



THE NIGHT
RUNNER
A GHOST MYSTERY

THE SPIRIT OF PETERBOROUGH: BOOK 2

TOM GOYMOUR

Peterborough, just an ordinary city full of people like you and me, steeped in history and totally unique, but it could be anywhere, really, it could. Every city holds secrets from its past that lie dormant ready to affect the future, but what if there was more than that? What happens when something from another time rises to the surface to confront us?

Josh Penfold knows someone is watching him, but who lurks in the shadows, across the town centre square and under the railway bridge? History repeating itself provides the trigger that draws Josh into this complex mystery, emotionally linked to his past. First a ghostly vision, then the stranger that haunts him night and day, but will he be able to make any real sense of his life when this tale of the unexpected finally unravels itself?

The *Spirit of Peterborough* is always there. He is watching, and as he sees through all of time in a glimpse of an eye, he dips in and tells the story that unfolds before him.

Now, open your mind and be ready, and I pledge you will never see *your* home town or city in quite the same light again . . . but afterwards, perhaps that light will burn for you just a little brighter.

** All characters in this story are fictional and any likeness to any persons currently living is purely unintentional.*

** References to historical figures, various localities and some past events are true. A specific glossary is contained at the back of this book.*

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THE NIGHT RUNNER

THE SPIRIT OF PETERBOROUGH BOOK: 2

TOM GOYMOUR

*A tale of fiction linked to the historical
documented ghostly past!*

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For all who have experienced a gap in their
own lives, and just need to know . . .

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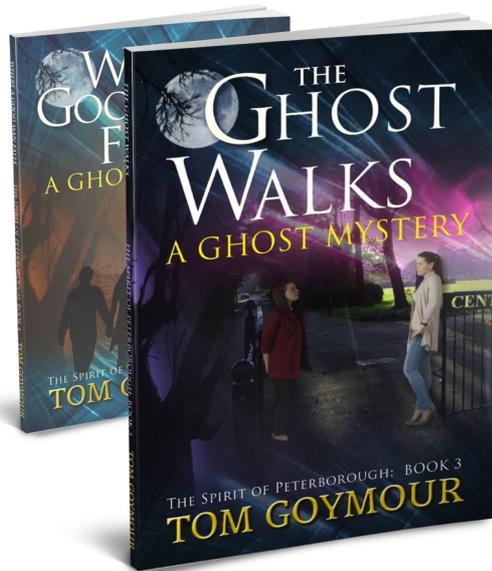
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Prologue

The past is us and we are its future. I have always known it to be so that sometimes the truth *is* stranger than the fiction.

I look at everything that lies before me, and I see stories from the past unfold in front of me. The people of today are tomorrow's past, they leave their footprint in the annals of time putting the pieces of life's jigsaw together for others to see in the future. But what do we do when pieces of our jigsaw are missing completely? We look for signs and we wait. Sometimes we delve deeper, sometimes we dream, always we hope.

Events shape our memories and I am no exception. As I drift now high over the city centre, I get a vision:

I am driving a car many years ago some miles from the city, and I am listening to the radio. I only ever listened to it in my car in those days to take in the major sporting events. The memory is far from clear as I battle with my recall to get a picture, but I am listening to a triumph, a glorious victory that was so uplifting. I wasn't at the event, I was driving down a steep hill in countryside somewhere far over to the west of here. But, it felt it as if I *was* actually there - I was so alive!

The powerful emotions experienced by many through local sporting triumph can bring folks together. Sport is a healthy battle of many things but it is the memories that live on, and the association we hold with them. People often remember where they were when some great sporting achievement took place. Sometimes it's just a connection they make to something quite frivolous, but on occasions it might be a link to a major event that shaped the

rest of their life. That is the way it was with this young man who's story starts not far from here, and not that long ago.

I float higher now as I peer down towards the south of the city, and from the suburb that is emitting to me a harsh glow of incandescent light, I can now see him . . . and he is running!

* * * * *

1. A Bright Evening in the Park

He turned sharply into the close, not even daring to break into a jog, if there *was* anyone following him that would surely be a bad move. No, he must just get himself into the house without even the glimmer of a thought of a look over his shoulder. Suddenly, the footsteps behind him grew louder and faster, and the pace of his heartbeat quickly began to match them. He wanted to look back but his mind had locked out, all he could do now was plunge forward full of hope and fear. He could feel the pounding now reaching into the back of his throat, as if the quickening feet behind had already managed to force their way through the intent darkness. There was nothing more he could do. He gulped, but then relief as the runner brushed past him and continued beyond into the night, fading like retreating car headlights in a fog, seemingly without even acknowledging that he was there.

There was someone, and for a few weeks now, he was pretty sure. There had been a few uncomfortable journeys home lately. What if they'd seen where he lived? What if they were just waiting and maybe this guy was like a scout sent out to observe? This was the worst thing; however hard he tried to be rational about it all, Josh Penfold had no answers, just so many questions. He dwelled on things as he gazed up at the early evening sun. This latest worrying episode had taken place just the other night, but it had now passed, and as he held this thought his mind jerked back to the reality of the present.

The sun beat down upon Botolph Green, as the three of them were sitting jubilantly discussing the match. That afternoon had yielded everything they had hoped for, and now it was time to celebrate.

It was May 20th 2011 and the City's football team, *Peterborough United* (*The POSH* as they are known), had just grabbed a famous 3–0 victory over Huddersfield Town in the Division One play-off final at Old Trafford. Josh couldn't afford to go but like thousands of others he was able to watch it live in *The Botolph Arms*, his local public house, just a stone's throw from where he lived.

The game had finished and the mood was generally a good one. Josh and his mates Daz and Jake were talking buoyantly and not really listening to what the other was saying as they sat out on the cool spring grass at the front of the quaint old building before making the decision to head off down to *Ferry Meadows*, the nearby country park, for an early evening celebration.

Peterborough is a city with a diversity of suburban areas made up of a mix of the old and new. Over the last forty years there has been much development: New townships have sprung up to the south and the older villages have also seen some attractive development. Josh Penfold, twenty, lives with his mother Sally in such a place; a semi-detached abode in Botolph Green, a relatively new development to the south of the River Nene and an attractive addition to the village of Orton Longueville.

“Tell ya’ what guys, we can hit Ferry for an hour or so now then grab something to eat, and, if you like, we'll do another session tonight somewhere and really celebrate . . . yeah?”

“Sounds cool . . . but ain't you with your bird tonight?”

The lads knew that their friend was currently infatuated with his female soul mate and it was sometimes very hard to prise him away.

“No,” replied Josh. ‘Kind of figured The Posh would do it and we might want to, er . . . well as we say . . . lubricate ourselves with a little of the amber nectar by way of celebration!’”

“Nice one,” replied Daz. ‘Lets get down Ferry . . . might have a go on the pitch and putt!’”

The lads headed off. Of course they were a little inebriated. Cars were hooting, flags were flying - generally a party atmosphere.

