





**A Fairy Tale Ending?**  
**A Collection of Short Stories By**  
**Michael Murphy**



**Thanks to Colin Cooke, Ava Lux and of course my  
wife Jacqui and the Kids**

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# Contents

9	- - - - -	Introduction
11	- - - - -	The Butty Shop
17	- - - - -	Bank Charges
25	- - - - -	The Case
32	- - - - -	The Running Dead
48	- - - - -	The Brotherhood of the Future
57	- - - - -	Small World
64	- - - - -	Ron
76	- - - - -	Burglary
83	- - - - -	I know
97	- - - - -	Is Billy Alright?
105	- - - - -	Kerry
109	- - - - -	The Legend of the Black Fox
118	- - - - -	The Boy Who Can Fly
125	- - - - -	Taxi
137	- - - - -	The Time Monkeys
150	- - - - -	Graveyard
158	- - - - -	A Fairy Tale Ending



## **Introduction**

My name is Michael Murphy; I am learning to be a writer and an illustrator and I thank you for taking an interest in this collection. I have gathered together my writings from the past few years into this volume to form a written sketch book of my ideas. The stories it contains vary in style and genre being the result of me playing around with characters and themes to create stories and essentially learning the craft of writing along the way. Some stories are serious, even maybe a little disturbing, some more light hearted and some plain and silly farce. The first few are in a script format and the rest a more standard layout. I hope that you, the reader, find something that interests and entertains you in this book.

Thanks

Michael Murphy

March 2010



# The Butty Shop

## 1. EXT: A BUSY ROAD - DAY

Pan slowly across busy road and zoom in on shops. Pick out a sandwich shop and hold shot.

## 2. INT: A SANDWICH SHOP - DAY

Man in apron is serving customers, a lady assistant is also serving, and a queue of customers wait patiently. One customer is dressed like a comical foreign army general.

MR BUTTYMAN

(To old woman)

So you want chicken salad on a granary roll Mrs Barker? (The old woman nods)

MR BUTTYMAN makes the sandwich slicing the roll in two and buttering it. He adds chopped chicken from a bowl and pieces of salad; lettuce, cucumber...

MR BUTTYMAN

Do you want onions MRS BARKER? (She nods)  
Here's yours love that's 1.40 cheers darling (to others) who's next

The lady assistant is busy dealing with another customer

and can be heard off camera. A man looks at a lady then at MR BUTTYMAN

FIRST CUSTOMER

I think she was next (pointing to a pretty young lady at the other side of him)

SECOND CUSTOMER

No you go ahead I'm still deciding (she smiles at the other customer shyly)

FIRST CUSTOMER

(Smiles at girl and holds her gaze for a second longer, he turns to MR BUTTYMAN) all right mate I'll have...

MR BUTTYMAN

(Interrupts) 'Sausage, bacon and egg with brown sauce on a large barm'? Eh? are you having your usual?

FIRST CUSTOMER

Aye go on then. How's your frank doing I haven't seen him down the Frigate for a while?

MR BUTTYMAN

Oh he's working on the bins now, yeah he's driving the wagons, up early with the birds.

FIRST CUSTOMER

Tell him I was asking eh?

MR BUTTYMAN

Here you are 1.75 (man gives the money and winks at MR BUTTYMAN) see you later!

Then MR BUTTYNMAN looks at the young lady but sees the lady assistant is serving her. The next man in the queue steps up he is the army general.

MR BUTTYMAN

What can I get you mate?

MR GENERAL

I would like to see your products.

MR BUTTYMAN

You're looking at them mate. We have a wide variety of fillings and cooked meats such as; turkey, ham, cheese, egg, roast beef, prawns, chicken tika, cottage cheese, all with salad on any of a good selections of rolls...

MR GENERAL

General (waits patiently for MR BUTTYMAN to finish) none of these, I want to see your OTHER items for sale.

MR BUTTYMAN

Ooh! The OTHER merchandise! Well you had better come with me then.

MR BUTTYMAN walks into the back room. The general follows as the customers continue as normal.

### 3. INT: DARK ROOM - MINUTES LATER

MR GENERAL

Our country is torn by civil war, our forces are weakening, we are losing ground on the western front, we need appropriate hardware to gain the advantage and I hear that you MR BUTTYMAN are a man that can help me.

MR BUTTYMAN

Maybe MR GENERAL, maybe, but for a price of course.

MR GENERAL

Why of course, MR BUTTYMAN we have money.

MR BUTTYMAN

Here you are, look at these.

The sound of a curtain drawn back. Next shot racks and racks of guns, rocket launchers and other various weapons

Hands are shaken

4. EXT: CARPARK AT BACK - DAY

The general is seen hauling boxes onto a large old army truck. It drives away.

5. INT: BUTTY SHOP - DAY

The general activity continues. The MR BUTTYMAN comes out of the back

MRS ASSISTANT

(To MR BUTTYMAN)

We are doing so well with the 'OTHER' merchandise (MR BUTTYMAN is continuing to serve other

customers as before) how did you come up with such a brilliant idea.

#### MR BUTTYMAN

Its all about finding a niche, seeing as gap in the market and whoosh you're in there! Easy money! Supply and demand! And these people they are usually already kitted out and the ones they had before were effective but unwieldy, these are Taylor made for them smaller to fit into smaller hands.

#### 6. EXT: VILLAGE - HOT SEARING SUN

The sound of battle is heard, gunshots in the distance. There is fighting close by as a BBC reporter wearing a bulletproof vest crouches in front of a terrified cameraman. Across the scene run soldiers, some men but some boys. The camera pans the scene to the truck where the general dishes out the weapons as he barks orders to the children dressed for battle. The guns are tiny in the hands of the general but fit perfectly in the smaller hands of the children.

# Bank Charges

NARRATOR

This film shows the complete injustice of bank charges. Picture if you will the scene; a young family, barely able to survive. The man of the house unable to work through injury.

1. EXT: GARDEN - MORNING

ROB is playing football with one of their children. He senses the presence of the camera then rubs his back taking a seat on the garden chair.

NARRATOR

The burden of the responsibility of taking care of their children resting solely on the small shoulders of JULIE. Unable to pay the bills she receives a letter from a bank requesting, no demanding that she pay. In desperation she seeks the aid of her mother.

2. INT: HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

JULIE with her baby in a trolley is at her mothers. Her mother is sitting at the kitchen table drinking tea while Julie paces worriedly

JULIE

Mum can you lend me 7 pounds. We got this letter they want to take the money today but there's nothing in the bank. They'll charge us summat like 20 quid if they try to take it.

MUM

All right here's a tenner, but you haven't got much time to get it to the bank. It nearly 4.30

JULIE

I'll send Rob round.

3. EXT: WALKING DOWN SREET HURREDLY –  
AFTERNOON

Julie walks the 100 feet or so to her house.

NARRATOR

Clutching the money in her hand Julie speeds towards home to find her beloved and to dispatch him upon this important errand.

4. INT: DIFFERENT HOUSE - 5 MINUTES LATER

JULIE

Rob get off your arse and get to the bank with this,

put it in the account then check to see if they've tried to take money earlier. Come on hurry up you lazy bastard, you have to be there before 5.00.

5. EXT: STREET - AFTERNOON.

Rob walks slowly with no regard for time. He passes a shop where he buys some cigarettes and he stops to talk to some friends on a corner. He reaches the bank at 5.15

NARRATOR

Rob encounters some problems typical of his class that cause his lateness to the bank resulting in him not being able to deposit the cash. He returns to his beloved wife with the bad news. Julie is understandably distraught;

6. INT: SECOND HOUSE – LATE AFTERNOON

JULIE

You fuckin idiot! all you 'ad to do was get this money into the bank and you couldn't even do that. (she hits Rob round the head and skulks off to a corner)

7. INT: BANK - NEXT MORNING

Julie has gone to the bank herself and is being seen to by one of the cashiers

## NARRATOR

The next day Julie herself makes the trip to the bank with the intention of depositing the cash in her account. On arrival and enquiry she finds that the company has already requested the direct debit in question and a charge has been brought against her account of 30 pounds, Julie can contain her anger and frustration no longer;

## JULIE

...Who made that one up you bastards? I can't afford to pay my bill cos I'm skint so what do you do? You fuckin charge me you twats. Who made up this arbitrary amount anyway...

Julie is now out of character. Her accent is now much better spoken. The bank is revealed to be a stage set.

## JULIE (OUT OF CHARACTER)

Whoa wait a minute. Do you really think that a character like this would be even capable of producing such language as 'arbitrary'? Couldn't we change it to something like... I don't know 'stupid' or something

## DIRECTOR

Cut

CASHIER ONE

Yeah you have no money because you probably spend it on bleeding booze you low life.

CASHIER TWO

Oi! You leave her alone, you think that just cos she's poor that she spends her money on beer, fags and the bookies.

CASHIER ONE

Well look at her the scruffy cow; has that hair ever seen shampoo.

CASHIER TWO

Well you cheeky, stuffy, stuck up bitch. I was like her once you know we can't all be born with a silver spoon up our arses.

CASHIER THREE

Hey! She's only bleedin' actin'. Calm down you two.

DIRECTOR

Oi! You lot shut it!

## CASHIER TWO

Well she started it.

Director gives stern look and the three cashiers fade in to the background still muttering.

## JULIE (ACTOR)

Look can we just change that word?

## DIRECTOR

Yes you're right and while we are at it could you give me a little more... (Strains) mmmmmpphhh! I don't know! This girl is at her wits end. She is being taken advantage of by this unfeeling giant of a bank. They don't even know your name. For being late with 7 pound this unfeeling institution at a whim decide to add weight to your burden increasing your debt by.. Yes an 'arbitrary' amount. Who made up this figure, it can't possibly go in to the admin charges. Why would a computer need 30 pounds to churn out a letter and add 30 pounds to your account? I bet none of the actual living staff knew of your charge until directly questioned and told by the *computer* (with disdain). Give me anger, give me desperation. I want to see anguish, your child needs feeding; you are the victim of insensitivity. Make us feeeeeeeel (hands in fists, face in pretend agony almost going red) your pain.

CASHIER Two

Yes! Yes!

JULIE (ACTOR)

Look mate, what's this all about? This girls had bank charges so what. Its part of every day life, get over it.

Girl sneers and goes to walk off set.

CASHIER ONE

Hah! You've seen sense at last you little tart. Oi! Don't leave this little brat here.

CASHIER THREE

Look calm down. The take is over. Come on now. Take deep breaths

CASHIER ONE

(Deep breaths speaks in different voice) Well how was I?

Director ignores them and goes after Julie.

CASHIER ONE

What you mean that wasn't filmed. I thought we'd entered an impromptu improv performance, rather good wasn't I?

Cashier two and three tut and exit. Baby gurgles a bit.

## The Case

EXT: STREET – DAY

A car is seen driving down a street. It isn't too busy. It is early evening

INT: CAR - DAY

Two men are in the car. One is driving while the other is engaged in a conversation on a mobile phone.

FIRST MAN

Yeah, we are on our way now. We're just gonna call into the supermarket and get something to eat.

EXT: CAR - DAY

The car is seen turning into the car park of a supermarket.

INT: CAR – DAY

The man is still on the phone and listening to the person on the other end.

FIRST MAN

Yeah, yeah, we got it right here don't worry about it.

The man looks down into the back seat at a black case.  
The car stops and the first man gets out.

First man

Do you want anything?

SECOND MAN

Aye a piss

FIRST MAN

Well you can wait. Stay here and watch that, you know there are thieving little gits round here.

SECOND MAN

Fuckin' hurry up then.

The first man is seen walking toward the supermarket

INT: CAR - FIVE MINUTES LATER

The second man is agitated and impatient.

SECOND MAN

Where the fuck is he?

He looks down at the mobile on his empty seat.

SECOND MAN

I can't fucking wait.

He looks at the public toilets just across the car park and gets out locking the car he hurries toward them

EXT: CAR PARK - EVENING

A group of three lads is seen looking at the cars they pass. One notices something.

FIRST LAD

There's a mobile in this one, you keep watch.

He jimmys the lock and grabs the phone the alarm blaring. He goes to run when he notices the case. He grabs it and the whole group is seen running from the car park.

INT: UNTIDY HOUSE - MINUTES LATER

The three lads are standing in the living room of a house breathless; an older man is examining the case and the phone the lads have got. Inside the briefcase is a laptop.

OLDER MAN

It's a good fucking computer this, nice one you bunch of scrotes, I bet we can shift this for a couple of oners at least.

The lads all give each other nods of congratulation.

OLDER MAN

How do you turn this thing on? Oh here it is.

The older man watches the screen as it flashes in his face. His expression is like an excited kid at Christmas. His face is seen peering over the unfolded screen of the computer the light of the screen illuminating his face as he inexpertly tries to make the machine do something. The expression of delight takes a sudden turn to one of utter disgust. The lads are curious and go to take a look. The older man closes the machine before they can see. He looks at them gravely.

OLDER MAN

Where did you get this?

FIRST LAD

From a car in the car park at the precinct. Why?

The man presses the switch to turn the machine off. It beeps a couple of times in protest before the fans fall silent.

OLDER MAN

Show me the car, come on.

## SECOND LAD

The police will be crawling all over it by now!

## EXT: THE STREET - EVENING

The protest of the SECOND LAD falls on deaf ears as the OLDER MAN marches out of the door. The lads follow. As the man marches toward the nearby precinct he knocks on several doors and following brief conversations with rough looking gentleman he soon accrues a small army of ruffians.

## EXT: CAR PARK - EVENING

The group gathers at one end of the car park and one of the lads' points to the car. The older man then watches and waits. There are as yet no police present though the alarm still squeals out onto deaf ears conditioned into ignorance by over exposure. The group watches as a man approaches the car first slowly then quickly as the realisation hits him that it is his car that is squealing. As he nears he presses a button that stops the siren and is set upon very suddenly by the groups of men.

## OLDER MAN

You dirty fucking twat!

The men kick the man hard as he is curled up on the tarmac. Passers by look and walk hurriedly on. The group

smashes the car before running back towards the estate from where they came. The camera is left looking at the whimpering blooded form of the man on the ground. The other man that had gone into the supermarket is seen approaching he sees his friend on the floor and sees the state of the car. He checks in the car looking in the back seat for the case, he looks in and around the front seat for his mobile.

FIRST MAN

Fuck! The phone is gone and the fucking case.

He reaches deep into his jacket pocket and produces a two-way radio.

FIRST MAN (INTO THE RADIO)

This is delta Romeo hotel victor, receiving? Over

A CRACKLED VOICE IS EMITTED FROM  
THE RADIO

Receiving, go ahead.

FIRST MAN

Send an ambulance to the... (He pauses as he look for a sign to ascertain exactly where he is) the Radfield shopping centre car park. An officer is down; I repeat an officer is down. Immediate assistance required.

A DIFFERENT VOICE ON THE OTHER END  
OF THE RADIO

Is that you sergeant Griffin? Jack, what's  
happened?

FIRST MAN

They've got the fucking laptop the bastards  
they've took it! They've got the evidence.

# The Running Dead

DRAFT SCRIPT IDEA FOR A SHORT GRAPHIC NOVEL

1. EXT: NIGHT, RAINING, CITY CENTRE.

A deserted street, cars left abandoned with doors still open. Smashed glass on shop fronts, fire reflected in wet road

CAMERA ZOOMS OUT

Buildings and cars burn in background and silhouetted are the figures of six people running towards us.

LOOKING THE OTHER WAY:

From behind now they run away reflections on wet road. Shadows from the raging fire dance long in front of them. As they recede a dark figure comes into view from behind.

The dark figure runs after the group.

Close up of terror in each of their rain drenched faces, breathing deeply as they run.

CAMERA ZOOMS OUT:

Six running people, two women and four men all wearing the same plain green boiler suit overall.

They go out of the picture.

Then the shadowy form enters the picture

Other dark figures come out from the shadows and all of them run after the six.

2. EXT: NIGHT, HARD RAIN, A DIFFERENT STREET:

As they run one of the men stumbles and slows a little the gap between him and the other widens. The others run on oblivious as a dark figure comes from the side and powerfully and quietly grabs the slow runner and with a quiet crack there is silence.

3. EXT: NIGHT, RAIN AND THUNDER, A NARROW ALLEYWAY

The remaining five run on in terror up a narrow alley, splashing through puddles. They come out into another street between two burning cars.

The alley is empty for a moment

The large dark shadowy figures are seen looking at the ground where the five ran, like they are sniffing or seeing something invisible, hunting

Suddenly and quickly in a blur they run in the direction

down the alley and between the burning cars.

#### 4. EXT: NIGHT, RAIN, WIDER STREET

The five run fast, footsteps follow and the dark pursuers are suddenly close behind like vague shadows in the mist they run with terrifying speed. One of five, a woman screams in terror and darts away left into a dark narrow road.

Some of the shadowy chasers follow

The others run on terror in their eyes

A piercing scream is heard coming from the dark road down which the woman fled.

The others running the remaining woman whimpers at the scream.

The dark alley again illuminated by a massive explosion, BOOM!!!

The ground shakes and the four remaining runners stagger, Glass flying, debris rains down

The pursuers scatter

Ext: NIGHT, RAIN. Under a bridge

The rain water flows in torrents down in the gutter of the road. Pouring into a grid.

FIRST MAN:

I think we lost them

SECOND MAN:

What should we do?

WOMAN:

What was that explosion? Where are the others gone? What the hell is going on? What are those things?

Footsteps from the right

THIRD MAN:

I don't know but I think they are coming, quick this way

He makes to run but the SECOND man stops him

SECOND MAN:

Not that way look

He points at figures moving in the distant shadows to the left.

SECOND MAN:

Down here, into the drains, they won't find us in there.

He crouches and with FIRSTMAN they remove the manhole cover.

WOMAN:

What? Are you mad, we'll be drowned?

The sound of footsteps faster and closer

SECOND MAN:

Come on it's all right; I used to work in the drains,  
its safer there that with these night terrors prowling  
around up here

They all climb into the dark hole disappearing into the darkness

The manhole cover slides back into place just as three dark figures appear under the bridge

They figures move past the manhole cover

4. INT: IN TUNNEL, WATER RUSHING FAST KNEE DEEP.

The figures of the four people crouched in the rushing water looking up in fear and listening to the footsteps fade

Relief

They back away from the ladders and down the main tunnel then turn into a narrow offshoot tunnel where the water flows less. Rats scurry by and litter floats on the surface, water drips from above and as they go up the tunnel the rushing sound quietens a little. They crouch and rest.

FIRST MAN: WHISPERING

I... I'm Terry

He looks at the others crouching afraid and shivering. They look up and introduce themselves.

SECOND MAN: WHISPERING

Well I'm Simon, I wish I could say it's nice meeting you but...

he shrugs, his whispered voice echoes eerily in the narrow tunnel

WOMAN: INCREASINGLY LOUDLY

I'm... I'm going to fucking die! And you people are making pleasantries. What are we going to do?

Her voice echoes loudly in the tunnel

SIMON: WHISPERING

Shhhh! Alright now calm down and be quiet

THIRD MAN: WHISPERING

I'm Reg and I agree with her, what we are going to do, the city just doesn't burn and people don't get chased like this not in two thousand and...

Suddenly from down the tunnel comes a CLANG! Followed the sound of something heavy dropping with a loud splash, lots of rats come running by screeching.

SIMON: WHISPERING LOUDLY

Out of here now! Back into the main tunnel

They pile out of the pipe and back into the rushing torrent. They follow SIMON down the tunnel, looking back there is a shadow and the sound of wading from behind. Suddenly TERRY stumbles and falls over under the water momentarily. SIMON stops and starts going

back to help, TERRY emerges from the water gasping. As SIMON is wading back the shadow looms large behind TERRY, SIMON cries out but too late. Two more dark figures come bounding up the tunnel and pounce on TERRY. They savagely tear the man apart limb from limb (IN SILHOUETTE) SIMON REG and WOMAN run on down the tunnel in utter horror.

They run following SIMON who doesn't hesitate when the tunnel branches three ways, All at once they run down the third tunnel that sweeps downwards fairly steeply but stops short at a large heavy iron grate through which the water flows out airborne momentarily before plunging into the wide fast flowing river below.

Frantically WOMAN pounds on the grate. The thick old iron bends

Splashing footsteps behind

REG and WOMAN pound at the grate and it buckles

Footsteps louder

SIMON kicks and the grate

It flies away with large chunks of concrete falling down into the water

They all look at each other surprised and their strength

Shadows appear in the tunnel behind

They jump

5. EXT: NIGHT, RUSHING RIVER.

They swim

Dark figures stand above in the pipe way looking down at the river

The remaining four swim fast with the rapid current

See figures running along the high concrete bank far behind

SIMON and the others round a bend in the river losing sight of the outlet pipe.

