Should he call him Ray, Raymond, Phantom or one of the many other synonyms for a visitation from the dead? In the end he decided that ghost was as good as anything else. “You have become, well a companion, a friend?”

“Then,” said the ghost in a melancholy voice, “I will return every night until I, you die.”

Ray sat and thought. He poured himself yet another (a third) glass of wine. After a few moments contemplation he spoke quietly, “What must I do?”

The phantom looked up at the clock, it was eleven o’clock.

“Tomorrow night at seven o’clock, be ready.”

Ray felt his head spinning. His next recollection was waking up, lying on the settee. The time was now a little past three in the morning and he looked over at the other sofa but no one was there.

Had he been dreaming? On the chair arm, the copy of A Christmas Carol lay just where he had left it hours previously, his empty wine glass sat on the hearth. His head thumped and his mouth had the feeling of a rather deep piled carpet.

The following evening he had followed his usual routine, tea, washing up, TV and book.

As the clock hit seven the shimmering apparition appeared sitting on the settee under the window.

“Are you ready?” said the voice in his head.

Ray nearly jumped out of the chair. It was real then, the phantom had returned as promised and on time. After the previous night’s drinking Ray had imagined the saga of the ghost to be part of an alcohol assisted dream.

“Come on, we’re going out.” The phantom gestured with a bony index finger for Ray to follow him out of the front door. He followed, he couldn’t help himself; he felt compelled to follow just as a salmon swims upstream to lay its eggs.

As he closed the front door behind him he turned to follow the ghost and found himself in a dark noisy bar.

Scattered around the bar were a large number of people all of various ages, mostly standing and wearing slightly embarrassed expressions on their faces.

“Where are we Phantom?” Ray was not used to being in public houses. Being around people unsettled him, people he didn’t know anyway. His work colleagues were different of course. He knew all of them much better than any of them knew him. In that environment he had the advantage, here he didn’t. This was no-mans land, open fields, no protection.

“This is a singles bar.” The phantom told him, “People come here to meet.”

Most of the people in the hostelry were paired up. They seemed to be like him, lacking in self confidence and self esteem all standing next to a friend of the same sex for moral support. “It is customary to buy a drink when in these places.” Prompted the ghost.

Ah, that could be a problem. He hadn’t brought any money out with him.

“Your right hand pocket.” said the phantom as Ray opened his mouth to speak.

Ray checked his pocket and found two crisp twenty pound notes. That was one problem solved. Next, what to drink? He cast his eye along the pumps on the bar, then the optics hanging down along the rear mirrored wall. Eventually he settled for a pint of bitter. The taste was not unpleasant. He turned to his friend the ghost and was about to ask if he would like a drink then realised he couldn’t.

“Well, what now phantom?” asked Ray wiping the froth from his top lip.

“The general idea is to meet and talk to people. Take a look around, do you see anyone you like the look of?”

Ray looked around the pub. There were many economically dressed young women, way out of his league. He was too old for many of them to even contemplate sparing him a second glance, or so he thought. He turned his attention to a quieter corner of the bar. No loud speakers pumped out mindless rhythms here. Two women sat in that area, both a similar age to Ray.

Prompted by his companion Ray edged toward the end of the bar closest to the women. One of them stood up and walked towards

the bar, only after a prod of encouragement from her friend. “Offer to buy her a drink.” Whispered the ghost.

The woman arrived at the bar. A look of embarrassment flushed her cheeks, an expression mirrored by Ray’s features. “Er, could I, that is, if you don’t mind, possibly, buy you a drink?” the words came out disjointed and nervously.

The woman smiled; her face lighting up as she did so, “Yes, that would be nice. Martini please.”

An unconscious bond had been formed. Ray returned her smile on hearing her agreement, was this the start of something? “Ray.” He said offering his name in way of introduction.

“Emma,” she replied.

“What about your friend, what would she like to drink?”

“My friend?” she asked with a puzzled expression on her face.

“Yes, over there...” he looked into the corner. The Alcove was empty. “Strange, I could have sworn...” he turned to look at his friend for one of those reassuring looks.

As he turned all he saw was the bar, there was no sign of the ghost.

It had happened as predicted, if Ray’s life changed course then the phantom would cease to be. It would appear that the ghost was right after all.

A Lament for Eilean Mor

Ay, though we hunted high and Low,
and hunted everywhere.
Of those three men's fate we found no trace
of any kind in any place,
but a door ajar and an untouched meal
and an over toppled chair.

From The Ballard of Flannan Isle
Wilfred Gibson

Douglas McKay stood on the cliff top looking out to sea. The mist that had shrouded the archipelago known as 'The Seven Hunters' for several days now, was finally lifting. Under McKay's arm was clasped a telescope; standing ready to be trained on the Flannan Isle lighthouse situated on Eilean Mor. He was retained by the Northern Lighthouse Board to keep sidle on the light and report if either the light was not operating or any signs of distress. A simple signalling system was utilised for such occasions. A flag would be raised aloft on the pole which sat on top of the beacon, indicating any signs of distress. Such a simple system should not fail.

The morning was cold; Douglas tightened the scarf around his neck as his warm breath turned to mist in front of him. He had only ever viewed the island from a distance; he vowed that he would never travel over to that small outcrop of rock.

The lamp had not been seen now for days before the fifteenth of December, the twelfth he thought, though he could not recall the exact date. The fog had not only shrouded the island but also his very soul. The fog around these parts had an almost oppressive feel to it. 'As for the keepers?' he thought to himself, 'only God could help their souls now.'

He had always imagined that life on Eilean Mor would be 'Hell on earth' but when the fog descended even hell sounded a good option.

Tomorrow he would travel to the post house and contact the board by telegram to tell them that all was not well at Flannan Isle.

The crew of the SS Hesperus waited below decks; an air of anticipation filled the room. The crew of the ship along with the relief keepers all could feel a sense of relief. The Hesperus was now at anchor off the small harbour of Flannan Isle. This was not the usual procedure for the vessel's docking at the isle. A ship the size of the Hesperus would normally dock at the quay side, but not today.

The crew chattered among themselves all offering their own theories of how well the incumbent keepers would have coped without any supplies from the outside world. Others told their own tales of abandonment on lonely lighthouse stations while some recounted the stories passed down regarding the spirits that to this day still walked the rock.

All spoke apart from one second mate; he simply sat on a chair and stared into nothingness.

On the bridge, Captain Harvie looked at the battered and twisted iron work which lined the dockside. Never had he seen such an area of devastation, though the weather had been furious it could not be the cause of such trauma?

He had been informed only by word of mouth that the SS Archtor had passed these waters on the fifteenth of December and had reported seeing the isle, but no light shone from the beacon. He had spoken to Captain Holman before this journey, what he told him was not good news.

As the Hesperus sat at anchor, Harvie trained his field glasses on the flag pole. Procedure dictated that a flag would signal that the incoming crew had been spotted and the way had been prepared.

No flag flew.

Harvie scratched his white, bearded chin. For a long moment he thought about what course of action to take.

The crew below decks were suddenly silenced by the sound of the steam whistle. Why was the skipper signalling; something was amiss. Harvie decided to despatch a small rowing boat to the harbour where a crew members could assess the situation. The launch contained the young second mate, McCormack and Joseph Moore, the third assistant lighthouse keeper. As they sat on the boat the Captain gave them their instructions. "Right lads. I canna say what is happening up

there. I've signalled, but no one has come down to assist. You'll have to land yourselves if no one comes down.

Go and find out what's happening to them over yonder. God be with ya' lads."

With that blessing the second mate pulled his large arms to and the boat pulled away.

The journey took only minutes to complete and soon the two crewmen were up against the sheer rock wall of the harbour. It took a man on the jetty to tie the rope up when landing as a rule, but today though no one stood to catch the landing line. "I'll have to make a jump for it." McCormack shouted over the sound of the crashing waves.

"Are you sure man?" Moore cried back looking at the wet rocks covered in weeds and algae.

"It's the only way." The second mate replied standing up in the small boat.

The skipper along with the crew members of the *Hesperus* collectively held their breath as McCormack made his leap ashore. Managing to grab one of the posts that were still firmly fixed into the rocks he dragged himself up and tied the rope off.

A sigh of relief came from the crew, the skipper included. Now that the craft was safe Moore jumped out of the boat and climbed the stone steps onto the Mor. "Well done lad." He said congratulating his fellow mariner. Moore was keen to establish the cause of the signal failure, so immediately set off up the stone steps which were carved into the sheer cliff face. Such was his enthusiasm that the keeper had not realised that McCormack had not immediately followed his pace.

The second mate, McCormack, listened intently. Somewhere in his mind a voice was calling him. The sound of the wind, waves and crashing sea no longer registered in his ears. Voices filled his thoughts, three he could make out three. "Who are you?" he whispered into the air.

"Turn around." One of them said to him, "Turn around." He did as he was instructed. A feeling of sheer dread had come over him; he dare not look, but he had too. He could see no one, had he imagined it. He allowed himself a sigh of relief as he saw three large, black birds sitting on an outcrop of rock; all their eyes were firmly

trained upon him. The species of bird he could not say though he thought he knew them all. Bigger than a gull, but smaller than a cormorant; they watched him intently as he turned and followed the path up to the plateau.

Joseph Moore breathed heavily as he stepped off the top step and looked across the barren green land which made up Eilean Mor. As was tradition, he doffed his cap then turned his whole body in the direction of the sun, which today was totally obscured by grey skies. It was a strange custom but one all the keepers and guests observed when visiting the isle. The history of the custom was probably lost somewhere in the mists of time. If they were anything like the mists around the Seven Haley Isles then he understood the concept.

Once the ritual was over, he turned to look back down the cliff face. McCormack was only half way up the steps, what was keeping him? That was the only thought he gave his comrade, Moore set off at pace toward the beacon house.

Perched on top of the rock sat a small house, a habitat no bigger than a two roomed bungalow. Attached to the side of this dwelling was the lighthouse itself. The structure was painted a brilliant white; it shone in the sunlight as brightly as the lamp did at night.

The wind blew at him from the left; it wasn't the worst wind he had ever known, but it felt the coldest. Then suddenly it stopped. McCormack surveyed the isle; he had a definite feel of unease in this place. His senses couldn't pin down what it was about the place, but something felt un-natural. He could see Moore heading toward the house, the sound of Moore's keys rattling in his hands drifted past him. Why had he taken the keys out of his pocket? Surely the door would be open? McCormick set off after him.

Something, somewhere watched him, the ritual of Flannan Isle had not been observed. The wind once again picked up.

The keys in Moore's hands were cold and hard. He had only taken them out of his pocket for comfort; they were a constant reminder to him of his duties.

As he turned the door knob to enter, his shoulder and forearm came squarely into contact with the door. He had not counted on the door being locked.

As he fumbled through the bunch of keys, McCormack joined him at the door, "Locked is it then?" he asked with a slight breathlessness.

"Ey." Replied the Keeper.

McCormick took a step in front of Moore and he too tried to open the door. It wasn't due to the fact that he had any doubts in the strength of the keeper, but he wanted to check for himself.

He came to the conclusion that 'indeed the door was locked'. Two attempts at opening it had proved that, "Why would they lock the door?"

"I dunna know?" Moore answered, still searching through the bunch of keys, which were now on their second rotation. Surely he must have passed the front door key by now? He almost jumped out of his skin as the fist of McCormick thumped three times against the brown wooden door.

"Ahoy there, is anyone within?" he shouted skyward toward the lamp room. No answer came. He rapped on the door once again and called out; still nothing. Then a voice came from behind him.

"Ah!" Moore had on the third attempt found the right key.

The mate stood aside to make way for the keeper, after all this was his realm, his jurisdiction.

Moore hesitated before putting the key in the lock, what did he fear? That question he could not answer, though he felt a dread at entering the building. What awaited them? Slowly he turned the key in the lock and the mechanism clunked into place, unlocking the door.

With a creak, the door opened. McCormack suddenly lost interest in the door and turned towards the wide expanse which made up Eilean Mor's barren landscape. Something made him want to look back, reassurance maybe, checking their rear guard. It was at that point he noticed a small stone building. It seemed to be made up of largish stones, similar to a dry stone wall; only this was some kind of shelter. Was it there for the benefit of the shepherds who grazed their flocks on this lonely isle? Somewhere to take refuge from the rain and bitter winds which sweep in from the Atlantic or worse, the Arctic.

Moore braced himself, ready to enter. As he did he felt a hand tap on his shoulder, at such a time as this he could have lived without the surprise.

“What is that?” he said in an impatient tone. McCormack, though a little preoccupied with the stone structure, realised that there were more pressing issues at hand.

Moore slowly entered the room, followed by McCormack. McCormack found himself in an entrance hall; hanging behind the door where a set of oil skins. Three coat pegs were attached to the wall, but only one set of wet weather gear hung in position. As he reached out to touch them, he felt a sudden tremor in his mind. He could not describe what it was but something brushed past his right shoulder, so firm was the feeling that it caused him to step onto his back foot.

Moore spun around to see what it was that had made his companion cry out in such a fashion. “What is it man?” Moore asked in a whisper. He was more than a little annoyed at the outburst as it could compromise their position of stealth.

McCormack’s face had turned pale, his mouth was wide open, he looked blankly at Moore and said nothing. His mouth was so dry that his throat was incapable of making a sound. It took at least two swallows to generate any kind of moisture in his mouth.

“I thought someone had just pushed me.” He said in a dazed state.

“Come on man,” Moore hissed, “I need you in sound mind for this.” Having given his companion a dressing down he continued to edge along the corridor toward the living quarters.

Through the arch at the end of the passage, Moore could see that it opened into what appeared to be a dinning and kitchen area.

McCormack watched intently from the rear. He did not want to be the first to step into the room; he did not have the courage for such an action.

Moore however knew no fear. The situation for him was the missing keepers and nothing else. His first priority was the safety of the shipping and the relighting of the lamp. Tentatively he edged into the open room. It was smaller than he had expected. On one wall stood a dresser filled with plates and cutlery and in the middle of the room was a table. Moore’s eyes looked at it wondering what could have happened here.

After what seemed like several minutes but was probably only a matter of seconds, McCormack joined him. A shiver ran through his body, the room to him seemed unnaturally cold. Was it the stone from which it was made or had the wind chill took all heat out of the blocks?

There was no fire in the grate, even the ashes were cold. A fire had not burnt here for several days now. Moore studied the table in detail. Around the simple wooden affair were three chairs, two of them stood in position around the table while one lay on its side as if it had been knocked to the floor? On the table sat three plates, on each was a simple meal of cheese and bread, each meal looked untouched. The cutlery still lay alongside each plate.

Moore's hand reached out towards one of the plates and he picked up one of the pieces of bread; feeling it to be stale he tapped it on the table top. It made a hard thud as it hammered three times on the table top. The meal was several days old; mould had started to form on the cheese.

Neither man said a word but cast each other a concerned glance. On the wall hung a clock, neither a tick nor tock resonated from it. Its key still hung on a hook next to it.

McCormack had remained silent and still since entering the room. He looked at the scene and felt a wave of foreboding wash over him. Things did not look good for the keepers; they had not eaten for days or lit a fire. If they were still alive, then they would be cold and starving.

The keeper slowly opened the internal door which led to a set of stone spiral stairs. A cold blast of air shot through the room, making it even colder than it had previously been. Moore tentatively looked up the tower; so cold was the air that his breath congealed into a cloud of mist as it exhaled from his nose and mouth. He then gave two gestures to his companion; one was to indicate that he was heading up the tower; the second was for McCormack to stay there in the room. Slowly and with great care he closed the door behind him.

The sound of boots on the stone steps gradually faded into silence. The room seemed to him to be deadly silent, 'as quiet of a tomb' he thought, then shuddered at the very fact that a thought such as that could have entered his mind.

It came as a shock when he heard a voice behind. Spinning around his eyes quickly scanned the room but no one was present. Another voice came out of nowhere. Again he spun around hoping, hoping more than anything that Moore had returned. When he looked, the internal door was closed; Moore had not returned.

He took a step back, then another. The voices came again, fading in and out of his audio range. Again he took a step back, he could not retreat any further, his back was against the wall. The first instinct that came to him was to run for the door. One of the voices had moved around and was now coming from that direction. The words he could not make out; it was more like a mutter than words, or even a chant. McCormack started to shiver uncontrollably. With his arms crossed over his chest and his shoulders hunched, he slowly slid down the wall until the seat of his trousers touched the cold, stone floor with his knees clenched under his chin.

The bright winter sun glinted off the water, blinding Moore as he looked out to sea. He breathed a sigh of relief. He had made it to the lamp room and he knew something had changed, but what? In the lower part of the building and indeed the tower itself, he had had a feeling of oppression. Now in the sunlight he felt liberated and free. Opening one of the windows he took a deep breath of fresh sea air.

His thirst for air now taken care of, he turned his attention to the lamp room mechanisms. The wick was damp; it left a residue of oil on his thumb and forefinger. Taking a match from the box, he lit the lamp and placed the glass bulb over the flame before adjusting the regulator. The single flame flickered gently. In the bright sunlight of the day he could hardly see it, unlike at night. Engaging the motor the glass lens started to slowly turn. He stood back a pace to admire his handy work and nodded to himself in a self satisfied moment. All was well with the lamp at last.

Outside on the circular walkway three black, birds perched themselves on the handrail; their eyes watched him closely. The lamp room had suddenly become cold. Moore turned to close the window he had just opened. As he looked out over the sea, he saw no birds sitting on the rail.

As the trap door to the lamp room closed a large ripple in the sea expanded out from a single point. The wave generated was so great that even aboard the Hesperus the crew could feel the unnatural rocking motion.

McCormack's breathing became heavier as he heard the sound of shuffling feet coming toward him. His heart was racing; the footsteps he could hear were slow and deliberate. One after another they came a little closer a little louder. A look of terror was in his scared, tormented eyes; darting around the room searching for any sign of movement. As the catch on the internal door clicked open, he buried his head deep into his lap hoping that he would not be observed by whatever God forsaken visitation was about to enter.

The door opened and shuffling feet entered, then stopped. The door closed.

Outside on the grassy land which made up the top of the Isle, the sun shone down. The slightest hint of warmth was in that sunlight. The hooded figure that looked across the Mor felt no warmth in the light, to him, Brother McPhail only cold could he feel. His hatred of the Abbot made his blood run cold. He also felt sorrow for his fellow Brother, Ronan. What was to become of him?

"What's wrong man?" Moore asked the figure crouched on the floor.

It took a moment or so for McCormack to realise that Moore was in the room. It was his feet he had heard coming down the stairs, not something unnatural after all, "Oh man, it's you." He answered, but no sign of relief could be heard in his voice, "I thought it was..."

"What man?"

"The voices?" his eyes darted around the room once more.

"What are you talking about man, what voices?" Moore could clearly see that McCormack was in some distress.

"While you were aloft I heard voices in here."

"What did they say?"

"I couldn't quite hear." He paused and thought for a moment. Then he heard one of them again. "There, there it is again. Do you not hear it?"

Moore had heard nothing, he simply shrugged his shoulders.

"There again." McCormack was now intently listening for the voices which were coming through to him. His fellow sea fairer thought that the situation must have pushed his nerves to breaking point.

"What are they saying these voices?" the question was only to humour him, he now felt a little frightened for his own life.

"Wait?" McCormack said, while he focused once again, "Sorry, they are, well I'm not sure. There are two of them talking about another. They are saying that he is committing ungodly acts, but who? Who are you talking about?" He could scarcely believe that he had just asked a question of a spirit voice, if indeed that is what it was. Then to his own surprise the answer came to him, "The Abbot?" the spirit was not talking to another present, but to him. The answer which came through awoke some memory in him; something he had heard from long ago.

"Who are you speaking too?" Moore asked him.

"Who are you?" the answer came to him, but not from a voice which he had heard earlier, but he could see the source of the voice. "Two brothers," he began before breaking off. He knew it had been one of the two talking directly to him.

"Brothers, what Monks, you mean?"

Brother McPhail and Brother Ronan, one of them is very mad with the Abbot." Then the voices stopped. McCormack faltered on his feet; the feeling that swept over him was one of having lost something from deep within him. He sat down in one of the three chairs which sat around the table; the other still remained upturned on its side.

His breathing was heavy, though excited; nothing like this had ever happened to him before. Though this had not come as a total surprise to him. "I'm the seventh son of a seventh son," he began to explain to Moore, "it was my Grandmother who I first saw talk to the spirits. She would do it on a Sunday afternoon and people would come from far and wide to have an audience with her. She told me that I had the gift, but up to this very day I did not believe her."

"Is that what you think happened, you think you spoke to spirits?"

"I do."

There was silence in the room for a moment while both men contemplated what had happened. "Do you think," began Moore, "that you could contact the..."

"Keepers?" interrupted McCormack, "Only if they have passed over to the other side." Both men wanted to know what had happened to the three men who lived and worked on Flannan Isle, but at what price?"

The price was the knowledge that the keepers had passed on, but then how had they passed it on? Had they come to some unspeakable end, or was there an easier, more natural solution to the mystery. Neither wanted to face that fact. Both men stood in silence for a moment. The atmosphere in the room was now slightly less oppressive than previously. This atmospheric condition lifted the hearts of the two men.

"Well, if it was a monk who passed on here; then that must have been long since. No brothers have lived in these parts for many a long year." Moore said sitting down on one of the upstanding chairs.

"You know the history of the Isle?"

"Ey, I know enough." Moore didn't want to take it any further than that, after all if McCormack was indeed a medium, then surely he should have the ability to access the details of the History of the rock.

"Please tell me more. If I am to find that my ability is indeed one of talking to spirits I will find out all I can, but at this time the ability to use it escapes me." He too joined Moore in a chair, again picking one of the seats which stood in its natural position. Neither of the men touched the over turned chair.

With a sigh Moore began to recount the brief and uninteresting history of Eilean Mor.

Much of the Isles history was of monks grazing sheep, the names and dates he was a little unsure of. The general gist of the history though was recounted.

"...does that make any sense to what you wanted to know?"

It did, though he didn't want to release too much of the information already divulged by the spirits. To him things said to him by those that had passed over to the other side were in the strictest confidence. As far as he could tell, murder most foul had occurred there at some point and there was a connection with the monks; what it was he could not tell.

"I'm not altogether sure, like I said, this gift has only just been realised, and anyway..." suddenly he broke off mid sentence. He could hear something coming through the air towards him. The temperature in the room was dropping rapidly, "Can you hear that?" McCormack asked in a slow and unsteady voice. He was still not quite sure in his mind which noises and visions were real and which came from the spirit world.

"What?" replied Moore, uneasily shuffling from side to side in his chair, his eyes darted from one side of the room to the other trying to make out what McCormack was referring too.

The sound the mate could hear, unlike the previous occasion, was the sound of music. It was someone singing, his unconscious thoughts were telling him that he could also hear the sound of a piper playing. He could not hear any piper, but he knew that one was present. The tune was familiar to him; the music could not be connected to worship in any way. So no connection to the monks he would presume. He knew the tune, but found it hard to concentrate, while listening to the spirits as his thought process were being compromised. The lone voice, along with the accompanying music, slowly faded away leaving him all alone in a void. Focusing on the present, he could see Moore staring at him, waiting for him to tell him what he had seen and heard.

"What noise?" he asked again.

McCormack could once again focus on the matter in hand, what, oh?" he muttered, "could you not hear the singing. It came right through this room." his right arm gestured to the right of the door which led to the staircase then across the room in the general direction of the entrance hall. "They came through this way, see." He tried his Utmost to put some kind of geography into the situation, for his own sake more than his companions.

"They?" Moore asked.

“Yes, one singing and one...” was there more than one? He could not tell now. “Flowers of the Forest?” it suddenly came to him, that was the song he had heard.

“But that’s a lament?” Moore said, “A lament for the dead.” He was correct; it was a song sang for lost souls.

Time passed slowly on the rock as the two men continued their search for any signs of life or an explanation into the mystery of the vanished keepers. The wind had completely dropped now. An inspection of the cliff edge was now called for. The two men slowly edged their way around the jagged perimeter of Eilean Mor. Moore had no head for heights, when working in a lighthouse he would seldom look out over the rolling sea, his time would be too occupied with the running and maintenance of the workings. On the odd occasion in which he did have to venture out onto an inspection platform, he would focus his eyes on the horizon and not look down. Looking over the sharp drop of the cliff edge was enough to make the strongest of stomachs turn. Looking down onto the rocks that sprawled out into the crashing, foaming waves was enough to cause his senses to fail him. On two occasions his balance was almost breeched, only steadying himself at the last moment saved a tragic accident.

McCormack stood forward, “Here, let me.” He said placing a reassuring hand on Moore’s shoulder. He had spent several years high in the rigging aloft the waves and was not fazed by the effects of sheer drops. His green eyes scanned below, looking for any sign of a body or piece of clothing. The complexity of the rock formation made the task almost impossible; still though the search continued.

As the two men reached the most westerly point of the Isle, McCormack sensed a presence. He stopped dead in his tracks and concentrated on the feeling. He could not either see or hear anything. The presence of three others were there with them. His eyes darted around the physical worlds, all he saw was Moore, his minds eye scanned the spirit landscape, but still no contact was made.

Bracing himself he took a step towards the cliff edge. On the horizon he could see a three massed ship. How he longed to be at sea once again instead of here in this desperate place. As he lowered his

eyes towards the rocks below, he noticed three large, black birds watching him. The strange beasts were not like any other he had ever come across on all his travels, but then he had seen them before. He had noticed them a few hours previously. "Three birds?" he said quietly to himself, three birds. It would be ridiculous to presume that the presence of the three could relate to the three missing keepers could it, surely not.

The birds' eyes didn't divert, their glare watched him intently. McCormack's conscious or sub conscious picked up neither the slightest word or motion from the direction of the creatures; the search continued. Curiously enough once his quick, but efficient scanning of the rocks was complete his gaze returned to the ledge where the three birds had sat; the ledge was now empty.

As the two men walked along the cliff edge McCormack's stride suddenly began to shorten and falter. His face was growing paler by the second, eyes wide and fingers becoming numb.

"What is it man?" Moore asked with a great deal of concern at the sight of McCormack.

Each step became harder to take, he felt as though an invisible force was pushing him away from the southerly end of the rock. The strange thing was, to him it seemed a strange occurrence, but he knew the source of the force was there to keep him and him only back. "What is that structure over yonder?" a shaking arm slowly raised and pointed towards the old chapel now in ruins.

"I thought I'd told you earlier, we call it the dog kennel. It was once a Chapel.

McCormack was no longer listening.

The structure was now roofless, the timbers long since decayed. The walls had also partly fallen; entropy had taken its toll. To him, in his mind, he could see a building in perfect condition. The roof was well thatched, the walls perfectly formed. On the gable end was erected a simple wooden cross, the two pieces of it bound together with what appeared to be a piece of rope made up of discarded fishing nets. The cross itself seemed to be manufactured from the remnants of the sea, the wood was almost certainly old flotsam and jetsam.

Three monks where also in the chapel, he felt. A lone voice could be heard echoing out of the doorway, the chant was in Latin, the

contents of it unknown to him. Even in the spirit world he could only understand his native tongue. A cold sensation started to envelope him, "There is death here."

Moore was not impressed with the statement; death was a constant companion here.

An older man was first to immerge from the depths of the chapel; the small amount of hair he still had was as white as snow. Around his legs, the habit which had been his only clothing for many a year, billowed out in the breeze. It was impossible to see the splashes of crimson on the front of his brown habit, but they were there?

"The Abbot." realised McCormack, "That's the Abbot over there, look."

"Who?"

"That's the Abbot of Killaloe." The name had come to him in an instant.

"Not one of the keepers then?"

"No."

McCormack watched as the Abbot slowly walked across the grassy turf. The sound of sheep bleating came to him; that animal had not grazed on this rock for a hundred years or more. Did animals' ghosts return to the place they knew best? His attention was then drawn away from the bleating when he saw another the brothers emerge from the chapel. Both had heads bowed, both bore a solemn look. The two monks followed in the footsteps of the Abbot who could no longer be seen in field of view. As the Abbot had vanished so did the feeling of oppression which had repelled him away from the dog kennel?

His eyes stared over toward the chapel.

"What about the search?" Moore asked. He knew that McCormack may have well discovered his powers as a medium, but at present they had been no use in discovering the fate of the keepers.

"I don't know, but if we go to that place over there...?"

"We might..?" what was McCormack hinting at, was it the final resting place for their souls?

As the men approached the kennel they were both of the same minds, neither wanted to be the first to set foot in the old stone

building. As they neared the building, both dropped their pace hoping that the other would take the lead and stride meaningfully towards the entrance.

Moore didn't want to enter the chapel in such a state. On a Sunday he would attend his local service dressed in his suit. Only that garment was good enough in the eyes of the lord. A shiver came over him for a moment or so as from over his head three strange looking black birds swooped, one at a time perching on the stone building. McCormack finally decided to take the lead; it had to be him after all he had the advantage of second sight.

At the very instant he set foot inside the open doorway he felt as though he had been transported to another world. On first appearance the chapel was cold, dark and lifeless but now he could see it in all its wonder. Candles illuminated all four walls; walls which were covered in lime plaster. The shack had a feeling of warmth to it; not only that, but a feeling of calm even joy. On a small table which served as an altar sat a brass crucifix. Such a place he had never expected to see on such a barren Isle as this.

"What can ya' see man?" the voice was Moore, calling from the outside.

This interruption brought the medium back into the realm of the here and now. Again he surveyed his surroundings, cold hard walls, no candles, no altar. "Nothing." He replied, "Nothing at all."

He could not see, but feel, the presence of others. He was becoming aware of something, someone approaching.

"Can I come in then?" another interruption from Moore.

McCormack could feel a growing tension in the air, danger was approaching, "No, don't come in yet, he called out.

Moore did as he was asked.

Once again the sailor saw the chapel as it was in days gone by, as it was meant to be, warm and light, He took a sharp intake of breath as, out of the corner of his eye, he saw the Abbot enter. McCormack stepped backwards against the wall, partly to make way for the monk, but mainly through fright. The Abbot knelt down and made the sign of the cross to the altar. For many moments he stayed there, still in quiet contemplation. He had

sinned recently and now begged for forgiveness. Of course he knew that absolution would be granted, after all he was the Abbot, no one was a more devout than he.

Part of McCormack's mind was searching for a conversation which occupied the small place but at a different time. It seemed to be two voices whispering, they were making themselves known to him without any intention of concealment. Who and where could they be? He could not tell at this time who they were. The monks who lived here were a silent order, so what would make them break their vow?

"I tell you brother; the Abbot is about something evil, sins of the flesh or worse."

"How can we be sure, Brother?"

The brother making the allegation could not say exactly how he knew, but he did. "I tell you, something is wrong. I don't know how I know, I just know." The Brother had a long history as far as the Isle was concerned. It had been his ancestors who had founded the Chapel on the Isle. The role of Abbot should have been his, but was not. Was his lack of rank in the brotherhood anything to do with the breaking of his vow of silence? "I did hear from the mainland," he began, checking outside the door ensuring no eavesdroppers were close at hand, if only he knew. "That the Abbot was seen in a house of ill repute, with a woman."

Only a stunned silence emerged from the second brother, never had he heard of such a thing.

He continued, "Not only that, but she was said to be with child. Two days ago she was found dead."

"The day we went ashore?"

The three brothers would, on special occasions, take a boat to the shore to celebrate the worship of special saints' days. Three days previously had been one such occasion.

"Ay' that's right and I'll tell ya' this..." the voice began to fade as he saw the Abbot moving. His skills as a medium were not all together complete. With his eyes focused on the Abbot so had his thoughts.

From the sleeve of his robes the Abbot slowly took out a short bladed knife. The silver blade glistened in the candlelight and on the ribbed bone handle he could see definite traces of blood. He held the

blade in the fingertips of both hands and raised them high above his head, "Oh Mighty Majesty, I worship your tool of despatch. May sinners burn in your glorious flame." He lowered the knife and placed it on the alter.

In the door stood the figure of a monk, hood draped over his head, its shadow obscured all but the tip of his nose.

"What's happening man?" called the far off voice. As McCormack's head twisted toward the entrance his concentration failed him once more, the interior became the present grim shell once more, but for a split second he thought he saw the Abbot and hooded figure turn toward him. Had they seen him there with them?

"What is it?" an angry McCormack called out. His head came out through the doorway. It took a moment for his eyes to adjust to the bright sunlight.

"Have you found anything?"

"I was about to, when you opened ya moth."

Moore felt ashamed. He should have known better than to interfere with thing he knew nothing about.

"It seems," began McCormack, his tone softening, "that all is not at peace here."

"With the crew?"

"No, not the crew, the monks."

For around thirty minutes he again tried to open the link between himself and the past. Nothing would come through. The two men decided to continue their search of the jagged rocks which made up the Isle's perimeter. They worked in silence, McCormack couldn't take his mind off of the events in the chapel unlike Moore, who remained salient and stayed focused on the matter in hand. He dare not speak out as he was wary of interrupting another communication. A few spots of icy cold rain had started to fall making the grassy MOR slippery under foot; this was not conducive to the task in hand. Moore was twenty or so yards away, peering over the edge, when McCormack felt someone moving behind him. Quickly he turned, but no one was there. Again he checked Moore's position; it could not have been he that had caused him to turn. Unable to see anyone or

anything, he decided to open his mind to other levels of being, it was then he saw it.

A little distance past the figure of Moore he could see a monk walking backwards, slightly stooping. McCormack began to run toward his companion, "Look man, over there.

Moore heard his voice and saw the sailor running toward him. He seemed to be gesturing over his right shoulder. Turning to look he saw the lighthouse as it had been for many a year, nothing else.

"Can't you see him?" asked the red faced McCormack coming to a halt next to Moore.

"Who?"

"The monk, look." He pointed directly towards the figure, but still Moore did not see.

The hooded figure was finding the task difficult, the turf under his feet was soft, the abbots heels dug into the mud as he dragged the body along. The figure stopped and looked around. His face should have been visible in the normal course of things, but McCormack was all the time discovering that this gift he had was not an antenna for the normal course of events. As the brother dragged his superior along, he paused for breath and mopped his brow. He exposed his facial features but all McCormack could see was a blank featureless shape. As he watched, the figure stared back at him; not through him or any other point, but directly at him. The colour which filled his cheeks drained away in front of Moore's very eyes. Moore asked, "What's up man?" No response was forthcoming, only his eyes looked crazily into what he presumed was the middle distance.

For too long a moment the monk stared at McCormack. That was the second time eye contact had been made, it would have been the second time if the figure had possessed eyes.

Moore saw nothing; his own eyes darted around first one way then the other. He could see no monk, though he could see a bank of heavy fog rolling in from the west. The search was of paramount importance and had to be completed. He estimated that only around one hundred yards of coastline remained to observe, if they made haste then they could manage before the fog made landfall.

"We best be heading back before the fog hits." Moore observed, "I dunna want to be out here then."

McCormack made no recognition, he was still watching the monk dragging the blood stained body ever closer to the cliff top.

With the lack of response Moore grunted and carried on with the search. For him McCormack's self imposed trances were becoming a little tiring. At no point had he put forward any explanation for the disappearance of the keepers.

The hooded figure once again paused for breath; to him the temperature was warm, a summer's afternoon in fact, nothing like the state of the elements that December day. McCormack started to become aware that a conflict was coming, not one of words but one of worlds, of souls.

Moore curiously edged along the cliff edge surveying the rocks below. It was as he took a step towards the beacon house that a sudden warm feeling came over him. The temperature had changed; he could smell honeysuckle and sheep droppings, the sea air also smelt different. So real was the feeling that he could feel his armpits moisten as perspiration formed. All too quickly the feeling passed and he became aware of the bank of fog rolling in. Under his arms though were still damp, his shirt sticking to his body.

McCormack was running toward him shouting something, his shocked state of mind could not however register the words spoken.

"Are you alright man?"

The words finally registered, was he alright?

"Oh yes, I just came over a little strange." He said rubbing his brow with the rough backs of his fingertips.

"I saw," McCormack knew exactly what had happened, "what did it feel like?" he went on to explain that the hooded figure had passed through the very point where Moore had stood. Not only had Moore linked with the brother and felt what he was feeling, but the monk from all those years ago had experienced a little of life in the here and now, he had for a moment known about the missing keepers, even the fog rolling in.

The monk was now standing at the edge of the cliff, the body on the ground lay at the very cliff edge, then with a push from the monk's sandal it rolled over and bounced down into the breaking waves below. The hooded figure watched as it bounced off the rocks before splashing into the water. He stood silently for a moment before

suddenly turning to look directly at the two men standing only yards away. Removing his hood the face of the brother fallen from Gods ways was revealed, it was Brother Ronan.

Any further examination of the isle was out of the question, the fog had now set in and the two men could only now busy them by making one last search of the beacon and house.

It took only a matter of thirty minutes to complete the search, still nothing. The lamp though was working perfectly which was the only thing of benefit to come out of the trip.

The two men sat at the table and drank a warming brew of tea. Neither spoke for several minutes, what was there to say?

"These spirits," began Moore, "Could they be responsible for the disappearance of the keepers?"

"How?" McCormack asked. Spirits were just there, they never bothered anyone.

"I dunna know, maybe the keepers saw them and went mad?"

"It's possible; I thought the favourite theory was the sea monster."

"Monster?" Moore's eyes widened.

"Didn't 'ya know the stories onboard the Hesperus? There's a sea serpent said to live in these waters, the monks here saw it once. Its recorded in some book the monks kept."

"Well, which ever it was the fact is that they're not here now."

It was now after the meridian though the fog obscured the bright winter sun, the fog horn intermittently coughed out its melodic drone. Both men were now convinced that all the keepers where lost to the sea in some way or another. A plan of action was decided on; once the mugs of tea were consumed the two men left the lighthouse.

The walk down was a solemn one in respect for the souls of the departed keepers. The journey down the rock face was a slow one. The steps dug into the rock where wet from sea spray, both men found it difficult to keep their step. McCormack had an uneasy feeling that they were being watched. The fog was so thick that the cliff top was obscured as was the jetty and small beech. If someone was observing them, they could have been anywhere. He knew no spirits

where here, if they were, his link to the other side would have informed him. This was something different. Moore was a matter of yards in front of him; he turned to look back up the stairway, still nothing. The feeling was now growing inside him, paranoia was making his body shiver, perspiration began to run down from his temples.

Moore could neither see nor hear anything, his only thought was to get off of this God forsaken rock and back to his ship. 'Leave Flannan Isle to the keepers,' he said to himself, 'leave them to it.' On the cliff he could see the three strange birds watching, "Strange?" he thought these odd looking gulls had been their constant companions on this trip. When he was back on the mainland he would look them up and find out their species. "Look up there," he said turning his head a few degrees to the rear to engage McCormack. When he looked again the birds were gone.

McCormack made no reply, Moore thought nothing of it until he realised that he could no longer hear the third mate's footsteps following behind. At the jetty Moore turned to see McCormack staring up into the fog draped cliff face.

In McCormack's eyes the fog no longer shrouded the cliff; once again he could feel the summer sunshine on his face. On the cliff stood two monks talking, but what were they saying? He used all the energy he could muster, slowly he began to understand.

Brother Ronan had seen the McPhails blood stained robes. Obviously he showed an amount of concern for his fellow monk, had he been injured in some way? "Are you hurt?" Brother Ronan asked. McPhails face was twisted in pain and torment, but he did not say a single word, why had Ronan returned to the isle so soon?

"I'll fetch the Abbot." He said running off toward the chapel, then pausing as though some invisible force had taken hold of his body. Which way should he go, to the lodgings or the chapel? He decided on the chapel. The thoughts running through his mind did not come easily to him or in any logical order, what could the abbot do that he couldn't? As he rushed over the Mor he caught sight of something glinting in the sunlight.

Moore stood on the jetty and started to untie the mooring rope which held the rowing boat to his post. McCormack was still high up on the stone staircase, what was he doing up there? "Ahoy there." He called up to him, McCormack didn't respond.

He hadn't heard the calls of his companion; his full concentration was on the figures up above him.

Brother McPhail stood motionless as a statue, Ronan slowly approached him. "Brother," Ronan said to the other's back, Mcphail had not turned to follow the path of Ronan and still refused to turn to face him.

"Brother McPhail, where is the Abbot?"

"I don't know." McPhail replied without turning to face him.

"Then what has become of him? Do you know that?" Ronan waited for a moment, still no response came, "well, what has become of the Abbot?"

Slowly the hooded figure of McPhail turned. A tear ran down his cheek as he quietly spoke, "Four hundred years since my family first came to this place. They founded the chapel here and dedicated it to St. Flannan. They were good men of God who founded this place for his work. They braved many things to make the journey here from the main land, wild seas and unspeakable terrors did not thwart them. They brought sheep here and built a shelter all in God's name. So when I found that this sacred place was being defiled by someone's actions I owed it to my fore fathers to seek revenge." His facial expression did not change from a look of blankness, eyes staring at the grassy pasture.

"What has this to do with the Abbot though?"

"It was he who defiled this place. For several months I had heard rumours spread among the gossiping women on the main land that the Abbot was visiting a house of disrepute. I tried not to listen to the outrageous comments which circled the town with more and more ferocity. Each time the story was told, the gravity of it would increase to such levels I will not corrupt your thoughts with them. The final account I heard was that one of the poor women that took their employment in the devilish places, had been murdered. The story was that one of the dead woman's clients was the Abbot himself, one of

her better regulars, so it was said. Not only that, but she was said to be with child.

Other rumours were spreading in regard to this woman; it is said that she is the servant of the beast himself and would conduct her satanic rituals during her work, all in the dammed ones name.”

This was all too much for him to take in; the young monk had to think for a moment or two before speaking. Not only that but all this talk had started to awake urges in his soul, feelings that he had tried to suppress for many months. “So you think that she bore the Abbots child and was murdered for it.”

“I do.” McPhails head was still bowed facing the grassy earth. If his ancestral line had founded this chapel many years before, what must he be thinking? The Abbot had disgraced the order in the most debase way. Once he had realised the deep feeling of emotion that McPhail must have been experiencing, it came all too clear to him what must have happened to the Abbot, “You killed him?” Ronan said in disbelief.

McPhails head slowly rose, as it did so he could see the knife used to kill the Abbot in Brother Ronan hand. He must have dropped it while dragging the body across the land. When he spoke it was with a whimsical voice, “Yes, I did that act.”

“And the Abbots body?”

He said nothing, but simply looked down to the rocks below.

McCormack watched as McPhial made a lunge for the knife, the ground on which they stood must have been damp even though it was summer, he watched as the hooded figure lost his balance and plunged over the cliff edge.

The vision disappeared, the summer sun turned into the cold fog of December. He could hear Moore calling now, “Ahoy there.” Still he could feel the presence of Brother Ronan, the last monk to live on Flannan Isle.

“They all went mad.” He told McCormack as he descended the final flight of steps.

“Who, the keepers?”

“No, no the monks of course.” To him it was obvious, not to Moore though, “Even Ronan, even he went insane.”

McCormack heaved too, slowly his large muscular arms pulled the oars through the water. As his strokes became regular his eyes glanced up to see Moore climbing the stone steps up the cliff. Then he was gone, disappearing into the fog. A flash of summer sun came over him, on top of the cliff he could see a monk watching him leave, would Moore be safe there on his own? It was only going to be a short period of time in which he was to be alone on the Isle; the two other keepers would be joining him shortly.

A dull thud brought him once more back into reality, a piece of driftwood had hit the boat, he watched it float past him as he moved through the water. After only another stroke came another thud, more flotsam and jetsam, the sea was full of it. An uneasy feeling was coming over him, he increased his rate of pulls from twenty five to thirty strokes a minute, McCormack wanted to see the Hesperus again. He looked over his shoulder first one way then the other, where was the boat. The fog still obscured his view, though he knew it shouldn't be to long before he could see it.

Moore closed the door behind him. The beacon house was so cold, unnaturally cold. The stove was beginning to throw out heat now, but as yet not enough to warm the room. He put the kettle on the hot plate to boil water for tea. When the other keepers arrive they would need a warm drink. As he waited for the water to boil he stood and stared at the chair which still lay on its side. For all their investigation neither man could come up with any explanation for the keepers' disappearance, even a medium could not throw any light on the matter. Was that down to the fact that their souls were not present? If that was the case then where had they gone?

Turning his head he looked at the lone set of oil skins hanging on the wall behind the door he turned his attention back to the over toppled chair. "Get a hold of ya' self man." he muttered.

With great determination he strode across the room and bent over to right the falling chair. His hand was only an inch from it when he froze with fear, knocking was coming from the interior door, the door which led to the lamp room. No way could it be the wind, there was no wind, the fog still hung heavily around the Seven Isles. The

noise was coming from behind, the knocking was slow and determined, someone was trying to get in? His mouth and throat began to become dry as sand, his temples were throbbing as blood rushed through them, was it the keepers?

The knocking was relentless, he had to answer the call, something in his head was making him. Slowly he stood up from his crouching position, the chair remained un-turned. His trembling hand reached down to the door knob, only one hand took hold of it, the other turned the heavy iron key which sat in the lock. In his throat he could feel his heart beat getting louder and louder. The door knob turned; quickly he opened it, depending on what was to be found behind it he may well die of fright.

Nothing.

Nothing was there. A sigh of relief exhaled from his lungs, relief, for a moment. Quickly his eyes glanced around checking no one was there before closing the door firmly and locking it shut. The smile which sat on his face soon disappeared as he turned back to face the room. On the overturned chair sat three strange black birds, each watched him intently.

Moore felt a chill come over him, the room had become cold. Slowly, his back to the wall he edged towards the external door. Once in the entrance hall he turned and ran for the door.

The moment his back was turned the three birds wings' flexed all swooped towards him.

McCormack's' body was covered in sweat as he rowed faster and faster as though pulling for his life. He stopped briefly though as he heard what he thought was a scream coming from the direction of Flannan Isle. With increased determination he began to row again.

His craft seemed now to be surrounded by driftwood bumping and banging against the wooden hull. Suddenly he was out of the fog, he felt the winter sun on his face, relief came over him.

He needed to find his bearings so shuffled around in his seat. Open sea greeted his gaze, where was his ship, where was the Hesperus? Had they left without him, surely not?

As he looked around through all points of the compass he noticed that one of the bits of driftwood bore several letters. He lent over the port side to inspect the piece in closer detail.

The water lapped over it, but the text was clear to see. It was a ships name plate.

“No, it canna' be?” he said to himself.

McCormack did not see the tentacles rise out from the dark depths behind him. He never saw anything else.

As the bubbles of air rose to the surface, the sign of something being dragged down into the deep waters a piece of wood bobbed up and down in their wake. It was a ships name plate, the black letters painted on a white background where clear to read, SS Hesperus.

A Long Awaited Landing

It was on a cold February morning when the crew assembled on the deck of the fishing vessel. The mist hung low over the dock; most of the features that defined the western half of the city were obscured; Holy Trinity church and the floodlights of Boothferry Park alike.

A glistening dusting of frost covered the deck, bridge and masts of the boat; each of the crew leaving a clear boot prints on the boards. From somewhere in the distance the melancholy call of a fog horn echoed through the fog. The skipper descended from the super structure, his boots clanking on each step. Dressed in his donkey jacket and blue cap he inspected his crew as was normal before a voyage.

Another trip, another month away from home. The crew over the years had become resigned to the fact that life at sea was hard, but the rewards were great. The landlords of the west Hull pubs would rejoice when a fully laden ship returned home. Each man would be on a 'thirteen pinta'.

As the craft motored out of St. Andrews dock a young lad turned to look back at the dock gates. On the quayside he could see his mother waving at him; her heart was full of pride. Her young seventeen year old son was following in the trade of his forefathers, though she feared for his soul. So many over the years had been lost. His first posting was an excellent one, cook to the crew of the ship nicknamed 'The Unsinkable'.

The craft ploughed her way through the calm estuary and out into the North Sea where the fog lifted. Strong winds took over and large as it was the vessel rode the peaks and troughs of the thirty foot high waves. The winds tossed the ship around making even the hardiest of the crew fall from their bunks and turn their stomachs into a knot of nauseous tension.

The young cook worked the best he could under the extreme circumstances. Most of the other thirty six men ate, some didn't. 'It was always the hard ones who crack first' his father had told him once and he was right. The skipper was as sure and steadfast as a rock, a shining example for the rest of his men.

On the fourth day they reached Barnes Sea, a stretch of water to the north of Norway. An area of rich pickings for those who dared to enter it. All trips to this part of the fishing grounds were hard, not only because of the sea conditions but many other factors also had to be taken into consideration. The weather was the main problem. On the border of the Artic Circle, ice would form on the masts to such an extent that the ship would become top heavy losing its centre of gravity and capsize. The other problem was man made, the Russians. Their submarines patrolled these waters and could snag the fishing nets dragging the boats under.

In between preparing the various meals the young cook would venture out onto the deck and watch the nets being hauled in, bulging with fish, the men working furiously clad in oil skins.

Nothing outside the confines of the boat was visible, fog had followed them for days now, and he often wondered how the helmsman could navigate. He thanked God for the ship's new radar system and modern dual band radio.

His attention was taken from the men toiling on the decks to a figure standing at the bow. In the mist he could just make out the silhouetted figure of someone, someone familiar to him?

Squinting his eyes he peered into the fog. He thought the image was his mother, yes; yes it was his mother who had appeared to him. Why he could not say, had she passed away suddenly? No, no she was too young and in good health. She was smiling and opened her arms out wide as to welcome him to her bosom.

His head suddenly turned as the voice of the skipper bellowed from his rear. The sound of his boots descending the metal steps echoed around the deck as he ran down them. The skipper was shouting at the top of his voice as a fizzing noise of the nets being pulled out drowned out his calls.

The voyage had been a long one. All the crew where exhausted, even the days seemed hard to calculate as they passed. 'The Unsinkable' fishing vessel slowly motored up the mouth of the estuary, the twin lighthouses of Spurn Point were like two home-coming beacons; this had been a long trip.

Only the skipper and mate were active that morning as they headed toward home. It was the mate who noticed it first, a land based ship's bow pointing out into the river. The huge structure appeared to be made of glass?

The skipper saw it, but could not believe it. Then the second almost jaw dropping moment. At the mouth of the River Hull was spanned with a huge structure, what was it?

The mate slowly tapped the skipper on his shoulder; he had lost the ability to speak by now, so he just pointed up stream. Out of the fog two huge towers rose up from the water, some kind of arc connected them; it looked like some kind of bridge, but the size was unfathomable. Slowly the skipper picked up the radio handset and sent a call to the Dock Master.

“Dock Master, do you copy me? Over.”

After a pause he continued, “Dock Master, this is the skipper of FV...”

On a hot summer's day the Harbour Master of Princess Dock looked out over a calm clear river before he realised that a call of nature was required.

As the toilet door closed behind him the radio crackled into life, “Dock Master, this is the skipper of FV Gaul requesting instructions...”

Where are we?”

A Message From the Grave

The cold wind blew the sleet across the graveyard, whipping into the faces of the graveside mourners. This was not an uncommon sight, another accident in one of the many factories springing up in the towns due to the onset of mechanisation. The industrial revolution was changing the face of the land both urban and rural.

The man in the plain coffin was Alfred Woodman, a labourer from one of the many mills which sat on the banks of the River Hull. As the Vicar finished off the service the widow of the man in the box, Rose threw a hand full of clay into the grave and then the mourners dispersed over the street to The Ship Inn public house.

The Vicar returned to the Church as the grave diggers began to fill in the hole, finally placing the turf on the top of the small grave shaped mound protruding over the natural lie of the damp grassy ground.

On entering the vestry the Vicar removed his cassock and shivered. The room was cold and damp, it smelt of old books and yellowing paper. He lit a candle for it was starting to get dark; it was now late in the afternoon and the three gas lights that lined the main street were now lit.

He was cold; a quick nip from the bottle of whiskey which he kept in the old free standing cupboard would soon put pay to that. He opened the door and looked in. The bottle normally sat out of view behind a pile of hymn books on the left hand side of the second shelf, but on moving the pile of books he saw the bottle had gone.

It was only then that he realised someone else was in the room with him, he turned back toward the door. Sitting behind the half open door was a man in late middle age, the verger. In one hand he held the whiskey bottle, in the other a glass.

“Alright Vicar?” he said raising the glass in salute before taking a generous slug of the drink. “There’s a bit of a nip in the air, I thought I’d just have a quick ‘un to keep the cold out.” He said pouring another large measure into the glass.

“Tell me;” asked the Vicar, “just what do you think your doing Verger?”

“Oh, just helping myself,” he said, his voice slurring slightly, “but then you’d know all about that wouldn’t you?”

“My dear fellow, I think you are under a misapprehension.”

“Oh, no.” he replied resolutely.

“You’ve been drinking. You can’t be sure what you’re saying. Why don’t we just forget all about this and say nothing more of it.”

“I know exactly what I’m saying, Martin.”

Calling the Vicar by his Christian name took him back somewhat; allowances must be made for a drunkard. “I’ve seen you every Sunday taking your own cut of the offertory, and the money from that service you have just given, not all of that will make it into the church coffers.”

For a moment the Vicar thought, “Do you have any proof of this?” he asked in a calm voice.

“Only the proof of my own eyes.” The Verger took another drink.

“Come and see me at the vicarage tomorrow, I’m sure that we can discuss your future salary. I think you’re more than due a pay rise.”

The Verger took the hint. A smile appeared on his face. The two men had come to an understanding, that would do, for now.

On the third attempt he managed to stand. Realising he still held the bottle in his hand he mentally plotted a path back to the cupboard. The Vicar could see what the Vergers eyes were trying to plan. Not wanting the contents of the cupboard spread across the floor he decided to dissuade his employee, “No, no.” he said quickly, “You can keep the bottle.” There was hardly anything left of it in any case.

