

Also by Martin J. Best

Short Stories

The Moth Trap

A Step Aside

Ghost Hunter Series

The Novice Ghost Hunter

A Matter of Faith

Of Gods and Ghosts

Blood Ties

www.martinjbest.com

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***GHOST HUNTER
REMNANTS and REVENANTS***

CHAPTER ONE

Calvin Yates was drunk. Well, drunk by his standards. He'd had three pints of lager in quick succession: which was two more than he was used to. He moved unsteadily from the urinal to the basin, washed his hands, then splashed cold water onto his face, and dabbed it dry with a paper towel. He felt a little better, and left the toilet. The barroom seemed less busy than he remembered. It took a moment before he realised that his companions were gone. He walked to where the barman was clearing away empty glasses from the top of the bar. "Do you know where my friends went?"

The barman glanced up. "No mate."

Calvin stood and thought about it. The missing stag party was led by his future brother-in-law, Peter. Calvin and Peter had nothing in common, but Calvin's younger sister, Karen, had insisted that her brother be included in the celebrations, and he and Peter had reluctantly agreed. Junior doctor Peter had already made travel and accommodation arrangements for the group, so Calvin was forced to arrange lodgings and find his own way from Coventry to Torquay. At half past nine, on the second Friday in October, Calvin found himself in a small room, the last available, in a guest house some way from the town. The guest house had recently changed hands, and the new owners had fully refurbished the interior. He had barely put his bag on the bed, when he received a curt text message, instructing him to join the group at a harbourside pub. Calvin obtained directions from the proprietors, and walked to the pub. Peter gave him a lukewarm welcome, and grudgingly introduced him to the rest of the party. He was intimidated into buying a round of drinks, then effectively ignored. The variety and volume of alcohol purchased, and the speed with which it was consumed, left Calvin staggered, and several of the group staggering. Two more pubs were visited, and talk turned to night clubs.

In all honesty, Calvin wasn't upset by the desertion: it gave him the perfect excuse to bow out. He would stay in Torquay tonight, and in the morning, take the train home; his sister could make of it what she would. He would be far happier back at home in Coventry, with his partner Alice. They could observe

their usual Saturday night ritual of takeaway food and a bottle of wine in front of the television. He left the pub, and headed up through the town towards the guest house. It was depressing to see the number of homeless people, some of them clearly under the influence of drugs, trying to extract cash from passing revellers. After fifteen minutes of walking, Calvin had cleared the town, and entered the mostly residential area where the guest house stood in a quiet, tree lined street. He let himself into the substantial, well-maintained building, and made his way quietly upstairs.

Inside the room, Calvin heaved a sigh of relief. The walk had cleared his head, and he felt much better. He poured himself a glass of water, drank it, repeated the process, and then poured a third glass which he placed on the bedside table. Using the toilet became expedient, and he quickly entered the tiny en suite bathroom. Afterwards, he undressed, climbed into the comfortable bed, and was soon asleep.

Some time later, Calvin was awoken by a desperate need to use the toilet again. He groped for the bedside lamp, knocking it, and the glass of water, over. "Shit!" He rolled out of the bed and stood up, his feet in the cold water. "Shit!" His head was aching, and he knew that he would have to clear up the mess. But it would all have to wait: he had to pee! He set off in the direction of the bathroom, colliding with a chest of drawers before he reached the door. The light switch wasn't where he remembered it, and he fumbled for what seemed an eternity before the bulb burst into life. Almost in a frenzy, he reached the toilet, and his bladder emptied with the force of a fire hose. Calvin let out a sigh of relief, and relished the moment. Eventually, the flood slowed to a trickle, and finally stopped. He sighed again, and exited the bathroom, leaving the light on so that he could find the main bedroom light switch. As he crossed the partially illuminated room, something fleetingly caught his eye. By the time he reached the light switch, his mind had processed the impression: there was something different about the chair opposite the end of the bed. Thinking that it must be a trick of the light, Calvin flicked the switch, and looked back at the chair. He stood petrified with shock. Adrenaline flooded his body, causing his heart to beat wildly and his pupils to dilate. Suddenly he was sweating, his breath coming in shallow pants. In the chair was a young woman. She met Calvin's horrified gaze for a moment, then she was gone. Calvin took an inadvertent step back, and banged his head against the wall. The sharp pain galvanised him, and in a few minutes, he was dressed and hammering on the door of the owners' private accommodation.



Until a little after three AM, police sergeant Tasha Dabrowski's night shift had been mercifully uneventful, so it was with a sense of resignation that she answered a call from the station dispatcher.

"Bit of an odd one, Sarge," the dispatcher said, "a male staying at a guest

house reckons he saw a ghost in his room. He's very distressed, and threatening a breach of the peace if the owner, a Mr Brown, doesn't do something about it."

"Has he been drinking?"

"Affirmative. Apparently, he's here with a stag party."

"Are they all staying at the guest house?"

"Negative. Just him."

"Understood. Give me the address, and I'll attend." The dispatcher supplied the information, and Tasha started driving towards the location. Her curiosity was piqued by the possible ghost sighting, although it was most likely to be an alcohol induced misidentification.

Tasha's interest in the supernatural had burgeoned since her first revelatory meeting with Malachi, Teena, and Carolyn Hunter, during the tragic case of Charles Chandler. Charles and his daughter Seraphina were possessed by two malevolent Victorian spirits, Vernon and Eliza, who had been preserved in the matrix of a pair of magnetite statues. Tasha became involved after the police were called by Charles' wife Isabelle, when Vernon and Eliza resumed a sexual relationship in their stolen bodies. Having had the situation explained to her by the Hunters, Tasha expressed a genuine desire to learn more, and was invited to join the Hunter's group as an apprentice investigator. She had worked with one of the other team members previously, former Detective Chief Inspector Nicholas Rueben; the remaining member was fabulously wealthy businessman Wolfe Fisher. She inferred that Fisher was related somehow to the Hunters, but the exact connection was never specified. His main residence was a Georgian mansion called Summerlands, part of a substantial estate tucked away in a quiet corner of the South Hams. Wolfe was eminently likeable, but Tasha sensed that there was much more to him than met the eye. As there wasn't a current active case, she had studied the group's meticulous records, and joined them on several investigations of reputedly haunted local locations to familiarise herself with their methods and equipment.

Tasha arrived at the guest house. She had barely exited the car, and put the unflattering uniform hat on when the front door was opened, and a man in his sixties, wearing a dressing gown, came out and met her on the pavement.

"It's about time!"

"I'm Sergeant Dabrowski, you must be Mr Brown."

"Yes, I'm Ray Brown. Now do your job and arrest this lunatic." Brown hurried back inside.

Tasha rolled her eyes heavenward, and followed him, closing the door after her. Brown was waiting impatiently beside the open door to the private accommodation. He gestured irritably for her to precede him. Seated in the comfortable lounge, Christa Brown and Calvin were drinking tea. Tasha looked enquiringly at Ray.

"We had to calm him down somehow."

“I’m sorry officer, my husband may have overreacted.” Christa saw the look that Ray was giving her. “Although, Mr Yates was very upset when Ray called you.”

“He tried to knock our door down!”

Tasha took charge. “Mr Yates, I’m Sergeant Dabrowski, will you tell me what happened please?”

Calvin told his story. “I didn’t imagine it: I saw her as clearly as I can see you all now.”

“I understand that you’ve had a drink.”

“Well yes, but only three pints of lager, and that was hours ago.”

“What did the woman look like?”

Calvin pursed his lips. “To be honest, I’m not really sure, I only saw her for an instant. I think that she had long hair.” He thought for a moment. “She was looking at me, but there was something funny about her eyes.”

“In what way?”

“Well, like I said, she was looking at me, but her eyes were sort of, glazed over.”

Tasha nodded, then addressed Christa. “Would you mind showing me the room please?”

“I’ll take you,” Ray answered, clearly unwilling to be alone with Calvin, “but you’ll have to be quiet; we have other guests to consider.”

“OK.” She followed Ray up to the top floor.

“This is it,” he said, opening the door and switching on the light, “though why you want to see it, I don’t know.”

“Just being thorough, Mr Brown.” She followed him in, and looked around. “Have you decorated recently?” She walked over to the chair, trying to get a feel for the room. It was warm and comfortable, almost cosy.

“We’ve renovated the entire place.” Ray closed the door. “What difference does that make?”

Tasha knew that alterations to a building could trigger or intensify paranormal activity. “Do you believe in the supernatural, Mr Brown?”

Ray looked at her incredulously. “Don’t tell me that you do!”

“My personal opinions don’t enter into it, I’m simply trying to assess the situation. How do you explain what Mr Yates saw?”

“He’s been drinking! What else needs explaining?”

“He’s hardly what I’d describe as drunk, and he’s adamant that he saw something he can’t explain.”

“And I can’t believe that you’re taking him seriously! Look, just get him out of my house.”

Tasha ignored him. “I can’t see any way that Mr Yates could mistake seeing a woman in that chair, even under the influence of alcohol. Perhaps you should consider the possibility that the room is haunted?”

Ray laughed humourlessly. “Are you for real? There’s no such thing as ghosts, but if this idiot starts telling people that the guest house is haunted, I’ll be ruined. We’ve only been here five months, and we’ve already ploughed all our savings into the place. It’ll take years to break even as it is, without having our reputation destroyed!”

“I’m sure Mr Yates would be discreet.”

“How can you be sure? You can’t guarantee that he won’t tell anyone.” Ray shook his head. “It won’t do, it won’t do at all.”

“Mr Brown, from a police perspective, no further action is required. Your allegedly drunk and disorderly guest is downstairs, calmly drinking tea with your wife.”

“Yes, but—”

“What do you expect me to do, Mr Brown? I have no reason to detain Mr Yates, and I certainly can’t prevent him from telling his story if he chooses to.”

“No, I suppose not.” Ray looked unhappy. “What happens now?”

Tasha considered carefully before replying. “Officially, nothing.”

Ray looked at her curiously. “Is there something else that you can do?”

“That depends on you, Mr Brown.” She interpreted Ray’s expression. “I’m not suggesting anything illegal.”

“What then?”

“I can put you in touch with a group of paranormal investigators, they’d potentially be able to help you if it turned out to be a genuine haunting.”

“How is that going to help? It’ll only bring more attention to this ghost nonsense, and it’ll cost me money.”

“They don’t make any charge.” Tasha was beginning to regret her suggestion. “Look at it from a different point of view: there are a number of establishments, like yours, that trade on their haunted reputation.”