A black Corsa passed them on the Oundle Road and hooted continuously.

“Hey look, it's Sneddy,” shouted Jake. “Hey Sneddy mate, we did it . . . we bloody DID IT!”

When they got to Ferry, the pitch and putt was too busy, so the lads just rambled up to the meadow chatting continuously about how Posh would do next season and arguing about who they should buy or sell. There were lots of folk out that evening. Ferry Meadows seemed to be getting busier by the week, in fact, Josh remembered reading in the local household newsletter that there had been more people in the park that Easter just gone than ever before! Not surprisingly over the next half an hour they came across a handful of people they knew.

“Oi, Jakey boy - safe mate,” shouted someone Jake knew, and then there was the familiar interlocking of hands and a 'gimme five' as the two passed each other. The lads made their way around the small lake and walked up a grassy bank that afforded them a better view than at ground level.

“How many folk are round here today!” exclaimed Daz, (it wasn't a question).

Josh looked along the path that stretched in front of them towards the sailing centre. It was a mosaic of colour, with a lot of blue and red. There were children in red Manchester United tops and also the odd splash of the colourful maroon and blue of the Barcelona football team's strip; (They had beaten Manchester United at Wembley the night before.) It goes without saying that many people were also wearing the blue of *The Post*. It certainly was an uplifting sight, everyone seemed in a celebratory mood.

Josh stood on a high bank scanning the landscape in front of him, the patchwork myriad of shining glimmering metal reflected the early evening sunlight (sadly a good number of people still come to the park in their cars.) To the left, broken by the tree line was the play park, here the distinct pattern was of movement as children scuttled from one play thing to another, and the noise, most of it was coming from here.

Beyond the sailing centre was Gunwade Lake with its great expanse of water stretching all the way to the outskirts of the park where Milton Ferry Bridge crosses the River Nene to link with the old A47.

As Josh looked out across the lake he became aware of something: In spite of all the people between that were partially blocking his view, he was sure that somewhere down near the edge of the lake someone was waving to him, and calling out as well - it seemed quite prominent although he couldn't make out any words. But someone *was* waving, and with both arms.

"Hey, Josh mate, are you coming?" called Daz.

For a moment Josh didn't reply.

"What's up?" said Daz.

"Just wondering who that is . . . over there at the edge of the lake," Josh pointed.

The others looked on but could see no one.

“I Can't see anyone.” replied Jake.

“No . . . neither can I now,” Josh stayed rooted to the spot, hands on hips, his eyes narrowed, “but the guy was there, he was waving!”

“You've had too much booze mate . . . no one down by the lake today, it's brass monkey weather near that water now the sun's gone in!”

They all laughed, but Josh felt a little uneasy, he hated not being able to place a face, especially when this guy seemed to want his attention!

“Come on guys,” said Daz getting impatient, “let's go get us something to eat.”

2. Fishing and Reminiscing

Josh got home at about 6.30pm. He called to his mum, Sally, to tell her that he was off out tonight to celebrate.

“Mum . . . did you hear?”

Her feet moved swiftly as she descended the stairs her head cocked slightly, and her arms full of washing,

“Why don't you have a quiet night in? You can have a few mates back here if you like.”

“Get real mum,” he replied, “we want to celebrate up town.”

“Do you have to go tonight?” snapped his mum “It's a bit last minute.”

“We only just decided, Posh only just won! And anyway, what's it to you? It's my life, I am nearly 21!”

“Yes, I *know* Posh won . . . and don't talk to me like that!” she raised her voice. “You're way out of order . . . you know I wanted you in.”

“Want me in? You hardly ever talk to me when I am in!”

Sally Penfold was a lady whose body language always told the story. In her early forties, she had lived in the south part of the city's suburbs for most of her life and Josh was her only child. Although they had a solid relationship there had been some obvious friction between them creeping in over the last few months.

What's up with her? Josh thought to himself short a while later as he stomped off down the Oundle Road to meet the others. *Why did she get so stupidly touchy about tonight?* He decided to forget about it.

The three of them managed to more or less fulfil their plans. The evening passed without incident and was generally good, they celebrated 'big style' and enjoyed every minute.

Josh didn't rise until after the eleventh hour had passed. He squinted as his eyes tried to resist opening. The rattling to his left became louder and a flailing arm flopped over the bedside table trying to locate the vibrating rectangle as he started to come to his senses.

Half an hour later Sam was round and they were talking in the kitchen.

"Have you spoken to your mum this morning?" enquired Sam, sipping her coffee, as Josh dodged round the room fixing himself some scrambled eggs on toast.

"No. She was well funny with me about going out last night. Anyway . . ." he tailed off. Josh didn't want to dwell on it. "What are we going to do today?" he asked, changing the subject and trying to sound enthusiastic. It was a Bank holiday. The pair glanced out of the window reluctantly acknowledging what always seems to be typical weather served for such a day.

"We could go out somewhere," Sam replied. "I want to talk to you about that course though Josh, it's got to be sorted by tomorrow evening, I have to put the forms in."

"Look, Sam, I told you, I ain't really that interested in local history, that's your bag."

Sam worked at Peterborough museum. She and Josh had been friends for years but now their relationship was becoming something more. There was a local history evening class starting next week, she wanted Josh to go along with her. Local history has always interested Sam, if only she could get him to show some interest too! After talking round the subject for five minutes, they agreed that Sam would do the course and Josh would at least show some interest when she came home and told him all about it.

“At least come on some of the field trips with me,” she pleaded.

“Yeah ok. But what about my career?”

“Well I would have thought this was right down useful street if you want to train to be a copper. What are you actually doing about that though? When is the next training intake?”

“It isn't until September and I won't know if I'm in until July. I really want to do it but no one is showing any interest . . . apart from you. Every time I mention it to Mum she suggests something else or changes the subject, I don't get it, I thought she'd be interested. Uncle Dan doesn't seem that bothered either!” Sam didn't answer , her face attempted a half smile. She felt for Josh because right now he needed the support (or at least a kick up the backside!) and, being able to read the reactions of those around her with the social intelligence that she possessed, she could no more understand their apparent lack of interest in Josh's future than could Josh himself.

Josh has a good relationship with his mum Sally's younger brother. Just passed the forty mark, he was still a pretty cool dude in Josh's eyes and they shared a great passion for sport - and, particularly - fishing. It was a couple of

days later that the two found themselves on the banks of the Nene spending a pleasant morning casting their rods in the early June sunshine.

“So you didn't get to Old Trafford then,” commented Dan, “me neither - costs too much these days don't it. I'll get you to the first home game in August if you're around, that will be a big one, the first home game in the Championship - sounds good, doesn't it?”

“We were there a couple of seasons ago though,” said Josh. “It ain't a first.”

“No, I know, but still . . .”

There was a moment of silence as the two contemplated what the future might hold for *The Posh*.

“You won't remember the first play-off promotion though,” said Dan.

“No. When was that?”

“1992, they hadn't been doing the play-offs for very long back then, and it has to be one of the greatest days out I ever remember.”