“Ah, right you are.” He shuffled round and made for the door. All his concentration was on getting out of the room. His senses didn’t react to the noise behind him.

The noise was the Vicar scraping a candlestick along the table top, an old heavy silver candlestick.

Moments later the same piece of high regalia was falling through the air before embedding itself into the Vergers head.

The Verger felt no pain. The alcohol had numbed his body. His face hit the cold, hard, stone flagged floor of the church. His nose exploded as it impacted, pushing the piece of bone that serves as the ridge up into his head. If he wasn’t killed by the blow of the

candlestick then he was dead now. A trickle of blood seeped out from under his broken face.

The Vicar panicked, though he controlled it well. Dragging the body back into the vestry before dropping the Verger's feet down on the floor.

What could he do with the body? Frantically he looked around the room, searching for the catalyst of an idea.

The Crypt, he could put it in the Crypt. No one ever went down there. No, too risky; occasionally someone would venture down there. He had no transport, he couldn't take it away.

One of the Vergers eyes was looking up at him. It was unnerving to say the least.

On the floor of the vestry lay a rug. He could roll the body up in it, that would do for now. As he turned it through ninety degrees it groaned. The noise gave the Vicar the fright of his life.

Suddenly something else added to his terror, the sound of the front door to the church opening. The latch clinked while the old iron hinges creaked as it opened.

The Vicar froze with fear.

The sound of heavy feet walking through the church could clearly be made out. The clergyman was almost paralysed with fear, but what did he have to fear? Apart from the events of the past few moments, nothing.

Stepping over the carpet covered body he looked out of the door to see who was in the church.

The figure, a man, had walked in. The Vicar recognised him as one of the mourners from the funeral.

"Can I help you sir?" asked the Vicar closing the vestry firmly behind him.

The visitor was cold and wet; snow clung to his brown overcoat and around the soles of his boots.

"Hello again Vicar, I was er," he paused for a moment then held out a coin in between his fingers, "looking for the collection box."

The Vicar didn't believe him. Though outwardly he remained calm his head was spinning. It seemed to him that it was more likely that this man had come in chancing his arm to see what he could

make off with. "It's by the door." The Vicar replied as he placed the candlestick on the altar. With a bit of luck this man would make off with it.

Thank you Vicar." The mourner turned and walked off, only pausing to drop the coin in the box before slamming the door closed.

Now back to more serious things. What to do with the body lying in the vestry? The man who had just left had given the Vicar the answer.

At twelve thirty that night the wind howled through the trees of the churchyard. Sleet still blew down from the north battering the 14th Century Norman church. The only light source was coming from The Ship public house; this threw just enough illumination for the Vicar to work by.

He carefully took the turf off the top of the mound and laid it to one side, then with the grave digger's spade began to dig.

With the grave only being a few hours old the loose Earth came out easily, each spade full was on the whole dry and powdery. Once down around five feet the blade of the tool hit wood.

Looking around to ensure the surrounding village was all quiet the Vicar rolled the body of the Verger into the grave. It made a thud as it hit the coffin below. The Vicar breathed a sigh of relief, but there was still work to do.

Picking up the spade once again he started to backfill the hole. It only took a matter of minutes, the turf placed back on top and there it was done. Nobody would ever know. More to the point the grave couldn't be opened without an order from the local Magistrate and he was a very religious man, he didn't believe in the digging up of graves.

Fatigued he cleaned down the spade before returning it to the tool shed and heading back toward the vicarage.

After a good half bottle of whiskey he retired to bed. He should have slept soundly, the effects of his labours mixed with the strong liqueur, but he couldn't because the face of the man lying dead in the grave haunted his mind.

The next day was a Saturday and it was a weary looking Vicar that took the Wedding service of two local young people. An invitation to the wedding breakfast had been issued to him by the

bride's parents. The thing with village life was everybody knew one another so to refuse would be altogether rude.

How he stayed awake through it he did not know. A good night's sleep would be assured tonight.

It was his normal routine to take a walk around the church and graveyard last thing at night, but as he came out of the Ship Inn he didn't cross the street to the lich-gate. He decided to go home. Another night of torment ensued. Now though not only did he see the face of the verger, but he saw him standing at the end of an open grave, with what looked like a candlestick in his hand. He lost count of how many times the vision came to him, but the last one of the night the spectre beckoned him to come closer. After that he did not even dare close his eyes. His night had been spent in a cold sweet. After the Sunday morning service no one mentioned the absence of the verger. He wasn't very much liked around the village, he wasn't one of them, he was from outside.

Once the last of the congregation had left, the Vicar returned to his vestry and quickly changed. On his way out he noticed that the candlestick had gone from the alter and he allowed himself a smile of relief.

Over the following week nothing out of the ordinary happened in the village. Life returned to normal, no one seemed to miss the Verger, so nothing more was said. The weather too turned fair, even the snowdrops were coming into flower. Then tragedy hit the close knit community. Long standing resident Albert Hurd died. He had lived his whole life in the village; the only time he'd left was to fight in the Great War.

The funeral was attended by almost the entire community. The Vicar gave the service at the graveside as was the wishes of Albert.

"I am the resurrection," he spoke the words from the heart as he had known Albert all his life, but then he suddenly stopped. Something had caught his eye. The grave he had buried the Verger in had not fallen. The bulge of grave shaped earth would normally have started to subside after a week. It was still as he had left it that night, over a week earlier.

After the service everyone gravitated across the street to the Inn, even the grave diggers went to toast the old man before filling the hole. This act was highly irregular, but today it was tolerated.

The vicar took full advantage of this and took one of the spades and raised it above his head before bringing it down hard on the mound of Earth on the Vergers grave. He spent a good few five minutes flattening it down. It looked much better, almost flat. He stood back to admire his handy work. A cold shiver ran down his spine. Out of the corner of his eye he saw something, it made his heart stop and blood run cold. Slowly he turned around. Fear filled him as he worked up the courage to turn to see what was there, something from the dark reaches of his mind. Something told him, even before he turned; he knew the spectre of the Verger had returned to haunt him.

As he looked he realised that all it was, was a piece of black fabric in a tree. The only ghost he knew existed was the third part of the holy trinity.

With a sense of relief he too followed the example of the rest of the village and joined them in the pub.

As darkness fell the mourners were still going strong in the public house. The wind and rain had whipped up outside, so everybody stayed in the pub.

The vicar felt uneasy, not with being in a public house, he'd spent many nights in there. Something else troubled him, home; he thought would be the best place to be tonight. A fire in the grate always made him feel better.

He opened the door and stepped out into the cold dark night. Dropping his head toward the pavement he set off toward the vicarage. Then something made him stop and look over the street toward the church. A light was shining through the stained glass window.

The lich gate opened with a creek, the wind blowing it shut behind him. Head down against the elements he crossed the church yard. Looking up again he realised there was no light coming from the church at all. It must have been a reflection of the moon, or maybe the pub.

He found that he had come to a stop beside the still open grave containing Albert Hurds uncovered coffin. The grave diggers hadn't been back to fill it in yet, no doubt they were still in the pub.

Once again he noticed the grave he had flattened earlier that afternoon. The mound was back? He had spent all that time flattening it and had come back, was someone playing a joke on him? Was it the Verger, maybe he wasn't dead? No that can't be, he'd buried him.

"Is this yours?" a familiar voice said. It came from the Vicars left hand side.

He turned to look, but no one stood there, "Here." Said the voice again.

The Vicar turned to see in front of him the Verger, face twisted and blooded. His right arm was raised above his head in his hand a candlestick.

"But your dead?" the Vicar struggled out the words as a clap of thunder sounded.

The candle stick came down on the Vicars head, his body falling into the open grave.

A week later on the request of the magistrate Albert Hurds grave was opened. On top of Albert's coffin lay the body of the vicar, the missing candle stick in his hand.

The grave from the funeral a week previous was also opened and the body of the Verger was found laying in peace with a smile on his cold white face.

An Experimental Haunting

Around the University of Hull, all was quiet. The students had long since gone back to their lodgings while the lecturers relaxed either at home or in one of the many pubs which were dotted around Cottingham and Beverley Road.

Academia was now closed for the night.

Not many people hovered around; the night was cold, there was a chance of snow falling. As the cold wind blew in from the north, whipping around the quadrangles and gardens which made up the campus, all seemed to be prepared for the long cold night ahead.

One light burnt brightly through the darkness though, just one.

In the bowels of the lavatories Professor John Street sat at a table. The starched, white lab coat which he wore hung off his shoulders like a piece of stiff card. Under it he wore a brown sports jacket and a pair of brown cords. Street never dressed any differently, even as a student his clothing seemed to be perpetual.

On the wooden topped table in front of him were scattered a collection of A4 sheets, all test results from metal analyses of different kinds. Much was done by the staff of this research laboratory. The university was engaged in vital mineral research and its extraction from raw materials with the minimum of processing. Theories would be drafted, debated and finally experimented with. The process was long and laborious, the results were also scrutinised in the smallest detail.

Along with these, several more interesting jobs would pass through the department. The local police authority for instance would use their facilities for forensic testing and call the senior staff in as expert witnesses.

At present a job had come in from within the university itself. The archaeology department had unearthed a collection of 'artefacts'. That was all he was ever told. The task entrusted to him was to date the findings using scientific means.

The professors, who where experts in the field, had let nothing slip in way of a clue to the dates of origin, though Street knew they would no doubt be running a book on his results. He had to remain impartial for that very reason.

Behind him, in a vice which was bolted to a table, was clamped a sword. The weapon was approximately four feet in length, base to tip. The handle and hilt were in considerably good shape for an object of some age. Corrosion had taken its toll on the piece and he imagined it would once have shone in the sunlight during the heat of battle, now it was brown and brittle.

Two samples of the sword were now contained in the innards of one of the many pieces of equipment. It was going through the process of a mild heat treatment which was all part of the age defining process.

Street was well used to the strange cacophony of noises in the lab. Machinery hummed, the lights also hummed, but at a lower frequency. The air conditioning unit buzzed while the plumbing clanked.

Now though he heard a different kind of noise, so strange that he looked up from his work.

A low frequency hum ran through his body, he felt it from the top of his head to the tips of his toes. Behind him he could hear something vibrating and the strangest thing was the feeling that someone was in the room behind him, watching what he was doing.

An involuntary shiver ran down his neck and putting his pen down on top of the sheets of paper, he looked around. To his amazement he watched as the translucent figure of a man walked, no not walked but floated across the room. Finally it vanished through the wall to his left.

For several minutes he sat on the stool unable to move, though it was not fear which had struck him numb, but the thirst for information. What had just happened, what had he just witnessed?

He was a scientist and not a believer in ghosts but then, he couldn't deny what he had just seen.

Action was needed.

Jumping up from the chair he quickly looked around the room. He wanted to recreate the exact conditions of when he had seen the vision. It was at this point that he noticed the sword in the vice was vibrating. Putting his hand on it, the vibration stopped.

It took him ten minutes to make his notes, everything had to be taken into account; which lights were turned on; which machines were in operation and what point in their cycles they were at.

The following day was bright and cold, though to Professor Street he cared little about the weather. He hurried through the grounds of the University eager to start the day's work. The little man hurried so much that he forgot to eat the apple which he held in his hand, breakfast would have to wait.

One more thing had to be checked before he could re-enact the events of the previous night. Putting his apple down he read the paper readout from one of the pieces of equipment.

Iron, the sword was mainly made up of iron. That would explain the vibration. Iron's natural oscillation frequency was the same as the heat treatment equipment; so that's what made the sword vibrate. Now what about the ghost?

The experiment was now ready to run. The conditions created in the lab were identical to the previous evening. He sat on the stool and waited.

For twenty minutes, nothing happened. No movement what so ever from the sword and no ghost.

Then at twenty six minutes and three seconds into the experiment the weapon still in the vice started to vibrate. Street sat and waited, the familiar tingle was running through his body, but where was the ghost, no sign of it. Then he realised that last night he had been crouching over his notes on the desk and saw the ghost when he half turned his body. So he mirrored those movements.

From his writing position he turned away from his work, just like the night before, but no ghostly image was apparent. As he let out a sigh his head position moved a fraction of a degree, but this had the desired effect. The ghost appeared, walked across the room and through the wall, just as before. "Perfect," he said to himself.

He noticed that in one of the light fittings situated in the ceiling a fluorescent tube was flickering. He stood on a chair and removed it, could it be?

The experiment took another twelve hours to recreate due to the cycle of several of the pieces of equipment running their course. Now

he would try again and on this occasion he had the strongest feeling that no phantom would appear and he knew why.

‘Your eyes can play all manner of tricks on you’ he had been told by a friend of his, and he should know, he was an optician. For your eyes to create an illusion an outside influence has to be engaged; in this case the faulty strip light.

The experiment began. His state of mind was perfect to susceptibility, he was very tired. This pet project was running along side his already busy schedule.

Like a train pulling in on time the sword started to vibrate then slowly he turned around, nothing. His mind went back to the last experiment, so he slowly moved his head in various direction and angles, still nothing.

He smiled to himself, he knew he was right. The process though had to be repeated, this would give him enough proof to write up his findings. All had to be reset once again.

It was the early hours of the following morning when he was finally ready to begin again. He promised himself that he would get some sleep after this final attempt and write up his findings in the morning.

So it began, déjà vu. Everything exactly as it was previously, the equipment, the vice, the ghost?

He sighed a huge sigh of relief. He had discovered the truth behind ghost sightings. They were all mere illusions caused by either natural or artificial frequencies.

Would this discovery make him famous?

The following day was a busy one. The work had mounted up and much to his disappointment he knew that his report of supernatural phenomena would have to wait until the evening.

The day passed slowly, the more he did the slower the clock seemed to move. The constant stream of visitors didn’t help as they came in wanting their test results or questioning information provided by previous results.

Finally, at eight thirty he closed the door for the final time. Sitting down at the very same table he opened his pad and began to write his report.

Everything had to be included, times, date, equipment, even the weather and atmospheric conditions had to be taken into account. All this was explained in great detail before any mention of the experiment itself was mentioned.

By the time ten thirty arrived he could hardly keep his eyes open. The pen fell from his hand on more than one occasion, but now he had reached the end of his report, the conclusion. This passage he was about to write could make his name famous, his name could go down in scientific history.

As he wrote the word ‘conclusion’ and underlined it he became aware of a shiver running from his head to his toes, just like the sensation he had felt during his experiments.

That was peculiar, no equipment was switched on, the faulty strip light had been removed.

He shivered and carried on writing. So deep in thought was he that he wasn’t aware of the sword oscillating. Now the artefact resided on one of the benches and not in the vice. It only did so for a moment; a hand wrapped itself around the handle.

Street saw its tip appear through the front of his chest as crimson blood showered onto his report.

Just before he passed out he managed to turn and see the translucent figure of a man disappearing through the wall.

Ballard of the Piper

RJP sniffed the morning air; it was cold, cold and fresh. The sensation in his nostrils was that of a cold burning as the air rushed through en route to his lungs. RJP was the name most people called the man in his mid twenties. He was christened Robert John Page; he always thought it a bit of a mouthful so from an early age he insisted on using his initials. His long blond hair waved in the breeze as he looked over the canopy of the part of Yorkshire known as Dalby Forest.

The smell of the morning dew and damp earth filled his senses. For RJP there was no other place in the world to be early on a summer's morning. On this morning he felt happier than he had for many months. He was in the employment of the Forestry Commission working as a forester on the night shift. Six months earlier he had been lucky enough to land the job. Starting his employment in the previous December he had spent most of his working hours in a hide or a Land Rover. The hours of darkness were long with the solstice coming in only his second week. All was cold and wet and on more than one occasion did he think he'd made the wrong choice of career. As spring approached the forest started to come alive. RJP was overjoyed when on a morning walkabout he split the bark of a birch tree and watched the sap trickle out. Catching a couple of drops on his finger end he tasted the sweet liquid; spring was most defiantly here.

Now six months had passed, today was the day he would be out at sunrise, work or not. Today was the longest day, the summer solstice. The sun was just starting to appear above the horizon when he was caught with a humming sensation in his head. Pushing both fingers into his ears he tried blowing out his cheeks as on an aircraft, but this gave him little, if no relief. The sun was now almost over the horizon and already its glare blinding to look at. RJP turned through one hundred and eighty degrees and looked into the west. The light slowly crept over the land illuminating all the landmarks as its rays paced. This was without doubt the reason why he had wanted a job such as this. In the air, the scent of so many familiar odours were apparent, honeysuckle, bracken and heather, not to mention the numerous species of wildlife which were now retiring for the daylight hours.

He knew that in a matter of only a few hours the day trippers would descend on the forest wearing their sandals and kaki shorts, bum bags and bib's. The serenity and stillness would be broken.

He sniffed the air again and sensed a different smell. Instantly he knew what it was. He was suddenly brought back to reality, his spirit which was crying out, longing to be free in this land he loved was suddenly back in the mind set of his job and the limitations it put upon him.

Walking down one of the footpaths which made up the Bride Stones walk he saw a small fire burning down in the Adder Stone valley. The smoke rose into the morning air, but not in the normal way. The smoke did not float up and out forming a mist over the valley as he would have expected, instead it rose into the air in smoke rings keeping their shape high into the air before he lost sight of them in the morning sky.

A fire in the forest was more than dangerous. The ground was mainly made up of peat, which could smoulder for many months before actually setting alight.

In the bottom of the valley he headed toward where he thought the fire was burning. In this part of the forest he had to be careful where he placed his feet. This was the habitat of the Adder, the only poisonous snake indigenous to these isles. Constantly watching where he walked RJP tried to keep a constant eye on where he was heading. The smoke appeared to be due north from his position. He had a bearing and a good reference point. Heading towards it as quickly as possible his attention was suddenly taken by the sound of bird song coming from nearby, he didn't recognise the species by its call. Looking around he could not see any sign of the bird. Focusing once again on his quarry he looked up at his reference point. To his dismay the smoke had gone, though not the small, it still hung in the air. RJP looked around then saw the fire, but this time it was to the east of his position, "Strange?" he said to himself, but then thought no more about it.

As he entered a small clearing in the trees he saw a strange little man sitting on a fallen birch trunk. His back was towards him and this made RJP slightly uneasy, why was that?

Slowly he crept up on him to try to see what the little man was doing.

“Ah, you here.”

The sound of the man’s voice made RJP jump with shock, he hadn’t made a sound on his approach, but was still caught out. He had lost the element of surprise, so dropped his guard. He sighed heavily and finished his approach, “Could you tell me what you’re doing?”

The seated man did not turn around but instead raised what looked like a recorder to his lips and ran through a series of chords. RJP had been a musician since he was a child and instantly recognised the phrase, Am, G#, C and D. The tune was slightly haunting, his thoughts were being manipulated by the tune or that was the feeling he was experiencing. This was not an unpleasant experience, more a feeling of peace with himself and nature and not an internal battle to regain control. The whole thing though was slightly unnerving, so he forced himself back to reality. “Excuse me?” he said forcefully, while tapping the figure on the shoulder.

The man stopped playing and turned around, throwing both legs over the log with well practiced ease. Now RJP could see him clearly, but at the same time he gave the illusion that, well he couldn’t put his finger on it. Maybe it was a trick of the early morning light. The man seemed to be slightly blurred or at least RJP’s eyes couldn’t quite focus on him.

The figure wore rough looking clothes, home made almost with pieces of foliage adhering to them. His shoes were made up of some kind of animal skin. As for his person, his face was pale with wiry sharp features as was his hair.

“What are you doing here? You know that fires are strictly forbidden in the national park.”

The figure sitting on the log smiled, “What fire?” he said. RJP pointed a finger at the piece of ground in front of the fallen log. “That...” then he stopped dead in his tracks. Where the fire had burnt the ground was green once more, no signs of any burning remained? No ashes, no signs of scorching, no smell of smoke. RJP felt more than a little embarrassed. The figure on the log smiled at his discomfort.

“Anyway,” RJP started again, not put off by the demoralisation of the fire, “What are you doing here at this time in the morning?”

“Oh,” he said swinging his legs like a child sitting on a chair, “I like to keep my eye on events.”

“Events?”

The little man said nothing; instead he played a few more notes on his flute.

RJP became impatient with this off hand person; who did he think he was, sitting there as though he owned the forest. He dressed as though he belonged in this environment, some kind of elf or fairy was the nearest description Robert could come up with. RJP had the distinct impression that he was of a simple persuasion, maybe he should humour him.

“The events she put in progress.” He answered once his tune had floated away through the trees.

“She?”

“Why, The Queen of the May.” He spoke the words in a hushed tone, looking around the immediate area in which he sat. Was he checking that no one had overheard him speaking the words?

“What?” RJP asked, “What’s wrong?” he continued also looking around; why, he did not know.

“Shh, she’ll hear.”

“Who?”

“I told you, The May Queen. She commands the forest life. It’s she who brings the buds in the spring, sends the sap rising. It is she who rules here. The forest animals and plants, they all know her, depend on her. I dare not speak her name for what she may do to me.” The man looked genuinely concerned as he shrunk back in on himself almost like a hedgehog defending itself against predators.

“I know of the May Queen, it’s normally a village girl who is dressed up on May Day.” RJP said cheerfully.

“Shh, she will hear.”

The bird Robert had failed to place was once again singing, its tune was drifting through the trees once again. “And you are?” Robert prompted now feeling at an advantage.

“They call me Piper.”

“Piper?”

“Yes, what of it? That is my name and that is my calling.”

“You pipe.”

“Yes.” The single word was said slowly, only a sly smile betrayed his partial lie. He raised his pipe to his lips and ran through a series of chords.

“You know, she told me once, many things.” Smiled the piper.

“Who?”

“The Queen of the May.”

“Oh.”

“She told me of how many things were laid down by her, but as I saw it all her words could have more than one meaning. She always gets what she comes for though. They’ve all gone now.” He sat in quiet reflection for a moment or two before repeating his last words, “All gone?”

RJP did not want prolong the conversation and wanted to return to his duties, “That’s all...”

“Of course, she’s almost finished now, tidying out all the old creatures, that’s what it is you know when you see the hedgerows and bushes rustling. It’s her having a tidy out of the old, a spring clean you could say.” Again he paused in remembrance, “I remember, laughing, does anyone remember?”

RJP didn’t know just what to say, “Do you need anything here, can I take you anywhere?” maybe he needed money, or something. This poor man was not all there in his head, but how could he help.

“Everything I need is here.” He said looking around, “I will tell you this though. If you join me we can stand tall against her and perhaps a new day will dawn on the world. We will be free then, free of here.”

Robert made his farewell to the odd little man sitting on the log, but as he walked away he was sure that he could still hear the piper’s voice, “There are two paths you know, but don’t worry there is always time to change your route.”

Robert turned around to look at the man, but the log was empty, he had gone.

The walk back to his office was only around three miles, no distance at all. He took advantage of the time to ponder the events of that morning. Who was this Piper fellow and the May Queen, who

was she? In a way he felt sorry for the strange little man, but then couldn't help thinking about his moments of slight dizziness while talking to him.

As the heat and greenery of summer turned into the reds and browns of autumn, he watched the forest with great interest. This was his favourite time of the year, soon Christmas would be approaching and the whole natural cycle of the forest would begin again.

On a cold, dark November morning he made himself a cup of tea in the forestry commission office. As he waited for the kettle to boil he looked through his post. Among the letters he found a postcard. The picture on the front was a picture of what he presumed to be some kind of fairy or nymph. She was floating above the ground looking down at a figure sitting on a log.

The kettle boiled, putting his bundle of letters down he made his early morning cuppa. Scratching his unshaven chin, he sat down at his desk and contemplated the tasks for that day.

Suddenly the blood ran cold through his veins; he riffled through the post until he found the postcard once again. He took a magnifying glass out of his draw and trained in on the small seated figure overshadowed by the winged figure.

Robert stirred at the figure; he knew who it was, he recognised him immediately. It was the Piper.

Turning the card over, he read the small lettering along the right hand edge, 'The Piper at the Gates of Dawn meets the May Queen.'

Bus Station Blues

Somebody once said, "That they loathed bus stations, full of lost luggage and lost souls."

Where these departure and arrival points also portholes between the worlds of the living and the dead, a place for ghosts to pass through? There is one person that believes that...

A cold, easterly wind whistled around the covered platforms of the then old bus station. The railings, girders and stanchions were covered with flaking blue paint; much in need of some attention. Not many people were around in the early hours of that Thursday morning; one man though leant his back against the cold railings as he craned his neck to see if there was any sight or sign of his bus coming. The only thing he saw was discarded fish and chip papers blowing along the road and finding homes in shop doorways and against sheltered walls.

His name was Shaun and he was on his way home from a gig in one of the many town pubs. Next to him stood a battered old acoustic guitar, concealed in a battered old case.

Shaun was the archetypical blues man. He had very little money, his playing fed him, but that was all.

Now in his early thirties he longed to buy an electric guitar and an amp and join a band. This would bring in more money, raise his profile and he may even enjoy playing again.

He was tired; it had been a long day. Slowly his head started to droop; sleep though was not forthcoming as the cold wind whipped through his thin coat.

While his eyes closed and head nodded he didn't see another person join him on the platform. The second man was old and haggard looking, though his clothes were of good quality and hung well on his body. Over his shoulder hung a camel haired coat. Shaun felt his presence; slowly he opened his eyes and with his head still bowed looked to his right. He saw the small man, his face was still as fresh as when he was young, the dark brown skin on his face shone in the gloomy light.

"Evening." The old man said to Shaun in a soft voice.

“Alright.” Shaun replied. A gust of wind whistled around the station. It made him shiver uncontrollably; trying to counteract the cold he pulled his coat tightly around himself.

“I see you play the guitar?”

“Yes, I try.”

“Oh you’re far too modest. You’re probably very good. Tell me, what you play?” asked the old man with a hint of genuine enthusiasm.

“The blues mainly.”

“Good.” He replied, “There’s no other kind of music for me anyway. Tell me; is there much money in the blues these days?”

“Not much.”

“No, there never was.”

A moments silence fell on the brief conversation.

“Whose music do you do?” the old man asked breaking the silence.

“Oh the usual acoustic stuff, Broonzy, Howling Wolf, Robert Johnson.”

“Ah Mr. Johnson. Now he could knock out a tune.” A look of nostalgia came over his face. “He was a strange man was Johnson you know. No one knew where he came from, he just appeared one day and recorded his songs. Then, not long after he died in a corn field, some say he was poisoned by a man whose wife he was fooling around with.” “No one knows for certain”.

“It was said that he’d sold his soul to the devil to make a record...”

Shaun was having an uneasy feeling about this old man, he was sure that they had met before, or at least he recognised him from somewhere.

“Do I know you?” he asked, the question getting the better of him.

“Oh, maybe, I’ve been around a bit you know, played one or two gigs in my time.”

“I thought so.” Was this old man being modest, he could have played with some of the greats, but at the same time he could be no one of any significance, just another old blues man. “Who with?” the question jumped out of his mouth.

“Oh, one or two people.” In his hand he held a piece of paper. It was folded on itself, once horizontally and once vertically. For many moments it passed through his fingers, then without warning he stopped fiddling with it and let out a sigh.

Shaun was curious to know what the piece of paper was; the old man nursed it in his hands all through the conversation.

“I want you to have this.” He finally said holding the piece of folded, yellowing paper toward the young man.

Shaun looked at the old marked sheet in his hand then into the old mans brown eyes. A look of longing was in them; was he at pains to relinquish it to him. If that was the case then why do it?

“It’s the last song I wrote, it never was recorded.”

Slowly Shaun took the paper from him, “Thank you.” He said, not knowing what to say.

Unfolding the sheet he could see the faded words scribbled down on the paper, they took the form of a two verse song. At the top of the sheet in capital letters was the song title, ‘Bus Station Blues.’

Shaun looked across at the old man. To his horror, no one stood there any longer. Quickly Shaun looked around, all he saw was the white blanket of fog shrouding the platforms, and all was silent.

Once again his eyes passed over the text, at the bottom the signature read Robert Johnson.

Cries From the Deep

Wilson Maxwell was not a great sailor, the slightest motion of the ship left him with the feeling of having had his stomach transplanted. The stars shone in the clear night sky, the moon reflected in the still ocean. The Atlantic that night looked like a millpond, how calm everything was. This did not do anything for his feelings of nausea though. He was en route from Southampton to New York for the press release of his latest book 'A Stitch in Time.' Wilson Maxwell was a writer of crime fiction and he was one of the best in his field.

His publisher thought him a great asset to the company; was that why they had paid for him to travel to New York in the luxury of the Queen Mary II at great expense, or was it because he was late handing in the first draft of his next masterpiece? Had he been isolated on a ship for two and a half weeks to finish his works? If that was the case then the deep thinking ones at Hargreaves Press House would be disappointed, he couldn't concentrate on a ship, his laptop would remain unopened for the rest of the journey. Thankfully he was flying back to England.

Wilson stood on the forward observation deck, this privilege was reserved for first class passengers only, he really should be grateful to be here but to him it was just ships, he didn't like them. As he stared into the inky blackness of the night he tried to distinguish where the line of the horizon was, but it was just black on black. Then out of the corner of his eye a flash of light caught his attention. A bright streak of white light shot across the sky, a shooting star? It must have been. He waited a few more moments to see if he could see any more. His patience was rewarded, he did see another, but it wasn't a shooting star as he had first thought. The ribbon of light came up from behind the horizon only to turn back on itself and fall back into the blackness again.

So, he had found the line of the horizon. His mind started to think about the display of pyrotechnics showing itself from over the horizon, maybe it was a birthday celebration or a wedding party. As he returned to his cabin he wondered if the party revellers were enjoying themselves. He reminded himself he was on this magnificent liner; the answer he thought must be yes.

It was now three o'clock in the morning and quite cold, even though it was the middle of summer. One of the many night shift stewards passed him as he left the observation deck.

"Good evening Sir." The steward said in a cheerful voice. Far too cheerful for Wilson at that time of night.

"Evening, did you see the fireworks over there a minute ago?" he asked the crewmember. . Maybe it was his lack of sleep, but now he was doubting whether he himself has seen them.

"I didn't Sir no." a grave tone had now suddenly entered his voice, "What did these fireworks look like Sir?"

"Well, I don't know really, just rockets really."

"Would you come with me for a moment Sir?"

Wilson was curious, what had he said to cause such a reaction? The steward led him through a door marked private. The corridor now entered was not designed in the palatial style, of public areas of the ship.

Quickly they walked along the corridor before coming to another door. Passing through it, both men climbed up the flight of stairs. At the top of the stairs was a door marked, 'Strictly No Access'. The steward opened it and ushered Wilson through.

He could not believe his eyes. He was standing on the bridge of one of the biggest liners in the world.

The night watch all turned their collective faces to see who the new comer was. It wasn't uncommon for the Captain or first mate to make an appearance in the early hours to see how the ship was operating.

Wilson suddenly realised the man he thought was a steward was actually an officer, a point confirmed by the bridge crew standing to attention on their arrival.

"This gentleman has reported seeing flares off the port bow, Mr Parker, check the radar, Mr Fossley check all communication channels, someone inform the Captain."

The bridge crew came alive, each man a professional in his own field. The radio operator had donned a set of headphones and was sweeping the airwaves on his brand new digital radio; the radar operator scanned the sea area for any sign of other craft.

“Captain Chambers,” said one of the voices on the bridge, “Your presence is required urgently on the bridge Sir.”

The radar operator removed his headphones, “Mr Smith,” he was addressing Wilson companion, “All I am getting is an old fashioned SOS repeating, no voice contact as yet.”

Smith gave him an order, “Reply to it, in voice and Morse, tell them we are on our way with assistance.” As he spoke Mr Fossley sent his message as instructed. Smith turned his attention to the radar operator, “Mr Parker, do we have a position?”

“Not as yet Sir, nothing is showing on the screen.”

“Let’s hope to God we’re not too late.”

Outside in the cold night air another flare lit up the sky.

If there was a ship in peril here in the middle of the Atlantic it was a thousand to one chance that another craft would be close enough to give assistance, tonight though was one of those occasions. The Queen Mary II steamed toward the explosions of light, a cry for help in the darkness.

The door opened onto the bridge, framed within it stood Captain Chambers, a large framed bearded man, his uniform immaculate, not a crease to be seen in any part of the white fabric. “What is the problem Mr Smith?”

His voice was full of authority, the entire bridge crew stood to attention on hearing his distinctive voice.

Smith explained to the Captain the events of the previous fifteen minutes.

“Have we had any voice contact?” asked Chambers.

“No Sir, just an SOS.”

“Do we have a fix on the position?”

“Er no Sir.” Smith sounded somewhat embarrassed by his lack of information. “We cannot find a trace on the radar Sir. The only point of reference we have are the flares.”

“And you sir,” the Captain said turning toward Wilson. “You saw the flares?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Do I know you?” the Captain asked staring at him. He had seen his face before, but where from?

“Wilson Maxwell Sir, I...”

“Of course, my wife’s favourite author. You must have dinner with us tonight.”

“Thank you, I’d be honoured.”

“Now back to the business in hand. Mr Smith, what’s the current situation?”

Smith was bent over the radar and satellite tracking machines. He and the operator were deep in conversation, “I don’t understand it Sir, we should be almost on top of it by now.”

The sky outside was beginning to lighten now. The clouds were deep shades of red and orange, the first mate took a pair of binoculars off a hook and scanned the ocean. Nothing was in sight.

“You won’t see anything.” Captain Chambers said in a melancholy tone, we’re too late, eighty years too late.” He turned to leave. As he opened the door he spoke for the last time, “Don’t forget dinner tonight Mr Maxwell.” With that the door closed and he was gone.

A sombre mood had fallen on the occupants of the bridge, no one mentioned the Captains strange comment.

“Resume course for New York.” Smith ordered. Without a word the wheel man turned the small wheel and the ship continued on its way.

Two days later the Queen Mary II arrived in New York dock. The decks and quayside were full of cheering crowds. Wilson was one of the first off the ship, he was desperate to get back onto terra firma.

After checking into the Drake Hotel he took a trip to the offices of the New York Times and requested to look at the archive section. He had not been able to talk to the Captain the previous night at dinner; he was placed on the other side of the table sitting next to the Captains wife. He was desperate to find out what the Captain was referring to as he left the bridge early that morning.

He now sat behind a microfilm reader and sorted through a box full of reels of film. He found the year he was looking for and loaded the machine. The film flashed past his eyes on the screen, it took only a matter of minutes to find the edition of The Times published on the 23 July 1925, almost eighty years ago to the day.

A chill came over him as he looked at a picture of a ship and read the headline above...

‘ALL HANDS LOST AS SS GLORIA SINKS’

Curtain Call

John Brockwell poured the boiling hot water into his enamelled tin mug with his left hand. His right hand had been favoured before his accident, but no more. Using a teaspoon he squeezed the tea bag against the side of the cup as it was removed. With a well practised flick he threw it into a bucket which served as a bin. Two heaped spoons of sugar were shovelled into the cup before he added a splash of milk.

In his small office a fire flickered in the hearth. The room was only eight feet square; just big enough for a table, chair and cupboard. Before sitting down he glanced out of the small net curtained window which looked out across the platforms of Paragon Station, the main rail terminal serving the city of Hull.

One of the large station clocks suspended from the ceiling showed the time as ten minutes past three; the station was deserted and cold. It was mid November 1952; the start of a cold winter for the residents of the city. Outside his office the cold wind blew in from the open end of this great Victorian building, whipping up ashes from the tracks and depositing them wherever the fell. Collecting in corners were scraps of half burnt papers; once used as fire lighters in the engines now blowing here and there. The biting wind also dislodged the fine, powdery soot which lay in every nook and cranny of the iron works supporting the roof. All was quiet as he sat down in front of the fire and took a sip of his hot tea. His duties as Night Guard at the station were simple. Each hour he had to inspect the security of the entrances, ensure the clocks were correct and deal with any traffic coming in or out of the station. The latter task was one which seldom bothered him. The main line station was used, on the whole, for passenger traffic which seldom ran through the hours of the night. Freight which tended to run at night as well as during the day bypassed the station; travelling both to and fro from the docks inland. John could feel an itch on his right elbow. He put the mug of tea down and instinctively tried to scratch it. A pointless task he knew, but after ten years it still caught him out.

A piece of red hot shrapnel had punctured his arm during the War. He had been serving in the Royal Navy when his ship, HMS

Endeavour had been hit by a torpedo. The arm had been badly damaged and had to be amputated. On occasion though, his nerve endings would tingle and trick him into thinking that a part of the long gone appendage was itching. With care he rubbed the stub which marked the end of his right arm. It made him think back to those dark days of the war.

As his mind drifted back to his time at sea, he listened to the wind howling in the beams and rafters of the station. The burning fire kept him warm as he finished off the last dregs of his tea. He coughed as a few of the rough leaves lodged in his throat. Time had come for him to do his rounds around the station. Picking up the keys from the table he stood up from his chair before putting them in his pocket. He then picked up his pocket watch, whistle and flags. Finally he lit the hand held lamp and reluctantly stepped out into the cold night air. Closing the office door behind him he soon realised that the temperature was not as low as it had been earlier that night. The air was very still inside the station, but he could clearly hear the sound of the whistling wind far above him. Another kind of whistling sound was also audible; it was an engine pulling a freight train, "Must be coming onto the mainline?" he pondered, all the time knowing that it was precisely that.

The office door opened directly onto platform three, the other two platforms were mere siding at the front and to the right of the entrance. These would be his first port of call, so he set off towards them.

In the darkness, outside the range of the station lights, he could see two red lights. These lamps hung on the centre of the buffers at the end of the two lines which served platforms one and two.

High up in the main signal box the signalman waved at the Guard who raised his lamp twice in recognition. This was merely a reassurance to one another that all was well. It was strange, he always thought to himself, but he and the signalman had never met, never engaged in any form of discourse. No doubt one day they would.

Turning on his heels he began walking back in the direction he had just come. The hourly inspection continued. All platforms were still empty, all doors secure. Standing in the entrance to the ticket

office, he shone the lamp around. The beam of light cast an eerie glow over the desks and now shuttered windows.

The sound of the catch clicking shut echoed around the empty ticket hall. The walls were tiled as was the mosaic flooring. Any sound bounced around off each and every hard surface.

All was well, as it was every night, every hourly inspection, always the same.

Slowly, with the lamp down by his side, he journeyed back toward platform three and the comfort and warmth of his small office, doing his final checks on his way back.

Adjacent to the ticket office and entrance hall stood the stone façade of the Station Hotel. One of the doors led to the cellar of the both the hotel and the station and was accessed via an old stone staircase. The passages under the hall led to a network of tunnels to the left and the right. The one on the right went under the platforms. Slowly he turned the key in the lock, the door swung open. In his hand the lamp shone down into the darkness. The stone steps led down into what appeared to be eternity. Slowly he descended into the darkness. Though he knew no one could be down there in the catacombs he would always be on his guard just in case.

Once in the passageways there would come a point where he could not see either end. This would naturally make him feel ill at ease and the slightest noise would cause his heart to race at speed.

Quickly he rushed down each of the tunnels and then out into the dim light of the station once again, gladly locking the door behind him.

Passing through the wrought iron gate he felt a distinct chill run through him; had someone walked over his grave? More likely, he decided, it was the wind whistling down from the end of the station.

He closed the gate and snapped the bolt across then began to turn away, but, suddenly he stopped and turned back toward the entrance hall and ticket office. He could not be sure, but he thought he had seen someone out of the corner of his eye. They had flashed by in a blur from right to left, or so he thought. Squinting his eyes he peered into the gloom, no one was apparent. For a moment he considered calling out, but then thought better of it; it would be a pointless act.

Once John had left his post at six the following morning he thought no more of the occurrence, though it had dwelt heavily on his mind for the rest of that night's shift. For the remainder of the night it was never far away from his thoughts.

The following evening was very much the same as it was most nights. His hourly checks would be carried out; he would read the newspaper and drink mugs full of tea.

No traffic was due that night so his duties were simple. Check the clocks, lines and gates.

At two o'clock he prepared himself for the hourly inspection; flags, whistle and pocket watch were all placed in the relevant pockets and then finally his lamp. Locking the door behind him he set off along the platform towards the goods yard. As he reached the end of the platform he looked up over at the box, the signalman was there, as always going about his business. John gave the pre-arranged signal to indicate all was well.

The wind, which had blown through the Station the previous night, was now gone. The air was still and calm. So quiet was the night that he could hear the rats scurrying along the lines. As he walked down the edge of platform three, he whistled a tune to himself. He wasn't sure what it was, but stopped as its echo returned. The sound was more than a little haunting.

Minutes later the lamp shone around the ticket office. The room was much the same as the previous evening, empty, dark, silent. On one of the many desks sat a brown suitcase, its two catches holding the lid closed were aided by a brown leather belt. "Lost luggage?" he asked himself. Closing the door behind him he continued on his rounds.

The cellars were next.

The key turned in the lock then he paused as he started to open the door. As he did he felt his body fall back, something had knocked him over, it wasn't physical, nothing had touched him, but something had exerted a force on him. John was conscious too of the fact that two figures, well he presumed that they were figures, rushed past him; one after another.

It took him a moment to recover from the shock of what he thought had just happened. Thoughts raced through his mind. The process only took a split second, but to him it felt like an eternity.

Two men had pushed their way through the door and past him, but how? They came out of the cellar, the door, he looked at it. It was only hanging open an inch or so, how could they have got through such a small space? Quickly he turned to try and see where they had gone. They would be locked in with him and that point raised another question; how did they come to be in the cellar? Through the hotel perhaps? That was the only explanation.

Getting to his feet he set off in pursuit. Were these two men dangerous? They themselves could be in danger if they were not careful. He set off at a brisk pace which soon turned into a run; nowhere could he see the two intruders.

For at least half an hour he searched the halls, offices and rooms of the great old Victorian station, still no sign of the men could be seen. Surely there must be only one place they could have gone, back into the underground passageways.

He had to make an inspection. For many minutes he stood silently looking at the door; it was still hanging open as it had been when the men had jumped out on him.

His head knew he had to go in, but his legs would not move. Bracing himself he reached out an arm and slowly opened the door.

The beam from his lamp danced around the walls. He could hear nothing; absolute silence rang in his ears. Down in the cellar tunnels the slightest noise echoed, even a breath was amplified. Silently he stood in the darkness not daring to breathe. Still nothing, then up above in the station he heard the clank of something small and metallic hitting the marble floor.

Quickly and with a certain amount of fear he ran up the stone steps and looked around; his eyes flitting from one end of the hall to the other.

Moments later he found himself rushing back towards his office. He had encountered no one in the confines of the station; this left only one possibility. Whoever had been there with him that night must have left via the tracks? Rushing down platform three he passed his office and on toward the goods yard.

Once out in the cold night air, he looked up towards the signal box. Raising and lowering his lamp he tried to attract the attention of the occupant.

Finally he caught the signalman's attention and he slid open one of the windows to speak to John.

"Did you see anyone leave on the lines?" Brockwell shouted up towards the box.

"What?" the signalman said as a train had passed on the dock line making the guard's words fade into the background.

"Did you see anyone on the lines?" he repeated, a little slower and louder than previously.

"I haven't seen anyone." The signalman replied.

In his office the fire was going out, he put another shovel full of coal onto the dying embers. Coal was not in short supply here, though it was in general terms. A relic of war time rationing. Once the fire was blazing again he sat down in his chair and sighed. He didn't now what to make of the events of that night. For the first time the thought that the station must be haunted crossed his mind; but did he believe in such things? The mug of tea was still too hot to drink when the time came for him to go out on his rounds again. He was not alone now; the station was beginning to come alive with activity. The stokers and firemen had started to arrive now to prepare the boilers ready to make steam. He didn't hear the noise of the railwayman outside, so deep was he in his own thoughts. When a knock finally came he reacted as though he'd been woken from a deep sleep. Part of him wanted to jump in fright while part wanted to withdraw somewhere else altogether.

The man who entered was Harold, his day shift counterpart. He always came in to see John on his arrival and start the change over from one shift to the other. Today though, he was not alone, another man accompanied him. This second person seemed strangely familiar. Where did he know him from? The third party was introduced as Mathew Rollinson, the nightshift signalman. Of course the signal man, that's who he was.

He had shown some concern about his fellow nightshift worker and now wanted to know what had prompted last nights out of the ordinary occurrence. Had someone been in the station?

John recounted his experiences to the two men. He did not know whether they would take him seriously; after all, even to him, they seemed to be almost unbelievable.

Rollinson assured him that, to his knowledge, no one had departed the station via the lines. John believed him; after all, why should he lie about such an occurrence.

After sitting down and going over the night's events with a cup of tea, John was sent home and told to rest. Were things getting on top of him to the extent that he was seeing things? They never said as much, his two visitors, but that is what they must have been hinting at with their comments. If these visions were ghosts then whose ghosts were they? As he thought things over his mind, he rejected the possibility that they could be anything else but flesh and blood. Still, he had to consider all options.

His father had worked on the railways all his life. Maybe he knew if the station was haunted. His father had never spoken of a ghost, but that didn't mean to say that there wasn't one.

Donning his flat cap and wrapping a scarf around his neck, he left the station via the front entrance. The day was bright and cold, the smell of autumn was hanging heavily in the air, though it was hard to pick it out over the smell of coal fuelled fires. He took an electric tram car down the tree lined Beverly Road. Instead of going straight home to his wife and bed, he was heading out of town to try and shed a little light on the mystery of the two phantoms.

At the green front door of 36 Wellington Street, he didn't break his stride as he opened the door and entered. His father, who had retired some ten years previously, was pleased to see his son walk through the back door into the kitchen but was also a little concerned. Why was here at such a time as this?

Once John had assured Mr Brokwell senior that all was well with his domestic life, he began to talk about why he was there. Both men sat in the back kitchen and smoked a cigarette. John told his father in detail of the occurrences of the previous night before asking the question he was dreading asking, "Have you ever heard of the station being haunted?"

His father sat back and thought. He had heard men's tales of ghosts that walk the deserted platforms and lines of Hull's railways.

All workers and staff on the railways that had come to an unnatural end were said to walk the location of their demise; a silent warning to others.

“Ah, this was not silent though,” he explained, “I heard something, some kind of metallic clank.”

Both men were distracted by the sound of footsteps coming down the staircase. Moments later John’s mother appeared at the foot of the stairs.

His father suddenly became very distant from the conversation. Standing up he poured her a cup of tea from the brown pot before helping to seat her in the chair he had just vacated.

Once the usual pleasantries were over he motioned his son outside into the backyard.

“What’s wrong father?” the elderly woman asked, not overjoyed with her husband for taking away her son.

“Oh, it’s just work talk mother.” Replied the old man, limping as he opened the back door. Years of hard work on the railway had left him crippled with arthritis in his knees. He struggled outside into the cold morning air as he did not want his wife to be privy to this conversation as too many old wounds may be reopened.

Outside in the yard, father and son simultaneously lit another woodbine. “So son,” said the older man, “you say two men rushed past you from the cellar.”

“Yes.” Remembering back filled him full of terror; he took a long drag on his cigarette.

“Then you heard the sound of something metal being dropped.”

“That’s about it.”

“I’m afraid to say I might know what it was you heard.”

John was relieved, “Oh good, I’ve been full of worry about it.” The relief that there may be some rational explanation for what he had heard and seen comforted him.

“When I say I know, I know of it.”

His son’s smile dropped slightly; this wouldn’t be closure to the matter completely, but it may put his mind at rest, “Well?”

Brockwell senior extinguished his cigarette under his boot before inhaling through clenched teeth, “It was over fifty years ago now that I heard about it and it goes back even further than that.

Before the station was built there was a theatre on that site. I can't remember what it was called now, your mother will know, but I'd rather you didn't ask her." The reason why was about to become apparent, "In them days all theatres had a set of actors who performed the plays they put on. The leading actor was known as the principal. There would be a lot of jealousy surrounding the principal as you can imagine.

Anyway, at this theatre the under study to the star was furiously jealous of his superior. The rivalry was well known in the company and the principal played on it, even mocking the understudy when he was in earshot.

One night the understudy stayed back after the performance and once everyone had gone, he confronted the lead actor and told him that he wanted the lead parts."

"Why was that dad?"

"He thought that the principal was too old to take on most of the roles they were performing. There were probably more reasons than that, but I don't know what they were. There was an argument and the younger man stabbed the principal."

"Whereabouts in the theatre was it?"

"I don't know, I didn't know the layout and how it maps onto the station.

I'm not saying that it's their ghosts you're seeing, but it is possible." He lit another cigarette and inhaled deeply.

Quietly John looked toward the house before asking in a whisper, "So why don't you want me to ask me mam about it?"

After taking another deep drag on his cigarette he spoke, without making eye contact with his son, "One of the actors was in your mam's family. It was a long time ago, but that side of the family never talk about it."

On his way home John thought of what his father had told him. The tram journey home passed in an instant. Why didn't his maternal half of the family ever speak of the events; after all it was so long ago now. Had the long lost relation been the victim or the murderer? Maybe that was it. The shame of having a murderer in the family had been a burden on the family line for generations to come.

This interested him; he had to find out more about it. The tram stopped at the top of Baker Street and with a piece of quick thinking he jumped of and headed in the direction of the Central Library. Some three hours later he sat at a desk in the library and although tiredness was starting to get the better of him, he continued his research. All around him lay copies of the Hull Daily Mail. It was now three o'clock in the afternoon and he was conscious that he had had no sleep that day and his shift at the station was fast approaching. He was about to return to the latest pile of newspapers back to the archives when something caught his eye.

The headline on the paper read, 'Murder at the Palace'. Accompanying the bold black text was a sketched picture of the Palace Theatre. Under the pencil drawing were numerous columns of text, detailing the events of a midsummer night in the year 1818...?

'It was with great regret,' began the article, 'that news of the death of Henry Morton was released today. His body was found yesterday morning with stab wounds to his stomach.'

The article went on to describe the victim, his family details and career. The article praised the life of the principal actor at the Palace Theatre but was damning of the understudy who was suspected of the murder.

Ernest Rollinson was, according to the paper, 'filled with jealousy' over the actor's talents and fame.

'He being of lesser talents would never hold the principal role that Morton enjoyed. Therefore Rollinson murdered him to pave the way for his own ends.'

Digesting the information as quickly as he could he left the library? He would have to call in at home, have something to eat then catch the tram back to work. He knew what reception would be waiting for him at home. His wife would not be best pleased with his absence for the entire day.

At seven o'clock that evening he sat on his chair in front of the fire in his small office, a mug of tea sat before him though he was so

tired that he almost didn't have the strength to drink it. He hoped that tonight would be a quiet one. The last thing he wanted was a shift full of incident.

Outside the confines of his office he could hear the dayshift leaving, their shift complete. The last of the engines were now leaving, only the few night trains would be running.

His eyelids felt heavy and a numbing feeling was coming over him when he was brought back to his senses by a knock at the door. Instantly it opened and in came the Station Master followed by a blast of smoke filled cold air. As he closed the door behind him he let out a series of barking coughs the like of which would only be the result of a forty a day habit.

Brokwell looked up at the newcomer through blurred eyes, trying to focus on his superior and to sound as though he was fully in control of his senses.

"Ah, evening," said the Station Master. His grey hair was cut short across the back of his neck so the GNER cap sat perfectly on his head. "There will be several pieces of traffic leaving during the night. Some line works at Boothferry Park require the opening of platform six. I'm leaving you in full charge. If the rounds aren't logged as normal, don't worry just make sure we don't have any unwanted visitors coming in." then he stopped and looked into John's bloodshot eyes. "Are you alright?"

"Yes Sir." He replied mustering into order.

"You look as though you could fall asleep any minute, but if you're alright then..." with that he was gone.

That was all John needed, a busy night. All he wanted to do was collapse into his chair in front of the fire; how would he cope with all the extra work?

Later that night he stared long and hard at his pocket watch. The time was quickly approaching nine o'clock, time for his rounds. By this hour he was requiring constant stimulation and decided that tea was probably as good as anything. He poured himself out yet another cup of the hot sweet drink and cupped his hand around it. Carrying the mug along with his usual tools of the trade hindered him in his work somewhat. The inconvenience though was necessary for the fortifying drink was keeping him awake.

Standing at platform 1 he half heartedly shone his lamp around. As was normal he signalled the box who replied with the standard confirmation.

Slowly he walked back towards the bottom end of the platforms, not showing too much enthusiasm and delaying the inevitable moment when he must open the door to the cellars.

All platforms were correct and in order, so he made his way towards the ticket office. As he walked through the hall he became aware that someone was there with him. His first reaction was that it must be the maintenance crew arriving for the nightshift, then realised that it could not be so as all entrances were locked. He had the keys for the gates in his hand? Quickly he turned to see who was with him, but no one was. A distinct chill came over him as he took a sip of hot tea. His condition was not helped either by the sound of what he thought to be footsteps echoing through the building. Standing at the ticket office door he froze as stiff as a corpse. His breath was becoming erratic as he tried to pull himself together. The noise he could hear was almost certainly a rat or other animal, his tired mind was no doubt playing tricks on him.

The ticket office was all clear, all was well.

Only one port of call was remaining on the nine o'clock round, the cellars. All too quickly he was standing by the door that led down to the subterranean world beneath the station.

John shone his lamp down into the black underworld to light the way. As he took a step into the doorway, three almighty bangs came up out of the blackness and echoed through the station. Before he could recover from this shock the sound of a sickening cry followed. John in fright dropped his tin mug. It clattered down the stone steps, finally coming to rest in the darkness below. He gripped the door frame with his fist, not wanting to follow the mug. His whole body was shaking like a nervous kitten. Once again he heard that same noise as before coming from his rear.