“Is that so?” Ray contemplated her words thoughtfully. “I hadn’t thought of it like that.”

“Well, you must do what you think is best.” She didn’t like Ray’s calculating expression. “I’ll have another word with Mr Yates, then I’ll be off.”

They went downstairs, and found Calvin and Christa talking quietly.

“Mr Yates is going to catch the six thirty-nine train back to Coventry. I’ve refunded the money for his stay, and he’s agreed to say no more about it.”

Ray bristled, but said nothing.

“Are you happy with that, Mr Yates?”

“Yes Sergeant, I am. I just want to go home.”

“OK, that’s fine. I’ll make a note of your contact details, but I don’t think that you’ll hear any more from us.” She wrote down the information. “What are you going to do until your train’s due?”

“Mrs Brown’s kindly agreed to let me stay here. It’s not far to walk to the station.”

“Right, I’ll be on my way then. Good night.”

“I’ll see you out,” Ray said quickly.

By the front door, Ray took Tasha’s arm, and stopped her. “That number you mentioned,” he said quietly, “for the investigators. Can I have it?”

She scowled until he released her arm; in her boots she was about an inch taller than him. “These are intelligent people, and they’re serious about what they do. They won’t waste your time, and I’m trusting you not to waste theirs.”

“Yeah, I get it. Are you going to give me the number or not?”

Tasha nearly didn’t, but consulted her phone, and wrote a name and number on a page of her notebook. She tore the page out, and handed it to Ray. “Don’t phone until at least ten o’clock. I’ll let them know that you’ll be in touch.”

“Thank-you.” He put the piece of paper into his dressing gown pocket. “Goodbye Sergeant.”



Tasha’s shift finished at six o’clock Saturday morning. She spent an extra hour catching up on paperwork, before heading home to her flat in Babbacombe. After a shower, she towelled dry her dark, shoulder length hair, put on a robe, and prepared some breakfast. Afterwards, Tasha dressed, then sent a text to Malachi Hunter. The reply came swiftly, and, at just after eight o’clock, she drove the short distance to the Hunter’s bungalow. Barking immediately followed her ring on the doorbell, and a few seconds later, Mal’s six-foot muscular frame filled the opening. Fermac, the family’s Rottweiler Wolfhound cross barely contained behind him.

“Morning Tasha.” Mal stood aside. “Tea?”

“Please, Mal.” She entered the hallway, stopping to make the obligatory fuss of Fermac. “I’m sorry to bother you so early.”

“Not a problem, we were already up. Well, Teena and I were; it takes dynamite to get Carolyn out of bed.”

Tasha laughed, and followed Mal into the kitchen. Teena, slim and pretty, with light auburn hair and sparkling green eyes, stood poised to make drinks as soon as the kettle boiled.

“Hello Tasha, have you had breakfast?”

“Yes, thanks Teena.”

“Take a seat, the drinks won’t be a moment.” The kettle boiled, and Teena poured hot water into the mugs.

“So, what happened?” Mal asked, when they were all settled at the table.

Tasha told her story. “I hope that I’ve done the right thing, giving Mr Brown your number.”

“Yes, you have,” Teena replied firmly. “If there is genuine paranormal activity, we can try to help.”

“What did you make of this Mr Yates?” Mal sipped his tea. “Is he a credible witness?”

“I believe that he saw something; he was genuinely scared. It’s Mr Brown that I don’t like. Although he doesn’t believe that the place is haunted, or in ghosts generally, I’m afraid that I’ve given him the idea of exploiting the supernatural angle to boost his business.”

“It’s a pretty niche market,” Mal said dubiously, “hardly a get rich quick scheme.”

“I’m hoping that his wife’ll keep his feet on the ground. She seems far more reasonable.”

“When do you think that he’ll let us investigate?” Teena asked.

“I can’t say for sure. Although, Mr Yates had the room booked for tonight, and he’s gone home now, so it might be straight away.”

Mal’s phone began to play ‘Rainbow’ by Emigrate. “I’m popular this morning.” He looked at the screen. “It’s a Torquay number, but not one that I recognise.”

“I bet it’s Brown,” said Tasha, “even though I told him not to call before ten.”

“Could be.” Mal was uncomfortable speaking to people he didn’t know.

“Answer it and find out,” suggested Teena.

Mal took a breath, and answered the call on speaker. “Malachi Hunter.”

“Are you the ghost catcher?”

“No, I’m a paranormal investigator.”

“Whatever. I run a guest house, and last night one of my guests reckoned he saw a ghost. He went nuts, and we had to call the police. The policewoman who turned up gave me your number, she said that you could help me: can you?”

“I don’t know. Without an investigation, I can’t tell if your property is even haunted.”

“I can tell you now that it’s not. That man last night was just a drunken idiot.”

“Then why are you talking to me?”

Ray paused, thinking rapidly. “My wife thinks that there might be something to it. She wants you to come and have a look around.”

“OK,” Mal said slowly, “when can we do that?”

“Is there any point in you coming during the day?”

“I’d appreciate a look around in daylight, but, to minimise contamination, we’ll need to stay overnight at least once.”

“You can come after we’ve finished serving breakfast: ten o’clock. We’ll see about the rest of it.” He gave Mal the address, and ended the call.

“He’s a charmer,” Teena said.

“I like him less and less.” Tasha shook her head. “I’m sorry that I’ve saddled you with him.”

“Don’t worry,” Mal smiled reassuringly at her, “we’ve dealt with worse.”

“Will you be joining us?” Teena asked.

“I really wish I could, but I’ve got to work tonight.”

“Can’t you wrangle the night off?” Mal asked. “It’d be your first proper investigation.”

“I can’t Mal, we’re seriously understaffed as it is. Besides that, I can’t afford time off. Since my divorce, I’m only just making ends meet.”

“Sorry Tasha, I get carried away. When there’s an investigation, I sometimes forget the realities.”

“Which is where I come in,” said Teena with a smile, “otherwise we’d be on the streets!”

“Are you going to bring Nick and Wolfe in?” Tasha asked.

“We’ll let them know what’s going on, but Mal and I’ll pop ’round this morning and get a feel for the place.”

“Well, I’ll let you get on with it.” Tasha stood up. “I’d better go home and get some sleep.”

“I’ll see you out,” Teena said.

“Let me know how you get on,” Tasha said to Mal.

“We will.”

At the front door, Teena took Tasha’s arm. “I know that we haven’t been friends for very long, but you’re part of our ghost hunting family now. Tell me if I’m being presumptuous, but if you need any help, financial or otherwise, we’re here for you.”

“That’s very kind of you Teena, and I appreciate the offer, but I’m all right: really. If I need help, I promise I’ll ask.”

“Fair enough. I’ll see you soon.”

“Good luck!”

Teena closed the front door and went back to the kitchen, where she found Mal on the phone. She sat down quietly, and waited for him to finish.

“Nick’s on board,” he said, putting the phone down. “We just need to speak to Wolfe now.”

“I’ll call him if you like.” Since their first meeting, at the start of the Watcombe Woods affair, Teena had felt a connection to Wolfe. They had subsequently discovered that the tall, long haired, enigmatic man was part of her ancestry, which confirmed a literal bond, and enhanced their already close relationship. Wolfe, the sixteen hundred-year-old son of Celtic God Carne and a mortal woman, Kensa, had added a genetic enhancement to the family which was particularly apparent in Carolyn.

“OK.” He stood up. “I’ll go and sort out some equipment to take with us.” He turned to go, then paused. “If you think that it’s a good idea, I’d like Carolyn to come with us.”

“I think that you’d struggle to keep her away!”

Mal laughed. “That’s what I figured.” He bent down and kissed her. “Back in a couple of minutes.”

Teena went into the front room to use the landline telephone.
“Hello Teena!” Wolfe answered cheerfully, “Everything all right?”
“Hello Wolfe. Yes, everything’s fine.” She explained the situation.
“Count me in. I’ll come straight over to the apartment in Ilsham, then I’ll be on hand whatever happens.”
“That’s great Wolfe, thank-you.”
“Ghost hunting with my family, how could I resist?”
“There aren’t many people who could say that.”
“True,” Wolfe laughed, “but I’m glad that I’m one of them.”
“So am I, Wolfe. I’ll give you a call as soon as we know what’s happening.”
“I’ll wait to hear from you. Bye for now.”
“Goodbye Wolfe.” Teena replaced the handset in the cradle, and went to tell Carolyn what was going on. She knocked on her fifteen-year-old daughter’s bedroom door, aware that the television was now playing.

“Come in Mum.”
Teena entered the room, silently noting how untidy it was. “How would you like to come and check out a potentially haunted location?”
Carolyn levered herself upright from a stack of pillows. Other than wearing glasses, she bore a close physical resemblance to her mother, and was almost as tall. “Have we got a case?”
“Maybe. We’ve been asked to assess a property.” Teena related the story again.
“Cool! When are we going?”
“So you’d like to join us?”
“What do you think? Of course I would Mum!”
“I think a more polite reply would have been better, Carolyn.”
“Sorry Mum. I just want to, like, get into a new investigation.”
“All right, you’re forgiven. Now, get yourself organised, because we’re leaving in,” she consulted her watch, “about forty minutes.”



At five past ten, Mal parked his truck just along the road from the Torre Mews Guest House. On the way, Teena had stressed the importance of not letting Mr Brown’s attitude undermine their investigation.

“He’s invited us into his house, so whatever his motivation, we behave courteously and professionally.”

The front door was unlocked, so they entered, and Carolyn rang the bell on a small reception desk. Shortly after, a tired looking woman with greying hair appeared.

“Good morning,” her smile was friendly and genuine, “are you looking for a room?”

“You must be Mrs Brown,” Teena said, returning the smile, “your husband asked us to call.”

Christa looked puzzled. "I'm sorry, he didn't mention it. What have you come to do?"

The Hunters exchanged a glance, but before Teena could reply, Ray joined them.

"These are the ghost chaser people," he said quietly, glancing apprehensively around. "You know, the ones that policewoman told us about."

"Oh?" Christa looked none the wiser.

"I'll sort it out: you finish clearing up the breakfast things."

Christa didn't move. "I'd like to know what's happening, Ray."

Ray huffed irritably, annoyed rather than embarrassed at being caught in a lie. "Last night, the policewoman recommended these people. They can tell us if Mr Yates really saw something, or whether he imagined it."

"And you called them without telling me?"

