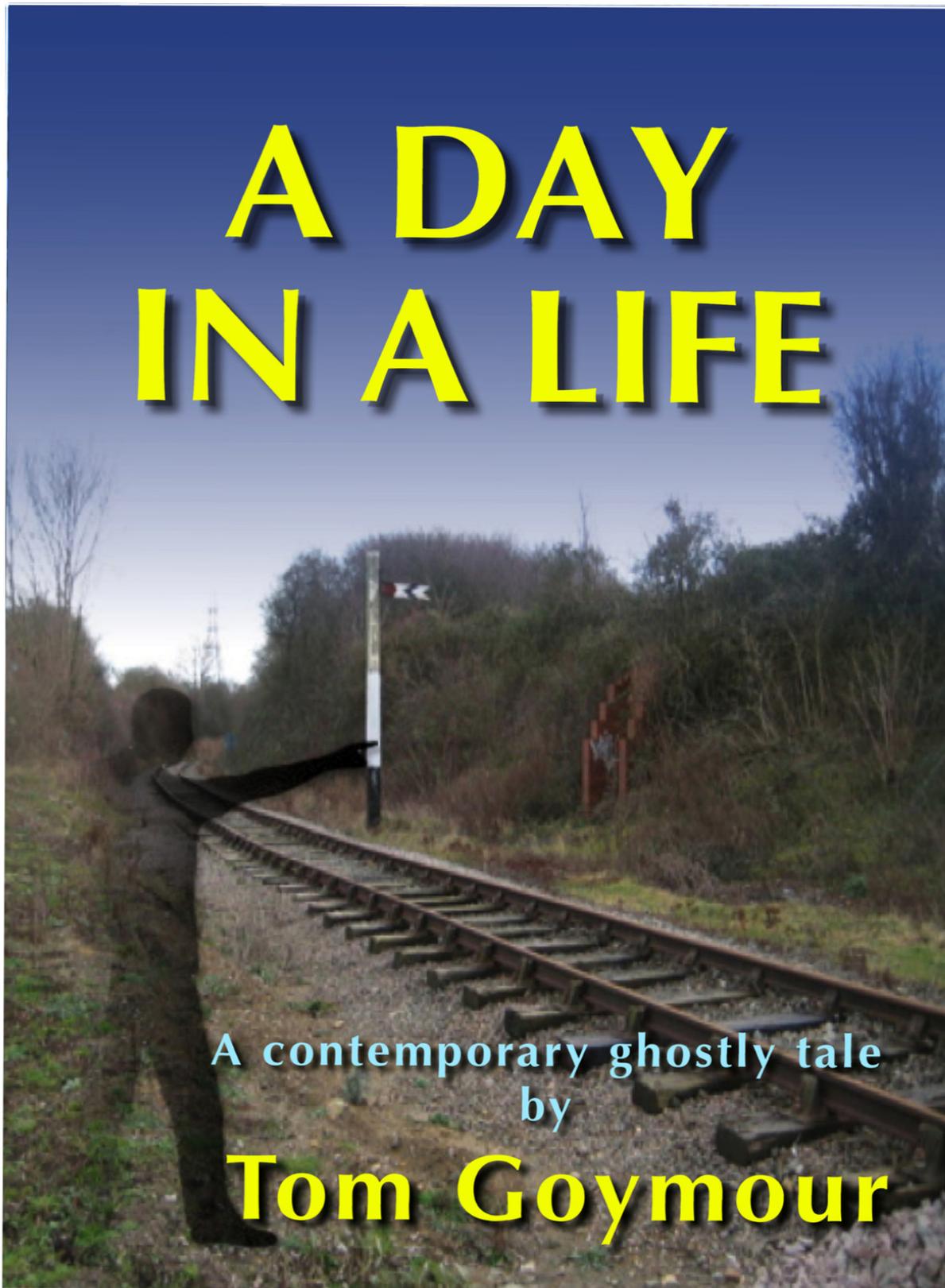


A DAY IN A LIFE

A contemporary ghostly tale
by

Tom Goymour



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Tom Goymour

V e r b u m
P u b l i c a t i o n s

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Foreword

He didn't seem himself. He seemed agitated as if he needed to tell me something but wasn't quite sure how to. Whatever happened last night had clearly shaken him, but I needed to know more . . . so, after I questioned him some more, he told me:

“Your serious! It really happened?” I was slightly taken aback. It was a Saturday, we had a lot to do and I had only been half listening as I bustled about the kitchen. I was trying to finish the dishes before my other half came down the stairs to complain about the mess. There seemed to have been a few strange things happening around us lately and we had all taken them with a pinch of salt, but the more I thought about it the more I felt something . . . as if it was a catalyst for something that was to follow.

“Honestly Dad, I know it was late and I was tired but it happened . . . I really saw it.”

I stood at the sink bathing my hands in the warm dishwater as I allowed myself that moment of daydream to take in what my son was telling me, and in that moment, my imagination began to take over. I thought; 'What if it were all true? Who might it be and what did it mean? I wanted to get in the car and go and have a look myself there and then, but there would be no point . . . surely there would be nothing to see in broad daylight!

The rest of that day is one I shall never forget; it was the day that inspired me to write. This was also in part due to another real event that took place later that day concerning a football match involving the City's team, but that is altogether another story . . . literally!

It all started that very spring evening when I told my children a story. I just made it up as I went along . . . but there were bits of the days' events mixed in. I've always believed that whatever I write about works best when I have some direct experience of the thing that caused me to write. On this particular day, my son Seb had seen a ghost under Botolph bridge in Orton Longueville and I found myself thinking, if it can happen to him then it can happen to any of us . . . *anyone might just think they've seen a ghost!*

We live in the suburbs of a large city, just like many others . . . steeped in history, and rife with its share of myths and legends. I got to the point of thinking what if some of it were true? And what about the people, how would they react to something so strange and sinister? I mean . . . if tomorrow you woke up and the day took an unexpected path, with a surreal twist . . . how would you react?

Some months passed and winter came and I remembered the experience of that weekend back in the spring – that single day when I felt inspired to tell a story based around a strange happening.

Sometimes in our lives we can point back to a single day that changed our perspective of life in some way, maybe not hugely so but then . . . who knows! So, on this cold bright February

morning I hand you a tale of a single day in a life of a family man who found that for him, one rather peculiar experience was to change everthing.

* * * * *

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Late Night Wanderers

She could see the lights ahead as she wandered alone and confused, but it was all right, she was on the right road. As she staggered ever closer she could feel it - something pulling her nearer. Onward she shuffled, dishevelled, and disorientated but that wasn't unusual, she had become quite prone to often venturing out in such a state. Tonight the lights were so bright, too bright she thought, but no matter, she was drawn out here on this cold February night because she knew it was important. Somewhere in front of her something was happening, someone needed her and she knew she had to be there. She had done this many times before, but somehow tonight, it felt different. No matter that it was dark, no matter that it was cold, it was stronger this time - the feeling - more important than anything that had happened before.

Her pace quickened, and, looking only straight ahead she soon became oblivious to the bright lights and quiet noise of the rumbling traffic flowing along the main road into town. She had to cross a road. Now, suddenly there was something else - something very near . . . it happened so fast - too fast! And, oh, those bright lights . . . too bright! Now it was right on her - the noise that in a flash grew to a dynamic climax, and then, all was suddenly quiet.

For a minute she couldn't speak, but then she realised everything was suddenly different now. Things seemed to start happening around her all at once, just like in a dream that mixes into just a few seconds one's perceived experiences of a day. She could see someone coming over towards her. It was a man, and she knew now that everything was all going to be all right. She knew that he'd seen to it and she thanked him.

* * * * *

A woman lay on her back, her eyes open. She knew him too well.

“Can't you sleep?” she asked quietly.

There came a sigh then a pause before her husband answered.

“I've been asleep, I've just woken up.”

(Men never like to admit something might be disturbing them, and that something might *actually* be preventing them from sleeping! It's kind of like admitting a weakness!)

In this case it was simply that her husband was starting a new job tomorrow. It had been a while, but now, finally he had a job, or at least, a trial - working on the railway.