SIMON is able to grab a ladder; he climbs up out of the water. Reaching down he helps WOMAN up onto the ladder then REG

They all climb up onto the street, dripping wet, vapour breath. there are distant sounds from both ways

There is a tall building set back. They run into the shadows. Looking up there is a fire escape ladder. SIMON jumps up to get it and hauls himself up. Helping the others they pull up the ladder and begin climbing the many metal steps up the side of the building

6. EXT: NIGHT, SKY PALING TO THE EAST  
BEFORE THE COMING SUNRISE, ROOF TOP

Peering over the edge of the rooftop they see figures looking around below, looking in the water and running up and down streets.

SIMON (WHISPERING)

They haven't realized we are up here, good!

Relief again, they all sit with backs to the lift mechanism housing. The rain is slowing and dark smoke drifts across the scene.

WOMAN:

Did you see what they did to TERRY? They're going to do the same to us, we're going to die!

SIMON:

Calm down woman. There must be an explanation. We were all in the hospital, that's where I woke up, there was an explosion, we were running, that's all I remember

WOMAN:

Running from those... those things... sob.

SIMON:

Alright, alright come on now.

REG:

What the hell has happened to the city, it's deserted, a bomb maybe?

I don't even know what city this is... do you

SIMON:

No

WOMAN:

I have no idea where we are. I am not sure of anything. But I am fucking sure that there are dead people everywhere. Where are the police, the fire engines? Where the fuck is everybody? Sob sob

REG:

Shes right

SIMON:

Why were we in the hospital? The last thing I remember... October 12<sup>th</sup> my sons' birthday. I was out getting a present... I crossed the road and a came car from out of nowhere. I must have been

taken to hospital; I wonder what day it is now.

REG:

You said October. Its June now, or at least it was when I fell.

WOMAN:

Where did you fall?

REG:

I remember it clearly. I was working up the ladder, the rung snapped and... it was a long way down. Then the blackness.

WOMAN:

I don't reckon on October or June. I too had an accident. On Christmas day 2018.

SIMON:

2018! No my son wasn't even born then he is six now and its 2025.

REG:

Well I make it 2014! So what the hell year is it? Have we all been in comas?

VOICE FROM OUT OF VIEW:

You're all dead!

They all jump, turning to see that the dark shadowy figures have silently climbed onto the roof. In the pale predawn light more detail are discernable. Dark and bulky they are now, faces seem to have three eyes glinting dark purple. Through the drifting smoke they slowly advance

DARK FIGURE:

You are all the running dead.

More dark figures loom over the edge of the building and slowly they surround them

SIMON, REG and WOMAN stand huddled together backs against the wall. The woman shaking.

Suddenly WOMAN can take it no more and leaps forward barging into one of the things lashing out with her arms she strikes it, it staggers back a couple of steps and at the edge of the roof it falls.

The others stop their advance and step back from the WOMAN

SIMON and REG look at each other surprised again at

the strength.

WOMAN stands looking around at the dark figures one lunges forward to grab her and SIMON leaps forward to defend her. Punching the dark figure hard in the chest it leaves the ground flying back and over the edge falling to the ground far below. All the dark figures then lunge forward grabbing SIMON and WOMAN and in horror REG watches as the things literally tear away flesh from the struggling pair, and rip away an arm before REG can look no more.

Cowering down with his head over his hand REG listens as the piercing screams die down leaving the sounds of the dark things tearing away. All hope is gone of survival and all thoughts of running too. He crouches and he waits...

Daring to look up REG sees the things have stopped. It is much lighter now and they do not look like monsters but soldiers with heavy clothes and body armour. The three eyes are some kind of night vision masks they wear. Looking down at the corpses torn apart on the floor REG is shocked, surprised, amazed and utterly astounded to see metal. Beneath the skin of SIMON and the nameless woman is metal and wiring. He reels, unable to take in what he is seeing. One of the soldiers approaches cautiously

SOLDIER:

Calm down sir, please listen, you are from the Craven-Doyle institute of cybernetics. You are Reginald Butterworth and you died in 2014, your body was held in cryogenic suspension. The year is now 2043 and your brains neuro-patterns, or something like that, have been mapped and programmed into some kind of artificial brain. You and the others had not gone through the standard reorientation process when the accident happened, that is why you are confused.

REG shifts his position and the soldier backs away a step.

REG:

What accident?

SOLDIER:

Shortly after activation it was found that your power cells are defective. Extremely unstable. Several exploded destroying most of the building, you six survived and ran. These bloody white coats keep pushing and pushing the boundaries and kablam, it's us left cleaning up the fucking mess.

REG:

I... I'm L...Like them?

REG points shakily at the heap of flesh metal and wires that were SIMON and the woman whose name he never learned.

SOLDIER:

Yes sir, you are...

Suddenly from each side several soldiers appear and grab REG holding him down.

SOLDIER:

...And you are doomed to die.

SOLDIER approaches and tears at REGS'S green overalls, then at the skin on his chest, the flesh tears and blood flows and REG squeals at the pain. He struggle but the soldiers hold him fast. Underneath is a metal skeleton. The soldier prises apart the ribs, reaches in and REG is no more...

BLACKNESS...

# The Brotherhood of the Future

2008

“I feel good about tonight, I think I’m gonna get something” Josh says aloud to himself as he adjusts the tripod of the large camera pointing towards the distant line of hills beyond the forest roof. The sun shines brightly in the clear evening sky touching the vivid green countryside with gold.

“This area has had so many sightings in recent years; I am bound to catch something on film”. Josh has grown used to speaking out loud to nothing but his tent, paranormal literature and expensive equipment, after countless nights of lonely vigil in isolated areas such as this, always in the hope of capturing the evidence of UFOs. Not for fame or fortune but because he knows there must be aliens or something else, he feels so disconnected with this world, this can’t be all there is. He searches for a purpose.

Suddenly a movement in the distance diverts his attention. He looks over the treetops and is amazed by a large dark disk shape above the trees way off in the distance.

“Holy shit! I never thought I would see anything this good this quickly!” he screams in a whisper of rigid excitement hardly able to believe his eyes and hoping that his camera is capturing this but unwilling or unable to check for fear that the apparition will go in the moment he turns his head.

The disk remains, silent and still yet shimmering above the trees, difficult to focus on as if vastly distant.

Then with sudden and unstoppable ferocity the forest seems to erupt, exploding in size then shrinking back, all in utter silence. More black disks appear above and below the first smaller and bigger. Suddenly Josh and the whole area around him, tent, camera and all are dragged by a hurricane like force forwards into the forest at an incredible speed. He finds himself in a room, surrounded by machinery and gadgets and metal things with blinking lights. There is a figure silhouetted seeming to reach out to him. All around is a deep, low hum. The figure is severely distorted and flickers in a way sickening to the eyes, changing in shape one moment the head is large then the body swells, like in a hall of mirrors. It drops a metal object at the feet of the man from its outstretched arms. All the time he feels like he is being grabbed by extremely powerful winds; pulled here and there. Suddenly with a gut wrenching snap he is back on the hill next to his tent breathing heavily. The activity in the forest dies down and the disk is gone. He glances down at the magazine lay on the ground beside him; a typical grey alien is shown on the front of it. He looks at the metal object at his feet. It looks like a metal brief case though crushed and twisted like a lorry has rolled over it. He looks again over panoramic landscape to see the first rays of the dawning sun peering over the distant hills to his left.

‘Dawn?’

## **2009**

Deep in the woods Josh is holding the traumatised metal case and studying an old book that was inside it, he is looking all around trying to find a place that the book

describes. The book is a hand written journal recording many amazing things and has lead Josh here deep in the middle of the woods where he had his encounter the previous year. Through the trees he sees an old abandoned building, pushing the rickety door he strides across the dusty floor boards and lifts the trapdoor. Descending the creaking steps into the dark tunnel he creeps along it with a flashlight pointing ahead until he comes to the metal door detailed in the book.

Cautiously opening the door he enters a surprisingly large room filled with very complicated machinery.

He looks around in wonder at all the machinery lining the walls and the huge dome like structure in the centre looking like something from a 60s sci-fi show. On a cluttered table he finds papers, they are all written in the same scrawling hand as the journal from the case and are logs detailing the large machine in the centre of the room. He reads with growing excitement, deciphering between mind bogglingly complex equations and mathematics that the machine is some kind of teleportation device or time machine. There is a door leading into the machine. The last line of the last page of the journal has the line written:

*All is set, the future waits.*

“I knew the aliens had led me here. This is the proof for which I have searched all my life. I have been chosen to lead the people through the portal into the future, a future bereft of war, and suffering, a future of enlightenment where we can live free. I will go through

the time portal and... no I will not go alone, I must share this but not with everybody, with like minded people. I must spread the message, gather suitable travellers, we shall be the Brotherhood of the Future”

## **2010**

The hall is filled with people in rows of chairs looking onto the stage. At the podium stands Josh giving a lecture, only a handful of people near the front seem to be taking any notice of him. The others scattered about the hall chat amongst themselves.

“When is Stanton Friedman due to speak?” asks a bored looking man to his equally bored neighbour.

“Not till seven, shall we grab a coffee?” The banner above Josh reads. ‘Alien intelligence contact symposium’ and despite his lack of attention Josh speaks into the microphone

“...I have been contacted by an alien intelligence and now seek out a party to travel to their paradise. Two years ago in 2008 I was visited by an EBE and given detailed instructions on how to operate a machine built by them that will lead us away from this war torn uncivilised world to a better place. Anyone wishing to know more about this please come to stall number fourteen after the presentations. You could join the ‘Brotherhood of the Future.’

## **2011**

A dark room and an initiation ceremony is underway with people in heavy red robes and each with a large metal amulet on a big chain around their necks,

they are surrounding a younger man all chanting in low voices. The initiate recites these words

“...I do solemnly swear to uphold the laws set out in the tome of the brotherhood. I hereby do promise to give with alacrity my life to the fellowship and will defend with my very being the fraternity and to do without question or opinion the will of our leader...”

Following the ceremony Josh stands up rearranging his gold trimmed heavy red robes and centring the polished amulet before speaking

“Today you; the Brotherhood of the Future have been initiated into to inner circle. You have been chosen to join me when we are taken to the New World. We will go in one lunar cycle and we must wear our amulets with pride. Let us prey to the lords of time” All the gathered brothers and sisters begin chanting again in low voices.

## **2012**

The day has arrived that the brotherhood will go into the future. Josh leads the meditation as he stands at the door of the machine, the members of the brotherhood chant slowly as they advance towards the machine and the vortex; a prayer to the aliens that have summoned them. There is a feeling of suppressed excitement and apprehension, the machine hums.

## **1972**

A camera switches on; it is old film footage, a laboratory is shown as the camera shakes and settles. A blurred image of a face appears looking into the lens.

“Is this thing on?” he says tapping at the top a few times causing it to shake then walking back he comes

into focus. He is standing proudly next to a large strange looking piece of machinery like a huge dome with a door in. He speaks excitedly

“I am Professor Jenkins. Today, er the sixteenth of June nineteen seventy two, I have done it. I have achieved my life’s dream. What you see beside me is the accumulation of a life time’s work. It has been a long voyage of discovery working here alone in this secluded laboratory. I believe, pending some tests of course, that I have created a machine that will transfer a physical object to another time. To project or propel if you like a subject into the future, and back again, only to the point in time when the machine is first activated of course. You see I have managed to create a localised, cylindrical, space-time, anomaly, by utilising vast amounts of energy, harnessed from a matter anti-matter total annihilation reaction. The efficiency is almost 100% and the energy levels are like nothing ever before experienced. The energy itself is enough to warp space-time but only a little and spread over too much an area. The key you see is in these secondary energy fields used to focus the gravity and shape it. The result is an area of local space-time that is twisted first in one direction then in the other. (In typical mad scientist fashion he swings his arms around wildly pointing and gesturing as he explains). The actual flow of time within these regions is different than the flow in normal space. In one case accelerated in the other it would actually have the reverse effect! I have tested the machine on several inanimate subjects with variable results. I find I am now able to fine-tune the energies required to manipulate the fields and I feel I am close to testing a living subject. I have calculated exact

field strengths and ascertained dial settings for controlling the amount by which space is warped. I have recorded all the details of the fine operation of this machine and placed the documents into this metal case, along with the location of this laboratory in the event of something happening to me. Now let me explain, you see there are two doors and the object needs to move through the field and out of the other side. The door is essentially where the 'vortex' if you like begins. You walk out in the future. The other two doors on the other side will send you back in time. I have calculated that with the reaction in the generator and the amount of fuel the vortex will last for approximately two hundred years, meaning I should be able to jump back and forth in time between now and then. I aim also to extend this time by hopefully finding in the future greater and more reliable sources of energy. I believe this invention will change our world. Today I will enter the vortex myself and emerge in space over there but in time in the future. Here goes"

The professor holds the camera to his body so that is at his side and enters the vortex warp. Inside looks like a metallic room the dimensions of which hurt the brain to comprehend. The camera seems to drift as if weightless and look out of a small porthole onto the lab outside. A plant the professor had on his workbench sways, flourishes then wilts and dies. The walls of the lab grow and stretch then shrink and buckle. Then the lab shrinks away revealing the forest beyond the walls. It is as if the trees are next to the camera then far away, the camera is being slung shot around forest one way then the other then all ways at once. The case floats slowly by the camera which is still drifting round no longer looking

through the porthole. The case twists suddenly then stretches like elastic, snaps back then crumples concertina like. The lab walls again stretch out of existence and distorted trees whoosh past, a tent and a man there then gone in a flash, the case with them. The reactions die down.

The camera still drifting round slowly reveals the deformed stretched and crushed form of the professor, suspended dead in the air. The camera continues to turn looking again out of the porthole. A figure appears momentarily in the lab, time is shooting by outside like strobe lighting. Again for an instant the lab is filled with red robed figures. The camera has drifted along with the dead professor toward the back door where they exit the machine and fall out onto the lab floor in a horrific heap of flesh and metal; the demand on his body by the gravity winds too much, the twisted camera clanks and chatters then stops.

## 2175

The lab is a museum. A tour guide begins talking to a group of people as the black and white film ends.

“This video footage was taken by the lone scientist professor Jenkins as a journal to record his progress and as you saw the moment he actually entered the machine, it was found thirty years ago in 2145 along with his horrifically deformed body. If you now follow me into the main chamber (the group follow) this is the actual machine that was constructed by Jenkins in the early nineteen seventies. The machine itself was intended as a time travelling device but the science was too crude and

not understood properly. The energy required to run it was immense and any large sources of energy back then were simply not pure enough. The slightest variation in the power input would have devastating effects on the spatial warp created. This would have had many strange effects such as huge black disks that look like ‘holes’ in the air, this as we know is the light being twisted by the gravity field. There are many other phenomena caused by space bending and stretching randomly. In fact this location was famous with UFOlogists and paranormal researchers for about one hundred and twenty years until this place was discovered. Professor Jenkins is however recognised as the world’s first time traveller. Though this work was ultimately for him a failure it nevertheless paved the way for the warp drive engines in use today by our interstellar transports. Professor Jenkins was a pioneer who gave his life for his science and helped craft the world today. The interesting thing is that the original spatial warp created by the professor is still in place here and will be for another fifty years or so. What the professor omitted to add to the design of this machine was an ‘off’ switch (the group laughs) it must be left to run its course.” Without warning the machine door opens. The tourist group looks on in shocked excitement while the tour guide tries to maintain control. Many once human bodies twisted and broken slump to the laboratory floor; A misshapen mangled mass of horrific proportions. Amid the twisted flesh and heavy red velvet material is an amulet bearing the symbol of the Brotherhood of the Future.

# Small World

## A Vision

Joe is happily lost in the cyber world of his computer. He is a seventeen-year-old rebel of sorts, excluded from school after trying to convince the lecturer that a monkey could breach the GVN's security and that the speed of the new 90,000 series organic processor could be greatly increased if the software developers would actually get round to using its full potential and stop resting on their collective laurels over the virtual neural algorithms developed so long ago. (Actually three months but in the world of high end computing this is a lifetime.) This and other arguments had raged for several days culminating in a rather brutal fight and the subsequent expulsion of Joe from the school. This is not however all bad as he is now free to glide for as long as he wishes and today he has invited some of his friends because this day is a rather special day for gliding.

Joe would once have been referred to as a 'Hacker'. This was before the mass protests of 2025. Joe's gliding and 'hacking' often took him into the secured, 'top secret' government Areas. He had been aware of the mind-boggling project that was 'Orion Connect' for sometime and had followed its progress from afar. The government had embarked upon a project that would connect Earth's Internet with the galactic equivalent. Joe fully though immaturely understood the implications of this and decided he wanted a piece of it.

'We'll show that lecturer and all those bastards at that intellectually desolate school!' he says to his friends

as they wait in cyberspace for the moment that halfway across the planet professor Arkin also eagerly anticipates.

Professor Arkin wears the headset that controls the computer. A large screen illuminates the otherwise dark room displaying a two dimensional representation of what the professor can in his headset. Behind the professor sitting in tiered seats are many people, the light blue glow from the screen picking out their apprehensive and excited expressions. This is the moment that the gathered throng has waited for for most of their working lives and the accumulation of the professors' life work. The project had been commissioned twenty years previously following the first alien contact.

Professor Arkin's mind controls the three-dimensional operating system as he glides (the term 'surf' now obsolete) the already established Internet. The GVN, Global Virtual Network has superseded the WWW some Twenty-five years earlier and is made up of 'Areas', rather like the old 'sites' of the web. The Areas are essentially virtual locations in cyberspace. The operator feels like he is actually in a real place. The Internet has become a global virtual reality through which people can walk, run or fly.

The Area entrance looms ahead and Arkin waits. In a few moments the 'doors' will open and he will be free to explore the interstellar network. The words "server temporarily unavailable" are all that is displayed. (These words were programmed in by the professor and are meaningless) Joe and his friends also wait. The words disappear and everyone holds their breath.

Arkin and his team had been asked to build a message processor to translate information from the interstellar network into a format that could be interpreted by our own. Similar to the IMPs built in the 1960s that created the backbone of the original Arpanet. This project had been completed and today they will finally connect. Orbiting the planet are satellites that relay messages from around the globe to the coordinates of the newly constructed wormhole. The physics behind this are staggering and Arkin is one of the few brains in the world that can come to anything like an understanding of it. The amount of energy required to sustain just one informational wormhole is phenomenal, and as he understands it this wormhole connects directly to one of many hubs, points in space where massive numbers of wormholes connected, and through these the information is relayed almost instantly to any part of the galaxy. The network was built by the galactic equivalent of a telecommunications company, which offered its services to advanced civilisations.

Arkin counts off the processes in his mind that he knows are taking place; The incoming data being stored was then interpreted in chunks according to the specifications made available to him; the concept analyser attempts to intelligently bridge the vast communication gaps; The special vector translators that organise the interactive environment into three dimensions, the colour image interpreter that adjusts the electromagnetic range for the human eye. All these things and more are taking place in the computers being fed the data from the satellites.

Suddenly the Area becomes solid and the effect is like standing in a vast marble hall. A sign overhead reads “welcome to the ISIN home Area, you are visitor number 983,993,234,224,112,453...” and the number takes up the rest of the sign. Along the edges of this marble hall are doors leading to other Areas; chat rooms, download Areas, games rooms, and so on.

The professor looks about him in awe watched by the people in the room. The president Mr Waldron says:

“We are here. Let’s explore. What infinite wisdom lies therein? What untold races and life forms will we discover?”

Arkin moves out of the welcome Area and into the labyrinthine maze that is the galactic network and the screen burst into life with audiovisual activity. His digital avatar skilfully weaves its way through cyber space. The gathered officials gaze in wonder at the screen as Arkin explores, they congratulate themselves and drink champagne. They have succeeded; the world will be a better place, they have moved into the age of galactic communication and become part of the galactic community. They are no longer alone. This network spans the entire galaxy and almost every technologically advanced planet in it. It is virtually infinite.

Beyond the official welcome Areas in the ‘infinite’ pool of information, the professor navigates through Areas that are dedicated to interests particular to individual alien worlds. He lingers on an Area devoted to triple mouthed-pieced water instruments, the workings of which were incomprehensible but the music angelic. Another showcasing the sports played by the inhabitants of a planet near the galactic centre that involves black

holes and hydrogen bombs, the physics of which are to the professor impossible. The range of alien beings that are encountered in this exploration is mind-boggling, every conceivable shape, size and colour of being is seen. The group look on in increasing wonder and awe at the things they discover. Their brains reel with the information taken onboard.

Joe and his friends love it. They laugh at the alien nudity, they are keenly interested in the new scientific concepts; they cringe at the gruesome galleries of victims of radiation poisoning and space accidents. They all make friends of alien teenagers on planets that they don't know or care the location of. They are in a chat room where representatives of hundreds of planets, space stations, moons and asteroids all converge for conversations ranging from the weather, and congested space cargo routes to the black hole fireball game last night, where the team from the Lizard nebula had won to regain the top of the league.