“You went?”

“Sure I did, everyone in Peterborough who cares anything about football remembers where they were that day when 'king Kenny' hit the net with that winner, but I can say I was *actually there*. We went bonkers when they'd won.”

“That's Ken Charlery?” checked Josh.

“Yeah . . . one of the best strikers Posh ever had . . . certainly back then twenty odd years ago, he *was* the best.”

As Dan started to remember, his eyes told the story. Josh was hooked, he'd never actually experienced a great *live* football moment, he'd always only seen the big moments on TV.

“We travelled down the night before - stayed in a hotel, you could do it easy in them days. Us lads - we had a bit of cash when we went out. The thing I remember is the noise. You never quite get the same feeling from somewhere like our London Road ground. The old Wembley man . . . it was something else! The minute we scored the winner it was sweet, oh so sweet. We couldn't wait for that final whistle.”

For a brief moment Josh imagined he was actually there with his uncle Dan all those years ago. Almost a lifetime had passed for him, but for Dan, it seemed like yesterday.

“What did you do when the final whistle went?” he asked.

“Well me and my small crowd managed to get on the pitch before security removed us. There was me, Ronnie Helstrom and my two best mates from the Sugar Beet factory where I worked back in the day, yeah . . . there was Geoff Tomkins, and . . . Billy . . .”

Dan's speech tailed off.

“Billy . . .” repeated Josh in an aim to help his uncle with what seemed to have suddenly become a surprisingly difficult sentence to finish.

“Bill McNeil, my best mate at the time.” Dan's voice dropped in tone as he stared at a spot on the floor six feet ahead of him. His mood changed.

“What happened?” Josh nervously wondered if the guy had died or something.

Dan paused briefly:

“We just kind of lost touch. Anyway, doesn't matter now.”

Just then there was a sudden jerk on Dan's line.

“Woooaah!” he shrieked. “This is a biggie!”

The two forgot their conversation and concentrated on netting the 9lb carp that had just taken the bait.

They had a good morning on the Nene and by lunchtime they were ready to go their separate ways. As Dan lived in Netherton which, from where they were based was the opposite direction, they both took their separate walks home alone.

The sun was shining and Josh felt good. He hauled his fishing tackle along the Ferry Meadows pathways and headed towards the wooden suspension bridge adjacent to the edge of Thorpe Wood golf course. From there he'd have a choice; he could walk the mile and a half back through the bird sanctuary, or he could cross the bridge and take the route that would take him down by the golf course. He chose the latter. He passed a few people walking their dogs and a couple of families out with their kids on bikes but generally not many folk were around today. He remembered the other evening and how packed the park had been. Today life seemed far more peaceful - more tranquil and should surely be taken at a steadier pace. He continued his walk around the back of Overton Lake towards the bridge. The path splits two ways by the wooden footbridge as the suspension bridge comes into view. It happened as he neared that junction. He wouldn't look up - he didn't need to. With his heartbeat now quickening in familiar fashion this was really starting to get to him. If he just kept moving forward surely he'd get clear daylight between them and he wouldn't have to go through this any more, but then, he would never know. Josh allowed himself just that one nervous and inconspicuous look up towards the bridge . . . just to check it out . . . just to confirm in his own mind, and for his own sanity. Josh managed to get a glance but only for a second, but this was now the third time in as many weeks. *He* was there again. Surely it couldn't just be a coincidence!

3. Try Telling the Ladies

“Did you have a good morning?” his mum asked of him an hour or so later.

“Yeah, not bad,” replied Josh.

“How's your uncle Dan?”

“He's fine. He was telling me all about Posh at Wembley twenty odd years ago, I didn't know about it.”

She didn't reply.

“Mum, I need to tell you something,” Josh sounded anxious, “I've seen him again.”

His mother just stared as she moved swiftly about the kitchen hastily grabbing a clutch of classes from one work surface before then nestling them down rather heavy-handedly on to another. Was she really going to pass this one off once again with little reaction other than that of slight annoyance? Over the last few weeks, it was fair to say he had become a little paranoid - he thought he was being watched by a mystery stranger who always seemed to appear just when Josh was alone, or right after the moment when all witnesses had left the scene. Frankly, Sally wasn't buying any of this.

“I know you think I'm paranoid but he's watching me, and, whenever I tell you or Dan, you just make light of it or laugh at me.”

“Look Josh, no one else has seen this guy, you are paranoid, you watch too much rubbish on TV and DVDs, and, quite frankly, it's getting to you. You need to get a grip. Get out there and start looking for a job.”

“Mum, I ain't imagining it. This guy seems to deliberately appear when everyone else has scarpered, he is medium height, has a short goatee beard and slightly curly hair and he's always wearing camo-trousers-”

“Enough.” screamed his mum. “I don't want to hear it any more . . . it's rubbish, and you're just making yourself worse.”

“But Mum . . .” His mum had left the room.

Why was she being so stupidly ignorant about this one, and why did nobody seem to believe him?

When later that evening he found himself alone with Sam, she could tell something was up. Sam listened to Josh. Sam always listened to him, even when she didn't think he was right about something. She wasn't just his girl, she was his best friend. He could always talk to her about things that mates just laugh about.

“Ok, so that's three times now you've seen this guy, he's always quite near but never within talking distance and always legs it as soon as he knows you've seen him . . . yes?”

“That's about it.”

There was a pause. Sam wanted to get this right, she didn't want to upset Josh but her natural instinctive interest just made her ask.

“Can I ask you something?” she said. Josh turned and looked at her blankly, she continued;

“Do you believe in ghosts? I mean do you think that . . . oh no, I don't mean . . . I just think . . .” Sam ran out of words as she clocked the vacant stare being returned to her. Then followed a horrible moment when Sam

thought she'd really upset him, but then Josh's reply took her slightly by surprise.

“I don't know any more Sam,” he said dreamily getting up and walking towards the window with his eyes fixed on some distant point. “I'm prepared to believe almost anything right now.”

“It might be someone you know from years ago just trying to get your attention.”

“Yeah right, so like, I'm nearly 21 and I know lots of guys in their forties. No, you're right,” (he went on . . .), “I've probably seen a ghost . . . yup . . . that's it. Hey guys I've got my own ghost . . . only appears to me, any time, any day . . . and you can't see him . . . ha, ha.”

Sam wasn't laughing, she actually took the whole ghost thing more seriously than Josh realised. Some of her local history research had seen her delving deep to investigate some of the historical but also ghostly tales from the past concerning the local area. Only last night she'd come across the story of the pale lady seen at the old Orton Hall Hotel and the story her friend told her that she had *not* read about: the archway that Mary Queen of Scots walked through before being executed at Fotheringhay castle was actually erected at the old building when it became the stately home of The Marquis of Huntley. Some time later it then became the school. These 'tie-ins' always fascinated her, especially when she discovered something that other locals didn't seem to know. Sam Bishop was a girl who always held an open mind.