It was then that like a breeze of relief drifting over him he realised that the noise was the sound of the nightshift crew. Turning away from the door, he made his way back to the main entrance, sorting through the large bunch of heavy keys as he rushed toward the gate. On arrival he unchained the heavy iron gates and let the

workmen in before locking the gate behind them. Many vagrants lived in and around the area of the station and he didn't want any entering and setting up camp in the building.

As the lock snapped shut he heard the sound of an engine pulling in. The blasts of steam from the boiler filled the high arches in the roof as the driver let off steam.

The workmen knew the routine and John watched as they all climbed aboard the third class carriage, laughing and joking as they embarked. John would not be in such a cheery mood if a night's working exposed to the elements awaited him.

Stepping out onto platform 6, he looked out into the night and waited for the signal to drop. Though he could not see the signal box, the red filtered light shone through the hazy mist which swept in off the river. When the red light turned to green he blew his whistle and waved his flag. The driver opened the regulator and the train pulled out.

Moments later he watched as the red tail lights disappeared around the right hand curve of the track.

The sound of the signal clicking back into position made him look upward into the misty night; the light was now back to red as were all the signals. Tucking his flag under his arm he made his way back to the comfort of his office.

Once the door was closed, he took off his hat and hung it on the peg before sitting down in his chair. Putting a shovel of coal onto the fire he decided to make himself a brew. He couldn't though could he as his mug was still where it had fallen at the bottom of the cellar steps. He wasn't going out for it now; it could wait until he did his next rounds.

Picking up his pen he entered the arrival and departure times of the train and the fact that he had unlocked and relocked the side entrance gate. Once his official duties were complete, he took out a note book from his bag and read through his researches of earlier that day. To him it was interesting in several ways. The fact that a theatre had once stood on this very site fascinated him. He sat and wondered what it actually looked like inside. The newspaper sketch had shown its external appearance, but not the interior. Was it a grand lavish

affair with columns and golden scroll work, or was it a mere flee pit? John felt most comfortable with the grand theory.

The second point he found of interest was the murder. Could actors generate so much jealousy that they were driven to murder to gain fame? Obviously one had, Ernest Rollinson. Where had he heard that name recently? Rollinson? Then like a flash it came to him, "Of course." The signalman was called Rollinson, what a coincidence. The third point of interest was the fact that his own family had been involved with the affair, but on which side, victim or accused? If it was the accused his mother was related to, could he and his nightshift colleague be some kind of distant cousins? Now he would probably never know for sure.

The railway issue pocket watch showed the time to be five minutes to three. As at this time every night, Brockwell stepped out onto platform 3. Fatigue was now taking its toll on him. The lamp in his left hand felt the weight of a sack of coal, lifting it to give the all clear to the signalman took an extra effort of both strength and will power. The second he saw his colleague wave, John turned and headed back into the station. Half way down the platform he heard the click of a signal; the workmen must be on their way back.

Realising this, he headed for the platform gate and opened it for the nightshift to exit. Stepping out into the hallway, he noticed the cellar door was open. He froze momentarily before recalling that it was he who had left it open earlier to let the men into the station. His mug was still down there, he would retrieve it once all was quiet again. From outside he could hear the puffing chimney of the tank engine drawing up to the platform.

He would lock the cellar door then meet the train.

As John walked away from the now secure cellar door he heard something knocking. He looked around in puzzlement attempting to see what could be making such a noise.

The noise was one he recognised, and surely it couldn't be what he thought it to be. The noise sounded not unlike his enamelled mug being dragged along the stone floor of the cellar. The thought of a rat climbing over his cup filled him with dread and turning on his heels he unlocked the cellar door and once again shone his belt mounted lamp into the darkness. The light threw a shadow on the wall, the

beam had flashed across someone's face, he jumped back in fright. Rats he had expected, a third party, however, he didn't expect to see. The beam from his lamp flickered as it shone from side to side down the stairway, but no one seemed to be down there, unless they had stepped back into the shadows out of the searching beam. John thought for a moment, the face he had seen in the half light was familiar to him, but who was it?

Because the face was so familiar he only had the slightest reservation about descending to retrieve his cup.

The light shone down and still all was deserted. John took a step down carefully watching his feet as he didn't want to slip as his heavy boots landed on each step. Then, through the darkness, he saw something move down below. Quickly he looked up and shone the lamp down. There was the same face again, but now the figure was climbing the stairs with a determined stride. A hideous look of rage was on his face and it was at that point that John realised who the face belonged too, it was the face of the signalman, Rollinson. Strange, why wasn't he in the box; what was he doing in the cellar. John inhaled and was about to ask those very questions when his whole attitude to the situation changed. Rollinson was not wearing the uniform he was used to seeing him in. It must have been a trick of the light, but John's feet seemed to be disappearing into the stone steps as the man ascended the staircase. As if this was not worrying enough in his right hand he carried a knife.

John turned in fear and ran for his life. As quickly as his fatigued body could move he crossed the main hall of the station. He dare not look behind him until he was half way to the ticket office. On platform 6 the tank engine steamed to a halt at a safe distance from the hydraulic buffers.

John looked over at the carriage doors opening, safety in numbers was his first thought. Quickly he glanced around checking his rear. To his surprise the hall was now empty, no one could be seen, but he could hear his pursuer.

Frantically he looked to his right then left, still no one was apparent. Then for some unknown reason he looked up, could the noise of running feet be coming from above him? The sound was not

of shoes hitting the hard stone floor, but more of the slap of leather shoes on wooden floorboards.

John saw, but didn't believe his eyes. Above him in the roof of the station hall between the girders, unsupported, two men grappled with one another. A glint of light flashed as the knife which Rollinson raised above his head moved quickly down into the other man's body. Repeatedly it rose and fell.

John watched; in his stomach he felt sick watching the spectacle above him. Once the massacre was over Rollinson dropped the knife. It fell from his hand down past the two phantom figures. John watched it falling, glinting in the lights before finally landing in his right, false arm. The blade was no phantom; he let out a piercing shriek of pain. Why was it hurting; the arm was made only of wood. Blood began to bubble up out of the wound. John found it hard to hold on to the reality of the situation.

On platform 6, the driver and fireman had at that moment stepped off the footplate of the tank engine. Too their amazement they could see the night guard on the floor looking upward. They simultaneously broke out into a jog on seeing him lying there. Their advance was broken by the heavy iron gates which served as a barrier between hall and platform, the guard had neglected to unlock it. Soon though the engine driver had vaulted over the gate as he heard the guard cry out in pain, the cry was followed instantly by the sound of a metallic clink as though a metallic object had fallen from a great height.

It took only a matter of seconds for the drink to reach Brockwell who was now lying on the floor with his left hand tightly grasping his right arm, blood seeped through his clenched fingers.

The driver was amiss to why the guard was on the floor. A look of anguish was on his face, his torso twisting and turning with agony, "What is it?" he asked

Only the words, "My arm..." could be made out through the cries of pain.

"What about it?"

"Look." Shouted John looking down at where the knife had entered. Then he stopped, his frame had ceased to twist in agony and he seemed to freeze. Something had changed as slowly he removed

his hand from the artificial arm. All that he saw was the arm of his jacket, no hole, no blood, no knife.

“What, but?” he gasped, “Did you see them?” he asked the driver, “Did you see them, up there?” he looked up into the roof.

The driver looked but could see nothing.

John lay there trying to work out what had happened, was he so tired that his mind had imagined it? The driver helped him to his feet. By this time a crowd had gathered at the platform gate, all craned their necks to see what was occurring with the two men in the station hall.

John brushed himself down as he stood and tried to make sense of it all. As he took a step towards the platform gate he was stopped by the voice of the engine driver. “Here you dropped this.”

John turned to see the man standing up after picking something off the cold, hard floor. In his outstretched hand lay a knife.

As he looked at it glinting in the light his hand grabbed his right arm where he had just seen that knife enter.

Drawing on Innocence

It all came to a head on one cold Wednesday afternoon. The winter of 1891 was the coldest in living memory. For most of the season a white blanket of snow, ice and fog had laid stroom over the city. So cold had the winter been many of the factories and mills had closed their doors due to the conditions. Boilers struggled to keep up the supply of steam and heat; the raw materials used locally became unworkable at such low temperatures, so the factories closed.

Through the rows of terraced houses that ran alongside the countless places of industry that snaked along the River Hull, thin wisps of smoke rose from the equally spaced domestic chimneys.

Coal was used at a minimum by the tenants of these dwellings; with the factories on part shut down the labour force was on part wages.

To keep warm anything was put on the fire, anything they could get their hands on by whatever methods.

Walking down Montrose Terrace came a triad of official looking men. The man at the forefront was the local rent collector, Mr Harrison. Harrison knew this house, he used to enjoy coming here, but not any more.

On either flank two uniformed Police constables accompanied him. All three came to rest outside one of the many front doors in the row. This door was plain; the brown paint that had once shone brightly now peeled away from the bare exposed wood.

A gloved fist banged on the door, then slowly it opened...

For many years Keith and Dianna had lived happily in the terraced house. Times were hard, but they had many things to be thankful for. They had roof over their head, a fire in each room and a toilet in the back yard. For many people some of these features would be classed luxuries.

Three children had been born into the house and all had survived intake.

Keith worked at the factory which sat at the end of the street, dominating the skyline. As with all the women in the city Dianna's job was to raise the children. The eldest of the three children, Marcus

was now thirteen and like his father had started work at the factory. His occupation was that of shop lad with the prospect of moving onto greater things in due time.

The middle child, the eldest daughter Emily spent much of her time with her mother learning such skills that would set her right in life. Though now only twelve years old, she could make clothes with ease while her bread making skills were said to be the best in the terrace.

The youngest child, Rose was five years old. Though she helped around the house she spent most of her time playing with her old doll. The house itself was small and cramped, the two up, two down rooms didn't allow for much space or any kind of privacy. Evenings were spent in much the same way every night. The main meal was eaten at midday, with a smaller meal in the evening. After tea the family entertained themselves by playing one of the board games made for them by Keith. He manufactured them from any old bits and pieces he could salvage from work. The two favourites were draughts and ludo. The boards were made from wood while the counts were washers and nuts. Many a happy night would be spent playing with the games. One late summer dinner time, Keith walked the short distance home from the factory. On entering the front room he asked Dianna the whereabouts of their daughter Rose.

"She's in the back yard," explained Dianna, "dinners ready." Keith walked through the back kitchen and out into the yard. He saw Rose sitting on the ground chatting away to herself while playing with her old doll. He crouched down beside her, "Hello Rose."

The little girl looked up at him, a smile on her face at the sight of her father, "Hello Daddy," she said, "dolly's playing hopscotch."

Keith smiled for a moment before speaking again, "I've got something for you." He said looking into her eyes.

"What is it daddy?" Rose asked, her doll still skipping along in her hand.

From behind his back he took a piece of slate, around six inches square followed by a piece of chalk.

"That's nice daddy, what does it do?" she asked with a questioning look on her young face.

“It’s a slate, look...” he drew a squiggle on its surface with the piece of chalk.

Rose’s eyes lit up, “wow?” immediately she took both the slate and chalk off him and started to scribble on the grey surface.



As the family ate their dinner the room became darkened as the bright sunlight was obscured by large black clouds. Within minutes, lightening was striking and thunder was rolling across the sky.

The family all sat at table looking out of the window watching the streams of rain run down the street. In the yard the dolls clothing became wet and heavy, the scribbled lines on the slate washed away. Keith finished his large mug of tea. As he stood up pushing his chair back away from the table he undid his belt a notch and patted both hands on his considerable gut. “Come on then young ‘un, time to get back.”

Marcus followed his father’s lead and prepared to return to the factory. The younger of the two men peered through the kitchen window, the sun was shining again, not a cloud could be seen in the blue sky. Dianna handed them both a flask each before bidding them farewell. “Well girls, just us again.” She picked up the plates from the table and put them in the large Belfast sink. “Emily, will you dry?”

“Yes mother.” Emily was eager to get on with her needlework, but it would wait.

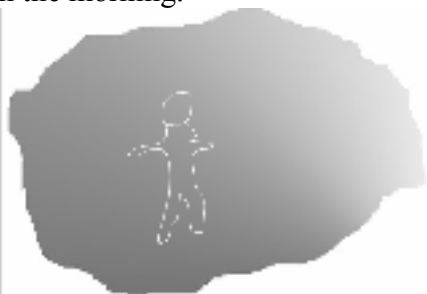
Rose jumped down from the chair on which she sat during the meal and went back outside to play.

It was not long after this that a strange sequence of events started to occur in that house situated down Montrose Terrace.

Dianna and Marcus were playing ludo on one half of the kitchen table while Rose and her father played draughts opposite. The games

lasted until nine o'clock when Keith announced that it was time for the younger family members to be in bed.

The two elder children started to pack away the games; Rose however laid herself on the floor in front of the fire for a quick late night draw. Placing her doll on the slate she drew around its outline. Stopped in her tracks by a word from Keith she decided to finish the drawing off in the morning.



That night the sky was clear, the moon a waning crescent. Dianna suddenly woke as a train's whistle blew somewhere. It came she thought from the direction of the river. The linen covers did not lay correctly on the bed, was it her husband or herself who had had a rough nights sleep up to that point? After straightening the cover and plumping up her pillow she lay back down to sleep once again.

For several minutes she tried too hard to fall asleep. Diana had a nagging feeling; it was almost as though she felt a presence in the room. So real was the feeling that she refused to open her eyes, afraid of what she may see before her.

After turning once again she now faced the wall, she dared to open one eye. Nothing was between her and the bed. The other eye slowly opened, both of them looked around the room. The faintest glow of light filtered through the curtains from the gas lamp on the street outside. For some reason she struggled to focus on the dresser which stood opposite the foot of the bed.

Sitting up she squinted trying to focus her eyes on the piece of furniture. As her eyes adjusted to the light she could see the figure of, well she wasn't sure. Only a shimmering silhouette was visible, no features on either face or body. Without taking her eyes off the vision her right hand found her husband's shoulder, she shook it several times, not giving up until he finally stirred into consciousness.

“Ey, what?” he grunted

“Look,” Diana said through gritted teeth.

“What?” Keith was half unconscious and didn’t hear the urgency in his wife’s voice.

“Look...” she repeated.

Slowly he sat up and tried to see what the fuss was about, “What’s up Di..?”

She said nothing, just carried on looking at the end of the bed.

He looked and looked, then finally saw. “Well, bugger me?” he said before his jaw dropped. As they watched in disbelief the apparition came closer and closer before passing right through the bed.

Dianna could feel her heart beating in her throat. Then she thought it was about to stop as the vision past through them, then on through he wall.

Neither got any sleep for the rest of the night.

The following morning both of them said very little. The breakfast was eaten in almost total silence; the children seemed to pick up on the discomfort in the room.

Once the men had gone to work Emily asked her mother if there was something wrong?

“We didn’t sleep well last night, that’s all.” Was the only reply that was forthcoming. Dianna continued with the washing until she suddenly stopped. She had seen something this morning that had made a mark on her consciousness, what was it and more to the point, where had she seen it?

Drying her hands on a tea towel she went through into the other room. Rose was sitting on the floor playing with her doll. Dianna looked all around the darkest corners of the room trying to remember what she had seen. There was nothing on the mantle piece, nothing on the dresser. Then she looked down to the floor.

On Roses slate she saw the start of a drawing. Rose had started to draw a picture of her doll, she had drawn the outline of the toy, but had been sent to bed before finishing the picture. What lay on the slate could be described as the outline of a human figure, eerily close to the figure of the ghost which had been present in their bedroom the previous night.

She looked down at the slate in disbelief then over at her youngest daughter who quietly sat on the floor holding a conversation with her doll. "Rose, did you draw this picture?" Dianna asked.

"Yes Mummy." Rose said only looking up to confirm the picture in question before returning to her game.

"What is it Rose?"

"It's my dolly mummy." She held the toy up against the slate. Dianna looked at the outline which almost perfectly shadowed the doll, and yes she saw precisely what it was.

Again Dianna did not sleep well that night. She waited with dread the reappearance of the visitation and while she waited the only thought which ran through her mind was whether to tell Keith what she had seen that day. Finally though she decided not to.

Around a week later the cold winds of winter had started to blow down the terraces. The fires now burnt constantly in the hearths of all the houses. The fogs of winter now hung over the town, mixed with the soot from smoke, both industrial and domestic, it created heavy smog choking the air.

On one Wednesday in early December two things would happened, one quite normal and the other was not in the normal course of events. In the morning a knock came at the front door. Dianna knew who it was. Every Wednesday morning the rent man would call around

He was well known, this man. He had taken over the round six months since and had built a reputation for being somewhat of a ladies' man. Whispers could be heard over garden walls, the talk was of his goings on for late or non payment of rents owing. Nobody knew who was taking advantage of opportunities, but it was common knowledge that some were. Whether it was true or not he made no effort to quash the rumours put about the chattering women on his round. In fact he enjoyed the reputation and offers of all kinds would be forthcoming purely because of it.

On the back kitchen table sitting on the green table cloth would sit the rent book and a pile of coins. The rent man would normally knock then let himself in, take the pile of money and fill in the rent book.

Over the last couple of weeks, getting the weekly rent together had been a struggle. Emily had been back and forth to the pawn shop trying to raise the money. Dianna didn't know how much longer she could do it. Though she did her best to protect Rose from any feeling of angst or stress Rose did pick up on the tension in her voice the closer rent day came.

Later that afternoon her mind was taken away from any such thoughts of herself. At two o'clock the sound of screeching brakes followed by a thundering crash filled the smoggy air. The sound reverberated around the yards and streets for up a minute, the awful noise of metal crashing against metal mixed with the sound of falling bricks.

All the front doors of the terrace opened, heads looked up and down the street trying to see where the sound of disaster had originated. Panic was evident on their faces; of course their first thoughts were that some kind of accident had occurred at the factory where all the men folk worked. On examination though nothing seemed to be amiss.

Something else had happened. The news gradually filed down the street. A train had derailed on the track which ran through the city on an embankment. It had come off the rails at the most inopportune place. The line travelled over several roads on a series of bridges and it was at one of these points that it had derailed. The weight and the speed of the engine had been too much for the supports of hold; the whole thing came crashing to the ground. Who was to know how many people could be trapped in the carnage?

Moments later all the men from the factory ran out of the large iron gates which stood at the entrance. All ran straight to the scene of carnage and started to remove rubble with their bare hands.

Some of the women watched, Dianna didn't. She returned indoors not wanting to leave Rose alone for too long.

Rose sat in front of her, her doll sat on her lap; both were facing the dancing flames in the hearth. Quietly she was singing a nursery rhyme to herself, "when the bow breaks the cradle will fall..."

Her mother smiled at the sight, no matter what happened the sight of Rose always cheered her up. She turned to go back to the kitchen when all of a sudden a feeling of horror gripped her. She spun

around again to look at Rose who was still singing quietly to herself, “and down will come baby, train and all”. Rose reached out to pick up her slate and chalk which sat beside her. Before she had time to wipe the slate clean Dianna took it off her and looked at the simple line drawing.



In the mess of lines she could clearly see what appeared to be a train falling off a bridge. Was she seeing things, was it auto suggestion playing tricks on her mind? Was it really there at all? What repercussions would this have on her daughter? Could it be that Rose had the power to prophecy disaster or even worse was she the instigator? Her drawings, were they the catalyst for catastrophe? Slowly she handed back the slate to Rose. Sitting in the kitchen on her own she sipped a cup of hot water and thought to herself how she could try and explain these strange events to her husband.

Life continued for at least a short while without incident. Rose made many sketches on her slate during the coming weeks but none of them resulted in paranormal events. This was much to the relief of her mother who had decided not to tell her husband of her worries.

Again on the Wednesday the rent money and book sat on the kitchen table. Rose spent most of the morning either sitting in front of the fire or looking out of the front window. Dianna and Emily spent most of the morning cooking and baking only on occasion would Dianna peer into the other room waiting for the rent man to call.

Outside the house in the cold freezing smog the rent collector made his way along the terrace. His finger tips were almost frozen to the bone, he could hardly count the money or hold his pen. He had nearly finished his weekly rounds as he walked up to number seven. Sitting in front of the fire Rose sat with her slate on her knee. Picking

up the chalk she drew a door complete with knob and a number seven. Then almost obscured the picture with scribbles.



Head bowed the collector blew his nose on a large blue handkerchief. He came to a halt outside the brown door of number seven and raised his right hand to knock.

As he tried to bring his knuckles down onto the door he suddenly stopped. His fist had come to a stop six inches from the door. He tried again, and again the clenched fist stopped short of the door. It felt to him as though his hand was being repelled as two like magnetic poles repel one another.

Having no success with knocking he tried to open the door with the handle. Again he could not make any kind of contact with it. An involuntary shiver ran over his shoulders as he stepped back from the door. Something told him that things unholy were in this house. Giving up, he continued onto the next house in the street.

Inside the warm house Rose sat cross legged in front of the fire, as the shadow of the collector passed over the window she allowed herself a brief smile.

At lunch time Keith noticed that a pile of money still sat on the kitchen table, "Rent man not been round?" he asked smiling.

"No." was the only reply she could give.

That night once the two youngest of the brood had retired to bed and their eldest son was washing up Dianna told Keith about the rent man not calling, then she explained about the picture on the slate. "It showed a door with the number seven on it. Then over the top of it she had scribbled what could be a mist, anyway it was an attempt to cover the door up."

Keith slowly picked up the slate and looked at the sketch, he was silent for a moment before whispering, "My God. You think she..." he couldn't voice the words to describe what he was thinking at that moment, but then what was he thinking. If he was honest with himself for a moment he didn't know quite what to think anymore. So many partial thoughts flashed through his mind, not one thought could he grasp and examine. "Do you think," he began, "should we have the doctor round?"

"Yes, yes I think we ought too." Dianna said quietly.

For the first time in a month the following morning was bright. It had been so long since the sun had made an appearance, this had an effect on the residents of the terrace. All the women brushing down their door steps did it with a cheerer heart today. Christmas was on its way and the sun was out. At number seven Dianna was giving Emily her instructions of what precisely to tell the doctor.

Keith was at home today, the factory had been put on half shifts and half wages. The fire was low in the hearth, every ones was, coal was now at a premium.

"I'm cold." Rose whined in a sorry voice.

"I know Rose, come here." He said to her. Rose sat on his knee in the chair which sat closet to the fire. The little girl snuggled into the crook of his arm, "Is that better?"

"Yes daddy, is there any more coal?"

"Not much dear."

Dianna put her head around the door, "I'll have a look, see what I can find." As she exited into the back yard a cold blast of air rushed through the two downstairs rooms, this caused Rose to wiggle deeper into her father's warm body. Within a minute Dianna walked back into the room carrying a full coal scuttle. Keith's eyes shot up his wife's, concern and surprise were evident in both. Dianna looked down at the little girl on his lap before returning her gaze to Keith.

"Rose," said her father, "where did all this coal come from?"

"I don't know daddy, did the coal man bring it?"

He paused and thought carefully before asking his next question,

"Rose, your drawing slate,"

"Yes daddy."

“Do you...” he paused again for a second, but before he had chance to continue there was a knock on the door.

“Hello,” they heard a voice say, “It’s Doctor Quis.”

Dianna left the room so to escort the doctor in. with Rose still on his knee Keith reached down and picked up the slate which was on the floor beside the chair. “What’s this picture Rose?”

On the slate was pictured of a mess of curls perched on top of some kind of oblong.



“It’s a coal scuttle daddy.”

Yes, it did look like a coal scuttle he thought, it was also full of coal.

Dianna entered the room followed by the doctor. The medical man had a kindly manner about him. Crouching down by the father and daughter sitting in the chair, he spoke directly to the little girl, “Hello Rose.” He said in a soft voice, “what can I do for you?”

“Hello Doctor Quis.” She replied in a soft sweet tone.

Keith cast a worried glance up at his wife, she then took up the conversation.

“Well it’s nothing physical we think, but she seems to...”

The doctor looked up at her, raised an eyebrow and nodded his head evoking her to continue.

“Rose seems to see things we can’t?”

“Oh,” Doctor Quis replied, “please tell me more.”

Dianna made a gesture toward the other arm chair, taking the hint the doctor sat down to listen.

“Rose draws things.” She took the slate off her husband and passed it to him, “On this, you see?”

“Oh yes.” Obviously confused he looked at the slate, “What’s this Rose?” he asked turning his attention back to the youngest member of the family.

“It’s the coal scuttle.” She answered.

“Full,” Keith interjected, “full, we’ve run out of coal?” he gestured toward the fire which was now roaring.

The doctor look and saw the bucket full of coal, “Go on.”

Dianna took up the explanation, “She drew around her doll, that night an apparition haunted us. It looked just like the drawing. Then there’s the train crash just the other week, she drew that before it happened”

Quis didn’t know what to think never mind what to say, “Has anything else happened?”

Wasn’t that enough? “Something strange happened the other day,” Dianna remembered, “the rent man never called. But only this house was missed out. The rest of the houses in the terrace paid as normal. That’s twice now, but I did notice Rose had drawn a picture of our front door then scribbled it out. Surely that must have something to do with it?”

“Very well, odd?” Quis said turning his attention to Rose, “Rose, these pictures you draw...”

“Yes?” Rose replied stroking her dolls hair.

“What makes you draw them?”

“They’re just picture,” she said, “I like drawing.”

“Do you know what you are drawing when you draw them, you know what they are?”

“Yes, they are my pictures.”

Doctor Quis thought for a moment before standing, “Could you wait in here a moment while I speak to your mummy and daddy in the kitchen?”

“Yes Doctor Quis.”

“Good girl.” He said as the three adults passed into the kitchen.

“Well doctor, what do you think?” ask the concerned mother.

After a moments thought he replied, “it could be a coincidence, but” he paused again, “I’d like a friend of mine to take a look at her. He is a practising doctor himself, but has an interest in cases such as this.”

“What do you mean, such as this?”

“Paranormal is the expression used. It’s for cases that fall outside the boundaries of normal medicine. I will telegram him today so should have a response by tomorrow.”

The doctor walked off down the row of terraced houses, each chimney omitting a thin wisp of smoke, all but one. The stack on number seven which billowed out great clouds of grey smoke into the sky.

As he rounded the corner at the opening of the terrace he almost bumped into the rent collector who was busy attending to his book. The doctor nodded in recognition as he rushed past.

The rent man found himself looking down Montrose Terrace. Today, he decided he would start on the right hand side and work around anti clockwise. By doing this act it would ensure that number seven would be one of the last visited that day.

Counting the numbers down he travelled from one door to the next, ten, nine, eight and then...”

The brown door of number seven was before him. He could feel an uneasiness as though someone was watching him. To the left of the door he could see a young girl’s face looking out of the bay window at him. Rose returned the smile he gave her before disappearing from behind the glass.

He felt a sudden chill envelope him as his fist raised up toward the door. His arm froze, it would not move any closer towards the door, it would not knock. A deep feeling of terror filled his inner self, again he knew someone was watching him. Slowly he looked down at the window. The girl was back smiling at him. She knew of his desperation.

Her piercing brown eyes never wavered off him until he finally overcame his paralysis. He shuffled off too number six not daring to look at the two brown eyes watching him as he passed.

“Rose,” said the voice of Dianna coming from the direction of the kitchen, “Have you seen the rent man in the street?”

Rose gave the rent collector a final icy cold stare before answering, “No mummy.”

The following afternoon both Doctor Quis and the rent collector, Howard Harrison were engaged in two separate meetings regarding the house down Montrose Terrace.

The doctor sat in his private room at the surgery with his colleague and outlined the case of Rose, the young girl who appeared to have the ability to predict or even cause future events. Each case he told in detail and drew on a piece of paper what he thought to be as accurate picture as he could from the accounts given to him. After furnishing the doctor with the relevant facts he asked his old friend's opinion, "Well Arthur, what do you make of it?"

"I need to see her," he began in his mild Scottish accent, "somewhere neutral, in laboratory conditions. Once I have seen this Rose on my terms I will be in a position to comment."

"Of course Arthur." Quis knew his old friend's methods after all he had read all his works. As far as he could see the time to set the events in motion was now. Opening the door of his consulting room he told his secretary to send a note to number 7 Montrose Terrace.

Harrison drummed his thin, cold fingers on the counter of the small police station. He had spoken to the desk constable at least ten minutes since and was now becoming impatient. He had not ventured into the details of the events which had brought him here, but only asked to see the commanding officer. It had crossed his mind that if he had gone into details then the prospect of seeing anyone would be improbable.

Suddenly in a flurry of activity he was ushered through into one of the back rooms. Sergeant Spencer was a friend of his fathers, always an advantage in matters such as this.

Howard told the old family friend of the strange events which would take place on every visit to that address.

Spencer listened with interest; never before had he heard such a strange tale. What issue was it for the police though? Was the son of his old friend, a young man he had known all his life, going out of his head?

Eventually Harrison came to the last part of his accounts and the girl in the window. How could he explain the feeling of uneasiness she had caused him?

Though the Sergeant didn't wholly believe his story he did listen with a sympathetic ear. Could it be possible that some kind of devilry was occurring? Here, in Hull, his heart thought not.

Maybe it would be worth sending a constable to the address with him, the rent had not been paid for three weeks now, this was a diversion from a legal contract and yes, it could be seen as an offence. This young man's father was a good friend, so he would send someone. His constables had spent far too much time in front of the fire for his liking, just because it was cold didn't mean they could shirk their duties. He decided to send two.

Once the message had been received it was decided that Dianna should accompany Rose to the surgery. Wrapping the child in an overcoat and muffler the two of them set off.

Fog had fallen once again over the city. It clung to the river like a great white snake dividing the city, east and west. The temperature had also fallen several degrees. Dianna could feel the biting cold, she could not afford a winter coat, all their money was spent on the children. As they approached the river the fog became thicker.

It was at this point that three males crossed their path, neither saw the other as both occupied different sides of the street.

Travelling away from the river were the three figures of Harrison and two police constables. Though the rent collector walked onward with a true purpose as he grew closer to the terrace his stride decreased in length.

As the doors past him by his mouth became dry and his heart began to race, "Here, here it is." He told the two officials either side of him. He considered knocking, but couldn't bring himself to. "Can you do it?" he said turning to the policeman on his left.

The officer was a little superstitious himself and hesitated a second before stepping forward.

Dianna and Rose were shown into the consulting room. A large fire burned in the grate, the room was warm and welcoming, such a relief after the cold afternoon outside. The heat from the burning coal instantly brought life back to their noses, ears and fingertips.

Dianna heard a voice she did not recognise; it came from the doctor's colleague "Please take a seat ladies." He ushered them both

into the two leather arm chairs in front of the fire. "Now," he continued, "would you like a cup of tea?"

A tray was brought in containing four cups, a tea pot and a selection of biscuits, "Now Rose," the consultant said in his friendly Scottish dialect, "you have as many of those as you like." He told her gesturing to the tray.

Such things were a luxury to Rose who took full advantage of the offer.

"Now," he began again, "Rose, I am a doctor, just like Doctor Quis here, but you can call me Arthur, is that ok?"

Rose nodded.

"I understand you like drawing?"

Rose nodded again.

"What do you like drawing the best?" he had to wait for Rose to swallow her biscuit before answering.

"I don't know, I just like pictures." Rose answered the question in an off hand manor, showing almost polite disinterest.

"Have you ever seen a ghost Rose?"

"A ghost! No, I don't think so." She looked across at her mother, the question had obviously scared her.

Dianna could see the shock registering on the child's features, "Don't worry Rose." She reassured.

The doctor continued asking several questions on all manner of topics ranging from playing in the street to looking at the night sky, then he asked Rose to draw a picture on her slate which Dianna had brought along.

A feeling of tension entered the air as Quis and Dianna watched intently. Rose however just picked up the slate and chalk, but did nothing.

"Is there something wrong Rose?" her mother asked with Arthur watching intently over her shoulder.

"No mummy." said Rose.

"Would you like another biscuit?" enquired the doctor.

Once Rose had taken one, she started to draw. Arthur craned his neck to see what it was the young girl was sketching.

"There you go." Rose presented the slate to the consultant.

Arthur looked at the slate with interest. It depicted several rows of stick figures situated in parallel lines. Over their heads was what appeared to be large multi pointed stars.



“What’s this picture of Rose?” he asked in his kindly voice. As he spoke he crouched down by the chair resting the slate on the arm. Rose looked at the picture, “I don’t know.” She said, “It’s just a picture.”

“Ok, that’s fine,” Arthur replied, “would you like to draw me another one?”

After rubbing the picture off the slate she took up her chalk and started to draw once more. At first sight he thought it was a ship sinking, but then realised it couldn’t be. Unlike before Rose told him precisely what this picture represented without any prompt from himself.



“It’s a sinking ship.” She said without any reaction.

The ship had no sails, only four funnels, smoke coming out of three of them, “Your ship has no sails Rose?”

“No.”

“Even Mr Brunnels steam ships have sails Rose.”

“Not that one.” On her face was the biggest smile he thought he had ever seen.

The door of number seven Montrose Terrace reverberated with a dull thud as the gloved hand knocked twice. A look of amazement shot across the face of the rent collector. Why was it that he could not do such a simple act as knocking on this door. Slowly the door creaked open, Harrison watched with horror on what would be behind it, but no one was standing there. Had it opened on of its own accord. What use would the police be in a case such as this? Immediately it crossed his mind that he should have consulted the priesthood and not the local constabulary.

For a moment that lasted an eternity no one appeared from the interior, then to his great relief Keith’s head appeared. His smiling face suddenly turned cold as he saw the two policemen flanking the rent collector.. “Can I help?” his tone was questioning, but optimistic, after all he had done nothing to warrant a visit from the local constabulary.

“Ah, right yes.” Harrison spluttered, “Er, I’m here for the rent.”

Keith eyed up the two policemen suspiciously before answering, “Of course, we’ve been waiting for you coming, have you been ill? Anyway don’t stand out in the cold, come in, come in.”

The three cold figures entered the house while Keith disappeared into the back kitchen to fetch the money owing. The fire was roaring, the heat most welcome. The small figure of the rent man looked around almost in panic, looking for the little dark eyed girl. Thankfully though he could see or hear no sight or sound of her.

Within seconds Keith had reappeared, in his cupped hands sat a large collection of coins, “We were worried you not calling around for so long.”

“Oh well, all done now.” Harrison said in an almost embarrassed voice, he wanted to be out of that house as quickly as possible.

“I hope you don’t mind me asking, but why have you brought two policemen with you, I’m not in trouble am I?” he was laughing at the very thought of it.

“No it’s...” Harrison was fishing, any excuse would do at this moment in time, “... them down the next street, number twenty.”

“Ah yes, gypsy blood them, trouble, probably.” Keith had no idea what the collector was talking about, but he thought he had to say something.

Quickly Harrison counted the coins, put them in his pocket and filled in the large ledger he always carried around with him. He wanted to leave now and made for the door. The two officers who had accompanied him were not in such a hurry to leave; they were enjoying the warmth of the fire too much.

The two doctors had taken Dianna to one side of the room out of the ear shot of her daughter. Rose was continuing to sit in front of the fire eating biscuits.

“Well doctor?” asked the concerned mother in a hushed tone.

“This is most definitely new ground for me,” he began, “but I would say that any happening experienced is no more than a coincidence. The two drawings Rose has done for me today show no resemblance to anything supernatural. If, however, something out of the ordinary does occur then please contact Doctor Quis here and he will telegram me instantly.”

Rose had left the arm chair which she occupied and now was busying herself drawing a picture on a piece of paper with the doctor’s pencil. Once she was finished she took up residence back in the arm chair and helped herself to another handful of biscuits.

Harrison was now alone. The two constables had returned to the station, and no doubt too their mugs of tea and a warming fire. Harrison though still felt uneasy. Though the air was foggy and cold around him, he felt hot and sweaty. The starched collar around his neck bit into his skin tighter than ever before.

Why was he hot? It was the middle of winter, the coldest for many a year. He had to take his coat off, it dropped from his shoulders onto the flagstones. Slowly he walked back towards the town centre, towards the river. Walking now was becoming more and more difficult as though some invisible force was pushing toward him. It was an experience he had had with the door at that house.

Then in the fog he saw a shape slowly emerging. The shape was white, almost transparent. It had some kind of face, two eyes and

a mouth, but that was all. A ghost if he had seen one before, that was a ghost. To follow the vision came voices, voices in his head. It was Dianna and her young dark eyed daughter approaching him through the fog. They immersed through the vision of the ghost, it was becoming like a nightmare to him.

Unable to move he froze to the spot; one of them spoke to him, but he could not reply. All he could do was slowly walk back toward his office, to safety, sanctuary.

As he reached Scott Street Bridge his head was in confusion, he couldn't get a single thought straight in his head. Half way across the bridge he stopped and grabbed hold of the hand rail. His white stiff collar felt tighter than ever, it was almost choking him. He tried to remove it, but it was stuck solid to this throat. This couldn't be, he was now gasping for air, falling to his knees he wrenched once more at the collar before everything went black.

In the doctors rooms the two medical men talked through the case of Rose and her pictures. Both were of the opinion that nothing more would come of the case and matters changed to lighter conversation. "So Arthur," asked Quis, "any more stories planned?" "I don't know, its getting in the way of my work somewhat." He sipped his tea and put his hand out toward the biscuits only to see that the plate was empty. "I see our guest enjoyed the hospitality." He said smiling.

"Why not, the people who live around these industrial areas don't have many privileges." As Quis came around his desk, something caught his eye. Something on his desk which wasn't normally there. His desk was always the same, tidy and organised so the merest hint of something not in the correct place drew his attention. After looking back on the desktop he saw a sheet of paper containing two drawings. "Doyle, look at this."

He showed the picture to his old friend.

Doctor Doyle immediately jumped up out of his seat and ran toward the hat stand, "Come on, we have little time." He said a hint of panic in his voice. "The two etchings Rose drew for me were too unbelievable to imagine happening here and now, but this picture," he held it up, "could happen at any point."

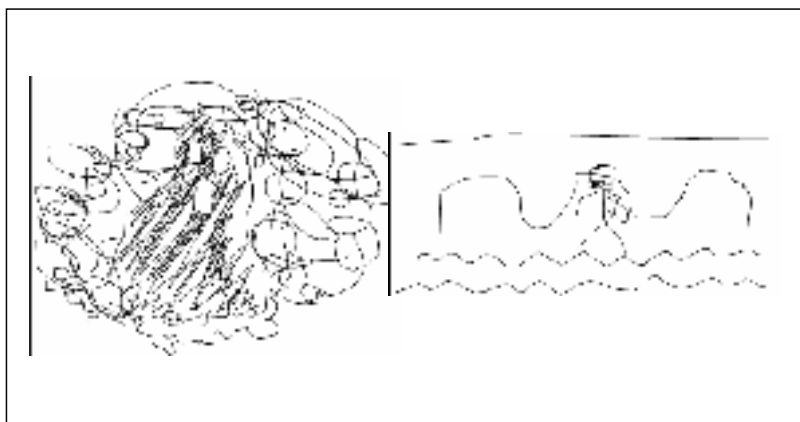
As the two doctors rushed through the fog, Quis listened intently to his colleague. Arthur didn't let on who he thought the victim would be, though he certainly gave the impression that there would be a victim. Quis didn't think that they were in danger themselves, after all they were doctors; did that make them immune from danger?

"The pictures," Arthur continued his narrative, "are as far as I could tell depict some kind of ghostly manifestation, but more disturbing was that of the figure of a man on a bridge..." he fell silent as they rounded the corner and saw Scott Street Bridge. "A bridge and a man, someone who carries something like a bag, it can be clearly seen in the picture. A bag or a large book, like a ledger. Look here." He pointed out the oblong held under the figure's arm.

Quis felt a cold shiver run down his back as he looked at the bag in his hand. He gave more than a sigh of relief as he stepped off the east side of the river crossing.

It was Rose herself who answered the door to the two medics. Quickly they rushed inside. Doyle wasted no time in talking to Rose. "Now tell me Rose," he asked with genuine affection for her, "this picture you drew in the surgery." He showed her the piece of paper. "Who is this?"

The entire family was now present in the room, all could see the pictures. Rose looked at the pictures showing no emotion, why, it's the rent man of course Doctor Doyle."



Around a quarter of a mile away from number 7 Montrose Terrace, a steam barge approached the bridge at Scott Street. When the Bridge master heard the whistle he engaged the lifting mechanism to raise the roadway.

As the two half's of the roadway lifted he came face to face with the cold, white, dead face of Harrison.

Here be Monsters

A note from the author:

In this story I have left it up to you to decide on the cause of the tragedy. The solution to the unexplained happenings are printed over the page, and be warned, reading it isn't as easy as you think.

The pungent aroma of freshly caught fish was overpowering in the cabin of the 'Gloria Huxley' the fishing trawler which was now full and heading back to the harbour at Bridlington.

As the craft motored back to the harbour, Steven stared into the fog. It was early morning, five o'clock. His two fellow crew members were asleep below. Soon they would be putting into port, home again.

His cold fingers gripped the wheel; the air around him was damp and cold. It would only be a matter of a few hours before the sun would be burning off the sea mist and another warm sunny day would be ahead.

Steven was looking forward to a few days on dry land. Five weeks at sea was more than enough time away for him to endure in any one stint. The thought of going into one of the many pubs that lined the harbour filled his mind with joy. His thoughts were so far from duty that he almost missed the vessel coming out of the fog on the port side.

Steven slowed this craft to dead slow and leaned out of the cabin window. It looked to him at first sight that the boat was adrift. No one was visible in the cabin and it looked as though at the stern he could see a table set for dinner.

Steven shut down the engine and stared at the boat. Opening the door of the cabin he stepped outside onto the deck and looked over the vessel. The sea was calm. Both craft gently bobbed up and down.

"Ahoy there." He shouted over.

No reply came, "Ahoy there." He tried once more.

He could not put his finger on it, but his instinct was telling him that something was amiss.

Jumping into the cab he restarted the engine. He would need help. Lifting the hatch to the sleeping quarters below he shouted for assistance, "David, Trevor, come up here I need your help."

The two other members of the crew slowly stirred from their slumber. They had only retired to bed some three hours previous and both were not overjoyed to be woken at this early hour.

David Lock, who was the skipper of the boat was the first to rise, he feared there may have been a problem with the boat, never would he have expected to be woken for something such as what they were about to find.

The skipper's head appeared through the hatch. "What's up young 'un?" asked the captain, his eyes mole like, still half closed.

"I'm not sure." Replied Steven in an uncertain tone, "You'd better come and see for yourself."

With a reluctant grunt Lock climbed up into the cabin. Steven pointed out the boat adrift alongside.

David Lock rubbed his bristly chin and stared at the boat, he appeared to be deep in thought. Stepping out onto the deck he called across, "Ahoy there." He was unaware that the young lad had already done this. "take us along side Steven." He said popping his head around the cabin door.

Steven was already manoeuvring the boat into a position alongside.

Slowly the crafts came together. As they did the skipper could see the name of the boat painted on the bow, "Mother of the Stars".

With a boat hook Lock pulled the two hulls together. Hiss burly frame jumped across onto the deck of the Mother of the Stars, making a loud thud as he landed. If the occupants were on board that would surely have woken them from their slumber.

"Ahoy there." He shouted once more, but again no answer came from above or below deck. He suddenly felt a shiver run down his spine. What was it he was feeling? Here he was alone in the North Sea, Viking long ships, First World War cruisers not to mention privateers of all ages had sailed, battled and died in these waters. What or who was walking over his grave? Maybe it was only the sea mist pricking at his nerves.

Slowly and quietly he had moved toward the stern. Why was he moving with such stealth? Unconsciously he didn't want anyone to know he was there, but then who would?

At the stern a table sat on the deck. Six place settings were laid out around it. Six dessert bowls lay empty, their contents consumed. Six coasters were adjacent to the place settings, on two of them a glass sat, the contents, red wine still intact. The other four glasses on the table were over turned, probably the motion of the boat, one though was missing.

Lock reached out to pick up one of the over turned glasses, but stopped himself inches short of it. Slowly he looked up and saw the door which lead down into the interior, it was hanging slightly ajar. For a moment he froze to the spot. He knew that an investigation would be needed, why was it him though?

"Pull yourself together man." He said to himself, you're a God fearing man; nothing down there can harm you.

Slowly he rounded the table and stood in front of the wooden door. Steven watched intently from the cabin of the trawler. Trevor was now on his way up the ladder, keen to know what was going on. He had heard the bump as the two hulls had docked and was eager to know what had happened.

Captain Lock pushed the door open with the palm of his hand, "Ahoy down there." He called before waiting for a reply.

"What's going on?" Trevor asked Steven.

Steven then explained how he had seen the drifting boat coming out of the fog.

Lock looked down into the interior of the boat.

No one was there. Another shiver ran through him. It was time to go.

He attached a rope to the bow of the ownerless craft and made ready to tow it back to Bridlington.

"Let's take her home." He said to Steven on his return to the cabin of the Huxley.

"What is it", asked Trevor seeing the look on his skippers pale face.

"No one's there, nothing, they've all gone?"

“Right, we’ll have salvage rights then.” Trevor said with a smile.

“You don’t want them lad, something un-natural happened on that boat, I can feel it in my blood.”

Only hours after the return of the Gloria Huxley to the harbour, rumour and speculation were rife around the inns and taverns of the little Yorkshire fishing town of Bridlington. All the talk that lunch time in the smoke filled pubs was of the missing crew of the ‘Mother of the Stars’.

The door of one such pub opened and in walked a suited man wearing a brown hat and carrying a briefcase. He was obviously not a local or a regular in this public house. As he entered a mutter ran round from mouth to mouth as the locals eyed up the newcomer.

Small fishing ports were tight knit communities where everyone knew their neighbours goings on, so it wasn’t surprising that when a stranger entered the group the locals would close ranks.

The suited man strode to the bar which was littered with spent straight pint glasses. The barman eyed him up suspiciously then spoke, “Ey, what can I get ya?!”

“Pint.” He said nodding at one of the hand pumps.

As the drink filled the glass he took out a card from his breast pocket and handed it to the inn keeper. It explained that he was a member of the press working for one of the larger local news papers, the Hull Daily Mail. Word had spread fast.

“Oh yes,” the landlord said handing the card back to the reporter, “and what can I do for you?”

The young man leaned over the bar so their heads were within twelve inches of one another. “I understand that a boat was towed in this morning, under mysterious circumstances.” His flowery language denoted him as a writer or journalist.

“Ey, so it was,” replied the landlord, giving the journalist a suspicious glance.

“Do you know the skipper of the boat who pulled it in?”

“Ey, he’s over there.”

In the far corner of the bar was a long table. Either side of it ran a rough wooden bench. In all fourteen men sat on the benches, all

were old and weather beaten, he guessed that each one of them would have some sort of tale to tell. "Right, you best give me a bottle of whisky then, it always aids the breaking of the ice."

The landlord reached up to the shelf which ran the length of the bar above head height. As he grabbed one of the bottles he heard the news man say, "Not that one, lets not go mad now, just give me a bottle of the cheap stuff."

The landlord readjusted his position and handed a different bottle to the customer.

Moments later the reporter stood at the table occupied by the old sea dogs, armed with his bottle he introduced himself.

"Good afternoon gentlemen, who's for a drink?"

All looked at him and for what seemed like an eternity no one spoke. Then from within the smoke filled room he heard the words, "Sit yourself down young 'un."

Putting the bottle on the table he seated himself on the end of one of the benches. "Thank you gents; my name is Edward Edwards from the mail. I hear that someone towed in a ghost ship this morning."

Silence reigned again. There were some things sailors would not talk about, but in this case they would forgo centuries of superstitions.

"Ey, 'ya could say that." said a rough voice from the shadows. As Edwards searched through the smoke filled gloom Lock's head came out of the shadows, gloomy light illuminating his rough features.

Edward was pleased he had found someone who knew something. That would save him a lot of trudging around from pub to pub. "You know what happened; do you know any of the crew?"

"Ey, you could say that lad." A chuckle ran around the table.

"You wouldn't be having a little fun with me now would ya?"

"No lad no. I am the skipper who found it."

"Ah excellent."

For the next twenty minutes Lock gave an accurate account of the events of that morning. As he spoke the contents of the bottle purchased by Edwards disappeared. He wrote vigorously on his little pad not stopping to look up from his note taking until the account was over. By the time the captain had finished talking the whole of the

pub was captured by the story. A minute of quiet reflection followed in remembrance of those lost souls.

Edwards broke the silence, his sombre voice breaking through like a hammer, "So, what do you think happened to those people?"

No one uttered a word. Were they not willing to talk of the dead or didn't they want to speculate on whatever un-natural forces could be at work?

It only took a moment though to realise the reason for the unwillingness to speak. In the middle of the table stood an empty bottle.

The local fishermen never stopped telling tales of the strange phenomenon which happened at sea, but if this city fool was willing to pay for it with liquor then why not take advantage of his generosity.

"Landlord," Edward called over his shoulder, "another bottle for my friends here."

All the men who sat around the table that afternoon were retired seafarers, one tough looking sailor was older than the rest, his long grey tangled beard fell from his face and curled up on the table top.

"This is Gerald," Lock told the reporter, "There's nothing he doesn't know, and if you were to ask me, well..." he shrugged his shoulders and paused for a moment, "...I don't know what happened out there."

Gerald took on the mantle of tale teller, "There be many things out on the waves that are ungodly. I worked all my years at sea and saw things that would make your teeth curl lad."

A ripple of acknowledgement went around the table. All present knew that Gerald had seen it all. He continued, "In that area, a long time since now, I saw..." he fell silent. In his mind he was reliving the horror of what he had seen. "It was fifty years since, in the good old days of sail, before these damn steam ships. Wednesday." Why the day it happened sprang into his mind he could not say, why remember that? "It was a Wednesday it happened. I remember that as it was my shift off. I was in my bunk sleeping off a brandy or two I'd had from my own supply when I heard a commotion on deck. All manner of noise was coming from aloft. I jumped out of my hammock and as quickly as I could went up on deck.

What I saw turned my skin cold. Tentacles fifty feet long, huge suckers on each one, and its body was as large as a main sail. The tentacles swept across the deck throwing the crew into the sea, several of them on each pass.” He paused again, pain showed on his old face.

“Was it some kind of octopus?” Edward asked.

“Octopus, I never saw one the likes of that; no this was a monster. As long as two war ships it was.”

A rumble of agreement circled the table as though they knew it to be true. The old man sat back in reflection, “What about you Marcus, you had a bit of a do out there didn’t ya’.”

Another old man entered the conversation. All looked similar in appearance; this must be the sailor’s code of dress.

Marcus was of a similar age to Gerald, the look in his eyes though gave an appearance of not really being in the room, only his body. “Ey, I have a tale to tell. Something happened to my crew that I swore I could never repeat, the memory still haunts me.” In fact he had told the story on many occasions.

“We were on route for Holland, our cargo was wool. On a calm misty sea we were adrift, no wind blew, all we could see around was white mist. Someone said that they could hear something off the port side. We all stared into the fog, but saw nothing. The muffled sound became clearer, then someone whispered, ‘It’s a bell.’ We listened and it was a bell, the distant sound of a single toll drifted out of the mist.

Slowly a shape came into view. Minutes later we all saw a ship in full sail. Its course was taking it toward us. How it was moving we could not tell, there was no wind, not a breath in the air. As it drew closer I could hear the voices of the crew, then a bang. One of the cannon fired, at what we could not see.

The tall ship remained on its course coming straight for us. We all shouted to warn off the oncoming craft, but our cries went unheard.

From nowhere a cannon ball hit their mizzen mast which fell on the deck below. A scream rang out; someone must have been trapped by it. The cry was then lost in the noise of a battle, it was deafening. The bow of the ship came closer and closer, it was only yards away from our mid ship. In sheer desperation I held out a pole hoping to

push us out of its way, then it happened.” The old sea dog took a large mouthful of whiskey. His pale face had turned a shade paler, even his grey beard seemed to lighten by a tone or two. “The ship passed straight through me. I could feel nothing but I could see all the innards of the ship, the men manning the cannon, the doctor operating on the table, the bran tub containing an amputated arm. Finally the captain’s cabin then out of the stern. I turned to see the ship once again fading into the fog. It was gone and so was the sound of battle. If the crew of that boat had seen that phantom ship yesterday I would say they would have gone out of their minds.”

Silence once again fell over the table. Edwards decided that maybe it was time to leave but was stopped in his tracks by another voice.

“I,” began the voice, “once saw a wave wash an entire crew off of a deck.” At the far end of the table sat a man who up to that point had remained silent. “It was as high as the main mast. On its crest were a hundred white horses bucking and kicking. When it landed on the deck all were trampled to death under their hooves then washed overboard.

I only survived by holding onto the brace for dear life.”

“Ey,” said another, “I’ve seen it too?”
another murmur circled the table.

Edwards took his leave of them before anymore old seafaring tales could be told. There was no chance of his article containing any reference to sea monsters or ghost ships, the editor would have him out of his position tomorrow. The wave story did have credence though. At the same time, how could a wave wash six people overboard yet the dinning table still be left set and standing?

This, he decided would have to remain a mystery. Who knows maybe it was a ghost ship or sea monster after all.

The curious events of that summer night and the solution to this tale can be found over the page.

ENI

The robe jacket was still coiled up on the deck of the boat asked one of the men.

The time had come to re-board the yacht. "Where's the jacket?" cold water cleared their minds.

The swim was just the ticket, one of them commented as the North Sea.

In a matter of a few minutes all were all in the cold waters of the men to join them.

women though were all in favour and eventually convinced the. The three men looked at one another with a grimace. The made the suggestion, "Who's for a swim?"

At the end of the meal one of the women let out a laugh and more so as the drink flowed.

