

## **Ghost Hunter: A Matter of Faith.**

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***GHOST HUNTER:  
A MATTER OF FAITH***



## *CHAPTER ONE*

Teena Maunder came awake suddenly. She lay in the darkness, eyes open, and listened for what had disturbed her. Since the birth of her daughter, she had become a light sleeper; the consequences of baby Carolyn waking Teena's father outweighing any amount of broken sleep. However, Carolyn was now fourteen, and Teena had left her parent's home over a decade ago, but was still unable to shake the habit. Becoming a single-parent at sixteen had forced Teena to grow up quickly. She had accepted her responsibilities without complaint, and with a single-minded determination had worked hard to provide for her daughter. The fact that Teena owned the small, terraced house that they now lived in was a testament to her efforts. The single bed that she slept in was evidence of her self-imposed celibacy; an idiosyncrasy that was a legacy of Carolyn's unplanned conception.

The sound of someone moving around downstairs focussed Teena's attention. Carolyn's best friend Emily was staying over, and the sounds likely meant that one or both of the teenagers were raiding the kitchen for an illicit snack. She glanced at the bedside clock; it was after two o'clock. Teena smiled in the darkness. Let them have their fun, there might even be an innocent explanation such as fetching a glass of water. She closed her eyes and relaxed. A moment later, she sat up in bed and switched on the light; footsteps were coming up the stairs. Concerned now, Teena waited for her bedroom door to open, prepared to diagnose and remedy an ailment. Instead, she heard the door to the spare bedroom open. Puzzled, she searched for an explanation. Perhaps Emily, unfamiliar with the house, was half-asleep and confused? Sleep-walking even? Teena quickly left the bed, put on her dressing gown, and hurried out onto the landing. The door to the spare bedroom was open, and she could just make out movement within. With a half-formed notion about not startling sleep-walkers, she crossed the landing and peered in through the doorway. The curtains were open, and there was sufficient ambient light that it was obvious the room was unoccupied. Uncertainly, Teena stepped back onto the landing. How could she have been mistaken? Before she could ponder any deeper, she heard footsteps in the kitchen. "Carolyn? Emily? Is that you?" There was no answer, but footsteps started up the stairs. Thoroughly disconcerted, Teena reached out and switched on the light. The footsteps stopped. The staircase was empty. An icy chill ran up her spine, and she stood petrified for several seconds, before racing back to her bedroom. With the door shut, she switched the main light on, picked up her phone and dialled the police. Assured that they were on their way, she summoned the courage to go downstairs and check on the girls. The house was quiet as she made her way nervously downstairs. She turned on the front room light and looked inside before entering; it was untenanted. Teena entered and crossed to the door that led to Carolyn's basement bedroom, opening it quietly. She walked down three steps of the steep wooden staircase and looked across the room. Enough light was coming from above that she could clearly see that Carolyn and Emily appeared to be sound asleep. Satisfied that they were alone, she retraced her steps, closed the door, and went to the window to await the arrival of the police.

As Teena waited, she attempted to rationalise what had happened. She was convinced that an intruder had been in the house, and that they had probably been scared off when she switched on the light. But that didn't explain the opening of the spare bedroom door. It occurred to her that she hadn't checked the back door. Perplexed now rather than frightened, she saw the police patrol car pull up outside, and went to open the front door. The two male constables introduced themselves as PCs O'Brien and Stevens, listened to Teena's account, and joined her on a tour of the house. Back in the front room, the two officers sat on the settee, Teena on an armchair.

"As far as we can tell, Miss Maunder, your property is secure," O'Brien said, "there's no evidence of a

forced entry, and the only keys are accounted for.” He leaned forward, hands clasped. “I don’t mean to doubt your story, but is it possible that you made a mistake?”

“I’m starting to believe that I must have; but I don’t understand how.”

“Perhaps the noises came from one of the adjoining properties,” Stevens suggested. “When everything’s quiet at night, sounds that you would normally hardly notice seem much louder; particularly if you’re half-asleep.”

“Perhaps you’re right.” Teena was sure that he wasn’t, but was starting to feel embarrassed. “I’m sorry for wasting your time.”

“You haven’t,” O’Brien said firmly, “far better to be safe than sorry.”

“Thank-you, I appreciate that.”

The two men rose, and Teena joined them.

O’Brien paused at the front door. “Your surname sounds familiar, have we met before?”

“No, I don’t think so, but you may know my brother, Bradley Maunder, he’s a Detective Constable in Torquay.”

O’Brien nodded. “That’s it. I knew I recognised the name. Well, we’ll bid you good-night, Miss Maunder.”

“Good night, and thank-you.”