Peterborough has something of the 'railway city' tag to its name; always it has been a prominent stop right from the early days of railway history as it is directly on the line north from London. Indeed, many folk have come to make a journey's stop at Peterborough. It's actually the first major City one comes to travelling north from the Capital. It is said, that Charles Dickens, had some inspiration for his novel 'Oliver Twist' after a visit to a city about eighty miles or so

from the capital where he had occasion to observe an active workhouse. He once stopped overnight in Peterborough and gave a talk from the Cathedral.

There is also the recreation of the world of steam; The Nene Valley Railway runs from Woodston, a suburb immediately to the south west of the centre, to Wansford, a picturesque village about eight miles down river west of the City. This recreates an experience of past times for those that want to take up the opportunity and seriously indulge themselves.

His new venture with the railway was an exciting prospect, but right now nervous anticipation was keeping him awake!

“It’ll be fine love” reassured his other half, hoping that this early morning conversation might now dwindle so that they could both get some sleep.

“Yeah, I think I’ll enjoy it, it’s just that . . . oh, I don’t know, something about me . . . and this job . . .” There was anxiety in his voice and Sue, his wife, recognised it.

“Look” she said, hitching her position so that she could sit up in the bed and talk.

“Just suck it and see, you’ve nothing to lose, it really doesn’t matter. Just relax and try and get some sleep.”

“Suppose you’re right, as always,” he replied as he attempted to settle.

Just then, there came a familiar sound. They could both clearly hear the key turn in the door.

“He’s home then” – Sue’s tone changed. “A bit late, I wish he’d tell us when he’s coming back, and he’d better not make a mess down there cooking.” She was unsettled now. The key had turned in the lock and that meant her son Seb had just let himself in. She glanced at the illuminated clock on the table bedside her;

“It’s nearly a quarter past one!” she gasped.

“Better get some sleep then” replied her husband, not at all surprised to hear his eighteen-year-old son straggling in so late - this wasn’t uncommon, but something else about it was!

They listened:

“He’s bumbling about a bit” remarked Sue “Now he’s coming straight upstairs, I wish he wouldn’t make so much of a commotion.”

It was true, Seb certainly was anxious about something and they could tell, just from what they could hear lying in their bed that he did seem to be of an unusually disturbed disposition - even for him!

“Ooh, my . . . for flip’s sake” Seb’s voice was vague and distant, but he was definitely uttering those words to himself!

“What’s he on about?” His mother was now quite perplexed.

“Probably some mate’s done something he doesn’t approve of, like bought the wrong colour sweatshirt, or put some embarrassing picture on facebook or something! Let’s get to sleep, we’ll find out tomorrow, I’m sure everything’s alright.” With that he shut his eyes, now totally uninterested in any of his son’s dramatics.

The next morning was cold, bright and crisp. The early February sun reflected off the traces of frost that adorned the rooftops as James Ambrose made his way through the Orton Longueville streets. They lived in the middle of the village that runs alongside the A605 Oundle road, the main road into the city from the west. Orton Longueville is situated to the south of the river Nene and the steam railway that cuts through the Nene valley. The bus stop he was heading for was on Shrewsbury Avenue - less than a hundred metres from the traffic lights junction. From there it would be a simple journey into town for the first day of his new job. Peterborough railway station is perhaps only a mile or so away as the crow flies and the main line runs at this point in a South East to North Westerly direction. The *Railworld* headquarters from where the Nene Valley Steam railway starts is situated on the old line somewhat nearer at Woodston.

‘New beginnings’, he thought as he approached the bus stop, and, perhaps he would look back on today as the first day of the rest of his life! Who knows!

When he arrived at the bus stop there were three other individuals already there waiting for a bus. There was an elderly man with a frown set like stone, as if fixed on some imaginary object, ahead of him on the ground. There was also an elderly woman beaming intelligently and catching his eye as he came to a halt, and then, there was the young girl; a teenager, probably a college student or maybe just a carefree youngster with a pliable and timeless schedule heading off into town to fulfil whatever the day threw at her. She smiled nervously across at James. However, after a moment or two it was the older woman that drew his attention, the woman that James just knew, even before she’d uttered a word, was going to strike up a conversation with him. The woman then spoke first:

“You off into town then?” she enquired.

“Yup” he replied realising almost instantly that he’d not given her a full enough answer and consequently the conversation was bound to continue.

“Off to work I guess then,” she continued. James was a little annoyed, he didn’t really feel in the mood for conversation, but he found himself answering to this quaint old lady. The woman had to be in her seventies James reckoned, she came across as sprightly of nature confident of voice.

“Let me see now” she said scrutinizing him with her sharp eyes “You’re a little apprehensive about something I reckon!”

“Well, yeah, maybe.” He grinned. James found himself becoming extraordinarily open to this woman. I'm just starting a new job you see, it's actually my first day.”

Over the next few minutes whilst waiting for the bus, the two of them talked. No one else seemed to take any notice at all, or even to be aware of the conversation taking place. James found the old woman quite a charmer, she was very interested in his new job on the railway, and, as they talked he thought he recognised her - a distant neighbour perhaps! She gave him a great heads up about a short cut he could take to his new job . . . and, in fact, as the weather was fine and the day seemed invitingly invigorating, he decided to take her advice.

So, off he strolled leaving the bus stop and it's three attendees to fulfil their own transport plans. He crossed the road, took the short cut into Landsdowne Walk - the cut-through road some seventy metres ahead of him by the traffic lights that his new acquaintance had pointed out to him, and, with a new lease of confidence growing inside he walked forward into the day ahead.

The Moaner

It was around 11.45am when Seb surfaced!. Sue had been up for hours and had forgotten about her teenage son. Actually, 11.45am was quite respectable for him after a late night out.

“Ah . . . so it moves!” remarked his mother sarcastically as Seb staggered down the stairs towards the general direction of the kitchen. “And, instinctively the creature will now seek food” she added under her breath.

“What time is it?” (*The creature spoke.*)

“Perhaps if you could engage a tiny part of your brain to the task in hand you might be able to answer that for yourself” – the creature's mother's sarcasm dwindled in its authenticity and now contained a credible instruction as the clock was right in front of the creature.

“Alright I only asked the time, you're always having a go at me.” Seb was annoyed.

“Well the clock *is* right in front of you!” exclaimed Sue.

“I've got to sign on at one o'clock - you should have woken me up.”

“Huh! . . . you never get up . . . I knocked on your door an hour ago, you said you were getting up, then you told me to go away!”

“No I didn't” replied her son.

“Seb, it's a waste of time arguing with you so I'm not going to . . . just don't leave this kitchen in a mess when you've fixed yourself something to eat. I'm not clearing up your after you.”

It was the day that Seb had to report in town to sign on. This had been the pattern for a few weeks now. With her husband James starting a new job today, Sue had quite forgotten it was her son's signing day.

"Maybe . . ." she began " . . . something will turn up. You never know!" Sue was trying to be on his side; being a young male out of work in Britain during the second decade of the twenty-first century is not easy.

"Oh . . . yeah . . . I forgot, of course, like . . . a job will just turn up! I'll be walking along down the street and suddenly, one day there will be the perfect job . . . it will just 'turn up' . . . especially for me! (the boot was now on the other foot as far as delivering the sarcasm was concerned.)

"You know what I mean" his mother replied. "Anyway, make sure you're not late. Have you got your bus fare?"

'So' Sue thought to herself 'The two men in the family were both destined to catch a bus into the city today in their quest for something . . . something more than what they currently had . . . that would place them in a better position than where they were right now!'

As her mind wandered back to her husband James and what sort of day he might be having, she noticed something slightly disturbing on the side in the kitchen.

'Damn' she thought 'He's left his mobile phone behind so he probably won't be able to ring me at any point to tell how it's going.' This put Sue on edge a little, she had hoped to perhaps hear from her other half at some point during the day, after all, she wasn't even sure how long he was working or when he'd be home!

"We don't have any eggs," came an annoying voice. "Why haven't we got any eggs left it's only Tuesday?"

"We haven't got any left because you ate them. Me and your father haven't got much money, we can't afford to keep buying more food on top of the weekly shop."