4. The Man Who Wasn't There

Over the next week Josh forgot about the Posh, he forgot about looking for a job, in fact the only thing he remembered to do was go out and have a good time. The weather was good and he felt he deserved to chill. Sam started the Local History course that she'd had planned for some time, then spent a long weekend away at a family wedding and the two of them didn't see each other for five days. The next time they met was the following Saturday in the town centre where Josh reluctantly agreed to the prospect of spending an exhilarating hour and a half in the Queensgate shopping centre. He didn't have any money but Sam did, and she wanted to buy a new outfit. That's when it happened . . . at the most unlikely time and in the most unlikely place.

It was one of those *'straight out of a film'* moments where you couldn't really have written the script any better. The two had just left the shopping centre and headed over to Cathedral Square after grabbing themselves a MacDonald's to eat out in the open. Cathedral Square is the open precinct area in front of the City's Cathedral which dates from the twelfth century, It is surrounded by an array of buildings; banks, restaurants, a coffee shop, and a bakery etc. Over the years these buildings have frequently changed hands and served many different purposes such is the nature of an ever evolving and diverse city centre setting. As usual the square was fairly crowded so they decided to go and sit on the steps by the Guildhall, a small ancient monument situated in the centre which once used to be the town's hall. This allowed them to look back across the square. Other families were sitting on various available seats and on the walls of the flower beds, as is always the public

habit. Pigeons nibbled rhythmically at the endless amount of scraps thrown to them and a small band was playing to their left, trying raise money for Thorpe Hall redevelopment. The two sat talking quietly about nothing much in particular when suddenly there was a whooshing sound. They had forgotten that they were sitting right in front of the recently installed fountain sprays - the council's latest fashion accessory to the square whereby 'walk through' fountains suddenly come to life and spray water. You can choose to move out of the way or get wet! As they both looked on there was a sudden increase of wails and screams around them, they wondered just how long this latest fad would last! All but a couple of young teenage girls who enjoyed the prospect of getting wet moved swiftly out of the way. As Sam and Josh peered deep into the watery sprays that blended with the quickly dispersing crowd they could see hazily through to the other side of the square. It was then that the laughs and smiles fell away from their faces, to be replaced by open mouths and wide eyes. Josh felt for a moment it was as if he was paralysed, as if his brain couldn't really process what he hadn't expected to see . . . standing in the crowd across the square, looking over a newspaper, eyes right at them - at both of them, *he* was there again. Their four eyes met his two for just a couple of seconds before the man - that same man Josh had seen many times recently, stepped back, and blended into the crowd. Then, he was gone.

“It's him,” shrieked Josh rising to his feet in a shot before belting across the square.

Sam Bishop didn't need telling. This time she had seen him too and it was clear that this was the figure that had been plaguing her soul mate for the last few weeks.

“Josh come back,” called Sam, she couldn't keep up.

It was no use, the man was gone. Sam came panting up behind, hardly able to get the words out.

“That's him isn't it Josh? That's the man you saw!”

“Where's he gone? He was here.” Josh was angry now. “Yes, that was him, and this time you saw him too.” Aware that their animated body language was now attracting some attention, they quickly found a nearby seat on which to continue their conversation.

“He seemed to be looking right at us and then he just disappeared,” said Sam dreamily. Josh was pleased that at last someone else had seen at first hand the guy who had been bothering him the last few weeks. For Josh the next step was to find out who he was and why he was tracking them.

“At least we now know I'm not seeing ghosts,” he said confidently, “come on, let's see what we've got and compare descriptions while it's fresh in our minds.”

“He . . . he just seemed to disappear . . .” repeated Sam, her mind apparently now absorbed by the now confirmed mystery.

Later that day Josh's triumphant mood was dashed when he again tried to describe the man he'd seen to his mum. Uncle Dan was round and he was no help either. Neither of them seemed at all understanding that Sam had also seen the guy this time, in fact, both of them couldn't change the subject quick enough. In fact they both seemed very touchy and annoyed that he was even bringing it up again! Not wanting a full on argument Josh stormed out, and what pissed him off even more was the very indiscreet lowering of voices even once he'd left the room.

“What aren't they telling me Sam?” He paced his way up and down Sam's hallway some time shortly after. He'd gone straight round, feeling quite upset and in need of a listening ear. Sam sympathised but tried to tell him that it was going to have to be enough for him at the moment that she'd seen the same as him and so could now believe . . . no more doubts. She wanted an early night as there was work to do before tomorrow night, the second of her Local History classes. She hadn't told Josh yet and didn't want to get into a deep discussion about it until afterwards, but tomorrow they were covering Ferry Meadows; week two was actually entitled ‘*Nene Park, Ferry Meadows and all its Mystery.*’

“So now you people should have a good idea of what a lot of locals don't know about Nene Park's history.” Sam's tutor was addressing her and seven other students.

“Here's something all of you can try during the week ahead please. Ask ten people if they can tell you within the nearest five years when Nene Park/Ferry Meadows, was first constructed. I bet you at least half won't be able to. People are so ignorant of local knowledge. It will be interesting to hear your results.” Sam's tutor then went on to the bit Sam had been waiting for.

“And now, to finish with, as promised, some of the darker tales about the area . . .”

Sam listened intently, making brief notes about the time in the early 1960s when a train driver gruesomely had his head knocked clean off when he leant out of the train's window, not seeing the train coming the other way. The tutor continued to describe the woeful fate of two brothers who drowned in a

canoeing accident at Orton Stauch in the early seventies - Sam was sure she'd seen an article about that in archive research she'd done at the museum. Then, she listened intently, as she heard the description of a man who disappeared into the night in Ferry Meadows, the man who was last seen running down the Oundle Road late one spring evening and entering Ferry Meadows never to return . . . the man known to the locals as *The Night Runner*:

“It is said that now and then, on a late spring evening, two voices shouting can be heard, followed by the apparition of a young man running frantically down Ham Lane before disappearing into the night.”

5. The Night Runner?

“Sal, Sally!”

Dan stormed into his sister’s house in Botolph Green as she came running down the stairs.

“Where's Josh, is he in?”

“No, he's out . . . what on earth's the matter?” asked Sally.

“He's back, he's back Sal, Josh's right, he knows it and now I've seen him too, this could get messy!” There rang a note of panic in Dan's voice and every muscle in his body seem to come in to use as he moved animatedly around the room.

“Okay, okay, slow down.” Snapped his sister. There was a moment's pause as she tried to compose herself while digesting the shock of what her brother had just told her. “So where have you seen him?”

“Ferry Meadows,” replied Dan, “early this morning while walking the dog. He was just sitting there by the lake on his own.”

“Did he see you?” asked Sally nervously.

“No, he didn't see me, but it was definitely him. It's been 19 years Sal, he's here amongst us again, he's come back to haunt us and he's going to do whatever it takes to find out whatever he needs to know about you . . . and about Josh.”

“Don't be silly, it's too long ago, he wouldn't bother us now surely!”