The conversation was light hearted to start and became even three bottles of the very finest Champagne.

venison and a collection of salads were all washed down with. The cold collation was eaten with vigour, cold roast salmon, warm as the anchor was dropped.

The sun was starting to set though the temperature was still into the open sea.

man. The third member of the party was navigating the craft out suborning evening dress complete with a glass of whiskey in men also were enjoying the late afternoon sunshine. Each women all in cocktail dresses stood drinking Champagne, two. The small yacht motored out of the harbour. On the deck three

The fate of the Mother from the Stars,

Subterranean Menace

Nigel Read had worked for the council for almost a quarter of a century. When he had applied for the job as a civil engineer his grand desire was for changing the landscape of Hull for the greater good. His dream was to design great sports centres, shopping arcades and cinemas; things that would last for many years after he himself was long gone.

Never had he imagined that he would gravitate into this particular field of civil engineering. He however was a well renowned authority in the field now. Nigel Read was in charge of the upkeep of Hull's ageing network of sewers.

The majority of the city was serviced by new systems, some no more than thirty years old, but in the older parts of the city his department waged a constant battle against the laws of thermodynamics, entropy and decay. Today he had to make one of his regular inspections; not a job he relished, but one he was used to doing.

Down by the muddy waters of the river he undid the padlock and let the rusty iron chain fall out from the iron bars on the cage. When traversing the labyrinth of tunnels beneath the city streets Read always would be accompanied by an assistant, Brian Opal. Brian acted as his scribe and any instruction given for work to be carried out Brian would mark down the details on his pad for the relevant contractor to be informed.

Many times the pair had descended beneath the level of the cars and pedestrians, none of them would ever have known anyone was there silently traversing the sub terrain world.

No matter how many times they descended to the underground world the smell would still take them aback. It was only a matter of minutes though and the smell would be part of the day to day routine. On this autumn morning heavy rains the previous night had washed the system clean. The inspection today would almost be a pleasurable one.

Read would always marvel at the skills of the Victorian builders, their brickwork was so precise. Pride had been put into the laying of each brick and every bead of mortar which held the bricks at

an exacting distance apart. He knew full well the techniques employed by the master craftsmen of over one hundred years previous.

Twenty minutes into the inspection only two points had been noted down in Brian's book, two small points hardly worth mentioning, but with the lack of any other corrections to be made, he felt somewhat obliged to note anything down. "Junction 22-B," Read shone his torch around the inner circumference of the of the egg shaped tunnel. The beam of light; danced over all the normal stress points, nothing untoward was to be seen. "Which way then Brian? Old town or new?" the sewer branched off into two in front of them. The left hand tunnel led towards the older part of the city, docks and river, whereas the right hand tunnel served the newer shopping areas. His torch beam flashed down one then the other.

"Er, old town I think, we'll see if we can break through into the Black Boy's cellar."

"Ey?"

Both men had a chuckle at being able to break into the cellar of the oldest pub in Hull. With that they set off up the slight gradient toward the oldest part of the town and system.

Each junction was inspected for any signs of damage or corrosion before the pair moved onward. The marker points painted on the walls counted down indicating that this particular tunnel would soon be at an end.

"7-A," Read said shining his torch at the number. That was when something caught his eye. "Hello, hello what do we have here then?" he trained the light on a recess in the constant oval section. The recess was the full height of the sewer and set back one half brick from the normal elliptical wall. One brick in the recess was well worn away. Taking a pen knife from his pocket he jabbed at the brick. On contact half of it almost disintegrated with the remainder falling down behind the wall.

Read instantly knew this could mark a significant problem, there should be no void behind the walls. This section of the sewer was a cut and cover section. The road would have been dug up, the sewer laid then recovered before relaying the roadway. Because of the back

fill, earth should encase the tunnels outer layer pressing the arch inwards strengthening the structure.

As the brick fell through a cloud of stale gas escaped, Read coughed as he took a lungful of the noxious foul smelling air. He felt dizzy for a moment before his senses returned. After a moment to steady himself he shone his torch into the hole.

He couldn't see in, the end of the torch obscured his view. If any further investigation was to be required he would have to remove more bricks. He decided that it was necessary and his knife jabbed at the mortar, it crumbled on contact.

Brian wrote furiously on his pad noting the location, state of the damage and condition of the brickwork. Read scraped at the crumbling mortar between each brick, slowly one by one he pushed them through.

Each time a brick fell it clanked against something hard on the floor, "Well, it looks like we've finally made it, what do you want bitter or mild?" he said with a smile.

"Mild defiantly." Brian answered.

Nigel Read shone his torch in through what was now a slightly bigger hole, "Unlucky, it's not the cellar. He said looking through. The hole was not a big one, but still big enough to see, "Looks like an air hole from when it was made..."

Nigel was cut off mid sentence as Brian suddenly turned around to look down the tunnel. What was that?" he said shining his own torch frantically around.

"What?" Nigel replied still busy inspecting the hole.

"I'm sure I felt something brush past me going in that direction." He made a gesturing motion with his hand.

"A rat?"

"No, this was past my face."

"Just a draft." Read reassured him.

Brian though wasn't convinced of his old friends' certainty. He would swear that something brushed past him.

"I can't quite see how far down..." Read was manoeuvring his torch in all kinds of directions and angles trying to gain a better view into the dimensions of the hole, "...it goes, Jesus..." suddenly he jumped back so far that his back hit the opposite side of the tunnel.

“What is it?” Brian asked showing a great deal of concern for his friend. Something had put the wind up him and that was for sure.

Read didn’t say a word, he couldn’t speak. The only movement he could manage was to lift his arm and point a shaking white finger toward the hole made in the brick work by his own hands.

Brains curiosity had got the better of him so slowly and steadily he too looked in. his torch beam scanned around the hole behind the sewer wall, but he saw nothing until he aimed it downward, “Bloody hell?”

At the bottom of the hole lay a collection of bones, if he was not mistaken, it was the skeleton of a human.

On leaving the sewer system both men were understandable in a state of shock. Brian fumbled around in his pocket and with a shaking hand took a cigarette out, put it in his mouth and lit it before taking a deep long drag. The nicotine rushed to his head, such was the ferocity of it he almost became light headed, “Do you want one?” he asked Nigel offering him the packet.

Read looked at him in disbelief, “How long have you known me Bri?”

“Just thought you might have needed one that’s all.” He said replacing the packet in his overall pocket. Both sat in silence for a few moments and looked out over the river. This event had to be reported to their superiors, there was so much to do.

By the time late afternoon arrived there had been much activity in the old town sewer. Nigel had headed the investigatory inspections by the teams of health, safety and independent risk assessors who had ventured under the city streets. A course of action was decided on and for safety reasons must be carried out within hours. A problem had occurred though; a team from the university had arrived wishing to excavate the bones from their final resting place.

Brian had taken an instant dislike to the representative of academia; to his mind they seemed to want to discuss all matters of the project in great detail. Each point being laboured over until the finest detail of the discovery had been made clear and recorded.

At one point a member of their party had suggested that the sewer be, 'taken off line' for the duration of the dig, were they completely insane?

Eventually the head of the group, a strange looking man whose grey hair gave the appearance of a man recently out of bed, was told that he had two hours to remove the bones. His reaction was one of disgust, but he soon came around to the idea when he was offered the choice of doing as instructed or being held responsible for part of the high street caving in, listed buildings and all.

Begrudgingly the Professor agreed.

By the time six o'clock came around the light at the entrance to the sewer was beginning to wane. News paper lined crates containing the bones were being packed into the boot of an old Nissan estate in which the professor sat. Once the students had closed the boot the engine fired and the car drove off. Without as much as a thank you. All that was left was the smell of burning oil, "Miserable sod?" Brian muttered under his breath.

Nigel Read was already in the tunnel overseeing the brick layers work, speed was the key. If a heavy rain storm came tonight the sewer would have to be back up to full strength.

He had never seen the sewer like this before. Several portable arc lights illuminated the area giving the whole sewer an eerie glow to it.

He watched the builders carefully several times he poked his finger into the cement checking its consistency. Once the job was completed the men packed up their tools and set off towards the entrance. Read followed carrying one of the lights, still shining. It cast two long bending shadow on the concave walls of the two men leading the way through the ankle deep water. Suddenly the man leading the triad stopped dead in his tracks, "What was that?" he asked the pair bringing up the rear.

"What?" asked his fellow artisan?

"Down there, something moved."

Read smiled, "Just shadows." He reassured them. "The times I have thought I've seen something out of the corner of my eye."

"No, something was there I saw it."

“Here take the light, I’ll lead.” Read led the way to the entrance without incident, “See nothing to worry about.” He said stepping out into the fresh air.

Though the two workmen never said much, both were more than relieved to be out of the tunnel.

Professor Martin Hicks bent over the table in the university laboratory. For the last five hours both the students and himself had painstakingly arranged the bones recently discovered in the sewers of old town on a setting table in the lab. Though he’d performed this task on several occasions, in fact too many occasions for him to recall, this time he found it more than a challenge. Many of the pieces seemed to him to be out of proportion to the others. The skull for instance, the teeth looked as though they were more animal than human.

He stood up and stretched the arch of his back when he heard a knock at the door. “Knock, knock.” The voice of his old friend John Crispin said as his fellow academic entered.

Hicks turned to see him holding two pre-packed sandwiches in one hand and two mugs of tea in the other. “John, come in and join the party.”

“How’s it going, heard about the excitement earlier.” As he walked toward the grey haired professor he took a look down at the bones arranged on the table then glanced over at the box of surplus bones which stood on a trolley next to it. “Having trouble?” he said, not taking his eyes off the subject. “I thought you might want a bit of supper?” he said finally taking his attention away from the table and offering one of the sandwiches to Martin.

“Thanks.” Hicks was grateful. He hadn’t realised how late it was now. His mind was so occupied with the work in hand it had not crossed his mind to eat.

Both men sat and ate their supper on upturned crates while Hicks explained his concerns over the skeleton. “I don’t understand it. Some of the bones, the femur for instance are bigger than normal both in size and weight and the jaw is more K9 than homo sapien. Crispin took a sip of tea, “Do you think we are talking of Neanderthal?”

“That was my first thought until I found this in with a collection of broken bones.” Hicks past him a disc.

On examination John could see clearly that it was a coin, dated 1890, “Ah?” he said knowing full well that that dated the body. “Do you have its layout on situe?”

“On the desk.” Pointing across to the other side of the room while trying to speak Martin pointed out a collection of photographs showing the position of the body was in behind the wall.

Crispin picked up a drawing of the bones which lay on top of the photos and showed the location of each bone in detail.



The body was almost in the foetal position, knees clenched tightly to its chest, the back bone bent. Then he took note of the area of debris where the extra bone and coin had been found. clearly it was the contents of the stomach; he passed on this observation to Martin.

“That’s exactly what I thought.” Said the little professor but what do you make of the over developed bone structure, and those teeth?”

“I don’t know, it could almost be the produce of a circus act or side show.”

That night was one of the longest Professor Martin Hicks had ever put in. Driven on by some unseen energy to succeed he wanted

more than anything to find the answer to all the questions this skeleton posed. By the time the sun was appearing over the horizon he had done as much as was possible.

John Crispin also spent the night in the confines of the university. He, however, was running through boxes of old micro films of notes left to the university by an old police doctor. There were numerous cases, too many to recall in detail but John knew that somewhere in those old records could be the answer to the riddle of the man in the sewer.

The following morning Nigel sat at his desk in the council offices. On it sat three piles of paper, all needed to be filed before he continued his inspection of the sewage system. Read's desk backed onto Brains and he knew Brian had arrived at work before him. His PC was logged on and his blue raincoat rested on the back of his chair.

Read decided that he would make himself a cup of coffee before starting the filing. The mug required cleaning out; yesterday's coffee still half filled it, now stone cold. It had been too hot at the time to drink, so it was left on his desk.

Slowly he ambled over to the small kitchen where he could wash his cup. He heard a voice calling his name. With a sigh he stopped in his tracks and looked around.

At the far end of the office his boss's door was open the incumbents head poking around the frame, "Nigel, over here?" Read said. Slowly he returned to his desk, put the cup down, then like an obedient dog trotted into his boss's office.

On entering he saw Brian already sitting in attendance but unlike his normal demeanour, Brian was smiling.

"So," began the head of department, "who's the most popular council worker then?" as he asked he closed the door not allowing anyone in the anti office be privy to the conversation inside.

On their exit some ten minutes later all heads turned, when any employee entered the room and the door closed it could mean only one thing and that wasn't good.

The assembled members of the department waited for a word from either of their colleagues, but none came. Both Nigel and Brian

walked straight into the lift. The head of department, Mr Spencer watched them go with a smile on his face, though as the lift doors slid shut the smile turned into a grimace then he spoke, "Jenkins, get you arse in here."

Neither said anything as they crossed Queens Gardens, Nigel could only think of what existed beneath his feet under what was the old Queens Dock. It was always the same when he was in the town, mind always on the job.

Minutes later they were at the entrance to the new BBC building and being ushered into one of the studios used for the production of the local news magazine program.

Once make up had been applied and micro phones clipped to their jumpers they were interviewed at length on their discovery. Both were somewhat taken aback by the interest the whole event had caused, rumour was that the story could even make the national news, so long as no floods or murders happened that day.

The two old friends laughed together as they crossed the garden once again heading back to their office. They had just been on the television, granted the interview would not be shown until that evening, but still...

They had enjoyed their moment in the limelight, but now it was time to return to work.

Overalls and waders now donned, they stood at the river entrance once again. For a moment they both paused, Nigel held the padlock in one hand, the key in the other. As Brian waited his ears picked up on a familiar sound, it was the sound of something heavy dropping into deep water; in this case the river. He looked down over the side of the bank, but saw nothing. Directly below was an outlet pipe from the sewer, the water came out of it in a slow trickle. So what had caused the deep clunking sound? On the surface of the water a ripple spread out toward the other bank and both up and down stream.

He said nothing as the pair entered the wrought iron gates and then down into the tunnel once again. Brian closed the gate behind him and hooked the catch across.

As their footsteps faded away the gate swung open and rattled as it hit the iron stopper. How it had opened no one saw, and no one saw

the mutilated torso bubble up from the surface of the muddy waters of the River Hull. Slowly it drifted down stream then disappeared back into the dark waters.

John Crispin rubbed his eyes; they could hardly remain open such was his fatigue due to the research he had carried out all through the night. Today he had two free periods in the morning, nothing until this afternoon. He had to allow himself some sleep. Not though before he had spoken to his old friend Professor Hicks about the extraordinary discovery he had made in the Police Doctors' archives.

Around a hundred and ten years ago or there about a series of disappearances had taken place in what was now the old part of the city. Many of the vanishings were sailors and prostitutes, those people associated with the High Street area of town. None of those reported missing was ever found and because of the location of the events, who knows how many more souls had disappeared in that time. People were often miles away from home, had no living relations or had lost contact with their families.

The only clues found to the disappearances, if they were in fact clues and not just coincidences were a necklace covered in blood and flesh found on the mud banks of the river.

At the time, so the notes said, it was put down to a practical joke to lead the police off the scent.

When the drains were laid the vanishings seemed to stop, the stalking ground of the predator had gone maybe? Had he moved on somewhere else? The police in those days didn't have such things as databases, so one force didn't communicate with any other on a day to day basis, so who knows?

The other curious point was when digging the drain which followed an underground watercourse, several bones were found and an alcove (or so it was said to be likened to) in the wall of the natural tunnel cut by the stream. It looked as though it could have been made deliberately, a sleeping quarter for some kind of animal, say the size of a large dog.

John put the phone down, Martin wasn't answering. He had an idea in his head that the missing people and the subterranean

discovery could be connected to his friend's findings which at present sat in the lab.

Martin didn't hear the telephone ringing, he too had been burning the midnight oil. For a man who was used to working in such an exact science, this skeleton was a curio. If he was not mistaken, and he seldom was, then the bone structure indicated that this wasn't a man, more a K9?

He put the elusion down to tiredness and turned in for the night, or at least the first part of the morning. Sleep was probably the thing for him.

"Did you hear that?" Brian asked.

"I'd like to say no, but..."

The inspection of the old town sewer was almost complete now. After the joy of this morning's TV appearance, both men felt ill at ease with their surroundings. The noise Brian had heard was almost a cry but more of a dog like growl.

Nigel thought for a moment; maybe they should call it a day, it wasn't often that an animal got stuck down here with them, but if it had would its instinct be to attack.

"Ok, let's go back." Nigel said, a hint of fear in his voice. Brian was not unhappy at the decision, "What, get off." He said striking out an arm, almost hitting his friend.

"What?" Nigel asked in a raised voice.

"You know, trying to spook me." He had felt Nigel poke him in the side of his neck, that wasn't like him, trick playing.

"I didn't do anything." Assured the older of the two men.

Both of their attention was taken away from the petty argument by a loud wolf like cry from somewhere close to them. Nigel froze; Brain dropped his torch which turned itself off as it hit the water.

They never saw what it was that made the noise.

On Look North that night the interview was broadcast, hundreds of thousands of people watched as the two men told their tale, but no one saw the blood stained bones of two men slide out of the outlet pipe of the drain and plop into the river.

No one saw the ripples made by the ID labels floating down the River Hull before they sank into the water as it reached the tidal barrier.

Temporal Line Works

Lee Dakin shivered. It was a cold December night 1935. He was dressed in a long overcoat bearing the crest of the East Yorkshire Railway company on the left breast.

After leaving the stench of death behind him in the trenches of Flanders he had returned home to the village of Holme on Spalding Moor. Lee had been born, grew up and attended school here. His home was above one of the Public houses, The Station Inn where his father was the Landlord. After the Great War he could have taken a steamer to anywhere in the world, but he had decided to return here to Yorkshire, this was his home and somewhere to have a feeling of security.

Lee looked down the platform of the railway station squinting into the darkness. In the blackness of the rural night he could not see out of the confines of the station. The three old, cast iron lamp posts sat on both platforms. Now electric light shone down from the lamps, the posts however were the original Victorian castings. He could remember quite clearly the illuminating gas lamps hanging high above him. When he was young he would spend hours watching the trains.

The stations had two platforms; on one sat a wrought iron open face waiting room, this platform was to serve the southern line. The north line platform however hosted the main facilities, the Station Master's house, ticket office and main waiting room. On the platform were two benches, three evenly spaced lamp posts and the large station clock which hung down from a scroll work attached to the waiting room wall.

Lee looked down the platform with pride, he had always had a deep interest in the railway. As a boy he would come down to the station after leaving school and watch the many varieties of rolling stock which came through the station. Some of his fondest childhood memories were of sitting here taking the names and numbers of the engines. Over time he became friendly with the signal man and station master, both were regulars in his father's pub, which always stood them in good stead with the local landlord. On his many visits to the station he would spend many a happy hour operating the signals

or sending the all clear along the telegraph wire. The station master would also allow him to perform such rudimentary tasks as blow his whistle and wave the green flag to indicate an engines departure. Lee felt so much at home here, at peace with himself even now.

From the end of the main platform he could see the Dakin ancestral seat, The Station Pub. Once his father's, but now in the trusted hands of one of his many elder brothers. This was where he most felt at home, in sight of the pub and the station house. The station did hold dark memories for him also, ever since he was a boy he knew something strange happened here. He could not tell what exactly, but a shiver still ran up his spine for no reason what so ever.

Was this the real reason he had returned to the village after the War? He had the chance to go anywhere in the world; some of his friends had. He could have gone with any one of them, yet he came back here. Finally he settled down into his new job as station master. This gave him the perfect opportunity to carry out what had become an obsession with him.

During one of his many fireside chats with the old station master, he had been told stories of how many train stations were haunted. This unnerved him somewhat; after all he was only a young boy, still open to susceptibility. To this day he could hear the crackle of the fire that night as the storyteller's words filtered into his imagination.

To this day in the station Masters house the very same fire crackled, the same wall clocks ticked. It was even the same paint on the windows as it had been when he was a lad. The thing that he associated most with that room though was not its functionality or his responsibility, but the words spoken on that cold dark night many years before, 'Train stations are full of lost cases and lost souls , they get on and off here like they would get on and off trains.' What was the meaning of that? He shivered involuntary, he always did when his memories of that night came back to unsettle him.

Over the years of his employment there his attention was focused on the rolling stock which passed through the station and the running of this part of the line. In moments when his mind wasn't so focused he would keep a lookout for any uninvited visitors, 'Always keep an open mind, you never see them square on, only out of the

corner of your eye you see them.' That was what the old man had told him years ago and he heeded the warning. On several occasions a fleeting glance had passed like a passing thought, only registering as he had been told, in the corner of his eye. No matter how quickly he would focus on the spot nothing would appear to be there.

It was after some time that he came to the conclusion that these events always took place in the same place, not necessarily at the same time but always in the same place. Once in his investigations on the platform he would ring the spot in chalk, but now there was no need. He knew exactly where the strange events happened.

On many occasions he had seen a figure either standing there or pass through the area. It was not confined to either gender or age though he couldn't be sure exactly. When he had spotted what he thought to be a sighting he could not connect them. Their clothes for instance, past present and strange attire were worn.

On one occasion he had seen something which terrified him so much that his mind had temporally blocked it out from his consciousness.

On a night in spring 1905 he had watched the evening trains come and go. All passenger services were almost over for the night and he looked forward to seeing an array of freight trains thunder through. As the 7.03 disappeared into the distance just its red tail light visible, flashing in the darkness. Lee decided to stretch his legs. It was a cold night and his knee joints were becoming stiff with the cold. Maybe he should have called it a night then, but he didn't. Something told him to stay a little longer. As he walked up and down the platform he stretched his joints to the limit, pushing the blood around his body. He stood under the clock swinging his arms too and fro, the finger tips tingling. The clock was ticking its loud tick, tock above him. Looking up at it he could see his breath forming clouds of steam in the night air. Again he blew out a lung full of air which obscured his vision for a moment and it was through that cloud that he thought he saw someone move. As the cloud of exhaled breath vaporised into nothingness it appeared that no one was there on the platform with him. Had he imagined it, was he a little open to suggestion after the station master's tale of the spirits that hang around the railway stations of the land. Slowly he walked towards the spot where he

thought the man had been standing. Without realising it he was standing on that spot where all his visions had taken place. His sight blurred as he seemed to be taken to another place. He had the feeling of travelling down a tunnel; but no time had elapsed. He stood there, nothing had changed at first glance, except he could no longer hear the large station clock ticking.

He knew that all the disembarking passengers from the last train had left the station and there were certainly no passengers left on the platform, but he could hear voices. Suddenly he froze to the spot. A feeling of uneasiness had overcome him as he looked down at his note book. Why he did this he did not know; maybe it was for security, maybe he didn't want to look up. The number of the last engine was still there written in pencil on the page. Then he looked up and to his surprise he saw many people on the platform. Where had they all come from? It was not only strange that the platform was full of what looked like passengers, all with luggage but they were all dressed in their 'Sunday Best'. Women in their summery dresses carried parasols; men in white blazers or army dress uniform, all looked very Victorian. What came next he tried hard to forget

Mist, where had mist come from on a hot summer's day, no it wasn't mist more of a heat haze making the image shimmer? All shimmered in the haze, all apart from the man in black. His outline and features stayed as clear as crystal. Another queer thing was that the ladies held parasols in their hands but he could swear that it was dark. Of course in his world all was dark it was a December night. Was he seeing the night too? Could it be that only the confines of the station had become immersed in this dream like state?

It may have been dream like for the most but one thing he would never forget was what this strange man was doing. In his hand he carried what appeared to be a black doctor's bag. At regular intervals he would stop and place the bag on the floor then take out a rolled up poster. Sticking the top edge against the wall of the waiting room he let the remainder fall sticking itself perfectly to the wall.

Lee couldn't quite see what it said. At regular intervals the man stopped and stuck up a fly poster. Only he seemed to be taking any notice of this, so out of place, man. All the other passengers on the platform did not give him a second glance.

The man was now only twelve or so feet away from him and was busying himself sticking up another poster. As he turned to continue down the platform he stopped dead in his tracks as though he had sensed a vibration in his very being. Slowly he turned around; all the while his eyes darted from right to left looking for something. Suddenly he stopped he had sensed his prey.

Lee started to feel ill at ease with the situation, he tried to move but couldn't. The strange man in black was walking towards him, his breathing became heavy, the sweat was running down his temples, his mouth dry.

The figure stopped as though he was unsure where his destination was. Silently he rummaged in his bag before taking out another fly poster.

The young Lee couldn't breathe; so much was the fear gripping him. Then he thought his heart was going to stop as the man's cold, grey eyes looked deep into his very soul and stretched out his right hand. In it was a rolled up poster, he was offering it to Lee.

He too felt his arm uncontrollably reaching out and taking it from the figure.

Once the transaction was made the cold looking man silently carried on along the platform sticking up his posters.

Lee's eyes looked down at the rolled up piece of paper in his hand. After casting one last look at the strange figure he unrolled it. The paper was rough, coarse to the touch though the printing on it was as clear as any he had ever seen, it was immaculate. He would never forget what it portrayed.

On it was a clock face; roman numerals around its edge marked out the hours. On the top of the banner were the words 'TEMPORAL LINE WORKS' while at the bottom of the page it read 'DO NOT ENTER RIFT'

A sense of foreboding came over him, he instinctively knew something was wrong and he should not be there. Lee screwed his eyes up as tight as he could and with all his effort and will power he stepped back.

The familiar sound of the station clock was welcome to his ears. Opening his eyes again he saw, much to his relief, an empty platform. Did he want to repeat this strange occurrence? A moment later he

found himself being let into the station master's house which was situated at the east end of the platform.

In front of a blazing log fire he sat with a cup of tea in his hand and told the Station Master what had happened.

For a long time the older man thought he had heard this story several years previously when a fireman had explained a similar kind of experience.

Lee went into great detail, "Everything shimmered. It was like walking through a waterfall but going down a tunnel at the same time, then when I looked up from my note book I could see all those people."

"What did it feel like?" the Station Master asked as he sat back in a leather arm chair and waited to hear what the young man had to say.

Lee thought, yes there had been a different feeling about the place. As he had stepped into whatever it was, the cold night air had changed into a warm breeze. There was also a smell in the air; it was a summer fragrance, warm air and pollen.

Once Lee had finished his account of the experience, he warmed his hands on the fire as a distinct chill had come over him.

The Station Master listened with interest. When a similar event had happened the fireman he had seen soldiers, rifles in hand, as they boarded a troop train. One thing the old stoker had mentioned though was...

"I saw something else," Lee started to recount again, he didn't look up as he spoke, his gaze remained deep upon the flickering flames in the hearth.

Good, he was going to tell it unprompted.

"Through the crowd in their summer dresses there was a man. He was dressed differently; he wore a long black overcoat, black trousers, black shoes though his collar was white. I seem to remember that.

He looked old and tired, his face was grey the expression on it was sadness."

"What was he doing?" asked the older man, he knew where this was leading, he hoped for the same conclusion as before, but he wanted to hear it through the mouth of the boy, first hand.

Lee didn't speak for many moments trying to remember the movements of the dark figure, "He walked towards me." He paused for a few seconds, he wanted to give an accurate account. How could he be accurate when he had no idea what had happened, "Then he looked at his pocket watch."

"Was that all?"

"Yes I think so." Lee said, but in his heart he knew that wasn't all. He could still see the soulless figure in his mind's eye walking toward him. That vision was as clear in his mind as the smell of the numerous hanging baskets lining the side of the station house and waiting room. If only he had spoken more of his tale; the Station Master knew the history of the station better than most and would have told the young man that never have there been hanging baskets suspended from any of the buildings.

That all happened so long ago yet still the image was clear in his mind. To this day he had never stood on that spot again. Quite often he came within a couple of feet or so of it, but never could he summon up the courage to make the step into it.

The fire in the station house living room was burning bright and warm but he knew that he would have to leave the comfort of the house shortly. The last train of the night would be arriving shortly and he had to ensure that the station was empty before locking up for the night not to mention saying goodnight to the signalman. The clock on the mantle chimed ten o'clock. As he normally did, he put on his jacket and hat before picking up the tools of his trade, whistle and flags before stepping out into the night.

The night was still clear and cold, stars twinkled in the heavens, no moon to obscure their faint light with its overpowering glare. His breath condensed as he exhaled.

A shrill whistle broke the silence of the night, the late train was approaching, the last one of the day.

Patience he stood and waited. He heard the flexing of the steel cables being operated from the box then instantly the signal dropped. Turning, Lee looked up to the signal box and gave his old friend Wesley a wave. Wesley obliged him by returning the acknowledgment. By this time Lee heard the engine's funnel blowing

out smoke as it thundered down the line. The head lamp was now visible in the darkness. Moments later the engine started to break on its final approach.

“Evening.” Bellowed the driver as he slowly passed, his voice clearly audible above the clank and roar.

It was a pointless effort to try to reply as the engine had already passed so he just raised an arm in greeting.

As the carriages past him by he noticed something reflected in the glass windows. No one was on the platform adjacent to the reflection, but he could see it. The image was that of a man in a suit. The cut of the suit was not a style he had ever seen before. The man looked as though he had an air of authority surrounding him. He was reading a broadsheet news paper. As the train came to a stand still he folded up his paper and tucked it under his arm before bending to pick up his briefcase.

Lee watched the figure in the windows of the carriages. When they finally came to a halt his view was taken away by one of the door windows being lowered as a passenger’s arm stretched out and opened the door. Quickly he turned his attention to the platform, no one was there, instantly he knew that the spot the man had occupied was the very spot he had witnessed those terribly frightening images. The suppressed memories from so long ago came flooding back into this minds eye.

He stood in silence as the passengers debarked, not moving or saying a word to any of them. Once all was quiet he looked into the reflection of the platform in the carriage window, no figure was there now. As he looked at his own reflection he was aware of someone else on the platform with him and suddenly another reflection appeared in the window behind his own. It was Wesley the signalman. “Lee.” He could see his friend’s reflection, but the voice didn’t register until Wesley placed a hand on his shoulder, “Lee, the driver’s waiting.”

The station master turned, his pale blank expression looked straight through his friends face. Something then registered itself in his brain. The train; of course. Slowly he waved his green flag and blew a low unenthusiastic blast on his whistle. The cold metal of the Acme thundered stuck to his dry lips as he removed it.

The engine driver raised steam and slowly the train started to pull away. Lee looked for the reflection again in the windows, but saw nothing.

“Are you alright?” Wesley asked, seeing his colleague was in some distress.

Slowly Lee turned to face him, his throat was dry and he found it difficult to speak.

The signal man’s eyes darted to the left before returning to the cold features of his friend. Had he seen something out of the corner of his eye? “I think you’re wanted.” His eyes pointed in the direction of a new arrival on the platform.

Lee could hardly move as a strange force processed him, he knew he had to look. Slowly and shaking his head he turned to look down the dimly illuminated platform.

The terrifying sight of the man with the posters stood there watching him. Though it was forty or more years since Lee had seen him last the man had not changed at all. The clothes he wore were still the same, his face still grey with those deep dark eyes set deep in his skull. Slowly the figure turned towards the waiting room. After only one step he had vanished.

Lee could not move or speak, why had this phantom returned to haunt him now, after all this time.

Wesley though took up the chase; he passed the frozen figure of the station master. Lee tried to shout out to warn him not to interfere for his own sake but nothing came from his lips.

As Wesley arrived at the spot where the figure had stood he was hit by a blinding light and a blast of warm air.

It took a moment for his senses to re-adjust to the new environment. He soon realised the blinding light was nothing more than sunlight and the wall of heat was again the warm rays of sunlight on a summer’s day.

His first instinct was confusion shortly followed by panic. This second feeling abated slightly as he found himself in familiar surroundings. He was still standing on the platform of Holme on Spalding Moor station though it was not the station he knew. The railway line itself had gone; a carpet of lush green grass now sat where stone chippings, sleepers and rails had once lay. The station

house and waiting room were still there, but it was obvious they no longer served their original purpose. At the far end of the platform the road still crossed what was the line, the crossing gates appeared to be long gone. Was this the station before the line was put down? No, how could it be, the line was always laid first, so where was he?

A sense of fear came over him as he realised that all was not well. He turned to look at the station clock, knowing the time would give him a reality, something real to cling to. Looking up, the clock looked old and rusted and no time showed on its face because the hands were missing.

Something moved to his right. The figure he had followed to this place was taking down posters off the waiting room walls. How could the posters be fixed to the walls the first place, he thought to himself, it was covered in ivy.

It was like a dream, he could see it happening, but it wasn't possible for it to happen in that way. He tried to snap himself out of it like waking yourself up from a nightmare. He couldn't though; this was as real a dream as he had ever experienced.

The dark figure took the posters down one by one and put them into his doctor's bag. Once the last one was down he stopped and sniffed the air.

To Wesley's dismay the man turned to face him and scowled. Had he expected to see someone else there, Lee maybe? Was he waiting for Lee? The man walked towards him with a look of terror on his face.

Mustering all his willpower and physical strength he stepped backwards, immediately a rush of cold air hit his face and darkness enveloped him. He was back on the platform, his platform. Finding himself at Lee's side they both watched as the figure of the man shimmered into view before disappearing.

"What happened?" Lee asked.

"I saw the station, with no line, no trains anymore?" Wesley's voice was disjointed. He had no idea what had just happened, the only comfort was that Lee seemed to understand what he had just witnessed, "It was summer, the clock had no hands, flowers everywhere?" his voice trailed off.

No hands, of course he remembered it so well the posters of the clocks with no hands.

“He was taking down posters from the walls of the waiting room and putting them in his bag.” Wesley’s voice was almost a whisper now.

The posters were gone, was this an end to it, finally.

“What are temporal line works?” the signalman asked.

“Who knows?” Lee didn’t want to know. As both men headed into the station house Lee stopped and from the corner of his eye he saw something, something that made his heart skip a beat. At the far end of the platform hanging on one of the cast iron lamp posts he saw something hanging. It was a poster and on it he could just make out the face of a clock with no hands...

Terminal

The droning planes of the Luftwaffe flew in formation over the bomb damage streets of London. For a period in 1940 the German aircraft bombed London not only during the hours of darkness, but also in daylight.

The sound of air raid sirens were the most common sound on the streets of the capital for a period of one month. On this Thursday the disjointed continuity of the cities life continued as normal as one may expect.

Alison Maple picked her way through the rubble on her way to work, she was an assistant in the department store Fortnum and Mason. The sun was shining in the sky, but was obscured by the rising smoke from the smouldering fires from the half ruined city. Though the carnage lay all around she was happy to be out in the sunshine, hazy as it was. Much of her recent life had been spent in air raid shelters at her work or with the two other generations of her family huddled together at home. Not all the family were there, the two male members of the family, her brother and father were away somewhere in the world fighting for freedom. None of them knew where exactly, the letters never said. Brother Harry was away in Africa and father, Ernest was in Europe somewhere.

Her moment of happiness was again disturbed as the familiar sound of the air raid klaxon.

Looking up into the sky that all too familiar formation of German aircraft was over head.

Looking round for salvation she made straight toward the nearest bolthole, Bank Underground station.

“Quickly.” Said the warden on the gate as he ushered he in before slamming the door closed behind him.

Deep down in the bowels of the network of tunnels she came out onto the platform. The usual sight was of many sleeping bags placed end to end along the length of the platform. Today though a different sight met her eyes.

The Londoners down here today were all awake, after all it was the daytime. Many stood chatting to one another, others remained seated indulging themselves in idle gossip.

As far as she could see it was mainly the men who stood, smoking and discussing the war, not that there were many men down there. The males that were there all wore suits, she assumed they must be some sort of official persons exempt from the call to arms.

The Underground system didn't operate during air raids so many people sat on the edge of the platform, legs dangling down towards the track.

Alison sat at the very end of the platform, next to her sat a young man around the same age as herself. He was dressed in a suit and carried with him an old brief case and of course his gas mask. As Alison sat down he passes her a polite glance, but didn't engage in any form of conversation.

"Sorry," offered Alison as she sat down nudging him with her elbow as she did so.

"It's ok, I've had worse." He replied, his voice was kindly. Once settled she looked around the densely populated station. All forms of expression could be seen in that short tunnel. Happiness, sorrow, despair, all could be seen on the faces of the people in that room. The face of the young man sitting next to her showed sorrow, almost abject despair.

"I'm Alison by the way." She said trying to spark a conversation into life, maybe she could cheer him up.

"David." He replied.

"Do you work here, in the city?" the question was innocent enough.

"Yes, the clothes you mean?"

"Clothes?" she couldn't tell what job he did by his clothes.

"Not in uniform, that's what you mean isn't it. Well it's not my fault." His voice almost broke.

"No, no," Alison has hit a nerve in him, "I didn't mean anything like that, really."

"I get used to it where ever I go. Women looking at me in the street, pointing and whispering.

"No, it's none of my business." Alison tried to reassure him that she had meant by the comment.

"I suppose your husband is away fighting and you want to know why I'm not with him?"

"I'm not even married."

A pause fell on the conversation. Alison thought to reengage the intercourse, but decided against it, the conversation was over.

Then all of a sudden he spoke again, this time in a steadier voice, "I have a horse shoe kidney." He said in a quiet tone before turning to face her.

"Sorry?" had she heard correctly?

"Most people have two, kidneys. I only have one. Because of that I couldn't join up. Apparently you need two kidneys to kill Germans." He was full of self pity for himself.

"Oh I see." Said Alison. She felt sorry for him. Did she wonder though, was he that disappointed not to be going to fight.

"I'm doing my bit for the War effort." He continued, in a happier tone, "working at the War Ministry.

"Oh yes, that sounds exciting. Alison tried to encourage his happier dispassion, "What do you do there?"

"Just a clerk, more of a runner actually." He was once again spiralling into depression.

"The smallest cogs keep the biggest machines running."

"That's true." He smiled.

A huge muffled bang came directly from above them. A bomb had landed nearby. The lights flickered and dust accompanied by bits of tile fell from the curved ceiling of the tunnel.

All the conversations on the platform simultaneously stopped, everyone looked upward. They all knew that was close, how many direct hits could a building take? In the eerie silence the sound of bombs could be heard exploding on the surface of the city.

Slowly the talking started again.

"When will it stop?" asked Alison.

"Soon," he replied, "soon. We are working on system called RAD..." he stopped himself. "Sorry can't say."

"I understand. Official secrets and all that."

"Walls have ears, you know."

Once again the conversation fell into an uneasy silence.

"You said you weren't married." He asked tentatively.

"No, no I'm not. Who'd have me?"

“Anyone I would think, I’d jump at the chance of...” all of a sudden he became self conscious, blushing his sentence faded. Much to Alison’s disappointment.

She attempted to recapture the moment , “Really, would you?”

“Er, yes, I, well, I, suppose I would yes.” His speech stumbled out, a nervous edge in his voice.

A break through had been made, he had never come to this point with a woman before, he was at that point, did he go in for the kill as it were or would he back away?

Alison waited with eager anticipation for the question, the answer she knew would be yes.

It never came.

“These days’ things are, difficult, aren’t they” the station once again rocked with another aerial bombardment as she spoke.

“Yes it’s hard, you see its...”

“Yes?” she wanted to know more about him.

“My family were killed in the blitz four nights ago. The house was flattened, they didn’t have time to make it to the shelter so they sat under the stairs. It took a direct hit, nothing was left.”

Alison could say nothing to him, she had up to now been spared any personnel tragedy. She placed her hand on his and her head on his shoulder, this poor man had lost everything.

“Theirs nothing left for me now, no family, no home, nothing.”

What could she do, what could she say? Alison felt completely helpless.

“Sometimes I think that I’m not long for this world. I would have been there, but I got stuck in Westminster Station during the raid. I feel as though I’m dead already.”

Not another word was said until the all clear sounded twenty minutes later.

As the orderly evacuation of the station took place Alison and the young man remained seated next to one another. As the warden ushered the last of the people out he saw the two sitting together.

“Come on you two, back to work.”

As they stood the young man handed Alison his business card. John Gilbert was his name. "Can I see you after work tonight?" he asked.

"Yes, of course." Alison said with a smile. She lead the way up the stairs toward the daylight. On exiting the station she almost choked on a cloud of smoke and brick dust. Putting her head down she ran throw the grey cloud.

"Get out of there luv., you might get killed." said a strangers voice. she felt a hand grab her arm and pull her to one side. She turned to see the entrance to the station flattened, only the arched doorway remained.

A sense of shock came over her, "but, but" she spluttered.

"Calm down" said the voice.

"John, where's John?"

"Who, theirs no one there."

Her eyes focused on the source of the voice. it was one of London's firemen. She looked around once more for John. He was nowhere to be seen.

"John, he's in there." She told the fireman, panic filled her voice as she pointed toward the pile of bricks that stood where the station had been.

"If he was in there when that bomb hit it then he's dead."

"But, the all clear has just sounded." What was this man talking about. She had just come out of the station and no bomb had just hit it.

"Here it's in 'The Sketch'. The fireman took a copy of the newspaper out of his pocket and handed it to Alison. "Oy you." He shouted at someone on the other side of the street before running off toward them.

Alison stood in the middle of the road. Rubble lay all around her. Fires ragged were gas supplies were breached and walls collapsed and the ruined buildings, she saw none of it.

On the front cover of The Sketch she read the story of how Bank Station suffered a direct hit in the latest round of bombings. The gates at the entrance to the tube station had been either left open or blown off by another blast. By a thousand to one chance another falling bomb had deflected off of a building and shot straight down into the

deep underground tunnels. The station collapsed in on itself, killing everyone sheltering in the building.

If these events were in today's press then it must have happened yesterday? This was surely impossible, she had just been...

Alison grabbed a pacing Policeman, "Is the station reopen yet?" she asked in a daze.

"No," he said, "I don't think it will ever reopen, it's completely entombed itself." With no reply from the young woman he started to continue on his way.

Alison grabbed his sleeve, "When?" she asked with tears in her eyes.

"During the daylight raid, yesterday." He said as he walked off down the street.

Death at Blackfriars

Three middle aged men stood on the platform of Blackfriars Underground station. No daylight ever found its way down here to the subterranean world. While the city above sparkled with the many colourful lights of advertising boards, theatre and shop fronts, the underground chambers dug out of clay under the capital remained a constant twilight.

At this precise time the watches on the wrists of the three men where synchronised at 2.01am. An eerie silence had fallen on the tunnels of the underground system; all trains had stopped running for the night.

The three out of hour's visitors to the station that night were not passengers or maintenance engineers, no they were something quite different. These three were psychic investigators, ghost hunters. They had come to the right place. This particular station had a long history of paranormal activity. A theatre had once stood on this site, the principle actor, John Hampton had been murdered in the cellars by a jealous understudy, who envied his talent. Hampton is now said to walk that very platform they now stood on. His murderer, only known as Edwards, had also come to the end of his life in that theatre; falling from the balcony. Had he been pushed by the ghostly Hampton; no one knew for sure, but his screams were often said to be heard coming from down the tunnels.

Several people had also fallen onto the track in modern times. Were they pushed or did they jump. We would never find out unless one of the spirits revealed themselves to such people as were staying there tonight.

The three men had all read up on the station, its history and its ghosts. Their plan was to spend the night here and record any unnatural happenings.

To do this they were armed with several devices. Tape recorders, video camera equipment with night vision recording and also a piece of kit borrowed from a TV camera man, It was a laser. Mike took one of the receivers down to the north end of the platform while Brian took the other to the south end. Once lined up the third member of the party turned it on.

The purpose of this piece of equipment served as an eye. If something broke the laser beam an alarm would sound. This meant that the three members of the expedition could explore the tunnels and not have to keep an eye on the platform.

The men stood at the north end of the platform checking watches and testing torches, their night's hunting was about to begin. As they turned to leave, Dave caught sight of something out of the corner of his eye. "Look!" he said in a hushed, but excited voice. As they all turned Dave was the only one to catch sight of the figure. It happened in a second, the look of shock on the figures face as it looked at them then, he fell off of the platform as a rush of air come down the tunnel. It was the sort of warm blast that signals the approach of an oncoming train, though none appeared. The laser eye omitted an electronic bing-bong. The alarm echoed through the tunnels, "Did you see that? Did you?" David asked excitedly.

The others hadn't and, to add insult to injury only David had his camera running. It would be luck more than good judgement if he had caught any of it on tape.

At this moment there was no time to check it, they were on a tight schedule. Minutes later they were slowly and carefully making their way along the northbound track, the three night vision cameras scanning every inch of the tunnel. Water droplets dripped through from the curved ceiling. At first the embellished echo of each drip made the three investigators jump out of their skin before continuing in a more scientific vain.

"Shall we rest here?" George asked his two friends.

"Why here?" Arthur was curious. They had hardly gone fifty yards down one of the tunnels.

"Because," George began to reply, "we are directly under the cellar of the theatre where John Hampton was murdered."

"Ah" said Dave with enthusiasm. Such was his enthusiasm his voice echoed up and down the tunnel. "Shhh." hissed George. The mono syllable also echoed around them.

"We don't want to wake anyone up do we." It was Arthur who broke the atmosphere that had started to shroud the evening.

The moment came as a little light relief to the three investigators. Still there was defiantly a heavy, oppressive atmosphere

in the tunnel. The temperature had dropped several degrees since leaving the platform. Pitch black surrounded them. Now the light of the station had long been left behind. The expression about not being able to see a hand in front of your face had never been so true in Dave's reckoning. Navigating along the tunnel would have been impossible without the aid of the night vision cameras.

This would be the first vigil of the evening. As practised two of the three, Arthur and George, sat back to back each viewing the tunnel in either direction. Dave stood off to one side with his back toward the tunnel wall, his camera panning around the area where his two friends sat.

Many ghost hunts of this type ended in disappointment. All ghost hunters only wished for one thing, to capture an apparition on camera but only a select few had ever done so.

For just over an hour they stayed in that one location scanning the surrounding area.

"Shall we move on?" Arthur's voice broke the silence. This made Dave jump out of his skin.

"I agree." Confirmed George.

"Me also." Came in Dave.

"Come on then" the two seated on the floor slowly began to stand.

"There." Shouted Dave. On his screen he saw something moving, then it was gone.

"Where, where?" shouted the other two.

All three crowded round the tiny screen on Dave's camera. He rewound it back thirty seconds and waited. Though the camera wasn't stationary at the time of the recording a shape was clearly visible in the frame, even if it was only for a split second.

The jubilation of the three investigators was soon over come by annoyance, "Just another thirty seconds and we would have had that."

"I would have had a clear shot of that." Protested George.

Once at the point of the tunnel where they estimated the apparition had been, Dave took an EMF reading. The Electromagnetic Force Metre was a tool often used by ghost hunters. It showed a slightly higher reading than normal, but that could be put down to the numerous cables that ran the length of the tunnels.

“Nothing out of the ordinary.”

“We move on then?” George was eager to move on.

Moving down the tunnel the track split. A choice needed to be made.

“Which way now?” Dave asked Arthur, who looked at the map before checking his watch.

“We can’t stray too far. We only have two hours left. I suggest going right, agreed?”

“You’re the boss.” Agreed George. He was happy to be here in the dark tunnels, any direction was good for him.

“I have a feeling about the left hand tunnel.” Dave said shinning his torch down the left hand branch of the track.

“We agreed, no splitting up.” Arthur said firmly.

“I know, I know.” Dave knew the rules, but, “meet back here in one hour?”

“Ok,” Arthur said reluctantly, “but if you fall and knock yourself out, it’s nothing to do with me.” He turned to George, “George?”

“I’m with you Arthur.”

Dave watched them leave. Once they had disappeared round the bend he made off to the left of the points.

Arthur and George slowly edged their way along the line towards their third point which was a notorious point; workmen had reported sightings on several occasions.

Time was difficult to judge in the dark tunnels. George estimated it to be five minutes to the service platform. This was the sight of a murder.

Two engineers were working on the line in between trains. A dispute had started between the two men over a women, what it was we may never know, but the dispute turned into a fight. The outcome of the struggle was that one of the men’s life was ended as he fell in front of a moving train. That was the story which was reported, did he fall or was he pushed?

The platform was the location of the next vigil. Both men positioned themselves at either end and pointed their cameras toward one another. Any movement on the service platform would be detected.

Dave had also found a similar service platform down his own line. He too sat at the end of the platform and pointed his camera toward the other end.

Dave had joined the other two ghost hunters eight months previous, after a conversation with a colleague who turned out to be a mutual friend of them all. Dave contacted the pair and joined the group. He was convinced that ghosts must exist in some shape or form. Over history too many sightings had been reported and not only by the usual attention-seeking cranks or half mad freaks. Members of the Royal Family had reported seeing the spectres of monarchs long dead. Not only members of the monarchy, but two members of the royal household reported see the famous ghost of Herne the Hunter in the grounds of Windsor Castle in 1977. Prime Ministers had reported figures silently moving around the Palace of Westminster in the early hours of the morning. If all these people had reported such occurrences they're must surely be something in it.

Mediums, now they were a different case; hundreds of these charlatans had appeared over history, from the ancient world through the Victorian hay day and on to the modern TV physics, they have all plied their trade. None of them had ever convinced him of their authenticity.

His mind was also open to scientific explanations to the existence of ghosts. Einstein looked into the possibility of links to other dimensions; was it possible that the evidence of these links were ghosts?

Sitting alone in alleged haunted houses gave him a lot of time to run through many theories and possibilities on the subject. At this moment in time he could not concentrate on anything, the tunnel felt cold, colder than the last one had been.

Silently, Arthur and George sat waiting. It would be a fruitless one. The platform where the murder had taken place was currently occupied by Dave. Unbeknown to them they were sitting on the wrong platform. Their expectations were high though, not knowing of their wrong location. When a single point of light flashed on George's camera screen he almost jumped for joy. Arthur on the other hand saw nothing.

Dave stared at the small camera screen, then into the darkness. The dark could play tricks on the eyes and as he looked into the blackness, shapes seemed to twist and turn; the only way of stopping it was to focus. Focus on the only point of light, the camera screen. Why he had come down here alone he could not tell; at the time it just felt right to him. No logical explanation could be given for it. Could logic be applied to the subject he was fascinated with? As an amateur parapsychologist his job was to apply science to anything that may happen in an evening's investigation.

He was fast approaching the point where he knew his instincts were wrong. Then the silence was broken as a scuttling sound could clearly be heard coming from somewhere in the darkness.

He jumped up and swung the camera round into the direction he thought the noise was coming from. There was nothing there, what was making the noise?

Then he saw it; a rat scuttled along line of the channels adjacent to the track. He sat back down with a sigh. Once again he set the camera to look down the platform.

It was now 5.30am, the sun was coming up over the horizon and the city once more awoke to a new day. Still deep underground George and Arthur were preparing to make their way back down to the rendezvous point.

Gathering their bits and pieces together they jumped down off the service platform and made their way back toward the station. Dave watched his camera. Nothing. Turning on his torch he checked his watch, 5.39am. it was time to leave. Then he stopped, frozen to the spot.

On the screen stood a man. He was dressed in Victorian attire, not a gentleman's clothes though, more a workman. Large boots, black coat and an old bowler hat on his head. The figure looked directly at Dave, who had frozen to the spot with fear. He dared to look up from the screen to view the apparition. Slowly his eyes lifted, he was almost too afraid to look. It was then he saw it, it was real, well as real as a ghost could be. The figure turned towards the track and walked forward. Its left foot stepped off the platform, his body followed falling towards the rails. It never landed though. Before it hit

the track it was gone. Dave had turned away as the blast of warm air came rushing toward him along the tunnel.

He sat there in silence, too afraid to move. His body shook like a leaf in the wind.

The sound of the air conditioning came on. This almost gave him a heart attack. He picked up his camera and quickly made off back toward the rendezvous point.

Arthur and George were already at the intersecting points, "He must have already gone." Said George, his torch trained on his watch.

"Ey, your right, come on."

As Arthur spoke those words Dave had reached the points, but both parties didn't meet. Somehow or other Dave had taken a wrong turning further up the line. His mind was on his experience and not on the geography of the line. The fact that he had taken a wrong turn was unknown to him as one intersection looked very much like another.

He knew time was against him, so he pressed on. A point of light greeted him as he came around the long sweeping bend; there in the distance was the station.

His two colleagues saw the lights of the station as they also rounded a bend in the track. Dave had somehow managed to enter the station from the other direction to Arthur and George.

Both parties were within twenty yards of the tunnel emerging into the station when a sound stopped them all in their tracks.

The sound was the bing-bong of the motion sensitive laser going off. Dave felt himself unable to move whereas Arthur and George ran the remaining part of the line jumping up onto the platform to inspect the laser.

Dave could see his two friends on the platform and once out into the light he too climbed up and inspected the transmitter at the opposite end of the platform. He checked the piece of equipment that was still sounding out its alarm.

"The trains must have started again." He thought to himself out loud. He could feel a warm rush of air coming from down the tunnel. Suddenly he dropped his camera as he felt a sharp jab of pain in his right hand side.

Arthur looked up alerted by a cry, at the other end of the platform and saw what looked very much like Dave flying through the air towards the track. Arthur looked on, paralysed with fear. Was this a replay of what Dave had seen earlier that night? The body propelled itself through the air off the platform and as it flew over the track, a train thundered out of the tunnel hitting the body. For a second, gravity held it against the front of the cab, before it disappeared under the wheels.

Both men ran down the platform to where the body had been launched into eternity. Arthur glanced up and down the track looking for any sign of a body but nothing was visible.

George picked up the camera which lay on the floor. He had an uneasy feeling. "Remember what Dave said he saw earlier, someone falling."

He rewound the tape in the camera and pressed the play button. The video that Dave shot earlier was shaky but, a man could clearly be seen falling in front of a train.