Teena closed the door, and leaned against it for a few seconds before heading back upstairs, turning out the lights as she went. She felt foolish, but was still convinced that someone had been in the house. She closed the spare bedroom door, and entered her own room, turning off the main light but leaving the bedside lamp on. Still feeling that the situation was unresolved, she removed her dressing gown and climbed into bed. The only good thing, she supposed, was that Emily and Carolyn hadn’t been disturbed. She glanced at the clock; it was almost three in the morning. Teena sighed, and tried to settle. For half an hour, she tossed and turned, before finally slipping into a restless doze. Almost immediately, a loud noise brought her fully awake. She sat up, gripping the quilt cover tightly, listening intently. Footsteps sounded on the landing. They approached her door, then stopped. Teena looked frantically around the room for a weapon, settling on a brass dog ornament on her dressing table. The door handle rattled. Terrified, she shot across the room, snatched up the heavy trinket, and faced the door with it held at head height, ready to throw or strike. The footsteps moved away and began to descend the stairs. With her only thought now the safety of the two girls, she opened the door and crossed the landing, switching on the light. She couldn’t see anybody, but she could hear movement downstairs. Clutching the brass dog tightly, she rushed downstairs. In the front room, the door to Carolyn’s bedroom was open. Without giving herself time to think, Teena switched on the light, and almost fell down the precipitous wooden staircase in her haste. She stumbled to a halt at the bottom, and steeled herself to face the intruder. Apart from the two schoolgirls, she was the only one in the room.

Carolyn sat up drowsily in the bed, squinting at her mother. “Mum? What are you doing?” She reached for her glasses and put them on. “What’s going on?”

At the other end of the bed, Emily sat up. “What’s happening?”

Teena was so confused, that she was speechless.

“Why are you holding that?” Carolyn asked, pointing at the brass dog.

With a mighty effort, Teena composed herself. “I heard someone moving about, and I thought that they’d come down here.”

“Is there a burglar?” Emily looked up at Teena, eyes wide with fear.

“I don’t know. I thought so, but there’s no-one here.” She looked around the room again, in case she had somehow missed the invader.

Carolyn exchanged a fearful glance with Emily. She bit her lower lip, looking worried. “But there’s, like, no-one here, is there?”

From upstairs came the sound of a door slamming, making them all jump.

“Pass me your phone please, Carolyn,” Teena said as calmly as she could. Carolyn mutely complied, and Teena called the police.

By the time O’Brien and Stevens arrived, Emily, Carolyn, and Teena were assembled in the front room. There had been no further sounds. The policemen listened patiently to the story, and conducted a thorough search of the property, checking every window and external door.

“There’s definitely no-one else here,” O’Brien said, scratching his head, “and I’m certain that no-one’s broken in.”

Stevens addressed the teenagers. “You two aren’t playing a prank on your poor mum, are you?”

Both girls shook their heads.

“It couldn’t be them, Officer,” Teena said, “we were together in the basement when the door slammed upstairs.”

“Well, I’m stumped,” O’Brien said. “You haven’t got a cat or dog, have you?”

“No, we haven’t any pets.”

“All I can do,” Stevens said, “is assure you that there isn’t an intruder in the house. When it’s daylight, have a good look around; I’m sure that there’ll be an obvious explanation.” His radio crackled, and a voice began speaking. “Excuse me.” He walked to the far side of the room and answered the call. A few moments later he was back. “I’m afraid we’ve got to go, Miss Maunder. Please try not to worry, there’s definitely only you three here.” He headed for the front door, O’Brien following.

Teena closed the door after them and turned to the two girls. “I’d feel better if we were together. Go down and fetch your bedding, then you two can top and tail on the settee. I’m going to dress, and I’ll stay awake.” The two girls obediently went downstairs. As Teena waited, she could hear them talking in hushed tones, but couldn’t make out any of the conversation. When they returned, she went cautiously up to her bedroom. She had never expected to feel unsafe in her own home, and she didn’t like it at all. Teena dressed quickly in a comfortable pair of jogging trousers and a sweatshirt, then switched off the light and left the room. Pausing on the landing, she tested the spare bedroom door, confirming it to be securely shut. Feeling tense and anxious, she went downstairs. Emily and Carolyn had made themselves comfortable on the settee, so Teena switched on a table lamp and turned off the main light. She seated herself in an armchair.

“Try to sleep if you can,” she advised the two girls. After a few minutes of wriggling, the girls settled. Teena leaned back, but was unable to relax. Other than the obvious, there was something that didn’t ring true about the whole situation. If there was a prowler, how had he gained entrance? And how had he evaded being seen? The only vaguely plausible explanation, was if someone had entered the house unseen and concealed themselves within when the back door had been briefly unlocked after she and the girls had come home. But where? It was a small house, and it had been searched twice by the police. Her reverie was broken by a door slamming upstairs, followed by footsteps on the landing.

“Mum! What was that?” Carolyn was sitting up, looking scared.