"Oh, you're always on about that, anyone can afford eggs, and I haven't had any since Sunday night!"

"Yes, but on Sunday night you had six! Me and your father never have more than two at a time and -"

"- Oh, you and my father this, you and my father that . . . give it a rest mum please, and do some shopping"

"Don't be so rude, it's about time you showed me some respect and made an effort." Sue was both cross and upset.

“To do what . . . get a job? And you don’t think I’m trying? Well, let me tell you this, I *am* trying. There are no jobs out there, it ain’t easy and you don’t seem to care anyway. You don’t appreciate when I *do* try.”

“Don’t tell me we don’t care, me and your father -”

“- Oh give it a rest mum please.” Seb stormed off to go and get dressed.

Forty minutes later Seb headed out to get the bus from Shrewsbury Avenue into town, just as his father had done earlier that day Sue supposed. She was now alone and feeling quite unsettled, not knowing for certainty when either of them would return.

Two Men on the Track

In what seemed like to have taken no time at all, following the elderly lady’s advice James found himself out on the railway track. It seemed it was all going to be pretty hands on and straight in at the deep end for his first day. He didn’t mind though, he had hoped to be doing practical work. He was a man who liked to get involved, he liked to get stuck in and get his hands dirty and it looked as if that was how it was going to be - actually working out on the track. It had all seemed to happen so fast, one minute he was walking down a railway line to his new place of work, the next he was out there being shown the ropes by a chap called Arthur who seemed to have been given or assumed the role of mentor.

Arthur was a down to earth friendly chap, a little older than James. He struck James as a very confident person, very definite, and someone who was clear about the tasks that lay ahead for that day and, James speculated, most probably every day. As they walked southward down the line away from the station, Arthur explained in some detail what they needed to do:

“There’s a lot needs doing, we’ve got to go and fix the points down there towards Fletton first.” He pointed. “Then when we’re done we go back to the yard and start greasing up the big girl.”

James assumed the ‘*Big girl*’ was some respected engine that was perhaps in need of some delicate but interesting maintenance, (he certainly hoped that was what his new friend meant!). Would this be part of his job as well?

As they trundled southwards down the line chatting together, tools in hand, it all seemed very strange. James examined his well worn uniform - a boiler suite of some age it would seem, and the smell - yes, that smell - oily but familiar. They were near the Sugar Beet factory and James wasn’t quite sure whether the smell of his boiler suite didn’t just have a bit of the old ‘British sugar campaign’ thrown in. It felt quite peculiar but rather quaint, as if he had entered another world!

‘We’re heading towards Botolph bridge on Oundle road, we’ve got to check those points out,’ commented Arthur. “Shouldn’t take long . . . just a bit of greasing, we’ll just check the rails as well . . . don’t really want to be there too long.”

James felt odd walking this way down the track, it was almost as if he was going back the way he’d come to work that morning taking the old woman’s advice but he wasn’t quite sure.

The two men talked a plenty as they headed down the line. Arthur told James about the many facets of the job and James listened attentively. Arthur also told some stories; - stories about things that had happened in the past. James listened even more intently.

“I much prefer to do maintenance up the other way,” continued Arthur, “up by the East station or on the east to west line at least. I don’t much like it down here, no one does really.”

“Oh!” commented James

“Well, we should be alright if we just go there and get the job done as quick as possible, but a bit of advice is to concentrate.” He paused, as if considering whether to say what he clearly had been about to say; Arthur continued; “Don’t . . . don’t look up the bank.”

This seemed to James a very strange thing to mention.

“Don’t look up the bank? What on earth do you mean?” James was puzzled.

“Oh it’s nothing really, just something I heard, well, just something we’ve all heard back at the yard.” Arthur knew he had let out too much and was now going to have to tell the whole story;

“Some people say they’ve seen someone up there when they look up, and the folk that say it . . . apparently, well, they either don’t come back or they get sort of ‘turned in the head’.”

“Go on . . .” James was all ears.

“Well, there’s supposed to be this face that looks down from the bank, only it’s not a face because, well, it’s faceless. *The Watcher* they call him. Thing is, you can’t look up - don’t ever look up.” Arthur’s voice was becoming more animated, and his eyes widened, as he seemed to gaze right past his new friend into the distance.

“So, it’s a ghost then. Why can’t you look at it?” asked James indignantly.

“Because, them who have, well something’s happened to ‘em. Either they’ve been called to follow such a ghost or they come back so terrified they are never the same again!” Arthur, now even wider-eyed, seemed very serious.

James however, began to laugh.

“Oh come on” he said “We all believe in ghosts a little bit, sure we do, but no ghost is going to get the better of me, I’ll tell you that.”

“Just don’t mock” Arthur replied abruptly. He was, it seemed, a little nervous as they were striding ever closer to the bridge that was suppose to be the scene of these strange visions!

“Alright.” challenged James “Who’s actually seen it then? Have you?”

Arthur seemed a little annoyed at the directness of this question.

“Well, no. But I’ll tell you something. I’ll tell you about some people who have seen him, and you better listen to what happened.”

James felt a little taken aback. On this bright cold February morning, his newfound friend was speaking from the heart and he felt compelled to listen.

Arthur continued:

“There was this woman a few years ago, Mrs Evie London. She was walking her dog alongside the railway line. She got to the bridge one evening about dusk, and she looked up. Next thing, she gets home to her husband in New road just off Oundle road down there all terrified. She says she’s seen this figure standing up on the bank just beyond the bridge looking down at her and he had no face! She reckons she *knew* he was there before she looked and that only her mental strength stopped her from actually following him such was the feeling she got”

James was not that impressed:

“Fanciful old women might reckon they’ve seen all sorts of things at dusk.” He said.

“That’s not all.” Arthur was now worked up into quite a state “Bob Wilkins then . . . used to work down at Peterborough east station. He was last seen heading down this line before he disappeared.”

“Disappeared?”

“Yup, just clean gone! He was actually walking home one evening down the line, (he lived in Fletton). He was drawn to the ghost you see, they reckon he followed it up the bank. What exactly happened no one knows but he were never seen again!” James gave Arthur a slightly startled stare but chose to say nothing.

The two men continued their trek with the weak late morning sunshine bathing down upon them. It was just a few minutes later when they arrived at the Botolph bridge that carries the A605 Oundle road over the railway line. James was somewhat sceptical. Most of what Arthur was telling him was unsubstantiated to say the least and James was not a man who was easily led to believe on fanciful ghost stories.

The line was soon mended, the work was done and neither man had looked up at the bank, but it was Arthur who was the more concerned and the more anxious and relieved when all was done and they could head back.

“You seem a little bothered by this place.” James felt he had to break the silence as Arthur had held his quiet mood for too long now.

“Yeah well,” he replied looking a little troubled. “sometimes I get a feeling that . . .” his speech stopped for a moment, “. . .well, it’s just that sometimes I sense something.”

“Sense something? Sense what?” cut in James

“No matter. Come on, let’s get back” Arthur’s mood seemed to suddenly change, right now all he wanted was to get back to base.

Sometime later, the two men arrived back at the station yard. James was not sure exactly where they were. It had seemed a short time for the distance they must have covered. Perhaps it was because Arthur had carried on telling him these many stories of strange that the time seemed to pass so quickly.

Presently, they were greeted by another man in uniform. This older man very quickly took James aside explaining that this afternoon he would be taking him under his wing. Arthur went to find his khaki green knapsack that contained his lunch. The older man seemed to James strangely inquisitive. Inquisitive that is, of what had taken place that morning. It was as if he was checking up on what Arthur had shown or told him.

“Come and sit here a minute lad” he said, gesturing towards a station seat that overlooked a panoramic view of the river Nene stretching beyond the railway line.

James still felt a little bewildered, leaving his house that morning to come to this new job now seemed hours ago!

“Was everything alright down at the bridge this morning?” asked the man.

“Why yes” James replied. “How do you mean? Was there some reason why it might not have been?”

“No no. It’s just that, Arthur . . . well he has a bit of a fixation on things at times and I don’t want anything he might of said to upset you at all.”