Rewinding the footage they watched it again, this time freezing the image at the only point which the alleged ghost's face could be seen. They both stared at the small screen, "My God," Arthur was the first to see the likeness, "that's Dave."

The Baker Street Irregulars

For a career soldier, the prospect of having to leave the service prematurely was not a thought greatly welcomed. Civilian life was no life for a soldier; society in its many forms were of no concern for these like minded brothers in arms.

Sergeant John Middleton was one such example of this. The Crimean War had brought him to the end of his career; losing the lower half of his right leg when a splinter of shrapnel had all but sliced it off, the result of cannon fire.

Now back in London, his home town, he found himself destitute. His army pension only covering his food and beer allowance.

John could not remember the last time he had frequented a public house; it must have been long ago.

On his return to the city he grew up in, things had gone from bad to worse. Finding that his rented accommodation had been re-let, he had nowhere to go. The landlady of his rooms had said that rumour of his death had reached her, so 'she had to make a living'. The few belongings he had in the residence had been given to the tat man. Having no living relations, there had been no one to pass his belongings on to.

John was a furiously proud man, and though homeless, his appearance was as clean and tidy as it could possibly be. When living on the streets, a tidy appearance does not bode well for donations to his upkeep. One thing though he could do was play the squeeze box to a high standard. It was a talent which he discovered early in childhood. His father had owned one and his only wish was to play the instrument.

Eventually his father began to teach him the craft. During the numerous campaigns he had fought in, he and his instrument were much in demand. On countless occasions he had played deep into the watches of the night relating all manner of tunes .

This could make him money in civilian life he often thought to himself, and now it had to.

After much thought and experiment, he found the best place to make money was the subterranean world of the underground railway system.

Finding a good spot in one of the tunnel junctions of Baker Street, he set out his pitch.

When he had first come to the station the atmosphere had been smoke filled, choking and dirty; benefactors though were many. Clad in his army uniform, many serving men had given to maintain his upkeep. He found that over time it would be the same people handing their money into the squeeze box case. They had become his extended family in his eyes, his only family.

On occasion he would venture down the many tunnels that made up the station, though would always gravitate back to the same spot. Over the passing of time this became his spot, no other dared take it. Not only was it his workplace, but his sleeping quarters also. Warm blasts of air would rush through the tunnels keeping him warm on the long, cold winter nights.

It seemed to him a curious thing but; over the recent passing of time he found he could no longer calculate day or date. All days, nights and seasons seemed to blend into one long eternity. No longer did he venture up into the daylight. He didn't wish to anymore. His world was down here in the tunnels where he was safe and warm. Besides moving would leave his spot open to rivals.

Day after day his fingers would hurt from the constant manipulation of the instrument. The meagre earnings though kept him in tea, soup and bread.

London was changing. He noticed different people coming down into the station. The old faces changed; some of his best benefactors had gone now, but others had replaced them; though many looked pale and tired.

More and more men in uniform came through the station now, the Crimean War must be hooting up.

It was around this time that a strange event took place. He had woken one morning to find passers by looking down on him. He stood up and grunted at them. Had they not seen a one legged man before? With that comment, they all dispersed, strange that? That same day, one of his regulars came down the tunnel. John knew

the man's favourite tune was the lament, 'Flowers of the Forest'. It was a sad tune of remembrance. Instantly he changed to that particular piece. Today the man was not alone; he held the hand of a young girl. On reaching his spot the man didn't put down the usual coin, but the young girl gently laid a single white lily. After a moment they moved off down the tunnel.

Strange thing to do, these were strange times though. The air quality in the subterranean world had changed now for the better and instead the smell of oil filled the air.

A few days later his friend was back, this time without the little girl. As usual he put a coin in the case, this time though it made no sound, then nodding he moved on. Something's never change. Not like the noises coming from the street these days. The air was filled with the roar of engines and the sound of horns peeping. Should he take a look out into the world? He decided not to.

A couple of nights later he was awoken by a noise. The sound was that of fifty cannons being fired, he had never heard any weapon sound so vile in all his time serving Queen and county.

He sat up and looked around. To his horror he saw hundreds of others like himself lying on the cold, hard, tiled floor. Huddled together as the noise continued outside. The engine noise from above had now changed to a droning while the deafening bangs continued. Were all these people down here escaping the noise outside?

For many nights he played his squeeze box to keep them entertained.

Soon after this, to his shock, another musician picked a spot next to his own. The young man was nothing like he'd seen before. The long haired boy wore brightly coloured clothes which were ill fitting. His old army uniform looked in pristine condition next to him.

From out of a case the youth took what he presumed to be a guitar. It was a strange looking instrument, the first time he ran his fingers over the strings, hardly any sound was forthcoming. Then he did a strange thing; he inserted what looked like a cable into the body. The next time he ran his fingers over the strings an ear splitting noise boomed from a box to his rear.

John had never heard anything like it. The youth played with great talent and dexterity. The music sounded so sweet next to his own modest instrument.

Passers by in similar brightly coloured clothes put their money into the newcomer's box. John still had his regulars though, still putting their coins in his case.

London had changed. He calculated that thousands of people came through Baker Street Station every day now. All were dressed in strange alien clothing with wires hanging from their ears. Even the people had changed. In all his time in the service he had never seen so many different skin colours or races.

One thing hadn't changed though. Sergeant John Middleton can still be heard playing his squeeze box at the same junction of two tunnels as his irregular customers file past.

The Beachcomber

A cold sea mist blew over the rippled wet sand of Flambourgh Beach. The strip of sandy beach was enclosed between the crashing sea and the sheer cliffs of Flambourgh Head. The cliffs were riddled with a network of caves naturally formed by the sea over the last hundred thousand years. Only one path led down to the beach and it was wise not to stray too far from it. The sea could easily and quickly cut any inexperienced person off from the only safe escape route. Many souls over the years had perished in this way.

The cave system, so it was said by locals were haunted by the ghosts of pirates trapped and washed out to by the sea.

A sole figure walked alone the beach that cold morning, on his head a pair of headphones, in his hand a metal detector.

John Smith came to the beach most days, for years the stories had been told of long lost treasure washed up on this part of the coast, he wanted to be rich, but he wasn't the sort of man who particular wanted to work and earn his money.

Each time the electronic beep sounded his trowel would furiously dig up the sand, the usual results would be no more then a piece of twisted old metal rusted off of a boat or packing crate. The occasional coin would manifest itself, but never anything more. After one such disappointing find he sighed and looked around. To his right the sea crashed down on the sand and to his left the cliffs rose up into the overcast sky. He was cold and had had enough for today.

If John Smith had have stood on that very spot almost exactly two hundred and fifty years previous a magnificent sight would have met his eyes. A three massed sailing ship hugged the coast line sailing south along the East Coast. The sails were taken in as it prepared to drop anchor off the Flambourgh coast. Its illegal cargo was being readied to be transported ashore and hidden in one of the many cave which served as a bolt hole for the privateers.

The assembled bags and chest of coins were safely secured into the rowing boat when the lookouts voice bellowed, "Gun ship astern." The crew that remained aboard jumped into action. The cannon were manoeuvred to the correct angle and pitch, but as a the Master at

Arms drew in a breath to shout 'fire' the Royal Naval gun ship let off a salvo at the pirates.

The Naval gunners knew their trade well, several balls found their mark. "Return fire." Bellowed Captain Jonathan Price. He stood on the poop deck at the rear of the vessel looking down on his crew, a crew of thieves and cut throats. they were not organised, not sailors. Eventually four cannon fired, their shots well off mark.

Another salvo came in from the damned Navy. The Mizzen mast took a direct hit. With a creek and grown the upper half of it broke off, just above the main sail.

"Look out Captain." Shouted a voice as a screaming man fell off of the falling jib into the sea.

Price looked skyward to see the mast falling toward him, quickly he jumped out of the way, but not quick enough. The mast caught his leg, pinning him down on the deck. He was in agony, the lower half of his right leg had shattered. Just before he past out he could see a small rowing boat making for the shore, "Go on lads." He tried to speak, but couldn't. as his eyes closed the small rowing boat took a direct hit, blowing it out of the water. "I swear no one will have it."

John took off his head set and made for the cliff path, time to go home. A shrill screech emanated from his head set stopped him dead in his tracks. It was fortunate that he wasn't wearing the equipment, the noise would have probably deafened him. The metal detector must have picked something up. Judging by the intensity of then tone it was something big. He moved the metal detector over the area, as he thought it was big.

With his trowel furiously he dug. The metal blade of the tool hit something hard. Scraping the sand off the surface he could see wooden planks bonded together and, yes straps of riveted brass holding them in place.

Such was his concentration on the discovery of the chest he failed to see a figure way off down the beech watching him. The silhouetted figure stood as steady as a rock , how he kept such a good balance was a mystery as the lower half of his right leg appeared to be missing.

Agony ripped through Price's leg as he regained consciousness. He opened his eyes to see unfamiliar surroundings. He was in a room, but alive. Stabs of pain shot up from the lower part of his right leg. Instinctively he tried to sit up from his laying position and grab that part of his anatomy to offer it some kind of comfort.

He couldn't sit up. He was tied down to the bed on which he lay, restrained like a wild animal.

The only part of his body he could move was his head, that at least was not restrained. Looking down his body he could see the source of the pain. The lower half of his right leg was missing, amputated just below the knee joint. Around the stump of the leg was wound a white bandage, most of it coloured red where his own blood had stained it.

Where was he and what had happened to his ship and crew? Most important of all, what had happened to the chest of gold coins, where was that?

By the door of the small room stood a red jacketed army private, standing at ease, on guard. He couldn't be guarding against an escape attempt from Price, even if he could liberate himself from his bonds and overpower the guard, how would he walk out with half a leg missing. He must be there then to stop anyone from entering, was his crew going to mount a rescue attempt? Were his crew at liberty, were they alive?

A knock came from the door. The guard turned and looked through the observation hole. The sentry saluted with a sharp recognition as an officer entered and positioned himself at the end of the bed. "There's a crowd outside Price, shouting for your release. We are popular aren't we. They are calling you the new Robin Hood?"

"Why don't you listen to them and do as they bid?" Price said through gritted teeth. The pain was so great he could hardly speak. The officer smiled at him, "Because your nothing but a common criminal, and your going to hang."

The following morning John Smith took the 8A bus into the town. Hornsea was a small seaside town on the Yorkshire coast,

modest in many ways. Its beach, amusements and town centre all small and rather understated.

Getting off the bus in the main street that ran through the town, John found the shop he was looking for. The doorway was not one he had passed through before. The neighbouring betting offices and fish and chip shops were more his normal haunts.

The owner of the antiques shop watched him enter. Immediately the small bow tied proprietor eyed him with suspicion. The scruffy unshaven man was not his normal clientele and as he entered the aroma of stale beer and cigarettes accompanied him.

“Can I help you?” asked the shop owner. If this unwanted visitor must come into the shop he wanted him where he could be seen at all times.

“Yes,” said John unsure of himself, “I need your help.” From his pocket he took out a white handkerchief. Placing it on the glass topped counter slowly he began to unfold it.

The shop keeper watched his large thick fingers unfolding the piece of cloth, ground in dirt highlighted the cracks and cuts in his hands while his finger nails were black with ingrained dirt.

His opinion of the visitor suddenly changed, as the last fold of white linen was taken off he saw the sparkle of gold.

A golden coin.

He was no expert on coins, but he took a close look at the disk with his magnifying glass. His heart started to race and his breath started to falter, “My God?”

“Is it worth anything?” John asked, it must be to have evoked such a reaction from this little man behind the counter.

“Where did you get it?” suspicion had entered his head, had he stolen it, he had heard no reports of a coin robbery. News such as that soon got around the antiques world, if any stolen goods came onto the market the thief’s could easily be traced.

“I found it, on the beach.” He didn’t mention his metal detector. The law was complicated when it came to such things, best not to say. The shop owner picked up the coin and took a closer look. As he did so he shivered with excitement. Out of the corner of his eye he caught sight of someone looking into the shop window. When he turned to look the figure was not looking into the shop but was on the other side

of the street. It was difficult to make out who it was, the sun was behind him silhouetting the onlooker.

“Well?” asked John excitement in his voice.

“If this is what I think it is, it could be worth anything up to five thousand pounds. Do you have anymore?”

John couldn’t speak. Shock had paralysed his motor functions. He heard himself utter the words, “One or two.” In fact it was probably more like one or two thousand.

He left the shop not knowing what to do. After walking three doors down the road he entered another establishment, one that he frequented on a regular basis, The Dog and Duck.

A crowd had gathered outside York assizes for the announcement of the verdict on the people’s champion. A quiet hum of anticipation circled around the crowd.

Inside the halls of justice Jonathan Price stood accused in the dock, a crotch under his right arm supported his right hand side.

The list of charges were long and numerous, most of them were at least based on fact, but several were an invention of the crown or committed by other parties, he of course denied all charges. What else could he do? The verdict of the Justice Thomas was never in question, before the trial began all knew of his guilt. When His Lordship donned the black cap no one gasped in surprise, least of all Price himself.

The sentence was also another foregone conclusion, to be hung from the neck until dead.

The prisoner was taken away.

A hardly recognisable John Smith stood at the back of Sotheby’s Auction House, London. It was the first time in his life he had worn a suit, his clean shaven and tidy appearance was now going to be the norm.

His treasure trove had an estimated value of 1.5 million pounds and the bidding was fast approaching that mark. The room was full, standing room only, whether the assembled masses were bidding or

just onlookers John couldn't tell. The event had even attracted media interest. A crew from the BBC news were present to record the proceedings. The bidding past its estimated price and raced onto the two million mark, then one of the bidders dropped out.

Two million was a fair price he was happy with that, then as the auctioneer called, "Going, twice..." a nod came from one of the line of men cradling telephones next to their ears.

The bidding was going again.

The three million mark was past, then four, five, six. Eventually the bidding stopped at six and a half million.

Jubilantly John strode up the centre aisle of the auction room to everyone's applause. At the front he shook hands with the auctioneer, thanking him whole heartily for handling the sale.

As he turned to take the applause and leave the sale room he saw framed in the double doors at the rear of the room a silhouetted black figure, the bottom half of his right leg missing.

The sight made him stop and think for a moment, where had he seen him before. He smiled at the bidders in the room, looking around at their happy faces, then turning back to the door whoever it was had now gone. The doorway was empty.

The Nasmire was a large expanse of open land on the outskirts of York. From first light the crowds had started to gather. The centre point to the gathering was a large old oak tree. Over the many hundreds of years it had stood there, it must have seen many events in its life time, but none as gruesome as its latest purpose.

An open topped cart trundled across the land pulled by a single horse. Standing in the back hands tied together was the figure of Jonathan Price. He saw the crowd waiting his presence, waiting for the show to begin.

Under the tree was erected a temporary platform, two steps leading up to it. the cart came to a rest along side of it. as it drew up a rope was thrown around one of the large thick branches of the tree. Price was led up onto the temporary gallows. Defiantly he smiled at the crowd who cheered his name, at least he was dying a hero and would not disappoint. The noose was put around his neck, then it was all over.

His body fell. The neck snapped, Jonathan Price, Pirate, thief, hero was dead.

Over the last few days John Smith had been in the company of a team of documentary makers. The program being filmed was part of a series on treasure seekers, the first program was about the biggest treasure haul ever made in this country. Several locations had been visited during the filming and now on the final day the crew had arrived in York.

A mock up of the hanging of Jonathan Price was scheduled to be the final piece of filming.

The gallows were erected before the camera, sound and make up crews arrived at the location. The director sat in his chair and took a look at the monitors showing each camera picture.

The first shot was of the actor playing Price dismounting the cart. The second and final shot was of the hanging body.

"Where's the body?" someone shouted. A flurry of activity ensued. The camera men lined up the shot as the director made several points of fine tuning. "What's that?" he bellowed. On the monitor he could see the black outline of a man standing away in the distance directly behind the shot, a one legged man. The director stood up looking over the bank of TV screens, "You there, bugger off." He shouted over the field.

One or two of the crew turned to see who he was shouting at. No one was around,, not to be seen in any case.

The director felt somewhat of a fool as he stared into space. He looked back at the monitor, the screen was blank. He sat back in his chair and picked up his plastic cup filled with hot coffee.

A crew member had found the manikin dummy of the famous pirate and was putting its head into the noose.

"Right, lets get it up there then." The director was getting impatient.

As someone pulled on the rope the director watched the process on the monitor.

"Hold it there." He ordered. The legs were framed on the screen, "Perfect." Then the figure was back. "What?" he yelled, "Who is that? They're ruining my shot."

again he jumped up out of his chair and drew in a large lung full of air ready to bellow at the intruder. Then words never came out of his mouth. The figure was gone again, a shiver ran down the back of his neck, was someone playing a joke on him.

He looked at the legs hanging down from the tree, “For Gods sake?” he said out loud, “Who was responsible for making the manikin?” whoever it was would be getting a rocket up their backside, Jonathon Price had the right leg cut off at the knee, this dummy had two full legs.

Slowly he looked up the torso of the hanging body. It swung slightly as it hung down from the branch, then he realised. The figure hanging down was not the mock up body of Jonathon Price, but the face looking down on him was the agonisingly twisted face of John Smith.

The Brake Van

The coal fire burned as the three men sat huddled together around it. Each of them clasped a cup of hot tea, both hands wrapped around it trying to keep them warm. Outside the confines of the small wooden shed which they occupied, the night was a cold one. Snow blew in on the biting easterly wind; the air temperature was well below freezing. On the King George Dock a procession of cranes lifted, scooped and shovelled great buckets full of coal out of ships' holds and onto the waiting railway trucks. The docks were lined with track after track of freight trains arriving and departing with all manner of goods. An endless cacophony of clanks, crashes and bangs echoed around the dock as cranes, lifting gear and trucks knocked against one another. In the shed sat three men, the crew of one of the many trains which would leave the dock that night. Their route was out of the city on the Hull to Barnsley Railway; through the many tunnels which pierced the Wolds, over the Humber then to the steel works of South Yorkshire.

The journey was familiar to all of them; they had travelled the route countless times before.

The driver and fireman chattered in a cheery carefree manner. The main topic of conversation tonight, as it was on most nights, was the rivalry between the two rugby league teams which divided the city down its centre. The discussion came to its usual end with a stalemate, "What do you think Paul?" The driver asked looking for the strains of moral support. Paul like the driver owed his allegiance to the Rovers side of the city. Tonight though, Paul Marson was not listening to the usual banter between friends, his thoughts were with the journey ahead.

One week ago he had sat in the brake van at the rear of the train, nothing unusual in that. That was his job. The job of the brake van was to keep the train taught when coming down a gradient or in the event of braking. By applying the brakes at the rear of the train it would prevent all the trucks or carriages from clattering into one another, or in the worst case, uncoupling.

Inside the van burnt a small fire, sat next to it was an old chair and in the centre a pillar which rose around three feet from the floor;

on it's top a wheel. This piece of equipment was known as the brake wheel which, when turned, applied the brake.

The Hull to Barnsley line was one of many gradients, though on parts of the route all he would do from night to night would be to huddle next to the fire warming his hands. The brake van was completely weather proof unlike the footplate, but for all this protection against the elements, the wind still howled around the wooden van. Doors rattled in the wind while the chimney rising from the small burner would emit strange groaning noises as the wind passed over its exposed top.

It was on one such night as this in the autumn of 1935 that he had experienced something rather strange and unnerving.

“Paul, Paul.”

Paul heard the driver's voice echoing through his head bringing him back to reality, “Sorry, what were you saying?”

His face was pale while on his wrinkled forehead beads of cold sweat glistened in the firelight.

“Are you alright?” the fireman asked. His two concerned colleagues cast a glance at one another. Obviously they felt a note of concern, Paul would be holding the train's safe passage in his hands.

“What?” It looked to them as though he was somewhere else, somewhere far away. Was he ill?

Paul's eyes stared at his two colleagues, “Will it happen again, tonight? Will it happen again?”

Again the two engine operators glanced at one another, “Will what happen, Paul?” The fireman said.

“Don't you see them?”

Both shook their head in disbelief.

The pop of a stray lump of coal jumping out of the fire and landing on the shed floor didn't warrant any reaction from the driver or fireman, it was a minor, common event. Paul's reaction however was most uncommon, he cowered away from the fire, a look of sheer terror on his face.

“Is something troubling you?” The driver's question was a little obvious perhaps, but something was amiss with their good friend and colleague.

“I don't know how much longer I can go on for?”

“With what?” They asked. Paul had made no reference to any problem with his affairs, domestic, health or otherwise.

“This, this run we do. I can’t do it any longer.” His eyes did not look at any point in the room, but elsewhere.

“Do you mean our occupation Paul?”

“I will not set foot in that brake van again as long as I shall live.”

The wind howled around the hut rattling one of the many roof slates. Paul looked around, his eyes desperately searching for something.

“Please,” began the driver, his voice full of sympathy for his unwell friend, “tell us why you cannot go into the van tonight?”

“I fear what will happen to me.”

“Fear, what do you fear Paul?”

“The strange thing is that I don’t know, I don’t know at all.”

Both men were of the same thought, Paul had lost his mind; he was making no sense.

“Is it a problem with the rolling stock, are we in some kind of danger?”

If there was a problem with the train then he wanted to know.

“No, it’s not that.”

“Then tell us, we can help you in someway.” His other colleague insisted.

“If I told you, then you would think me mad.” Paul grunted.

A pause followed the latest exchange of words and Paul was unwilling to continue the conversation. It came as a relief to the other two present when the guard finally spoke again.

“A month ago,” Paul began, he didn’t look up at them, instead, his eyes stared into the fire. “As we came out of the town, I had an uneasy feeling. As we passed through Kirkella the feeling grew.

I sat by the fire, that part of the line being free from gradients. There was no wind that night, nor rain, but all of a sudden I felt a whoosh rush past me, and through me then a light passed me, then...

Then it was all over.” He paused for a moment. As the driver opened his mouth to speak Paul continued, “The journey that night continued without incident.”

“So what do you think it was then, this strange occurrence?” the fireman humoured him, already he had come to the conclusion that the guard was out of his mind.

“Then I didn’t know.”

“Do you now?”

“I know more than I knew then.” Up to that point Paul had sat with his oil and coal covered hands clamped around his cup of tea leaning forward, but now he sat back in the chair. Looking a little more relaxed now as though a burden had been removed from his shoulders he prepared to continue the tale.

Outside the snow was still driving in from the east. A freezing wind blew the crates wayward as the line of cranes lifted them off the great cargo ships and onto the waiting transports.

“On our next trip, two nights later I watched the line behind us disappear into the night from the warmth of my van. As usual we passed through Kirkella Station and thought little of the previous trip’s events. When the sign bell rang my mind was wholly back on my work.” The sign bell was the only form of communication between the engine and the brake van. In the normal course of events the braking pattern of a set journey would be well known to both driver and guard. On occasion though, work on the line could involve the train breaking in other places as well as the routing locations. “I turned the wheel, feeling the vibration of the rail joints slowing down; I knew that braking would soon be over. As you know we almost stopped dead before entering Little Weighton.”

“Yes I do.” Remembered the driver.

“Well, that’s where it happened. This was the second of three events so far on that stretch of the line. As we slowed, from the corner of my eye I thought I saw someone pass through the van. I say pass because that is what the figure did, pass, not walk. I don’t know how, but I am certain that the figure was a woman, in a dress. Yes a cream coloured dress, with small blue flowers and a blue hem.”

“You saw her *pass* through the van?” the fireman asked.

“It was the strangest thing... but then all of a sudden many more people came into the van. They all looked at me with mournful expressions. Their faces blackened, clothes burnt and ripped, they all looked toward me for help, I could offer nothing.”

A moment of quiet reflection followed as outside a bell tolled as though summoning a mourner to a funeral, it was only a ship. Inside, the flames of the fire danced on the faces of the three assembled friends. Moments later Paul sighed readying himself to tell of the next part of his experiences.

“Two nights ago,” he began again, only pausing to take a mouthful of tea, “We made the same journey again. I was hopeful that we didn’t slow down on the approach to Little Weighton. I said a silent pray to myself asking that we wouldn’t see anything tonight.

We passed through Hull without incident and then at Kirkella we stopped. I had hoped that that would be the last stop of the night. Had the works that had stopped us outside Weighton now moved down the line to Kirkella? I hoped they had. For nearly twenty minutes we stopped there, I tried to occupy my mind with all manner of thoughts, rugby mainly. When I heard the engine get up steam I breathed a sigh of relief. My van lurched forward and we were off once again onto the coal fields of South Yorkshire, I hoped. To my horror as we made the approach to the spot I had dreaded the signal came to brake. Of course I was given no option but to brake. We slowed right down to all but a crawl. As happened before the women appeared, then the assembled distressed phantasmagoria. I stood paralysed, the backs of my legs burning against the fire, but the air all around was ice cold. Slowly they turned to look at me and in unison extended an arm toward me. On the end of each arm was an open palmed hand, a gesture pleading for help. A chill ran through my body as they all drifted toward me. The train was moving, how I knew this I did not know, all I saw was those white faces. I edged away until my back was against the door; I fumbled around searching for the door handle. My hand couldn’t find it, panic overcame me, at that point I was desperate with fright. As my hand found the handle, the van lurched forward, the motion threw me against the back wall, the sudden jolt had no effect on the spirits. As the train picked up speed the phantoms vanished through the back wall, through it and through me.” Marson was obviously affected by the telling of the tale and began to shake involuntarily where he sat.

The fireman took the kettle off the burner and refilled Paul’s enamel mug.

“That was the last trip. Is there any wonder I hesitate to make the trip tonight?”

“What do you think it was?” asked the fireman, putting the kettle back down on the stove.

“I don’t know, but it wasn’t anything natural, and they were coming for me. I know that for sure.”

“Why would that be?” it was the first time the driver had spoken for several minutes.

The guard said nothing, but hid his face in the tin cup.

“Well, I’m afraid,” the driver continued sighing and putting his own cup down, “you’ll have to do the run tonight, there is no one else available.” He stood up and put his hat on. The fireman followed his lead, slowly standing up he too put on his cap, but shot a concerned look across at the driver.

He returned the look and thought for a second, “Paul, do the run tonight then tomorrow I will make sure you are transferred to another route.” Calmly he waited a response.

Paul grunted a response of acknowledgement.

Outside the driver, fireman and guard battled through the driving snow carrying out their routine checks before the journey. Once all the couplings, valves and links were checked, Paul made off to the rear of the long train and his brake van. In his hand he carried the lamp to be fastened to the rear. An eerie red glow shone out through the driving snow before disappearing into the van.

The two engine crew watched him disappear into the clouds of swirling snow, “What was all that about?” asked the fireman. The driver looked at the snow covered chippings under his boots but said nothing before climbing into the cab.

Paul arrived at the rear of the train, red light in hand he hooked the lamp onto the back of the van before climbing on board. Cutting himself off from the elements he sat huddled next to the fire and attempted not to think of the journey ahead.

“Paul has not always just been a guard on this railway.” The driver told his colleague as he checked the steam pressure valves. “No; once he worked this route in a different capacity. He was a driver of some experience.” All the time he spoke his eyes did not

once look directly at the fireman. Instinctively his colleague knew a tale of tragedy was coming.

“So why does he now sit in the brake van?”

For a second the driver thought and released a regulator lever. A blast of steam blew from one of the exhaust points on the side of the engine. As he opened his mouth to speak the wind direction changed and a snowy blast came through the cab. Both men turned their backs against it, shielding their faces.

“It was a snowy night similar to this one, about two years since. Paul was taking a special passenger train to South Cave. Because of the snow, traffic was moving slowly and in the blizzard he missed the red signal. The passenger train passed through the red light at full speed and hit a coal train. All the passengers were killed in the crash, many were burnt to death in the fire that followed. Oil from the carriage lamps mixed with a ruptured gas main which one of the bogies hit, it ran alongside the line you see.” Again he paused deep in thought as he recalled seeing Paul moments earlier walking away into the blizzard carrying the red lamp, “I think his nightmares have returned to haunt him.”

“So what happened after?”

“He was found to be,” he whipped his hands on a rag, “not wholly responsible for the crash, the weather was particular bad and there was a rumour, never confirmed, but the light on the signal was said to be faulty. Whether it was or not, well the enquiry never mentioned it in the report.”

“So he kept his job, but as a guard.” The fireman now understood.

A whistle blew somewhere on the snow bound dock.

The driver looked through the porthole and saw the signal drop. Looking back toward the brake van Paul was waving his green flag. Several huge plumes of greying smoke and steam puffed out of the funnel as the engine lurched forward.

In the brake van Marson felt the jolt, he closed his eyes and said a prayer.

The engine ran through the blinding snow pulling the coal wagons along behind it, on occasion it slowed down to receive reports from the signaller on the weather conditions up ahead. The train

thundered across the railway bridge spanning the River Hull then out toward the suburban provinces and the stark barren Yorkshire Wolds. Paul took a look out of the back door into the night. Illuminated by the snow the station house at Kirkella flashed past, on the platform he noticed a single silhouetted figure watching the train.

Quickly he stepped aside out of the view of the door, his eyes so wide they looked as though they would fall from their sockets.

The Station Master at Kirkella watched the coal train roll through then returned to the comfort of the station house.

Paul took a tentative look out of the window, the dark figure had gone. He contented himself by sitting huddled; foetal like nestled to the stove.

He waited, the train travelled at speed, no signal had come to brake, maybe tonight the nightmare would not come, was it over? Could that dark figure in the snow be saying a farewell to him and his haunting.

In the engine room the driver saw the red light, "These workmen are taking their time," he said turning to the firemen while easing off the regulator, "signal Paul."

In the brake van the bell rang.

Paul's eyes shot up to look at the golden coloured bell mounted on the wall of the van.

The train slowed, as a workman appeared in the swirling snow brandishing a lamp in his hand, a red glow circled it and illuminated the man's rugged features.

"Dead slow," he shouted up at the cab, "all done, but still men on the line dropping chippings."

"Right you are." The driver replied touching the peak of his cap in recognition.

Paul was huddled in a corner of the van, knees up to his chest, eyes buried between torso and thighs. He couldn't take the tension any longer; curiosity was getting the better of him. Looking up he saw, nothing. Slowly he lifted himself to his feet and took a tentative look out of the rear door.

All he saw was flakes of snow reflecting the van's rear light, that was until a second red light came into view. Suddenly he shuddered and jumped to the right of the door.

With his breath becoming heavier and heavier he looked at the far end of the van. The fire had burnt low, the temperature in the confines of the cell was cold and it was getting colder.

Then as had happened on the previous journeys the pained looking woman glided in through the front wall. His breathing changed from deep and heavy to not at all; he couldn't catch his breath, his whole attention was on that woman before him.

She moved toward him, her face pale, eyes dead. The rest of the assembled phantoms followed her. After a moment's pause they all, as before, raised their arms holding out an open palm.

Paul's breath returned, only now it was rapid and irregular, he could stand it no longer, "What do you want with me?" he called, so loudly and desperately that even the men on the line raised their heads to see who had called out in the dark.

A single word came back to Marson, "Help!" the word was spoken by all, but none of them had opened their mouth.

"Help?" What can I do, how can I help?" he was slowly moving toward the door.

"You..." came the response.

His hand found the door handle. He turned it pushing the door open, a cold blast of wind driven snow blew in, the phantoms were not affected, they did not relent.

"Me, what can I do to help you?" he took a step back out onto the veranda, out into the cold night.

"You," they continued, "you sent us here."

"No, no" screamed Paul.

The train slowly started to pull away. As it did the uninvited guests in the break van began to approach the guard. As they moved closer he took another step back. The rail which ran around the open part of the van jabbed into the small of his back.

He steadied himself; one hand grabbed the snow covered wooden hand rail. Now he was trapped, the phantoms moved closer.

"You killed us." They said in unison.

"No, no, I didn't see the light, I didn't see the light."

The van lurched, the suspended red light swung, he turned to see what it was next to him, though only the lamp, now everything put his mind into turmoil.

The lamp struck him on the side of the head, the dead moved closer.

He felt himself fall, then cold. The cold sleepers beneath him were like stone, the chippings which dug into his legs and arms like icicles piercing him. Looking up he saw the brake van light slowly disappearing into the snowy night.

As his head dropped against the cold sleeper for the last time he heard the whistle of an approaching engine, it was travelling at speed toward him...

... even though the signal was at red.

The Chimes at Midnight

Rain beat against the window pain that dark night. Craig Paull lay recumbent on the sofa, he drifted in and out of consciousness. On the arm sat an almost empty glass of Irish Whisky. He was comfortable and warm. The television was on, the light from it danced all around the room, mixing and merging with the twinkling lights on the Christmas Tree.

This year he wasn't going to be bothering with many decorations, but thought it would be beneficial to keep the old traditions alive to a certain extent.

Craig was finding it difficult to remain conscious, though he did not want to move, here he was warm, bed would be cold.

The lunchtime lager had had more than an effect on his continuity now and at this late hour he was beginning to flag somewhat.

Christmas was the worst time for those living alone, he knew that. He had considered going away for the festive period but then decided against it.

A lump came to his throat as he remembered only one short year before, two sacks of toys sat in front of the fireplace just there before him, coloured gift wrapped boxes peeking out of the tops. His wife had already gone to bed and he was watching the Ghost Story for Christmas session on one of the many BBC channels.

Then his world had been torn in two when the car carrying his immediate family had run off the road following a blown out tyre. The fire that ensued killed them all.

Less than a year ago, but it all seemed like a dream now, a dream he could not awake from. Was he asleep now or awake? He didn't know exactly.

This year's re run ghost story was 'The Signalman', Dickens great classic, and his favourite. He just managed to find the remote and turn over the channel for the late 'Carry On' film which would inevitably be on the TV in the small hours of that Christmas morning.

The channel changed he could now relax again. Finding the arm outline on the sofa again he watched through narrow eyes.

Warm, comfortable, happy?

The voice from the TV announced, “and now we go over to Liverpool Cathedral for Midnight Ma...” he heard nothing more.

When he opened his eyes again a feeling of confusion swept over him. Where was he? What time was it?

The room looked different, the decorations he hadn’t put up were now hanging up. He must have put them up after all. Something was different, he could not quite put his finger on it though. The TV was still on, now showing children’s programs. His eyes panned around to the clock on the wall. His eyes strained as he tried to focus on the time piece.

His vision was blurred somewhat, but he could see a red light shining through from the kitchen, the oven was on. Why had the oven come on? Slowly he swung his stiff legs around off the sofa and onto the floor.

He rubbed his eyes and focused again on the clock. One thing was for sure, he’d missed the Carry On film.

“Oh no, six o’clock.” Six in the morning on Christmas day, he was cold, mouth dry.

His sock covered left foot could feel something. Whatever it was soft. Slowly he looked down toward his feet, through his half open eyes he could see two sacks full of brightly wrapped presents, just like... Before his mind could register he heard a noise, the sound was a door closing. A look of shock came to his confused facial expression as the living room door opened and his two children ran into the room, followed slowly by his wife.

All were dressed in their dressing gowns and all wore smiles on their faces.

“You soft thing,” said the women looking down on him. The soft voice of his wife was like a gentle caress on his soul, it was something he thought he would never hear again.

“What, sorry I...”

“Don’t worry,” she said, “I told you I’d do the veggies today. You didn’t have to stay up all night doing them.”

He tried so hard to remember the previous evening. He couldn’t recall peeling or chopping any vegetables, he couldn’t remember anything apart from the pub at lunch time then watching Carols from Kings at around 3pm. Was the memory of that yesterday gone or was it

the last year as he recall it, was all that a dream? Surely now, in the here and now it must have been.

"I'll put the coffee on," she said opening the door which lead to the kitchen. The slightest hum of the oven could be heard, it had switched itself on, ready no doubt for the dinner to be cooked.

The children had already set about the presents assembled in their relevant sacks, several now were already open. Wrapping paper now lay strewn across the floor.

The woman returned from the kitchen two cups of coffee in her hands one of which she passed over to her husband. Sitting on the arm of the sofa her hand on Craig's right shoulder and watched the two excited children opening their presents. Craig felt the hand touch him and rejoiced in the feeling, all was well again.

He took a sip of his coffee, it was too hot to drink. "Happy Christmas Dear," she said handing him a small wrapped box.

Still in a state of shock he unwrapped the gift. Under the paper was a box. He took off the lid and peered inside.

"It's to replace the one that got broken." said a soft voice in his ear.

In the box was a brass compass engraved under the lid with the words, 'love from Amanda, Rebecca and Joseph'

The children were already playing with their new toys, Amanda had drifted off now into the kitchen again. On the TV the children's programs had finished and the voice was announcing the programs for the rest of that day.

Presents, what had he bought for his wife? He must have bought something, where was it? What was it? Frantically his head turned through so many memories or at least the lack of them. What had he bought her?

Craig stared at the children playing on the floor. Christmas had always had an unmistakable smell in his mind. That smell was plastic. When the plastic packaging which invertible comes around all manner of toys has a smell all of its own when removed. Why was that? He could not say, but it had. That smell was as integral to the season as the aroma of pine needles and roasting turkey.

Taking another sip of his coffee he became aware of a lump in his dressing gown pocket. Putting in his hand he pulled out a small box. The box was gift wrapped and labelled. The label was marked with

Amanda's name. Moments later he stood framed in the kitchen doorway.

Dotted around the worktops were various bowls of water covered chopped vegetables, enough to feed an army. "What time did you finish doing this lot last night?"

Nothing would have pleased him more than to have an answer for the question, but he hadn't, instead he handed her the box found in his pocket, "Happy Christmas." he said to her.

"Thank you." She replied taking off the wrapping paper in the neat and organised fashion as she always did. Beneath the paper lay a felt covered jewellery box. Slowly her fingers opened it revealing a necklace, the pendant containing a single diamond.

His heart settled into a rhythmic beat once again, he was so glad she liked it and even more thankful that there had been something in it. After a kiss on the cheek she sent him back into the living room where he sat back down and watched his two offspring playing.

The late night was catching up with him now and he could feel his eye lids slowly becoming heavier and heavier.

"and now on this Christmas morning," the continuity announcer said, telling the TV viewing world the next morning, "we go over to St Paul's for..."

His eyes closed, but he could still hear the TV, "... for Midnight Mass."

What? Midnight, midnight was... he forced open his eyes...

The room was dark, the smell of plastic no longer filled the room, the hum of the oven was gone. The cup of coffee which occupied the arm of the settee next to him was also gone, replaced by a tumbler of whisky.

The light from the TV scene mixed with the winking tree lights. The clock on the wall betrayed the reality of the time, midnight.

His heart sank, had it all been a dream? He felt awful. Downing the remainder of the whisky he decided that the time had come to go to bed. As his foot felt around the floor for his slipper it found something else. Whatever it was, it was hard and cold. Looking down he struggled to focus on the small round object.

Craig reached down to pick the object up, but suddenly stopped. Something was stopping him, was it fear.

At his feet lay a brass compass. It was with a shaking hand that he picked it up, dare he look inside under the lid?

The case opened with a click. Inside were inscribed the words, 'Love from Amanda, Rebecca and Joseph.'

The Division Bell.

The hotel bar had an aroma of coffee about it. Though it was the height of summer the room was cool, the air conditioning cancelling out the summer heat. The lunchtime rush was over now and no more than a dozen people remained in the bar. The customers and residents were made up of suited business men, women out for a day's retail therapy, miscellaneous pairs and single participants.

At the bar stood a middle aged man, his clothes were rather shabby as was the strip of hair which wrapped around the back of his head connected each of his ears. On his feet a pair of old trainers, laces untied.

The barman presumed that he must be an inventor or some kind of mad scientist, his wallet was full of notes though he noticed. Sat a table two women in their twenties both partake in a glass of wine. Around them were numerous shopping bags all bearing a designer insignia on their exterior?

Seated on a quartet of leather sofas and arm chairs the suited men sat talking at length on such things as sales figures, projected targets and golf. Above them a plasma screen TV was showing News 24 with reports on the latest fighting in the Middle East.

In the centre of the room two men in their fifties sat back in a satisfactory slouch after their considerable lunch. Like the business men in the corner these two men were part of a considerable large product, though have probably more money between them than the suited men's company would turn over in one year.

The pair hadn't seen one another for a while so the lunch was a good excuse to meet up again and discuss the future. They had talked around the merits of keeping things as they were, after all people still wanted that, but could they move forward? The thought of trying new material was exciting, but would it succeed?

They were old and established, their name sold whatever they decided to produce. "So," began Dave, "we keep it very similar?" it had been an easy decision to come too, they already knew in their hearts it would be so.

"I think Nick would be happy with that."

It was at this point that the eventual question arose, it was Richard who tentatively approached the subject, he craved a cigarette, but of course everywhere these days was non smoking. "What about Roger, do you think..?"

Roger had returned into the orbit of his old friends briefly a year previous and it had been good to have him back in the fold, but they both realised that it had been too long without him. They had moved on as they had done before. The founders name was never mentioned these days, he would never be back.

The hotel bar was almost empty now. The business men had left, returning to their offices no doubt and the two designer shoppers were making towards the door.

Dave was conscious of the man at the bar watching them, there was nothing unusual about that, he was quite often recognised and had learnt to live with it, though it still made him a little uncomfortable. "So, when?" Richard asked.

The question drifted over Dave's head, he was trying to keep an eye on the man at the bar, but not trying to look as though he was. He had a strange feeling that they had met before, but couldn't place him. It would come to him in time.

"Dave," Richard said attracting his old friend's attention back to him.

"I'm sorry," Dave replied looking back toward his friend and colleague. "What were you saying?"

As Richard repeated himself Dave felt a vibration in his pocket, he had received a text message. Before he had chance to answer the man from the bar had situated himself behind Richards chair, who jumped a little as the mans hands lightly clamp down on his shoulders.

"Dave?" said the new arrival, his voice was slightly rough, but intriguingly attractive, "I just wanted to say before I go, that you were more than an admiral replacement."

Dave opened his mouth to answer, but nothing came out.

"And Richard, I had to see you once more."

Richard shivered, who was this, he could not tell, not looking from this angle.

“Oh yes,” said the stranger, “say hello to nick for me, and try to patch it up with Roger. Life’s too short you know.”

Another shiver ran down Richards’s spine, he had the strangest feeling that he knew who it was standing behind him, no, no it couldn’t be, could it? He turned to have a look at the mans face, he *had* recognised the voice.

As he did Dave had taken the mobile phone out of his pocket and read the message, it was from his wife. As he read it a state of shock came over him. He read the message twice such was his disbelief. Slowly he looked up at Richard.

His friend was staring at the stranger when he heard David’s voice, “Richard, its Syd...”

Richard could see that, joy filled his heart for many years he had waited for this day.

“...he’s dead.”

Shocked, his mouth dried, “But?” he knew that their old friend and founder member was standing behind him now. After a moment to compose himself he jumped to his feet and turned to face Syd.

The man who had just lightly held his shoulders was gone. On the plasma screen suspended on the wall a News 24 was showing a picture of Syd announcing to the world that Syd Barrett had died earlier that day at home in Cambridge.

The Drummer Boy's Ghost.

The summer that year was particularly hot. Throughout the month of July the sun blazed down. The harvest had already started; wheat, barley and corn were being threshed and bailed while the farmers mopped their brows and waited for the next hay bail to fall out of the combines.

Dogs took full advantage of the many streams and rivers that criss-crossed the Yorkshire Wolds as did their owners. During the height of the heat wave walkers were seldom seen traversing the footpaths and bridleways which ran every which way across the ordnance survey maps.

Out of the heat haze two ramblers slowly appeared. Their bodies shimmering as the haze rose from the grassy bank of the River Derwent. Both were in their mid twenties; Lee was a well built young man reaching almost six feet in height. On his back was perched a large heavy ruck sack. Catherine was of a tall athletic build, her shoulder length blond hair tied up in pony tail. The burden on her own back was now becoming intolerable. Both struggled to climb the last stile before making the final ascent onto the bridge.

Catherine dropped down onto a bench which adorned the pavement and soon Lee was sitting alongside her. Both drank heavily from their water packs. Occasionally a car would rush past them causing a draft of air. For a brief moment a cool blissful wind would pass over their skin, all too quickly though it would be gone.

Four o'clock had come and gone, the sun though was still high in the clear azure sky, its heat still strong.

After a few moments of relaxation Lee took out his OS Map and unfolded it to the correct place. "There you see..." he said showing the map to Catherine, "we're just here." He enforced the position by pointing his index finger gently on the map.

"So we are." Replied an exhausted Catherine. "that's it for today then?"

"Oh yes, that's it." Lee paused, "Well apart from getting to the camp site."

"And how far is that?" she asked interrupting her drink.

"Not far, half a mile or so through the village."

Lee stood up and hooked his ruck-sack on his sweaty back. The perspiration was cold against his skin, the shock causing him to take in a sharp breath. Catherine held up a hand, she was now lacking the strength to stand up unaided.

Slowly the pair of young walkers made off toward the medieval church. The church had stood there for many centuries. It served as a local landmark for travellers and a sign post for vessels coming up river packed with goods for the weekly market. Headstones littered the surrounding yard, some told of the inhabitants of the village, but most were now illegible. Nothing though told passing travellers that this, the main grave yard was not the only place where collections of human bones could be located. There was somewhere much more heavily populated with the memories of the fallen.

As Lee took off his heavy ruck-sack for the last time that day he sat down on warm grass and took out his map. Catherine's shadow eclipsed him as she too arrived at the finishing point for the day. Looking around she scanned the field for any signs of life. Through the haze she could see, well nothing. A hedgerow surrounded the field and in it only grass. A pylon holding aloft electric cables towered above them in the adjacent field and behind them rows of new houses imitated rows of shoe boxes. "Are you sure this is the right place?" she asked. Catherine had expected to see a field brimming with tents of all shapes and sizes not to mention campers and walkers all busying themselves cooking bacon on small gas stoves.

Lee was laying his map out on the ground and lining up the blue longitudinal grid lines with the north to south reading on his compass. Catherine sat down beside him. Both studied the map and came to the conclusion that they were in the right field, with the excessive heat of the afternoon, hunger and fatigue from the walk they didn't really care, whether the location was correct or not. It was after all a place to pitch the tent for the night. The last stretch of the walk was looming the next day.

An hour later the hot sweltering day was turning into a warm evening. A meal of an all day breakfast, straight from the tin left them feeling much refreshed. Both Catherine and Lee sat in the open flap entrance to the tent. Inside the canvas the air was hot and dead, the prospect of staying in it for the night wasn't Catherine's ideal idea

of an evening in. “We passed a pub earlier, didn’t we?” The question was loaded, Lee never missed a pub and she knew that he wouldn’t need asking a second time.

“We did. Fancy a drink?” He was already pulling on his boots. Each blister on his feet throbbed as the boot passed over them. Still the pain was well worth the effort if a drink was the ultimate goal. A cool breeze greeted their faces as they stepped out of the pub’s double front doors. The sky was black, apart from a thin bead of light that ran along the western horizon. In only a matter of four hours the sun would be rising in the east. Catherine looked up into the night sky. The moon was full and the stars bright. Both had consumed far too much real ale considering the planned early start the next morning. Slowly and with much effort they meandered back to their tent. On arrival they were soon asleep in the red sleeping bags which ran almost the full length of the tent.

The moon was full, the light reflected from its surface cast well defined shadows across the land. The creatures of the night ran in and out of the hedgerows and copse, all of them alert to each other and the dangers of predators or from something else in the field that night. Catherine woke with a start. She sat up and fumbled around for her watch. The face of the time piece glowed an eerie green in the dark. Her breathing was erratic, some noise had woken her, what was it? Next to her Lee omitted a loud snore. So that’s what had woken her, too much beer. It was always the same following an evening in the pub, a night of broken sleep for her, but not for him.

As the next guttural snore began to rumble up from Lee’s mouth Catherine leaned over and with her thumb and fore finger squeezed his nostrils together. Immediately she returned her bare arm back into the warmth of her sleeping bag while Lee coughed and grunted for a moment before settling back into a rhythmic sleep.

Breathing a sigh of relief Catherine also lay her head back down. Sleep was not forthcoming. She was aware of some distant noise. It wasn’t the usual countryside noise; she was well used to the hoot of owls and the snaffling of hedgehogs, even the grunting cry of the badger. None of these were known to phase her. This noise was something else. The sound was familiar, so familiar she couldn’t

place it. That was it, it came to her in a flash. The noise was out of place, it didn't belong in this environment at all.

While still pondering over the noise another sound eclipsed the original noise. Rapid thumping, a horse, a horse galloping. The sound became louder. A horse must be out for a midnight run, she thought. As long as it didn't come near the tent. The sound of hooves thumping turf slowly subsided. Catherine's heavy eyes began to close as that strange noise returned, but now it was increasing in volume. Was she imagining it or not? The sound was like a drum beat, a slow rhythmic beat.

"Go to sleep." She told herself, but couldn't.

The beat became louder and as it did the sound of voices came into range. What the hell was going on?

Catherine froze. She dare not move, who was outside? From the distant murmur she tried to estimate how many people were advancing on the field. As the voices came nearer it was obvious that there were numerous. Horses' hooves thundered past the tent as the voices became louder. Out of the corner of her eye something moved. Someone had passed over the outer skin of the tent, the moonlight casting a shadow on the canvas.

This was enough, Catherine shook Lee's body whispering, "Wake up, wake up."

As he started to stir, multiple shadows were projected onto the tent, the sound of voices were clear as was the sound of the drum, still banging out the same beat. Horses' hooves and the clank of metal on metal also rang in their ears.

"What is it?" A disorientated Lee asked, scratching his head. His mouth was dry, an awful taste was left in his mouth, the remainder of the last night's drinking.

"Listen?" Hissed Catherine, now white with fear.

Lee listened, and heard. What was going on outside? Were a group of hooligans going to attack them were they lay? What was the noise?

Suddenly all fell silent. Catherine clasped her arms around her boyfriend, fear had total hold over her. The silence remained for several long moments then...

A whole cacophony of sounds erupted around them, men's voices shouted in strange languages, metal crashed against metal, screams, horses, the sound of the horses footsteps sounded as though they were in the tent with them. The moonlight flickered and danced on the canvas. Lee grabbed his ruck-sack and took out his pocket knife. Catherine looked at him in amazement, "What are you doing?" She was almost pleading with him.

"I'm going to see what's going on." As he told her his plan his legs were swinging out of the sleeping bag.

Lee opened the blade of his knife and unzipped the entrance flap.

He looked out into the dark night, from behind him he could feel Catherine hanging onto his legs in terror. As he looked around he surveyed the moonlit landscape, all around was quiet. Not a living creature, man nor beast, could be seen.

Crawling out of the tent he stood and looked around. He could feel the cool air causing goose bumps to form on his naked legs.

The field was empty.

Lee zipped the tent and returned to his still warm sleeping bag. Catherine looked at him amazed, "Well?" what had been outside, was he not going to tell her?

"What?" he yawned.

"What's going on out there?"

"Nothing, it must have been a dream."

Catherine knew it was no dream. For the rest of the night she lay awake staring at the moonlight on the canvas.

The next morning was a fine sunny one. The sun's warming rays touched Lee's face as he stood drinking the cup of tea resonantly made on the small gas stove. As he looked around, the memories of the early hours of that day repeated themselves in his mind.

Catherine remained in the tent, her white hand clamped around her own cup. Lee took a breath of clean morning air and contemplated the day's walking ahead. The route they were taking took them York to Beverley, The Minster Way, fifty one miles in total, twenty of

which were already completed, another twenty to be walked today. A voice echoing in the morning mist took him away from his thoughts.

“Morning.” Said the old gruff voice.

Lee spun around to see a man of around fifty approaching them.

“Morning.” Lee replied.

“I was wondering what had happened to you.”

“Why's that?” Lee took another mouthful of tea, “Would you like a cup?” Lee said offering the cup towards the newcomer.

“No thanks young man. You booked to camp in my field?”

“Yes.”

The man smiled, “Wrong field. The camp sites other side of the copse.” He said gesturing towards a collection of trees about half a mile away.

“Oh sorry.”

“No problem young ‘un, I own this field too, but don’t normally let campers in, they never stay long.”

With that strange remark the farmer turned on his heels and walked off back into the morning mist.

Catherine climbed over the stile at the entrance to the field, she was a good fifty yards in front of Lee who was still putting on his ruck-sack. She wanted to be out of there as quickly as possible. As she waited for him something caught her eye.

Wandering over to a plinth she looked at the plaque which was secured by four brass screws.

Lee dismounted the stile, when he looked over at Catherine he could see that her attention was transfixed on the object she was leaning on.

Slowly he walked up to her and looked over her shoulder at the engraved plaque.

It read...

Stamford Bridge
Site of Battle
1066

The Erroneous Judgement

“This story was inspired by a wet day on Lindisfarne, somewhere I suggest you do not visit in the rain”

NW.

The island of Lindisfarne on the Northumberland coast has, over the years, been the source of many stories regarding the supernatural. Its history is littered with tales of monks from the priory dying in unnatural circumstances, strange goings on in the castle and sailors from the small fleet of crab catchers being lost at sea.

Nobby Harper sat in the dinning room of the small bed and breakfast; in front of him sat a plate containing a full English breakfast. The fare was that plentiful that the bacon teetered on the edge of the plate almost falling onto the white table cloth. The smell of the cooked breakfast reminded him that he was on home turf. He had recently returned home from the Great War and had tried to forget the nightmarish events that he had experienced in the trenches of France, this trip he hoped would put a closure to that particular part of his life.

“You here on holiday then?” asked the landlord of the B&B as he carried in a toast rack filling the room with the smell of warm toast.

“Sort of.” Nobby replied. “I’m here to visit someone.” He didn’t want to be drawn into a conversation on why he was here, it was too much of a personal matter.