Dan rounded on her angrily raising his voice,

“Then why has Josh seen him? Why have your son and his girlfriend got so much to report about seeing the man we both knew might always come back to haunt us . . . all of us . . . come on Sal, you know it's true, you just don't want to face it.” Sally Penfold couldn't answer her brother, she knew he was right and now, for the first time in years, she was going to have to face some plain hard facts about her past.

* * * * *

It was Jake's 21st at the weekend and he was going away with his mum and dad to Lanzarote for a week. That Thursday night Jake, Josh, Daz and the boys had planned on hitting the town for a wild birthday celebration. The Botolph Arms was their starting point, from there it was only a short crawl up the Oundle Road to the Cross Keys. By the time they had staggered another half a mile to The Cherry Tree, the prominent Woodston public house well known to visiting football fans, they decided to skip the preliminaries and head straight on into town.

It was going well until came the early hours. Josh decided he'd better be getting back. Rising to his feet, he would have to concentrate as he announced his imminent departure but they were unable to return any kind of focus on the matter. *More drunk than I am?* He thought. There were things planned for the next day. He figured he might get away with a lie-in but not a grade one hangover! Not enough money left for a taxi! He'd have to leg it home. He persuaded Daz and Jake to leave the town centre with him, and some time later the three of them finished up at 'Charters', the public house barge situated permanently on the river under the town bridge. From here a pathway winds down under the main railway line past the power station and runs for about a mile and a half between railway track and river, it would eventually lead Josh home.

“Ok guys, I'm off,” said Josh seizing the moment.

“Yeah safe one . . . hey mate . . . I love yoouu . . . where's your taxi mate . . . yoouu gotta have a taxi for my mate . . . my special mate . . . oi . . . !”

Jake was completely out of it - totally sloshed! The others pulled him back.

“Come on Jakey-boy,” said Daz, “Josh is safe, he's off now, hey, see ya mate.”

With that, Josh Penfold started to make his way down the footpath into the dark of the night by the river.

Josh was drunk but not stupidly so. He never got really out of it, but it was a rather silly 'alcohol-affected' decision to walk alone down by the river and, some would say, equally irresponsible of his mates, however drunk they were, to allow him to do so!

The moon provided the only light on this clear dark night. Josh looked up at the eerie glow breaking through the sparse clouds. As he did so, the moon disappeared behind its invisible screen once more, and Josh realised just how dark everywhere around him actually was.

As he quickened his pace, he passed Railworld; the city headquarters of the Nene Valley Steam Railway, and the footpath led him under the bridge. It was now the early hours of Friday morning and he hadn't bargained on the light going altogether.

Shit! he thought, *can't see a thing now at all down here!*

He was too far gone now to turn back, and anyway, he knew the path would eventually lead him to where he wanted to be.

Suddenly there came a clattering sound, for a moment, he lost his footing. His breath was taken as his heart rate soared for a second or two. The stone

he had kicked had been sent scuttling across the cold hard brick wall of the rail tunnel through which he was now passing. Relief. Regaining his composure, it was now like entering another world, facing the unknown. Only a couple of hundred metres behind him were the city lights, the cars and taxis, the laughing and shouting of young people having a good time, but ahead of him lay emptiness, a quiet abyss that seemed not to belong to the town or to the suburbs, but would lead him back to where his home lay somewhere way in front of him.

Then - a noise! He should quicken his pace. *Probably a cat.* Nowt at jogging speed he glanced nervously over his shoulder expecting, or perhaps just hoping to see a pair of small, bright animal eyes piercing the night air. It came again - surely, more like a shuffle! Someone was there under the bridge! No looking back now, he started to panic and broke into a run. What was that up ahead? A fence post? Or just a streak of light against a tree trunk? He desperately tried to calculate his position but his jumbled mind wasn't allowing it. His breath became short as a voice called out.

“Oi boy, stop, I need to speak to you.”

Now Josh started to really run, and he could, he was quite athletic and fit enough to turn it on in times of need. Surely the footsteps were behind him now but his own breathing muffled the sound. He peered up in desperation as if hoping for some kind of answer. The moon shone down, breaking clear from its cloud mask once more as if it was lighting up the sky deliberately for him . . . as if to say, *Go on, take another look.* Dare he . . .? He had to know . . . so he looked back, and very quickly could see that he *was* being chased. Adrenalin kicked in and started to combat the effects of the alcohol and he found a surge of energy he wouldn't normally have had. It was a long way in

the dark. How far behind was the man? How long would he keep this up? The man again yelled out in wheezy gasping tones:

“I said wait . . . I'm going to find you . . . so . . . so stop . . . and face me . . . d'ya hear . . . ?”

Now running at almost full pelt alongside the railway track, his heart felt like it was going to burst. He didn't really know where he was or how close his pursuer was getting. He must run, and keep running hard. With a now furious flow through his adrenal veins, his mind kicked him in a memory of himself ending a school track race with a lung-bursting finish some years earlier. Suddenly then he thought he could see a glimmer of light through the trees. Street lights? He had to know how clear he was from his pursuer, surely just one more glance back if he could just calculate timing it with the glimmer of a street light or the fitful appearance of the moon. Even as he turned his head, he kind of knew what he was going to see . . . it just had to be, didn't it? That feeling, like *deja vu*, when you just know what that next thing to happen is going to be. It was *him* again, it was definitely him, this time he meant business *and*, he was most definitely real!

Josh didn't know why he did what he did next, maybe one day he should work it out, but for now he was just glad he did it. He turned left. He turned left without knowing there was a turning to the left to go down! If there hadn't been an opening he would have run smack into the railway fence, but there *was* a gap and he'd found it. Before he knew what he was doing, he was running across the railway track. There was a small gateway ahead and street lights were becoming more common casting their light from the other side of the road. If he could make it to there he would be safe, there would be people around. Surely the man would stop if he was able to attract attention to the situation! His panic started to subside as those footsteps were disappearing

into the night. He forced himself to concentrate - were they getting further away? Wasn't that the man's muffled voice calling him again? The man chasing him had run straight on.

Finally he felt safe, but where was he? He suddenly realised he was running up one of those roads in Woodston that leads out onto the Oundle Road. He never knew that you could get through from the bottom of Wharf road but that was actually where he was. By the time he reached the main road, Oundle Road, he stopped, heart still pounding, but relieved that the imminent danger had seemingly passed. He stood for a minute leaning against a garden wall, there was no one around, just a solitary figure some hundred yards or so along the road and the odd vehicle passing through. *Thank goodness he's gone, he must be half a mile or so away by now. I must be safe.* He was exhausted.

With throat was rasping, stomach churning and wheezing for breath, he fumbled in his pocket for his mobile, and now, feeling just about ready to throw up, he could do little else but call Sam.

6. A Rescue and Disappearance

The next day Sam's nephew and niece were with her. The weather was fine again and Sam planned on taking them out for the afternoon. Josh had told Sam about everything the previous night but he was certainly still in a bit of a state and Sam was anxious to talk to him properly.