"I thought that we should find out what was going on."

"We?"

"All right," Ray held up his hands, "let's not make a big deal out of it."

Christa looked hard at him. "No, let's not. You go and clear up, and I'll take these people up to room seven." She gestured for the Hunters to follow her, and set off upstairs. "I'm Christa. I'm sorry, I don't know your names..."

In the room, everything was as Calvin had left it. Christa walked around the bed, opened the curtains, picked up the glass, and set the lamp upright. Mal closed the door behind him and paused, trying to get a feel for the room. Carolyn walked slowly towards the chair.

"I apologise for Ray," Christa said, "he does things without thinking. I hope you don't feel that we're wasting your time."

"Not at all," Teena replied, "we're happy to help."

"I've noticed something funny about this room before," she said hesitantly. "I've never mentioned it to Ray, he wouldn't take me seriously."

"What have you noticed?" asked Mal.

"Well, it seems a bit silly really, now that I think about it. I mean, I might have been wrong."

"Believe me," Mal said, "we've heard all sorts, and sometimes it's the little details that help us the most."

"We'd really like to know, Mrs Brown," Carolyn added.

"Well, all right, but I don't expect that it's important." Christa took a breath. "It's the curtains."

"The curtains?" Mal cocked an eyebrow.

Christa nodded. "The first time, I thought that I'd made a mistake: I felt sure that I'd opened them, but they were closed. It's happened maybe three times since."

"That is odd," said Teena. "What do you think Mal?"

“If it had only happened once, I’d say that it was probably a lapse of memory. Four times? It’s certainly noteworthy.”

“Pass me an EMF meter please Dad, I’ll take a baseline reading.”

Mal opened his bag, removed the instrument, and passed it to Carolyn. He handed a digital recorder to Teena, and took out the ultra-high definition full-spectrum camera for himself. “Christa, do you mind if we film and record in here?”

“No, I suppose not. Why do you need to?”

“There’s a couple of reasons: it saves taking notes; and we might catch something that we would otherwise be unaware of.”

“Sometimes,” Carolyn added, “if there is activity, it’s not like, audible or visible to our senses, but the digital equipment picks it up.”

“Do you think that there is something happening?”

“It’s a possibility,” Mal answered. “We might know more after we’ve done a sweep with the equipment, but the best chance for evidence is an overnight investigation.”

“Well, the room’s free tonight, as long as you’re quiet.” She turned to Teena. “Do you mind if I leave you to it? I really ought to go and help Ray.”

“That’s fine. We’ll come down and have a chat when we’ve finished.”

After Christa had gone, Carolyn sat on the chair whilst Mal filmed her.

“Do either of you sense anything?” Teena asked.

“Sort of,” Carolyn answered thoughtfully, “there’s like, a trace of something, but I’m not sure what it is. What do you think, Dad?”

“I think you’re right: there was something here.” He looked around the room. “It’s weird, but it feels like...” he hunted for a suitable description, “an echo of a presence: if that makes any sense.”

“Yeah, that’s a good way to put it.”

“Do you think that it could be residual?” Teena asked Mal.

“That might well be the explanation: hopefully we’ll find some answers later.” He smiled at them both. “Let’s document everything, and then go and see if the Browns can tell us anything about the history of the building.”

In the Brown’s private accommodation, Teena relayed their initial impressions to Ray as Christa made them drinks.

“You’re serious about this, aren’t you?” Ray asked.

“Yes, Mr Brown, we are.”

“So I’m expected to believe that there’s a ghost in the room?”

“It’s not there now,” Carolyn said.

“Then how do you know that it’s there at all?”

“We’ve experienced the supernatural many times,” said Teena before Carolyn could reply, “we know what we’re looking for.”

“If you’re so sure that it’s there, where’s your proof?”

“Ray! There’s no need to be rude.” Christa appeared, carrying drinks on a tray.

“It’s all right,” Teena smiled as she accepted a mug of coffee, then turned back to Ray. “We don’t have any evidence: yet. We may have something to show you after tonight’s investigation.”

“I don’t remember giving permission for an investigation.”

“No, I did.” Christa met and held her husband’s eyes until he looked away.

“Was the property used as a guest house when you bought it?” Teena asked.

“No,” Christa replied, “it was flats; bedsits really. We’ve had everything refurbished, but the layout’s basically the same: except what was the garden flat downstairs which we converted into a kitchen and dining room.”

“It was more like a doss-house,” Ray said. “The previous owner filled the place with druggies and the unemployed, and, as long as the social security cheques kept coming, just left them to it.”

“Were any of the tenants still here when you took over?” Mal asked.

“No. Certainly not.” Ray shook his head emphatically. “We made vacant possession a condition of the purchase.”

“I don’t suppose you have any records of who was living here then?”

“Why would I? You’d have to find the man we bought from, Konstantinos Zambati, and ask him.”

“OK, we’ll do what research we can. What’s the best time for us to come back and set-up for tonight’s investigation?”

“How much setting-up do you need to do?” asked Christa, looking concerned.

“We’ll put up a couple of cameras and a recorder in the room, but we’ll need to monitor them remotely with our computer system.”

“I’m sorry, I can’t let you trail cables all over the house; it’d be a Health and Safety nightmare!”

“There aren’t any cables,” Carolyn said, “our new system is wireless.” Wolfe had insisted on upgrading their equipment to the highest specification available, at his own expense.

“Why don’t you just stay in the room? Surely that’s the obvious thing to do.” Ray looked challengingly at the ghost hunters.

“We’ll conduct vigils in the room,” Mal replied evenly, “but, depending on what’s there, it’s equally possible that it’ll manifest if the room’s empty.”

“But, if there really is a ghost, which I doubt, why would it appear if no-one’s there? What would be the point?”

“There are a number of different sorts of haunting,” Mal explained patiently. “We can’t say anything with certainty, but with what little we know so far, we’re tentatively assuming that this might be a type of residual haunting. That means the ghost will do what it does, regardless of the situation: there’s no intelligent determination to its actions.”

Ray looked puzzled.

Teena attempted to clarify. “Think of it as a recording of something that the person did in life, possibly quite mundane, being replayed. There isn’t necessarily any motivation. The apparition Mr Yates saw might appear at the same time every night, but normally no-one’s there to see it.”

“I understand,” said Christa, nodding.

“Well, I’m glad you do,” her husband replied, “‘cause it all sounds like rubbish to me.”

“And yet you called us in,” Teena said, letting her irritation show. “Why was that?”

Ray looked momentarily flustered. “Well, I don’t know, I suppose it was because that policewoman suggested it.”

“It doesn’t matter now,” Christa said firmly, “I’m very pleased that you are here, and I would really appreciate it if you would come back and investigate tonight. Would seven o’clock be convenient? You can put your computer in the dining room.”



An hour later, Nick and Wolfe had joined the Hunters at their bungalow. They sat around the kitchen table as Teena concisely detailed their visit to the Torre Mews.

“Mr Brown sounds like a prat,” Nick commented when she had finished.

“He is, but fortunately Christa is reasonable, and open to the possibility that the room has activity.”

Wolfe addressed Mal and Carolyn. “Can you be any more specific about the impressions that you had of the room?”

“Not really,” Carolyn answered. “It was like Dad said: sort of an echo. Like whatever had been there, was hardly there at all.”

“It sounds like you could be right, Teena: a residual haunting. The curtains closing on their own is an interesting twist though.”

“We need to find out who lived in that room when it was a flat,” Nick said, “and if anyone died there.”

“We do,” Mal answered, “but it might be sensible to go back further than that.” He looked around at them. “We haven’t got much of a description for the entity beyond being female, possibly with long hair, and glazed eyes. She could’ve been there for much longer.”

Carolyn was working furiously on her tablet. “The guest house was built around eighteen-sixty,” she announced, “the information’s on one of the estate agent’s sites. It wasn’t a guest house then, obviously, it was a private villa called Tor Lodge.”

“Victorian, then,” said Wolfe with a wry smile. “Let’s hope that the ghost isn’t!” During the ghost hunter’s previous investigation, the Chandler family had nearly been destroyed by two Victorian era spirits.

“We need to try and narrow the time-frame,” Nick said.

“How can we get hold of a list of the tenants?” Mal asked. “Even if we can find this Zambati character, there’s no reason for him to help us; he may not even still have the records. How about the electoral roll, or the census?”

“Census information is only available up until nineteen-eleven online,” Teena replied, “which should give us something. I can check the electoral roll, but it’s only going to be helpful if the occupants were registered to vote.”

Wolfe reached for his phone. “I’ll get one of my investigators on it immediately; that way we can concentrate on what we’re doing.” He left the table, and walked to the window. A few moments later, he was speaking rapidly to Zaira, his London office manager.

“If the tenants were on benefits,” Nick said, “there should be records of their rent payments to Zambati. That could tell us who was where.”

“I don’t think that we’ll be able to access benefit records,” Teena said.

“No, true. If Wolfe can’t find what we need, I may possibly be able to call in a favour.” He rubbed his stubbly chin. “Although, Tasha might be able to find out: she has a legitimate interest in the property.”

“She’ll be asleep by now, but I’ll text her later and see if she can help. Just so we’re covering all the bases, I’ll mention it to Wolfe.” She left the table, and walked over to Wolfe, stopping a polite distance away.

He glanced at her, guessed her intention, and smiled. “Zaira, Mrs Hunter has something to add.” He handed his phone to Teena, and rejoined the others.

“I think that I’ve found something about Mr Zambati,” Carolyn informed him. “If it’s the same man, he owns a restaurant in the town.”

“That’s good work, Carolyn. Although, if we can find what we need without contacting him I think it would be better.”

Teena came back to the table, handed Wolfe his phone, and sat down. “Thank-you Wolfe. Zaira’s put Adam Ross straight to work: but it’s bound to take time.”

“It doesn’t directly affect tonight’s investigation,” Nick said, “we may even find some answers ourselves.”

“How do you want to do this?” Wolfe asked Mal.

“We’re going to have central command in the communal dining room, which keeps us separate from everyone. I thought that we could have two cameras in the room, a full-spectrum and a thermal, both of which we can remotely monitor. We’ll leave a recorder running, and conduct vigils as we feel the need. Of course, if anything happens, we can change our strategy to suit.”

“Sounds good to me,” Nick said, getting to his feet. “Shall we get the gear organised?”



At eight minutes to seven, Mal parked close to the Torre Mews.