He wasn’t sure why but he had to see his old commanding officer’s grave to make sure he was dead.

As the landlord, a large wild haired man, probably an ex-fisherman Nobby thought, put the toast down on the table he paused before returning to his vertical stance. His attention was drawn by the regimental badge on Nobbys' tie. It was the emblem of the local regiment, the Lindisfarne Fusiliers. You were in the Fusiliers I see.” said the landlord looking down on the seated guest.

“Yes I, that was my regiment.”

“You knew Captain Armstrong then?”

“Oh yes, he was my commanding officer.”

“You’ll know all about how he was killed then?”

“Not really; as far as I know he was killed by a sniper, taken out while lighting a cigarette.”

“There was an official inquiry you know.” The landlord said in a stern voice.

“We only heard whispers. You don’t know how it was in the trenches. It was cold, wet, we were never told anything of what was happening in the outside world. People would leave to fetch supplies and we would never see them again, hit by a shell whilst working their way back from the front.” He paused for moment before continuing, “It was the worst place on Earth, if you avoided the bullets, chances were that you would go mad with the continuous firing of the guns; you can’t imagine what it was like.” Nobby stared into space as he remembered the terrible ordeals in the trenches.

The landlord felt a twinge of guilt at using such a sharp tone on the veteran, “It’s just that Arthur was well liked here on the island. Rumour was that his wounds could not have been caused by any German sniper, he was shot three times in the stomach. The inquest found that the bullets taken out of him were from a British pistol.

He came back a hero, but a dead hero is no good to anyone.”

Nobby slowly nodded his head in silent reflection, “That’s why I’m here, to visit his grave.”

In the kitchen the landlady was closing the lid on Nobby’s packed lunch. She listened to the conversation between her husband and paying guest with some interest. She had known Arthur Armstrong since he was a babe in arms and she had been hurt more than most on hearing of his death.

She carried the tin box out into the dinning room and carefully placed it next to the now half empty breakfast plate. “You knew the late Captain then?”

“Yes, I was just telling your husband, I was his Sergeant.”

“Oh it was awful, there were rumours that he was giving the Germans secret information. I have never heard anything so outrageous in my life. He was one of the finest young men you could ever meet.” Tears began to swell in her eyes and she found it difficult

to talk. "He won't rest well in his grave, not until his murderer is brought to justice."

Her husband placed a reassuring hand on her arm. She took a tissue out of the front pocket of her piny and held it up to her face, the soft white paper covered her mouth and the lower part of her nose.

"Many awful things happened in those dark days in the trenches."

With his lunch box safely packed in his rucksack, he set off on his bicycle down towards the sea shore. The sun was shining; reflecting on the sea in between the small collection of fishing boats. The bicycle came to a halt and he looked around the natural harbour; a haze hung over the water making him involuntarily narrow his eyes. Turning to his left he could see his destination. At the end of the spit of land that reached out into the sea, high on the outcrop of rock sat the castle. It sent his thoughts back to his childhood when he had read the novel Dracula. The castle he now looked at was just how he had imagined the castle in Bram Stoker's story.

Dismounting his ride, he pushed the machine up the steep cobbled hill. The air was thin today and he was quite breathless on reaching the top.

Leaving his bicycle against one of the huts made from the upturned hull of an old boat he made his way up yet another up hill path to the castle entrance.

The interior of the castle was cool, a slight smell of damp met his nostrils as he entered the various rooms.

Climbing a staircase he noticed a doorway marked 'Upper Terrace'. He opened the door and stepped into the sunlight. From that high vantage point he could see most of the island. Following the line of the outcrop of land he had cycled along he could clearly see the ruins of the priory and beyond the huddled together houses, then the church. The church was his next calling point.

He took a deep breath of air and looked down at the small people walking both to and from the castle.

One figure didn't walk either way, it just looked towards it. Nobby couldn't make out whether it was a man or woman, the heat haze blurred the image. A shiver ran down his spine. He heard the

door which led back into the interior of the building close and he knew someone else has joined him outside in the sunlight. He turned to see who the newcomer was, but no one was there. They must have changed their mind about coming outside he thought.

Turning to gaze again at the view of the island he noticed that the figure that had stood watching the castle had now gone.

His mind returned to the conversation from breakfast. He hadn't told his hosts all he knew of the late Captain's death. He knew precisely what had happened that dark day in October 1918.

Rumours were rife that secret information on such things as battle plans and troop movements were finding their way into enemy hands. The source of the leak had eluded the command for several months until purely by chance Nobby was talking to a Private who served as the Captain's secretary.

The man in his mid thirties was attaching messages to the rings on pigeon's legs then letting them fly away back to the general's way behind the front line.

Private 'Chunky' Read stood in front of two baskets of birds, three messages were attached to the legs of the pigeons from the basket to his left, while the other four were attached to the legs of the pigeons from the right hand basket.

Nobby was somewhat curious to the choice of birds for the message carrying.

The Private's reply was not satisfactory, "Orders from the captain sir, three messages to go by pigeons from basket 'A' and the other four from basket 'B'.

To Nobby the mystery deepened as the birds were released into the dusk sky. Three of the birds headed back toward head quarters while four of the birds headed into no man's land.

"What was in those messages Private?" demanded Sergeant Harper.

"No idea sir, I am under oath not to read them."

Nobby had had an awful thought, could it be? No, surely not.

The bicycle free wheeled down the hill away from the castle. The hill was so steep that he didn't have to start to peddle until he had nearly reached the town.

The events of that dark day filled his mind. He rode the bicycle up the hill toward the church. He could see the tops of the grave stones over the dry stone wall which marked the perimeter.

He lent his ride up against the wall and decided that before he would do what he came here for, he would sit on the wooden bench and have his lunch.

As he ate the excellent cheese and pickle sandwich that the landlady had prepared for him he had the uncomfortable feeling of being watched. Was he imagining it or had the temperature dropped suddenly? The sun was still shining and it should have been the warmest part of the day, but he could feel a definite chill coming on. Out of the corner of his eye he saw something familiar, it was the figure he had seen earlier that morning looking up at the castle. Now he, for it was defiantly a man, was looking at the church. Nobby couldn't make out the features of the onlooker, he seemed to be wearing some kind of hood which masked his face.

His lunch finished Nobby slowly walked through the lich-gate and started to read the epitaphs on the gravestones. He was looking for just the one name. A sense of nervous apprehension came over him as the dates became more contemporary. Finally there it was...

Captain Arthur Armstrong

We trust the soul of our
fallen brother to Gods love.

...read the epitaph.

Nobby thought of the man who lay there and how he met his end.

Sergeant Nobby Harper silently walked into the Captain's quarters. The room was a mere hole in the Earth off the main trench, but it offered some amount of comfort. The Captain had a bed, a desk and a bowl for washing and shaving; much more than the average soldier.

The Captain sat at his desk reading a newspaper when he realised that someone had entered the room. Slowly he looked up at the figure of his Sergeant standing six feet in front of him.

"It is customary to knock before entering Sergeant." The Captain said frowning at his officer.

Harper remained silent.

"Well?" the superior officer asked, a note of impatience in his voice.

"I have found the information leak Sir." Harper's voice was matter of fact tone.

"Well done Harper, who is it?" the Captain sat up in his chair and threw the news paper down on the desk.

"Don't you know Sir?"

Had Harper gone mad? Of course he didn't know, if he had known then the culprit would have been dealt with already.

"Pigeons Sir, pigeons." Harper had not moved a muscle since his arrival, he appeared to be frozen to the spot. "Its all to do with pigeons."

"Pigeons?"

"Someone has homing pigeons that fly to the German side of no mans land Sir."

"Excellent work, who is it?"

"They look identical to ours you see Sir, they just fly in a different direction."

"Who is it man?" shouted the Captain, now at the end of his fuse.

Harper unclipped the press stud on his leather side arm holster and took out his pistol, it came to rest by his thy. "Its you Sir."

"What?" Armstrong couldn't believe his ears, "What makes you think that Sergeant?"

"They're your pigeons Sir." Harper showed no emotion as he pointed the gun at Captain Armstrong.

"This is outrageous, how dare you raise a weapon at me, I'll have you court marshalled for this." Armstrong had gone red in the face with rage.

"I don't think so Sir."

“Come on then, let’s get it over with. I am obviously under arrest, are you going to take me into custody?” The Captain said these words in a mocking tone, a dangerous thing to do considering the mental state of his Sergeant.

“No point Sir, you are too well connected in high command, I am not here as your jailer, I’m here as your executioner.”

“What? You’ll hang.”

“I don’t think so Sir.”

Armstrong made a lunge for hi gun belt which hung on a hook nailed into one of the roof supports. Harper emptied three bullets into the Captains torso.

His body fell back against the wall and as he slid down he took a towel which had been hanging on a nail with him. As his lifeless body hit the floor the towel sank onto his head obscuring the top half of his face.

As silently as he had entered Nobby left the Captains quarters.

He had to do it, he had to. He told himself as he looked down at Captain Arthur Armstrong’s headstone.

Why had such a good man gone over to the enemy?

There was that strange figure again. Standing on the other side of the grave yard; he hadn’t seen him pass, how had he got in?

A thought ran through his mind, he took in a sharp breath and shivered. What had he been thinking, he must have been out of his mind, it was the guns, the constant sound of the firing guns. They had warped his mind, he can’t have been thinking straight. The Captain wasn’t sending messages to the enemy, it was his secretary Chunky Read, he was the one.

Oh no what had he done?

His breathing suddenly increased, his heart thumped louder and louder in his chest. Slowly he looked up at the figure watching him. The figure had not been looking at the castle or the church, it was him he was the one being watched.

Slowly the figure lifted its head for the first time. Under the cowl was the white drawn face of Captain Arthur Armstrong, his two eyes black and bulging out of their sockets.

In sheer abject fear Nobby turned and ran.

Outside of the church yard wall he wrestled with his bicycle before finally mounting it and peddling off down the road as quickly as he possibly could. He turned his head back toward the grave yard. The figure was gone.

Turning to view the road once more his heart skipped a beat as he saw the ghostly spectre no more than ten feet in front of him. He swerved to avoid it. Faster and faster he peddled the machine, again he turned back, nothing.

Nobby rode down the hill, head down he went faster and faster, he looked up. There directly in front of him was the phantom, laughing. Nobby took his hands off of the handlebars and shielded his eyes with his forearms, a collision was now unavoidable.

The bicycle continued on and suddenly slowed then tipped over as it hit the fast moving current as the sea passed over the cause way, the only way off of the island. The bicycle and rider were swept away in the unforgiving waters.

Nobby dragged himself onto the shore. He was not sure what had happened to him in the last three hours.

His bag remained at the B&B, he never returned to the island to retrieve it and he never returned to Holy Island again. On one occasion he stood on the Northumberland shoreline and looked across the small stretch of water that separated the island from the mainland. He couldn't be certain, but he was sure he could see a dark figure looking back at him.

He walked along the coast to the car park that marks the start of the causeway but never crossed.

The Ghosts of Christmas Past

A Ghost story for my Children Sam and Jacob,

The house was completely in darkness, all was prepared for the following day. Outside the sky was clear and the moon shone full and bright. The straggling partygoers were now a little thin on the ground at this late hour, as thin as the light dusting of snow that had fallen an hour earlier.

All over the world children and adults alike slept, dreaming of the following morning's revelry, all was prepared.

In a the living room of a house sat a bureau. Normally throughout the year it served as a purely functional piece of furniture, but now in the season of advent it had become the focal point of the room. On it sat a small plastic tree decorated with silver and red glass baubles. A string of green beads also hung from its branches as did a collection of twinkling lights, now turned off for the night.

Either side of the holly adorned fire place stood two green and red felt lined sacks both bursting full of parcels, brightly wrapped. The old Christmas tree had seen it all before of course, it knew that the following morning he would hear the words, 'He's been?' as two excited young boys would both see the empty glass and plate in the dinning room, not to mention the well chewed carrot top which always accompanied Santa's fare.

Seconds after that the living room door would spring open and the unwrapping would commence. The ritual was the same every year, presents, trying to get the youngsters dressed then the smell, oh the smell of the cooking dinner.

All that was yet to come, still several hours away.

The little tree thought back over the years, how many presents had it seen unwrapped, too numerous to remember, some though he could not forget, some long gone for whatever reason. Worn out through over use or disposed of because of neglect, some would stay here always.

The time was fast approaching now, it usually happened at the stroke of three.

The clock on the mantel piece read two fifty five, still five minutes to go.

A thud broke the silence of the night. The baubles on the tree let out the slightest jingle as they gently touched each other, was it vibration from the activities upstairs or was it the tree curiously looking around?

Listening hard the tree heard a slight cry from one of the boys, then silence once more. Obviously one of the over excited children dreaming, not surprising really as this was Christmas Eve.

Once again calm fell over the house as it did over most of the village, not to mention the world.

Then something happened, without the slightest hint of anything untoward happening a blue and red ball, the size of a tennis ball rolled across the floor.

The tree smiled to itself, the yearly trip through nostalgia was about to commence.

From one side of the room a robot, not unlike an android from a popular '50's American TV show crackled and fizzed across the floor. In the other direction coming to meet it was an old racing car, sticking out of its brightly coloured shell turned a clockwork driven key.

Bouncing down from somewhere unseen came a wooden hoop. The tree didn't remember this present long disregarded, the Jack in a box took his mind though elsewhere as it sprang open. Both of these long gone toys were from a different time, another generation. The old play things were followed by a wooden spinning top. It stopped, toppled over then silently disappeared. A doll, blond wiry curls filling her head appeared. She was in a push chair being paraded around the room. While the pram lapped the room once again an armed vehicle drove into the middle of the floor, a male doll dressed in army attire sat in the driver's seat.

More and more toys appeared shimmering in and out of existence, all overlapping but not interfering with one another.

The table football game stood in the middle of the room as did the snooker table, on the floor building blokes of many various designs and ages formed together to make cars, ships and space craft before dismantling themselves and reforming into other sculptures.

Police cars, fire engines and ambulances criss-crossed the floor, some of them with lights flashing some without.

Watching over all of the toys from years gone by was a larger orange ball, two ribbed horns protruding from its top, on its surface a large smiling face. It was of course a space hopper. Like the tree he had seen it all and watched with a quiet calm about himself.

As the clock struck four o'clock all once again fell silent. Only the tree remained.

In an hour or so this years presents would be unwrapped and played with. He wondered which toys would be favoured?

At five thirty a bump was heard from the upstairs, this was quickly followed by excited voices.

Moments later the thump, thump of feet coming down the stairs could be heard. The door burst open and two excited boys burst into the room followed by two bleary eyed parents.

The eldest of the two climbed onto the arm of the sofa and flicked on the light switch.

Joy appeared on the young faces, "He's been, look Jake, he's been?" said Sam to his young brother.

The first and biggest present opened that morning was a space hopper.

'Strange how these things come around' thought the tree allowing itself a little smile, after all no one was looking.

The God Forsaken Rock

The winter of 1801 was one of the worst in living memory. The seas off the Pembrokeshire coast raged uncontrollably and along with the vicious wind the Welsh coastline was taking a battering never the like experiences before.

No man had braved the seas for three months now so bad was the weather. This was hard enough for the residents of the dwellings which clung to the coastline around St. David's Head, but for two men it truly was the worst of times. The two men who were employed as the keepers of the Smalls Lighthouse.

This beacon to shipping was perched on a small outcrop of rock twenty one miles out to sea. The distance was irrelevant to the men, so far were they out to sea the light could have been situated in the middle of the Atlantic.

At the first opportunity the English and Welsh Lighthouse board despatched a vessel to the island carrying much needed supplies and provisions.

The skipper Gwinn Bird set sail on a cold, bright morning. Accompanying him on the voyage was the first mate David and Seaman Russell. As the supply ship 'The herald' left the port and made sail several women stood on the quayside and watched. All had a heavy heart, three of the women were the crew's women while the other in some way related to the two lighthouse keepers.

The three men were all glad to be back at sea, the skipper could not stand to be on land for too long at any one time. He would often become land sick and long for the rocking motion of the sea once more.

Though the sea today was rough all three members of the crew enjoyed the blowing easterly wind and salt spray on their faces. This was a trip they had taken on many occasions, though an eternity had passed since their last trip to Smalls Isle.

By mid morning Russell's voice could be heard over the crashing waves, he had sighted Smalls Isle and the beacon. As the ship neared its destination the form of the light house could clearly be seen through the rolling waves.

The wooden structure stood on nine wooden legs each firmly planted into the rock beneath it. The design of the light was thanks to an instrument maker by the name of Henry Whiteside, he believed that the raging seas would pass throw the legs without coursing any structural damage, the same principle as wave breakers on a beach and to a certain point he was correct. The beacon stood firmly on the isle for eighties years in total.

On top of the stilts was a living area which the two crew members were forced into cohabitation and on top of that sat the lamp room. The room containing the lamp was round, twelve feet in diameter a pitched roof, on its top was a weather vain.

The three crewmen of The Herald craned their necks to look for any signs of life in the lamp room. The ship was still too far away to see anything clearly, with the rolling of the sea observation was down to a minimum.

Again it was the young Russell who first alerted his fellow mariners of his sightings. One of the keepers was out on the walkway around the lamp room. All the crew sort to see the man, was it Howell or Griffith? They could not decide.

It was a curious thing, the skipper was of the opinion that which ever keeper it was, was lying down. His arm beckoned then towards the isle, was he too weak to stand up?

The sea was calm enough to more alongside the rock, as the craft edges its way up to the jetty all watched the keeper motioning them to the light, though only his arm moved, his body remained static. "Ahoy there." Shouted David as he tied the rope too an anchor point. Looking up he could see only the frame of the beacon silhouetted against the white and grey sky. The keepers arm still beckoned. For a moment David thought he heard a scream of terror or madness emitting from above, he hoped it was only the wind passing through the wooden structure.

The hold of the ship was packed with provisions for the two men crew. The skipper opened a crate and took out two packets of biscuits and a bottle of brandy, putting them into a duffle bag he trough it over his shoulder and instructed the crew to follow him up the ladder to the lamp room and then down into the living quarters.

He knew that a warm welcome would await them, after so long the keepers would brake out the brandy instantly.

The skipper was first up the ladder, as he stepped off the ladder a sudden gust of wind pulled the air out of his lungs. He took in a beep breath of sea air as he looked around. The sky was clear now, as he looked to the east he could just make out the Welsh coast sitting on the horizon.

The two members of his crew were now ascending the ladder coming up to join the lighthouse crew, eager to see if they were in good spirit. As Captain Bird waited he became aware that he had seen something on the lamp room walkway. For a moment all went silent in his head as he tried to remember what he had seen. It came to him in a moment, on the approach they had seen one of the keepers beckoning them forth to the beacon. Where was he?

It took him only two steps around the walkway to see. The keeper was still there.

Howell, one of the keepers was lying on the walkway, his left arm hanging over the edge, dangling and swaying in the wind. His body, for that what it was laying face down its skin split and hanging off the bones, maggots where feasting on it. As the wind blew around the lamp room the smell of death breezed toward him. Nosier hit him, in all his years at sea, he had never felt sick, now though he did.

The two men's boots echoed on the wooden walkway behind him. Both were in a light hearted mood until they both saw the decomposing mess which lay before them.

"Holy mother of God?" whispered Russell in his young soft voice. He had never seen a dead body in his life, not at least one in such an emaciated condition.

David was speechless, all stood in silence. Bird removed his hat and rested it on his chest, standing in a moment of silent prier.

All was still and quiet, the waves crashed against the island and the wind howled, but for those three sailors high up above the waves only the present situation occupied their minds.

Finally Bird spoke, "Come on lads, there was another keeper here."

Inside the lamp room all was still, warm and quiet, the exact opposite to the conditions outside were the elements battered the beacon. Slowly he descended the ladder into the quarters.

The sight that met him there was as much as a shock to him as was what he had seen outside on the walkway. All the candles had burnt down to nothing, only the natural light shining through the soul window gave the room any illumination. The log was open on the table, a pen lying on top of it sat there its top removed and long forgotten. Finally in a chair sat an old man. Bird did not recognise him at first, he had a white bearded and long white hair. His skin was pale, and his eyes stared into space. The man was wearing the uniform of a keeper, but who was he?

As Bird approached him with more than a little caution he looked deep into his lifeless eyes. How close dare he approach this strange figure? Was he solid, or a spirit. The ghost of the lost keeper perhaps? It was at that point he could feel someone behind him, a wave of relief came over him as in the window he caught sight of the reflection of his own crew mates. Both like him were gazing in awe at the ghostly figure sitting in the chair.

Bird slowly approached holding out an arm behind him warding off his two friends, he didn't want them exposed to any more upset than they had already experienced too.

Outstretching an arm towards the keeper's face he braced himself, what would the reaction be, if any? Nothing came, so what was the next course of action, check his breathing or give his burly friend a nudge?

He took another step toward the chair when the two dark eyes suddenly moved and focused on him.

All three men jumped back in fright at the sight of what they first thought was a corpse move.

Only the eyes were active, they looked at the three men standing before him in the dim light. Slowly they focused on the figure standing closest to him.

The three strong crew of the herald returned the stare, all were struck dumb. Bird knew this man, suddenly like the rising sun filling the land with light, light came to his mind. The figure sitting in the chair was Griffith, one of the keepers. This realisation of the fact

struck him with cold reality, the man he had known before from his previous visits was in his forties. A well built strong man with a great mop of curly black hair that with his full bearded framed florid face was now a pale image of what he was once was. There was no wonder the Bird had thought him a spirit so white was his face.

The ghostly looking figure inhales deeply as though being woken from a deep trance so dark that Gods light could never reach him. His dry cracked lips slowly parted as he tried to speak. It had been so long since he had uttered a word to anyone he no longer knew exactly what to say. His throat was as dry as dust. His muscles grinded against one another as he tried to swallow. "Ah..." was the only sound which came from his bone dry mouth.

Bird's horror at the sight of the man immediately turned to sorrow and pity. Taking the duffle bag from his shoulder he hurriedly took out a bottle of brandy and uncorked it. Taking a tin cup off the floor he poured a generous slug of the brown liquid, "Here, drink this." He told the keeper and raised the cup to his lips. Tipping it gently towards him Griffiths felt the hot liquid run down his saw throat.

The effect of it caused him to cough and splutter before slumping back down into the chair. "What happened here?" Bird asked in a quiet tone.

The keeper said nothing and looked into space once again as though his brain was trying to recall the events of the past months. The two dark eyes in his deep sockets darted around the room finally settling on the three newcomers. Did he know where his was?

Slowly the index finger on his right hand raised itself from the chair arm and pointed toward a small wooden table sat against one of the walls. The finger was thin and white, the nail bitten right down, it must be cursing him pain. A look of terror had appeared on his face, was there something or someone behind the three men? If the look on his face was in anyway an indication then it was the most terrible aspect.

All three men froze, none of them wanted to be the first to turn and look. Bird took a drink of the brandy to fortify himself before slowly turning round. Thankfully he saw nothing apart from the room and his two ship mates.

“The log.” David said after a moments though, “He’s pointing at the log.”

With a huge sigh of relief the keeper rested hi arm back down on the arm of the chair. At last his story would be known, a story of his ordeal. He hoped that it never told outside the group of men there that cold winter night, he would never know.

As skipper it would only be right for Bird to read the log, so he read silently while his crew busied themselves with their duties. Sitting at the table he turned the pages back over the days, weeks and months. It became clear that the head keeper had not entered anything into the log for several weeks judging by the dates quoted.

The hand writing also changed further he looked back in time. The last entry date was two months previous and was in an almost unreadable scrawl. Ink had blotted all over the page where the pen had either been dragged or slipped. It looked as though the pen had been refilled with the utmost of carelessness and his hand or arm dragged across the page. Around three months ago the hand writing was neat and consistent with the entries to that point, so he made this his starting point.

Friday 20th December 1801.

The supply boat was due today, but never arrived. The sea conditions were such that I do believe the skipper could not moor his vestal to the island with any safety. We have provision aplenty, out individual spirits are high.

Tonight I fetched supper, pickled onions and the last of the salt pork, as usual ‘he’ complained about the something trivial. I cannot recall.

Saturday 21st December 1801.

Today was the shortest day. The lamp functioned perfectly over the whole of the hours of darkness. Supply boat did not come, weather stormy, strong westerly wind blowing. The tower rocked like it had no other night. My colleague for that’s all I can call him as now tried to undermine authority as captain of this light by informing me that the shift system we use was not effective.

Sunday 22nd December 1801.

No problems to report. Did not speak to Howell today. Weather stormy, wind, unchanged.

Monday 23rd December 1801...

As Griffiths woke early that morning he could hear the perpetual sound of the wind howling around the legs of the lighthouse. The sea was as it had been for many days, crashing against the rock beneath them. Al was as it had been the previous day, would Howell speak to him today? Sitting up in bed he swung his out and looked around. Slowly his focus sharpened, nothing significant had changed since the previous evening. Howell he could see sitting in the chair opposite, “Anything amiss last night?” Griffith asked.

Howell did not reply.

Getting out of the bed the lighthouse skipper crossed to the small galley where he found the stove had burnt itself out during the night. Opening the front grate he moved the ashes around hoping to find any trace of wood or coal still alight. “Didn’t you stoke this last night?” he said turning to face his fellow keeper. Again no response came from the lips of Howell. Griffith noticed that his old enemy had not moved a single muscle since he had woke. Was he playing some kind of game? If he was he would not rise to it.

An hour or so passed. Griffith occupied himself with the daily running checks of the lamp, lighting the hearth and recording the weather conditions in the log. Once the lamp was inspected he descended down the ladder onto the island surface. He would do this most days weather permitting. Life in that one room could be more than a little claustrophobic. He and Howell were not the best of friends, indeed their disagreements and quarrels were legendary. He would spend only a short time walking around on the rock, but the time was a most welcome rest bight from his work and living quarters.

From the corner of his eye he could see Howell watching him from the lamp room. A few moments later when he looked again the figure of Howell was gone. Griffith shook his head before climbing back up the ladder to the lamp room.

A week had past now since the supply ship had failed to arrive, as he looked out of the glass room at the horizon he knew that a boat

wouldn't be arriving for days. The weather had set in for the winter now. What they would do without supplies he did not know, no food, water or relief from now until, wellspring possibly?

The prospect of living in close proximity with Howell until the spring was not one he relished, his patients where running a little thin with the man as it was.

In the living quarters Howell had resumed his position in the chair as he had been before. Griffith said nothing, he had noticed him looking down on him earlier from the lamp room. He crossed to the galley and placed the kettle on the hot plate.

"A watched kettle never boils?" he said to himself casting a glance over his shoulder and waiting for a response, still none came.

The whistling of the kettle grew louder as the water boiled. He poured out two cups full of tea, "Tea up." He said not looking at Howell. Griffith took his own cup up to the lamp room away from his companion.

His watch had now officially started. Sipping his hot tea he looked out to sea and pondered on its many wonders and horrors which it contained. From below he could hear Howell getting into bed. This pleased him, maybe after a sleep his colleague may be a little more accessible. Griffith would let him go off to sleep before descending back down into the living area.

The last dregs of tea rolled down Griffith's throat. It was almost cold now, he too could feel a distinct chill in the air. Quietly he descended the ladder into the living quarters and tip toed across to the stove. Out of the corner of his eye he could see the figure of Howell under his covers, as silently as he could he put a chair down by the now warm stove and sat down next to it. He faced the palms of his hands towards the hot stove and left them there until the warmth penetrated the outer layer of skin. Once the heat became unbearable he retracted them furiously rubbing them together generating as much heat as possible.

Quietly once again he put the kettle on the hot plate. This act was all to do with timing. As soon as the spout started to whistle then he would take it off the heat and pour his drink.

Once the hot cup was full he sat back down to enjoy the fire once moor.

For the first time since entering the living quarters he took a look around. In an instant panic gripped his very soul. All moisture in his mouth disappeared, his finger ends became numb once more. The fleeting glimpse he had observed in a moment had sent such a chill down his back unlike any other he had experienced before.

Slowly his shaking head turned toward the centre of the room, sitting in the chair, just as before was Howell, still unmoved from when Griffith had seen him an hour or so earlier. "Howell?" he said in a shaky voice. Griffith must have suspected something if he had broken the silence, "Howell, this game isn't funny." For a moment or so he looked at his fellow keeper in the chair. The figure did not move a muscle or breathe for that matter.

Slowly Griffith stood up from his chair, he was waiting for Howell to laugh at him for showing an amount of concern. As he edged toward him though nothing came. Eventually Griffith was standing directly in front of the chair, he spoke his name once more, "Howell?" still no answer came.

The captain lifted a finger and poked Howell in the left shoulder blade. The body and head of the seated figure did not move. It was then that he noticed how pale the other keeper was, a flash of raw panic ran through his mind. With a shaking hand he touched the back of Howells wrist, it was ice cold.

Quickly he withdrew it. It took a lot of courage, but from somewhere he summoned up enough will power to take Howells pulse. Two fingers placed themselves on the ice cold neck. He could find no movement.

Instantly it was clear to him that his fellow keeper, Howell was dead. He fell backwards into the chair in which he had sat previously. His disbelieving mind quickly thought over the past few hours and how he could not tell that this man was dead.

How long had it been since his passing? The body of the man was as stiff as a board, surely he must have died several hours previous?

This could not be so, when he was aloft in the lamp room he could hear Howell preparing for bed, only an hour before when he himself was down on the rock Howell had appeared on the balcony. Had he stood there at all? All the evidence was against that likelihood.

He had made a drink for his opposite earlier, was that still there? He dare not look.

Howell was dead, but how? No signs of physical injury were visible.

His thoughts then turned to himself, what was going to become of him? He would have double the rations now, but what about the longer term. It was widely known that he and Howell didn't get on. In this situation her could accused of murdering him either after an argument or mealy to access to his rations. In a normal situation Griffith would have thrown the dead body over the side of the lighthouse, what to do now though? It needed a great deal of thought. He emptied the tea out of his cup and into a bucket, then from a small cupboard he took a bottle of rum and poured himself a generous slug. Time was lost to him as he way up the various options open. He could not leave the body in that room, such thing was macabre. He had to move it. The lamp room was out of the question also. The operation of the lamp must be up most in his mind. Only one other place was available to him, that was out on the balcony. The room was growing dark and the body was beginning to smell by the time Griffith stopped hammering and stepped back to look at his handy work. He had managed to put together a makeshift coffin out of pieces of timber canalised from the lighthouse and drift wood scavenged at low tide. With great effort he dropped the body into it, before nailing down the lid.

Outside it was dark and the sea heavy. There was no way that he could do anything tonight, he would have to watch the lamp. In the morning he could move the casket and then catch up with his sleep. As the night dragged on toward midnight Griffith stayed in the lamp room. He did not want to descend into the room in which the casket lay containing the body of his dead colleague. Sitting against the exterior wall he fought against the onset of sleep and listened to the battering waves and howling wind outside. Mixed in these noises he could swear that he could hear the sound of someone or something moving in the room below.

Tuesday 24th December.

Griffith woke with a jolt, the sun was up, his first thought was of the light, it was still burning. A wave of relief came over him quickly followed by a similar feeling of anxiety. He knew he had to move the coffin from down below.

Griffin had been dreaming the previous night, an unseen spectre had attempted to put out the light which shone into the dark night, he had tried to fight against it but seemed paralyzed, not being able to make a move against it. Was this all due to the terrible situation, the thought that there was no hope for him?

The job was now in hand. Griffith had spent an hour in preparation for this moment. In one of the roof beams which crossed the lamp room he had secured a hook and pulley system through it he threaded a rope. One end of the rope dangled freely in the lamp room while the other he tied around the coffin. Pulling on the rope he took up the slack, then slowly he began to pull and slowly the casket began to rise. On each long pull of the rope the coffin inched higher. The sound of the body slumping in it made no difference to the crates position. Again he started to winch.

Finally the coffin sat in the lamp room. This was not the final resting place. With great effort Griffin managed to man handle the wooden box outside onto the balcony. With the waves high and the wind lashing it became obvious the rope which he had just used was needed to tie down the casket to the balcony. After all this effort he didn't want it being swept out overboard and out to sea.

He breathed a sigh of relief as finally the door to the outside world was closed, he would not step a foot outside that door again, he told himself until the rescue boat arrived, if it ever came? Finally that morning he climbed into bed.

That evening he woke. For the first time he realised that today was Christmas Eve, though no celebrations were planned for the following day. He shouldn't even be on the island for the season of good will.

The lens which increased the intensity of the light was turning, the lamp itself was burning freely offering a warning to all mariners who travelled this part of the coast line. He did not know that a vestal had not passed this way for a several weeks now, no craft could leave port so foul was the weather.

He looked out into the dark night and tried to make piece with himself, but was suddenly brought back to the here and now by a noise. He spun around to peer across the lamp room. Momentarily he was become blinded by the flash of the lamp, there it was again, the noise. The sound was a tapping on the window. Quickly he reached the spot where he thought the noise had emanated from, but as the light swept around he saw nothing reflected in it.

A shiver ran down his neck. He decided to return to the living quarters and have a hot drink.

With his hands wrapped around the tin mug he stayed close to the fire and watched the single candle burn, the only light in the room. Somewhere in the night Christmas Eve changed into Christmas Day, salvation for the world, but the world had forgotten about him. Through the window he could see the glare of the light as the lens rotated, the fact that it was still working was the only small relief for him.

For the hours of darkness of that Christmas morning he started out of the window into the darkness, the waves continued to pound against the rock making the tower rock uncomfortably. As the dawn broke Griffiths eye lids became heavy, they could not remain open for much longer. He came too with a start as from above him in the lamp room he heard the heavy footsteps, someone was up there walking around. His first reaction was that a boat had come to his rescue, but the sea was too rough for any craft to even attempt to dock.

There was only one other person up there...

With that horrifying thought at the forefront of his mind Griffith past out.

Wednesday 25 December.

Griffith's dreams that day were naturally occupied with Howell. In one he found himself sitting opposite his dead colleague at the dinning table toasting each others health with a glass of red wine. They were in a restaurant wearing dinner suits.

In contrast another dream saw him all alone on Smalls Island on hid knees in front of the light house, the wooden legs though did not the supports of the beacon, but the legs of the dead keeper, boots the size of a two man rowing boat.

As he looked skywards the huge white face of Howell stared down at him. He was pleading for forgiveness off the dead keeper. Howell could only laugh and tell him that he was going to hang for murder. Nobody, he was told would believe that he didn't kill his fellow keeper in cold blood after an argument. With that a deep dark bell tolling the crashing waves the figure of Howell produced a hang mans noose from his rear.

Griffith a looked up at it in horror, he could feel the rope tightening around his neck, the feeling of breathlessness came over him.

Knowing that this was only a dream he forced himself to wake. He found himself in bed breathing heavily and sweating. He was fully clothed still. Though he could not recall getting into bed he came to the conclusion that he have done at some point. Once his breath had steadied he pushed the covers back. A terror overtook him as he did so, something was in the bed, slowly he turned his head to the left seeing another head on the pillow. It was the head of Howell, blue and cold, his tongue hanging out. Worst of al a rope was tied around his neck.

Griffith screamed out loud as he opened his eyes. He was still seated at the table, it was still Christmas Day, a dream within a dream? That what must have happened?

He still needed to sleep, but the sun had set. His shift had started. Making a cup of tea he thought to himself, how long could the tea last? It was the only stimulant available, when he ran out of it life would become difficult.

The same storm had raged now for several days, how long was it exactly? His mind couldn't work it out anymore. The only respite he could recall was that morning when he stood on the island and saw Howell watching him. For the first it crossed his mind that Howell must have been dead by that point. For a long moment he remained frozen to that thought.

By the time midnight came he had drunk half a bottle of brandy, strictly against regulations, but now he had lost his sense of reality. His decline had started.

Thursday 26 December.

He woke in the afternoon, an hour or so before darkness fell. The sound of the wind howling around was starting to have an effect on his sanity. As it rushed through the legs of the tower it spoke to him, words, but what words did it say?

Friday 27th December.

Griffith looked out of the window, he desperately looked for any sign of a rescue boat, the slightest hint of light was all he wanted to see. The waves rolled ten feet tall or more, the rain lashed down rattling on the wooden roof of the tower. He had not given up hope yet.

Saturday 28th December.

It was two o'clock in the morning as Griffith sat writing in the log, a single candle was the only illumination to be had in the room. The message in the log was full of hope for his rescue.

Then he stopped mid sentence, from above in the lamp room the sound he had heard nights before returned, heavy footsteps clunked around the room. Again and again they circled.

Griffith started to shake with fear. He grabbed the bottle of brandy and downed what was left in it. Fortified he grabbed a boat hook and started to climb the ladder up to the lamp room.

Pushing the hatch open and peering through he passed a candle around from side to side looking for any signs of *life*?

There was nothing to see in the lamp room, the sound of footsteps continued, desperately he looked around but could see nothing. It was behind him, the footsteps approached him from the rear. Quickly he spun around the candle light flickering, but in the instant before the wind blew it out he saw the grotesque features of Howell staring at him in the darkness.

Griffith took a sharp intake of breath such was the shock followed by a gasped word, "No?" he shouted in disbelief and stepped back, he dropped to his knees and fumbled around in his pocket for the matches. With shaking hands he managed to light the candle. By the time the moon had come out from behind the storm clouds. The lamp room was empty once again, save himself.

The eerie moonlight illuminated each of his raged features which made up his face, the candle light formed flickering shadows across the room, the lens turned, but still no one was there with him.

Slowly Griffith looked outside to see if anyone, if Howell was out on the balcony. He walked to the door, dare he open it?

The moment he turned the door knob the wind caught hold and flung it wide open ripping it out of his hand. The makeshift coffin which had occupied the walkway days earlier was now gone though the body of Howell remained. It hung there caught between the railings. The corpse's arm hung down swaying in the wind in a beckoning motion.

Griffith turned away, he could feel his gut twisting around, sickness was coming over him.

"Sunday 29th December," began Bird, his two men engrossed in the tale. "The last entry of the log reads..."

I dare not go up to the lamp room as he wanders up there every night now. I know it is still shining as I see it glare from the window. I hope a rescue boat will come soon as I cannot put up with the persistent haunting for much longer.

That's it?"

"But that was over two months previous." The young seaman said, "What's he been doing since?" the lad looked around the thick set figure of his captain and stole a glance at the seated man.

Bird came to the conclusion that time for debate was not a luxury he had. The forecast brake in the weather would not hold out for much longer. After weighing up the alternatives he issued his orders. "Right, here's what we do. Take our friend here down to the Herald, David I'm putting you in command. I'm staying here." Both other members of his crew looked at each other with incredulity, "What?" David asked.

"Look, this man needs medical attention, and someone has to watch the light." His voice was that of authority.

"But the diamonds that haunt the isle?" the youngest member of the crew was well versed in the ways of the church and of superstition. He feared the departed souls of old mariners, such things where not to meddle with.

“I will be fine, after a life at sea there’s nothing much that haunts me.”

The wind had already started to pick up while black storm clouds approached from the west. Flashes of light bounced along the horizon and the distant rumble of thunder echoed through the heavy air. He watched his ship bob away across the rough sea, in his heart he had a feeling that he would never see her again. He watched until the craft was visible no more.

The living quarters were a mess. The keepers were assigned only two duties to speak of, one was maintain the running of the lamp while the other was keep their living quarters clean and tidy. The latter had obviously not been adhered to.

Griffith set about making good the room. Empty food cans littered the floor as did several empty bottles which had at one time contained varying spirits.

Once the room was tidy and cleaned down he set about stripping the two beds of their sheets. He did not want the incoming keepers sleeping in the bed belonging to a dead man. He bundled the sheets up and put them in a linen sack. As the bottom sheet was removed from one of the beds a book dropped out of the folded sheet and landed on the floor. Griffith stood for a moment and stared at it.

Slowly he bent down and picked it up. It was leather bound with no visible text on either cover or spine. Holding it in his left palm the finger of his right hand tapped the top of it gently. Should he open it and look at the contents? His curiosity easily got the better of him, so he gently opened the book.

Instantly he could see what it was, one of the keepers was keeping a personal diary. The only name to be mentioned was that of Griffith, so it must have belonged to Howell.

Bird sat down at the table, along with the book a bottle of rum, a glass and a wheel of cheese occupied the table top.

For most of the afternoon he read the diary. He could for the large part of it not believe what he was reading. General opinion was that the two keepers were constantly at one another’s throats, hardly ever speaking apart from in disagreement. The diary told otherwise. It spoke of how Howell could not wait until his return to the light house, his chance to be with Griffith once again. On land they had too avoid

one another to keep up the pretence. Now finally away from public they could be together, people didn't understand their predicament. It went on to describe of how they had to make both beds look well used, though only one bed would ever be in use at one time. 'A man shall not lye with another man' that's what the bible said and that was the general opinion of the masses, he wrote on more then one occasion.

Some of the passages contained in the book he could not read, the thought of the two men together made a shudder run down his back.

He was one of the people Howell must have been referring too. At sunset Bird turned on the lamp. He had a feeling of peace about him as he looked out of the observation window. He knew that the man who had died here departed this world a happy man.

He would keep the dairy, if it came to the point were Griffith looked as though he was going to swing for his fellow keepers death then he would make the book available to the public. Griffith would still face disgrace in the publics eyes and would still be imprisoned for the crime of homosexuality, but that was better then death.

As Bird slept that night he was not aware of an opaque figure sitting at the table, he was writing an entry in the dairy. After a short while he stopped and put down the pen and turned to the bed which bird slept in. with a smile on his face the figure disappeared.

Bird woke suddenly, all was dark. From above him he could hear the sound of footsteps walking around in the lamp room. The Captain turned over and returned to sleep, but woke suddenly some time later as he felt some else climb into the bed with him.

The Lighthouse Keeper

It is not a widely recognised fact that the Humber Estuary, the largest waterway on the east coast of England is one of the most dangerous shipping lanes in the world. Over the years many ships have grounded on the constantly shifting sandbanks and mud flats.

During World War Two the estuary was used as a navigation aid for attacking aircraft; though the German warships never ventured into the estuary. Maybe it was because of the guns placed along the shoreline or the sea forts nestling behind Spurn Point.

Maybe, it was for another reason...

Spurn Point was a lonely desolate place even in the height of the summer months. Even when the tourists and bird watchers would venture down the spit of land protruding out into the open waters which divided the North Sea from the estuary, it would still have a stark bleakness.

Edmund thought that was exactly the reason he liked it there so much. Rufus was the skipper of the lighthouse which stood at the very point of the thin slither of land that made up Spurn. He had taken the job after the war, the war in which he spent most of in Far East, undergoing shameful acts of torture in a prisoner of war camp. Those dark days he didn't think about now though they came back to him in his darkest nightmares. The only way he managed to get through the ordeal was to detach himself from the experience. When his turn came for the whippings and drowning attempts he entered a state of mind detached from his normal thoughts. All his pain and anger were felt by another Rufus, not him. After two years though, the scars were left on his body and mind. His alter-ego was left in that awful place leaving him to have a life once more.

All of this considered, he was not a people person, all he wanted to do was keep himself to himself. When this job came up he decided that it was the ideal occupation; solitude was what he wanted more than anything.

The only other souls he ever saw where the other two keepers, and even then, he stayed out of their way.

Each keeper had a small prefabricated dwelling next to the light, so it was only at the changing of the shift he would come into contact with his fellow keepers. The night had been a quite one, no sea traffic had come past either in the North Sea or up the river. As he looked to sea he could see the moonlight reflecting on the calm sea, illuminating the south side of the old lighthouse. Now no longer in use, the land it stood on reclaimed by the sea. He smiled to himself as a stray thought crossed his mind. The mythical beast of Spurn Point wouldn't be roaming tonight.

With his checks on the lamp now complete his large burly frame set off down the spiral staircase, the time had come for a cup of tea. The lighthouse was cold; snow had been falling intermittently for most of the day. As he had come on shift a blizzard had whipped itself up covering Rufus from head to toe as he made his way to work. Outside all was quiet now; no traffic was passing the point, no boats at anchor in the bay created by the spit of land which formed Spun. Even the weather was calm now, the sky had cleared and the wind had dropped.

Nothing moved anywhere, such peace was unknown at this busy point of converging seaways, but something was staring in the dark. The florid faced keeper sat down at the table in the sparsely furnished crew room which served as the galley, due to the fact that it was the only room with running water. He consulted the wall clock and barometer before opening the log and making an entry. He tried to pick up the pen, twice it slipped out of hand, he hadn't realised how cold it actually was. Cupping his hands around his cup of tea he tried to get some life back into the cold skin.

Once again he picked up the pen, then realised that apart from the weather there was nothing to report. Putting the pen back down he watched it roll into the centre of the log. Sitting back in the chair scratching his beard he took a mouth full of hot tea.

The next job for that shift was to check the pressure on the generators for the fog horns, but that would wait until he had had a smoke of his pipe.

Archibald Spencer was preparing himself for bed. His shift in the light was over that day. He was of course on standby for any emergency, but was now looking forward to a well earned rest.

As he finished the last dregs of his malt drink he looked out of the window. As always there was the lighthouse towering above him, the light shinning. Rufus had the ghost shift tonight. He didn't like the nightshift, the light always seemed to take on a foreboding edge to it, he didn't like going down to the generator room, he always had the feeling of being watched. As Archibald let the curtain fall back into its pleats something made him reopen them.

He could see a bank of fog rolling in off the sea. For a moment he watched it rolling in toward the shore, any moment now the fog horn should sound, in fact it should be sounding now. Maybe Rufus hadn't seen it.

The fog engulfed the old tower off shore, for a moment two bright points of light shone in the mist, then vanished.

Archibald pulled on his overcoat turned on his torch and set off the short distance to the tower.

Rufus exhaled a large lung full of smoke, the room had the unmistakable aroma of ships tobacco about it.

Right, it was no use sitting around, there was work to be done. Archibald was halfway along the path when the fog came ashore. He shivered a little as the cold mist passed over him. His pace speeded up slightly, the fog horn needed to be on now. Several things ran through his mind. Had Rufus had an accident, and where was Stagg, the other keeper? He should have been on watch, how come he wasn't around. Archibald knew something was wrong, he was a rational man who held no belief in rumour and superstition, not like Rufus who swore blind that the legend of the beast was true.

No one knew where the stories had come from, or about who or what it was. Several deaths had been reported all in foggy conditions. Not an uncommon occurrence on such a terrain as this, but all the bodies were found to have been mutilated on discovery. The mutilations were not the effects of the sea, that was a fact agreed upon by all concerned.

He arrived at the black wooden double doors of the tower and as his arm reached out to grab the handle he heard a sound coming from his right hand side.

Quickly he turned, pointing his torch in the direction of the sound. Relief came over him at the sight of a friendly face. Though he

didn't believe in the existence of the beast he was relieved to see it wasn't some strange creature coming out of the fog.

Rufus entered the generator room, the two twin horns were polished to perfection, the dials clearly showing that the pressure was correct.

His attention was suddenly taken by the sound of a loud scream which, in his judgement, came from not too far away from the tower. What should he do? It was expressly against rules to leave the light unattended. Someone outside though was in trouble. In his opinion the best course of action would be to return to the lamp room and observe from there. After all Stagg was on watch and was more than capable of dealing with any crisis. In the back of his mind a well surprised feeling of horror surfaced, could the beast be on the prowl once more?

On his return to the top of the tower he was confronted with the thick blanket of fog which had descended upon them. Quickly he dropped the lever sounding the two tone fog horn.

George Stagg sat in his prefab listening to the radio, suddenly he heard the noise. Only moments before had he found himself looking out of the window at the snow laying all around, there was no sign of fog then, only clear skies. Why was the fog horn sounding? As he was on watch a personal investigation would be needed outside. Just as Archibald had done moments before he wrapped his overcoat around him and with only his torch to guide him he set off into the night.

From his vantage point in the lamp room Rufus watched the door of Stagg's prefab open. A beam of torch light shone out into the night, the figure carrying it flashed it from side to side scanning the area en route to the light house.

The figure hundreds of feet below disappeared out of sight as he reached the base of the tower.

Rufus waited a few moments for something to happen, anything. The longer he waited the more nervous he became. All he wanted to hear was the sound of the door opening and closing, or the sight of Stagg returning to his prefab. Nothing came.

The sound of the fog horn rang out into the night, what was he to do? Opening the door he looked out over the parapet on which the

inspection walk way sat. Leaning over the rail he craned his neck, but could not see anything. He had to know what was going on.

Slowly the large figure descended the spiral staircase. His face was red, but cold sweat ran down it. Eventually at the bottom of the stairs he crossed the cold stone floor to the external door.

The door creaked opened allowing a cold blast of damp night air into the interior.

As he looked out into the night a sickening feeling came to him; trembling he looked down at his feet. On the cold snow covered ground lay two bodies, the bodies of his fellow keepers, Stag and Archibald.

“Oh Lord?” he said, quickly looking around.

In a manic rush he pulled the two bodies into the tower. Once safely inside and the door bolted Rufus shone his torch on his two colleagues. Both of their faces were covered in blood.

So it was true, the beast had returned. Why come to him, after all he had been through during the war. He paced round and around, panic was set in his mind, he couldn't think straight for panic. He was going to die, he was going to die, at the hands of well, a monster.

He sat down on the bottom step of the staircase then loaded his pipe.

There was only one telephone on the point and that was in his prefab. The line to the lighthouse had been felled during the war, thanks to a stray shell.

He had to get to the prefabs and contact the authorities. Moments later he was ready to go. In his hand was a flair gun; if anything came near him it would get a flair between the eyes.

Gingerly he opened the door and looked around. Snow had started to fall, the fog had lifted. He knew though just what to do, turning on his torch he ventured into the night.

His boots crunched through the clean virginal snow; with each step the snow came further up his boot. A cry rang out from behind him, he spun round simultaneously pointing the flair gun and torch in the rough direction of the sound. A round spot of light fell upon the walls of the lighthouse while only snow filled the beam of light.

The cry he had heard was known to him, but he couldn't quite put his finger on where he had heard it before.

Once again he turned to the direction of the prefabs, though he didn't take another step. In front of him stood a figure.

He couldn't quite make out the shape, the snow was distorting the view. It was not a wild animal at least but he still had a feeling of foreboding about this stranger. Rufus lifted the torch and pointed it at the figure. The sight that met his eyes was not a pleasing one.

The man's clothes were tattered and ripped, scars where on show all over his body. The torch light travelled upward illuminating the stranger's face. It was old, twisted and scared, Rufus knew the face of this man. He had seen it before. With the shock of seeing it he dropped the flare gun, he knew it was the face he thought he'd left behind in that God awful camp, it was the face of his alter-ego, the face of himself.

Was he the beast of Spurn? Had he brought it with him?

The figure took a step closer.

"No?" Rufus said, his voice trembling.

The torch landed softly in the snow as a splash of crimson coloured the pure white powder that covered the ground.

No one was left on that isolated spot to hear the fog horn or see the light reaching out into the darkness. All was at peace again.

The Phantom of High Street

The winter of 1899 had been one of the excessively bad weather, the worst in living memory some were heard to say. Snow had fallen in abundance, many people had died in the cold snap which held this part of East Yorkshire in its grip. Along the River Hull barges were frozen to their moorings, not that they could navigate the course of the river as the numerous bridges that crossed the waterway were also frozen; each cog and gear wheel refusing to move.

By the March of 1899 the thaw had passed and life in the busy port was returning to some kind of normality. As the sunlight became stronger day by day a new optimism could be felt in the air and even the estimated death toll claimed by the winter wasn't as bad as first reported.

On one of the cold, but bright spring mornings Harry Grimshaw walked along the old High Street in Kingston upon Hull. The High Street ran adjacent to the River Hull, which gave the city its name. Both sides of the narrow street were lined with tall three story buildings casting long shadows onto the cobbles. On the riverside of the street a constant block of warehouses dominated; only the occasional narrow ally allowing access to the river side.

The opposite side of the narrow road though was made up of a mixture of shops, mews and public houses. Harry always walked this way to his employers, the Lloyds Insurance Bank situated in Low Gate where he spent his days as an accountant's clerk. The High Street was not in any way on a direct route to his offices but every day he would divert his path to walk down the oldest part of the town. He loved the architecture of the buildings even though the pungent smells of the mud on the river, decaying fruit and sewage outlet pipes could often make his stomach turn.

One other reason drew him down this street. It was something he could never quite put his finger on, but it was always there. As he reached his favourite pub, 'Ye Old Black Boy' a strange feeling started to take hold of him. Something about that piece of cobbled road made him shiver. Sometimes he could swear that he could hear voices inside his head, the words were unfathomable though they were definitely saying something.

Often he wondered to himself what was causing this unsettling feeling.

The most obvious explanation that came to mind was the noxious aroma that breezed down the street trapped in between the buildings. Were they the cause of the phantom voices?

He'd heard all the stories regarding the various ghosts that were supposed to walk the old rooms and corridors of the building. It had stood there since the fourteen hundreds and deserved its claim to be the home of a number of ghosts.

As he walked past the public house the sensation started to fade and once past the entrance to the shop next door it had totally gone. Ever since he was a child he had mused over what the shop sold. In the window of frosted glass many jars filled the shelves. What was in the jars he never asked, he was of the opinion that the frosted glass was there to obscure something that was not to be seen except by those who wish to enter. Saying that he had never looked above the door or indeed the window at the sign, but this act would have made him none the wiser.

Three weeks later spring had arrived, the equinox now behind them, the daffodils and tulips were coming into bloom.

At the bank the manager, Mr. Edward Hardyman announced his long waited retirement. The announcement was long overdue, but not unexpected. On occasions such as this never would the management fraternise with the workers, Edward though was a man dedicated to his employees.