“Come with us to Ferry Meadows. We can take the children to the sailing centre play park.” She invited him over the phone.

“So it was definitely him?” enquired Sam.

“I was a bit out of it, but yeah . . . it was him, what the hell does he want with me Sam?”

Sam was actually a little disappointed, it hardly seemed like a ghost was haunting Josh now, more so that they were actually in some possible real imminent danger from this guy!

“So it was definitely the guy we've been seeing around.” Sam reiterated.

The two of them sat for a minute with the conversation kind of locked. They both wanted to say something meaningful that would move the conversation on, you know, like when someone has mislaid something and you're helping them to look for it and after a while all you can think of to say is *where did you last have it?* or *you definitely had it at such and such a time?* Neither could think of anything else to add other than the obvious fact that someone they didn't know, that they had seen all over the place the last few weeks, had chased Josh last night.

Just then their thoughts were interrupted. Sam's little niece called to them from the slide.

“Yahoo, Auntie Sam,” cried the little girl, “look what I can do.”

Josh looked up, the little girl was waving at them with both arms. His gaze fixed firmly upon the little girl, for a split nano second he got a flashback of someone else waving at him, then everything happened so quickly: Josh found himself vaulting the play park fence and before he even had time to think what he was doing he was running towards the slide, he was halfway there when he heard Sam shout to her niece,

“Jessie, no!”

Josh was now very close to the slide as the little girl attempted the summersault on top of the slide, and he was right underneath her a moment later when she lost her footing and fell. As she tumbled, he broke her fall and caught her, saving her from nasty injury.

“Well done mate, that was close.” A stranger was coming over to help.

Jessie was unhurt, the moment had come and gone. Sam came over and hugged Jessie then gave Josh a hug and a kiss.

“My hero,” she said. “Alright Jessie.” Sam hugged her niece. “Lucky Josh was quick to catch you, hey?”

“What made you get there? All she did was call out!” asked Sam, still amazed at what she had just seen.

“No,” replied Josh, “she didn't just call out, she waved. She waved with both hands . . . didn't you see?”

* * * * *

Later that night Josh met Dan in the Botolph for a pint and was proudly telling him about the day's event. It was a good chance for them to catch up. They hadn't really spoken since the morning they'd been fishing together.

The Botolph Arms is a pleasant little abode. It's only a stone's throw from Josh's house and he's spent many a pleasant evening in the spring and summer months sitting in their beer garden. The building is set back from the Oundle Road about 150 metres and the driveway leading to it is lined with trees. The garden is situated at the front of the building. The night was cool and the two men decided to perch against the wall of the building, claiming the nearest bench looking out onto the garden.

“So what are you up to over the summer then Josh?” asked Dan.

“Oh, a bit of this and that,” he replied. “There are a few things I'd like to do.”

It suddenly occurred to Josh that he didn't *actually* have a clear answer to this one; when someone asked him outright he always shied away from saying what he really was planning on doing. There was a slightly awkward moment of silence before Dan spoke again;

“You know, talking to your mother, she is a little concerned about you Josh.” Dan hoped he hadn't touched a nerve, but he felt he needed to have this conversation with his nephew.

“You really are going to have to try and get some form of job soon you know, do you have any real idea what it is you want to do?”

Dan knew the likely answer but he wanted to hear it from Josh.

“Yeah I know how it looks Dan,” Josh replied, “I still really do want to go into the police force if they'll have me, but I have to wait until September to

see, and I can't even officially apply until next month. Meanwhile I was thinking, Sam and I might take a holiday - she's into all this mystery stuff and wants to get us on one of those murder mystery weekends, you know the sort of stuff - where you get clues and have to work it all out - murders and all that . . .”

Josh's voice tailed off as he caught his uncle's gaze. Dan wasn't listening, his eyes were fixed with firm intent and he was staring straight past Josh, out beyond and into the Beer Garden.

“Dan,” called Josh trying to recapture his attention, but it was no good. Once Josh followed the direction of Dan's stare of apparent disbelief, both men had seen clearly what neither of them wanted to see! Sitting out there under the trees was the man - the man with a goatee beard, short curly hair and camo-trousers. The man who Josh had seen turning up all over the place recently, and definitely the man who a night or two before had chased him. Now, feeling actually quite angry, but at the same time confident and safer with his uncle Dan alongside, Josh was ready for the inevitable confrontation.

“Billy!” murmured Dan with a resonance of disbelief clearly audible in his voice.

“Who is he Dan . . . Billy who? What does he want?”

Dan didn't answer.

“Well we are going to find out right now,” demanded Josh.

Dan had no choice as Josh got up and headed outside across the beer garden. The man glared back at them both as they approached him. He did not try to look the other way or make for any sort of cover, he just waited until they had both come close enough, then, he spoke:

“At last . . . Dan, and it's Josh, isn't it?” the man nodded respectfully.

“Billy. After all this time, Billy McNeil.”

Josh looked from one to the other, clearly the two men knew each other, and that name . . . it rang a bell.

“Look guys what's going on? I need to know. I've seen you all over the place, why did you chase me? I think I deserve some answers.” He was addressing Billy.

“Come with me Billy, a word - and now.” Dan grabbed the man and walked him swiftly across the beer garden between the tables and benches amongst the hearty crowd of drinkers and towards the bushes that lay at the far end of the garden near the pathway. There was a moment of sudden but controlled aggression in Dan's actions, and, although this chap Billy McNeil seemed for a second slightly taken aback, it was quickly apparent to Josh that Dan had taken control of the situation. Josh, feeling somewhat deflated, left them for a few seconds. Whatever was going on? What explanation was he going to get? He was wise enough to see that his uncle Dan had some prior knowledge and therefore the first move in this strange reunion should be made by him. If there was something Dan had to get off his chest first then he figured that was okay, he trusted his judgement. He was, however, expecting them to return imminently to answer *his* questions, but instead . . . nothing! After a minute or two more the two men had still not reappeared.

“Hey, you two.” Josh headed quickly over to the corner of the garden by the bushes. But they were gone . . . both of them! He thought he could hear two voices on the pathway behind but, when he looked, nothing! Those voices were now already just echoes disappearing into the dark. Josh was not to see either man again that night!

When he arrived round at Sam's some time later that evening, Josh was somewhat distraught and angry. He told her the details of the evening's events and that he was going to confront his mother and uncle to find out the truth about this Billy McNeil bloke. Sam begged him to stay cool but she knew it was likely to be in vain.

7. About Billy McNeil

The next day, back at work at the museum, Sam couldn't help wondering how things were going. She hated the thought of arguments and upset, she was just as puzzled and annoyed as Josh was. She decided to spend her lunch break researching. Who was this Billy McNeil character? What did Josh's uncle know? There were some archives in the museum and in the city library. She was sure to be able to find out something. If she found any leads online, anything at all, it would be far easier to track down things like newspaper articles or borrow and replace any relevant hard copies right now, than when she got home.