Although nobody had actually said it, it was clear to James that this station chap was their senior and that whatever words he spoke should be listened to.

“Did he tell you a few strange tales by any chance?” asked the man

James was slightly shocked.

“Well, yes he did as a matter of fact” he replied.

“Aaah! I see,” continued the station man, “then I suppose he told you about Evie London, and the rest?”

“Well, yes, sort of.” Now James really was a little uneasy, was he being a little disloyal to Arthur, discussing what he’d said with this chap?

“And people that disappear?” continued the man.

“Why are you asking?” questioned James, feeling he deserved a quick answer.

“Well, don’t take this the wrong way lad, Arthur is a great bloke, but you see, he’s got this problem.”

“How do you mean?”

“Well for a start, did he tell you that a man called Bob Wilkins disappeared down the line?”

“Y. . yes’ James stammered.

“He actually ran off with some tart you know. His wife heard from him three months later. You see, there was nothing odd about him not coming home that day - he’d planned it all along . . . only thing is, it makes such a story you see. Anyway lad, you carry on, I just wanted you to know, he’s a bit fanciful is Arthur and it gets to him sometimes. He feels he’s one of those folk with ‘special powers’ - one of those that strange things might happen to. I don’t think he’s ever seen anything but he’s known to get himself worked up into a bit of a state at times.”

For a moment James didn’t know what to say, he’d trusted Arthur but he could see that his stories were possibly all a little make believe.

“So are you saying it’s all a load of bull . . . ?” he asked.

“I don’t say all of it, he certainly thinks it’s all for real, but don’t you let it affect your duties, I tell you, it ain’t worth it.”

Just then another man came up to the older man and asked if he may have a word. James watched intently as the two moved away and spoke in lowered tones for about thirty seconds.

“Well well.” Said the first man turning back to face James.

“It seems my concerns are immediately relevant. You’ve got a bit more to do on those points I’m afraid.”

“Yeah?” queried James.

“I told you Arthur was not always quite in control - seems he’s forgotten to actually change something! You see, they must be moved right over. There’s only one thing for it, you’ll have to go back and do it. As soon as Arthur’s finished his lunch, go and get him and the two of you can head back up there.”

Fifteen minutes later the two men were once again heading south down the old Fletton line towards Botolph bridge. Arthur seemed a little on edge, almost annoyed at being asked to go back and correct something he thought he’d completed. He said very little as they strode back along the track. The sun was bright and in their eyes as they headed south. The time seemed to pass swiftly as the bridge came quickly into view.

“Best make this quick” spoke a somewhat agitated Arthur as they approached the point where the maintenance was needed. The two men downed their tools and turned to examine the point on

the line that needed their attention. Arthur said nothing . . . he just stared. Then - he started to gaze upwards.

James' attention was drawn by something else, something real - something was vibrating!

"Do you feel something?" he asked.

Arthur didn't reply, his gaze was now fixed firmly in front of him.

"Hey, can you feel that vibration?" There was slight panic in James' voice.

Arthur was looking up at the bank . . . oblivious to his colleague's remarks.

The railway line was now vibrating furiously, that could mean only one thing! James looked down the line and he could see the distant shape of the approaching object!

"Train coming!" he yelled, but Arthur was looking up towards the bank and pointing; a terrified look of fear set firm across his face.

"Th . . . there!" he stammered. "Look . . . there he is!"

But all that James' brain could cope with processing was working out the fastest way to get off the line - like now!

"Move!" He screamed as he stepped clear of the rail track, quite expecting his friend to follow.

But Arthur stood firm on the track:

"The watcher!" He stammered as he pointed.

James peered upwards he could see nothing. In that same split second, his instinctive reactions kicked in - but Arthur's didn't! He was paralysed, frozen to the spot!

In a flash, with the train now just metres away, horn sounding loudly, James grabbed Arthur as he leapt across the line forcing his body momentum to take his colleague with him all in one movement as they were both thrown clear on to the foot of the bank in the nick of time. There was a deafening roar as the train thundered past just inches clear of where they both now lay. Arthur had missed certain death by a whisker but he wasn't to realise this - and neither right now was James!

The two men lay side by side for a moment both motionless. Then, after a few seconds it was Arthur who came to his senses and struggled to his feet. He rubbed himself down, for a moment completely forgetting what caused this tumble. He turned his attention to James who still lay motionless.

Arthur panicked, James had hit his head on a stone slab embedded in the embankment his eyes were shut and he lay still. The elder man made a feeble attempt to revive him in those few seconds that passed before his brain went into full panic mode:

‘We never should have come back here’ he thought to himself, ‘It was the Watcher I saw and it always brings something bad, just like they always said . . . now James might be . . .’

. . . He couldn’t finish his own sentence, he just started to run. He knew he must get help for James yet he also knew he must get away - away from this *bad* place - away from where he’d seen this apparition which he was convinced now more than ever, was evil!

So, as Arthur ran back up the track, the cold air of the afternoon filling his lungs with every breath, James lay still and motionless. The weak February sunlight beat gently down upon Arthur as he ran back up the line in an attempt to get help.

It was some time later that Arthur returned with colleagues from the station on one of those old pump trolley hand cars carrying some basic medical equipment. When they arrived at the spot where James had been, of course, James was gone!

It was even later when James found himself staggering disorientated down the Fletton line facing back towards the tunnel situated on the Oundle road. In fact it was now quite dark and very cold. James had lost all track of time. Somehow, he had come round and wandered south in the other direction down the line. He’d actually wandered a fair way from where he had fallen before he’d vaguely sort of realised this and started to head back.

‘What happened?’ he thought to himself. ‘I must have been knocked clean out!’ He surmised, but he wasn’t really sure. There was a commotion, a train had been coming and he’d panicked, he could remember that, but wasn’t there something else? Wasn’t there another man with him? James couldn’t quite remember. What he did know was that his head was hurting. It was cold, dark, and probably very late, and he was wandering somewhere on the railway line heading he thought, now northwards, back towards Woodston.

Strangers in Town

In anger, Seb had stormed out and had actually left a little early. This was unusual to say the least, but it steered him towards a change of plan. He hadn’t got much money;

‘Why waste it on the bus fare?’ he thought. So, he passed straight by the Shrewsbury Avenue stop and decided to walk on into town. The day was bright and the February sunlight beat gently down upon him as he headed over the same Oundle road bridge that had supposedly been the site of his father’s work that very same day. He felt calmer now and he was just pleased to get out of the house. He started to wonder what he’d do with the rest of his day once he’d signed on, but as he pondered over this he was distracted by something that caught his attention as he neared the crown of the bridge. A sound; surely, a distant train! He slipped to his right where he knew there

was a small footpath junction lined by a grey metal fence. The footpath cuts off the corner of Oundle road and Shrewsbury Avenue from the point of juncture with the bridge. It was a short cut that Seb had often used. He stopped to glance over the fence, it afforded him an angled view of the railway tunnel entrance. Then, as he stopped and looked he realised that the sound had faded and it occurred to him that the line was no longer used or at least, he thought, hardly ever - only on special occasions to bring in vintage trains of yesteryear from the main line to the Nene valley railway. He concluded that the sound couldn't really have come from there in spite of it seeming so nearby! Then, of course he remembered how close the Nene Valley Railway actually was as the crow flies;

' They are always running trains in steam, testing them out, starting them up and then stopping' he thought.

One can often hear the familiar sound of a steam whistle in this part of the world. His thoughts then turned to the time and he looked at his watch; a quarter past one; he should be able to do it walking, he just need to make sure he didn't stop for anything.

Forty minutes later the woman the other side of the desk explained that it was because of the duration of time that he'd spent out of work. There wasn't really anything she could do. Seb's face dropped as she continued to explain that required to participate in some voluntary work, and, just by chance, a certain charity shop in the high street could see him for a trial and interview right that afternoon! So, in what seemed like no time at all Seb found himself being interviewed by yet *another* lady, somewhat older, in a charity shop in the high street.