Joe is talking with a being from the planet 'Rrrraarrgh!' called Lanx

"...Right in the dying seconds Geoorkarg scored a fireball right in the corner vortex, the crowd went crazy, you should have been there" Lanx excitedly relates.

"I'd love to have been there, it sounds awesome" Joe enthuses. "Bolton wanderers won the FA cup last night, Wong scored just before the final whistle right in the top corner, what a goal!" Joe related. The conversation drifts.

"My teacher is a fool; he thinks he knows it all but he just reads from his ancient books"

“Yeah! We have fools like that on this little rock My mentor just won’t grasp new ideas, he is just stuck in the past!” the alien sympathises. “The adults, the ones in charge, their generation dreams of the future, they impellent the revolution but they can never deal with the results, they cannot accept the changes so they cling to ‘the way we have always done it’”

“I think ego plays a part. Anyway balls to em. We should have fun before we’re the old ones!”

“Yeah! What do you mean balls?”

“Bollocks, love sack, nuts, scrotum, testicles”

Lanx understands “hahahahahehe!”

The Earths ‘official’ galactic Internet pioneers begin to encounter things that are not so wonderful. There are sites dedicated to what the people could only assume was pornography, images of alien beings entwined in impossible and unpleasant dances. There is an abundance of advertisements for ‘things that will change your life’. There are horrific, sickening images of victims of accidents and diseases.

To their surprise in one Area Earth is referenced. Arkin enters and on closer examination the humans are part of a comedic sketch played out by mocking aliens. The humans are being ridiculed for their barbaric and rudimentary technology, their lack of understanding of the lager picture, their arrogant superiority and their traditional “are we alone” attitude. There are films taken from saucers that have buzzed the inhabitants in isolated places were the saucer pilots laugh it the dumb reactions of the humans. There are other lesser-developed races treated in much the same manner or worse.

In another area a truth about the interstellar communications company is implied, that is that they were actually running out of subscribers and following observations of the less advanced worlds it was apparent that Earth was only a few rungs down the technological evolutionary ladder with its global network still in its infancy. They didn't want to wait the few thousand years for the normal developmental process to take place, not especially with the renewed risk of world war destruction that once again overshadowing Earth politics. They thought now was a good time to find some fresh business before the chance went up in a puff of nuclear smoke.

The galactic Internet offers a vastly diverse range of topics and the audience sees technology millennia in advance of anything they'd even dreamt of. Earth's comparative insignificance in relation to it makes her representatives feel crushingly humble, inadequate, frustrated, angry and small.

"This is not what we expected at all. This is not for the betterment of the earth." Waldron expresses the general mood.

The people gathered for this momentous occasion descend into chaotic disarray. Some have left the room. Some are laughing manically. Some have fainted. Some are vomiting and one man takes his own life. The professor has lost it. He is flitting from Area to Area in a wild disjointed madness trying desperately to find something familiar to cling to. He craves the safety of something recognisable. He turned the machine off, shakes violently and gazes into the darkness.

## Ron

It was a gloriously bright and warm summer's day. In a small and charming country pub, Howard and his friends, Gill and Paul were sitting at a table, drinking fruit drinks and cooling from the scorching sun. They chatted quietly among themselves conscious of the eyes of the locals on them. They were waiting for their friend. Sally walked in to the pub talking and laughing with a man. Howard, Gill and Paul all looked up wondering who this person was

“Hi guys, this is Ron, this is Howard, Gill and that's Paul.” They all nodded and said ‘hi’. Ron was young, tall and skinny, unshaven with scruffy hair. His tee shirt said ‘Shit Happens’ in big black letters his jeans were dirty. The group appraised him looking him up and down and made little effort to hide their distaste. Sally motioned to Ron to sit down next to where she had placed her light jacket

“Can I get you a drink?”

“Yes I'll have a quick one but I must be going soon, they're expecting me at the green at 12. I'll have a lager please” Ron's accent was an unusual mixture of local and city. It sounded rough to listen to and Howard and his friends found it not to their liking. This man was definitely not the kind of company they preferred to keep. Sally went to the bar while the others looked on a little uncomfortable waiting for her to return and start a conversation. Ron was the first to speak though.

“Do you folks live round here or are you here for the show this afternoon?”

“We come from the city. Sally said this show would be a hoot.” Howard ventured. Ron looked at him curiously.

“A hoot?” he repeated.

“Yeah, they’re having a guy breaking some record by jumping a row of buses on a motorbike. I can’t wait to see that.” He enthused as Sally returned carrying the drinks

“Here you are!” She sat down and handed out the drinks “how’s everyone getting on?” this question was met with an awkward silence. Ron seemed to sense this and spoke;

“I was just about to invite them to the fair, you’re already going though. How would you lot like to come back to my place after the show?” Sally didn’t hesitate and replied for the group

“That would be great. Do you live round here?”

“Just a little place near the edge of town” he kind of nodded in the rough direction. Gill looked at Howard and Paul in turn and spoke their collective thoughts.

“I don’t think so; I mean I need to get back reasonably early and...” Ron leant forward just slightly and cut her off.

“I won’t keep you long, I Promise.” He smiled a broad grin and sat back finishing his drink in one thirsty gulp.

“Now just let me go for a piss then we can go to the fete” They all watch him go before Paul speaks.

“Where did you find this guy? He’s beastly!” He whispered across to Sally a look of indignant surprise crossing her pretty girlish features.

“Oh don’t be such a prude. He’s fun” She smiled cheekily; Paul looked for the reactions of his friends.

“Well I’m not going to his house. I think we should leave now!” Howard nodded but Gill hesitated.

“We can’t just walk out; we’ll lose him at the fete.” The others grunted their agreement as Sally frowned.

“You are a miserable lot.” she pouted.

The sun shone relentlessly hot from the cloudless sky, the village was alive with bustling crowds all heading for the village green, the hub of all communal activity and the site of the annual village fete. The atmosphere was generally happy. The group followed behind Ron as he weaved his way rather skilfully through the crowds. Paul looked for an opportunity to quietly suggest to his friends;

“Come on, let’s leave him. We’ll go this way.” Howard gave him a quiet thumbs up.

“Yeah. Come on...” but suddenly he stopped in his tracks and gazed ahead, “Oh... oh! I don’t believe it.” He said the others stopped also curious as to what could cause Howard to stop. Howard pointed “Look over there its Mr Burns,” the others searched the crowd puzzled “...You know the owner of the mall. What’s he doing in a place like this?” Gill recognized the face of one of the richest men she knew and shrieked in delight.

“Oh my God! So it is!” She looked excitedly like a pleading child to her friends “Oh Come on we must speak to him!” the others shared her enthusiasm but then Sally remembered;

“Wait! What about Ron?” but the others just waved their hands in dismissal, Paul saying haughtily.

“Forget that loser, look its Mr Burns.” He emphatically pointed out. Gill took hold of her arm.

“Come on Daddy will be furious if he knew we were just yards from him and we didn’t introduce ourselves. Daddy has done business with him and your father too Howard.” She stepped forward waving her hand above her head screeching ‘Yoooo whooo!’ to get his attention. Mr Burns turned round and looked at the oncoming teenagers, he looked a little perplexed but politely said.

“Hello.”

“Hi! I’m Gill Baxter” she searched his face for any sign of recognition but found none “You have done business with my father. It’s good to meet you sir!” Mr Burns only just hid his growing impatience behind his mask of perplexity but still he was a gentleman and replied a little patronisingly;

“Oh yes, nice man. Pleased to meet you...” this was followed by an awkward silence as each waited in expectance for the other to speak, the noise of the crowd bustling around them. Mr Burns asked “Erm... are you here for the show?” Howard replied almost before Mr Burns finished with nearly military servility.

“Yes sir. Yes we are sir, looking forward to it sir” another awkward silence as the four of them stood before Mr Burns like kids dumbstruck when their favourite pop star says hello. The noise of the crowd swells and wanes. Mr Burns looks at his watch then starts to make his excuses.

“Well I hope you enjoy the show, I must be...” but just then he saw someone pass by and he looked pleasantly surprised and stepped to one side to attract his

attention saying a fleeting ‘excuse me.’ To the kids. He then almost jogged to catch up with this mystery person which left the group in mild shock. To see a man of Mr Burns Stature actually skipping up to talk to someone was unheard of. Mr Burns tapped the man on the arm who turned and came into the view of the kids.

“Ron, Hello Ron how are you?” Ron smiled at Mr Burns but to add one final level of surprise to the on looking kids he said;

“Hey! You all right Burnsy? Listen man, I gotta rush. Catch up with you later yeah?” and Mr. Burns obsequiously replied.

“Of course Ron, Hey I’m looking forward to the show!” then Ron noticed behind Mr Burns the four kids Paul, Gill, Howard and Sally watching in stunned silence.

“There you are Sally, Gill; I thought I’d lost you. Listen Meet me over by the beer tent later Yeah?” with that he disappeared into the crowd. Mr Burns and Gill looked at each other and at the same time said;

“You know Ron?” then Mr burns looking far more interested than before asked “What did you say your father did?” Gill still a little shook by what was happening replied.

“He’s in property”

“Really? Mr. Baxter you said? We must arrange a meeting.” Mr. Burns was about to speak again when a surge in the crowd suddenly swept Mr Burns away. Gill looked for him but could not see him. She turned to the others who were still behind her but they had lost him also. Then shouts from the crowd told them that the show was about to start. They allowed the crowd to move on a little and when it was quieter Gill spoke to the others

“Who is this guy that he calls Mr. Burns ‘Burnsy’? Come on lets go and watch the show. I think we should maybe meet Ron afterwards” But Paul was not convinced.

“Oh I don’t know just because he knows Mr Burns.” But sally wanted to any way.

“Well I want to” she said in a slightly ill-placed ‘told you so’ tone, Howard mediated.

“We’ll see, come on” and they walked with the crowd to see the show.

They soon found themselves in the large green. Barriers kept the crowd from an area in the centre. Helicopters circled overhead. There was a ramp set up and a platform upon which to the groups’ utter astonishment climbed Ron, punctuated by a cheer from the crowd. Sally, Gill, Paul and Howard all looked at each other in amazement.

On the ramp Ron wore no protection and was in just his jeans and white tee shirt. He mounted a motorcycle and revved it. He threw the bike down the ramp and sped across the green. He hit the next ramp and was launched high into the air and over six busses all in flames. As the bike began to fall it was clear that it would not make it and was heading directly into the end inferno. The crowd gasped in horror. Without warning Ron reached out and grabbed onto a metal bar that suspended from one of the circling helicopters. The bike fell into the flames. Ron is lifted and flew over the crowd. He looked like he couldn’t hold his grip before he let go falling into one of the tents, which then collapsed. The crowd was silent and stared for any signs of life. Then from beneath the canvass was a movement and Ron emerged

unharmd. The crowd roared with a deafening volume. Ron waved and the crowd went wild. A voice over the loudspeaker announced he was OK

“...Unfortunately though he didn’t break the record this time” the group stood on looking in utter amazement.

“Who is he? He must be some kind of celebrity round here” mused Sally starry eyed.

Later at the beer tent, other activities were on going at the green and people generally buzzed around. The group waited, looking around. Ron approached carrying a plastic bag.

“Hey you made it. Did you like the show?” his broad grin lighting up his face, Sally stood close to him.

“It was absolutely awesome Ron, you were amazing.” Ron brushed aside the compliment modestly and explained;

“To be honest we staged the tent and the helicopter, I mean I would have liked to have broken that record but I thought if it goes wrong why not make it look spectacular!” Sally began to voice the question at the forefront of all their minds;

“Just who are y...” but Ron interrupted her.

“Come on, I said I would take you up to my house. We can talk there” and he lead them from the green and greeted everyone he met by name. He suddenly made a run for it and signalled to a passing bus. They all got on. Ron handed them all a can of lager from the carrier bag. They drank and joked as the bus drove away.

They got off the bus and Ron lead them up a road going up hill. They reached some massive iron gates behind which was a huge mansion. Ron buzzed at the

intercom and the gates slowly opened. The group looked at each other questioningly. Ron marched up to the house and up the large steps where he turned and said.

“Welcome to my home.” They all walked into the massive hall and followed Ron in through a door and down a huge long corridor. He stopped at a door and entered. It was a games room with a full snooker table, a pool table, and several classic arcade machines lining the walls. There was a huge fridge from which Ron offered his friends another beer. Howard finally asked the question;

“Is this your family home?” the others listened attentively for the many explanations they needed and Ron obliged.

“Nah! I had it built. I’m not like you lot I wasn’t born into money. We had a shitty life as kids on an estate, rough it were. I made my cash quickly and lots of it. An Internet start up company. Well several actually. The trick you see is to pull out just before going bust. You make millions then move on start afresh do it all again. I’m worth billions now. I had this place built. Just me living here”

“What do you have no staff? Servants and butlers?” Paul quizzed

“No, well there is just old frank the grounds man; he basically looks after the place while I’m not here... I’m an artist now, I sell art via the internet. Hey I’ll show you some of my work if you want” Sally looked excited.

“Ooh that would be fab! Wouldn’t it guys?” and the others were in a state of bemusement by now and simply nodded.

Ron led them from the room and took them on a tour of the house showing them some of his work. The sculptures and images were mainly bleak and dark portraying poverty and depravation. He described them to the group who looked on sympathetically as he told them of his days poor and hungry, homeless and addicted to drugs, fighting for survival on the mean streets of the city. By now the group are caught in the mood created by Ron and were feeling ashamed of their ignorant affluence. Ron sensed this and asked if they would like to see his best work. They readily agreed. He led them down yet another corridor and up steps and into a dark room. He told them to sit on the rows of chairs. Sally looked around like a child.

“Oh, theatre? Are we going to see a play?” Ron paid her little heed as he ran his fingers over a small control panel.

“No!” then a screen displayed a film. It depicted a man being made to dance forcefully happily the stop the torture of his wife. And Ron explained as they watched there faces screwed in distaste.

“This represents the delusions of happiness suffered by the impoverished masses to keep from suffering” then another short film is shown. A woman is forced to the point of desperation that she begs to be relieved of her life by being shot. This state was achieved by the depravation of her senses. Ron again explained his face full of glee as the groups features expressed their growing disgust.

“This is a representation of the blind suffocating way in which the poor embrace death in their everyday

lives with their pollution, drinking and smoking and unhealthy eating.”

“Ron this is...” Sally began to protest but Ron ignorantly cut her off.

“And now for my latest and greatest work...” his eyes staring forward wildly. He pressed a button on the control panel and the screen rolled up revealing an illuminated stage with a wax man, he was naked but for a tie and expensive leather shoes. Its face showed agony and the group gasped in excited horror as they see weights suspended from his body on thin wire attached to fishing hooks. The weights pulled the hooks tearing his flesh. Ron explained his work.

“This piece represents the feeling of the burden of debt that the poor feel all the time. Tearing at him.” Then the stage slowly revolved, there was a figure lay on a table. A large glass box encased her head. It was naked and a drip took blood from her arm. The drip was attached to a canister of oxygen and two other tanks.

“This piece represents the way in which society feeds from the poor offering in exchange the very things they need to survive. Oxygen in the canister, water in the tank and there is also the option of the nitrous oxide, you know laughing gas that will relieve her suffering, in exchange for blood of course.” Sally finally protested shrieking;

“This isn’t art. It’s grotesque”

“I can feel their suffering. This is a stark illustration of the oppression of the poor. I think it is amazing.” Howard more thoughtfully offered.

“As sculptures they are graphic and their message is strong yet I feel there’s something missing.” Gill more

constructively added. Then for the first time since they started this private viewing Ron turned to Gill and looked her in the eyes.

“Do you see it? You see the missing element don’t you? No lump of wax and clay and plastic could ever truly convey the horror, the agony, the torment and the despair...” Paul followed his train of thought to the horrifically obvious conclusion.

“You don’t mean use real people do you?”

“Exactly!” Ron and Gill both said together, again sally protested.

“No that would be torture, inhumane it wouldn’t be possible, where would you find volunteers for such a thing?” at that point Ron’s countenance altered as he stood up and looking sinister he paused scanning the faces of the four young rich kids. Then he smiled a broad grin...

“That’s where you come in.” All four of them let out a yelp and jumped from their chairs rubbing their legs and looking down they all saw hypodermic needles dripping with fluid, they started to protest but they were unconscious before they hit the floor.

Sally began to gain consciousness. The sound of chattering drifted to her ears from some distant place. Then her eyes filled blood red as a bright light shone through her closed lids. She tried to open her eyes now awake and aware of the chattering voices around her. She forced open her lids against the bright light and squinted, feeling resistance against her attempts to move, she was lying down with her arms and legs strapped. She was able to move her head and look down at her naked body and a drip in her arm. A glass box surrounding her head.

Slowly she became aware that she couldn't breath. She squeezed her hand, a rush of oxygen, a warm sensation in her arm.

She moved her head sideways and saw next to her Paul and Howard; Weights hanging from their naked bodies tearing their skin, their screams of agony mix with screams of delight from a macabre collection of beings tier upon tier in the chairs watching the show. They all began to simmer down and looked at the stage as a piercing maniacal laughter drowned out their chatter. Sally, her face contorted in laughter, the blood pumping down the tube from her arm. Her body paling visibly, the needle on the nitrous oxide canister moving.

## Burglary

It is a summer evening and the daylight is fading with a dazzling display of warm colours. On the quiet suburban street, the orange streetlights are beginning to flick on. Behind the neatly cut rows of privets that line the litterless pavements something in the darkness lurks.

To the rear of the large semi detached house, the pride of the up and coming residents and a symbol of their affluence, something silently creeps.

The neatly cut lawn and flowering borders, in the darkness of the large laurel and chrysanthemum shrubs to the rear, leaves quiver and shake slightly as something sinister slinks.

From the shadows a dark crouched figure emerges, moving stealthily across the edge of the lawn towards the house.

Joe is clever; he knows this as he thinks about how he had tricked the occupants of the silent, empty house. The previous week Joe had dressed smartly and called at the house expected, as a prospective buyer and spoke to the young couple that was selling it; he had charmed them into giving him details of when they were actually moving out. He knows that tonight the house is unoccupied but full of neatly packed possessions for him to take as he wishes.

There is a quiet tinkling of glass and Joe disappears through the French windows. The beam of his torch shoots out illuminating the far wall to where he saw a Welsh dresser; but to Joes puzzlement there is only

more wall! The beam quickly skips around the room and reveals it to be empty.

“What the...? Where is everything?” Joe goes into the living room and again all is empty so with growing annoyance he clambers up the stairs the sound of his breathing loud. All of the rooms have been cleared with just a few items like tables and empty boxes scattered around.

“Damn it! They must have moved out earlier than they planned!” he curses and leaves less quietly.

Joe walks hurriedly down the street mumbling irately. On the corner beneath a street lamp and stops to light a cigarette deciding what to do next. The houses along the suburban street all have lights on. All but one. He watches that house for a few seconds before deciding to move a little closer. The house is big and mostly hidden in the shadows of large trees and over grown privets. Slowly he walks up the garden path flanked by unkempt lawns with weed tangled borders. Slipping down the side of the house and round to the back door he looks in all the windows and seeing no activity he decides it is worth the risk.

“Tonight might not be wasted after all!” he thinks to himself and with a tinkle of glass he is in the kitchen the beam of the torch flitting around skilfully This house is old and the contents look like they have been here since the house was built. There is however signs that the place is presently occupied, food in cupboards and unwashed dishes. He walks through the wide hall to the living room and looking at the old television he tuts, beginning to realise that he has made a mistake

“There is nothing here worth nicking” The upstairs rooms a similarly old, dusty and unclean. Disappointed again he goes to leave when in the hallway he passes a tall narrow door which goes under the stairs and possibly to a cellar. Standing with a sudden inexplicable feeling of trepidation he slowly tries the cold handle and it opens with a loud click.

Joe very cautiously shines the beam of the torch down the stairs then begins his descent filled with a fear he cannot explain and rarely has; it would be a definite handicap in his profession. At the bottom is another old door similar to the first, Joe’s heart begins to race as he tries the handle. He gulps hard.

“I bet there’s nothing in here anyway. I’m going!” he whispers nervously and he turns to walk back up the stairs but stops.

“What’s there to be afraid of? Its probably full of old antiques. I need the cash. Sod it, here goes!” and filled with resolution he turns the handle and pushes the door which creaks softly as it swings open. The light of the torch illuminates the cold damp bricks of the cellar wall with a large tea chest and some boxes stacked against it. He slowly enters the room. There is a smell that is foul and flies buzz loudly.