“You’re going to need a bigger wagon,” Nick remarked to Mal as he levered his broad shouldered, stocky form from the back of the cab.

“Why’s that?”

“If Tasha’s with us, we can’t very well put her in the back.”

Teena laughed. “We could go mad, and bring two vehicles.”

“One for the men, and one for the ladies,” Carolyn said.

“That should make for a quieter journey!” Nick said, quickly stepping out of Teena’s reach.

“Cheeky devil! You wait ’til I see Victoria.”

In jovial mood, they took their equipment from the truck, and assembled in the lobby, where Ray and Christa joined them.

“This is Wolfe Fisher,” Teena introduced the tall man to the Browns, “he’s an investigator, and our tech specialist.”

“Pleased to meet you.” Wolfe shook hands with Christa, and then Ray. “Thank-you for letting us into your home.”

Ray looked guardedly at Wolfe, obviously daunted by the big man. “That’s all right.” He quickly hid his discomfort. “Just remember that we’ve guests staying, and I don’t want them disturbed.”

“I assure you that we’ll be discreet.”

Teena quickly moved on to Nick. “This is retired Detective Chief Inspector Nick Rueben, an experienced investigator who has turned his talents to the paranormal.” As she was speaking, a bespectacled man in his forties entered the lobby from the street. He stopped, and regarded the group curiously, his gaze resting on Nick for a long moment.

“Good evening Mr Cooper,” Christa greeted him cheerily, “have you had a good day?”

“Yes, thank-you, Mrs Brown. I’ve just come back to change my clothes, and then I’m going to pop out for some dinner.” Cooper was wearing hiking gear, his boots muddy.

“I hope that you enjoy your evening.”

“Thank-you, I’m sure I will.” He nodded politely to the others, and disappeared upstairs.

“Do all you coppers believe in ghosts?” Ray asked Nick. “First that woman sergeant starts on about it, and now you’re here.”

“As Teena said, I’m not a policeman anymore. I can’t speak for anyone else, but I’ve seen enough to convince me that the supernatural is real.”

“If you follow me,” Christa said before Ray could comment further, “I’ll take you down to the dining room, and show you where everything is.” She led the team downstairs.

Ray watched them go, then shook his head, entered the private accommodation and closed the door.

The dining room was spacious, with nine round tables set ready for the following morning’s breakfast. Patio doors revealed a large terrace area outside. A swinging door led to the kitchen.

“You can move the tables if you need to, and help yourselves to tea and coffee, but I’d appreciate it if you’d put it all back as it is when you’ve finished.”

Wolfe smiled at her reassuringly. “You won’t know that we’ve been here.”

“Thank-you. Do you mind if I stay and watch for a while?”

“Not at all,” Teena replied. “Perhaps you’d be kind enough to tell us how you came to buy this property?”

Christa pulled a chair away from the nearest table, and sat down. “It was Ray’s idea actually: he’d been made redundant, and had quite a large pay out. Both our children have left home, and I think basically he was bored. He saw this place for sale on the internet, and we came down for the weekend to have a look at it.”

“Where are you from?” asked Nick, as he helped Mal unfold the legs of the computer table.

“A place called Caister-on-Sea in Norfolk, just up the coast from Great Yarmouth.”

“Bit of a busman’s holiday coming to Torquay: leaving one tourist resort for another.”

Christa laughed. “You’d think so, but Ray actually worked in engineering, and I was a teacher. Have you been to Norfolk?”

“Once, years ago, when our girls were young. My wife and I took them to Great Yarmouth on holiday.”

“Running a guest house is a big change from teaching,” Wolfe commented. He and Carolyn were unpacking the computer equipment.

“Yes, it’s been a steep, and expensive, learning curve.” Christa shuffled uncomfortably on the chair. “The refurbishment cost far more than we’d budgeted for, which meant that we had to dip into our savings, and there isn’t much left.”

“Are enough people coming to stay, so that you can, like, keep going?” Carolyn asked.

“We’ve been very lucky,” Christa smiled at her, “bookings have been much better than we’d hoped. We advertised with the Princess Theatre, and we get quite a few overnight guests who have come to see concerts and shows. Although, it’s going to take a long time before we break even. We’re not going to be able to retire anytime soon.”

“Do you enjoy what you do?” Teena asked.

“For the most part, yes. I tend to look after the front of house, and we divide the rest between us. You might be surprised to learn that Ray’s an excellent cook!” She leaned back on the chair. “I can’t pretend that the financial situation hasn’t put something of a strain on Ray and I’s relationship: that and we’ve never spent so much time together!”

“Mal and I run our own business, so I understand the stresses that go with it.”

“What do you do?”

“Landscaping and garden services. Mal, and Carolyn when she has the time, do the physical labour; I take care of the office and admin.”

“We’re ready to put the gear in room seven,” Mal interrupted.

“Right, let’s be doing. You and Carolyn take a walkie-talkie, and go and set up. Wolfe’ll monitor the feeds, and Nick can advise on camera angles.”

“Right oh.” Mal gathered up the equipment, and he and Carolyn left the room.

“If you hadn’t guessed,” Wolfe said to Christa, “Teena’s our team co-ordinator.”

“Makes the army look disorganised,” Nick agreed, smiling at Teena.

Teena smiled back. “Thank-you, I think.”

Christa looked puzzled. “I thought that you were a policeman?”

“Before that, I was a regular soldier.” Nick didn’t elaborate, but he had spent twenty-two years in the army, including five years in the SAS, and fourteen in the Royal Military Police.

A walkie-talkie crackled on the computer desk, and Carolyn’s voice came through.

“Carolyn to Wolfe.”

“Go ahead Carolyn.”

“Can you confirm with Mrs Brown that she opened the curtains when she showed us the room earlier please?”

Wolfe looked enquiringly at Christa.

“Yes, I’m sure that I did. At least, I think I did.”

“You did,” Teena said, “I remember it quite clearly.”

“Carolyn, the curtains were definitely open.”

“Well, they’re closed now! Thanks Wolfe.”

“I knew that I hadn’t imagined it!” Christa’s satisfied expression changed to one of unease. “That’s actually quite creepy, isn’t it?”

“I wouldn’t say creepy, exactly,” Teena answered. “As paranormal manifestations go, it’s rather innocuous.”

“I suppose so,” Christa said uncertainly.

“These things are unsettling,” Wolfe said, “but highly unlikely to be malevolent.”

“It’s possible that the activity’s been triggered by the work on the property, and that once things settle down it’ll fade away,” Nick added.

“So, you’re saying that there’s nothing to worry about?”

“We can’t say anything with certainty yet,” Teena replied, “but so far it seems harmless.”

“The cameras are live,” Wolfe announced.

They clustered around the table. One of the large UHD monitors showed a split screen display of the two camera feeds: the purple tinted full-spectrum

image on the left; and the garish red, yellow, green, and blue thermal image on the right. Nick picked up the walkie-talkie.

“Nick to Carolyn.”

“Yes Nick?”

“Turn the thermal camera a few degrees to your left please.” The image moved correspondingly on the screen. “That’s fine. Now turn the full-spectrum a little to your right, and down a fraction.” The image swung a little across the screen. “A little more. That’s spot-on Carolyn, thank-you.”

“We’ll just put a recorder by the chair, and we’ll come back down.”

“Understood.”

Wolfe was working on the keyboard, a waveform display on the second monitor. “I’ve got the audio feed from the full-spectrum camera.” He adjusted a setting, and they could clearly hear the sound from upstairs.

“The recorder’s running,” Mal announced, “let’s go back down.”

“Do you want me to open the curtains?”

Mal thought for a moment. “No. Much as I’d like to film them closing, I think it’s outweighed by the possibility of light pollution.”

“OK.”

The group in the dining room watched on the full-spectrum camera as Mal and Carolyn left the room, the sound of the door closing clearly audible.

“What happens now?” Christa asked.

“Now we watch and wait,” Wolfe replied, then grinned suddenly. “Don’t let anyone tell you that ghost hunting isn’t glamorous!”

Christa laughed. “I think I’ll go back upstairs, at least the picture on the television changes! We’ll be up until about eleven o’clock if you want anything, otherwise I’ll see you in the morning.”

After Christa’s departure, Teena made them drinks, then she and Wolfe settled in front of the monitors. Nick, Mal, and Carolyn sat around the nearest table.

“When do you think that we should start the vigils?” Nick asked.

“Unless anything happens,” Mal replied, “I think we should leave it a couple of hours. We’ll take turns on the monitors every twenty minutes or so, so no-one ends up with eyestrain.”

Nick nodded. “I’m going to go out for a smoke.” He had found the key for the patio doors on a hook in the kitchen.

“I’ll come with you, I’d like to see the building from outside.”

“I’ll stay here and go through the recordings from earlier.” Carolyn had her tablet and headphones out.

Outside, Nick lit a cigarette, and blew smoke into the air. “Still mild, considering that it’s October.”

“It is.” Mal had walked to the edge of the terrace, and was peering at a small sunken lawn bordered by flower beds. He turned, and looked up at the building.

“That must be number seven’s window up there.”

Nick joined him. “No-one’s getting in that way.”

“No. What do you make of the Browns?”

“She seems genuine; he’s a knob.” Nick took a pull on his cigarette.

“Unfortunately, to persuade him to let us investigate, Tasha gave him the idea that having a ghost might boost his business.”

Nick snorted disdainfully. “It’s hardly Berry Pomeroy Castle.”

Mal laughed. “I think running a guest house indefinitely has lost its appeal for Mr Brown, and he’s looking for a quick fix.”

“Probably true. Ghost or not, I doubt that it’s going to give him what he wants.”

“It’s Christa I feel sorry for: she’s had to give up everything to make something work that wasn’t even her idea.”

“We’ve enough to do without getting involved with their domestic difficulties.”

“You’re right, of course. What are your views on the case?”

Nick drew thoughtfully on his cigarette. “The potentially residual nature of it makes me curious. I understand how an impression is left on a medium like magnetite, we’ve seen that at first hand, but what’s the imprint of this woman attached to?”

“I don’t know for sure, but probably some part of the fabric of the building. Although the original Stone Tape Theory has been pretty much discounted, there are theories that consider the possibility of impressions being left at a quantum level, then triggered by a shift in the ambient energy. Then there’s the time-slip theory.” Mal took a breath, his enthusiasm building. “If you imagine that time isn’t linear, but that all time coexists simultaneously, it’s possible that, in some circumstances, different time events overlap.”