An invitation was pinned on the staff notice board inviting his loyal workforce of counters, cashiers and clerks to join him in a celebration of his long career with drinks at Ye Old Black Boy public house.

That night Hardyman's staff gathered in the oldest pub in the city. Hardyman, if he had one weakness it was his love of real ale. Never had he mixed business with pleasure, but today, his last day he would. The one and only time he would drink with his staff would be today.

As he gave his leaving address to his loyal minions, Harry found it difficult to concentrate his outgoing manager's message.

In his head a cacophony of voices chattered, and it sounded to him as though they were in pain. Could he make out the chattering, yes he could.

“Help us, we’re here.” they said, followed by one final word, “Forever.”

Hardy shut his eyes and shook his head, this action ruffled the straight black oiled hair, which clung to his scalp. Once the voices had subsided he realised one or two of his colleagues were noticing his state of unrest. He took himself to the rear of the small room where in the toilet he rearranged his appearance.

Two hours later only a hand full of bank staff remained in the pub keeping the regulars company.

Several pints later the clock struck ten o’clock, the regulars, all ex-sailors were telling all manner of nautical tales. Each story of sea monsters and the like became more unbelievable with each passing. Harry listened and laughed as the storyteller became more and more comical with each passing drink.

It was only after Harry’s sixth pint that he plucked up the courage to tap into the endless local knowledge.

“Tell me,” he laughed, “is this pub haunted?”

“Ah,” said one of the locals as all the other voices fell silent, “you could say that young ‘un.” He too then fell silent. Harry hung on the moment’s silence waiting for someone to speak. Each passing second seemed to him like an age. Finally the old salt spoke again, “Ey lad, I would say it is, yes.”

“Who by?” Harry asked as a shiver ran up his spine, what was the expression, a goose walking over your grave?

“Many lost souls are said to walk this house. In the olden days this was the last building sailors saw before setting out to sea, it was a muster point for many a voyage. Many never made it back, I wonder how many of them walk the rooms?”

The landlord who up to that point had remained quiet listened to the same old stories told not for the first time. “Don’t forget Charlie?” he said from behind the bar.

“Charlie?” Harry asked. If anyone should know it should be the landlord, he surmised.

“Charlie was a Cavalier during the civil war. We don’t know what happened to him, but I’ll tell ‘ya something, I hear him in the cellar and when I do,” his eyes narrowed and caught Harry’s own gaze, “I don’t go in there, not for all the beer in the pub.”

“Do any of them speak?” the question was an open one. No one answered, in fact all now seemed reluctant to carry on the conversation.

He knew it was time to take his leave, not only had the conversation gone cold, but his head was starting to become disorientated.

Quietly he put on his over coat and stepped into the corridor which led to the door onto the High Street.

The night was dark, no moon shone. As he stepped out into the street his breath condensed into a cloud of mist. Buttoning the coat up he set off along the street, at least he tried to. His legs seemed to be suffering from some kind of paralysis. He stood and looked down at his trouser legs. Standing up straight again he was aware of the voices.

“Help us.” the whispered, “Help us, we’re here”

Harry put his hands over his ears, “No” he shouted, at least, he thought he had shouted.

The memory of falling entered his mind, of sitting on the flag stones pavement, hands clamped over his ears, he knew what had happened. Where was he now? Was he indoors?

“Forever.” The voice repeated.

With a jolt he came too. It took a moment for his eyes to focus, where was he?

Four glass lamps illuminated the dark room. Brown, the room was a definite shade of brown.

When focus eventually returned to his eyes he found himself in a, well what looked like a dispensary. No, not that, a shop. He was in a shop, but what kind of shop was this?

All around him jars filled the shelves, old dark shelves. A strange smell brought him back to full consciousness, it was an acidic smell, wine, no vinegar.

He looked at the jars, they contained pieces of meat, vegetables, fruit and, oh my God, small animals. All the contents were suspended in liquid.

“Ah, you are back with us I see.” Said a strange voice, an accent attached Harry could not place.

“Where am I?” he asked rubbing his eyes.

“You collapsed outside in the street. I brought you in before you froze to death.”

Harry looked up at the man who had spoken to him. He had dragged me into this place, he must be stronger than he looked. Harry saw before him a small, weak looking man. His first impression was that the little man looked rather like a mole, his head slightly leaning forward and his eyes squinting a little as though he suffered from short sight.

“Who are you?”

“I am Ivan.” He replied.

“Sorry, I don’t mean to sound rude.” Harry apologised.

“I do not hold it on you.”

Strange words thought Harry to himself. The little man though continued to talk, “I am from Iceland, my English is still not perfect, it is I who am sorry.”

“No please. Your English is fine really.” Harry realised that this man was not from these shores. Iceland, where was that? He decided that it was probably better if he didn’t ask.

“Where am I?” he asked standing up for the first time. Up to that point he had been seated on a wooden chair.

“This is my shop.” Ivan told him, “I pickle things” a smile came on his face. He was obviously very proud of his small shop. The gaslight flickered off his white teeth and pale skin.

“Pickle?”

“Yes pickle. You see in Iceland we live a little differently to you here. You are used to day following night. In my country things happen differently.”

Harry was still feeling a little light headed and the last statement didn’t seem to make any sense. What did he mean night didn’t follow day, what did then?

“In Iceland we have the ‘long dark’. Because the island is situated where it is we go without sunlight for six months of the year. Nothing grows. So we harvest all we can during the summer months and then pickle it so we have a food supply all through the dark months.”

“And that’s what this shop is, you sell pickled,” he looked around and could see a dead mouse suspended in a jar, “Things?”

“Please do not alarm yourself. I supply medical students with animals to dissect.” He told Harry as he pointed out a shelf of pickled rodents.

This was a subject that Harry knew something of, his brother was a medical student in the city of Leeds. This would make an interesting conversation on their next meeting.

Ivan seemed to be alive to the interest shown. “would you like to, it’s not normally, well I should say it’s for medical doctors only. This is not my only stock, there is another room. Through that door I have all sorts of specimens.” He pointed to a door positioned behind the counter.

Harry eyed the door eager to discover what lay behind it. Once again he stood up and took one step toward the inner door. An instant smile came onto the shop keeper’s face. As Harry approached the door he once again heard the voices, “forever” or did he?

The door creaked open, the interim was a dimly lit room of incomprehensible dimensions. Lines of wooden shelves crossed the room obscuring the view to only but the immediate proximity. The smell of some kind of clinical substance filled his nostrils as he entered.

Ivan closed the door behind them once they were both inside. The crack of the three pin lock echoed through the room. Harry looked on the scene with amazement. The collection of jars in the shop paled into insignificance when compared to the stock room. The racks reached high up into what he could only imagine was the roof of the house. The two upper floors had been taken out. High above them, Harry could see the roof beams pointing upward. As he looked high into the eaves a feeling of disorientation came over him and momentary the voices returned, “Can you hear that?”

“Hear what?” the guide asked.

“Voices, I keep hearing voices.”

“What do they say?” did this strange little man believe him?

“I’m not sure, it something about been here forever”

Ivan smiled, “It’s probably the pub next door you can hear, I no longer hear the noise coming from that direction.”

On one of the many shelves Harry spotted something he recognised. “Is that a cat?”

“Yes it is.” Said the little man struggling to take the heavy jar off the shelf. “this is not for sale you understand, but is part of my own collection.

Harry didn’t know what to say, what do you say to someone who pickles domestic animals.

“Come this way, I’ve something to show you.” Harry followed the native of Iceland through the maze of racks until they came to a wooden staircase. The host was still carrying the jar containing the cat, “Go on, up you go.”

Harry climbed the staircase. He knew something odd was about to be revealed though he couldn’t dream what the revelation was going to be.

As he came to the top he found himself on a wooden platform overlooking a huge jar, its diameter must be at least twelve feet, as for how deep, he could not tell.

“Here, we’re here.” The voice sad a little clearer now. He looked down, not knowing why, but in the huge vat of vinegar he could just make out what looked like an arm.

Stooping down to take a closer look he squinted his eyes trying to get a clear look in the dim light. It was indeed an arm, not only that, but he could see several bodies in the liquid. A pair of dead eyes stared up at him as he heard the voice again, now he knew. The voices were coming from the tank.

He took a sharp intake of breath, feeling sick he struggled for breath, he had to get out of this mad house, what was going on here?

Thoughts now had turned to the basic instinct of survival.

He tried to turn and run, but his legs were suffering from a paralysing fear. He could easily overcome the little man if need be, he’d have to for the shopkeeper was coming up the stairs. Again he

tried to move, he could not take his eyes off the face staring back at him. The rolling dead eyes held him in a kind of hypnotic grip.

A sharp sudden pain manifested itself in the back of his head.

Slowly he felt himself fall forward.

The body of the young man splashed as it broke the surface of the brownish liquid.

Standing on the platform the little Icelandic man wiped the blood off the jar containing the cat. He smiled as he looked down into the vat of pickled people.

The summer in Hull was as hot as the previous winter had been cold. For several weeks the clientele of Ye Old Black Boy had noticed an unpleasant smell emanating from the pickle shop next door.

The local constabulary was called in. on investigation no reason for the aroma was forthcoming so the door was broken down.

In the back room a macabre sight was witnessed. Due to the excessive heat several of the jars had exploded. The owner of the shop was lying dead on the floor. The only explanation was that a piece of flying glass had imbedded itself in his neck. Next to the body of the owner lay a dead cat lying in an unnatural pose.

A week later when the gruesome job of emptying the various jars was complete, several human bodies were found. The one later identified as Harry Grimshaw held a piece of broken glass tightly in his hand, the tip of which was covered in blood.

The Radio Operator

Marion Fitswalter dropped the sun visor onto the windscreen. The bright summer sunlight blinded her as Richard, her husband of forty years, turned the car into the Yorkshire Air Museum. On the back seat of the car sat their excited seven year old grandson.

During the summer holidays they would take the schoolboy out for several excursions; it was a good chance for them to visit places not normally visited by a couple of senior citizens.

Parking the car they began their trip through aviation history. Thomas had already run off into the first building eager to see the exhibits.

Flying was in the family, Richard had been a young pilot in the Second World War and Marion a radio operator at Hedon Aerodrome. All trace of the aerodrome had now sadly disappeared. The more foreboding view of the BP refinery now dominated the landscape. The only reference of the aerodrome ever having existed was the filling station on the main road, Hedon Aerodrome Garage said the painted sign above the forecourt entrance.

After leaving the exhibition on the early days of flight and the pioneers of the air, Keighley, the Wright Brothers and others, the young lad was running off toward the World War II exhibition. Thomas of course wanted to see the spitfire displays and mock-ups. As he saw them his face exploded into a smile and he ran off toward the numerous exhibits.

Left somewhat behind the two boys, Marion looked around. Without any warning she was suddenly taken back to her wartime roll. Marion was unprepared for the flood of memories which came rushing back. Each piece of equipment evoked a different thought, memory or even smell in her mind. The radio sets, headphones, maps and markers were all there, just as she remembered them. In one case there was a log book on display, the small plaque underneath it read, 'Flight Record Book, Hedon Aerodrome'

Marion's heart missed a beat as she studied the neat hand writing on the open pages. The handwriting was her own. Marion was overcome by a wave of nostalgia. She could actually remember writing the aircraft number down, the times and the dates. It was a

strange coincidence that the ledger should be open at that particular page. The events of that night she remembered vividly.

On a cold clear night in November the twenty four year old Marion, dressed in her air force uniform, sat down at her radio station. Though the aerodrome was not an RAF station an operator was always left on site for any aircraft needing assistance.

Putting the headphones on she plugged in and turned the dial looking for any signs of activity. All was quiet that night, earlier in the evening a squadron of Luftwaffe aircraft had droned overhead, her German was not good enough to pick out any meaning for what was said so she didn't really pay much attention to the unrecognisable babble that came from the speakers. Since that contact, nothing. She looked out of the window, all she saw was the clear, cold sky and the bright moon shining down. The tea lady clattered her way into the room, all the contents of her tray rattling as she crossed the uneven floor.

Violet the char woman already knew Marion's order. A cup of hot tea with one sugar was placed beside her. "Thank you Violet." Marion smiled, glad to see someone else, it was a quiet night.

Sitting back in her chair she took a sip of the hot tea. It was so quiet. Marion didn't enjoy her turn doing the ghost shift as it was called. In the gloomy light, shadows were cast across the floor; the moonlight casting more shadows in the opposite direction.

Every click, tick and bang usually made her jump out of her skin, tonight though there was no wind so no doors banging or windows rattling. No need to change the signal square either. The signal square indicated the direction of the wind for landing aircraft. Nothing was landing tonight anyway. As she sat in the eerie silence Marion almost did the unthinkable, her eyes slowly started to close. Her attention was quickly brought back to the cold reality of war as her headphones crackled into life.

"Mayday, mayday" came the faint voice in her ear. Marion twisted the dial on the radio trying to tune in on the faint signal. Moments later it had gone. Frantically she turned the dial trying to find the voice again, then she heard it. She checked the time for the log, 1.41am.

“Is there anyone out there? This is flight zero y d zero u. request permission to land.”

“I hear you flight zero y d zero u. What is your position?” all Marion heard was static for several minutes. She held her breath waiting for a response. Some of her brave boys sounded like they were in trouble and this was one of the reasons why she was here, to talk them home or give them a reassuring voice to listen to as they flew to their death.

The radio crackled back into life, “We’re somewhere on the coast line, our navigator is trying now to plot a position”

The drone of the engines almost drowned out the faltering voice of the pilot, “That’s the trouble with Lincolnshire, it’s all so damn flat.”

“Where are you heading flight zero y d zero u?” Marion asked. Her voice was calm, almost sympathetic. She knew something was wrong, the tone of the pilot’s voice gave that away.

“Not sure” said the pilot interrupted by static, “we took a hit over the Wash, our tails on fire.”

“Not far now,” the calming voice from the ground disguised the upset in her heart. Would they make it? She didn’t know, they didn’t know. It was a mirror on the war, insecurity everywhere, “I’m sure the drinks are being poured for you now in the mess ready for when you land.” Marion continued. A single tear ran down her cheek. If their tail was on fire the aircraft wouldn’t last much longer now.

“What?” the pilot’s voice broke the silent airwaves. Shock, surprise and incredulity was all held within that one word. “No wonder our navigator was lost.”

After a moment of anxious waiting Marion dared to ask, “What’s the problem flight zero y d zero u.”

“We hit a bank of fog ten minutes ago. When we emerged our navigator had trouble finding a bearing. We managed to get back from Berlin, but got lost on the coast. Now he’s telling me that he has just sighted the Humber.”

“Then you’ve overshot?”

“We can’t turn back now, This old bird will never make it.”

“Don’t worry, head north west, once you’re over the river, you’ll see the aerodrome landing lights.” Marion reassured the pilot.

“Roger that, heading over the river now.”

Within an instant Marion had contacted the operations tower and explained the current situation with flight zero y d zero u. the runway lights came on, at that instant the lights in the radio room dimmed slightly such was the drain on the electricity.

“Flight zero y d zero u do you copy, can you see the runway.” She asked.

Only static, no reply came.

Was it too late? Where were they?

After two desperate minutes the radio crackled into life. “We see you, coming in. We’ll only get one chance at this, thanks for your help.”

“My pleasure.” Smiled Marion, they had made it against all the odds they had made it. For the second time that night a tear ran down her cheek, this time it was of joy, not sorrow.

Leaving her post she crossed the room and looked out of the window. The incoming aircraft was a bright ball in the clear sky. Slowly it started its final approach.

As it approached the flames licking in the air from the tail became more defined, there was not much of the fin left. It came closer and closer until it flew over the top of the building. That was the last time she ever saw it. The north side of the room had no windows for her to see the landing. No more radio contact was heard, but they were safe, that was all that mattered.

“Look grandma, look.” Marion was brought back to the present by her young grandson tugging and squeezing her coat sleeve. As he did he ran off to the next glass case standing on tiptoes to gain a better view.

Marion’s own attention was drawn by one of the numerous facsimile news paper cuttings on the wall. It was a number in the text that first caught her eye, zero y d zero u.

Above the text was a picture of a crashed Lancaster Bomber flanked by six head and shoulder shots of the crew. The sight of it took her breath away. That was the flight number she always remembered so well. What had happened to it and its crew?

As she read the article, tears welled up in her eyes. This could not be true, there were no survivors. Maybe it was wrong, nothing in the article was correct.

The piece told the sad story of a Lancaster Bomber, flight zero y d zero u that crash landed in a fireball at its home base of Scampton, Lincolnshire. The date was 23rd November, the time 1.25am

That was fifteen minutes before she had spoken to the pilot and guided him to safety.

The Saint Steven's Day Hunt

Lord Harnett, Master of the Hunt looked out of the first floor window. In the courtyard below the hunt members assembled ready for the mornings ride. An air of anticipation filled the air as the riders and stable hands chatted about the days proceedings. The sound of horses hooves clattering on the cobbles paired with the barking of dogs drowned out most of the conversation.

The Master checked his appearance in the full length mirror, his dress was immaculate, the scarlet jacket and cream riding breeches were pressed with military precision. The riding boots that fitted so well around his feet and calves shone so much he could almost see his own reflection.

A knock came at the door, "Come." He said in a commanding tone.

A young lad entered, no more than fourteen years old. He was dressed very much like his Lordship, only a miniature version. In his hand he carried a silver tray, on it sat a glass of sherry.

"I thought you may like a glass of something Sir?" he said in his quiet innocent voice.

"Why, young man," retorted his Lordship, a genuine warmth in his voice, "thank you very much." He took the glass from the tray and held it up to his lips. "Sit down young man."

The lad sat on a stool in front of the dressing table, "And who do we have here?"

"Edward Bennett, Sir."

"Bennett?" the Master recognised the name, but where are you from.

"The Crown, Sir. My father's the landlord."

"Of course." Smiled the old man, "Harold's young son. The last time I saw you, you were in short trousers." He tossed the sherry back in one movement.

As he put the glass down on the dressing table he felt a cold draught on the back of his neck. Although it was the twenty sixth of December the weather was unusually mild for this time of year. So where had it come from? He finally put it down to the glass of sherry he had just consumed. "Is this your first hunt young man?"

“Yes Sir.” Said the lad, “I’ve been riding all year now, practising for today.

“Good lad.” He replied sitting down on the long stool next to the teenager. He looked into the middle distance and reminisced about days gone by, “I still remember my own first hunt, “he said with a nostalgic air in his voice, “it was all different in those days. If I remember rightly I spent more time on the ground than on my horse. I’ll never forget it though. The dogs bagged a fox, it was a good kill.”

“Did you get blooded?”

“Oh yes, my father did it.”

“Will I today?”

“Let’s get one first. Then I will do it myself.” Again a shiver ran down his spine. “It was all different in those days. Now the hunt is plagued by these working class protesters, all of them from the towns and the cities, not a clue about our traditions and ways, damn dogooders. In the old days none of them would dare stand in the way of the Master’s horse. Anyone who did would be whipped.”

“Really?” asked Edward, a hint of excitement in his voice.

“Now, hunting itself as a sport is in danger, the government now are trying to abolish it, damn labour classes. The vote should never have been given to the common man.

On the wall hung a huge mirror. From across the room the Master looked at his own melancholy face. Then he saw something behind him. It was a fleeting glimpse, but a figure stood behind him. He spun round to challenge the newcomer, but no one was there. Strange, he could have sworn a woman was...

A trick of the morning light, it must have been.

“This hunt,” he continued, “had its roots in the middle ages and has had a bloody history down the ages. It started out as a hunt for convicted criminals. The Lord would give any convicted man a fighting chance, this only happened on mid summer’s day and Saint Steven’s Day. The choice was theirs, the block or the hunt. The block was a quicker death, but the hunt gave them a fighting chance.

Later in the seventeenth century it became more of a race between man, dog and horse. Man against beast.

So there you are young man, today when you ride out you will be riding into history, and,” he said with a smile on his face, “you might even hit the odd protester, what.”

This time man and boy laughed. His Lordship liked this boy, they seemed to be on the same wavelength. The laughter died away, “A protester was killed once here. It was back in the late eighteen hundreds. By all accounts she was a strange woman, lived up on the Wold’s in a shake...”

It was a cold winter morning in 1895. The hunt was planned for later that day. Amongst the comings and goings of the stable lads the Lord of the Manor took a stroll around the courtyard. The horses were being exercised, the hounds fed and in the tap room leather and brasses were being polished to within an inch of their life.

The Master was happy with the work being carried out by his staff, so he returned to the house for breakfast.

After the sizeable meal he allowed the newspaper to captivate his time for the next half an hour. This was interrupted by the butler knocking on the dinning room door.

“What is it Hargreaves?” asked the thick set florid faced Master.

“The gamekeeper begs your pardon sir. He would value a moment of your time sir.” Hargreaves was of the old school, almost pre-Victorian, steady as a rock and discrete as a spy.

“I’ll be out presently.” He replied not looking up from his copy of The Times.

“Very good Sir.” As silently as he had entered he left the room.

Lord Harnett squinted as he left the confines of the house and out into the courtyard.

There next to the door stood Prescott, the game keeper, cap in hand waiting his lordships pleasure.

“Ah, Prescott. You wanted to see me”

“Yes, my Lord.” He said twisting his cap between both hands.

“Well out with it then, busy day you know.”

“It’s the Molly woman Sir, she’s been seen.” The game keeper appeared to be on edge.

“And?”

“Well, Sir...”

“You people from the village are all so superstitious.” He said, “Come on show me where.”

Molly was a mysterious woman who lived in the woods high up on Brantingham Dale. No one knew who she was or where she had come from. Several attempts had been made to run her off of the land, but every time a group of foresters had been sent into the wood to find her she would disappear. The air of mystery surrounding her intensified on every failed attempt to rid her from the property.

In the local Inn the foresters would tell their tales of how she had vanished into the trees the tale embellished each time it was told. Some said she could talk to the animals, if she had lived two hundred years earlier she would have been burned as a witch. Were the animals her familiar spirits warning here of the oncoming rabble? Others said she was a tree spirit or forest elf. No one was entirely sure.

Prescott had taken his Lordship to the main gate of the estate. The gate stood on the only track into the grounds of the house, for a mile out after the gate the wood clung to both sides of the road. “She was there Sir.” He said pointing into the trees to the right of the stone pillar which one of the gates swung on.

“What was she doing?”

“Just looking Sir. Prescott now felt a little bit of a fool. Maybe it had been somewhat of a knee jerk reaction bringing his Lordship out to the gate. He felt the expression of disapproval on his Lordship’s face burn into the back of his head. He turned to face his Master, “Sorry Sir.”

“Carry on.” He said turning and walking away back toward the house.

On returning to the courtyard much activity met him. Most of the horses were out of the stables and being walked around. The dogs were unusually frisky, all barking as though they had been excited by something. This pleased his Lordship, the hounds would be on good form today. His own horse, Pegasus was the finest for miles around, on every hunt it led the way. The head stable boy should be seeing to him now, he would pay him a visit, make sure everything was in order.

The moment he entered the stable he knew something was wrong, the horse seemed disturbed by something, the fire in its eyes had gone. As his Lordship arrived at the gate he saw a figure bending down at the rear right leg of Pegasus. "You boy, what do you think you're doing there?"

The figure remained in the crouching position, still and silent. "You boy," he repeated in a louder sterner tone, "I'm talking to you." The hooded figure slowly rose and then turned. To the Masters surprise the figure wasn't the stable boy, but that of a middle aged woman, her face haggard and worn. She looked considerably older than her years. In her hand she held a short bladed knife, blood smeared on the blade. On the cobbled floor of the stable a small pool of blood gathered by the horses hoof.

"What the hell's going on here?" shouted his Lordship. His voice so loud everyone in the courtyard stopped their work and looked toward the stable, none dare investigate the cry.

"You kill animals." Said the woman, disdain in her voice. "they do you no harm. Without them the woods will become unbalanced, you destroying the woods natural cycle."

Mad, she's mad. He thought to himself.

"So I'm going to stop you, you can't hunt without a horse."

"Do you have any idea how much the animal is worth?" he blurted out, "if you've done him any harm I'll kill you."

With a brisk act of defiance the woman pointed the knife at the master. A clear threat to him in his opinion.

"You insolent peasant." Grabbing a long hook off the wall he swung it round in a circular motion over his head before bringing it down towards her. The curved hook embedded itself in her throat, blood shot out of the wound both where it had entered and the exit wound opposite.

The woman fell to the floor. A pool of blood formed around her lifeless body.

Prescott was the first person to come into the stable on hearing the scream. Seeing the body he froze. His eyes bulged in their sockets and his jaw fell open.

"Any idea who she is?" asked the Master without a hint of emotion in his voice.

“Sir, that’s Molly, the woods woman.”

“Good, get rid of it.”

“Sir?”

“Get rid of it, now” he bellowed.

“Where, Sir?” his mind wasn’t thinking straight after the shock of seeing the grotesque image on the floor.

“Come on man, pull yourself together.”

“Yes Sir. The new cesspit, we’ve just dug a new cesspit.”

“Perfect, get on with it man, good riddance to her.”

“Wow.” Said Edward after listening to the story, “Is that true.”

“As far as I know,” he told the boy, “the story’s been passed down the family for generations so who knows how accurate it is to what actually happened.

Now run along and make yourself ready.”

Edward left the room, a smile on his and a heart full of anticipation. Ten minutes later he was ready. Checking his reflection one last time he made towards the door.

In the hallway he was met by one of the stable staff, “Yes Carl, what can I do for you in this fine morning?”

“Morning Sir. The usual group of protesters are massing at the gate Sir. Do you want me to take any action?”

A sinister side of Lord Harnett became prevalent, his face hardened and his teeth ground together. “Do we have any spare dogs?”

“Dogs, yes Sir, about a dozen.” No, he wasn’t going to, he wouldn’t.

“Then set the dogs on them.” He said grinding his teeth.

Carl didn’t move, had he heard the Master correctly?

“Well what are you waiting for man.”

“Sir.” Answered Carl scuttling off down the hallway.

Holding his head up high his Lordship walked out into the daylight ready for the days hunting.

The day’s activities went well, no protesters plagued the hunt and the hounds chased and caught three foxes. An excellent day’s work by all concerned.

Young Edward Bennett was blooded by his Lordship himself much to his delight. Throughout the hunt though the young boy couldn't help but think of the murder there all those years before. The image in his mind was brought to life when he saw a hooded woman in the woods watching the passing horses.

Later that day as dusk was falling, the hunt ball was in full swing in the great hall. His Lordship felt a little hot in the house so decided to work off the five course meal he had just enjoyed with a walk in the cold bracing December air.

He found himself in the courtyard, now hosed and cleaned down after the aftermath of the hunt. The acoustics of the courtyard could play tricks on the ears with its echoing stone walls. He swore that he could hear someone talking. No one was around, it must have been a voice from the house. Standing looking into the sky he could see the stars now becoming visible in the east while to the west the last throws of sunlight coloured the sky above the horizon.

There was that voice again, behind him this time. He turned, no one was there. If someone was having a practical joke with him there was only one place they could have slipped out of view, the main stable block.

Slowly he crept in.

It was almost pitch black in the stable, the only light came in through the windows. It took a moment for his eyes to adjust to the lack of light. In the stable bays the horses stood silent and still, not a shake of a main or tail or nod of a head from any of them. That was strange in itself. He felt a chill in the air and shivered.

There they were. The practical joker was standing in a shadow in the darkest part of the stable. "You there, show yourself." Silence was the only reply. He took a step closer to the figure, then something made him stop. A strong suspicion came over him that this person was not one of his invited dinner guests. He stretched out his left hand and took the first thing he could off the wall. a long handled hook. If this was a thief then he wouldn't be getting out without a fight. "Show yourself." He ordered again.

The figure in the shadows took a step forward into the partial light of the window.

It was a woman. Her hood obscured her face from view.

“What are you doing in here? This is private property.” Abruptly asked the Master.

As she lifted her head the light shone on her disfigured face. A face that was black with old blood stains and he saw a hole in the front of her neck.

Fear struck Lord Harnett. Something was behind him also, he could feel its breath on the back of his neck.

In sheer panic he swung the long handled hook at the figure standing in front of him. It hit her in the head. He felt no resistance to the swing. It had passed straight through her. The momentum swung him round through a hundred and eighty degrees, behind him silently sat the pack of hunting hounds watching him patiently.

He turned back to the woman. She slowly lifted her arm and pointed a finger at Lord Harnett. The dogs stood to attention then attacked him.

Once dead the hounds returned to the kennels in silence while Molly returned to the trees.

There were no more hunts on that estate, no more protesters, no more deaths, no more need for justice to be handed out.

The Signalman's' Ghost

Albert Morrison had always had a passion for the railway. Both man and boy he'd spent many an afternoon watching the steam engines pass the end of his terraced street. All the walls of the houses were black with soot from the combined chimneys of the house fires and the passing engines.

From six in a morning to nine at night the clank of tank engine buffers ringing around the coal yard and streets of the huddled together houses where Albert lived.

The coal yard was the location of his employment. He was only a labourer, but loved being around the engines. Then on one cold morning in mid winter a loose sack of coal dislodged itself from a slow moving flat car. Albert tried to jump out of the way but the heavy sack landed on his right leg. The ankle was crushed, his employment terminated. Such accidents were not uncommon and the staff knew not to expect anything from the company.

A week later he received a visit from his Uncle. They sat in the front kitchen, Albert's leg raised in front of the fire. That visit brought him better news than he could ever have hoped for.

A friend of his Uncle was the Station Master a Brough railway station. A job as signalman was in the offing. The Station Master himself had lost a foot in the trenches of the Great War and on hearing of his friend's accident offered him the post immediately. On Monday 2nd February 1933 Albert Morrison climbed the wooden steps to the Brough East signal box.

It was a dream come true for the young man just creeping into middle age. As he entered, the first thing he laid eyes upon was the bank of signal levers along the right hand side. Above them, the windows looked out onto the tracks running past. On the left hand wall as he entered was a large shelf protruding out and on it sat a large open book with a lamp shining down on it. The book was used to record all traffic passing over the level crossing. The click, click of a wall clock could be heard, this was situated on the wall above the shelf. At the East End of the box sat an old armchair and a table equipped with a kettle, teapot and a couple of old well worn mugs. The kettle and teapot were also at least ten years old and well used.

The Station Master followed him in and over the next hour and a half informed him of his duties and showed hi the operations of the level crossing.

“So, do you think you’re up to it young man?” he asked.

“Oh yes Sir.” Replied Albert with an enthusiastic tone in his voice.

The box was cold. Several of the windows were open to stop the room becoming misted up with condensation, a fire would soon cure that.

The Station Master made a mug of tea for them both. He sat down on the chair and asked if Albert had understood everything? He had. After a lifetime of reading about, watching and talking to the men off the railway there wasn’t much he didn’t know.

One thing puzzled him, what had happened to his predecessor? When asked the question the Station Master turned in the seat and paused a moment before answering. As he opened his mouth to speak the bell rang. His first traffic of the day was minutes away.

“Ah, here we go Albert. Show me what to do.”

“Right.” He said preparing himself. He looked at the bank of levers before him, after pulling the change lever he pulled the lever changing the west bound signal so it dropped leaving the green light showing. Then opening the door he ran down the wooden steps and closed the two gates blocking off the road, not that there was any traffic at his time of the day, or indeed at any time of day here. He returned to the box and waited to see what would come through.

Two and a half minutes later an A4 Pacific thundered past the box. The smoke blew high into the air as it shot through at high speed. Once clear Albert went about reversing the process changed the signal then the changing lever and finally once again he went down the steps onto the road and opened the gates.

“Morning.” A passing pedestrian said to him as he went about his business.

“Good morning.” Replied Albert in good spirit. That was his first train through.

On the opposite side of the road a cinder footpath ran alongside the track up onto the east bound platform of the station. Albert could see a figure, all in black looking down the path toward him.

It was still early; the sun had not yet rose above the horizon. It was only out the corner of his eye that he caught the fleeting glimpse. He finished opening the gate, the latch snapping into its clip on the post. He looked again down the ally.

The figure was gone. It must have been a trick of the light, or the lack of it.

He closed the door behind him and took off his hat and coat hanging them up on the peg next to the door.

“Forgotten something?” asked the old Station Master quizzically.

“The log book. No, just about to do it.” he said picking up a pen and recording the time and direction of the train in the duty log.

“Well, I’ll let you get on. The 6.40 a.m. to Hull will be coming through shortly.” He put his mug of tea down and walked out of the box into the dark morning.

Albert finished his mug of tea, he was happier now than for as long as he could remember. The bell rang once again, “Here we go,” he said to himself. Five minutes later it was all over. A freight train came through at a low steady speed. The gates opened, signals changed and the log book was filled in.

Varying amounts of time elapsed between traffic coming through his crossing. It stood on the main line linking Hull and the main East Coast line as well as the transpennine route linking east and west coasts.

By the time mid morning had come his heightened state of alert had waned somewhat. He knew that there was time sit and read or make a cup of tea in between his duties. He took a book out of his bag and sat down to read. It was a copy of ‘The Signalman’ by Charles Dickens bought for him by his Uncle when he had been offered the job. He enjoyed ghost stories and this particular one seemed to be have written just for him.

As he read the spooky tale he heard the sound of heavy footsteps coming up the steps. He froze with fear, his mind was still in the book. The door swung open and in stepped a black faced figure, in fact he was black from head to foot. Albert after a sudden moment of shock breathed a sigh of relief when he saw that it was only the coal man covered from head to toe in coal dust.

“Now then.” Said the black face, white lines protruding from the corners of his eyes and the creases in his face made by his large smile. “Coal.” He said dropping a black sack on the floor.

“Morning.” Said Albert in return.

“Cold day.” the newcomer looking at the tea pot, “Any tea on the go?”

“Of course.” Albert put his book down and poured two mugs of hot tea, he handed one to the coal man, “Here” he said passing one mug over.

“Oh God bless 'ya.” He said wrapping his coal black hands around the hot cup, “You the new guy then?”

“First morning.” He told him sitting back down in his chair.

“Lets hope 'ya last longer than the last pair they had in 'ere.”

Albert remembered that the Station Master had avoided the question with regard to his predecessor earlier that morning.

“What happened to him, I asked the Station Master but he didn't say.”

“Him, them more like.” His white teeth shone through his blackened face. “It all started, oh I'd say about three or four months since, before Christmas any road.”

He thought back as he took another mouthful of tea. “It was like this. ‘I'm on the day shift...’ began the coal man perching himself on the edge of the table.

The bell rang.

“Excuse me” said Albert, duty called.

The low winter sun shone in Arthur's eyes as he walked down the steps. He could see his breath in the cold air as he swung the gates closed. The sunlight wasn't strong, but bright enough to make him squint.

There he was again, that man on the footpath, all in black. He could see a little more clearly now, the figure was wearing a hat. The brim of it throwing a shadow onto his face. “I'll have to go.” Said a voice from behind him. Albert turned quickly and with a start. Behind him stood the coal man standing one step up from him, “Thanks for the tea, did me the world of good that.”

Arthur wasn't listening, “Do you know who he is?”

“Who?”

Arthur pointed towards the path, "*Him*"

"I don't know who 'ya mean." Said the bemused coal man.

"Him there, I see him every morn..." his words were cut short as he turned to look at the strange figure, but now no one was to be seen. The path was clear only the wind rushed down it. Again it had happened, yesterday though it had been in the hours of darkness and he had put it down to a trick of the light.

The coalman's steam driven van puffed off down the road toward the crossroads. Arthur returned to his box, once in he peered down the path. He could see nothing.

The bell rang interrupting his thoughts, more traffic.

As he walked along the bank of levers his book fell to the floor after catching on his sleeve. He looked at it and thought of the story. The signalman in the story saw predictions of death and then ultimately his own demise. Was the strange figure a ghostly apparition? He read too many ghost stories.

The next morning was stormy as Arthur took over the charge of the signal box from his night shift contemporary.

"Goodnight" said George as he wrapped his collar up around his neck.

"Bye George." Said Arthur pouring a kettle full of hot water into the tea pot.

He took a sip of the hot drink and looked down the track. From behind him he heard the sound of footsteps coming up the stairs, "What's he forgotten?" he muttered to himself waiting for George's head to appear at the door.

George's head never appeared though, nor did anyone else. Arthur felt a sudden chill come over him. Slowly he crossed the length of the box and looked out of the door. At the bottom of the stairs he could see a dark figure swinging a hammer down on what appeared to be one of the gates. He put down his mug and hurriedly put on his jacket and hat. On his way out of the door he picked up his lamp. It would be useful not only to light the way but could be used as a formidable weapon. On the stairs the rain whipped into his face, the wind was coming from the north and had an icy bite to it.

“You there” he shouted at the figure, but what figure no one was there. He stood looking at the empty road. Apart from the howling of the wind and the constant beating down of the rain all was quiet. The ringing of the bell brought him back to the present. After closing the gate he was glad to get back into the safety of the box.

One hour later he heard the sound of the footsteps coming up the stairs, with nowhere to run Arthur waited to see who it was. A wave of relief swept over him when he saw the face of the coalman appear at the door.

Minutes later he had his usual cup of tea and was warming himself by the fire.

“Tell me, is this station haunted?” Arthur asked him.

The coalman looked into his tea cup and nodded. Slowly he told Albert the story, “Yesterday you asked me what had happened to your predecessor.”

“Yes.”

“Well, he is the one that haunts this station.”

“Heavens, why?”

“It turns out that, well let me start at the beginning.” He sat himself on the edge of the table.

“Here sit down here.” Arthur offered vacating his old red leather arm chair.

“Thank you” he sat down, making himself at home in the seat. “The men that were stationed here before you now are both dead.”

For a second in that signal box the silence was deafening.

“The dayshift man, David Morgan his name was. It turns out that he was sleeping with the wife of the nightshift signalman. He knew that every night he would be here so no chance of getting caught by him with his wife. Somehow though the nightshift man, what was his name? Morris, Morris Pinder, that’s him.

Anyway he found out. So just over a month ago Morgan clocked on at 5.30am as normal. Morris Pinder said his goodbyes before leaving for home. Morgan was none the wiser, he didn’t know his secret had been discovered. Carrying on as normal he made himself a cup of tea and sat down to read the newspaper.

The bell rang, he put his paper down and changed the signal. Outside he undid the latch that held the gate open.

Two wild eyes were watching him. His back was toward the man skulking behind one of the bushes that grew on the boundary between the road and railway property.

The figure of Morris Pinder slowly came out from the shadows carrying a hammer in his right hand. He raised it up above his head and brought it down on Morgan's head. The force threw him out onto the line, half conscious. Pinder followed him. Bending over the body he once again brought the hammer down on his head again and again cracking his skull. The hammer fell with vicious rapidity. The body lay on the ground, dead, but still the hammer rained down on him. The skull was holed and the soft pulp of the brain was exposed to the air. Pinder was a man possessed by hatred and jealousy. He didn't hear the frantic whistling of the engine speeding toward him.

At the last moment the hammer raised above his head ready to strike one last time, he looked up and saw the Pacific engine approaching. The whistle drowned out the scream as his body was thrown over the two bar fence that separated the rails from the foot path down to the station."

"Where did his body land?"

"About half a mile down the path."

That was where Arthur had just seen the dark figure standing.

"I never heard about it, it wasn't in the local newspaper."

"No, it was hushed up. The railway company told the Police that it was an accident."

That night Arthur's dreams were filled with the images of what must have happened that fateful morning. He did not sleep well and when he got to work the next morning he was adorned with dark rings around his eyes.

"Bad night?" asked George.

"Yes, couldn't sleep." He replied taking off his coat. As Arthur sat in his chair drinking tea, his mind was still thinking of the murder there only weeks before.

Still the coal man was coming early today, that was always something to look forward to, he would have the kettle on ready for him.

The bell rang. The first mornings arrivals was on its way, so began another day.

He changed the signal and put on his hat and coat. On leaving the box he dared to look up the path to the Station. No one was there. He felt more then relieved.

Bending down to unhook the latch a dark figure came up behind him and brought a hammer down on the back of his head. Arthur's body lurched forward onto the track. The hammer came down several times pummelling his head.

The coal man's steam lorry was coming down the road, from in his cab he could see a strange occurrence at the level crossing. Something struck him as being wrong, he open the regulator valve and hurried to the scene of the crime.

As he pulled up a coal train thundered through.

This time no body was thrown off the track. The brakes of the engine squealed in the darkness as the driver shut off steam. The coal man looked at the sliced up body on the track, he felt sick, and then was sick by the side of the road.

For half an hour he stayed there staring at the disassembled body. The driver of the train arrived, out of breath he had run back down the line.

"I didn't stand a chance. I only saw him at last minute." He wheezed.

"What did you see?" asked the coal man without taking his eyes off of the body.

"Just him lying on the track, where's the signal man?"

"He's the signal man." An uneasy pause ensued. "You didn't see anyone else?"

"No just him."

For the first time he looked up from the track. Why he didn't know, but something made him look down toward the station.

Half way along the cinder track he could see a dark figure watching him.

The Stairway

In a tastefully furnished first floor room Henry Sullivan sat at a writing desk. He checked through a large ledger to see who would be calling on him that day. The clock on the mantelpiece was striking eleven o'clock as Sullivan looked out of the window at the bustling city below.

The first of today's business would be calling on him shortly. A single oil lamp illuminated the room, this was placed on the top of his desk. It burned to serve only one purpose, to aid with the reading of the assorted papers piled up neatly on the desk.

The only entrance to the room was a door situated at the top of a flight of stairs. The stairway was cold and unfurnished, no carpet lay on the floor, no banister rail protruded from the wall.

It was winter outside, but even in the balmy days of summer those who had the misfortune to tread the steps up to that room would feel a chill on the back of their neck. The fortunate ones would also have the experience on the return journey back down the stairs, just though the fortunate ones.

Outside the front door of the white stone property, times were hard in the city of Hull in the year 1885. Men returning from the Crimea, of which there were many, found it difficult to fit back into civilian life, jobs for the veteran soldiers were hard to come by.

The docks thrived with cargo coming and going from all parts of the world, the port was a vital link to the Empire. In the west of the city, seagulls hovered above the fish docks waiting for a tasty morsel to come their way; while on the pier, box loads of fruit were being unpacked for the Humber Street Market.

As the Dockers worked, the prostitutes watched from the doorways of the many pubs knowing that for many of the men, today was pay day, a busy night ensued.

A middle aged woman, shabby in appearance stepped off the top flight of the staircase and stood outside Mr Sullivan's door. She paused outside the door waiting a moment to compose herself. With a deep breath she knocked on the door.

For a moment nothing happened, then she felt something on the back of her neck, it was icy cold. Drawing in a short sharp breath she

turned, but no one was there. The creak of the door opening took her attention back to the purpose of her visit.

“Come in Mrs Streetwater.” said Sullivan, his body framed in the doorway.

The woman entered the room and stood in its centre. Sullivan closed the door behind her. As the catch clicked shut Mrs Streetwater shivered.

Sullivan eyed her from head to toe looking for any evidence of new garments on her person. It was clear to him that she possessed none. On every visit she had worn the same old filthy clothes. Sullivan sat at his desk and consulted his book, not that he had to, he knew the exact amount owing.

“You now owe fourteen shillings Mrs Streetwater, do you have this week’s payment?” she said nothing.

“Well I’m waiting.” he sneered.

“No, Sir. I don’t.”

“Well. What am I going to do with you?” again she remained silent. She had heard the tales of his late payers, some were never seen again.

“Well?” he shouted at her.

“Sorry Sir, it was my youngest, Albert, I had to take him to the docs. his breathing was...”

Sullivan interrupted her, “I’m not interested in your petty domestic affairs,” he yelled, “But, I am not a monster despite what some people say, you have until next week. Two weeks owing next week or I will not be so understanding.”

“Thank you Sir.” She turned towards the door.

Sullivan jumped out of his chair and opened it for her. She passed through the door, her body as stiff and tense as a stone column, she was still afraid of what he could do to her before she made it out of the front door. He watched her closely as she passed him then slowly descend down the stairs. As she opened the front door onto the street she breathed again, then out of the corner of her eye she caught sight of something that made her run out of the house in blind terror.

At the bottom of the stairs there was an internal door. It had swung open and there standing in the kitchen was a dwarf of a man wearing a blood stained overall while in his hand he carried a meat cleaver. A disfiguring scar ran down the left hand side of his face, from the forehead down over the eye stopping at the line of the jaw bone. He smiled at the woman's response, stepping out into the hall he closed the front door.

"Be ready, soon." said his master's voice from the top of the stairs, "It'll be the next one in, with a bit a luck."

Accompanied by a laugh the dwarf disappeared back into the kitchen.

In the street outside the white stone house, a one armed man paused at the door. He took one last drag on his cigarette, flicked the stub into the road's central gutter before looking round. After that final turn of his head he opened the door and entered the house. Slowly he climbed the stairway. Half way up he felt a pressure building on his chest, cold engulfed him. He felt cold now and his legs wouldn't go another step upward, it was as though an invisible force was trying to stop him going any further.

Since he had returned from military service he had heard voices in his head, but never had he experienced something as strange as this.

"Go, go back." said a voice deep inside his head, "Heed my words, for I am Ian Foreman." it continued.

The voices had started again, his head hurt, something inside his skull was beating like hammer on anvil.

Composing himself he continued up the stairs and once at the top knocked on the door. With a creak the door opened. "Mr Jackson, come in." as the ex-army man passed through into the room his wake omitted a smell which the nostrils of Sullivan picked up at once, though he didn't mention it, not yet. Slowly he returned to his seat and consulted his book, "Now let me see."

Ben Jackson looked at the floor as Sullivan read out his notes, "You borrowed three guineas' one month ago. This was to procure lodgings for yourself and 'tide' you over while you sort out employment, is that correct?"

Silence was Jackson's only reply.

"Since then I have not seen a penny piece of my money in return. Do you have employment sir?"

Again Jackson said nothing.

"Well?" Sullivan raised his voice.

"No, Sir. I have not, I have only had enough money to eat the smallest amounts of scraps."

"Really. It would appear that you have enough sir to purchase smoking tobacco and matches. Is this a justified use for my money?"

"No Sir."

"The loan is called in Sir, you will have the money to me by the end of the day."

"That's impossible Sir, I need more time to find a..."

"I have given plenty of time due to your being one of Her Majesty's men at Arms. Normally I would take action after only one missed payment, you have had three Sir, three."

"I will try Sir, tonight, I will have it."

"Very well." Agreed Sullivan.

"By the way," Ben was pushing his luck, but for his own sake he had to know. He asked the question that to him seemed more important than the money owed, "Who is Ian Foreman?"

"Foreman, what makes you ask that? Sullivan asked.

"It was just a name that I heard."

"He was a man who couldn't pay his debts." Sullivan replied in an off hand tone. He crossed over to the door and opened it for Jackson, "Tonight, no later than six o'clock."

As Jackson passed, Sullivan lifted up a walking stick from the stand next to the door. This particular stick was only used for special purposes as it was weighted with a lead insert. Raising it above his head to achieve maximum velocity he brought it down on the back of Jackson's neck.

Jackson lost consciousness as soon as the contact was made. His limp body rolled down the stairs landing at the bottom in a twisted heap. The interior door to the kitchen opened. There in the doorway, cleaver in hand stood the dwarf, an acidic smile on his face.

The smile turned to a look of determination as he brought the cleaver down shearing Jackson's head from his body.

“Clean that up, then make the usual arrangements.” Sullivan ordered the little man. He returned to his office where he sat down at the desk and began to count the day’s takings. The interest from his loans plus the trade with the local research hospital was reaping in quite a tidy sum. If his clients couldn’t pay with money then the sale of their cadaver more than covered the amounts of the loan.

At six thirty he had finished for the day. As he placed the pile of bills and coins into the safe he began to feel uneasy. A sense of being watched came over him, a rubbing sound was coming from the door to the stairs. Slowly he crossed the room as quickly as he could then opened the door. No one was there. It was dark now, he closed and locked the safe then lit a candle. After extinguishing the gas lamp he set off down the stairway, the candle in his hand lighting the way.

Half way down the stairs the flame blew out. This left him in almost total darkness. He took out the box of matches from his pocket and struck one of them. The flame was warm, he could feel the heat on his face, lighting the candle once more he took another step down the stairs, then stopped.

What he thought was approximately seven steps down at the bottom of the stairway he could see the figure of a man looking up at him. The flame from the candle was obscuring his view, so he moved it to one side.

“Who is it, who’s there?” he asked, but no one answered his call.

Each time he took a step down the figure moved down a step too. After four or five times he realised that he should have been at the bottom of the stairway, but he wasn’t. It went on.

Turning to face upward back toward his office he no longer could see his office door, only stairs. Turning back to face the apparition he stared at the almost translucent figure, “I know you.” he said walking down the stairs toward it. “I know you, you’re that no good Ian Foreman.” then it dawned on him, Foreman had been one of his victims, Ian Foreman was dead, murdered by him and his cook. The spectre smiled at Sullivan then slowly disappeared leaving him there. He ran down toward the front door, but it never came. On and on he went until he was out of breath.

He sat down on the stairs his head in his hands, the candle beside him, the stairs with no end or beginning, no top or bottom.

The Tomb of Lord Holderness

On a winters morning in 1789 the cold mist lifted off the site of the folly. The stone masons arrived on mass at first light, ready to labour on their works until sundown. Huge vats of lime mortar were mixed by young boys whilst the chip, chip of the chisel on stone filled the morning air.

The noise woke his Lordship. He lay in a large four poster bed covered by various bed coverings and animal skins. He was not surprised to see that his wife, some thirty five years his junior was no longer lying beside him. He felt the mattress where she had laid, it was not even warm. He was sixty five years old, his first wife died and then he took one of her maids to fill her place. The relationship hadn't come about after the death of his spouse, but had raged for at least one year before her death.

Rumour and speculation in the household was that his Lordship had probably done away with her leaving the way open for the young maid to find his bedchamber.

He got out of the bed and wrapped himself in a blanket before walking over to the window and viewing the early morning scene. Through the mist he could see the masons working on his mausoleum. He looked at them with a sense pride, all of them toiling for his final resting place. Wait, what was this, he could see one of the workers slacking. The man slacking from his work was standing by his piece of stone, smoking a pipe. He would be dismissed immediately with loss of his wages.

His attention was taken by something below his window. The sound of footsteps on the gravel could be heard directly below him. A man had just exited from the front door of the house. What had he been doing in the house? He had more than a good idea what this common trade person had been up too. He looked back over his shoulder at the empty bed, oh yes he knew all right.

On the site of the mausoleum one of the masons looked up from his work and saw George Mason coming up the hill from the direction of the house, home to the Holderness family. Edward shook his head

as his son approached. Edward was the Master Mason, his son took more than a liberty with his fathers trust.

“You’ll end up on the end of a rope, my boy.” He said as his son as he walked up the last stretch of the path, a large smile on his face.

“Don’t worry yourself father, I have friends in high places.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of.”

With a smile George picked up his shovel and continued to mix the mortar.

In the kitchen the young Lady Holderness drifted around the large table used for the preparation of food. She was deep in thought, thinking of the last twenty minutes she had spent with the young muscular craftsman George.

To her it was poetic justice for his Lordship upstairs. They had come together after an affair, him cheating on her Mistress, so now she was doing it to him. She would meet George again later that day, he had promised to slip away again if he possibly could.

The construction was slow on that folly of a tomb. His Lordship would not lay out the money for lifting equipment and tackle, so the artisans had to construct the memorial the old fashioned way, the unsafe way.

Already the job had cost the lives of three men raising many a complaint with Edward, but nothing had changed, no one dare approach his Lordship, not if they wanted to maintain their employment.

“His Lordship.” Said a panic stricken voice as one of the men looked up to the figure approaching from the direction of the house. Edward put down his trowel and prepared himself to meet his Master. Holding his cap in his hand and pointing his eyes to the floor Edward waited for his Lordship to speak. No words came, the Master was too busy looking around at the men busying themselves. “Morning your Lordship.” Edward offered the greeting while touching his forelock.

As Lady Holderness passed through the great hall she noticed a scrap of paper on one of the hall tables. Looking round to ensure no

voyeur was spying upon her, she picked up the piece of paper and read its contents.

The print was crude and disassembled; she knew it was a message from George. There on the scrap of paper were two pictures, one of some kind of bucket or pot and the other a tree. Underneath the two etchings were twelve straight vertical lines.

She understood the note perfectly, this was the only way of communication between the two lovers, it wasn't the safest way, but it was the only way.

"Good morning Edward, I see progress is coming on well."

"Er yes Sir, that it is."

"Two things Edward. I need one of your men to come and see me at the house at twelve noon, send your lad George down, he seems capable. "

"Right you are my Lord."

Lord Holderness turned on his heels to head back towards the house, then stopped and turned once again to face Edward. "One other thing."

"Yes Sir."

"That man over there, the one with the pipe."

"Arthur Sir?"

"Finish him, no wages."

"Yes Sir." Edward knew better than to ask why.

Finally Holderness turned and walked back to the house.

"Trouble Dad?" asked George.

"For you lad, for you."

At five minutes to midday an excited but cautious Lady Holderness came into the kitchen. The rendezvous was set, she was early, eager to repeat the morning's copulations.

Good, no one about, "This bodes well," she thought to herself. The note clasped in her left hand was clearly indicating the time and place for the assignation. He had no formal education; his trade was learnt from his father.

The picture of a pot and a tree indicated the location to be the old pantry and the time, twelve o'clock. Quietly she sneaked in and hid behind the door.

Through the small window she could see the large figure of her lover walking down the hill towards the house.

The noise of the pantry door slamming made her jump. Who had closed it? George was still on his way.