“Phwooar it stinks. Must be the damp.” The door begins to creek shut slowly as he walks further in toward the boxes. A scratching to the right and he quickly shines the torch in the direction. A rat scurries from the light. Moving the beam along the wall following the rat, all else in complete darkness, the circle of light is suddenly filled with a vision of horror; a pale face stares blankly back at him with eyes and mouth wide open. The skin

white and shrivelled hangs from the dead face. Maggots emerge from its mouth and ears, flies crawl on its cold flesh. The corpse is slumped against the wall, a large iron fire poker protruding from his chest. Blood, black and congealed where it has soaked into the shirt. Joe drops the torch with a clatter and it goes out enveloping him in complete darkness, the horrific face clear in his mind. Scrambling for the fallen light he frantically feels for the on button. Again the body is illuminated in sharp contrast with deep shadows in the hollows of its sunken skin. Another body is lay over it, an old woman, her face contorted in terror her mouth open mid scream, a huge gash in the side of her head. Joe's heart is racing as he darts to the door pulling it open, and scrambling up the stone steps, he trips and bangs his head with a painful jolt. With a cry of pain and fear he frantically climbs to the top and runs out of the back door breathing heavily.

Joe runs and runs and runs. When he is a good distance from the house he stops and doubles over panting.

“Jesus Christ! (Gasping) What the hell? (Panting) those people have been murdered. (Gasp) I’m going to the police!” and he sets off running again.

“All right Joe you just wait there and I’ll get an officer to come through, you can tell him what you told me OK?” In the police station the desk sergeant turns his back on Joe as he calls into the back office for an officer to come and take his statement. Turning back Joe is gone.

“Oh where has he gone now? Joe!” he shouts at the closed door and looks for a sign of movement of the fleeing Joe in the darkness beyond. Just then another

officer walks through the door which creaks and strains loudly as it is pushed.

“Did you see Joe Reilly pass you on the way in?” he asks the entering officer.

“Joe Reilly? What was he doing here? You got him in for burglary again?” smiles the large constable, PC Hattle.

“No, he was in here reporting a murder, but before I could get any more detail he was off in a flash just a second ago. You must have passed him”

“Well I don’t suppose this is his favourite place in the world, the sly old bloke, I didn’t see him pass me!” and they both look out of the window again in silence broken abruptly by the clunk as the creaking door finally shuts.

“What did he say? A murder?” The constable asks eyeing the desk sergeant seriously

“Yes, he gave me an address. I had better send a patrol car round to check it out!”

A police patrol panda is parked on the street outside the house and voices can be heard from beyond the hedges in the garden. Torch beams flick and dances through the trees as officers’ search for clues.

In the hallway it is dark and lights can be seen moving from the open doorway leading to the cellar. Calls and shouts of the police officers mingled with radios crackling. Yellow tape stretched across the doorway warning the casual observer not to cross the line.

The following day the sun lights the room through the high windows illuminating in sparkling streaks the dust that hangs in the air. It is a police interview room and the desk sergeant is sitting opposite two other officers. The first officer speaking slowly;

“...So that, in your own words, is what happened yesterday 22nd June? Joe Reilly was here in this station, and tipped you off about a murder and told you about the bodies in the cellar?” The desk sergeant nods and the man continues. “...But he left before you were able to take a statement or otherwise gain official acknowledgement of the allegations?” The desk Sergeant nods again. Then a third officer enters the room and whispers something to the seated detective. The desk sergeant thinks he can hear something about security camera footage. Then slowly the first officer turns back to the desk sergeant, he rubs his face with large hands and sighs.

“Look Bob, let me explain then you can understand where we’re coming from. I don’t want this to turn into an official investigation! You said Joe Reilly came into the station and reported a murder, the CCTV footage shows nothing, we’ve checked and double checked Bob, it’s just you at the desk before PC Hattle comes in. Yesterday you requested that a panda check out a report made by a known thief. They checked it out and the reports came back of the two bodies found just as you had described. According to the pathologist they had been dead for approximately ten days, murdered.” He leans onto his elbows bringing his face closer to the desk sergeants and looking him directly in the eyes “They also found a third body Bob, been dead for just a few hours.

This body was on the stairs leading to the cellar. It was Joe Reilly. He died when scrambling to get out, hit his head on the concrete steps. So do you see Bob? Joe couldn't have reported this last night!"

## I Know

From the overcast sky diffused light filters down onto the streets of the town where the roads are jammed with cars, most of which carry their single frustrated occupants the mile or two to their offices. People pass over the bridge; the usual morning rush of workers crowding the streets. Halfway across the bridge the walkway is clear in a small semi-circle as the masses instinctively avoid passing too close to a vagrant sitting on the paving slabs, a dirty sleeping bag, his home, wrapped about his legs.

He gazes at the legs of those passing all the time mumbling his hatred for their intrusion into his repose. He looks into the faces of those that approach and sees their eyes turned away as if he is invisible. He knows the look of people deliberately not looking; he has seen it in all the 'rat race members' he encounters. He knows the look but he has never really got used to it, and at times his tolerance diminishes and he cannot quell the outbursts. He lashes out at these uncaring people with shouted abuse and the waving of fists, mirrored by the motorists who vent their anger at each other. The people simply give him a wider berth in response.

Of the people who pass not all choose to ignore. Some cast a sympathetic glance and prey to their gods to help him as they pass. Some give him a look of contempt and tell themselves they are better than this piece of dirt as they pass. Some look at the man and wonder how he could have got in this position and if he chose it, they count their blessings that they are better off and rerun

their lives in their minds searching for a moment that could have lead to them being in that position, and they pass. Some tighten the grip on their bags and check their mobile gadgets. Some finger the change in their pockets picturing themselves throwing him a pound or giving it to him in his dirty hand as they pass and the change feels a little heavier in their pockets when they pass. None actually do anything beyond swerving to avoid him without looking as if they are swerving to avoid him.

This performance on the bridge goes on day after day. The cast is different but the dance is always the same. It is accepted, it is expected which is why when a man stops and faces the vagrant the flow is momentarily disrupted. Only momentarily, but it is felt, like a shockwave through the crowd. ‘What’s he doing, does he know the man and is he a vagrant too? He doesn’t look like one, urrh! Don’t touch him!’ That thought resounds spontaneously through many of the passer-bys minds as the man puts his hand around the vagrant’s neck and through his tangled hair and pulls him to him in an affectionate embrace.

Dave knows what the people think but he also knows what Damien, the vagrant thinks. He knows why he is here, how he came to be here and he whispers in his ear the only words that could possibly help him. Damien weeps as he feels the warmth of Dave’s body; something he has not felt for so long, he weeps as he hears the words softly spoken, the words that he has so longed to hear. He wipes the tears from his eyes and for the first time in a long time the homeless, helpless man walks tall and with a purpose. He walks through the parting crowd

and Dave watches him go before walking in the opposite direction.

Dave is sitting in a pub. It is quiz night and there is quite a crowd gathered to pit their wits against the other teams to win the prize money of two hundred and fifty pounds. He is at a table of people he knows well telling them about a brick in the wall.

“Marcus O’Brien laid the brick as he had laid all of the internal brick up to here. When he got to this brick he trapped his finger and gave a shout attracting the attention of his foreman who came to see what the fuss was...” the people around this table are not listening to him, their attention is fixed on the quiz master who now asks the next question:

“This is a ‘films’ question: who directed the 1982 film the Empire Strikes Back?” there are whispers among the people on Dave’s table of ‘George Lucas’ as they scribble into their answer sheets, Dave continues seemingly unaware of the question.

“The foreman told Marcus to take a break and clean up his finger as it was bleeding; Irvin Kershner directed the Empire Strikes Back. Which left his labourer alone for a few minutes. His labourer was fed up with carting buckets around and wanted a bit of the action so he laid these next few bricks. Do you see how these three are not quite in line?” the only response from the people at the table is to say it is incorrect and George Lucas directed all of the Star Wars films. Satisfied they are right they listen attentively now for the next question, all the while Dave rambles on about the bricks laid here.

“This is a tough one, its science, ok here it is: what is the atomic weight of uranium?” all the people on Dave’s table sip their drinks and scratch their heads as Dave continues his story:

“...When Marcus got back he saw what the labourer, 238.029, had done. Now you would have thought he would not be pleased by apparent insolence...”

“I reckon about 5 ounces” suggests old Bill.

“No it’s not that, they make bombs out of it and they’re quite heavy” put in Daphne.

“What did he say?” asks Frank pointing at Dave.

“...he then went on to be a master brick layer, 238.029 is the atomic weight of Uranium.”

“Did you get that down Frank 238.029?” the quiz master asks the next question:

“This is nature now.”

“Ah you should know this Bill; you spend enough time down that allotment of yours” Daphne quips.

And the quizmaster continues;

“By what name is...” A pause as he looks at the question with a shuffle of papers, Dave appears to have finished his story of the bricklayer and says:

“Tomato” and the others look at him puzzled as the quizmaster finishes the question.

“...Lycopersicon esculentum better known?” Bills looks at Dave in amazement.

“You’re right! How did you know that?”

“Have you looked at the papers?” Frank eyes Dave suspiciously.

“No Mr Dennison, I have not looked at the papers.” Dave’s expression or tone does not change.

Frank scribbles down the answer. The quiz master clears his throat for the next question.

“Music now, who recorded the 1970s hit God save the queen?”

“Ooh! That was one of them rocky bands, Black Zeppelin or Purple Sabbath” Daphne falters

“Go on, tell us what it is” Frank looks at Dave.

“The sex Pistols” Dave replies

“I beg your pardon” Daphne looks slightly offended.

“That was it I remember now” Bill wrote in the box.

Dave wants now not to be here so gets up to leave. Bill, Frank and Daphne object:

“Where are you going? You know all the answers, we’ll listen to your stories of the bricks all night if you help us win the competition mate” pleads bill.

“You will win! Goodbye Frank, Daphne and Bill.” and he is out of he door. Frank looks at Bill.

“He was a nice man, a bit strange but nice enough, where do you know him from?”

“Me? I thought you knew him, who is he? Daphne do you know?”

“Never seen him before in my life”

It is only 7.30 pm and it is still light outside. Dave knows the sun will set at 9.55 tonight. He walks along this road looking at all the people he knows greeting them by name and receiving some strange looks. He sees a couple arguing and knows they are Roger and Gill, Roger is angry because he thinks Gill is seeing someone else. Roger has a knife and Dave knows he is angry

enough to use it even if it was not his intension when deciding to carry it. Dave approaches the couple who are standing in a small grassy area surrounded by hedges and showcasing a monument surrounded by wooden benches. He approaches hearing Rogers raised voice just in time to catch the fist of Roger that was destined for Gill pretty tear stained face.

“Roger, stop. Gill has not been seeing Phil the butcher.” Roger and Gill both look at Dave astonished.

“Who the fuck are you?” Roger turns his shoulders square to Dave, anger now directed at him. Dave knows the anger was a release of long bottled up emotions. He knew Rogers father had been cruel to him he knew that Roger was calm and sometimes apparently emotionless but if pushed the bottled up aggression towards his father would emerge.

“Your father did love you you know, your mother drove him to do those things with her constant demands. Your father is sorry he hurt you. You should go and see him, he never rejected you, he left because he was ashamed of hitting you that Christmas morning, and he couldn’t live with it. He regrets it every waking minute. He is in now and so dearly wishes you to call. 12 Baker Avenue. Besides Phil is homosexual.” Roger and Gill look at Dave their jaws open. Dave leans a little closer to Gill and speaks softly.

“Tell him you love him, tell him you didn’t mean to walk away, and tell him to throw the knife away it can only lead to sorrow”

“What knife?”

“How did you know I had a knife?”

“What knife Roger? Have you got a knife?”

“In your right pocket. Throw it down the grid and go and see your father” with that Dave walks away knowing Roger will find his father and deal with those issues. Knowing that Gill will tell him she loves him.

“Who was that Roger? One of your mates”

“I have no idea who he was” Roger stares after the retreating figure of Dave, with tears in his eyes

Dave walks toward the church where he knows the evening mass is over. He greets the congregation by name as they leave. He sees old Archie hobbling on sticks and he knows his problem is minor. He knows Archie is reluctant to visit the doctor but the ailment is so easily cured he knows exactly where in his back the nerve is trapped and that it could be cured by applying exact pressure to the vertebrae in the lumber area of the lower back. He knows that Archie has lived like this for some years now and that some days he cannot even walk. All because of such a niggling little thing. Dave approaches Archie.

“Archie, throw away those sticks” Dave holds Archie at the waist and with the other elbow pushes into his back. Archie lets out such a squeal people run over thinking he is being attacked. A man goes for Dave to grab him from behind but Dave without looking catches the mans wrist before it grabs his shoulder.

“No Ron, I am not attacking Archie, now throw down your sticks” Archie had already dropped the sticks in the shock and the pain and Dave knew this. It was more of a metaphor. Archie arches his back holding on to it unsure. Then he swivels his hips around like Elvis. He walks slowly then faster in a circle until he is running.

“The pain has gone. It’s a bloody miracle” he does the sign of the cross in repentance for his swearing in the church yard.

“Who are you young man?” his old face lighting up like a schoolboys at Christmas.

“Why do you ask who I am?” Dave knows the answer to this question. It was because this man doesn’t know him. Neither did Roger or Gill or Daphne or Bill or Frank. Why do they not know who he is? The question hangs around Dave like a hungry dog. A man approaches, Dave knows he is a very religious man and he knows why he approaches. Dave feels more comfortable now being back on firmer ground.

“You have cured him it is a miracle!” the man drops to his knees. Dave knows why.

“No Daniel, I am not the messiah!” David is very matter of fact and the thing is being so matter of fact can some times, ironically have the opposite effect to that which is intended. To call this man whom he had never met by his name and calmly tell him he is not the very thing the man was about to utter had the effect of reinforcing his belief and not from correcting it. Dave knows this, he says it again.

“I am not the messiah!” he might as well have said hello my name is Jesus at this point. Dave knows he should go. He walks away. Daniel follows him.

“Who are you then?”

“Do you mean you do not know?” Dave knows he does not know but he knows that he must state the obvious to make the other understand what he means. This is odd to him and now he is entering the strange territory again of confusion. He knows that Daniel thinks

he is the messiah and he knows what he said reinforced this belief. This is Daniels problem not his, but he knows he has to manipulate his words in order to appease this mans passion for his Christ whom he sees in Dave.

“I know everything” is what Dave says. He knows Daniel desires proof to reinforce his belief and he knows he has to give the proof to make Daniel see the truth.

“Take this man here he is a shoe maker. a cobbler since childhood isn’t that right Mr Forbes? You love James bond. You are married to Sheila who is currently suffering from a bunion on her left foot.”

They go into a supermarket as they talk.

“This is Glenda, widowed four years ago, her husband suffered a tragic fate when he plummeted from a fourth story window after being caught in the act of making a beef dinner. Glenda was a strict vegetarian you see but she walked in and in panic he went to throw the offending joint from the balcony subsequently tripping on a potato, a tragic irony. You’re in here every weekend aren’t you looking for a replacement” Glenda cried on hearing this. she ran from the shop sobbing.

“Hello Roger. Why don’t you just admit how you feel about him, what’s it been now six years? You know he feels the same, here he comes now. Derek, Roger has something to say to you” and they leave the bemused pair and walk up the frozen food aisle. Daniel just follows watching in absolute amazement

“Ah reverend Philips. The peas are in here.”

“Oh thank you son” says the reverend. He reaches for the peas then pauses a second wondering how he knew.

“I know reverend, I just know” on they walk through the aisles Dave commenting on and to every other person creating every reaction from disbelief to offence.

Daniel speaks to Dave; “The more you do the more you confirm what I say, unless you are...”

“I am not him either. I know that you do not know me, I know that these people here don’t know me, why do you people not know me when I know you?”

“Perhaps god has not yet revealed himself to you”

“I am not the Christ; I am not the son of man. The son of man is here with you if you would just open your eyes and look. I am not it!”

“What do you mean the son of man is here? Please you have to tell me” Daniel clings in desperation to Dave’s sleeve. Dave knows he is desperate. Dave knows he is to be pitied though he does not feel it himself. He knows what he had to say to Daniel to appease him.

“What ever you believe about God, go on believing. It is true”

“I believe this is the second coming, you have come to free us, to judge us”

“No Daniel I haven’t” Dave looks over at a man rooting in the shelves for spaghetti, Dave knows this man, he is suddenly and deeply disturbed by the things he knows about this man; he knows he hates people, he sees images of maiming and murder surrounding him, dark images of an arrogant quest to over power the weak and vulnerable. he knows this man is called Allan, he know he doesn’t use that name, he knows Allan committed robbery only one hour before being here rooting for spaghetti and left an eighty year old lady seriously

injured in her flat not far from here. Dave knows Allan has no remorse for what he did, in fact he feels elation. The spaghetti is for a meal, it is his favourite and he is using the money from the pensioner. Dave knows Allan had committed these atrocious acts regularly and that he feels justified in doing so because the world has treated him badly. Dave knows the world has not treated him badly.

Dave knows all this and recoils from Allan. He knows all these facts, he can picture clearly the crimes, robbery, murder, rape, that Allan has done, he know that none of the other people in this shop have ever done anything like that, this make Allan different. What he doesn't know and fails to understand is why? Why has he done them and then walks around with all these people as if what he does is normal. The people in this shop pay him no particular attention. Why do the people allow this? Are they all the same, are they like Daniel, do they really not know.

Dave knows they don't know he just doesn't know why. He is confused. This means that he is different, not them, he is wrong, not them, that is why Daniel reveres him so much, that is why he gets such reactions. Dave's head spins, something is very wrong, he can tell every person here everything about themselves, he knows details of all the products on the shelves he knows everything. He knows it is wrong, he always has. 'What does that mean? I don't know! I do not remember anything that has gone before, have I always been this way? I don't know! Where did I come from, where am I going? I don't know. I have no memory of events or people. I just KNOW!'

“Are you alright Dave?” Dave knows Daniel is concerned. He tries to focus. Allan finds his spaghetti and moves along the shelf closer to where they are stood in search of pasta sauce. Daniel is waiting for an answer. Dave knows what to do to answer Daniel; he knows what to do to save people from Allen.

“Would your messiah do this?” he clenches his fist and swings it round to where he knows Allan’s head is. With a cry of pain Allan falls into the shelf scattering jars of tomato and basil sauce all over the polished tiled floor of the supermarket. Dave holds Allan by the neck to stop him getting up and looks the writhing man in the eye as images spin in his mind of the murders and rapes that this evil man has committed. Daniel shouts for Dave to stop, people watch afraid and concerned, Dave feels anger and the need to punish this man; he brings a knee into the side of his head then stands up stamping on his head several times until he feels the arms of a security guard pull him away. Allan whimpers in pain holding his head, blood trickles from his nose and ears and Dave knows he will not die but wants him to.

“I know you Allan, DIE!, and I know you peter leave me alone” Dave shoves off the security guard called Peter, his head filled the images of agony and pain and he wants them gone, if Allen dies as he deserves to then the images will die too. He jumps with both feet onto Allen’s head but Allen rolls instinctively and Dave’s feet miss, Peter grabs and holds Dave firmly.

Sirens outside and Dave knows the police will take him. Hang on... He is wrong, there is someone else, a man in a brown suit, he is not police, and all of a sudden without warning Dave knows everything. he hangs his

head and stops struggling. He knows now what he is and he knows this man will take him away.

The man in a brown suit approaches with police and other suited men just behind, he speaks to the police men.

“Take this man away now, and await my instructions” the police man nods and picks Allen up from the floor cuffing him and marching him away. The man in the suit motions to the other men dressed similarly.

“Get these people out of here for god sake and find out what they know. The usual clean up procedures hey lads.” the men round up all the bystanders including Daniel and they take them away. The man then turns to Dave as Dave knows he will and says “Dave, whatever you know about that tell me immediately, before it goes” Dave knows the man in the suit. He is called John as are all the men in similar suits. He tells him all the details he knows of Allen’s crimes while John listens and makes detailed notes.

“I know its only small fry stuff but while you know I might as well inform to police. Get another piece of shit of the streets. Come on Dave” they walk slowly out of the supermarket and into a plain van.

“I lost you back there Dave and I’m sorry about that, I heard over the police radio that you might be here. Anyway you’re back now and I’m glad to see you mate”

“Where have I been John?”

“It doesn’t matter, you’re here now. We will go back to the institute today and get you checked out. The MOD wants us to go to Washington tomorrow, they need some information”

Dave gazes out of the window as they drive down the road and he utters the words his lifelong partner at agency John is so familiar with;

“I know!”

## Is Billy Alright?

*The time is four thirty two on the twentieth of January 19XX. Interview commencing with Mr ~~XXXXXX~~, also present are WPC Williams and Detective Inspector Harris. OK Mr ~~XXXXXX~~ can you describe to me in your own words and in as much detail as you can recall the events of 24th December 19XX.*

Well let me think, it was winter ...