An hour passed. What a strange hour it was. Seb was shown how to rearrange second hand paperback books on a shelf so that they didn't all fall over. He was shown how to manage a standing coat rack so that it could hang twice the number of shabby cast off clothes that it was ever intended to, and how to enthusiastically rearrange china ornaments into a table top display that would surely attract anyone over seventy-five with any sense of decorum!

When they asked him to come back the next day Seb felt he'd really arrived, in fact, this was really it; he now had a job of sorts - in a charity shop! And voluntary!

Sometimes, just sometimes, things all become too much. Seb decided that this was one of those occasions, so when his mate Marco rang and invited him round that evening it was music to his ears. It would be a chance to get away from the pressure of the day - this particular day that had so far turned out to be so very different from what he might have expected.

* * * * *

It was early afternoon when Sue went to the front door to answer the gentle knock she thought she'd heard. It was one of those days when she just couldn't settle to do anything. They'd lived here in this house since Seb was quite small and Sue hadn't really ever found herself at a loose end in all the years since, except for those few weeks when Seb started school back in the nineties and, like all mothers there was that transition of adjusting to home life without anyone around the home all day. She had worked as a department manager for many years at a couple reputable chains but as James *had* been earning good money she'd decided to give up work late last year. Then, it had all gone wrong - James had been unexpectedly made redundant and her plans for starting her own retail business from home fell into disarray. Sue hated being alone when she was on edge about something, and she enjoyed the company of others, so, although she was not very familiar with the face that greeted her when she opened the door, she was glad all the same to have the opportunity to converse with someone.

"Oh do excuse me," began the elderly lady, "I don't suppose you can spare me a drop of coffee?"

The woman was a neighbour of sorts, Sue recognised her from somewhere on the estate. She thought this lady lived in Basil Green or maybe Thornleigh Drive, she wasn't sure, but she seemed vaguely familiar.

"I do apologise" began the lady, "I'm Madge - Madge Allbright. My friend has gone out this afternoon and I thought of you. I live just opposite . . . over there." The woman gestured with her hand very vaguely towards the other side of the Orton Longueville street.

"Oh . . . come on in" replied Sue, "I'm sure I can spare you a little coffee."

"I was just passing really, and I thought of you," she continued. "Didn't I see your husband this morning at the bus stop?"

Sue was slightly alarmed by this remark, she knew nothing about this quaint old lady, and you know that feeling of slight unease we all get when someone you don't really know seems to know that little extra fact or two about your nearest and dearest. Sue replied:

"Yes, maybe, he was due to catch the bus this morning."

"Aahh! I thought so, such a nice man, so committed."

For a minute Sue wondered if they were talking about the same person, then she came to her senses and decided that a slight explanation was necessary:

"Yes, he started a new job today, he should be catching the bus into town most mornings now."

Sue reached towards the shelf above the sink and clasped the jar of coffee.

“I spoke to him,” continued the woman, “he’s a good man you have there.” Madge’s eyes were fixed firmly upon hers. Sue was a little taken aback, but somehow she knew she had to listen to the lady that sat at her kitchen table in front of her.

“Tea?” asked Sue . . . it now seemed the natural thing to offer.

“That would be nice my dear.” smiled her guest. The two women engaged in conversation.

“So you see,” continued Madge, “ I’m sure your husband will do very well in his new job. In the few words I had with him I could tell he had a strong sense of conviction . . . a sense of purpose . . .” Madge was now gazing out of the window as if in an effort to find the words she wanted to follow on with, “. . . a sense of duty to do what he has to do.” She stated.

Sue pondered over this for a second or two but then thought this was all getting a bit too serious.

“More tea Madge?” she asked.

“No, no . . . I must be going” replied Madge.

Smiling, the quaint old lady got up hastily and bid her goodbye. Sue closed the door softly after her, slightly wondering just what she’d meant!

Ghost Train

A few hours later Seb found himself round at Marco’s house. They hadn’t really got a plan for the evening so they decided to call for Sam, another mate who lived on the Sugar way estate. It was well into the evening now, none of them had eaten. Once they’d called for Sam the three decided that food was the first priority so they trekked to the shops at the nearby Valley Park centre.

“Let’s go down to the Riverside Pavilion” suggested Sam, “Sometimes they do training and stuff there on the astro pitch, the canteen will probably be open.”

“Yeah, I’m fed up with crisps and cold sausage rolls, - could do with something hot” remarked Seb.

A few minutes later the trio were heading down Candy street on their way to the pavilion and the conversation turned topical.

“Did you hear about that accident last night?” asked Marco.

“Hear about it! – I virtually saw it!” exclaimed Seb.

“Really?”

“When I came back last night there was ambulance and police down Shrewsbury Avenue - proper shook me up.”

“What happened?” asked Sam,

“Dunno, but I reckon it was serious, it looked like someone had been hit by a car.”

“Come on, let’s get down to the pavilion.” Marco interrupted, feeling the conversation was going morbidly round in circles. So a few minutes later, they found themselves hanging around the prominent building at the end of Candy street. The Riverside complex had only been there for a year or two, it had become the home ground for various football clubs. Sports fields have been created over the previously unused space that lay between the River Nene and the site of the old Sugar Beet factory. A stretch of railway line runs between the river and the sports field and a disused section swings around to the south and runs adjacent to much of the Sugar way estate, eventually running it’s course out towards Fletton and under Botolph bridge.

The lads had managed to get a hot drink but not much else, they’d looked in on some small boys playing football on the astro-pitch, Marco had thought it might have been the night his young cousin trained but there were only men playing now and even their game seemed to be finishing.

“Probably too late mate, little kids train early evening.” Sam pointed out.

As the last of the footballers started to head for their cars Seb realised that time must be getting on - and he hadn’t contacted home! When he took his phone from his pocket to check the time he couldn’t believe it was so late – no point in ringing mum now - she’d just shout, and anyway, he often didn’t come in until late. She’d work it out. He’d think of some excuse then he’d definitely let her know in a while when he’d be home.

A solitary chap now seemed to be locking up in the distance as the last of the cars left the scene, and the floodlights that illuminated the astroturf pitch now suddenly began to fade.

“Hey guys it’s going to be pitch black here in a minute” Seb gestured towards the fast dimming lights, - the only nearby illumination as the Pavilion was now closed.

“Don’t sweat, car park’s got lights” chirped Marco,

“Nah” Seb gestured towards the tall lights that adorned the car park and road leading to it, “Maintenance work going on, they won’t be lighting up tonight!”

The others could see that this much was now obvious, soon the place would be suddenly in darkness.

“Ooh, spooky. Let’s see if we can head back across the field before it gets black” challenged Sam.

The lads jogged out towards the football pitch centre circle. It wouldn’t actually be that dark because only a hundred metres or so away were the first house lights of the estate nearby from where shortly they would exit the complex, but it was a bit of a laugh all the same. They tried to make each other jump by creeping up behind each other and making silly noises.

“Listen!” said Marco, suddenly displaying authoritative importance in his voice that immediately got the other two’s attention. They stopped.

“What?” Seb couldn’t hear anything.

“Can you hear that?” Marco’s voice contained urgency.

“Nothing.” remarked Sam after a second or two.

“Exactly!” replied Marco as the other two looked at him blankly.

“Dead quiet - scary don’t you think?”

“After a couple of seconds getting the joke, the three burst into nervous laughter as if to mask or create distraction from the pertinent point that Marco had just made. They talked quickly about similar scenes in films and the experiences of other people they’d heard about etc.

“My Dad told me about this ghost his mate’s Dad’s uncle saw once” began Sam. The others looked at him with nervous grins of anticipation. “Yeah it was in Woodston somewhere years ago. Apparently some woman in black -”

“- Ah! the woman in black, that ain’t real mate it’s a film.”

“No. Shut up and listen.” Marco wanted to hear the rest of the story.

“It was just some woman that walked through a cut by a churchyard and she disappeared. Apparently a lot of people saw her - supposed to be looking for kids that had died or something. He was walking through around dusk and it went all quiet then he saw this woman coming towards him.” The others gasped nervously.