The next day Josh found himself sitting round the kitchen table with his uncle Dan and his mother who for once were keen to explain something to him. Dan knew that overnight Josh would be angry and he had worked out that it was time to tell Josh something that he would happily have told him years ago if only his sister had complied.

“Well I'm all ears,” His eyes darted from one to the other.

“Ok. Look, I know you're angry and you deserve an explanation but you might not like what you're about to hear,” began Dan.

“You see, Josh,” his mum spoke nervously, “you know I have always said I never knew who your father was . . . well . . . strictly speaking, there was someone.”

“Well, you don't say,” Josh looked sarcastically at his mother. He didn't like to be reminded of anything to do with his father, he'd never been told anything with any clarity. From what he did know he had come to the

conclusion that his mother simply had a *'one-nighter'* and that was that. It was the thing in his life that upset him the most, and now these two closest family members sitting before him seemed as if they were about to blow some big secret.

"You remember I told you about my mate Billy McNeil? Well, good mates we were, and last night is the first time I've spoken to him for nigh on eighteen, nineteen years," Dan continued;

"You see, Billy got into a dispute one day at the factory, it carried on in the Cross Keys pub later that night and . . ." Dan tailed off.

"Well?" urged Josh.

"Billy ended up deliberately running him down - killed him straight out. He was out of his senses but there were witnesses and it was an open and shut case. Billy was done for murder and got life. The word is he's recently come out - after 19 years inside!"

There was silence for a moment as Josh tried to get his head round the facts.

"So, he killed someone and he was your best mate . . . you never spoke to him again because of what he'd done . . . ? Doesn't make sense, and why has he been stalking me?"

"Th. . . there's more," stammered his mum. Tears were now rolling down her cheeks as she held her brothers hand.

"Sal," whispered Dan.

"No, it's ok, Dan," she snapped. Sally Penfold was about to face up to something she'd denied for virtually all of her son Josh's life.

"Christ," screamed Josh. "You're going to tell me he killed my father -"

“No, no, interrupted his mother. The man he killed was not known to us . . . the thing is . . .”

Sally couldn't continue, she was now sobbing uncontrollably. Dan and Josh both had tears in their eyes as Dan continued the story: He told Josh that his mother had had an affair with Billy two years earlier and that they had always believed that Billy McNeil was his father. Billy McNeil certainly believed this and that was why he wanted to find out about Sally and her boy who could be his son - Josh. At that, Josh got up and ran out of the room, he couldn't cope with any more right now, he was too upset.

“Josh,” called his mother.

“Leave it Sal.” Dan put his hand on his sister's arm. “Give him some space; he'll be okay.”

Josh was both angry and sad, but strangely, as it all sank in, partly relieved as well. At least he now knew what was going on and why his mother and uncle had acted so strangely out of character towards him whenever he mentioned seeing the man.

But what next? He thought as he attempted to compose himself, *This evil guy is my dad and I don't want him anywhere near me.* Why did he have to come back now, just as things were looking up for him?

8. Sam Digs Deeper

Back at the museum Sam Bishop had found something. Once she set her mind to completing a task, she went at it hammer and tongs and, with only a year or so in the job, she had become a very proficient researcher. You see, there are ways to find out things online *if* you know how to skirt round the subject and *if* you are prepared to dig deep enough and you just happen to take the right track you can sometimes find gold quite quickly, and today Sam did exactly that.

She came across an old news item about a man who was sacked from the British Sugar factory in November 1991, it was only small print in the Evening Telegraph next to the columns for obituaries and bankruptcies etc. but it gave the man's name - 'McNeil'. Surely it had to be the same guy? She started to search '*Billy McNeil, Peterborough 1991*' - nothing. Then she used the museum newspaper archive search; '*Billy McNeil, offences, Peterborough 1990 – 1992*'... '*McNeil, Billy, charged 1991, Peterborough*'...

Then Sam could hardly believe her eyes; this is what came up on the screen:

May 26th 1992

'Senior officers investigating the murder of Alan Davidson which has previously been investigated by officers at Thorpe Wood Police station have announced that they have arrested a man for his murder. The man has been named as Billy McNeil (24) of Bardney, Orton Goldhay. McNeil was picked up alone in Ferry Meadows on Monday morning after a tip off and didn't resist arrest. The murder of Davidson took place on

January 12th 1992 when McNeil deliberately ran Davidson over on the Oundle Road after a dispute in the Cross Keys public house earlier that evening.

The arrest of McNeil is not being linked to the missing Police officer, David Shearman, who hasn't been seen since Sunday evening. Shearman was last . . .'

Sam felt a cold shiver run down her spine, this was even more significant than she thought possible, She just had to tell Josh right now. As she reached for her phone it vibrated before her hands were able to touch it . . . it was Josh. Slightly annoyed that she hadn't got to him first, she fumbled to read the message. His text said simply, *'Ring me, I need you'*.

I think you can imagine what happened next. Josh had the whole story to tell to Sam. She had this incredible bit of information to tell him and together, although emotionally drained, they figured that at least part of the puzzle could now start to be put together. Sam took that afternoon off for a 'family emergency' and once they'd both calmed down and got their heads round it all, something still wasn't right!

"So," began Sam, "let me see if I've got this. Your mum and uncle think that McNeil is your father because your mum had a one night stand with him and he was good mates with your uncle Dan. Dan has never forgiven him for the murder and not kept in touch at all while he's been inside and now McNeil is a free man again and wants to meet his only son and perhaps rekindle with your mum . . . ? Or at least be friends with your uncle Dan again to see if he's forgiven him perhaps?"

"And where does that leave me?" begged Josh. "I don't want to meet the bloke. Quite frankly Sam, I just want to get away for a day or two, let them

sort it, and perhaps when we get back he'll be gone . . . or whatever . . . I don't know. I don't really care anymore." Josh's desperation was obvious.

"Okay, replied Sam, let's do it."

"What, you mean really?"

"Yup. Look I'm due some holiday, I can take it now I'll say I need to go now for a family grievance or something and take it out of my leave. Let's go to that farmhouse in Norfolk my uncle always says I can use any time."

"But what about money? I don't have any."

"I can see us through a few days, we'll take my car. Leave it with me and go and pack your bags . . . Oh, and don't tell your mum until we're ready, in case she tries to stop us!"

So for a couple of days Josh and Sam were able to finally relax a little. They even managed to arrive at the farmhouse the very next evening, a family had conveniently just left and it was vacant now until the end of June.

9. Trouble Back Home

The next couple of days were pleasant. They did a bit of sightseeing, went out for a drink or two in the evenings and kept in touch with home via texts. Josh was anxious that there shouldn't be any more friction between himself and his mum and Dan, but he didn't want to talk to them right now. He kind of knew they'd understand.