*Loud and clear for the tape Mr ~~XXXXXX~~*

I said it was winter, well obviously its bloody Christmas, the weather was bitter that day and we welcomed the warm blast under the door of the shopping centre. We were in a rush so we couldn't stay as long as we sometimes did. Then we were walking fast through the shopping arcade, me that is with my son, Billy was only three... oh Billy (sob sob) have you bastards found him yet. Why am I here now? Why do I keep waking up in your filthy cells?

*Just carry on Mr ~~XXXXXX~~*

Alright, alright. Well let's see, he wore a green coat like the old snorkels we had in school, an action man ice world coat or something like that, you know with a fur trim round the hood, which he was wearing up since

we just came in from the cold. The place was crowded in the run up to Christmas; the frantic population obeying the commercial giants demands to give them money in return for items of limited life span and use. Anyway, so there we were pushing through these hordes to try to reach the toy shop, on the other side of the walkway,, before it closed when I felt Bills hand slip from mine and to my horror he was swept away in the crowd. It was like an instant that he was gone. I charged through the people ignoring the cries of objection and reached the end of the walkway that opened into an open eating area, and here the crowd thinned significantly. I was sweating and panicking,

‘What if I can’t find him? Oh shit how could you do this? Who’s got him? I’ll kill you? He’ll be scared to death, why can’t I hear him cry? What will his mother say? Will the police find him? Oh Jesus where are you? Where are you son?’ And on this went in my mind frantic with worry and fear and self loathing and this hatred for all the shoppers because they didn’t care what was happening to me and my boy. All this was within seconds, maybe five or six from when his hand first slipped from mine. Then across the food hall I saw him skipping along happily with his green action man coat. Relief filled me as I ran to him, and then that turned into anger with myself for slipping up like this and what could have happened. That was quickly replaced with frustration because the shop will be shut I just thought ‘I’ll never get that present in time now!’

“Come on lad and be more careful!” I grabbed his hand and made for the shop.

“Oh no! The shutters are coming down, run come on” and through the heaving crowds we pushed our way, me not letting go of his hand, gripping tightly; I nearly dragged him. The elation at having not lost him was lost for the moment in the need to get to this shop. For weeks my wife had been asking; ‘have you got the robot yet for Robs Christmas present?’ and I had told her it was all sorted out, no problem. That is until Christmas Eve and here I was racing to beat the shutter to buy this damned robot, why didn’t I do it earlier?

Why are we going through all this again, you’ve heard all this the first time?

*Please Mr ~~XXXXXX~~ this is important that we clarify and record everything. Please continue.*

Ok, well the shutter is coming down and I’m dragging Billy but then there is this scream so loud and piercing everyone’s looking, I had to turn my head for a second to see. Was someone being robbed or some thing, Bill was crying and trying to pull away from my hand. ‘Stop it Bill’ the screamer looked straight at me her face filled with horror and the crowds followed her gaze. ‘What the...’ I looked behind and around me, ‘what are they looking at? Oh the shutter...’ so off I dragged Bill again fast ignoring the goings on of these crazy shoppers. I shouted to the man operating the shutter control;

“Here mate I just need one thing” But he just stared at me with a look of disbelief. I can see why now! Then there was lots of shouting as security men, speaking into these chest worn communication devices. They were running in our direction, the people looking on letting

them pass. ‘Oh no the shop I bet its being robbed, bloody shop lifters.’

“Come on Bill we’ll have to try somewhere else, are you alright we’ll go to MacDonald’s on the way home” looking down at the crying wriggling form I pushed back his hood and froze in horror. The dark mop and scrunched features were not of my son.

I had no time to take in the implications of this before the security guard slammed into me wrenching the boy from my grasp and pressing my face into the shop window, shoving my hand up my back so that it hurt. There were angry cries of ‘child snatcher, peado and kill him’ as the security struggled to control the crowd. The mother hugged her child hard her face red with tears. The security held me fast talking quickly to me and to others and in their walkie talkie things but all this was going on elsewhere as I retreated into some dark place trying to take this in what was going on. Then the horror of it struck me like a train.

“Where’s Bill?” I screamed loud and my face was slammed hard into the glass. ‘Where is he? Where is he?’ Wailing sirens outside and a scurry of people. The security grabbed me and marched me through the walkway ignoring my words ‘where’s Bill’

Then I saw him on the lower level, scared, crying, running away from an old lady, scruffy grey hair and walking kind of funny, like a rag doll or something, I thought she was trying to help him, he was panicking and I had to get to him to protect him.

“Let me go! My son is down there” I shouted but they just held me and pushed me to the door, I struggled and fought but they fought harder fuelled by the emotions

whipped up in the crowd hungry for my execution. God! To think if you would have just listened to me we wouldn't be here now I fucking hate you the lot of you.

*All right Mr ~~XXXXXX~~ please just stick to the facts. Do you want a cup of tea or something? Do you want a break? No? Ok carry on and calm down*

“Get off me you fuckers, Bill!” I screamed but you bunch of bastards took me and threw me into the back of this filthy police van out side. I couldn't move my hands and realised they were cuffed. I could just see Bill running in the opposite direction away from the woman who was trying to help him, but it looked more like she was chasing him, with this zombie like shambolic shuffle. Then the van doors slammed. Why did she chase him?

With a screech of tyres and the loud siren the van sped off flinging me hard against the side. I struggled to get up and sit on the wooden bench my mind racing, this has all happened so fast and my world had changed into a nightmare. My son was alone in the crowds at the shopping centre and the police had me in a van accused of snatching a child. ‘But I did snatch a child’ the van cornered and I hit the doors with a bang. ‘I thought it was Billy, oh my little Billy’.

“Let me out of here you bastards you can't do this to me I have to get my son. Just stop the fucking van and listen to me” I was screaming but you wouldn't answer. All I remember is the bloody siren wailing as we went down the street. Oh yes, then the van stopped abruptly. I slid up the bench a splinter digging into my thigh. I

thought ‘Good they’re letting me out’ I stood and the van sped off again I fell heavily onto the sticky floor of the van.

“Arrgh! Let me out of here!” I shouted and struggled to get up in the moving van, and then I kicked at the doors at the back all the time trying to balance. I was thinking ‘Why are they doing this? Why won’t they just listen don’t they realise they are making a mistake this is a misunderstanding and they’re turning it into a crisis just because no one will listen to me. I’ve got to get out of here’ I kicked the doors and slammed my body against the doors and barged my head into the doors. I had to get out, every second was taking me further from my son every moment was torture, if I could just open these doors. I lunged again at them, but it must have been at the exact moment the van lurched in acceleration because I felt a crushing pain in my head and don’t remember anything after that.

I assume I must have knocked myself out and they found me when they got to the police station and just flung me in a cell. God, when I think back if I had just stayed calm and waited I might have reasoned with them at that point.

Anyway the next thing I remember is waking up in a cell, my head pounding. I had no idea how long I had been there or what time it was. Looking up at the high window it was dark, assuming that is that the window looked outside. The full details of the unbelievable events leading to this incarceration came back to me in an instant moment of horrific realisation. I was up and pounding on the door, not even noticing that my now cut and bruised wrists were no longer cuffed. I demanded to

speak to someone I screamed out to whoever could here me.

“Let me out I need to talk to someone.” BANG! BANG! BANG! On the iron door but the only reply came from what I assumed was the adjacent cell telling me to shut up. After a while doing this with no results I broke down from frustration and exhaustion sobbing in the corner of this cold, whitewashed brick cell I had so inhumanely been abandoned in. That is about it.

*OK Mr ~~XXXXXX~~ your doing fine, now can you describe in your own words the events leading up to and including last night.*

I can't remember, let me think, what happened after waking up in the cell. Ermm well the next day, Christmas my wife showed up and the police finally listened to me; that's it, you started an investigation, examined the CCTV from the shopping centre and took witness statements, you acknowledged that I had made a mistake. They tried to identify the woman that Billy was with they asked me everything and spoke people. I did feel relieved that the police were doing something and angry that they didn't listen in the first place, but also angry at myself for allowing this to happen.

Anyway a few days passed and we heard nothing, a few weeks passed and we heard nothing. Me and my wife argued and fought, Ben, that's our other child was crying all the time. We spilt up in the end, I remember feeling like killing myself but couldn't not till Billy was found. You can't imagine how desperate I felt wandering

the streets in the rain unable to comfort my family, they hated me. They still do I bet.

Last night, let me think, I don't remember last night much, I had been drinking I remember that, drinking quite a lot, it was raining, I was on the bridge and... that's it I looked down and saw the woman, the old woman that looks like a witch the same one from the shopping centre the one who took Billy. She was walking along the canal I was sure it was her the same scruffy hair, the same shambolic walk.

What did I do? Oh God remember... I followed her, yes that's it, I followed her to the house up on Moorcroft hill. That dirty looking place. I looked in the window, the light was on, she sat down on a chair rocking back and forth, she was speaking to someone sat in the chair facing away from me, she was talking I just remember the back of the chair, who was it... I cut my hand on the glass. Why did I cut my hand? Oh fuck I remember now. I smashed the window, I knocked her down, she hit me with that bloody brass poker right here on the head, I was dazed, she was strong and we fought... Oh my god! It was Billy in that chair, strapped in! Is Billy alright?

*Mr ~~XXXXXX~~ I am arresting you on suspicion of the murder of Mrs ~~XXXXXX~~ of Moorcroft hill farm, ~~XXXXXX~~, ~~XXXXXX~~. England. You do not have to say anything but ...*

IS BILLY ALRIGHT?

## Kerry

Kerry looks into the mirror, frowning with concentration then straightening the face to get rid of the frown wrinkles, carefully putting on the eyeliner, not too much, just a hint near the edges, Kerry's no tart. Applying the foundation covering all the blemishes and imperfections, matt this time because of that photo in the Sun supplement with the cameras flash glow bouncing back off the cheeks. What to wear? That's the next question, to make that good first impression and not to end up in the 'what not to wear and definitely how not to wear it' section of the News of the World 'who's who' pull out. Some are too tight, some are too baggy or the colours not right, need to loose a few pounds? Need to have surgery. Not yet. Finds one eventually that matches the eye colour.

Getting ready for the big film premier, the stars arriving at 7pm sharp with celebrity guests and press going in about half an hour later. 'Looking good', Kerry thinks catching a reflection in the full length mirror on the way out and locking the door of the swanky new apartment in the swanky new building on the quays. Leaving through the foyer door where watchman Wayne says from his desk

"Have a good evening Mr Kelly sir, I hope you get the big one tonight"

"Thank you Wayne, how's the leg?"

"It's OK now Mr. Kelly" Wayne is the only man he knows that uses Kerry's surname. Mr Kerry Kelly,

maybe his parents had a sense of humour when they named him. On the canal path going towards the colourful lights of the city Kerry sees a groups of lads, so he waves and smiles. His mobile rings with Lady Gaga's Poker Face drowning out the comment from one of the boys

“Who that batty boy wavin at us man?” Kerry answers the phone (after listening to the whole chorus of the song) in a voice so loud everyone nearby turns to see.

“Hello, ahh Richie how are you...” They turn back to there own business muttering comments, mainly ‘tit’ “... you know I can't cut the Lady short... yes...on my way now...about fifteen minutes...purple...is she?... no!...no?...nine stone at least ... it was her that mixed up metro with retro ... try for the interview with Clooney? Of course... alright see you in a bit ... toodle-oo ...” He reaches the high street, all full of late shoppers buzzing about. Kerry smiles aware of glances, wanting the attention, the approval and the love. He's a local celebrity in this town but he wants more. He want to be an A-lister known globally. But for now he's content. A crowd gathered in front of the theatre, big black cars drop TV stars onto the carpet of red. Camera flashes and sparkly dresses, wide smiles with white teeth, not a hair out of place round their perfect faces. This is where Kerry wants to be. This is where Kerry belongs. Swerving the crowd heading for the side door his entrance is blocked by seventeen stone of smartly dressed muscle.

“Press” says Kerry trying to brush aside the man

“Show me your pass sir” Kerry is taken aback. ‘hmmm, he must be new in town’ and flashes the pass

identifying his 'fashion editor' status for the local advertiser.

"Sorry sir, only nationals tonight. No locals"

"What? I was told..."

"Only nationals tonight sir, now can you please step aside?" this polite request accompanied by a very firm hand pushing Kerry quite roughly to one side allowing two other men to pass through after showing their press passes. Kerry glimpses the people inside, laughing and drinking mainly, just for a second before the door closes and the doorman takes up his grim guardsman's position, leaving Kerry alone with the general hubbub of the ordinary people waiting behind the barriers for the next star to arrive. The cheering swells, Kerry turns, a car stops, the door opens and out steps;

"George Clooney!" Kerry squeals and runs to the crowd and through the crowd throwing out of the way an old woman with an ER tee-shirt to reach the metal barrier to see his idol.

"Mr Clooney sir, Mr Clooney sir" he's looking over, he's coming over

"Hi" he's reaching out to shake Kerry's hand which Kerry grasps and clings to tightly.

"Mr. Clooney sir, could you give me a few words for the fashion column of the..."

"I can't, I'm sorry, I gotta keep moving, you enjoy the movie and have a nice evening" George tries to free his hand a photographer steps up and points the camera, Kerry doesn't let go of Georges hand not till the picture is taken. BANG! The right hook of the old lady in the ER tee-shirt, with a lightening storm of flashes all cameras focus in on the commotion as Kerry goes down dazed

still clasped to Georges hand pulling him half over the barrier before George can tear it away. The woman stands on Kerry, wicked heels digging in to reach over and kiss George full on the lips, he pulls away heading for the entrance to screams of

“I love you George!”

Back in the swanky apartment next day, Kerry holds ice to his swollen eye looking at papers spread out on the table as the phone rings.

“Hello?... Yes I’m looking at them now, beautiful isn’t it?... front page of three of them, me George and that crazy old lady... yeah it could have been better but I’m on the FRONT PAGE! Richie, you can’t buy that.”

## The legend of the Black Fox

The island of Clantrellis lies somewhere off the western coast of Scotland. The summers are harsh and the winters cruel. Inhabited chiefly by fishermen and farmers, the islands best known export is the large rare chickens, revered in restaurants across the mainland for their succulence and flavour. Jake Farnsworth owns the largest of the poultry farms and sitting in the pub the Black Fox one evening he is listening to his friend Patrick telling them about his son's illness.

"We'll take him to the mainland tomorrow; have the Doc take a look at him." Pat says

"What's wrong with him" Peter asks taking a loud slurp of his bitter.

"He woke crying this morning; there was blood in his cot and he had these strange little pock marks on his body. Jenny is frantic, but there's no ferry until tomorrow morning."

"I hope he's alright Pat" says Peter wiping the beer froth from his beard. Patrick nods and smiles then looking over at Jake he asks:

"Why are you lookin' so down in the mouth Jake?" Jake looks over his glass at the others.

"Chickens Pat. I went out in the yard this morning and there was blood and feathers everywhere, a fox got in by the looks of it, I fixed the fence up good but the little bleeder got away with three of my finest laying hens, just imported from central Europe, cost me a pretty penny too. I say it's a fox but there was black fur in the fence where it squeezed itself through, maybe a dog." Just then

an old man with wild hair and wide eyes sat nearby stirs. His name is Ged and he leans across saying in a loud gravely voice.

“Black fox? Chickens? Tell me young sir did the fox eat the chickens?” Jake looks at him a little surprised.

“It’s funny you should say Ged, there was a right bloody mess there, feathers everywhere like the girls had put up a feisty fight, and two of the bodies lay there, headless, the other dead with her giblets trailing. The dog must’ve been scared off or something cos he didn’t eat them” the old man looks thoughtful as if remembering something then says mysteriously.

“Vulpine Gallinaceous decapitation” he looks up at the others then says “That means when foxes bite off chickens heads. This brings to mind the story of the greedy black fox that terrorises these parts from time to time. In fact it’s where this fine establishment gets its name” he says raising his glass towards the barman who is standing at the pump listening “I was a boy when I heard my father talking about the chickens losing their heads, they say the fox was searching for the best chicken and wouldn’t eat the others, he was saving himself for the prize. They said that if not happy with chickens that the fox moved on to attack children, babies found dead in their cribs.” Jake and Peter exchange glances and look at Patrick. Peter protests

“Alright Ged that enough with the old stories, are you trying to scare us all” but the old man still lost in thought continues to talk.

“What was it they said? There was a rhyme or riddle that went with the legend. On two legs it walks, drinks blood after dark, from cribs babies cry, from

woods howling barks. The shadow approaches, heads lost in the fight, if black fox can't stop gorging, people die in the night"

His loud voice demands the attention of all in the pub and when he finishes the silence is total. Jake laughs, not a big laugh but quiet and strained, enough to break the spell.

"Just wives tales Ged. A plain old fox had my chickens but it won't get in again, I've patched up the fence good n' proper. Anyway it's time I was going. Good night all" and he gets up to leave. The others finish what's left of their drinks and leave too bidding good night in the dark road outside as they go separate ways

"Good night Ged, you take care in the dark on the way home" says Jake as he walks in the opposite direction.

At first light next morning Patrick wakes Jenny and they go to check on the baby. The window is open letting in a gentle breeze.

"I shut this window last night Patrick, I'm sure of it" says Jenny. Looking into the cot they both gasp shocked to see more blood on the sheets. The baby is hardly moving, looking up with wide eyes his skin pale and drawn. More strange pock marks cover his body.

"He's getting worse jenny, you get him ready for the doctors, the ferry leaves in a couple of hours." Says Patrick gently stroking the baby's fine hair with his large rough hand.

Going into the yard as the sun peers over the horizon Jake is horror struck by what he sees, the fence

he fixed yesterday is torn down. Piled up and scattered around are the headless corpses of chickens. Looking around and finds a blood trail and paw prints going off towards the dark line of the distant woods. He follows across the field reaching the first of the dark tall trees and peering through the mist shrouded trunks he decides to go no further feeling a little spooked.

“I’m going to get you fox” he mutters turning back to go and fix fence and clean up the mess.

After the days work the men meet again as they always do in the Black Fox. Jake arrives as Patrick is telling the others about his baby getting worse and that Jenny has taken him to the mainland, she won’t be back until the morning.

“Hello Jake, any new on the fox? Has he had anymore of your prize chickens?” Jake looks over darkly from the bar.

“Three last night, I tell you I’m going to get that fox. How’s the boy” Jake asks paying the barman for the pint.

“I was just telling the others here that...” just then a young man, David from the old mill, bursts through the door breathless. Everyone stops talking and looks round at him and between panted breaths he gives the shocking news;

“Old Ged... he’s dead” the collective gasp is loud at the alarming news, David continues “... blood everywhere... it’s horrible”

Jake goes to the boy putting a hand on his shoulder.

“Come and sit down David” he says softly leading him over to the chair Patrick has pulled out “have a drink and tell us calmly what happened” he sits and with shaking hands he gulps the whisky given to him.

“I always see him standing at his gate every morning but he wasn’t there this morning. He didn’t go home last night by the looks of it. We, me and John McTravis that is, looked about his place and then along the road. I found him” he breaks down into sobbing and it is a few moments before he can continue, another whiskey is brought over “He was at the side of the quarry road, it was gruesome, he looked like he had been dead for a year, just a pale skeleton...” and he gulps the whiskey and sits head in hands.

“He must have been attacked last night on this way home, I told him to be careful” Jake says quietly “The black fox? My god he said it himself the black fox is greedy, it’s going after the men now my chickens aren’t feeding his appetite.” He looks about the table at the drawn faces staring back at him and a resolution builds in him. Banging his fist on the wood he says “We must kill it, we must hunt it down and get it before it gets us. I’ve lost a quarter of my stock to this damn fox. What if it goes after our kids?” Just then the barman speaks up.

“Little Rebecca Shelton, Gregg’s little girl, he was in here earlier and was telling me that Rebecca was out playing in the yard, she is only just walking God bless her, yesterday evening and Gregg and his missus say they went inside for a minute to get drinks when they heard her scream, they went out and she was there crying at the bottom of the garden and she has scratches on her face, the scratches were more like gashes, it has to be the fox”

“That settles it for me I’m going out right now to kill it. Who’s with me?” all the men there say they are with him. They quickly form a plan agreeing to go round the village to gather what support they can. Then to go up the old quarry road where Ged met him demise.

As they talk to the villagers a gruesome picture emerges, children all over the village have been attacked or taken ill, many in their cots at night. Pets have been found dead and many sightings of the mysterious shadowy fox are reported. As orange orb of the sun descends slowly to the tree lined horizon as many as forty strong men are gathered by Jakes poultry farm on the field. They are waiting for Peter and Jake to meet them, and soon see them jogging along the road.

“All the women and children are safe now in the church. Old father O’Rourke was happy to help. They’ll spend the night there or at least till we bring the head of this beast to them.” Peter explains

“And my remaining European chickens are there too, I can’t afford to loose any more.” say Jake before they head off on the hunt.