“Despite what Professor Brian Cox has said about the impossibility of ghosts, I believe that physics will eventually prove us right.” Nick took a final drag on his cigarette, put it out, and flicked the butt out of sight. “In the meantime, we know that they’re real, and we’ll just have to collect as much evidence as we can.”

“On that subject, let’s go back in and see if anything’s turned up.”

Back in the dining room, Wolfe and Teena were talking quietly, and Carolyn was still reviewing the recordings from earlier.

“Anything?” Nick asked.

“Not yet,” Teena replied.

Time passed. Carolyn finished her review, revealing no evidence, and swapped places with Wolfe at the monitors. The tall man joined Nick and Mal at the table.

“How about a vigil? We could try an EVP session, and get a feel for the room.”

Mal checked his phone, it was nearly nine o’clock. “Why don’t you and Nick take head cams and a recorder and give it a go?”

Wolfe spent a frustrating few minutes trying to display the head cams feed on a split screen with the audio feed, finally managing it. He and Nick set off upstairs. Outside of room seven, Wolfe produced the key, and carefully opened the door. The two men entered quietly, and Nick closed the door silently behind them. They stood motionless, absorbing the atmosphere of the room.

“Do you feel anything?” Nick whispered.

“Only very faintly.”

“Any idea what it is?”

Wolfe sat on the side of the bed, careful not to obscure the camera. “It’s...odd.”

Nick switched on his torch, and mirrored Wolfe’s position. “How so?”

“As Mal said, it’s like an echo: the odd thing is, it’s constant.”

“If it is a residual haunting, imprinted somehow within this room, surely there would be a constant background presence? It just takes someone with your sensitivity to detect it.”

“You could be right.”

“You don’t sound convinced.”

“It doesn’t feel like I expected. Perhaps, if the apparition manifests, it’ll fluctuate, but I don’t understand what would trigger it.”

“Perhaps it’s present all the time, but only visible at specific moments.”

“That could be it.” Wolfe smiled ruefully into the darkness. “I don’t like admitting that I can’t work it out.”

“Give yourself a chance. Hopefully it’ll make more sense when we’ve collected some evidence.”

“Speaking of evidence, shall we do an EVP session?”

Nick switched on the high-resolution recorder. “EVP session, Wolfe and Nick in room seven, Torre Mews Guest House,” he pointed the torch at his watch, “twenty-one eighteen. Is there anyone here with us?”

“Did you live in this room?”

They continued questioning until they couldn’t think of anything fresh to ask. Nick turned off the recorder.

“Shall we review this now?” Wolfe asked.

“Might as well.” Nick returned the recording to the start, and began playing. Wolfe leaned across the double bed so that he could hear. The playback was crystal clear, the studio quality device picking up every breath and rustle of clothing: but there was no answer to any of their questions. “Come on, let’s go back down.”

On the landing, Nick waited as Wolfe closed the door. They had reached the staircase, when the door to room nine opened, and Mr Cooper came out.

“Detective Chief Inspector Rueben?”

Nick exchanged a glance with Wolfe, and turned back. “I used to be.”

“Would it be possible to have a word with you?”

“About what?”

“I’d rather discuss that in private.” He stood aside, and gestured into his room.”

Nick didn’t move. “Why?”

“The subject matter is, personal.”

“I’ll need more than that.”

Cooper crossed the landing, and found Wolfe looming over him. “It concerns a case that you investigated some three years ago.” He looked apprehensively up at Wolfe. “A case that was unsolved.”

Nick and Wolfe exchanged another glance, they both knew what Cooper was referring to. The case had caused a sensation at the time, the violently dismembered bodies of two volunteer restorers had been found in the ancient chapel that they had been working on. Less than an hour later, the bodies of a young couple were discovered in a house nearby, with their hearts ripped out. The couple’s hearts, their ten-year-old daughter, and a third volunteer restorer were never found. Even with his years of experience, Senior Investigating Officer Nick, and his team, had been unable to find a motive or produce any significant evidence beyond linking the excardiated man to the vicinity of the chapel.

What Nick hadn’t been aware of then, was that paranormal forces were involved. In the thirteenth century, the Pagan Gods had created their own sanctuary, the Summer Lands, sometimes called Dumnonia, an annexe parallel to the everyday world of men. The entrance to the Summer Lands, known as The Fall, was hidden in the unworked bedrock of the chapel floor. During a harrowing, but necessary, visit to the Summer Lands to seek the counsel of his father, Wolfe had learned something of the truth behind the event from his sister Brigid. Two men had passed through The Fall, one accidentally, one by design. The Goddess Ardwinna had killed the willing traveller, and consigned the other to be hunted by Carne. He had escaped back to the Old Lands, but was pursued by Carne who murdered him, and the three other victims, before abducting the young girl. As the incursion was unlikely to ever be repeated, neither Wolfe nor Nick had thought much more about it.

Knowing that the others could see what was happening through the head cams, Nick made a decision. “I’ll listen to what you have to say: on condition that Mr Fisher accompanies me.”

“Is that really necessary?” Cooper looked uncertain. “I’m hardly likely to attack you.”

“Take it or leave it.”

“I’ll take it. Please come in.” He led them into the room. “I’d appreciate it if you’d take those cameras off.”

Nick and Wolfe removed the head cams. Nick sat on the chair, surreptitiously switching on the recorder, Cooper sat on the bed, and Wolfe leaned against a wall.

“We’re listening, Mr Cooper.”

“What do you remember about the Chapel Woods murders, Mr Rueben?”

Nick thought for a moment, marshalling the facts, and realisation dawned. “Two men dead in the chapel, a third missing. A young couple dead in a house in Shiphay, their daughter missing. No motive, no evidence, no suspects. The missing man, and one of the deceased in the chapel, were surnamed Cooper. I presume that you’re related.”

Cooper nodded. “To all three men, actually. They were cousins: Todd; Greg; and Tom. Tom was my father.”

“What do you want from me Mr Cooper?”

“Call me Will, and I’m not sure, exactly. I didn’t expect to meet you.”

“What are you doing here, Will?” Wolfe asked.

“I’m, exploring the area.”

“By which you mean retracing your father’s footsteps.”

Will looked sheepish. “Yes, actually.”

“How do you know where he’d been?” Nick asked.

“My father kept records of all his research. I ended up with them after his death.”

“Research? Do you mean about the chapel?”

“Amongst other places. I’ve brought it all with me.”

“I have a feeling,” Wolfe said, “that you have a story to tell.”

Will considered that. “I do. But first, you tell me something: what you’re doing here is connected to the supernatural, isn’t it?”

Wolfe smiled broadly. “We can’t comment: client confidentiality.”

“I thought so. Well, it might help with what I have to tell you.”

“How about you come downstairs, meet the rest of our team, and tell your story there?”

“It would be a relief to talk to people who might have some idea of what I’m dealing with.”

“Come on then,” said Nick, standing up. “Quietly though, Mr Brown’ll have a seizure if he finds out that you know what we’re doing.”



After introductions had been made, and a brief explanation of Will’s identity given, Teena made him coffee, and they sat around a table to talk. Mal stayed at the computer, watching the monitors.

“My father’s family are a bit of an odd bunch,” Will began, “some of them have, unusual religious beliefs. They call themselves Pagans, and worship gods from the Celtic pantheon.”

“You’re sure that you mean Pagan and not Wiccan?” Carolyn asked.

“Certain. They have, strong views, about Gerald Gardner and Wicca.”

Wolfe laughed. “With some justification.”

“For as long as I can remember, my dad’s beliefs were a bone of contention

with my mum. At first, he made a real effort to keep them in the background, but it was almost like he couldn't help himself." Will paused, and drank some coffee. "By the time that they got divorced, when I was fourteen, he was completely obsessed. He stayed near where we lived in Ashford, Kent, but the few times I did see him after they'd split up, he shoehorned his religion into every conversation, and spent all the time I was at his flat researching the family's Pagan roots. In the end I didn't see him at all. Reading his notes, it seems that, over time, he roped in his cousin Todd, then, later on, another cousin, Greg. Todd was retired, and had lost his wife, so he had a lot of time to fill. They spent years delving into the family genealogy, not to mention their research into the Celtic Gods."

"I should very much like to look through the research," Wolfe said quietly.

"Maybe we can arrange that. I'm still going through it myself; there's a lot to take in. Anyway, they came across a document, the Will of a distant ancestor called Jared Cooper. There was no record of his actual death, it appeared that he had deliberately planned his own disappearance. The only clue was a reference to something called The Fall."

Will's audience sat in absolute silence. Each were aware of The Fall, Wolfe and Mal had travelled through it, but they had believed that its existence was unknown outside of their group.

"This is where it starts to get really wild. You remember I told you that they believed the Celtic Gods were real? Well, dad and his cousins believed that they were alive and well and living in a sort of parallel world, and that The Fall was the gateway to it. Finding The Fall became their mission. They visited a number of locations looking for it, the last of which was the chapel."

"How much of this do you believe?" Teena asked cautiously.

Will looked uncomfortable. "At first, I didn't believe any of it."

"And now?"

"I'm, starting to think that it's plausible. I think that they might have found what they were looking for in the chapel." Will finished his coffee, and looked around the table. "You see, when Todd first got involved, he didn't believe in the Gods. So, one night, my dad took him to a place called King's Wood, near Challock in Kent. What happened that night convinced him that they were real. In his notes, my dad says that he took Todd to see a Goddess called Damara. I went there myself, at night. You may not believe this, but I think that I saw Damara."

"Why would you think that?" Nick asked.

"I got to the place where dad took Todd, which is well off the beaten track, and I called her name. I don't mind telling you that I felt a total prat, but I wandered about calling her name for ages. I was about to give up, when I saw what I think was a woman, standing between two trees."

"What did she look like?" asked Mal.

“Sort of fuzzy, indistinct, not much more than an outline. I could see through her. She was there for a few seconds, then she just faded away.”

“So, she could have like, been a ghost?” Carolyn suggested.

Will looked embarrassed. “When I stopped running, and was driving home, I wondered about that. It really shook me up, but it made me want to know more about what had happened.”

“That’s how it starts,” said Nick, glancing at Teena. “What did you do?”

“I took an online course called Fundamentals of the Paranormal, run by a research foundation called Esoterica. It gave me a basic grounding in hauntings, UFO theories, cryptozoology, and alternative religions. When I’d completed it, I began talking online with one of the tutors, a Dr Campbell. She was very interested in my dad’s research.”