“And guess what lads . . . it was only just over there!” Sam pointed in a vaguely south-easterly direction. The trio gazed briefly in the direction Sam pointed before ambling back towards Candy Street chatting about the scariest ever moments in real life or in films and arguing their cases buoyantly. Suddenly the conversation was interrupted by what was to Seb a familiar whistling sound.

“Hear that?” he cried. He could clearly hear the sound of a steam train.

“What?” remarked Sam as he listened.

“Who wants to be running a train on Nene Valley this time of night - and this time of year?” Seb questioned.

“They do though, quite often at odd times you hear it.” Marco pointed out. “Can’t hear it now though!”

“No, listen!” Seb heard it again, it sounded surprisingly near as the unmistakable haunting pitch of the steam whistle travelled on the breeze in the quiet night air. The other two looked at him blankly.

“It’s you you’re scaring now mate, not us, we did the ‘can you hear it bit’ - sorry, it don’t work twice!” Sam and Marco laughed. Seb was perplexed.

Madge Allbright

Back in an Orton Longueville home a certain woman was becoming very worried. It was now quite late in the evening and she hadn’t heard from husband or son for hours! She’d gone through the logical process in her mind as one does in these situations; ‘James couldn’t ring or text, he left his phone behind, and Seb? Well Seb never let’s us know anything of what he’s doing until it suites him’ she thought to herself. But, something wasn’t adding up. Surely by now her husband would have let her know somehow that he might be coming home this late?

Sue had been worrying for a couple of hours now. She’d tried taking away the unlikely options to hopefully leave her with the probable answers, she’d weighed the situation up in her mind, fifty/fifty, now she had to use her last option - she’d call a friend: Nicky had come straight round and provided the rational approach that Sue needed.

“It’s his first day, he’s forgotten his mobile and probably he’s under a bit of pressure to make a good impression. They may have asked him to work late, or, more likely, knowing your James he just dived in with both feet and volunteered.”

“Yes, I suppose you’re right” replied Sue. “I just think somehow he should have let me know by now. What time is it?”

“Ten twenty.” Came the reply.

Nicky gave her friend a hug, she knew in her heart of hearts that yes, it was late, and that really by now Sue would have expected to hear from James one way or another.

‘It would help things . . .’ she thought to herself. ‘If her son would at least let her know what he was doing.’ She could do without that extra worry.

It was just then that Sue wandered towards the window. She had spent much of the evening on her feet pacing up and down but now, as she gazed outside she saw something she certainly didn’t expect. Madge Allbright, the friendly neighbour she had spoken to earlier that day was out on the street and caught sight of Sue’s gaze almost immediately. The two women were looking directly at each other. Madge, realising that Sue had seen her and, realising that her presence at this late hour might seem at the very least a little odd, was already heading towards the front door. Sue instinctively did likewise.

“What’s up?” asked her friend. Sue didn’t reply, she just went to open the door.

“Madge!” she exclaimed.

“Indeed.” Replied the old Lady. There was an awkward pause. “Look . . . do you think I may come in for a moment?”

Now three women stood together in the kitchen. Madge knew instantly by her body language that something wasn't right for Sue. After introducing herself, Nicky did most of the talking; taking Madge to be another concerned friend of Sue's, Nicky did her best to give a quick and clear synopsis of the day's events . . . but, of course, Madge already knew a lot of what she was about to be told. She listened intently as Sue then added details of how her day had gone - the argument with her son Seb earlier, and the obvious anxiety she now had over her husband's whereabouts.

“He will be back. He will be back soon, I'm sure of that.” Madge spoke clearly and with conviction. “But, there's something else. . .” suddenly the old lady looked a little unsure. “Do you know I can't remember!” she exclaimed.

“Can't remember what?” asked Nicky

“Well I can't quite remember . . . where I was going to when I came here!”

“It's a bit late to be wandering the streets.” Pointed out Sue, “It's cold, dark and breezy out there, not really the

night to be out walking Madge.” She added.

“Ah but you see my dear, I'm always out late in the evening. . . can't stay in you see . . . have to get out. There always seems to be something . . . something that gets me out there. . .” Madge's words tailed off as she looked distantly out through the window onto the streets. There was an awkward pause before Madge spoke again;

“Look, I'm sure everything is going to be okay, I can sense it. Your husband is a good man and good men come home. He walked this morning you know.” Madge beamed at Sue as she delivered this comment as if this was going to be all she needed to hear to make everything right.

“Look, I must be going now” she said, suddenly changing her tone.

“Wait a minute, walked?” enquired Sue.

Madge stopped and turned to reply.

“Yes, you see I showed him a short cut, he can actually walk down the disused line.”

Sue was puzzled.

“Under the bridge, there's a little cut you know - just up the way there.” Madge vaguely pointed. “He was up for it, and so full of enthusiasm, I was so glad he took my advice.”

Sue couldn't really process the old lady's ramblings right now, it all seemed a bit unlikely.

“I think I'm going to ring the police all the same just in case. . .” Sue didn't want to say it.

“ . . . just in case there’s been an accident? No no, there’s no need for that.” finished Madge. She turned to let herself out. “Mark my words, he’ll be back soon.” and with that she disappeared into the night closing the front door softly behind her.

Nicky walked over to the window but she couldn’t see the old lady.

“Strange one that.” she commented, ”But there’s sense in what she said, there really is no point in worrying, and as it is, at the moment the police wouldn’t do anything for several more hours.”

The next hour or so was very difficult. You know how it is when you try to be positive and convince yourself there is going to be a good outcome to a situation, and then you give in to desperation and do something - anything that might change things? Well this is what happened with the two women. At eleven o’clock they decided to ring the police.

About thirty minutes later, a police officer arrived and twenty minutes after that Sue had gone over all the details of the day for the third time. They almost regretted taking this drastic course of action. The policeman was concerned only with the facts, and the facts were simply that husband had set off for work that day and not returned, son had done the same, and, quite honestly this was *not* of momentous importance in the grand scale of things. However, somehow Sue, and now her friend Nicky realised that there was much more to this.

“I suppose I can make one or two enquiries for you,” began the officer. “but it will have to wait until the morning. Let’s see now, what have we got?” The tall police officer consulted his hastily filled out incident form. “He set off walking down the disused line, the woman who saw him told you?”

Sue had almost forgotten this, she looked at her friend for confirmation and reassurance before replying;

“Yes, apparently.”

“Well we can contact Nene Valley Railway in the morning, give all his details and check he actually got there. I think that’s the first step, in the meanwhile let’s be positive and -”

“- Oh no, no it isn’t Nene Valley Railway! My husband went to work at a job at the Peterborough station!”

Just then Sue’s mobile vibrated, she nearly jumped out of her skin, her hands trembled as she grabbed it. It was a text from Seb.

“On way home, Been a long day c u soon.”

“Well that’s something,” said the police officer. “Can I just go back to this woman who told you she gave your husband information about a short cut he could take, do you know her?”

“Hmmm . . . sorry?” Sue was still pondering over her son’s text with mixed emotions,

“Oh . . . she’s a distant neighbour, I only know her in passing, in fact I think I’ve seen more of her today than ever before. Madge Allbright is her name.”

The officer looked up “Madge Allbright?” he said, he seemed slightly surprised. “Just excuse me a moment, I need to get a message back to base.”

He wandered to the edge of the room talking quietly on his radio. At least now, it seemed to Sue that something at last was happening.