“Lets go, we’ll head up the old quarry road and see if we can cut it off or maybe trap it by the quarry walls.” and with that they walk along the same road old Ged walked the previous night.

The sun has sunk low and the shadows are long by the time they reach the quarry with no sign yet of their quarry. Then one of the men shouts, they see the dark figure of the fox moving among the boulders. It doesn’t seem to have seen them so they quickly encircle it and close in. Suddenly the black fox stiffens becoming acutely aware of the danger. Tail outstretched, black fur

bristling, shoulders and back arched teeth showing and ears back it growls low and threatening, eyes flitting to the men searching for escape. With its back to the man made cliff it is trapped, fear and instinct control it.

“I’m gonna make you suffer you little wretched dog. Attack our children would you?”

“Grab it, lets string it up and beat the living daylights out of it!”

“I’m gonna tear it apart” roars Peter in red faced anger lunging forwards.

“They’re losing their heads” thinks Jake then suddenly a realisation hits him.

“Wait!” Jake shouts suddenly and loudly, the men stop and look.

“It’s not the Fox, my god old Ged’s rhyme, ‘walks on two legs’. ‘If the fox can’t stop the gorging’, its the chickens, the fox is trying to kill the chickens”

“Yes we know that, what’s your point?” shouts Peter frustrated at being stopped in venting his anger.

“Its trying to protect us from the chickens, its them that are attacking our children. Drinking their blood, my god Jesus Mary and Joseph they’re vampire chickens. They came from central Europe, Romania” the foxes tail begins wagging and he relaxes a little.

“What? Are you serious?”

“Peter, think about it. The pock marks on little buddy, could they have been made by chickens?” Jake pleads

“Well I suppose...” Peter says slowly

“The rhyme Ged said, ‘walk on two legs’, like chickens do. The fox suddenly darts away disappearing into a crack in the cliff wall.

“Aww look now, it’s got away you and your...” before Peter can finish the fox re-emerges carrying something in its mouth. It’s a limp chicken head which he drops at Jakes feet. Looking down jakes sees the chickens face is horribly distorted, evil looking its beak long and lined with jagged hooked growths that look like teeth. When the horror shock subsides Jakes is suddenly hit with another thought. He had just locked his remaining chickens in the church with the mothers and babies. The sun has gone over the horizon and darkness rises.

“Quick back to the village, we must reach the church before it’s too late and he sets off at a sudden run, his pace rapid, fuelled by images of bizarre chickens feasting on the corpses of dead women and children. It’s a few moments before he realises that the fox is running along side him and the men following behind noisily.”

When they reach the church yard the sky is pale along the western horizon and stars shine like jewels in the sky. A flight of geese pass noiselessly, fast and low silhouetted against the bright halo of the full moon. The church yard is quiet as the men weave through the mist shrouded gravestones. The cockerel topped spire looming high ahead.

A sudden high long scream comes from the church ahead urging the men onward to the large doors. Jake and Peter reach them first slamming their bodies against the heavy wood finding them locked by their own advice to those inside against attack of the fox that now runs with them.

Screams and cries come from within as they pound upon the door shouting, but it is solid. The fox moves to

one side sniffing along the wall while the men continue pounding. Halfway along the fox lets out a high wailing bark and starts scratching at the ground. Some of the men stop and look to see what the fox is doing. Jake goes over and sees that he is scratching furiously at a wooden trapdoor half buried under grass and tangled weeds. Jake shouts to the men then clearing away the foliage finds a large rusty handle. The strength of several men is needed to open the door and the fox is first into the dark hole. With lit torches in hand the men file down the damp dirty narrow passage which come up behind the altar. The lofty church hall echoes with screams, screeching squawks, and the growling of the fox running through the benches after the vampire chickens. A scream from the right brings Jakes attention to a chicken attacking a woman. He runs over wrenching the fowl mutant from her with an arcing splatter of blood from where it was feeding on her neck. The thing hisses at him snapping its deformed beak, with horrible red eyes glaring at him. Keeping his head Jake gives a well practiced flick of the wrist wringing its neck. The men and black fox soon chase down and kill the last remaining chicken freaks, then check on the women and children, all are alive and not hurt too badly, the men had got here just in time, and found the underground passage with the black foxes help. Jake looks around for the fox but finds it gone.

## The Boy Who Can Fly

A stuffy, dusty classroom with rows of wooden desks each with a child sitting attentive to the teachers' lesson.

“...acceleration of the falling body is calculated...”

Nine year old Callum O'Brien is finding difficulty concentrating feeling his eyelids heavy and distracted by a dull pain in his side. The teacher continues in a voice so low and monotone that it's a strain to listen and digest the words;

“...therefore the equation is  $F=MA$  where  $M$  is the mass of the...” to Callum the words melt together into one long humming sound almost indiscernible from the noise of the steel works drifting in through the open window from across the river, where his father used to work.

‘I don't know what he's on about. If he is supposed to be so clever why can't I understand him?’ thinks Callum looking around at the other boys. ‘Them lot seem to get it, it must be just me, why can't he just tell me clearer so I know’

The teacher scratches chalk here and there on the blackboard adding blurred marks to the already fuzzy lines to Callums eyes. As he tries to focus on the dancing scrawl he sees lines in the black, lines like rivers of treacle running down through the white marks.

“...so the velocity is the average speed over distance between point A and...”

‘... Blah Blah Blah...’ Callums eyes drift out of the dirty window while his mind drifts away, far away to his

favourite place, soaring high above the world, up in the clouds with the birds, soaring over the green hills far below.

“...is measured how CALLUM?” he is wrenched back to earth by the loud shout of his name. Looking at the teacher just in time to see the chalk streaking across the room with a trail of dust launched from the teachers hand and hit him hard, square on the forehead. The laughter of the other boys is quickly silenced by the teachers’ stern look as Callum rubs his head thanking God that he wasn’t rubbing out at the time with the heavy wooden duster.

“Get your head out of the clouds O’Brien”

The playground teems with energetic children playing ball and running around, shouting and shoving, laughing and singing. Callum sits all alone, as usual, by the fence looking down at the murky water of the river and the white clouds reflected in the oily surface, happy for the moment to have escaped the gaze of basher McKenzie and his cronies. Not for long though, it turns out when he hears the familiar cracking of knuckles behind him, McKenzie’s usual calling sign. Callum sighs and turns to face them.

‘Lets get this over with’ he thinks drawing his scrawny frame up to his full height of four foot five, the top of his scruffy hair equal to McKenzie’s over large chin. As they taunt and begin pushing and shoving Callum tries to look scared. He isn’t scared but he thinks this is what they would want. They laugh at him being picked on by the teacher and they call him thick.

“That jumper used to be mine, I threw it out, did you get it from my bin?” taunts McKenzie to the amusement of the others lads.

None of this bothers him in the slightest; it’s all a silly game these bullies play. McKenzie then hits him full in the face knocking him into the fence and onto the grass. Callum can’t keep trying to look scared and begins laughing. The punch though hard is like a little girls slap compared to what he is used to. The bullies look down, confusion slowly crossing their round features.

“Freak” they call him as McKenzie hits him again and again with growing wrath until the laughter dies. Satisfied he has learnt his lesson they leave but Callum barely even notices they are gone. In his mind he is soaring far above the world with the wind rushing through his hair, looking down on the green hills of Ross Common far below.

The loud school bell signals home time and Callum cringes as the others make their way home. He is last to leave and walks slowly going over the fields and along the coast road. It’s the long way round and is getting increasingly longer, ever since his dad took to drinking again. For years he was sober and respectable but not recently,

‘Not since he had an accident and fell off a wagon or something, he must have hurt himself real bad because he gets drunk now every night. He gets upset with me all the time, cos my school works not so good I think, but I don’t understand any of it, why should I go to school anyway? I only go so he won’t get angry but he gets angry just the same.’

Cliffs swell up taking the road high and looking down at the sea now crashing on the rock below. Callum feels a little dizzy and steps back looking further out towards where it meets the sky. It looks calmer way out there. In Callums mind he steps from the cliff. He floats up among the large gulls and other sea birds that wheel and turn about the windswept cliffs, hovering arms outstretched face into the wind. Then with sudden dashing speed he swoops down to the waters surface weaving in and out of the high wind tossed waves that crash erratically into the rocky cliff base. Then he soars out over the sea skimming his hand in the rippled water sending a spray higher up behind him as he goes faster and faster flying towards the calm sea where it meets the paling sky.

The wind blows chill and salty and stars shine bright and clear in the black sky when Callum finally moves. Each step towards home is heavy, hoping his father is out or has drunk so much that he is sleeping. His stomach gurgles with hunger, the meagre school dinner now a faded memory. Walking away from the sea and over the hill, lights from town come into view and the road winds its way down towards them.

When he finally reaches his house the lights are out. Feeling a little relief he creeps up the path to the door. He doesn't know what time it is, he was given a watch for a birthday once but he could never get the hang of telling the time. Carefully opening the door he peers inside down the dark hallway. There is no sound; he creeps towards the stairs glancing at the kitchen door wondering if he should risk trying to get something to

eat. After a few minutes standing in the dark and not hearing anything but his stomach grumbling he decides to risk it. Feeling for the light switch he flicks it on but nothing happens and flicking the switch on and off a few more time the darkness remains. Suddenly from nowhere a fierce roar and dark face filled with anger.

“Do yea know anyway bout this yea little shit yea?” his father lunges from the darkness grabbing Callum by the jumper and, with a violent jerk, hoists him irresistibly toward the whiskey stench and harshly bristled chin.

“Why do thay do it? I told I’d pay em” he shouts shoving a crumpled letter before Callums face. He sways releasing the grip on Callum using the hand to steady himself on the table knocking it noisily. Callum backs off to the corner because his father blocks the way to the door, curling up he covers his head with his arms and looks up at the huge shadowy figure of his father finally steadied and looking around the dark kitchen for him.

“Don’t you (belch) run from me boy, yea know shummat don yea?” in fear Callum lets out a sob and his father homes in with frightening speed.

“Gotcha” he hauls him up throwing him hard across the room. Callum lands painfully in the overflowing bin spilling the rubbish across the floor. For an instant Callum smells food and he thinks about finding something in here to eat.

“Why didya no sho... tell... they cut us off Cal, tell me” he shouts not making much sense but making the distance across the small room in one unsteady step fist clenched missing the punch and instead burying his fist in half a rotten chicken. Callum cries out in fear then the

door swings open knocking his swaying father in the back and making him stumble.

“John!” Callum’s mother rushes into the room “John, for Christ’s sake leave the boy alone, it’s not his fault the electricity was cut off, you keep pissing the money away. Leave him be” his father then turns his wrath on his mother and as the small room fills with sounds of slaps, thumps muffled cries, angry grunts, furniture crashing and dishes smashing Callum is flying away from the heat and violence high above the world with the stars and the bright silver orb of the moon. Going far away from the house, the town nothing more than twinkling lights fading into the distance disappearing in the folds of the shadowy hills. On he flies to new places, strange places where they don’t know him and won’t hurt him because he is smaller or stupider.

Callum wakes with the morning light coming in through the kitchen window. The smell of rubbish strong in his nostrils, he picks himself up from where he still lies in the overturned bin rubbish and looks gingerly around. His father is gone, his mother too leaving only debris of the fight in the night all over the place. Hungry he searches the cupboards and mess for something to eat; all he can find is stale bread which he eats hungrily with water to wash it down. Peering cautiously into the living room, still dark with the heavy curtains drawn he hears loud breathing. He allows his eyes to adjust to the dark while chewing hard on the brittle bread which becomes goopy dough in his mouth.

‘Dad snores like a lawnmower so that must be mum on the settee’ he thinks as he creeps toward her

wanting to wake her up so he can talk to her, get some reassurance from her and a hug, to hear that everything will be alright and it won't happen again, but looking at her face he stops short. Tears well in his eyes and sobs burst from his heart seeing the awful swelling and dark bruising disfiguring her beautiful features.

‘Why doesn't dad like us anymore? He wants me to make the lights work again but I don't know how. It's my fault that mums hurt. If I go he will like mum again’

He leaves the house silently into the chilly silent dawn and walks up the long road towards the cliffs. All he can think about is flying away, leaving the school and the teacher to their effequalsemmy rubbish, lifting off the ground and flying faster and faster leaving it all, leaving that stupid basher McKenzie. Leaving the broken light bulbs and the dirty kitchen with no food in. but most of all, leaving his dad so he can get better; With him gone dad won't be so angry about him not doing his school work and will get better from falling out of the wagon and will like mum again and will kiss her instead of thumping her, and he could even fix the lights and make the house bright again. He reaches the edge of the cliff and without a pause he jumps lifting up and flying high leaving it all behind him. He flies free and totally happy at last, up into the bright white fluffy clouds swirling all around him as he spins and loops and turns, laughing out loud feeling all the worry and pain and misery and helplessness falling away from him, heading out far far away and then on into the beautiful blindingly bright light of the rising sun. While his limp frail body crashes onto the jagged rocks in the icy cold water far below.

# Taxi

“Taxi!”

Jesus Alfonso Matarazzo responds with long practiced automation to the familiar sidewalk whistle, shout and raised arm of the man hailing him, with the hard break and sharp swerve cutting across the outside lane of traffic with brash inconsideration for the other motorists causing a fanfare of horns and pulls over. Before the cab is stopped fully the man has swung open the back door and flops heavily into the seat. Jesus turns to him beaming.

“Good morning sir, and what a beautiful sunny New York morning this is. I’m Jesus A Matarazzo, where can I take you?” Jesus says in a foreign accent so vague that his Brazilian / Italian roots can only be guessed. The man, a large middle aged Italian looking man glares back at him with dark deep set eyes then says in a low voice;

“The Starbucks corner of 5th and west 46th street, and do me a favor and shut the fuck up”

“No problemo, I’ll have you there in no time my friend” says Jesus still smiling broadly and unphased by the mans rudeness. He pulls out into the traffic without signalling, not with the indicators anyway but cheerfully flips the bird to the large lady who screams ‘jerk’ from the window of her station wagon that brakes violently behind to avoid hitting the yellow taxi. The man in the back takes something small from his pocket and looks at with minute interest then taking a cell phone from his other pocket he dials irritably then waits for an answer scowling from the window.

“Don? That you?... well put him on then... no, you get him on this line now weasel!... .. Don? You got the merchandise? Please tell me you got it?... good, meet me under the west side of the Queensboro bridge on 1st avenue at three, ya hear me? Three pm this afternoon... I don't give a camel's ass about your kid sisters shoulder, three pm Queensboro bridge!” Jesus hears the man shout ‘Queensboro bridge’

“You wanna go Queensboro Bridge now huh? No problemo my friend” and swings the cab suddenly right so that the man in the back slides right across the back seat and into the opposite door.

“Not you ya fuckin' asshole, Starbucks 5th and 46th. Don you still there?... well ya shouldn't be! You should be getting my stuff to the west end of the bridge by 3pm. I don't wanna be left standing there with nothing but my prick to hold onto, mess this up Don and I swear I'll mess you up!” If the phone had been a traditional land line he would slam the receiver down aggressively but being a mobile he can only press the disconnect button quite hard. The taxi takes another sudden swerve to the left as Jesus readjusts his route again for Starbucks, sending the passenger sliding back over the seat.

“Will ya goddam watch what ya freakin doing ya little punk” he shouts at Jesus who turns and smiles.

“No problemo my friend”

After a few more minutes of cross town driving Jesus slams on the brakes beneath the large Starbucks sign and turns to the man.

“We are here my friend that'll be nine dollars please”

“Nine bucks huh? Here ya go chump and if ya wanna tip; get some goddam air freshener for this stinkin cab” and gets out slamming the door and throwing the nine crumpled bills in through the window at Jesus.

“Thank you my friend, have a nice day” Jesus smiles back collecting the notes before driving off with a screech of tyres.

A moment later on the corner he is flagged down by a man dressed like Mr. Spock from Star Trek even with the pointed ears. When Jesus stops the cab Spock beckons to another figure, this one made up in a full rubber alien costume, he waddles over awkwardly hauling the cumbersome suit into the back seat.

“Nice costumes my friends” says Jesus with sincerity as they get in the back. “My name is Jesus A Matarazzo, where can I take you. The space port perhaps?, Ha Ha Ha” Jesus chuckles at his own joke. Mr Spock smiles a little self consciously.

“We’re new in town and don’t know the way around.”

“Just beamed in huh?” quips Jesus, Spock smiles and nods “Yes I see, very good, no we are trying to find the New York Conference Centre but these streets are like a maze”

“The NY conference centre, its over on Madison avenue, no problemo my friends, it’s not far I’ll have you there in no time, what are you?” he says looking at the large lizard like alien who seems to fidget continually. Spock answers;

“He a Gorn, an early Gorn based on the one Kirk fought in the ‘Arena’ episode”

“Ooh kaay!” says Jesus and he turns to drive then turns back in mock seriousness “I only take American dollars you know, no galactic credits here my friend” then after a moment of serious staring he grins broadly “Huh? Huh? galactic credits? You get it?” Then turns laughing heartily as he speeds away. The Gorn seems to fidget none stop, trying to scratch under the rubber mask. Noticing this Jesus asks him;

“Are you alright my friend?” the reply is muffled and might well have been in Gornian or whatever they speak. After some time they pull up outside the conference centre building, hundreds of aliens and Starfleet crew converging on the main entrance. Spock and the Gorn get out, Spock asking how much at the drivers’ window.

“Seven dollars my friend” Spock pays him a ten dollar bill telling him to keep the change, as they walk away the Gorn still fiddling and scratching Jesus holds out his hand with a gap in the middle of his fingers and says “Nanoo Nanoo”, Spock turns a little irritated;

“No that’s Mork from Orc, it’s Live long and...” but Jesus is already driving away.

A few minutes of driving looking for another fare he sees, standing alone on the sidewalk, a dejected man stooped in a long brown overcoat who steps out into the road causing Jesus to hit the brakes hard. The man looks up shocked at the bright yellow hood of the taxi just inches from him.

“Are you alright my friend?” Jesus ask with genuine concern getting out of the cab.

“Erm yes, I didn’t order a cab did I?”

“No my friend you were not concentrating and nearly got yourself killed. You need to be careful” looking a little dazed the mans shoulders slump.

“Now that you are here perhaps you could take me somewhere” he says rather miserably.

“Of course, where would you like to go?” The man looks around slowly then says;

“Away from here. Take me to the nearest bridge”

“The nearest bridge, that would be the Queensboro bridge, will that be good?”

“Is it a high bridge?”

“Yes I suppose it is, come, get in my friend.” he holds open the back door and the man gets slowly in.

“My name is...” the man cuts him short with a loud groan

“Oh! God.” he says shaking his head. “Oh God why? How can this be” Jesus begins driving and after watching the man in the rear view mirror shaking his head, rubbing his face and groaning Jesus asks

“What is the matter my friend? Is something troubling you?” the man looks at Jesus in the narrow mirror but then his eyes glaze over. He undoes his overcoat to reveal beneath a black shirt with white dog collar.

“You are a man of god, forgive me father I didn’t know” he crosses himself. The man eyes become focussed again

“A man of God? What does that mean? How can god allow such suffering? The poor woman has lost her husband and why? Why you ask? Crime, a simple robbery gone wrong. And the money they took? It was all the money she has saved to get treatment for her

leukaemia so now she will die. Do you know what she said to me sitting in that mouse hole they call an apartment? Sitting on a wooden pallet drinking tea from a shoe? Do you know what she said? 'Its my faith that keeps me going father' her faith she said. I asked the bishop if we could help her out with money but they said no, and the only thing she possesses of any value is a statue of Mary, 'The Blessed Mary' she called her. How can the God she loves and worships so dearly take from her the man she loves and her only chance of a cure" as he speaks tears well in his tired eyes. "I have devoted my life to God, given everything but why? If God exists why would he allow it, God can't exist, not the God I thought I knew" he buries his head in his hands. Jesus looks at the man with pity.

"When I was a little kid my momma made some cookies, I ask her if I can try one but she said no, I pleaded with her to let me have a cookie but she was stern, no cookies for you. She left those cookies cooling and I sat looking all the time wanting one, just a little taste. My lips went sore I licked them so much, the smell was wonderful. I thought my momma was nasty, why did she make the cookies if I can't have one, but I listened to my momma and was a good boy and didn't have one. Later that day my momma wrapped up those cookies and took them out of the house. She looked back as I sat sulking and said 'come with me, I will show you where these cookies are going' my momma gave them to kids, orphans who had nothing and they were so happy. And do you know what? One of them kids shared his cookie with me and it tasted better than anything I'd ever tasted"

“Is there a point to your story? What are you trying to say?”

“That we little people cannot ever presume to know Gods purpose, we cannot see the bigger picture. Those cookies were needed elsewhere, and things just have a way of turning out alright. Here we are, Queensboro bridge.”

“Bridge? Oh yes the bridge. You are a wise man in a strange kind of way, you help to put things into a different perspective. What do I owe you?”