“Was she interested in any specific parts of the research?” Wolfe asked casually.

“I didn’t feel comfortable going into much detail online, but she did seem genuinely intrigued.” Will looked around the table. “I might as well tell you, I’m meeting with Dr Campbell tomorrow to show her the research. The Esoterica Foundation is here in Torquay.”

“I’ve never heard of them,” Mal said.

“I’ve found their website,” Carolyn announced, looking up from her tablet, “they offer courses on all sorts: demonology; exorcism; ghost hunting; Ouija.” She looked over at Will. “They’re very expensive.”

Will nodded. “They are, but if you read the reviews, there are a lot of satisfied customers.”

Teena was going to ask more about the Esoterica Foundation, but Wolfe caught her eye, and gave an almost imperceptible shake of the head. “Please don’t think me rude, Will,” she said instead, “but why has it taken three years to do this?”

“Well, it was some time before I even had the research, the police seized everything from dad’s flat, and his lodgings in Torquay, as potential evidence. When I did have it, I agonised for ages about even looking at it. Then I had to sort it into some semblance of order: most of it’s undated; and it’s all handwritten. My partner, Kaili, doesn’t even like having it in the house; she says it gives her the creeps. The upshot being that I could only work on it when she was out.”

“Where’s Kaili now?” asked Nick.

“She’s gone on a three-week cruise with friends. If I haven’t got it out of my system by the time she comes back, we’re going to have a problem.”

“Do you think that you’ll be able to do that?” asked Teena.

“I don’t know.” Will turned to Nick. “So, now you know more about what my dad was doing, do you have any theories as to what happened to him and Greg?”

“It’s technically an ongoing case, so there’s not much that I can say. Beyond the obvious, there was no forensic, or even circumstantial evidence to lead us to a perpetrator.”

“Surely you must have some personal thoughts on what happened?”

“They were attacked by a maniac.”

“After what I’ve just told you, how can you believe that?” Will’s friendly demeanour evaporated. “They weren’t just attacked, they were torn apart! What sort of man could do that?”

“I’ve seen terrible things done by mentally disturbed individuals.”

“What about the couple with their hearts ripped out? If that’s not some sort of occult ritual, I don’t know what is. There have been others like that since, haven’t there?”

“Two.” Nick looked uncomfortable. “Lauren Brown and Pasha Sokolov. I can tell you however, that current police thinking is that some sort of modified mechanical grab tool was used to extract the hearts.”

“You’re trying to tell me that this is the work of a serial killer?”

“Possibly.”

“And you don’t give any credence to the possibility that there’s some sort of supernatural force at work?”

“I try to keep an open mind,” Nick answered reluctantly, “but a lack of evidence doesn’t automatically mean that the supernatural’s involved.”

“I sympathise with your predicament, Will,” Wolfe said, “but Nick’s right: it’s easy to let your imagination run away with you.”

“Before I read my dad’s research, I might have agreed with you, but now I think that you don’t know what you’re talking about.” Will stood up abruptly, and addressed Nick. “When I found you here, doing what you’re doing, I thought that it was fate, and that you’d be able to help me. I can’t tell you how disappointed I am to learn that you’re so narrow minded!” He paused, and looked suspiciously at Nick. “Unless you already know what’s going on, and you’re part of a cover up. Either way, I don’t need you: Dr Campbell’s taking me seriously; and she’s promised to help. I am going to find the truth.” He stalked out of the room.

“This is not good,” Wolfe said, running a hand over his grey streaked auburn hair.

“I feel rather sorry for him,” Teena commented.

“I do too: right up to the point where he reveals The Fall to all and sundry.”

“Can’t we tell him the truth?” Carolyn asked.

“I don’t think that we can. We don’t know how he’d handle the truth. At the moment, he suspects that there’s something weird going on, if we confirm that his dad’s research is essentially correct, he’s going to want to tell people.”

“He’s already going to tell Dr Campbell,” said Nick, “tomorrow.”

“Can we stop him?” asked Mal hesitantly.

“I don’t see how.”

“And yet I may have to find a way,” Wolfe looked serious. “For obvious reasons, I have a duty to protect the location of The Fall.”

“Let’s not do anything in haste,” Teena said. “We don’t know that this Dr Campbell’s going to take him seriously. Even if she does, they can’t access the chapel, and neither can the council!”

“I know that it’s my padlock on the gate, but all it takes is a set of bolt cutters.” Wolfe sighed. “I’m amazed that any record of The Fall has survived after all this time.”

Mal joined them at the table. “It is unfortunate.”

Wolfe smiled at him. “As ever, your talent for understatement is serving you well. Teena’s right though, we need to think this through.”

“Why did you stop me asking more about the Esoterica Foundation?” Teena asked.

“I don’t believe that Will knew anything about them beyond what he told us. Also, I didn’t want him to think that we had any sort of professional rivalry with them. Not that it matters now.” He took his phone from the table. “I’ll get Adam Ross to find out what he can. Excuse me.” He walked to the bottom of the stairs.

Carolyn looked anxiously at Nick. “We’re not going to have to, like, kill Will, are we?”

“No,” Nick shook his head, “I think that we can find a less drastic solution.” He looked at Teena and Mal. “Any ideas?”

“We can’t stop Will talking to Dr Campbell,” Mal said thoughtfully, “but we can stop them from entering the chapel, if it comes to that. It’s a grade two listed building, they’ve no legal right to go in there.”

“That’s not bad, Mal.” Teena smiled at him. “The downside would appear to be that you have to stake out the chapel indefinitely.”

“No need for that.” Wolfe was back. “Simon and I have been testing out some new remote trail cams as part of the security overhaul at Summerlands; they’re very good. I had them customised, so they’re basically unlocked phones with sophisticated cameras that automatically send pictures to pre-programmed numbers as soon as they’re activated. If no-one has any objections, I’ll get Simon to bring a couple over, and I’ll set them up tonight.” Simon was Wolfe’s Magister Factotum, and amongst other things, he acted as: Estate Manager; Housekeeper; Business Secretary; and Chef.

“That’s a good idea,” Teena said, “the sooner that we’re on top of this, the better.”

“If you can spare me,” Nick said, “I’ll give Wolfe a hand.”

“I would appreciate that.” Wolfe looked askance at Teena.

“That’s fine. I’m sure that we can manage here.”

“Excellent. I’ll call Simon.” He moved away.

“Well, that’ll teach us to think that we know what we’re doing!” Nick said.
“Don’t worry,” Teena replied, “we’ll hold the fort here. This business with Will is too serious to ignore.”



Just over an hour later, Nick pulled Mal’s truck up behind a Mercedes estate that was parked outside of a primary school that stood opposite the top entrance to Chapel Woods. As they climbed out of the truck, Simon exited the Mercedes.

“Good evening Mr Rueben, Mr Fisher.”

“Hello Simon,” Wolfe greeted him, “thanks for coming so promptly.”

“My pleasure sir. I have the cameras,” he held up a canvas sack, “do you require any further assistance?”

Wolfe glanced at Nick. “It might be sensible to have an extra pair of hands.”

“The more the merrier. Come on, let’s get in the woods before someone notices us.”

The three men crossed the road, and followed a narrow path that led between stone walls into the woods. At the end, they turned left, and joined a stony track that led gently upwards. On their right, the main body of the wood dropped away, bordered at the bottom by a main road. On the left, a far shorter slope stopped at the back gardens of adjoining properties. They walked on until a steep grassy bank on their right heralded the location of the chapel. Wolfe led them up the bank behind the rear wall of the structure, and they found themselves in a small clearing on its south side. The chapel was substantially built from local limestone, with an impressive stone tile roof. Wolfe walked to the low wall that topped the cliff below, and looked down. Earlier in the year, Charles Chandler, racked with guilt over what he had been made to do by the malignant spirit of an ancestor, had fallen or jumped from this very spot, sustaining injuries that cost him his life. Wolfe looked up, flicking his long, neatly plaited hair over his shoulder, and, ignoring the intervening buildings and street lights, gazed at the distant, dark sea.

“You OK?” Nick’s normally stoic expression betrayed concern.

“I am, Nick, thank-you.” Wolfe put a large hand on Nick’s shoulder. “This place casts a shadow over me. The Fall is all that keeps me from the Summer Lands and my sister Brigid, but I can’t go there because of my father, Carne. Don’t get me wrong, I’m happy here, but it would be nice to see Brigid, just occasionally.”

“I wish I could help.”

“You do: you all do.” Wolfe shook himself. “Come on, I’ll show you The Fall, then we can decide where to put these cameras.”

Nick and Simon followed Wolfe to the metal security gate that blocked the entrance. The tall man fished in his coat pocket, and came out with a bunch of keys. He selected one, unlocked the padlock, and opened the gate.

“Mind your step,” he warned, “the floor’s uneven, and the wooden supports make it a bit of an assault course.” He set off towards the corner farthest from the entrance.

Nick produced a torch, and motioned Simon to precede him, directing the beam so that he could see his way. Wolfe didn’t need artificial light, the design of his eyes with their super-elliptical irises gave him excellent vision in all conditions. After a couple of minutes, they all stood near the corner.

“Point your torch at the floor,” Wolfe instructed.

It took Nick a few seconds to reveal a small, weathered spiral carved into the bedrock. A few moments later, he found a second, the mirror image of the first. “That’s The Fall?”

“It is. As my Lord Carne carved those symbols into the stone, he focussed the combined energy of the Old Gods and their followers to create the Summer Lands beyond.”

“May I touch one of the spirals, Mr Fisher?” Simon asked quietly.

“Only one. We don’t want to send you off to the Summer Lands!”

Simon knelt, and tentatively ran his forefinger around the spiral groove. “It’s an unusual sensation, like a mild electric shock.”

Nick knelt beside him, and repeated the action on the other carving. “Very odd.”

“That’ll do, I think,” Wolfe said. “It’s unlikely, but I wouldn’t want to attract the attention of anything on the other side.” Simon and Nick hastily withdrew their fingers and climbed to their feet. Wolfe squatted, and brushed dust and stone fragments over the spirals. “Let’s get these cameras set-up.”

They crossed back to the gate, and, using zip ties, located the first camera on a length of wooden support. From outside of the gate, it was essentially invisible.

“I’ll switch it on so that we can test it,” Wolfe said. He ducked back into the building, activated the device, and exited quickly, closing the gate behind him. “Simon, walk up to the gate and away again.” Simon complied. After about thirty seconds, Wolfe’s phone announced the receipt of a message. He opened it, and examined the picture. “That’s excellent! I can clearly make out that it’s Simon.”