Like Father . . . Like Son

Sam had gone in. He lived on the Sugar way estate, Marco headed off down the Oundle road a few minutes later leaving Seb to make the short journey home over the bridge and down onto Shrewsbury Avenue. He *had* heard it, he had definitely heard it - so why hadn’t his friends? Were they winding him up? Had they really heard the sound of the train as well but just wanted him to think they hadn’t? Just then, as he was turning this over in his mind he became rooted to the spot for he could hear that distant sound of a steam train once more. The throbbing rumble of the engine was far away but he could clearly hear it, and the eerie sound of the steam whistle to him rose above the drone of the nearby traffic. Why was *he* hearing this? He walked on not wishing to stop. He crossed the road and paved his way forward over the railway bridge. A few vehicles passed him; he just wanted to get home now. As he reached the pinnacle point of the pathway over the railway line, he strained his ears to hear the nagging sound above the constant buzz of the nearby traffic. Surely that was the chuntering of a steam engine coming this way! He stopped again just for a moment; there was a cut - a pathway that led down onto Lansdowne Walk. Instinctively he peered over the metal fence and looked down into the mouth of the railway tunnel that ran beneath the road and was just visible from this angle. Suddenly, silence fell! No traffic, no sound of any train - nothing. Then came another sound; echoes of voices! It seemed there were two voices, just for a few seconds before everything fell eerily silent once more. He couldn’t help it, Seb had to look, so he stared hard down at the line and as he did so he saw a figure gliding towards the tunnel. His heart pounded as he felt his breathing become faster, his brain could hardly take in what his eyes were seeing. A figure appearing to be a man in a shabby boiler suit was walking with an almost slow-motion floating movement along the railway line. It’s feet seemed to merge with the darkness of the ground, yet there was a slight glow around it’s torso and head, as if deliberately illuminated just enough to be visible in the darkness that surrounded it. The figure stopped and stared up the bank directly at him. Seb found himself unable to move, his heart now

racing. A cold shiver ran through him as he was able to mentally process the startling realisation of what he could now clearly see – this figure had no face!

For just a moment longer he was rooted to the spot before instinct kicked in and he was able to turn and run, but, he found himself looking back over his shoulder almost right away! The figure was *still* staring at him, maybe even pointing! At this; Seb, now terrified, came to his senses, and he ran – he ran and he didn't stop until he reached home.

The sound of the front door handle being somewhat aggressively turned made the three of them jump and a sense of unease filled the room. The police officer started to move towards the door. Sue looked up with feelings of mixed emotions, both of anger and relief as she set eyes on her son for the first time in nearly twelve hours.

“Seb, thank goodness you’re back” she gasped.

Seb burst into the front room, his eyes darted from one person to another, and a clear look of panic came across his face as he eyed the Police officer.

“What’s happened?” he demanded, his raised voice clearly trembling.

“It’s alright. I called the police because, well, your father hasn’t come home yet and I’ve been quite worried Seb.”

Seb’s brain was in overdrive, he’d barely got himself together from what he had just experienced, and now there was something else to worry about. His attention was now suddenly diverted towards this new predicament.

“As far as we can tell there’s nothing at all to worry about,” added the officer. “Your mother called us because she doesn’t know where your father is, we’re making enquiries and we’re on to it. Don’t worry.”

“Well did you try ringing his new job? I’m assuming you can’t get an answer from his mobile!”

Sue looked to the side where her husband’s mobile phone lay. Seb followed her gaze, he didn’t need the explanation.

“He’s always doing that,” he said “Probably just got delayed, maybe he got asked to work nights on his first day and agreed?” Continued Seb, not really buying his own explanation but, still in a state of shock himself he was doing his best to sound positive.

“That’s exactly what I said,” added Nicky. “I’m sure he’ll be home soon.”

While all this was going on the police officer was busy receiving radio messages. His replies were short and sharp. Clearly something of some urgency was being checked out.

* * * * *

James could see the lights ahead;

‘That must be the Oundle road?’ He was confused, but he knew he should be on that road for the right way home. As he staggered ever closer he could see he was now just metres away from the bridge, but where should he go next? His head was thumping as if he had just managed to struggle to his feet the morning after a night of heavy alcohol consumption. Surely this *was* where he’d been earlier. As the rumble of traffic above him over the bridge drew his attention, he stopped and looked up. He looked up the bank, and as he did so he became very aware of something, someone was looking down at him! James tried to focus his eyes but the glare of nearby street lamps combined with his general condition made it very difficult. Suddenly he felt something. He felt he was being drawn towards the figure he could see. He stood for a moment and raised an arm, almost pointing in anticipation. Then, as his eyes managed to focus the startling realisation of what he was looking at hit him – the figure had no face! The shock caused him to look away for a second, but when he looked again - the figure was gone!

Strangely, James felt no fear, he seemed to have no control over his actions as he started to climb the bank. There was an old railway sleeper, damp and greasy to the surface, he clambered carefully over it and negotiated the thin wire fence that hung beyond. He found himself now on a pathway in a dark damp corner. The road was above him and the railway tunnel behind him and somehow, he knew he had to bear left winding his way between the strangely familiar houses set back from the road. It was all coming back to him now - he was going home.

His head was still pounding, his vision blurred, but he kept going. Not too much further now. The air was cold and the lights were bright - too bright, he yearned to be home . . . but where was home? His mind searched deep in anticipation for the synapses to link so that he might remember, and although his thoughts wouldn’t mould into words, somehow he knew . . . he knew the way home. The brightness engulfed him as he trundled out of Landsdowne Walk and onto Shrewsbury Avenue: it was too bright! He had to follow something, what was it? The figure? Yes, he’d seen a figure and he *had* to follow it.

As he crossed the road the lights caught him, those lights so bright were flashing now and they sucked him in. And, as he struggled to walk straight down the path ahead, he was aware of someone calling him. A woman’s voice came from nearby to the left. He wandered over and he could see now what had happened. There was a blue flashing light and there were people bustling around. The atmosphere was one of panic as the sound of the sirens told him there had been an accident. There had been an accident and *he* was right there on the scene! Someone was lying on the pavement. He could just about make out that it was a woman that seemed to be the one that

was hurt, she was the one all the fuss was being made about . . . and hers was the voice that was calling to *him!*

She spoke to him but nobody else did . . . and James heard what she said, but no one else did . . . and when she spoke, somehow he recognised her, but he didn't remember her . . . he didn't remember what she'd said but he knew it was alright. It was alright because he was nearly home, and now, he found he knew the rest of the way home.

So, it was just a few minutes later that James Ambrose blundered through his own front door to be greeted by the four others that had gathered in his Orton Longueville home. For a moment the overwhelming feeling of relief rendered Sue speechless. Then she came suddenly to her senses.

“Oh my word, thank goodness you're here. We've been so worried.” She dived towards her still bemused husband and gave him a hug. There was an awkward moment as all present quickly realised that James Ambrose was still far from feeling himself. “Darling, are you okay? I've been so worried, I expected you home hours ago, what on earth happened?” For a moment James just stared at his wife.

“I . . . I don't know. I'm not sure, it's . . . it's all so strange. . .”

“Perhaps now would be a good time for me to be on my way” interrupted the police officer seeing that there was obviously going to be a need for some family soul searching. Now all three family members were safely under one roof the pressure seemed to be somewhat lifted.

“I've seen an accident” blurted James. There was a sudden silence in the living room and everyone instantly gave James their undivided attention.

“An accident?” enquired the officer. “Where and when have you seen this accident?”

“Just a few moments ago, your chaps are there I think. A woman - roadside accident . . . she . . . she spoke to me.”

The officer looked at James, scrutinising his face trying to make sense of his words. Sue looked from her husband to the officer and then back at James again. Their son Seb just looked very pale and shocked, he wanted to say something but the sentence wouldn't form in his head.

“That's very strange, very unusual indeed.” Having made this comment the officer felt that he had to offer some explanation, but not to James who clearly was not yet back in full control of his rational mind. “Mrs. Ambrose, might I have a word in private?” he whispered to Sue.

Sue made eye signs towards her friend Nicky and to Seb as if to usher them towards making James feel a little more at ease. At the same time she beckoned the officer into the kitchen.

“That lady you spoke of earlier” continued the police officer, “You gave a name - Madge Allbright.”

“Yes, that’s right, I think she lives across the road” replied Sue.

“And your husband reckons he’s just seen a road accident tonight!” continued the officer seeming himself somewhat puzzled.

“Officer, what is it? What are you getting at? It’s been a long day.”

“Well, I’m not quite sure how to tell you this, and I think we should very careful about sharing any of this with your husband until he’s had a good night’s sleep as he’s clearly not himself right now-”

“- Look, what is it, what’s happened?” Sue was getting impatient.

“Well, a woman of the name of Madge Allbright was killed in a road traffic accident near the bus stop on Shrewsbury Avenue just down the way there. . . but that was last night! I suppose with the sort of day you’ve had you’ll not have heard yet – It seems very improbable that a woman of the same name should be across your street and visiting you today, and even more improbable the chances of another similar accident happening in the same vicinity tonight!”