“I don’t know.” She jumped up and shut the internal door. “I’m calling the police.” She picked up her phone with a trembling hand and dialled. For several minutes after the call, footsteps continued on the upstairs landing and staircase, then ceased abruptly. A few minutes after that, the police arrived. The officers this time were PCs Harris and Patel. Teena and the girls told their story, and Teena took PC Patel on a tour of the house. Back in the front room, Patel remained standing, and addressed Teena and the girls, who were lined up on the settee.

“I understand that this is the third time tonight you’ve made an emergency call?”

“That’s correct,” Teena replied.

“And our colleagues were unable to find any evidence of a break-in or an intruder?”

“That’s right,” Teena answered with a feeling of resignation.

Patel fixed Teena with a hard stare. “You’re aware, Miss Maunder, that wasting police time is a serious offence?”

“My mum’s not wasting your time!” Carolyn said indignantly. “It’s not our fault if the noises don’t happen when someone else is here.”

“Perhaps not,” Patel turned her gaze on Carolyn, “but it does seem rather suspicious that they don’t.”

As if on cue, a door slammed upstairs, and footsteps marched across the landing.

“There!” Teena shouted. “What about that?”

The two officers raced upstairs. A few minutes later they were back, their expressions a picture.

“Well?” demanded Teena, “Am I wasting your time?”

“Miss Maunder,” Patel said, her confidence clearly shaken, “I’m sorry. I can’t account for what we just heard.” She looked utterly mystified.

“Do you have access to the loft?” Harris asked. “It’s the only place that we haven’t looked.”

Teena led him upstairs, and fetched a pole with a hook on the end from the spare bedroom. She used

it to unlatch the loft hatch above the landing, then pulled down the ladder. Harris rather nervously climbed up, and, using his torch, looked around the small roof space. He came back down the ladder shaking his head.

"There's nothing up there but insulation, and the loft itself is walled off from the adjoining properties."

"I know." Teena pushed the ladder back up and closed the hatch. "What on earth is going on?"

"I'm sorry, Miss Maunder, I don't know, but it's giving me the creeps." He glanced around apprehensively. "I can't think of any natural explanation."

"That's not at all comforting."

"Let's go back down and see if Jaya, I mean Officer Patel, has any ideas."

"Did you find anything?" Patel asked as Harris and Teena entered the room.

"No," Harris answered. "Do you have any thoughts?"

Patel looked at him for a second, then shook her head. She turned to Teena, "Miss Maunder, could you and I speak in private, please?"

"I suppose so." Teena ushered Patel into the kitchen, closing the door behind them. "Well?"

Patel looked uncomfortable. "This is very difficult for me to say, Miss Maunder, but have you considered the possibility that your house is haunted?" She continued quickly before Teena could respond. "Officially, the Force doesn't acknowledge the supernatural; in fact, we wouldn't respond to a report of paranormal activity unless there was a welfare issue, or an offence had been committed. What I'm trying to say," she met Teena's gaze, "is that I have no explanation for what's happening here, and I'm prepared to file an official report to that effect."

"Hold on a moment," Teena was reeling, "are you telling me that we have a ghost?"

"Officially, I'm telling you that the disturbance is currently unexplained, and we've exhausted our lines of inquiry: unofficially, I believe that there is some sort of paranormal activity occurring, and I suggest that you seek help elsewhere."

"I find this difficult to accept, Officer."

"Don't think me rude, Miss Maunder, but, given the evidence, do you have another explanation?"

Teena was silent for several seconds. "No. I haven't," she answered reluctantly. "Where do you suggest that I seek help?"

"Perhaps your local church? Failing that, I'm sure an internet search would turn up something."

"I'll need to think about this. I'm sure that you understand it's come as quite a shock."

Patel nodded sympathetically. "I can only imagine how you must feel." They stood in silence for a few seconds. "Miss Maunder, we have to leave now."

"Isn't there anything that you can do?" asked Teena desperately.

"I'm truly sorry, but no. Even unofficially, I wouldn't have the slightest clue how to approach this. You need to find some expert help."

Teena took a deep breath. "Very well. I'll have to see what I can do. Thank-you, Officer, I'll see you out."

After the officers had departed, Carolyn asked, "What did the policewoman say to you, Mum?"

Teena thought for a moment, unsure whether to reveal Patel's conjecture. "She said we ought to consider the possibility that the house is haunted."

Emily and Carolyn exchanged an anxious look.

"I honestly don't know what to think. Supposing for a moment that she's right, we've never experienced anything like this before, so why is it happening now?" Teena shook her head. "Fretting about it won't help. I'll speak to Uncle Bradley later, and see if he can make any suggestions." She forced a smile. "Now, let's be doing: you two might as well go back downstairs and be comfortable. I'm going to stay up, so you've no need to worry."

"Will you be all right, Mum?"

"I'll be fine, Carolyn. You and Emily go and settle down in your room."

When the girls had gone, Teena slumped back in the armchair. For the first time in her life, she was faced with a problem that she didn't know how to solve.