“Where shall we put the second one?” Nick asked.

They settled for concealing it in a bush opposite the rear wall of the chapel, that anyone approaching the entrance would have to pass. Nick tested it, and after a short interval, Wolfe received the picture.

“We’re good to go.” He led them back along the path, and out onto the road.

“How long will the cameras last?” Nick asked as they arrived at the vehicles.

“Depending on how often they’re activated, up to twenty-eight days,” Simon answered.

“I have a feeling that we’ll have a result long before that,” Wolfe said.

“If, when, they come, what are we going to do?” Nick’s expression was serious. “By preventing them from accessing the chapel, we’re sending a clear message that there’s something important in there, and we know what it is.”

“True, but if we don’t keep them out, they’re going to go through. Maybe not straight away, but they’re bound to do it.”

“Perhaps we should let them. Odds are that they won’t be back.”

Wolfe laughed. “Tempting though that is, we run the risk of someone knowing where they went, then we’d be back to square one.”

“So, play it by ear?”

“I think so, we need to find out what sort of people we’re dealing with. Will you help me Nick? I don’t want to rope Mal in unless there’s no other choice; unlike us, he has to work.”

“Of course.”

“Thanks Nick, I appreciate it.”

“Do you require anything further of me tonight Mr Fisher?”

“No, thank-you Simon. I’ll be staying at the Ilsham apartment for the time being, you’re welcome to stay there tonight rather than drive back to the South Hams.”

“I appreciate the consideration sir, but there are things at Summerlands that require my attention.”

“That’s fine, I rely on you to do whatever’s needed.”

“Thank-you sir. I’ll bid you goodnight gentlemen.”

“Goodnight Simon.”

Nick and Wolfe drove back to the Torre Mews. It was twenty to one as Wolfe quietly let them in. In the dining room, they were surprised to discover that Carolyn was absent.

“She was tired,” Teena explained, “so Mal suggested that she sleep in the haunted bedroom.”

“Is that wise?” Wolfe asked.

“I think so,” Mal answered. “If anything happens that wakes her up, she’s quite capable of dealing with it. Besides which, we’re watching, and we can hear anything that happens.”

“Fair enough.” Wolfe related their visit to the chapel. “I have a feeling that they’ll go there at some point tomorrow.”

“What will you do?”

“Unless they try to enter the chapel, nothing. If they do, Nick and I can be there in ten minutes. We’ll try to dissuade them, but, failing that, we’ll have to see: maybe call the police.”

The remainder of the night drifted slowly past. The investigators took turns monitoring the equipment, but no overt supernatural activity was apparent.

Teena caught herself starting to doze in front of the monitor. She blinked

rapidly a few times, sat up straight, and looked at her watch: it was almost six o'clock. Mal, next to her, was listening to the audio feed through headphones, and fiddling with his phone. Nick and Wolfe were talking quietly at the table. She stretched, and stood up.

"Anyone fancy a coffee?"

A few minutes later, they were supplied with drinks.

"I suppose we ought to think about packing up," Mal said, sipping his tea. "The Browns'll be down to start breakfast before long."

"Do you think that we've caught any evidence?" asked Wolfe.

"I haven't heard or seen anything, but that doesn't mean that there isn't something on the recorder upstairs, and it'll be worth reviewing the cameras again, just in case."

"It is difficult to concentrate after a while," Teena said, "particularly when nothing seems to be happening."

"Let's have our drinks," Nick suggested, "put the gear away, and have a tidy up. I'll bet Mr Brown'll be looking for an excuse to criticise us."

"We'd better wake Carolyn," Teena said.

"We?" Mal cocked an eyebrow.

Teena laughed. "All right, I'll wake Carolyn. Unless one of you gentlemen wishes to volunteer?"

"I've got to help Mal with the equipment," Wolfe said quickly.

Nick shot him a look. "What he said, and I'm not a gentleman."

"I see."

"Can you bring the cameras and recorder down with you please?" Mal smiled winningly.

"I expect we can manage that. Back in a minute."

The three men began to disassemble and pack away the computer apparatus.

"I suppose we've been spoilt," Wolfe said, coiling a cable, "with all the activity that we've experienced previously."

"True," Nick responded. "Although, you sensitive types are sure that there's something here."

"There is something in that room," Mal said, "I'm convinced of it." He sighed. "Knowing it is one thing, proving it is something else altogether. Depending on what Mr Brown wants to do, we may never get any evidence."

"I don't feel disposed to put myself out for Mr Brown," Wolfe said. "It's unlikely that whatever's here is dangerous, so we might just have to put it down to experience."

"We can see if the research turns anything up," Nick said, "and, if necessary, submit a written report for our own satisfaction. I'm not prepared to lower our standards because Mr Brown's a twat."

"Well said Nick, you're quite right. I shouldn't let my personal feelings cloud my judgement."

Before they could discuss it any further, Teena and Carolyn entered the dining room carrying the gear from the bedroom. Teena put the two cameras with the rest of the equipment, and faced the three men.

“Carolyn has something important to tell you.” She took the tripods from her daughter.

Carolyn cleared her throat self-consciously. “I, like, had a dream.”

Mal gently took her arm, and sat her down at the table. “What was it about?”

Carolyn furrowed her brow, “It was odd.”

“In what way?” prompted Wolfe.

“It’s, difficult to describe.” She looked unsettled.

“Carolyn,” Nick spoke softly, “if you think this is important, then it is. Start at the beginning, and take your time.”

Carolyn nodded. “Thank-you Nick.” She took a deep breath. “I dreamed that I was in room seven, but it was different, it was sort of tatty and scruffy. But it wasn’t just that. Even though the curtains were closed, everything was, like, bright and clear. I mean in really super sharp focus, so I could see every tiny detail, and all the colours were like, really bright.”

“Psychedelic?” suggested Wolfe.

“I’m not sure what that is.”

“Never mind. Go on.”

“Could you see anyone?” Mal asked.

“No. It was like, my room, I was the one who lived there.” She hesitated. “Like I was the ghost, before she was a ghost.”

“How did you feel?” Wolfe asked.

“It was weird. I felt really lonely and so, so sad, but at the same time I was happy: like really mega happy. Does that make sense?”

“If I’m right about what you’re describing, then yes, it makes sense.” Nick looked serious.

“There’s more. It all sort of, intensified. The walls and the furniture all started, like, rippling; almost as though they were breathing. Then, I wasn’t me, or anybody, anymore. I was everything all at once, and everything made sense, and there was nothing that I wasn’t a part of. I can’t describe how overwhelming it was. I couldn’t see or hear or anything, but I was aware of everything. Then it was all gone, and there was nothing. Absolutely nothing at all.” Carolyn looked around at her audience. “The next image I saw, was like really dull; normal, I suppose. I was sitting in a chair, in a big room. There were other people sitting around, and a man in a uniform, but it didn’t matter, because I didn’t need to speak to anyone anymore. I just closed my eyes and everything I needed was in my own head. Then mum woke me up.”

“That’s quite a dream,” said Wolfe.

“It sounds like more than a dream,” Mal said, “more like Carolyn subconsciously tapped into the residual impression left in the room.”

“What do you think Nick?” Teena asked.

“The sensations Carolyn described, are consistent with taking a hallucinogenic, most probably LSD. It makes sense, given what we’ve been told about the previous tenants.”

“Do you think that the girl died of an overdose?” asked Carolyn.

“It’s unlikely that someone in reasonable health would die from an overdose of LSD. It’s not physically addictive, and they’d have to take an enormous quantity before it became dangerous. The greater risk comes from doing something irrational whilst under the influence, particularly if the subject has mixed LSD with alcohol or other drugs. Because of its mind-altering qualities, it can exacerbate existing mental illness, or even cause severe, persistent psychosis. Some of what you described, the loss of a feeling of self, is commonly referred to as ego death.”

“That sounds ominous,” Wolfe said.

“What LSD does to the brain, is it connects some of the different parts that don’t normally communicate directly. One relatively common effect is that the user can hear smells, or see music. Another less common one can be that their identity is subsumed by what appears to be a heightened universal awareness: ego death.”

“Did you learn all this when you were in the police force?” Teena asked.

“Partly. I picked up most of it when I was in the military police.”

“Is there a lot of drug use in the army?” Mal asked.

Nick nodded. “Enough: particularly cocaine and cannabis.”

“So, if she didn’t die of an overdose,” Carolyn brought the debate back on topic, “what happened?”

“We don’t know if she took other drugs, or had mental or physical health issues. The last scene of your dream, was set in what sounds like some sort of institution: perhaps she died there? To me, it seems that the connection to room seven is the intense experience of the drug trip.”

“Makes sense,” Mal agreed. “Somehow it’s imprinted in that room.”

“It makes sense to a point,” Teena agreed, “but how would the image of the institution be there? Clearly that’s an event that happened subsequently.”

“I was wondering about that,” Wolfe said.

“Perhaps,” Mal suggested thoughtfully, “even when she was elsewhere, she was connected to room seven because of her experience, and she was reaching back there right up until she died.”

The discussion was interrupted by the sound of someone coming down the stairs. A few moments later, Ray appeared, and stopped at the bottom, scrutinising the room.

“Good morning Mr Brown,” Teena said politely.

Ray took a few steps into the room, still looking around. “Morning. Everything all right?”

“Yes, thank-you. We’re just packing our gear away, and then we’ll tidy up.”

“I can see that.” Ray appeared nervous. “Why don’t you take your stuff out, and I’ll make you some breakfast?”

The ghost hunters looked at him in surprise.

“It’s still early,” Ray continued, “the first guests won’t be down for about an hour and a half, plenty of time for you to have something.”

“That’s very kind of you,” Wolfe said slowly, “we’d appreciate that.”

“Yes, we would, thank-you,” Teena agreed. She turned to the three men. “If you take the equipment out to the truck, Carolyn and I’ll tidy up.”

Between them, they gathered up the gear, made their way carefully upstairs, and out into the road. Mal opened the back of the truck, and they pushed the gear inside.

“He’s up to something,” Nick said, lighting a cigarette.

“Definitely,” Wolfe agreed.

“I wonder what?” Mal asked.

“I don’t know,” Nick answered, “but I intend to get breakfast out of him before I find out.”

Wolfe laughed.

“Hopefully Christa’ll be down in a minute,” Mal said, “I don’t think that she’ll stand for any nonsense.”