For the next thirty minutes or so Sue’s head was spinning. She took the officer’s advice and kept what he’d told her from her husband before he finally bid them all good night with a promise of contact for follow up in a day or two. James needed a good night’s sleep and so did she, they’d talk about it in the morning. Then she thought for a moment, whatever will happen in the morning? Does her husband still have a job? She really didn’t know anything of what had happened to him this day! Nicky gave the best advice - get to bed, get some sleep and it will be seen in a fresh light in morning, and she’d be round to support.

“But that name, Madge Allbright, the officer said it was the name of the woman that was killed! What are the chances of that?”

“Listen” Nicky said firmly. “There are lots of possibilities, she might have a screw loose and just heard the name branded about today on the news and for some sick reason decided to call herself that.” Nicky was right, there were many possibilities once you start to think and Sue was too tired to think straight any more tonight. Seb was equally confused but he did confirm one thing, he had definitely passed the accident the night before soon after it had happened just as the police officer had said. It had certainly shaken him up when he’d come in late the previous night. He too had experienced a confusingly strange day. Apart from everything else it was the day in which he’d seen a ghost! He pondered as he lay his head on the pillow, and as he tried to sleep he couldn’t help thinking . . . why . . . why him? And who was that faceless figure looking up from the railway line?

After a hot drink and a quick shower, James tumbled into bed and waited for Sue to join him. Random memories of the last few hours were swimming around in his head, he tried to be rational

and separate what he had imagined from reality. That walk along the track with the chap Arthur, was that really earlier today? It now seemed so, so long ago! And what had he seen? He'd seen something - a face, as he looked up the bank from the bridge . . . and the old woman at the bus stop, wasn't it her who hours ago encouraged him to walk instead of catching a bus? It didn't make any sense right now, and his head was pounding. He'd try and get some sleep and make some sense of it all in the morning.

So it was in the early hours that Sue turned to her husband concerned that he wasn't going to be okay to sleep.

“Are you all right love?”

“I'm okay, it's just been so strange, I think I fell over and hit my head or something, I'm probably slightly concussed.”

Sue hadn't thought of this, would he be all right to sleep?

“Can you remember what happened today? Was it good? You haven't told me anything about it yet!” She decided she needed to hear more from him just to assure herself that he really was okay.

“Bit's of it. It's been a long day. Let's try and sleep and deal with it all tomorrow.”

There was a moment's silence as the two lay thinking.

“A day in a life” said Sue.

“How do you mean?” James felt he knew what she meant but wanted to hear it from her.

“I mean, just a day, a normal day, but for all of us, me, Seb, and especially you, what a day it's been! So much has happened since the early hours yesterday when we were lying here having that conversation as Seb came in late. We seem to have so many unanswered questions.”

“Hmm.” Was all she got as a dreamy reply. They were both too tired to talk any more that night.

It's All Right Now

The next day came and things moved on as so often it seems they do. Seb didn't want to talk about it, he was too tired to get up. When he eventually arose to just beat the thawing of the frost on the trees outside, he was off and out quite swiftly. Nicky and Sue pondered for an hour over coffee and decided that they should try and locate this Allbright lady as that would at least give them the opportunity to find out who she really was. They didn't want to go there today however, they were more concerned for James. James himself could still hardly remember a thing. He hadn't attempted to go into work, in fact he couldn't really remember anything much of yesterday

at all and Sue had insisted that he just chilled for the day until at least some of his memories returned. The day passed without any event of note. It was the next day after when the police officer returned to tell them that the lady Mrs. Allbright of Thornleigh Drive, Orton Longueville had indeed been a victim of a fatal road traffic accident the night previous to the family's strange experiences. The police spoke to James, but all he could really remember of that strange day was that he'd spent much of it on a railway line with a chap called Arthur who had become in some way paralysed and unable to move out of the way of an oncoming train!

* * * * *

Time passed and the family moved on. Hardly a day went by without one of them at least turning over in their minds some of the events of that strange February day a few weeks ago. However, it was some time later and still recovering from his ordeal that James Ambrose, his devoted wife Sue, son Seb and their friend Nicky sat in the front room of their Orton Longueville home in a combined state of relief, disbelief, and shock: They gazed at the computer screen in front of them showing the *'Peterborough Today'* website article entitled:

"Recently departed Orton Longueville psychic might have saved many lives."

"Mrs. Madge Allbright of Orton Longueville who was tragically killed early last month in a road traffic accident just yards from her home might be responsible for saving many lives. Testimonies from friends and strange unexplained circumstances surrounding her death prompted police to bring in the services of an Oxford scholar, Dr David Reynolds, who specialises in the psychic predictive paranormal.

'We were sure that Mrs. Allbright had some incredibly detailed knowledge of events from the past and spent much of her life using this knowledge to the good. I was called in by police because immediate events surrounding her death seemed to suggest some rational impossibilities.' Stated Dr. Reynolds earlier this week.

The interest in this phenomenal case centres around two things the police discovered in the home of the old woman; a collection of newspaper cuttings that date back to the turn of the century, (Peterborough museum have already expressed an interest in ownership of this collection), and a meticulous journal that she'd kept. It appears to document all her perceived successes regarding justice, averting danger, putting right wrongs etc! Of particular interest and possibly relating to the case of her own death is this clipping she had kept:

'Railway worker Arthur Brandon had a lucky escape on Monday when he was found dazed along the Woodstone line adjoining the main line to Peterborough East station. He was apparently

suffering from some form of amnesia and it had been noted by the driver of the Express from Whittlesey that he was extremely lucky not to have been hit by the locomotive. The driver stated that it was a miracle; as he was standing on the line right in front of him yet somehow he avoided being struck. Mr Brandon, recovering at home remembers nothing of the event other than 'seeing a face looking down from the bank!'

February 10th 1908'

This article was of interest because of the story given to police by an unnamed possible witness close to the scene shortly after her death who claimed that they'd had a similar experience that very day!

The journal kept by Mrs. Allbright contained further information substantiating the woman's claims to be able to affect events in the past from the present day:

'It has been at least three times now I've been called to wander late at night but I know not why. Last year I walked and walked around Ferry meadows until I met the young woman I'd known that sooner or later I would meet so as to be able to tell her not to travel; - she was spared when others weren't, so I know I did the right thing. But this? This is different. I don't know who I will affect but there is a man in danger nearby and I feel that I must help. I will go when called. It's east from here somewhere - near a bus stop - that's all I have! I sense danger all around like I've never sensed it before, but I must do my duty. I know I can save him. No matter the cost, but my heart is heavy over this . . . very heavy.'

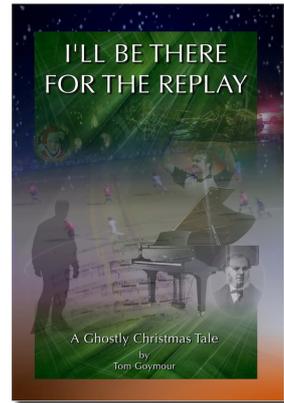
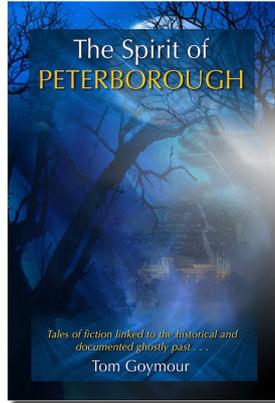
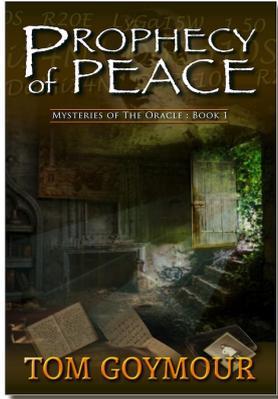
This was her last entry, made earlier on the day that she was killed."

The four of them looked at each other. Nobody spoke. It was all right now, and they all knew it. Nobody spoke to James because nobody needed to. Somehow, he knew now that everything was all right.

* * * * *

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