“Eight dollars my friend”

“Here keep the change” and walks away, Jesus shouts after the man from the window.

“Just one thing father.” He stops and turns

“Yes?”

“How can the woman drink from a shoe?” the priest smiles. “I mean won’t it just spill out and get messy?”

“It was a glass ornamental shoe” and he walks away. Jesus begins driving away when he sees a man sprinting towards his cab hand raised. He stops and the man hurriedly gets in, Jesus turns smiling.

“Hello, my name is Je...”

“Just drive, drive quickly” he shouts sweat beading his head and looking through the rear window “For god sake go! Go! GO!” Jesus recognising the signs of a man on the run steps on the gas speeding away with screeching tyres and a cloud of rubber smoke. In his rear view mirror he sees a large man running to where the cab was, stopping quite breathless and then running back and getting into a large black car.

“The chase is on my friend, your pursuer has got himself some wheels.” the man looks round then turns to Jesus screaming:

“Step on it” which he does “Take a right, we need to head north towards the freeway” Jesus swings the car into a sharp turn racing down a narrow alley emerging onto a wide road where he goes left. Driving very fast along this street weaving in and out of the slower moving traffic fearlessly. He then turns to the fidgety passenger saying.

“My name is Jesus A Matarazzo. I’ll have you at the freeway in no time my friend. It looks like we lost him quite easily”

“Wait a second! He’ll go after Tess, the son of a bitch he’ll go for my kid sister. Quick go to the hospital; Mount Sinai hospital, its opposite central park. Shit!”

“No problemo my friend, I’ll get you there double quick.”

“Oh God they’ll get to her then come after me. It’s not my fault; he says I stole something from him. He took the stuff and I was on my way, he came chasing after me saying I had stole something from his car, I didn’t I swear. I’m only a delivery man. I only do it for the money, I did everything they asked, I need to pay Tess’s medical bill. ‘Don you filthy thief’ he shouted, what does he think I stole? He was pissed, real pissed”

“Calm down my friend, we’ll get your sister before he does then get you both to safety, then you can try to figure out what to do.”

“Yes your right. How far now?” the cab screams though the busy downtown New York streets, Jesus easing the car through impossibly narrow gaps with

smiling confidence. Within minutes they arrive at the hospital stopping outside the main entrance. Don tells Jesus to wait, the looking around for the black car he runs in through the sliding doors. After a few moments Jesus sees a large black car screeching to a stop behind him. Out steps the large Italian, the fare from earlier. Hoping to buy Don a little time he gets out quickly intercepting him before he enters the sliding doors.

“Excuse me sir, I wouldn’t park you car there, they tow them away...” the man scowls at Jesus

“Get out of my damn way, jerk off”

“But sir they’ll be here any minute” the man shoves him aside striding towards the door. It slides open and coming out is Don his arm around a woman with a bandaged shoulder still wearing the unflattering hospitals gown. He sees the angry Italian his face paling with fear.

“Frankie, I swear I didn’t take anything from you, I swear to God, I swear on my kid sisters life I didn’t do it.”

Brushing the woman roughly to one side Frankie grabs the terrified Don by the lapels slamming him into the wall beside the door.

“I had it before you sat your stinkin butt in my Sedan, you must have taken it.”

“Took what Frankie? I didn’t take nothing honest, I wouldn’t do that to you, I’m just a delivery man” he says almost sobbing. Frankie looks into Dons eyes and sees in them genuine fear and he senses he is not lying.

“Did you look in the case? Did you see what you were carrying?”

“No Frankie I swear.” Frankie thinks hard.

“I had it this morning, I got the taxi to Starbucks, then picked up the car from the garage, I met you and got the case, come to think of it I never actually saw it after Starbucks, but I did have it in the taxi before ringing you.” he looks up at Jesus who is consoling the girl. “You” he points “You were the taxi driver this morning. Did you find anything in the back seat after you threw me around like a goddam lotto ball” Jesus looks innocently at the Italian

“I found nothing; you’re welcome to look my friend”

“I freakin well will. Don’t move” he strides to the cab flinging open the door and, large round backside sticking out, he searches the seats and the floor and down between the seats all the while muttering and grumbling ‘Jenny, where is it’ then roaring with anger he shouts

“It’s not here, where the hell is it?”

“What exactly have you lost?” asks Jesus. Frankie looks at his as if ready to explode, then letting out a loud sigh he says

“Alright, alright. It’s a stamp, the rarest of rare stamps, the inverted Jenny. I collect rare stamps. Don’t you dare f\*\*kin laugh and if any of you repeat a single syllable of this I’ll kill you. Who else have you had in this cab” Jesus thinks for a minute

“Mr Spock, an alien lizard and a suicidal priest”

“Are you makin’ fun of me?”

“No”

“One of them could a had it. Where are they now? Where did you take em?”

“A star trek convention and the Queenboro Bridge. There were hundreds of aliens at the convention and I

didn't see their faces, and the priest was so depressed he is probably lying at the bottom of the river by now."

"Do you have any idea how much that little stamp is worth? Half a million bucks. It's your fault, driving that taxi like maniac, you made me drop it, I'm gonna kill you." the big Italian grabs Jesus and, chubby fist clenched, he is about to strike him when a siren blaring ambulance stops in front of the hospital. Jesus wrestles himself free. The back doors swing open and a trolley is wheeled out with non other than the Gorn alien on. The paramedics tell everyone to move back and a bemused looking Mr Spock gets out following the trolley.

"I don't believe it, that's the very alien" says Jesus. Frankie follows the trolley into the hospital as Jesus stops Mr Spock.

"What has happened?"

"He collapsed at the convention. they said he is having some kind of allergic reaction to the latex in the costume, look, I had better get in" and he trots off after them. Don approaches Jesus

"Thanks for everything, can you take us home?"

"No problemo my friend" and they get into the cab along with a very confused looking Tess. Jesus drives off smiling broadly and says"

"I love this crazy city"

The priest stands on the bridge looking down into the swirling water for a long time after the crazy cab diver with his strange story has gone. He thinks about jumping in and ending it all but the words of the taxi driver keep coming back to his mind. About the bigger picture and about thing turning out alright.

‘What does he know? The only way things can turn out alright is if a big lump of money was to show up.’ as darkness begins to rise he turns his mind to the job at hand.

‘I suppose I should get on with this, should I take off my jacket and shoes? There are no rules, no guide books on this sort of thing. Maybe someone can find them and use them.’ he kneels down, unties his laces and takes off the shoes. He notices something stuck to the bottom of one

‘What’s this?’ its a small piece of paper in a plastic cover stuck to some gum, peeling it off and looking closely at it in the light of the passing cars headlights he notices its a stamp. The biplane printed on it is upside down. He recognises this from his childhood study and collection of stamps

‘This is one of the famous inverted Jennys. These are worth a fortune.’ looking up into the darkening New York sky with a smile on his face he says aloud;

“Why did I ever doubt you?”

# The Time Monkeys

## Chapter One

Peter hurries into the dining room to see what all the commotion is. Jack, his seven year old son, is shouting and crying and making a right old racket beside the kitchen table. He is jumping up and twisting around trying to wipe something away from his backside. There is custard and jam sponge cake squished all over the chair and the floor and Jack's shirt and his shorts.

"Dad, I just sat in my pudding" Jack cries looking up at his dad with tears in his eyes "I didn't do it on purpose, dad, I promise". Peter looks at his son and the mess with a mixture of amusement and confusion. "I was eating my pudding then got up to get a drink and when I sat back down I felt all this squidge, my bowl was on my chair" he begins crying, his dad puts a soothing arm on his shoulder.

"It's OK Jack; I think I know what's going on here. You have just been pranked by the Time Monkeys" Jack looks up at his fathers caring face with wide wonder filled eyes.

"What are Time Monkeys dad?"

"They are strange, monkey like creatures that can jump around backwards and forwards in time, bending time and twisting events so they get all mixed up, moving things around and juggling stuff about and generally causing lots of mischief just for their own fun."

"Wow! Can I see one Dad?" says jack excited, tears instantly stopped

“They are very hard to see but sometimes if you scrunch up your eyes really tight and listen really hard you might be able to hear one laughing” Jack immediately scrunches up his eyes and listens with all his might.

“I think I can hear one dad” he says enthusiastically. “I can hear it laughing. Where do they come from dad? Do they have names? Why can’t I see them? Do they have them in the zoo?”

“Come on jack, let’s get you cleaned up and ready for bed and I will tell you all about the time when I was a little boy like you, and me and your auntie Jane nearly caught one”

## **Chapter Two**

They go up to the bathroom and begin cleaning the mess while Jacks dad tells him of his adventures with the time monkeys when he was a child.

“It all started when your auntie, that’s my sister, Jane and I were out playing ball in the garden”

“Do you mean our garden?” interrupts Jack

“No it was the garden where we lived back then, your Gran’s garden. We were throwing the ball to one another and catching it, your auntie was rubbish at catching” he adds with a grin “And I threw the ball up as high as I could but it didn’t come back down. We both stood there looking up into the sky waiting for it to drop again but we couldn’t see it. After a few minutes we thought it must have gone over into the neighbours garden so we were about to go and get it when all of a sudden it appeared and fell right onto your sisters head”

Jack chuckles at this while swilling the water around in the bath as it fills. “We laughed too, well I did, I’m not sure Jane found it so funny, but we just thought that maybe the neighbour had thrown it back and carried on with our game.

‘Hang on a minute, the neighbour couldn’t have thrown it back, I heard dad telling mum that he has disappeared’ Jane told me. ‘Give me a peg up’ she said and looked over the fence. ‘Oh my god’ she gasped. Then I felt my legs knocked from under me and Jane and I toppled over onto the grass.

‘Why did you drop me?’ she screamed hitting me about the head

‘Something knocked me over’ I shouted but looking around and expecting to see Bruno, the dog or something, I saw nothing. ‘Why did you say oh my god?’ she stood up,

‘I thought I heard someone rattling the shed door and banging on it, but it is padlocked on the outside. Someone is locked in there. Could it be Mr. Jones?’ We looked at each other with surprise then went round through the back gate. Approaching the shed all was quiet and we peered in through the little window.

‘It’s empty’ said Jane with relief tinged with disappointment. ‘I swear I did hear something’” Peter pauses as he pours some bubble bath in the water then turns off the taps and helps Jack into the bath.

### Chapter Three

“That was just the start of the strangeness.” Peter continues while Jack sponges his arms down with no enthusiasm to get clean, his attention totally on the story “Later that day after our tea we took Bruno the dog out for a walk down by the canal. Bruno was a big hairy dog and liked to go for a swim. We would throw the stick in and he would dive in to get it then get out and shake all the water all over us, drop the stick and wait for us to do it again. But this afternoon we watched him dive in and swim for the stick but as we watched he disappeared along with the stick. Jane and I thought he had dived under but he just didn’t come back up and the water was still. Panicking that he had drowned we ran as fast as we could to the house to tell mum or dad.” Jack had abandoned all pretence of bathing now and sat listening to the story.

“Mum was talking on the phone when we went in to tell her about the dog.

‘Mum’

‘Can’t you see I’m on the telephone?’ she said

‘But mum...’

‘Shhhh’

‘But it’s Bruno he’s...’

‘Be quiet’ she was getting quite angry so we waited. She was writing something on a piece of paper and when she put the phone down she pinned it to the notice board. It said:

‘Spoke to Mr. Davies about  
mending front gate’

Right you two what’s all this about. We are about to tell her when suddenly and shockingly Bruno ran from under the table and was dripping wet and started shaking the water from himself all over the kitchen, then he dropped the stick at my feet and waited for me to throw it into the canal again. Then mum started shouting about the mess and why did we bring a soaking dog in the house. Bruno seemed to realise that the canal was not there anymore and went and curled up under the table.

Mum got the mop bucket out to clean up the mess. She filled it with water and soap and turned round to get the mop. When she turned back the bucket was gone. She looked at us with such rage.

‘What have you done with my bucket?’ she shouted

Just then Dad came in and said hello.

“Mr. Jones from next door still hasn’t come back, Bridget’s frantic” he said to mum who I don’t think was listening from inside the cupboard where she was looking for the mop bucket. Dad went over to the notice board as he always did to check for messages and letters

‘What’s this’ he asked mum pointing at the note she had written. For some reason it was torn down the centre and read:

‘S                    to Mr. Davies about  
                         nding front gate’

Then he suddenly whipped up into the air nearly doing a backward summersault and crashed onto the wet floor, then sat there looking dazed and mumbling something about children and monkeys running wild around the house.”

## **Chapter Four**

Jack gets out of the bath and is drying himself while Peter gets his pyjamas from the drawer. While he is putting them on Peter continues with the story:

“That night mum had sent us to bed early because she was still angry about the mess the dog had made and the missing bucket. Jane crept into my room and we talked about the strange things that had happened.

‘When Bruno was splashing the water all over the kitchen’ she said to me in a whisper ‘I swear on my Cindy doll that I heard something laughing, cackling like those chimps we saw at the zoo last week. What do you think it was?’ I thought for a minute but nothing sensible would come to mind.

‘Do you think it’s got something to do with the ball and the dog?’ I asked at last. My sister was a year older than me and quite a bit more cleverer than me, though I would never tell her that, she frowned in thought then said;

‘I think we should keep our eyes and ears open for anymore strange things, ok?’ and she went back to bed, I tried to keep my eyes and my ears open for as long as possible but it was very hard and I got tired and wanted to sleep, I tried just keeping one eye open and one ear but eventually I slept.

## Chapter Five

“I woke up early the next morning, the grandfather clock in the hall said nine thirty which was early for a summer holiday Monday. I went and got some cereal and sat down in the lounge beside the Christmas tree with its presents laid out neatly beneath it. I sat and dozily munched my cornflakes thinking about the strange things that happened the day before. Then I heard Jane in the hall shouting me.

‘Peter, Peter I’ve just seen one, the dark shape of a monkey running across the...’ as she open the door to come in the lounge the plastic mop bucket that went missing the day before was perched on top of the door and came crashing and splashing down on her head covering her pink pyjamas in soapy water.

‘Aaarrgghh’ she scream then she stopped and stared beside me.

‘Peter. There is a Christmas tree in the lounge’ she said pointing. I looked and was shocked to see the tree I had been sat next to.

‘It’s only June’ was all I could think to say turning back to Jane.

‘I saw a monkey in my room. I had just woken up but not moved. Opening my eyes I saw it and didn’t see it if you know what I mean, a movement in the corner of my eye. When I turned to look it was gone but I heard the laughing like I heard yesterday. You know what this means don’t you?’ I just shook my head dumbly ‘There is some kind of invisible monkey playing practical jokes on us Peter!’ She said in that tone only girls seem to be able to manage as if something very silly is perfectly obvious. ‘They moved the mop bucket above this door and put the

Christmas tree up in June'. We both looked at each other for a few minutes trying to take in the meaning of it all

There came a strange ripping sound then a boinging sound. One of the presents beneath the tree had suddenly ripped open and the jack in the box that was in it sprang up, this knocked over the Christmas tree which fell in my direction. It would have fell right on me but was stopped by the high arm of the chair, but all the baubles and tinsel and stuff went all over me. We both heard the cackling laughter fading off into nothing leaving only the still wobbling jack in the box grinning maniacally.

Then mum came in."

## Chapter Six

"What is all this mess? You did this yesterday bringing the muddy dog in the house, now all this, what has got into you two?" she roared from the doorway.

'But mum it wasn't us' Jane pleaded

'Ok, then lets hear it, who was it?' We looked at each other, both realising that what we were about to say sounded silly

'It's a monkey.' I said. We waited a moment to see how mum would react. She didn't, she just stood looking down at us her big fluffy slippers sopping in the mop water. Then we tried to explain

'Its an invisible monkey'

'I saw it in the corner of my eye'

'And I heard it laughing'

'It took Bruno from the water'

'Then put him in the kitchen'

‘The ball too’  
‘Oh yeah it hit Jane on the head’  
‘The mop bucket’  
‘And a Christmas tree fell over’  
‘Tipped all over the floor’  
‘The jack in the box’  
‘It was black’  
‘Grinning when it jumped out’  
‘And ran across...’

‘STOP!’ Shouted my mother. ‘I’ve heard enough of these tall tales. Now clean all this up then you can stay in your rooms until your father gets home’ we didn’t say another word and sulkily we cleaned the mess. As mum was walking away there was something stuck to her back, a note saying:

‘poke  
me’

It was the piece that had been torn from the note the day before. Jane and I let out a snigger. Mum rounded on us

‘What is so funny?’ then jumped and screamed. ‘Something just poked me’ she cried then stalked off to find the culprit. I swear I saw a monkey laughing in the shadow of the hall, then leap away up the stairs.

## **Chapter Seven**

“Come on now jack, it’s time the get into bed”  
Peter says to Jack

“Aww! But you said you would tell me about how you nearly caught one” Jack said climbing under the duvet.

“Yes, you’re right, I did” said Peter and sat down on the bad.

“Well let me see, Mum clearly didn’t believe us about the monkeys so while we tidied the mess we formed a plan to catch one. We would pretend to be busy doing something but watching for any movement in the corners of our eyes then if we saw one we would jump on it and grab it before it could disappear. We got dressed and set about casually playing Tiddlywinks in the lounge.

We were not playing long when we both saw it, the movement over by the fire. Without saying anything we both lunged at it and to my amazement I grabbed it’s tail and Jane grabbed onto my leg. We could see the monkey now clearly and it was startled. It was holding a large fish in it’s hands that it was no doubt up to some mischief with. It dropped the fish and began running to try to get away but I clung to it’s tail and Jane clung to my leg and we were dragged across the floor.

Then the most curious thing happened. It was suddenly night time in the lounge, then when we got to the hall way it was day again then being dragged through the kitchen it was morning and dad was just reading the note in the kitchen and the monkey knocked right into him bowling over off his feet completely. Then out into the garden and it was the day before and I saw myself and Jane playing ball. The monkey bowled me over the same as it had dad and carried on into next doors garden then into the shed then out again. Jane squealed and I felt something heavy dragging as we were pulled through the back hedge and out onto the field. I couldn’t hold on to the tail any longer and let go.

## Chapter Eight

The monkey ran off fading away, laughing as it went. Me and Jane were left sitting in the field and with us was the old man from next door.

‘Mr. Jones? So it was you that grabbed onto my ankle?’ Jane asked

‘Yes my dear’ he said ‘I’m very sorry about that, but when I saw you were holding on to a time monkey I quickly took my chance and grabbed on. You see I had been locked in that shed for over an hour. I’m very grateful to you for rescuing me.’

‘You know about the monkeys?’ I asked with surprise

‘Oh yes indeed I do, in fact it was a time monkey that had trapped me in there. I have been trying to catch one for a long time now, I finally managed to grab onto one but it ran off thrusting me back and forward in time but never slowing, until finally I could hold on no longer and had to let go. It was then I realised with some astonishment and indeed a little embarrassment that I was inside the locked shed.’ He stood up and brushed himself down and helped me and Jane to stand up. ‘I see you yourselves have been having some adventures with them.’ he said ‘At least now I know I am not going mad, they do exist and you yourselves nearly caught one eh? Well done’ he said with a wink. ‘now I wonder what day it is that we have been deposited in’

‘It was Monday afternoon on the 14th of July 1981 when we grabbed the monkey’ said Jane

‘Ah but you see it could be any day now, we have been dragged back and forth through time. As far as I could observe, and my tests determine, they only seem to

move within approximately fortnight of the present time. That is to say a week into the future and a week into the past. So, you see, potentially it could be anywhere between 7th and 21st. It was Sunday morning when I almost caught it.'

'Yes my dad said you had been missing' said Jane

'Oh poor Bridget will have been so worried. But who knows what day it is now. Lets go and face the music and find out. Ah but it is probably best not to mention the monkeys just yet. I really don't think they would believe us. And when this has all blown over what do you say we try to capture one again?' we smiled and nodded and then went back to our house and Mr. Jones went back to his. When we went in my mum and dad were sitting there looking very worried. My mum jumped up and flung her arms around us.

'I've been so worried. You've been gone all afternoon'

'All afternoon?' Jane said 'So it's still Monday?'

'Yes, what a strange thing to ask' she said and hugged tighter.'''

## **Chapter Nine**

Jack yawns wide and says sleepily:

"Time monkeys are great dad. Did you and Mr. Jones and auntie Jane ever try to catch one again like he said?"

"Maybe Jack, but that's a story for another night. You go to sleep now" And he kisses his forehead and pulls the quilt up to his shoulder, before he has crept to the door Jack is fast asleep.

Downstairs Peter's wife has cleaned up the mess.

"Is he in bed?" she asks.

"Yes" he says as he puts the dirty clothes in the wash basket

"What happened?" asks his wife.

"I don't know, perhaps he had the bowl perched on the edge of the table and it fell. He was upset but I told him a story and gave him a bath. He's fine now and fast asleep"

"What story did you tell him?"