The sound of clicking came from the lock, someone had locked the door. Slowly and quietly she turned the doorknob. It was stuck. Frantically she rattled the door, but with no effect. The door was locked. Her lover would be here shortly and he would free her from the small room, which had become a cell.

Two minutes later George entered the front door of the house. As he touched his forelock his Lordship spoke in a business like tone, "Follow me."

The mason followed the Master into the kitchen, "That old doorway, brick it up." He said without any show of emotion in his voice. Did he know his wife was trapped in there? Of course he did, it was he who had left the note in the hall for her to find.

"Right you are my Lord." George was more than happy to oblige his Lordship. He was expecting a whipping at the very least. "Do you want me to take the door off sir? It will make a neater job."

"No, no just brick it up."

In the room she heard the voice of George. He was here to save her. There was another voice; it was the voice of her husband. Her husband was there also. When he left George to his business then he would open the door to return her liberty no doubt.

For what she reckoned to be one hour she sat silently waiting. Noise was to be heard coming through the door. She could wait no longer, "George, George," she called.

The penultimate row of bricks were being laid when George heard the cries for help. He knew who it was and also where the appeals were coming from. Turning to his Lordship he saw the stern look on his face, the hard expression he understood all too well.

He stopped work laying his trowel down on the top of the last course of bricks, an act of defiance to his Master.

"You will finish the work, or I'll have you flogged to death."

George was younger, bigger and stronger than Holderness; he could easily overpower him in a fight. Was she worth it?

No. There were plenty more like her. He finished the wall; he knew when he was well off.

On the inside of the cell Lady Holderness attacked the door with half a brick she had found on the floor in a dark corner. Sheer desperation spurred her on.

Finally the handle came away, the lock broken.

She opened the door to see a wall standing in her way. The doorway to her freedom was gone. Crying she fell to her knees.

The sound of sobbing could be heard for three days after that, on the third day no more was heard.

Six months later the mausoleum was finished, the work complete. George himself had laid the last stone in place, a plaque with the inscription,

“Lord Holderness. A Fair and Honest Man.”

He now worked directly for his Lordship as head of his estate. Lord Holderness had rewarded his obedience with his purse. Did George feel any guilt for what he had done six months previously? The honest answer to that question was, no. The Lordship's wife had been one in a succession of women; no one mentioned her name now. His latest girl was the daughter from his Master's first marriage. Ironically he had landed with both feet firmly on the ground when a noose around his neck was a more likely outcome.

The workers were paid off and thrown off of the estate with the Lords usual grace. Once he had no more use for a man then he became a trespasser on his land.

His Lordship and his latest wife didn't sleep well that summer's night. The next day was the official dedication of the tomb, a celebration would be had.

Though it was a warm summer's night the bedroom was unusually cold, an icy cold wind blowing through the room.

The ceremony finished, many members of the family were now drifting back down the hill towards the house. George took his Lord and Master for a private tour around his memorial.

He had expected it to be cold in there after all it was made of stone. The temperature drop though was much greater than he had expected.

The faithful George showed him the two lines of plots for his ancestors to be buried in and at the end of the aisle stood the monument to him.

His Lordship was pleased with the work. He looked around high and low, nodding his approval. In his side he felt a sharp jab from his estate manager. How dare he touch his Master in such a fashion? He turned toward him and was about to let loose his wrath on the young man for striking his better when he saw the lad's face. It was drained of all colour. Slowly looking around to face the monument to find the source of George's terror.

Standing on the bottom step was a woman. Who was she? How dare she enter this place? Then he stopped dead in his tracks, as he approached her he realised that the slightly translucent figure was the second Lady Holderness. It was the woman the two men had bricked up six months previous.

The figure raised a translucent arm the hand pointing at the plaque. It had changed. It now read...

Lord Holderness

Murderer

George Mason

Betrayer

Both men overcome with fear turned and ran towards the entrance. As they reached the arched doorway they were met not with the door but with a solid stone wall. The archway was still there, but the doorway had been replaced with a solid continuous wall. No sign of the door was visible anymore.

The ghostly figure smiled then faded away.

The Undiscovered Country

The morning started like any other, breakfast while reading the paper, the train to work and the purchase of a bacon sandwich at the station buffet. The indulgence of the sandwich would not please his wife. Eating such an unhealthy snack wouldn't do his heart condition any good at all. He enjoyed his sandwich though, that really was his only pleasure in life other than a glass of wine at the weekend.

His weekends were structured now his children had abandoned the family home. Shopping on a Saturday, church on a Sunday.

The shopping he didn't enjoy, but that was when he chose his bottle of wine, the highlight of the trip. The pilgrimage to the church was, well not meant to be enjoyed, but still he and his wife would attend every Sunday. The two children didn't accompany them anymore. They had long since strayed from the road of religious instruction. It was not totally unexpected. He himself had rebelled in his late teenage years. The excesses of the late '60's consumed him. Jimi Hendrix, Cream, free love and pot had enticed him during his years at university and he would look back on that time with disgust publicly. In his private thoughts though, he remembered them with great regard.

It wasn't until his late twenties that he had fallen back under the reassuring umbrella of the church. He married another member of the congregation and now both attended every Sunday.

Sitting at his desk in the accountant's office where he was employed, he stared at his computer screen unable to concentrate; distraction was all around him. The young twenty something girls that would walk past with their short skirts and open top blouses were a constant distraction. On more than one occasion he would throw more than a cursory glance at them as they wiggled past. After all, he was only human.

The young girls would look upon this fifty year old as a father figure and yes, he could still be deemed attractive for a man of his age, not Sean Connery or John Thaw, but still the best of a bad bunch of older men in the office. He enjoyed their company; it did his ego the world of good to be seen by the other members of the department conversing with them.

Later that very afternoon the sun shone through the south facing windows of the office.

He felt hot and had started to sweat. Frantically he undid the top button of his shirt and yanked down his tie. Then he wasn't aware of the sweat running down his body, a pain had taken his attention, a shooting pain that ran up his right arm into his chest.

Violently he lurched forward knocking his terminal off his desk. Everyone within a twelve foot radius looked up from their work to find out from where the uncommon noise had emanated.

The top half of his torso lay flat on his desk then sprang backwards against his chair. The feeling of panic and helplessness overcame him. He knew all too well that it was a heart attack. Getting to his feet he took one last look around, looking for help, before collapsing on the floor. He dropped like a sack of coal and hit the floor with a heavy thud.

He knew what had happened, his vision was gone, but still he was partly conscious. He heard someone say, "Quick get an ambulance." After that the voices merged into one great echo.

The light his eyes could see was fading now, was this death?

He'd lived a good life all in all. His charity works had raised thousands of pounds, the times volunteered to good causes was incalculable. He was happy with what he had done in life.

Darkness fell.

Wait voices, movement. He was in an ambulance, there was still hope for him. The rocking motion of the vehicle was sending him back off, no he had to fight it, stay awake.

"Don't worry," said a voice, "You'll be at the hospital in a few minutes, they'll take good care of you." It was a paramedic who was speaking to him. He was alive. Now with this piece of good news he allowed himself to slip back into his sleep.

Once again the darkness slipped away. This time he was in an operating theatre. The doctors had inserted tubes up his nose and in his mouth, cables were sticking to his chest and temples. At least a dozen people must have been in the room, he calculated, from what he could see.

He could see a large light above him and at least two cabinets containing all manner of equipment. Then it struck him, how could he see so much?

The view of the events was not one from the perspective of the patient lying on the operating table but of watching the proceedings from a position up in the ceiling. He was looking down at himself on the table.

Three of the nurses caught his eye, they were like angels. The men who seemed to be in charge took two paddles off a machine. He didn't have a clue what it was, but he did know what its purpose was. The machine was for shocking the heart back into a rhythm. Again he asked the question of himself, was he dead?

A cold wind blew from behind him, he turned to see where it came from, what he saw answered his question, that was it he must be dead.

A tunnel of light stretched out before him, twisting and turning with a bright light source at the other end. He looked back toward the operating theatre and saw his body convulsing on the table with each passing shock.

Let it go, he said to himself. As he thought the words he felt himself being projected along the tunnel. The light source became brighter, the living world smaller as he passed through to the other side.

He had never had such a feeling of calm. He was floating, no standing in, what was it? where was it? all he could see all around was light. Did it reach to infinity or was it a mist that shrouded something else. Holding out a hand in front of his face to judge distance, it was perfectly visible. Turning back the tunnel had gone. He didn't feel any fear, the opposite in fact, unrealisable joy.

In front of him a figure appeared, floating in mid air. It was a man, was it? Yes, it was a man. Strangely he couldn't put any other descriptive form to the figure. It was a man dressed in white. What colour hair he had, he could not tell, what his nose was like or eye colour, all were a mystery to him.

"Welcome" said the figure, "you have been expected." He said with a quiet calming voice. "You have many questions?"

"Who are you?" he asked the visitation.

"I am who you think I am."

He said nothing, but he did hope to himself.

"They are all here."

"Who?"

"Your family. Mother, Carol, Father, Paul and your little Uncle."

"Uncle?"

"Billy."

How did he know of that?

"You were the only one who called him Billy were you not; he is here."

This must be paradise, he thought; no one knew he called his Uncle William 'Little Billy' not even Billy himself.

Joy overwhelmed him. Then he felt a stab in his chest, "What was..."

"...That?" said the figure finishing the sentence off for him. "Your time has not yet come to join us. You're going back to spread the word."

Did he want to go back?

"Is there anything you want to ask me, quickly while you have a chance."

"When am I coming back?"

"Soon, soon."

The vision slowly faded from view. The light all around him also began to wane. The pains in his chest were becoming unbearable now, ripping through him wave after wave.

He sat bolt upright on the operating table as the paddles were lifted off his chest for the last time. He was breathing heavily, the doctors had to restrain him and force his body back down onto the table.

He felt as happy as he ever had, it took the assembled personnel of the operating theatre from stopping him jumping off the table and dancing around the room.

His mood has abated somewhat as he lay in a hospital bed, ward eleven. It was two days after the wondrous events he had experienced though, told to rest, he occupied his time writing up his experiences so to never forget them. Forget, how could he ever do that.

The rest of the ward wished he would, as any new arrival came into the ward he would tell them the story in a more than excessively loud voice.

Several visitors called on him during his stay, his wife, children, friends, colleagues and the Reverend Collins from his local church. Each heard the story.

At the end of the second day's recuperation the doctor who had brought him back from the dead paid him a visit. The conversation had only lasted minutes when he lurched into the story of his journey back from the other side.

The doctor listened with interest as he told his tale, he had heard such stories in his time at this and others hospitals. "Tell me," asked the medical man, "did you see anything on top of the two cabinets when you were floating in the room?"

"You don't believe me do you?" he said with a calm forgiving voice, "I know what happened to me, I saw the face of..."

"I ask," interrupted the doctor, "because we are trying to prove that cases such as yours are valid and not just one part of the brain telling another part that the body is on the threshold of death. That is what you're supposed to experience on passing to the other side, next life, heaven etc."

"I can assure you it was real enough." He was not to be moved on the point.

"What convinced you that what happened was a real experience?"

"He knew that I called my Uncle William, Billy. No one knew that, not even him."

"From what I hear you were given the chance to ask this vision a question?"

"That is correct."

"And did you?" the doctor asked full of hope.

"No, I didn't think there was any need too. He had proved himself by knowing what I called my uncle."

"But, that information was already contained in your brain, he told you nothing you didn't already know. That cannot be proof of anything. Why didn't you ask one of the big questions like, 'What is the meaning of life?' or 'How did he create the universe?'"

“That was unnecessary in my opinion and completely disrespectful, after he had shown me so much.”

“You had the chance to ask God why we were here, but you didn’t. Oh well, no doubt we will all find out one day.”

“Doctor Hanson, what on earth do you think you’re doing disturbing my patient?” a large framed West Indian nurse was stampeding down the ward. The doctor in dread of his life stood up to leave,

“My question, did you see anything on top of the cabinet? A picture perhaps?”

“I do believe there was a picture, yes.”

“Of?” asked the young doctor quickly.

“A landscape I think, yes a landscape with a lot of colour. A country scene I think, it was a bit blurred.”

“Thank you,” he said leaving before the large nurse could get within reach of him, “You look after yourself.”

The Sunday morning after his release from hospital he proudly stood in the pulpit of his church and told the assembled congregation of his experience.

They listened in awe at the things he had to say. Not all believed him when he said that he had met God, but most did.

How he had come to the conclusion that it was the almighty he had conversed with didn’t matter to him, it added to the story, ‘I met someone in Heaven’ sounded much grander than ‘I met God.’

He was enjoying his fifteen minutes of fame his story had brought him; a book was even talked about. Three weeks later while walking down the stairs one morning he felt the familiar pains in his chest.

His wife found him at the bottom of the stairs and immediately phoned for an ambulance.

He could feel the bumping of the trolley as it clattered through the hospital corridors. He was at peace with himself, if he died Heaven was waiting, if not he still had work to do.

His body lay once more on the operating table. In his eyes darkness had faded, this was as it had happened only weeks before, his

vision returned. As before he was looking down at his own dying body on the operating table. He watched as his body convulsed with the electricity coursing through it.

The voice of the same doctor who had treated him before spoke to his staff, "Once more."

The bolt of electric current discharged, the line on the heart monitor remained flat.

From his vantage point high in the ceiling he saw the demise of his body. That was it this time, so he waited patiently for the cool breeze to signal the arrival of the tunnel of light to appear once more. This time he would find out what the meaning of the universe was. As he waited, he saw the picture that the doctor had asked him about. It was a black and white picture of, Mickey Mouse.

The Waiting Room

The sensation was one of falling, normally the cause of rapid eye movement whilst in the depths of sleep. That was the exact feeling he was experiencing now, yet he could swear that this was no dream.

All around was blackness, he could see his hand in front of his face, that meant a light source must be present somewhere, although all around was black. No points of brightness, was he in a small room or a black hole? He was still falling though.

With a bump he landed, what a strange thing. He had been falling, but not down, but up. Now he had hit solid ground?

Opening his eyes, his senses told him that he was lying down, he must still be in bed. As the dim light filtered through his adjusting eyes they focused. The floor was hard, not his bed then, that was obvious.

So where?

As he exhaled his breath blew fluff covered hair across the stone floor. Slowly sitting up he looked around the room. The place smelt old and musty. The pungent aroma of old paper mixed with some kind of polish. Leather padded benches lined three sides of the walls; on the fourth wall was a window with the word 'Tickets' etched into the glass in white letters.

It dawned on him, he was in a waiting room or ticket office, something along those lines anyway. Where though, and how had he come to be here?

Getting to his feet he brushed the grey dust off his trouser legs and took a look around. Framed on each wall hung countless timetables, maybe they could give some kind of clue to where he was. The blind on the ticket office was pulled down, maybe the station wasn't open as yet? He crossed over to the nearest time table and ran his eyes up and down the various columns. Strange, the columns were littered with station names and train times, but he could not read them. It was as though the focus of his eyes had failed to work. Normally his vision was all but perfect, so why could he not read the board? His eyes scanned over the back of his hand, he could see that perfectly well. He tried the board once more. As he looked he realised that it wasn't his eyes that were the cause of the problem, but the print

itself. The figures on the board were coming in and out of focus before his eyes had chance to read them.

This is ridiculous, what was going on?

As far as he could see there was only one explanation, he was dreaming. All he had to do was wake himself from his slumber then once again fall back to sleep. He sat down on one of the benches and prepared himself to wake. Anytime now, he had done this before, anytime now.

It did not happen, he remained sitting on the bench. Then something caught his eye; a light had come on from behind the blind covering the ticket office window. Now he could get some answers to the questions running around inside his head. Had he been out the previous night? Was this place and lack of memory the result of a night on the town?

Once at the window he tried to find the slightest crack between frame and blind; desperate to see through into the other room. His nose traced the edge of the frame, no gap was visible.

This only added to his frustration, "Hello?" he called hoping that a staff member would hear his cries for help, "Is there anybody in there?"

Putting an ear to the glass he heard nothing. If someone was in the room they were making no sound, as quiet as a ghost he thought. The prospect of this old station being haunted made him cringe. He didn't know where he was or why he was here, and now all he had for company was a ghost. The sense of bewilderment he had experienced up to that point was rapidly turning into sheer panic. He had to get out of this room, it was freaking him out.

Running to the door he wrapped both hands around the knob then turned and pulled. Nothing moved. Not only would the door not open, but the doorknob would not turn. Was it there just for show? If that was the case how did he get in. More questions flooded into his mind; if this was a train station where were the trains, he hadn't heard any? Maybe they hadn't started running yet. A large clock hung on the wall above the door; he could hear the melancholy tick, tick of the mechanism.

He stepped back away from the door allowing himself a better view of the clock face. He could see the Roman numerals around the

outer edge and in the centre the words, Railway Company Clocks'. It was not surprising that the words were clearly visible to him, there were no hands on the clock to obscure the text.

The clock ticked on.

For a moment he didn't know which way to turn or what to do. Was he going mad? It must be a dream, no, not a dream, a nightmare. Taking a large intake of breath and gnashing his teeth together, he was on the brink of a violent outburst. The door would be his first point of angst. As his mouth opened to let out a scream of anger mixed with frustration, the blind on the ticket office window opened. He heard the noise of it being rolled up, it couldn't be anything else. Quickly he turned his head to look who had entered.

Behind the glass was a middle aged man wearing the uniform of a railway official. He couldn't make out whether the accreditation on the arm denoted him as a guard or ticket office clerk, but then that didn't matter to him.

"Right, who's next?" said the man from behind the glass.

For someone who had so many questions revolving around in his head he found it difficult to utter a word; the only thing to emerge was, "I, I, I, what, where?" His shoulders dropped, he felt defeated. Composure was needed, he took a deep breath before trying again, "Could you tell me, where the hell..."

The ticket man interrupted with such ease that he must be quite used to being asked that question, "...are you?" the little man said with a smile.

The atmosphere in the room changed instantly. His rage disappeared even though he tried to maintain the level of anger he was feeling, the situation was now defused.

"Where to sir?"

Where to? What sort of a question was that? Where to? He didn't know where he was.

"What?" he answered, confusion in his voice.

"Where to, up or down the line Sir, there's only two ways."

Must be a branch line or something, it wasn't a city station. He knew from his days of going on holiday when he was a child that the old country stations hadn't changed for many years. This must be

such a place, as he looked around the waiting room he could see no sign of a telephone or electrical arrivals and departure boards.

“Where am I?” he asked. Desperation was entering his voice once again

“Ah well there’s a question.” Beamed the railway employee.

Oh no, not one of those was he? A bloody yokel who cannot answer a simple question. He’ll probably end up saying the next train is a week on Thursday or something as ridiculous, “We are in the middle of nowhere really.”

“Why bother building a station here then?”

“Ah well, that’s a good point. The station is very important.”

He looked down at the dusty cold floor then after letting out a sigh looked back over toward the window, “Wh...” his voice trailed off as he saw that the blind had again been pulled back down, the position was closed.

“What you were going to ask?” a voice said in his left ear.

A shiver ran down his neck. Quickly he turned to see the uniformed man standing behind him.

“Well yes.” He felt very uneasy now, something strange was happening here.

The station is half way between four places.”

“Four?”

“Oh yes.” Smiled the ticket clerk.

“But where, where the hell am I?” his face was turning red with incredulity.

“Careful, mind your blood pressure!” the remark left the new arrival shell shocked. He watched the uniformed man walk across the room and sit on one of the benches.

“How did you know I suffered from high blood pressure?” the question hung in the air like the seeds from a dandelion clock waiting for the wind to blow them along.

“Tell me Morris, if you could have your time again, would you do anything different?”

That was a strange question a railway employee to be asking him. Hold on, “How did you know my name was Morris?” his eyes were staring in terror, his skin drained of all colour.

“Don’t you know?”

The only explanation that came to mind, it was a dream.

"Oh, it's no dream." The man sat on the bench said, was he reading Morris's mind, did he know what he was thinking?

"So what would you change?" Up to that point the ticket clerk had been sitting forward, his palms together. After that question he sat back resting his left arm on the back of the chair and crossed his legs. Playing along, Morris thought of his life so far, of course he had been guilty of things he'd rather forget, but nothing major. For all his sins though he had tried to repay them all by his charity work that had taken over his life in recent years, "Not much I don't think."

"No, what about your divorce? Your children suffered greatly." "Well," he said in an off handed manner, "these things happen. It's character building." He knew that they were torn apart by the divorce though he'd tried to put it out of his mind.

"Crying yourself to sleep every night isn't character building."

"No, no you're right." Morris felt a twinge of guilt; it wasn't the sort of thing any child should have to endure.

"Then there was the promotion fiasco." Smiled the seated man, "you blackened your rival's name to get the job."

Morris had heard enough of the allegations cast upon him; not only that, but he was found to be wholly innocent of the mud slinging in that case. In any case his one rival for the job, Higgson went to the right school, drank in the right bars and played golf at the right club. He hadn't a chance of over-coming the old boy network, so he needed to gain the advantage.

"You will find that none of those events where down to me." He was too confident, pride comes before a fall. "Nothing was ever proved."

Morris enjoyed the small victory and took a seat opposite the railway employee, crossing his legs and resting his arm on the back of the bench, he waited for the man to speak again.

"Have you not realised where you are yet?"

"No, but I want out." Morris replied with anger growing in his voice.

"It won't be long."

Morris sat in quiet reflection for several moments. He could not tell how long, as the clock had no hands, how could he?"

Several things still troubled him; how did this man know so much about him, where was he? He hadn't established that fact as yet. None of his questions had been answered, and why did the railway clerk look strangely familiar. Was he someone from his own neighbourhood or an old school friend? Whoever he was though, the things he had said were right. He had done some things he should be more than ashamed of.

The ticket master smiled to himself and looked up, "On the whole we haven't lived a bad life, have we?"

"*We?*" Morris looked up quickly.

The railway man was no longer in the room. The blind on the ticket office window was once again open. Standing behind it was the ticket clerk brandishing in his hand a ticket.

The door to the platform was now wide open, through it Morris could see the open doors of a carriage, "Your ticket." Said the man from behind the glass.

Morris was about to make reference to the open door, but didn't. Instead he crossed the waiting room and took the ticket off the clerk, "You said 'we'. We haven't led a bad life."

"You didn't recognise me did you?"

"Recognise you?"

"Nobody ever recognises themselves."

Morris couldn't speak; shock paralysed the muscles in his jaw. He looked at the ticket in his hand, it was a single.

'Destination, down.'

His mind started to operate at a speed unknown to him up to that point. Did 'down' mean what his greatest fear was, "Am I dead?" he asked with a frail whimper.

"I told you that this line was in the middle of four destinations. We are between life and death and we are also between heaven and hell."

"Does this mean I am going to, hell?" his voice finally broke into a cry. "You said I'd not lived a bad life, so why send me down?"

"Well its like this. To get into heaven you have to be in the right golf club or drink with the right people, it's a closed shop nowadays. They like to keep the riffraff out. In life or the after life, it's all bent."

Morris looked down at the ticket. So that was it, the end. “Would you board the train, it’s ready to leave.”

The Walled Up Room

In many ways hunting's are inflicted on innocent people through nothing more than coincidence, being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Even something as innocent as decorating could ignite a tortured spirit into returning to where they once walked the living world.

The gravel drive crunched under the weight of the white transit van as it drew up outside the large detached house. Adorned on the side panels of the van was the printed legend 'A.D. Macdonald Builders'.

Mr Macdonald sat in the driver's seat, "here we are then." He said to his apprentice. Adrian Macdonald was a man in his late forties and prematurely grey. He enjoyed working in these big houses, it was a glimpse into how the other half lived. During his many years of experience he had also learnt on the whole that the wives of these rich households were not averse to a dalliance with a bit of rough like himself. Many a bored housewife had accidentally walked in on him wearing nothing but a towel or dressing gown, and after the usual silver tongued repartee the inevitable would happen.

McDonald's hopes on this job though would be dashed. The lady of the house was a young, good looking girl in her mid twenties, far too young for someone of his age to make any kind of move on. "Bloody Hell?" said Andrew his apprentice looking at the house, "these must be rich?"

"Ey lad," said the older mentor, "We'll do alright out of this job."

Twenty minutes after their arrival the two artisans stood in the large kitchen, both of them holding a hot steaming mug of tea in their hands.

The man of the house Douglas Robinson was giving the two workmen the rundown of the job in hand. His young wife, Kylie, twenty years his junior stood by his side. It was her who had decided that she wanted a new kitchen. The whole lot had to come out, a wall knocked through into the old outhouse and a new kitchen fitted.

Ady's eyes lit up, the kitchen currently in residence was hardly a year old. The hob by the look of it had never been used. The glass

fronted oven door had not a mark on it. No doubt they ate out most nights. With a little care this kitchen could be removed and sold on at a profit, this job he would enjoy.

The removal of the units and appliances took all day, each piece carefully packed in bubble wrap and placed in the van.

The next morning the builders were at the house at nine sharp. The kitchen became a no go area as the sledge hammers and bolster chisels came out. The wall between kitchen and out house was coming down after they had finished their second cup of tea. Ady and Andrew donned their protective equipment, hats, masks and goggles before taking the heavy shifting gear to the wall.

On the first strike the old plaster shattered, shooting in all directions like shrapnel from a bomb blast.

Several strikes later a layer of dust covered both the kitchen and both of the builders.

The heavy head of the sledge hammer impacted once more with the wall. Two bricks disappeared in the darkness beyond the other side.

As the dust settled Ady looked in the newly formed hole. Through the dust covered goggles he couldn't see a thing in the darkness, he removed them to obtain a better look.

Peering into the hole he could see nothing. No light was shining into the outhouse, that was strange. He looked out of the kitchen window, the outhouse door was open. Some natural light should have been finding its way in from somewhere, Go and have a look in that door, "he said gesturing toward the outhouse door, "See where we've come through."

Andrew, grateful for a breath of fresh air went out into the garden and disappeared through the green door.

"Can ya see anything?" Ady shouted out to his mate.

"No." came the muffled response.

What was he talking about. He had to have a look for himself. Andrew had been right, no hole in the outhouse wall, "It must be a double course."

Back in the kitchen Ady took a black rubber torch out of his tool box, turned it on and shone it into the newly formed hole. He needed to know the distance between the bricks, it could alter the kitchens

dimensions; something he hoped would not be the case. At worst it could mean the surveyors being called back in.

The beam of light shone into the dusty darkness. A smell filtered out of the hole. It was a putrid smell of something rotten. The beam shone about three feet before it hit the second wall. "Strange?" a three foot square room? "waste of space." He muttered to himself.

There was nothing to be seen.

Andrew came back into the house from the garden. The sun was out now and he felt a definite chill as he entered the room. Must be all the bare brick, it always made a room feel colder than it was.

"Ah you are here then." He said with a hint of sarcasm in his voice, "Come on lets get on." Andrew picked up his own hammer. "Have you just come in?"

"What?" Andrew asked.

"From outside, have you just come back in from the outhouse?"

"Yer, why?"

"Oh I could swear you were standing behind me."

"No."

The destruction continued.

Moments later the sun shone bright rays of light into the room illuminating the clouds of dust and also the ever growing hole in the wall. Andrew took another swing with his heavy hammer. The whole of the left side of the wall collapsed into a pile of bricks on the floor. Both men jumped back to avoid the falling masonry. Clouds of dust filled the air, penetrating the paper dust masks that protected their lungs. Andrew erupted into a fit of coughing almost bending him double. He held onto the door frame for support as he continued to bark.

Slowly he stood up, fanning the dust cloud away he looked into the hole where the bricks had up until then lay.

"Jesus, Christ?" he shouted, as he looked into the hole which was now illuminated by sunlight. He saw a skull looking back at him. Not only a skull but a whole skeleton sat leaning up against the side wall.

Three weeks later the two builders were gone. Kylie had her new kitchen, Douglas was happy because once again he was not only keeping up with the Jones's, but well ahead of them.

It was a warm summer's night, the couple had invited two other couples around for an evening of drinks and dinner, and of course an opportunity to show off their new state of the art kitchen.

The newly decorated room was still in a spotless, pristine condition as it had been left by the cleaner that had come in to liberate the room from the builder's destruction. 'Who was cooking tonight's meal then?' thought more than one of the arriving guests. In fact the catering was being delivered, Kylie had commented earlier that evening to one guest, "How can I enjoy myself while cooking all night?"

Once everyone had arrived Douglas just happened to mention about taking the drinks out into the garden, unavoidably taking them all through the kitchen. Once in that room the guests were treated to a guided tour. All stood there while Douglas told them of the cost of everything, and then the final gloat, the story of the gruesome discovery of the bricked up body behind the wall.

"Where is it now?" asked Edward. Edward was Douglas's boss. He was a man in his eighties now, though anyone meeting him for the first time would not put him down as past fifty.

"Once the Police had been and had a look, the medical research students came in from the University. They took the bones away to run tests and research the age."

"So, where was it then?" it was Emma, a friend of Kyle's who had asked, purely from morbid curiosity.

"Just here," demonstrated Kylie pointing under the breakfast bar.

"Does it haunt the house then?" Emma asked excitedly.

"Well..." began Kylie, but Douglas who didn't like the subject of ghosts interrupted her.

"No, no it doesn't."

With a chuckle of laughter the party passed out into the garden to enjoy the evening sun. Kylie held her school friend back for a moment grabbing her by the arm as she followed the others out. "It does." she said quietly.

“What?”

“It comes back and moves things. Doug says I’m imagining things, but I’m not.”

“What does it do?”

“I’ll show you. Give me your wine glass.”

She placed both her own and Emma’s glass on the black marble breakfast bar. From a cupboard Kylie took a bag of flour and lightly dusted a thin layer of power around the glasses. “Now we just have to wait. Grab another glass of wine.”

Kylie and Emma each holding a freshly filled glass joined the others in the garden, leaving the kitchen empty, almost empty.

At eight o’clock the dinner was delivered, by nine thirty the meal was over and the bottles of wine on the dining table were empty.

“Would anyone like more wine?” asked Kylie playing the ideal hostess. Douglas did, “Emma, would you like to give me a hand, in the kitchen?”

It took Emma a second to take the hint, but then she suddenly remembered the experiment they had arranged earlier in the evening. “Oh“, yes of course.” She said enthusiastically quickly following Kylie out of the room.

Slowly the two women entered the darkened room. By this point both women had forgotten about the trip to collect more wine and had only one thing on their mind. Kylie switched on the light ‘click’. Turning the corner Kylie smiled to herself, she had been proven right. It hadn’t been the most scientific experiment ever undertaken, but it had worked, Kylie was jubilant, Emma on the other hand felt faint.

Both glasses had moved at least half an inch. A crescent of undusted worktop was visible next to the base of each glass. It appeared that both glasses had been dragged along the surface about a quarter of an inch.

“There you see, I told you. Sometimes things fall off the end, I hear them crash on the floor. The ghost can’t have been feeling very energetic tonight though.”

Emma couldn’t speak. Her mouth hung wide open in amazement.

By the time the two women returned from the kitchen the rest of the guests had seated themselves in the living room. The room was quite dark with books lining two of the wall from floor to ceiling.

“Are you alright Emma?” John her boyfriend asked as she appeared back in the room. “You’re as white as a sheet.”

“It was the ghost.” Kylie announced to the room, the comment was much to her husband’s annoyance.

“How many times do I have to tell you, there’s no such thing as...”

“Oh yes there is.” Interrupted Emma.

A sudden tension had entered the air of the room, Edward’s wife Margaret could feel it and decided it was time to exorcise these ghosts. She had hardly spoke for most of the night; it was as though something else preoccupied her thoughts all evening, now though she unleashed her wisdom on them. “There is one here.” She said.

Everyone looked around at her almost in shock as such a quiet woman could talk with such force and authority.

“I have felt the presence here since I arrived earlier tonight.”

“Are you a medium?” asked Kylie.

“I am.” she said, Edward remained silent. He like his old friend didn’t hold with such practices, not only were they unholy, but the product of a deranged mind. That was his opinion.

The two young women held a different view and were both thrilled with the prospect of having a real medium in the house with them. Emma asked the question Margaret knew was coming, it always did.

“Can we have a séance?”

“Of course we can.” she replied in a calm friendly voice.

“Do we have to sit in a circle and link hands or something?” Kyle asked.

“No. we don’t do that sort of thing anymore, well only in the theatre and that’s just for effect.” She said with a smile.

“Come on everybody, let’s do one.” Kylie invited everyone to join in. Douglas and Edward who were sitting closest to the fire, shook their heads defiantly, such things did not amuse them.

Strangely enough the fire was on. No extra heat was required, this after all was the middle of summer, but Douglas had paid a lot of

money for a fire that simulated a flame effect without producing any heat and it was always on in the evening.

Emma, Kylie and Emma's' boyfriend Paul each pulled up a chair and sat in a rough arch around Margaret. "oh hang on," said Kylie, jumping up and turning the lights off.

Margaret sat in a high backed armchair, she closed her eyes and prepared herself to transgress to the other side. The flickering fire light danced on her face. That was the only illumination in the room, giving her an almost devilish appearance. She took in a large breath then began to speak, "I can feel two spirits present in the room."

"Two?" Kylie said shocked.

"One is old, she has been here many years. Murder. She was murdered. Pain I can feel pain, starvation.

She was walled up, why?" a tear had started to roll down Margaret's cheek. Was she really feeling the pain of a murder victim?

"Who was she?" asked Emma.

"A servant girl, she was, oh no, she was pregnant with the Master's child. He had her walled up. She is still in pain, I can feel it. I don't understand, she's been here for many years, but she's only just arrived. I don't understand?"

Kylie did, "She was trapped in the walled up room the builders found. Knocking the wall down must have realised her."

"That would make sense." agreed Margaret. "The other has just arrived, I can't see them though, not yet. I don't think the spirit body has had chance to form yet." She fell silent for a minute before continuing, "Do you want to leave this place?"

She must now be talking to the spirit the others thought, "Then move towards the light, do you see it, do you? Can you see it, yes that's it, move toward it and you'll leave this place. Both of you, yes, if you wish."

"Edward," Douglas began to talk, he was silenced by his young wife.

"Shh," she said abruptly.

Margaret relaxed her body, sitting back in the chair. She bore a happy smile on her face, it was the greatest gift of a medium to help a poor lost soul into the light, tonight she had the pleasure of assisting

two such wanderers in eternity. Opening her eyes she looked around, "There, they've gone."

"Who was the second spirit?" Paul asked.

"I don't know, some other poor lost soul."

It was all over, Kylie turned on the lights.

Douglas took a drink of his claret and glanced across at his old friend, "Edward, do you..." he came to a halt mid sentence. Edward was staring into space, his glass of red wine had fallen from his hand and rested on his lap, a scarlet stain on the lap and thighs of his tweed suit.

"Edward?" Douglas repeated in a raised voice. The urgency in his voice instantly attracted the others' attentions. Douglas jumped up out of his seat and knelt down beside Edward. Putting his fingers around his wrist he searched for a pulse, none could be found. Edward was dead.

He had passed over to the other side only a minute or so earlier.

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and tomorrow

Henry Amlet spent a large part of his life in airports. The more he thought about it the longer he seemed to be in them. His employment was as a pharmaceutical rep for a multi-national distributor; his market place was the whole planet.

In these days of multimedia communication, Henry would still fly around the world ensuring that the special client/rep relationship was maintained. Dealing direct face to face would always ensure he retained his status with the client.

From the United States to the Far East, Iceland to Australia all were visited on regular occasions.

Henry was now in his late forties and though he enjoyed his job this constant travelling was becoming tiresome. He found the waiting around for transport was becoming more and more unbearable.

Having checked in at Heathrow's terminal number two he slowly walked toward the endless lines of seats. A two hour wait stretched out before him, at least two hours, no doubt a delay would manifest itself sooner or later.

He was always curious to see his fellow passengers; he often wondered what and who they were and what their business was. Why were they travelling? Was it business such as his or pleasure, a holiday perhaps?

Finding a bank of vacant seats he sat down. The small suitcase that accompanied him on such trips was located between his legs; if anyone had tried to liberate the bag from his person his legs would clamp shut around it.

The clock on the wall behind him read eight thirty. Henry took a look around. The population of the hall was a sixty forty percent split of men to women. Several children were running around trying to amuse themselves. Two hours to them was a lifetime for an excited child going on holiday. Reaching down between his legs he unzipped his bag, damn, he had forgotten his book again. Sighing heavily he zipped the bag up again.

Was this all there was? It was true that he had a good job, a large salary, wife and two daughters, but what could he do with it all? Most of his life was here in an airport lounge.

Never did he have chance to spend his earnings, though his wife and girls saw to that. Never at home, never with the children.

He scratched his chin while these thoughts drifted through his mind. The rough stubble scrapped along his fingers. He could have a shave; that would waste ten minutes or so.

In the well lit toilet he took a battery powdered razor out of his bag. He carried it for just this sort of occasion. Being the ambassador for a company he never liked to be seen unshaven.

The task over, he returned to the eerie, fluorescent light filled lounge. Purchasing a copy of that morning's Guardian he sat down once more. Folding the newly resized publication in half he set to with the crossword.

A smile appeared on his face as he filled in the answer to one across, 'bluebottle,' the answer to the clue, policeman doesn't have the stomach for it.

The last answer was filled in as the voice on the PA announced that his flight was now boarding. Standing, he tucked the newspaper under his arm and headed off out of the lounge.

Then he stopped. No he wasn't going to get on the flight. He was going to go home and spend some time in his own home with his family. Making an about-turn he walked toward the door to the terminal entrance.

Enough was enough now, the job could wait. His heart raced, a smile came to his face, he was happy again. Up to that point he hadn't realised how depressed all the travelling had made him.

As he reached the door a clock caught his eye, it said eight thirty, quickly he looked back down the lounge, the clock at the other end read ten thirty.

All of a sudden he drew in a breath, his heart almost stopped as he saw a figure he recognised walking through the boarding gate to the aircraft. Instantly he knew who it was.

The figure was Henry Amlet, himself.

As the figure disappeared the clock at the far end of the lounge changed to read eight thirty.

Henry Amlet stood at the check in desk, again.

Where's Bob?

This short story is based on a tale told to me by Loraine, our office woman that does. It was in turn handed down to her by her grandfather who was one off the men involved in the following...

From the nineteen hundreds all the way through to the mid twentieth century the area around the docks situated to the west of Hull bustled with the sound of trains, lorries, boats and most of all masses of Dockers going about their work.

The fully laden trawlers would dock brimming with cod and haddock before being unloaded, sold in the market or shipped elsewhere. The whole process could take as little as a few hours. The docks themselves along with the community which occupied the streets and terraces around the dock never slept. Such was the volume of cargo working its way through the dock that the manpower were on a rotating shift though some employees would be called in at any time of the day or night. The bobbbers were such an occupation.

Bobbbers where the army of men who took charge of the landing of the catch. Once the trawler had docked it was their job to take the load fro the ship, pack it in fresh ice and either store it ready for the next market or have it loaded ready for transportation. This body of men where constantly on call and in demand, a bobber was not unlike the labourer on a building site, a good one was worth his weight in gold.

On a cold dark night in November 1934 a ships horn blew across the now quiet docks. The sky was clear and a large amount of constellations could clearly be seen over head.

The Dock Masters office door opened allowing all the heat which had warmed its confines out into the night, he would have to put another log into the small boiler.

After catching the captains' eye and giving him a salute he closed the door of the hut and shivered with the cold. Lifting the receiver off the wall mounted phone his cold white fingertip dialled a four digit number. On his hands he wore fingerless gloves, but these did little to combat the cold winter night. "Hello, Mr Lewis. Dock Master here. The Aeropia is docking now sir." He paused waiting

instructions, "Yes, right, thank you." Standing up from his desk he slid open the window and shouted down to the skipper, "Docking forty three."

In the offices of Whales Trawler Company Mr. Lewis sat at his desk. Lewis was the nightshift supervisor, his office was always a pleasant temperature. He was not known to venture out into the cold nights unless it was necessary, Lewis was a lover of the warm indoors. Having received the call from the Dock Master he opened a black book and looked up the page containing the bobbbers' names. Running his finger down the page he eyed the first of the names over his half round reading glasses. Lifting the receiver on the telephone he rang the number.

Weststock Avenue lay only a few minutes cycle ride from the dock. Situated as it was off Hessle Road all the houses were occupied by members of the fishing industry. Several bobbbers lived down that particular thoroughfare and one by one their telephones started to ring. As they did the electric light would illuminate the bedrooms windows all along the street.

In the bedroom of number six Weststock Avenue Lance Hewlet swung his legs out of bed. The air was cold and no light came through the window, what time was it, middle of the night or early morning? He could not tell it being this time of year.

Quickly he rushed down the winding staircase of the two up, two down terraced house. Noisily he fumbled his way through the back kitchen then on into the living room. Putting on the light his eyes took a second to adjust to the light dim as it was. Somehow he managed to make it across the room to the Bakelite telephone, "Hello," he mumbled into the mouth piece, "what is it?" he said rubbing the sleep from his eyes as Mr Lewis gave him his instructions, "What, right you are sir, five minutes."

Back upstairs he found his trousers hanging over a chair. The material was cold on his flesh as he pulled them on, time was never on his side on this job, he had to be at the dock shortly. He knew that the fish had to be off the boat and into storage in a matter of minutes. Similarly the telephone rang at another address only two doors away. The occupant of number ten, Arthur also readied himself for a night's work. He had already done a shift that afternoon and was not overly

enthusiastic at the prospect of another few hours labouring especially at this time of...

He too was uncertain of the time, was it morning or mid night? Lance took his cycle out of the lean too shed and turned on the two lights before departing. The green back yard gate sprung shut behind him. As Lance turned into the street the frost bitten air hit his face with a biting blast. It was a cold night, but clear the lights of the dock formed an eerie hallow over the end of the street. The air rushing into his nose was so cold that it almost burnt his nostrils. Slowly he set off riding carefully on the cobbled road, he couldn't be sure how icy the road surface was. Moments after his own journey had started Arthur swung his own bike out a ten foot and joined his fellow bobber en-route to the dock, "Now then?" lance called out to his friend.

"Alright," replied Arthur, "its gonna be another cold one?" he replied hinting his obvious observation at the temperature.

From further down the street the two men saw another faint red bike light twinkling in the night air. As they approached they could see that it belonged to Bob. Bob was the oldest member of the bobber's crew, he was slowing down in his old age, but his fellow workers always made sure that he was covered in any aspect of his work. Bob was approaching retirement age and his mates wanted to see him alright until he left.

As the approached Lance could see bob fiddling with the chain around the area of the back cog, "Alright Bob?" he asked as they came alongside the old man.

Bob said nothing in reply, but raised his hand in recognition and signalling that nothing was amiss. The two men carried on toward Hesse road, "We'll have a lid of tea ready for 'ya" Arthur called back over his shoulder then the two rear lights disappearing as they rounded the corner.

Mr Lewis stood on the dockside waiting for the bobbers to arrive. He was well protected against the cold night. His thick overcoat was fair lined while his hands sat comfortably in a pair of sheepskin gloves, Right men," he began, "the Aeropia here requires unloading and putting into rack F. the skipper assures me that there

are 124 units to unload.” He looked down the line, the five men all nodded their acknowledgment.

“Mr Lewis,” lance asked, “Bob’s on his way now, are we gonna wait a bit for him?”

Lewis looked at him in some puzzlement, “Haven’t you heard?” asked the foreman.

“Heard what, I’ve been a bed most of the day?”

Lewis looked at the icy cold ground before speaking, “Bob died last night, he had a stroke and was gone before the doctor could get to him.”

Brough Shorts

For the past ninety years an aircraft factory has stood on the north bank of the Humber Estuary next to the village of Brough, East Yorkshire.

The site was founded by Robert Blackburn in the early part of the twentieth century and since the site has had many names. When my father started employment there in the 1930's it traded under the name 'Hawker Sidley'. When I myself started my own working life there it was know as 'British Aerospace'.

Many names, but does Blackburn still walk the corridors of his old office and how many peoples spirit have never left the site. Also we have to bear in mind that the land around has been populated since the days of the Roman Empire.

Do ghosts have time limits, or do they go on..?

Here are three stories told to the author by the people in question who allege them to be true.

Some of the events, locations and names have been changed on their own request. I do not believe this is for anonymity against the spirit world, more to do with the fact that some of them still work here and want to carry on their employment.

NW.

Blackburns' Ghost.

On a cold autumn night a van drove through the main gate of the factory. Two carpet fitters sat in the front seats, the driver following the directions given to him by the security guard. The van came to rest outside the rear door entrance of the general office block.

The building was steeped in history, for on of these offices situated on the first floor which now belonged to the manufacturing directors once belonged to Robert Blackburn.

Blackburn was the man who all those years previous founded the site, his picture still hung on the wall of his old office.

Once the two men had finished their flask of tea, eaten their sandwiches and read the paper they started to unload the van.

The long length of carpet had to be taken up two flights of stairs, not an easy task. They were under strict instructions from the site facilities manager not to cause any damages to the wall mounted lights, assorted paintings or the glass staircase.

After much negotiation and manoeuvring finally the carpet arrived in the room it was bound. The room was large with many media inputs around the wall, a large plasma screen and ceiling mounted projector were but of the new pieces of kit.

The room was a simple rectangle only the door and radiator pipes being the cause of any obstacles. This would be a quick and simple job. They were on pay all night, until six the following morning, the quicker the got the job done the quicker they could leave.

Dave the senior of the two took out his knife and undid the brown masking tape which held the carpet in a roll, "Come on, lets get this done and we can be home by midnight."

John, his apprentice set too.

Soon they were hammering the carpet into the corners at each end of the room. Suddenly John stopped, "I thought no one was in here tonight?" he had seen someone passing the door.

"Security probably." Dave had done more of these night shift jobs then he cared to remember. On each occasion the security guard would always make an appearance, were they not trusted? Security would always attempt to stamp their authority upon them, never really did they manage it, after all most of them were unemployable in any other field.

It took only one hour to put the carpet down. They could be cleaned up, out and in the pub for half past ten. A good night's work.

"Come on," Dave said stretching his back, "lets get a cuppa, I saw a machine down there." He gestured toward the other end of the central corridor.

Both men stepped out of the room and set off down the dimly lit corridor. John wasn't as yet comfortable with the dark, Dave thought was, and he was alive to John's feelings on the subject. Occasionally Dave would nip into an alcove or store room leaving his young helper

alone in the dark. Always he got the same reaction from John, normally a string of profanities.

“We’ll take these back into the room,” Dave said gesturing to the two cups of steaming coffee recently dispensed from the machine, “the gaffers still hanging around somewhere.” Down at the far end of the corridor they could see a man through the office window.

“He looks like that bloke on the wall, you know that big oil painting in the room where doing.” John explained.

“Come on,” insisted the senior of the two, “Let’s get tidied up and get to the boozier.”

Both men crawled around the floor on all fours picking up the off cuts of carpet and the various tools which lay around.

Dave spun around in surprise to hear John’s voice talking to a new comer. “Alright,” then after a short pause John spoke again, “can I help you?”

Dave could see a man at the far end of the room, as the two carpet fitters looked at him John noticed that it was the man who’s full length portrait hung on the wall in that very room, but not only was it the same face as the picture. The man in front of him was wearing the same cloths as the painting.

John’s face turned pale, cold beads of sweat appeared on his brow.

As the brown suited man turned to leave the room John let out a grunt, his voice had escaped him for the moment, with his right arm he pointed to the portrait on the wall. Dave looked at the painting and realised what his teacher was trying to tell him.

Looking back at the figure all he saw was its back and leg disappearing through a partition wall, a wall that had been a resent addition.

Both men made a bolt for the door, neither looked behind them as they exited the corridor and half ran, half free fall down the stairs.

A lone security guard saw the burst out of the external door, seeing them in distress he helped them across the road and into the medical centre.

Most of the night was spent in there, neither of them spoke for an hour.

The tools that had been left abandoned were collected by a security guard who packed them away and drove the van around to the medical centre entrance.

Neither John nor Dave has returned to the site since that autumn night.

The Nightshift

Over the past few years the site has undergone many structural changes. Unfortunately for any Ghost Hunters the story in this short tale is set in one of the locations now sadly lost.

It is a general fact that the nightshift of any factory has a reputation for its aversion to work, this site is no different. Rumour and speculation would always be rife about the happenings on the nightshift. From beer raffles to playing football in the alleyways, much was talked about them on the dayshift, some of it justified, some not.

Eric who manned one of the various stores was the typical 'nightshift' employee. Each night his routine would seldom change. On starting his shift at seven thirty, a cup of tea would be brewed and placed on his desk, closely followed by that day's copy of The Sun. Once the newspaper was read and another cup of tea made he would look at the list of jobs to be done on the dayshift handover pad. The tasks never amounted to more than an hour's work and judging by tonight's list it would be no longer than that.

An hour later that night's work was over and yet another mug of tea appeared. Also making an appearance on his desk was a black and white portable television which was now turned on and tuned in. Settling down he put his feet up on the desk and watched the programs which would air until the transmission closure.

By two o'clock the night's programmes had finished and all the pages of ceefax had been read. Turning off the set he turned his attention to the crossword in the newspaper. Only three clues in, he became aware that someone was in the store with him. There was no admittance into the store, so how someone had gained access he could not tell. The walls were windowless and the fire door was firmly shut.

One explanation that came to mind was the hanger cat. A year or so previous a cat had strayed onto the site and took up residence in the one of the hangers. The fitters adopted the feline and began feeding it the scraps of their lunch. Feeding any animal on sight is strictly forbidden, animals spread disease, in an environment such as

this it could be fatal to a pilot, but the cat was welcomed. The main reason for its easy passage into the hearts of the men was that it would keep the rats at bay.

He needed to stretch his legs though, the lack of movement was playing merry hell with the circulation in his legs.

Leaving the front desk unattended he ventured into the store. Through the racking he could see something moving. A feeling of unease swept over him, "Hello?" he called out into the dimly lit store, "Is anyone in there?"

A figure moved.

It was definitely not the cat.

Quickly he ran around the racking to catch out the intruder. It could be any number of people trying to play a joke on him, after all he was guilty of many pranks himself.

Eric was gaining on him now, he would sneak up behind him and shout a deafening 'BOO' in their ear.

He rounded the corner at the far end of the store. As he jumped out disappointment filled him, no one was there. That meant whoever it was could only be in one place, in the single toilet, there was no other way out available.

Taking a deep breath he burst through the door to see...

No one, the small cubical was empty, the only evidence of someone being there was the chain which hung down from the cistern. It swung very slowly from left to right, almost as though someone had hold of it.

Bakers Dozen

Mike was, as was his normal state of mind, thinking of the past. Recently Mike could feel the torrid advances of middle age not so much creeping up on him, but galloping toward him at a high rate of knots.

With a sigh he turned the key in the lock before pushing the chocolate brown door open, entering the store then locking the door behind him.

The strip lights flickered into life gloomily illuminating the secure tool store. It was his turn for late shift. Every night someone had to bridge the gap between the day and night shifts. Tonight was his turn on the rota.

The large hanger which was now utilised as a tool store was cold, no wonder, there was no heating and it was the middle of February. Snow lay on the ground outside and the wind whistled along the narrow passages which bordered two of the external walls. His breath condensed as he exhaled, the mist exhausting from his mouth reminded him of the days when he indulged the habit of smoking.

In his hand was a list containing thirteen tool numbers and their locations, picking one he set off into the gloom?

As his boots climbed the stairs the metallic clank resonated through the store. The sound was to him not an unpleasant one, it was a dull not unlike a dampened base drum. Mike or ginger as he had become knew a lot about drums. His youthful years had been spent in London during the late sixties and early seventies playing in bands. During this time Mike had had the privilege of performing alongside some of the musical giants of the time. Hendrix, Clapton and Floyd to name but a few.

At times such as this when he was cold, tiered and fed up he would long for a revival of those days.

The first location was found, the tool removed and taken down. Checking the second location on the list he found to his dismay that the location was also upstairs. Muttering to himself he once again ran up the staircase tapping out a rhythm on the banister. Even though he knew no one could ever be in this part of the store a feeling always

lingered in the back of his mind, never could he be quite sure that he was alone.

D1, F1 was marked on the draw which he proceeded to open. Inside lay an assortment of drill and file jigs, none bigger than a child's shoe.

As he checked the twelve digit numbers against the list he thought he heard the sound of a door closing or at least some kind of bang.

Quickly he looked up from his work, but said nothing. After all this was a big hanger and sounds echoed in all directions.

When Mike descended the stairs again it was with an air of caution, checking all ways to see if there was any sight or sound of another person in the building.

Several parts down the list Mike found himself high up on one first floor gantries. The sound of metal clanking on metal echoed through the store once again.

Mike looked through the gaps in the floor panelling, "Hello, is there anybody there?" he asked sure that there was.

No answer came back. He had the strangest feeling that he was not alone. It was as though, the feeling you get when someone is standing behind you. Yes that was it exactly.

The lights flicked momentarily. A bead of sweat ran down his left temple. From below he heard the faintest shuffling followed by the distant sound of someone whistling.

That was it, Mike dropped the list, by the time it landed softly on the floor he was already halfway down the stairs.

At the door his hands wouldn't coordinate to find the door key. Constantly looking over his shoulder at the interior he finally managed to unlock the door burst through it and slam it shut behind him.

"No more nightshifts?" he told himself.



A note about the author.

Neil Wesson started writing for pleasure at the age of thirty. Starting on screen and stage plays he soon progressed onto short stories as well as longer works.

As well as writing Neil is a keen sportsman and enthusiastic musician and hat wearer.

Picture taken at the Scarborough Cricket Festival, 2006.

Contact the author...
kb@wes.karoo.co.uk