They waited while Nick smoked his cigarette, then made their way back to the dining room. Mal was relieved to find Teena and Carolyn sitting at a table talking with Christa.

“I was just telling Christa about last night,” Teena greeted them.

“I feel guilty that we’ve wasted your time,” Christa said.

“Not at all,” Wolfe answered firmly, leaning on the back of Carolyn’s chair. “We’re in agreement that something’s definitely going on.”

“It’s possible that when we review, we’ll find evidence,” Nick said, “also, the research might give us some leads. After that, it’s up to you and your husband how we proceed.”

“Room seven’s vacant now until Friday,” Christa said. “There’ll be a few different guests in and out of the other rooms, and Mr Cooper in nine, and Mr and Mrs Wilson in two all week, but I don’t think that you’d be bothering anybody if you wanted to come back.” She smiled wanly. “Of course, I’ll have to run it past Ray first.”

“He seems, more approachable, this morning,” Teena said tentatively.

“I know: to say I was surprised when he said that he was going to cook you breakfast is an understatement.”

“Well, we’re grateful!”

Ray put his head around the kitchen door. “Christa? Will you help me a minute?”

“Coming.” Christa left the table, and headed into the kitchen.

“Deeply suspicious,” said Nick.

“You’re right,” Carolyn’s gaze was unfocussed, “he’s done something: someone’s coming.”

“Do you know who?” Teena found Carolyn’s occasional prescience disquieting.

“No, but it’s for his benefit, it’s not going to help us.”

“No use worrying,” Wolfe said, “we’ll just have to deal with it.”

Christa came out of the kitchen carrying a tray with drinks on it. Wolfe immediately moved to help her.

“Thank-you,” she said as Wolfe took the tray. “If you don’t mind serving those, I’ll fetch the rest.”

As Wolfe distributed the drinks, Mal sat at the table with Teena and Carolyn, leaving Christa’s seat vacant. Nick took a seat at the next table, and Wolfe joined him. A couple of minutes later, Ray and Christa came out with breakfast. When everybody had food, Christa resumed her seat, and Ray, rather hesitantly, joined Nick and Wolfe.

“This looks good,” Wolfe smiled at Ray, “I’m certainly ready for it.”

Ray nodded, glanced at his watch, but said nothing.

Conversation ceased as they began eating the sausages, bacon, scrambled eggs, mushrooms, and baked beans. Wolfe and Mal finished first, and waited patiently for the others. Only Teena and Christa were still eating when the reception bell rang.

Ray, who had been unconsciously spinning his fork, started. “I’ll go,” he said immediately. He left the table so hurriedly that his chair almost toppled over. Wolfe caught it, and watched curiously as their host rushed up the stairs.

“Are you expecting someone?” Teena asked Christa.

“Not that I know of.” She laid her cutlery on the empty plate, looking concerned. “I hope he hasn’t done anything stupid.”

Mal exchanged a glance with Carolyn. “I expect we’ll find out in a minute.”

A short time later, footsteps sounded on the stairs, and Ray appeared, accompanied by a smartly dressed young woman. They entered the dining room, and stopped before the two occupied tables. Ray looked at his wife, a self-satisfied smile playing on his lips.

“This is Juliette Grogan, she’s a reporter for the local paper. She’s going to do a piece on our ghost, and with a bit of luck, the nationals’ll pick it up.”

Juliette, a generously proportioned girl of medium height, her blonde hair overwhelmed by pastel highlights, took a confident step forward, smiling broadly. “Good morning everybody,” she said loudly. “It’s all right, I don’t bite!” Receiving no response, she ploughed on. “All I need to do is ask you some questions,” she took a digital recorder from her bag and held it up, “get a bit of background about your group, take a few photos,” she raised an expensive looking camera on a strap around her neck, “and you can tell me all

about Mr Brown's spook. No need to be nervous."

Christa leapt to her feet. "Ray! What the hell have you done?"

"I'm using my head, making this work to our advantage!"

"But you didn't ask me! You didn't ask any of us!" With a visible effort, she reined in her anger. "Did it even occur to you," she continued in an icy voice, "that I might have an opinion? That Teena and the others might not want to be in the paper?"

"Come on Christa, see sense: of course they do. It's free publicity for all of us!"

"You bloody little tin-pot dictator! You don't think of anyone but yourself! I should never have let you talk me into coming here!" Tears streaming down her cheeks, she pushed past Ray, and ran up the stairs.

"Oh for Christ's sake!" Ray looked furious.

"Shouldn't you go after her?" Teena asked quietly.

"Mind your own damn business!"

Mal stood up. "Don't talk to Teena like that."

The overt threat in Mal's tone brought Ray back to earth. He looked from the brawny landscape gardener to Juliette. "I'll be back in a minute." He scurried upstairs.

"Well," said Juliette, seemingly unfazed, "I wasn't expecting that. Whilst they're sorting out their differences, shall we carry on and do your interviews?"

Wolfe laughed. "I admire your professionalism, but we're not giving any interviews." He and Nick stood up, Teena and Carolyn following suit.

"Oh, come on," Juliette wheedled, "it'll only take a minute, and Mr Brown's right, it'll be good publicity for you."

"We don't need or want publicity," Nick said as he walked past her.

"Just think about how many more people would know about the work that you do. Think of the interest a sympathetically written article could generate."

"We're quite happy as we are, thank-you," Teena said, following Carolyn towards the stairs.

"Can you at least tell me if you found anything?" A note of desperation had crept into Juliette's voice.

Wolfe stopped, and turned to face her. "Regardless of whether the place is haunted, and we can't confirm that it is, Mr Brown has manipulated the entire event to his own advantage. He's duped us, his wife, and you." He turned, and followed the others upstairs, catching up with them by the front door.

"Should we wait and speak to Christa?" Teena asked. "It seems rude to just walk out."

The Brown's door was flung open, and Ray stalked out. He gave the ghost hunters a withering look, and marched downstairs. A few moments later Christa appeared, dabbing her eyes with a tissue. Immediately, Teena went to her.

“What can I do Christa?”

“I don’t know.” She looked at Teena, her eyes full of tears, but empty of hope. “We’ve had an awful row. He said some terrible things, we both did. I think it’s the final straw for me, I don’t think that there’s anything left to save.”

“I know it’s trite, but you need to wait until you’re both less emotional, and try to discuss things calmly.”

“I know you’re right, but I honestly can’t see how we can sort this out.” She reached out and gripped Teena’s arm. “Thank-you for caring, and I don’t mean to seem ungrateful, but I think it’d be better if you went now.”

“I understand.” Teena reached into her back pocket, removed a business card, and handed it to Christa. “If you want to speak to me, for any reason, don’t hesitate.” She squeezed Christa’s hand, and followed the others out.

In the truck, the ghost hunters were silent for several minutes as Mal drove.

“Breakfast was all right,” Nick said finally.

“Most of it’s been all right,” Mal replied, “up until that performance with the reporter.”

“I can see it from Brown’s point of view,” Wolfe said, “but his delivery is appalling.”

“Poor Mrs Brown was really upset,” Carolyn said.

Mal’s phone played the opening bars of Hayseed Dixie’s ‘Bouncing Betty.’ He passed it over his shoulder to Teena. She entered the PIN, and read the text message.

“It’s from Tasha. She’s found some information on Torre Mews for us.”

“That’s good news,” Wolfe said.

“If we can make use of it,” Nick added pessimistically.

“What do you want me to tell her?”

“If she’s available now, ask her to come to our place.” Mal laughed unexpectedly. “If she doesn’t mind riding in the back, we could pick her up!”



Tasha sat in the kitchen with Teena, Carolyn, and Nick. She had told them how her shift had been, and was listening to their account of events at the Torre Mews. Mal and Wolfe were walking Fermac in nearby Brunel Woods.

“I knew Mr Brown would be trouble,” Tasha said, shaking her head. “Where does this leave the investigation?”

“Up in the air for the time being,” Teena answered. They had deliberately omitted the encounter with Will Cooper. “Depending on whether Ray and Christa resolve their differences, we may not be able to go back.”

They heard the front door open, and a few seconds later Fermac careered into the room, enthusiastically greeting everybody before flopping onto his bed. Wolfe and Mal followed at a more leisurely pace, and joined the group at the table.

“What have we missed?” Wolfe asked.

“Tasha’s had an eventful night,” Nick said, looking at her.

“What happened?”

“There was quite a large brawl down on the Strand in the early hours. Let’s just say it got rather physical.” She pulled her right sleeve up, revealing a graze surrounded by bruising. “Some intoxicated halfwit managed to shove me into a wall as we were trying to detain him.” She shrugged. “I got off lightly: he punched my colleague in the face and broke his nose.”

“Assaulting a police officer,” Nick said, shaking his head, “he’ll be for the high jump.”

“Possibly, but it highlights the lack of respect that some of the public have for us.” She held Nick’s gaze. “I’ve been in the Force sixteen years now, and I’ve been thinking about looking for another job for the last eighteen months or so.”

“I don’t blame you. In the twelve years that I was in the civilian police, it definitely changed for the worse: and, before anyone says anything, not because I was there! When you watch minimums become optimums, there’s clearly something wrong.”

“What would you do?” Mal asked, then smiled mischievously. “I can always use manual labourers if you fancy that.”

Tasha laughed. “I appreciate the offer, but I’m not really a big fan of mud and digging. I’m thinking more of something like private security.”

“If you’re serious about making a change,” Wolfe said, “I could make some enquiries.”

“I am serious, and I’d be grateful if you would do that.”

“I’ll do what I can.”

“Thank-you.” Tasha took a breath. “Going back to the case, I have some information that may help. The police were called to Torre Mews on numerous occasions when it was flats, mostly for public order and drug offences. It’s a wonder that I hadn’t been there before. Anyway, I checked specifically for anything involving flat seven.” She produced her notebook. “The only occupant we have a record of is a twenty-two-year-old woman called Charlotte Mason. She was definitely a resident for over two years.”

“She sounds right,” Mal said.

“Possibly. Mason ran away from her parents’ home aged fifteen, claiming to have been physically and sexually abused for years, and became the responsibility of Children’s Services. There’s no record of a related prosecution. She was a persistent drug user, starting in her teens, with a long history of mental illness, and was arrested multiple times for possession. She was under the supervision of Social Services.”

“Was it the drugs that like, killed her?” Carolyn asked.

“That’s why I’m not sure she’s the right one, Carolyn: Charlotte Mason is still alive.”