

Chapter 7. Extract from Father of Lies by S. E. England

It was only four o'clock but the light had faded to a purple dusk. Becky waited at the bus stop. The wind whipped sharply round her legs, cutting into her back through the thin jacket she wore. Behind her, miles of barren moor land. To each side, a grey and empty highway; and in front - the lights of Drummersgate: a galley ship in the rolling fog of a November afternoon. It had been a long and draining day.

The fog was closing in now, quickly enveloping her in its squally mizzle. She stamped her feet, trying hard not to recall the ghost stories they'd all laughed about in the dry, warm safety of the staff room. Circles of ethereal children seen dancing on the highway, faces ravaged with bubonic plague. Tales recounted by workmen laying the new road up to Drummersgate a few years ago - of hearing children's tinkling laughter from somewhere in the fog; of faces oozing with open sores, looming in at the windows of their trucks when they took a nap...

Stop it Becky and stop it now! She told herself. Think of something else. Ghosts do not exist.... And yet... she had seen those red eyes and heard that guttural, obscenity-ridden voice coming out of Ruby's frail body... You know now, don't you, Becky? There really is something we can't explain - something not just to be a bit spooked about...but terrified out of your mind...

Once more her thoughts switched to the hypnosis scene with Ruby and Jack. Replaying it over and over, against her will, as she would do a thousand more times yet - when she woke at 3 a.m. to the sound of a loud bang in the kitchen or a slammed door on a still night. Recalling the heat racking up and up and up in the treatment room, sweat breaking out across her chest, soaking her underarms, trickling down her back... of the inability to move from her position facing the wall. Who had turned her to face it? It had been as if her feet were stuck in sucking mud while the horrific scene unfolded and the men outside the door were helpless to get in - pounding at it with all their collective weight. But most of all she would remember the look of rictus terror on Jack's face. Jack, of all people. Jack McGowan - the medical director they all admired and relied on. The buck stopped with Jack every time - he was the father of the unit, the one they all went to no matter what because he always had the answers.

Yet that slip of a girl had broken him. Physically. Emotionally. Maybe even mentally, with the demonic filth she hadn't been able to block her ears from hearing - powerless as the destructive venom poured out of Ruby and into Jack.

He'd had to be helped from the room like an invalid, and driven home. Took time off and still hadn't returned to work. He'd withered away in front of them, diminished somehow, as though his very spirit had been drained.

Her mind tried to rationalise the event, again and again, ever since and every night, lying awake with her eyes tightly shut. At middle age, suddenly afraid of the dark and what it might be hiding. *How does anyone know anything for sure? If parallel universes co-existed then what if we were actually spirits, with our very beings only a fantasy? And who ruled this kingdom of spiritual realism? What if devils and demons didn't belong to fairytales and old wives talk at all - but were based on a foundation of ancient truth? We like to think we have all the modern-day rational answers - but do we? How arrogant? How bloody, bloody arrogant...and fragile!*

The last vestiges of a bruised sky faded to black, plunging Becky's lone figure

into a chill, dark night choked with fog. Dying leaves congealed around her ankles, a faint whiff of wood smoke from a nearby farm.

There was someone behind her... was there, was there...breathing into the nape of her neck? She whirled around nervously. And was that the sound of drumming from somewhere out there in the wilderness? Getting louder? They called this place Drummersgate for a reason, she recalled - the psychiatric hospital had been built on the ruins of an old prison; one in which prisoners, often diseased and half starved, were then hanged to their deaths. People said they were brought out here in wooden crates pulled by horses, accompanied by drummers and dancing children, as they made their final journey at the centre of some macabre carnival....

Becky shivered - how vulnerable she was out here on her own.