"I made one up about time travelling cheeky monkeys"

"Time travelling cheeky monkeys? You've got a weird imagination Peter" she says smirking. He goes into the dining room and looks at the table for a minute, then with a quick look around, he scrunches up his eyes and listens really hard. Hearing nothing he chuckles to himself then goes to the lounge to watch the X Factor final with his wife.

## Graveyard

“Come on, we’ll miss the bus” shouts Peter.

“Alright I’m ready” says Sue coming down the stairs pulling her small jacket about her.

“Have you got your Keys?” he asks.

“Yes”

“Phone?”

“Yes”

“Money?”

“Yes”

“Tickets?”

“Yes” she pats her pockets “Oh hang on, no, try the notice board in the kitchen” Peter goes and looks.

“Yes, got them, now let’s go”

Locking the door they walk hurriedly down the empty dark Street. John looks at his watch

“The show starts at eight, if we miss this bus we won’t get in, why does it take you so long to get ready?”

“You want me to look nice for you don’t you?”

“Yes” he says a little sharply then looking at her he mellows “and you do. You look beautiful” They exchange smiles and walk fast rounding the corner, up over the railway bridge and past the dark silhouette of the church spire rising black against the orange tinged clouds. The graveyard lies silent and still in the darkness beneath.

“I hate this place at night” Says Sue stumbling on her high heels to keep up with John’s rapid pace.

“What are you scared of? Zombies rising out of their graves?”

“Shut up John” She says grabbing onto his hand. They reach the corner of the main road just in time to see the bus leaving the stop.

“Damn it, now we are going to miss the start.” Says John in a burst of frustration.

“I’m sorry” says Sue.

“No, it’s not your fault” he smiles “Well actually it is, but it doesn’t matter” he looks up into the dark church yard. “You know we could cut through the grave yard, then through the woods. That would bring us out on the main road. There will be other busses along there. What do you reckon?”

“The graveyard? No John, its dark”

“Come on Sue it’s the only way, I’m with you, what can happen?” he smiles one of his most charming ‘trust me’ smiles and she relents.

“Ok John”

They go to the large iron gate leading into the graveyard, John pushes it and it creaks open onto a narrow path that disappears into the dark shapes of the graves like the crooked teeth of some sleeping beast. Holding Sue’s hand tightly he leads her into the darkness. The sounds of the road fade as they creep along the crunching gravel path. Peter and Sue’s eyes slowly adjust to the deep gloom as the large dark shapes of the stones rise up on all sides. An icy chill seems to descend and their breath shoots out in vapour clouds.

“I’m cold John” says Sue a slight chatter to her teeth. He pulls her to him in a strong embrace “It’s so creepy in here” she says softly looking up into his dark face. He removes his jacket and wraps it around her, saying nothing but leading her on deeper into the yard.

They soon pass the church sensing more than seeing the hulk of the old building fall away to their left leaving the less dense darkness of the open sky. Row upon row of dark silent graves pass by and suddenly John whispers;

“We’re not on the path” he looks around for something to orient himself with; a light from the road, the dark church spire, the line of trees of the wood they are heading for, but he can see nothing. A thin mist seems to drift before his eyes and there is no sound but Sue’s breathing.

“This graveyard is bigger than I thought” he says, his voice seeming loud and falling flat against the silence. “We’ll keep going this way” he says with more confidence in his voice than he feels.

They hear a sound, a quiet wailing some where distant and Sue freezes rigid.

“Jesus John what was that? It sounds like someone crying for god sake”

“It’s just a cat.”

“A cat? That’s the most human sounding cat I’ve... Listen” she says sharply and the sound drifts over them again.

“It’s a cat sue, honestly, come on”

They soon come to a spiked iron fence crossing their path and dividing the graveyard into two. Following this to the left, picking their way awkwardly through long tangled grass, they come to an opening. There is no gate on the old gateposts and they find they are on the path again which plunges down several worn stone steps.

“Look there’s the wood.” He points to a line of trees dark against the sky ahead, “We’re nearly there”.

“Oh my God John, I just saw a shadow moving over there. She whispers hoarsely digging her manicured nails into his arm.

“It’s just your imagination” He looks over and a chill runs through him. He too sees the shadowy figure gliding slowly through the gravestones. His breath comes in sharp gasps trying to rationalise what he is seeing.

“It will just be someone walking their dog, ignore it, come on we’re close.” Forcing the shadow from his mind he leads Sue on aware that she is shaking. When they get to the trees the ground falls sharply away. There is still no sign of the lights from the road. A trickling can be heard from down the dark slope and John peers into the darkness.

“Damn, we’ve come the wrong way. It’s the river down here. That must mean the road’s that way.” He points back over the way they came.

“Back through the graves? John please no”

“It’s not far, come on Sue hold it together” Just then something whooshes past both their heads so close that the breeze of it lifts Sue’s fair hair; she screams loudly, clinging on to John.

“Hold it together John? Why did you bring us in to this fucking graveyard? Get me out of here please I can’t take any more. I want to go home” And she breaks down sobbing. An owl hoots loudly. He realises how upset she is as she rarely uses swear words like that.

“It was just an owl.” He says trying to reassure her while his own racing heart slows. “The shadowy figure was just someone walking his dog or taking a shortcut home from the pub. You’re just letting your imagination run away with you.”

“I just want to go home, I’m so scared, I have never felt so petrified in my life” she buries her head in his chest, sobs wracking her body as she repeats over and over “I just want to go home”

“Alright! It’s ok. I’ll take you home. There are no ghosts here, trust me, why would they want to hang around such a dreary place? They’re off somewhere else, probably watching the show we’re going to miss.” He looks at her, the glimmer of a smile plays in her eyes before fear fills them with tears again. “We’ll just go back this way and follow the path back.

“Ok John”

And they walk slowly back without talking. Sue with her head on John’s shoulder not looking. John scans the night, his senses on high alert, her fear infecting him and growing in him and he fights to push it down to be strong for her.

They reach the path and he looks left and right, unsure which way leads back past the church. The path is lined with the dark forms of skeletal trees; still sentinels watching over the resting place of the dead. He feels Sue let go of him and he looks to see what she is doing. To his surprise she is staring into the darkness.

“I think it’s this way.” He says but she doesn’t respond or seem to hear him. Instead she stares into the darkness, a sad look on her tear stained face. Following her gaze he can see nothing, unless it is a slight movement just on the edge of sight

“What are you looking at?” Sue seeming to come out of a trance momentarily to focus on John says in a distant voice.

“That poor little girl, she has lost her mother, she shouldn’t be out here alone at night in the cold darkness, she must be so scared” without warning she runs between the graves.

“What? Sue!” he shouts in confusion at her sudden change in behaviour “It’s this way. What little girl?” but she has disappeared into the darkness. He sets off after her with growing fear and confusion,

‘She got hysterical and now she is acting strange. Maybe something has snapped in her head.’ He follows her receding form through the graves then into a small hedged area. There is a quiet tinkling sound of wind chimes hanging from the trees surrounding the small garden of remembrance. John can see Sue like a shadow running up the steps on the opposite side, her hair trailing.

“Sue, please stop, Sue”, he shouts but she is gone “What the hell in she doing?”

He runs across the lawn, nearly stumbling over a bench. Up the steps and through the hedge he sees her in the distance disappearing round a towering monument. The word “Sue” is frozen on his lips mid shout as he hears a high scream that freezes his blood. He sprints through the graves towards the monument his mind filled with the most horrific thoughts of why Sue would have screamed. A carved gargoyle grins maniacally down at him from the old stone obelisk like tower and John imagines he can hear a cackling laughter somewhere in the distance.

‘Please be alright’ he thinks, ‘Just hysterical with fear but not hurt please.’ going round the other side of the monument he cannot see her among the rows of graves

stretching away from him. He walks ahead looking all around frantically. He stumbles as he walks into a large mound of dirt. It takes several long moments for him to realise what this is. A freshly dug grave lies at his feet. The clouds part high overhead and a beam of bright moonlight shines down. Lying deep in the narrow pit is the painfully twisted body of Sue.

“Susan!” he shouts and without thought drops down onto the dark hole careful not to step on her in the cramped space. “Susan speak to me, are you hurt? Please speak to me, oh God, oh God what should I do?” despair overcomes him as she doesn’t move or make any sign of life. He refuses to believe she can be dead as he shakes her vigorously, desperately trying to get a reaction out of her.

“Please no, speak to me Sue, speak to me!” he breaks down sobbing his head on her lifeless chest, deep in the bottom of the freshly dug grave.

“Peter”

“What?” he is up now listening. Sue spoke his name but it wasn’t from her cold dead lips. The voice came from the distance, somewhere above him.

“Goodbye peter” the voice drifts again, quieter now. He jumps up and claws his way out of the grave. Breathless and dirty he looks around the darkness of the graveyard but can see no one.

“Susan” he shouts but gets no reply. Falling to his knees he cries tears of deep sorrow for the loss of his Susan. Then he hears a quiet laughter and looking up there is a girl standing on the other side of the grave. The deep shadows of night do not touch her. Cascading golden wrinklets of hair around her shoulders. Her

beautiful face pale with eyes like deep hollow pits of blackness. She gazes down into the grave at the dark body then looking straight at peter she laughs, she turns and skips playfully away through the gravestones, her hair bouncing with each skip. The girl is skipping towards another figure. Susan! She stands ethereal amid the stones looking at Peter she smiles and waves slowly then holding the little girl's hand they turn their backs and walk away disappearing into the darkness leaving peter to cry by the graveside.

## A Fairy Tale Ending?

“Don’t get out yet, wait, and let me take the picture.” says Kevin closing the driver’s door with his foot and looking through the camera viewfinder at Dianne in the back seat “Move the blanket from her eyes”

“Ok. Hurry up she’ll be getting cold” says Dianne looking at the camera with a smile.

“Oh, that’s beautiful” he says looking at the picture preview on the digital camera as she struggles out of the car. He continues snapping, then notices she is trying to kick open the front door, he says “wait let me open that”

“Thanks Kev”

“Hang on; I’ll get one as you carry her over the threshold for the first time”

“I just want to get her in out of the cold” Inside she lays the baby on a mat and sits down in the arm chair with a deep sigh.

“It’s good to be home.” She says “Make us a cup of tea, love” Kevin is kneeling down over the baby carefully unwrapping the blanket from around her.

“Leave her while she’s quiet”

“I just want to get some pictures of her”

“You’ve got hundreds, leave her and make me a brew”

“Hang on a minute, you’ve put that baby grow on inside out Dianne, do you want me to change it?”

“No Kev it’s meant to be like that”

“Eh why?” Dianne looks at the floor a little shyly.

“Mother used put our vests on inside out to keep the bad fairies and pixies away.” He chuckles at the silliness of it and gets up.

“I’ll make that tea then”

A few weeks later the baby is settled in to her own nursery. Its late afternoon and Kev and Dianne relax on the sofa. The baby monitor emanates a crying and Kev sees that Dianne is relaxed, something that is rare for her just lately.

“I’ll go” he says kissing her forehead and easing his arm from under her neck. When he gets up to her room she is simpering. He creeps to the cot making soothing sshh-ing sounds and looks over to see her eyes closing slowly as she falls back to sleep. Deep love for her, his baby, his little princess, wells up in him and he feels so full of pride. Then he notices half a slice of wholemeal bread at the top of the cot and is confused.

‘Was Dianne eating a butty and dropped this?’ he thinks to himself picking it up. ‘It’s not one of her silly superstitions is it?’ Trying to leave the room quietly Kev stands on something bag like and there is a sudden blaring noise like a wheezy old man wailing.

“What the hell?” Looking down in the soft glow of the baby light he sees a set of bagpipes.

“Why the hell are these bagpipes here?” He says to himself. The baby stirs again with the noise and Kevin stuffs the pipes into the wardrobe quickly, trying to minimize the raspy squealing they make. He goes to sooth baby again saying in a soft voice;

“I thought those were in the loft. Your crazy old uncle Fraser left these last New Year. They were bloody

awful to listen too, like a cat was being strangled... Sshhh but don't you tell him I said that! Good night" He goes back downstairs and Dianne is asleep. When he sits next to her she wakes with the movement.

"She's gone off again now. This bread was in her cot. Do you know anything about it?"

"I put it there" she says sleepily

"Why? Not another superstition?" she sits up straight

"It's to ward off Fairies"

"Fairies? Why? Aren't they nice little butterfly things that live at the bottom of the garden under a mushroom and leave 50p under your pillow for a tooth?"

"No" she says with an amused look on her face "Mum said that's just Disney. Fairies and pixies can be nasty little things that come in the night and swap your baby"

"Swap it with what?"

"One of their own, a changeling"

"A changeling?"

"Listen, I just do it in memory of my mother. She believed in this and always said when I have a baby I must protect her. That's all it is"

"Hmmm." He looks dubious then says under his breath "I always said your mother was a witch"

"I heard that" says Dianne laughing and hitting Kev around the head with a cushion.

Several more weeks pass by and Kevin puts up with Dianne's superstitious quirks with quiet amusement until one evening he is passing by on the landing while

she is putting baby to bed and is shocked by what he sees.

“Whoa Dianne, what are the scissors for?” she looks up surprised to see him in the doorway

“What? My mother said...”

“Oh, your bloody mother again”

“Don’t say that. It just a tradition, iron wards off the nasty pixies and open scissors are the best deterrent for them”

“Bits of bread in the bed and inside out clothes are one thing but scissors! That’s just dangerous”

“Its not! They go under the mattress, they are nowhere near her”

“And how long have you been putting these under her mattress?”

“All the time, and look, she’s safe” She looks over at the window with a strange glance. “She’s safe Kev”

“You’re taking these superstitions too seriously Dianne. What next? Garlic to ward off vampires? And those bagpipes in the room a few weeks ago, were they one of yours too?” she nods a little sheepishly.

“It’s just a way of alerting you, mum said a changling can’t resist playing a good tune on them” Kev tuts and rolls his eyes. She looks thoughtful a moment

“Do you think garlic salt will do?”

“And how will you stop the aliens abducting her?” he snorts

“Aliens! What do you mean Kev?”

“Dianne! Will you stop this for God sake, are you real? This is your mother filling your head with all this rubbish”

“Don’t you talk about my mother like that, show some respect for the dead Kevin”

“Respect? It was your mother who...” He stops himself “I’m going out”

Later after a long walk he comes back and finds the house silent. Quietly he goes upstairs and peering into his room sees that Dianne is sleeping. In the next room the baby is stirring and looking at his watch he thinks ‘it’s probably time for her night feed’ picking her up before she cries he notices with some chagrin that her clothes are still inside out and the bread is still in the cot.

‘For god sake Dianne. I bet those bloody scissors are still under the mattress too. I’m gonna get rid of all this superstitious rubbish and show her that its nonsense.

“Fairies kidnapping you in the night and leaving a pixie in your place, I’ve never heard such rubbish, and you mother seems to really believe it too, yes she does” He says the last bit in quiet baby talk and is delighted to see her smile back at him.

Kev wakes the next morning. Rolling over he sees Dianne’s side of the bed is empty. He lies back looking up at the shadows the early morning sun casts in the raised patterns in the textured wall paper on the ceiling. He can hear her moving in the next room through the baby monitor.

‘She doesn’t seem to have noticed that I took those things away. That’s good, hopefully it’s the last I will hear of it’ Barely has he finished the thought when a screech comes simultaneously from the open door and the baby monitor

‘Where are they? Why are they gone? The clothes too? Oh no why? Kevin!’ She comes into the room. ‘Kev did you get rid of the scissors and the bread and change her clothes?’ He tuts and rolls his eyes ‘Kev did you?’ she shouts.

‘Yes Dianne I did’

‘Why’

‘Because it’s stupid Di, come on a few superstitions is ok but you’re obsessed.’

‘No I’m not. My mother...’

‘You and your mother, she died four years ago and she’s still interfering in our bloody lives’

‘You never liked my mother

‘She was a mad old witch, and you’re going the same way with all these stupid ideas of yours’ Dianne starts crying. Kev gets out of bed and puts his dressing gown on. She stands at the foot of the bed sobbing into her hands. He goes to her put his arms around her but she recoils from his touch moving away.

‘Get off me, you don’t care, you don’t understand me, you just live in your own little world. I hate you’ and she breaks down crying. He goes to embrace her and this time she allows him.

‘I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have spoken like that’ She doesn’t respond except to rest her head on his shoulder. After a few moments the sound of soft crying comes through the monitor.

‘She needs us’ he says softly and leads her into the nursery, Kev says to Dianne

‘Look, she is absolutely fine. She wasn’t taken or harmed or swapped for a fairy child’ he picks her up and kisses her Cheek then hands her to Dianne ‘She is fine

and she wants her Mummy” Dianne smiles and takes the baby. Kevin wipes away the tears with his thumb then kisses her Cheek then the babies again.

Things are a little strained between them that day but Dianne doesn't mention things again. Then next day, Monday Kevin goes to work early before either of the girls are awake. It's about six when he finally arrives home.

“I'm home” He says coming in and hanging his coat up on the peg. “Di. Are you in, love? It's been a hell of a day, I'm knackered. Di” He goes into the kitchen. The baby is in a chair on the table next to a large basket of eggs. Dianne, still in her dressing gown is bent over the stove holding something over the flame.

“What are you doing Di?” Asks Kev a little confused and concerned. She looks at Kev and says

“Watch this” in a low voice and looking at the baby. She is carefully holding a spoon over the flame that has half an empty egg shell balanced on it which is filled with water.

“I'm just boiling water in this egg shell” she says almost trying to act casually as if not wanting the baby to be alerted. She points at the baby who is sucking quietly on her finger. ‘Watch’, she mouths.

“Watch what?” Kevin's concern is growing, “This is not normal behaviour Dianne what are you talking about?” He goes over to turn off the gas but she pushes his hand away.

“I'll show you that that is a changeling. That is not my daughter Kevin, the fairies swapped her and if you

will let me I will prove it to you” He looks her in the eye and is startled to see absolute sincerity.

“You’ve gone mad. You need help Dianne. Look at what you are doing can’t you see this isn’t right.”

“I am not mad Kevin”

“Well why are you boiling water in friggin egg shells?” He raises his voice.

“So that thing...” She points with restrained aggression to the baby and continues through gritted teeth “...will be caught out, if you don’t give the game away with all your shouting! Watch” and she shows the baby the eggshell with steaming water in. The baby sucks its little fingers oblivious.

“‘That thing’ is our daughter Dianne. Oh God this is madness. You need help.”

“It’s only cos you came in shouting your mouth off Kev. Don’t you think I would know my own daughter, my own flesh and blood? What would you know; you never carried her in your belly for nine months. I know Kevin! I know” and she cries. He stands unsure for a moment feeling a little lost, wishing that her mother was still alive so he could either shout at her for making Dianne like this or else get her to talk some sense into her, to tell her its just old wives tales. He steps closer to her, she backs off pushing him firmly away.

“I’ll show you! I’ll make you see!” and she grabs the basket of eggs, emptying them onto the table and floor where they smash in a mess. Then she picks up the baby not too gently and puts her in the basket. Kev makes a Small move to object at how rough she is but the crazed glare from Dianne stops him in his tracks. A sudden and over whelming fear washes over him that she is unhinged

and could actually harm the baby. He feels very alone and frightened watching horror struck as she places the basket unto the stove and lights all the rings

“Come on you little bastard, get out run back to where you came from and send my daughter back” screams Dianne right into the babies face. Kevin’s paralysis was momentary. He is master of his mind and his body once more and he needs to take charge. He strides across the room knocking Dianne to the floor and taking the baby from the basket which he flings to one side. It falls and sizzles in the slimy egg that is running all over the floor as the flames that had just about started in the willow weave are put out. Dianne cries in the corner on the floor while Kev checks that the baby has not been burned, he hugs her shaking with tears welling in his eyes.

“Severe post natal depression you say... and she will need to stay there for a few days? Thank you Doctor Forbes for everything you have done for her... Yes the babies upstairs sleeping now... I will. Thanks again... Good night” Putting the phone down he sits and rubs his face looking at the dark TV screen and listening to the utter silence in the house, thinking about the last twenty four hours or so. Not knowing what to do and feeling desperate he had called A&E and had been put through to a crisis team. Once he explained how Dianne had been acting and the potential danger to the baby they acted immediately, sending out a CPN and social worker to evaluate her. She maintained the changeling story even with them and after much debate and discussion and with great reluctance Kevin had agreed it would be the best

thing to take her to a secure unit for treatment for the babies' safety.

Slowly Kevin becomes aware of rasping wheezy noises building note upon note into a fast jolly jig. At first he looks at the TV, and then wonders if the radio has been left on. Then he realises with a terrifying chill that this is the sound of the bagpipe playing coming from the baby monitor. They are being played in the babies' room!