As they walked in the early evening down a Norfolk country lane, the sun shone through the oak leaves at the field's edge, bathing them both in dappled sunlight. They started to talk about what had happened, all they had been through the last few weeks, and what could lie ahead. As he listened to his friend's wise words Josh's smile started to return. He felt relaxed with Sam, he could tell her anything and she would listen and try to understand, but, as they talked it through, something still didn't add up. Now they were looking at the facts objectively in the cold light of day, why would Billy McNeil come back? Was it really to see Josh, and if so would he really do it by spying?

The mobile suddenly rang, it was a text from his mum:

'Hope u r well and r home 2morrow as planned, had a break-in last night, don't worry all ok, nothing gone, police on to it c u 2morrow'

"Strange, Mum's had a break-in but it's all in hand apparently."

"Oh!" replied Sam.

"I'll text her to say we'll be back tomorrow pm"

That night Josh had a dream, a strange dream details of which he couldn't completely recount the next morning (you know how dreams are), but he got the gist, and it bothered him. It bothered them both:

In his dream he was running, and strangely, he was running up Wharf Road and then out on to the Oundle Road away from town. The air was cold but the lights - the street lights increased in intensity as he got further along the road. This bothered him because early last week he had actually been doing just that! The difference was last week he was running away from something, but in his dream he was chasing someone or running *towards* something! He wasn't sure quite what. In places he seemed to be running further down the Oundle Road towards Orton Longueville and beyond . . . he seemed to be in a race of some sort, but then . . . perhaps not, because it was dark - always night-time. People were waving at him and for some reason he had to keep waving back!

The two travelled back to Peterborough and when they arrived in the late afternoon, they went straight to Josh's.

"Hi Mum, I'm home," called Josh.

His mum came running down the stairs and threw her arms open for him.

"Did you have a nice time?"

"Yeah, really cool thanks. Hey, what's all this about a break-in - no damage I hope, sure everything's okay?"

He could feel his mother tenseness as she uncoiled her arms and took a small step back from him. Sally looked down avoiding her son's gaze. Then, her arms grabbed his and she looked him directly in the eye.

"Josh they've got him, it was Billy, Bill McNeil - he came back."

For a moment Josh couldn't speak, he was thrown. He'd had visions that his mother and uncle might actually be talking to the bloke while he was away, trying perhaps to build bridges from the past. After all, McNeil was his uncle Dan's best friend once, and quite possibly Josh's father! But now they were telling him this was the bloke who tried to break in - and had been arrested again!

He felt an angry butterfly deep down in his stomach and his hands started to randomly open and clench. He didn't want to face the thought of McNeil even possibly being his father.

“Josh, I'm so glad you're back, he's a bad 'un whatever he is, and the night before last he tried to break in. He was after us Josh - you and me!”

“Where's uncle Dan?” asked Josh urgently rounding on his mother as if he hadn't taken in a word she'd just said.

“He's only just gone, he's talking to the police now about Billy and stuff years ago, apparently there might be some new evidence or something . . . Christ, I don't know what's going on anymore.”

Sally sat down, exhausted.

“Don't upset yourself Sally, we'll stay tonight if you like, let's see what Dan has to say when he gets back.” Sam was trying to be comforting.

The piercing ring tone caused them to turn their heads sharply. Sally answered the phone, caressing it with both hands as she slowly took it to her ear as if she knew what she was about to hear was something very important.

“He's here now,” she said. “Yes, he'll be here . . . okay . . . okay I know, yes I'll tell him . . . yes, I said I'll tell him.” Josh observed his mum, she was visibly shaking as she replaced the phone into its dock.

“What's going on, Ma?” enquired Josh. “What was all that about? Tell me.”

“Josh, sit down.” stammered his mother. “I need to tell you something.” Her son stood with arms held slightly away from his body and his hands still clenched in a clammy sweat. He looked her in the eye before slowly taking a seat without taking his eyes off her.

“You see, you know me and your uncle think Billy McNeil is your father . . . well there was someone else-“

Josh rose from his seat raising his voice.

“-You mean you slept around!”

“No,” screamed Sally, “no, it wasn't like that. But there *was* someone else.”

Sally could tell her son no more. Josh broke the silence.

“Well who? Who in God's name?” he bellowed.

“I don't know, I can't say. Look, a policeman is on his way to talk to you, please wait to hear him, Josh, please . . . I can't . . .” Tears started to roll down her cheeks preventing her from saying any more.

Sam clasped Josh's hand, then she spoke.

“Let's wait to hear what he has to say, it surely can't make things any worse.”

10. What the Police Didn't Know

About twenty minutes later a policeman arrived with uncle Dan. A grey-haired burly man in his late fifties walked authoritatively into the kitchen. His uniform suited him, Josh thought. Sometimes the wrong people seemed to be in uniform but there was instantly something about this guy, that seemed a bit special, and whatever it was it just put Josh at ease.

“Hello Josh, I'm Sergeant Malwade, you can call me Jim. I believe I've met you before, some years ago.”

“Sorry,” said Josh, “I don't remember.”

“You had your bike stolen and your mum was a little bit upset.”

“Oh yes,” replied Josh. He wasn't really interested in making any attempt to try and recall the details of this although he did vaguely remember.

“Anyway Josh,” continued Jim Malwade? “I've come to tell you something important and your mother would like you to hear this.”

Right now he was prepared to listen to anything this man in front of him cared to say.

Sergeant Malwade looked up at Sally Penfold as if to get the reassurance he required from her in order to continue.

Sam, Dan, Josh and another police constable who had accompanied the Sergeant sat silently waiting to hear what he was going to tell them.

“You see,” began Jim, “sometimes when solving a crime, we uncover other facts that need an explanation, and when we find we can put two and two

together and make four, it can affect someone in a big way irrespective of the crime itself. Part of my job is to tell people when we know we have evidence of something so that their minds can be put at rest, so to speak. Do you follow me?"

"Yes, I think so, I suppose it's about my father and all this with Billy McNeil isn't it." Josh chose his words carefully because he didn't want to pre-empt exactly what Jim Malwade might be about to tell him.

"Well, yes, it sort of is really," Jim looked up at the others briefly before continuing.

"As you know, we've arrested Mr. McNeil for trying to break into this house two nights ago. You see, normally this wouldn't happen, but we got a tip off." Jim Malwade looked at Dan.

"Your uncle Dan helped us because he knows he meant harm to probably all three of you. When he broke in he had a knife, a crowbar and a small bottle of something forensics are describing as lethal. I know it's not nice to hear, but we think he was actually after you." Jim paused slightly guarded of what Josh's reactions might be.

For a moment his brain just seemed to freeze as if he couldn't take in the startling information however prepared he felt he had been. Then he felt it kicking in. It felt as if his blood ran cold. How close he had been that night down by the river, this guy was trying to perhaps even kill him . . . but why?

Malwade continued:

"McNeil is a murderer and usually when murderers are released, if they decide to go after someone, it is to cover up what someone else might know about any other crimes they've committed. So, they do this by getting rid of the evidence, or maybe by simply trying to avenge some action. Now, we

know your uncle Dan knew Billy well, it could just be him he was after, but there might be something else - something you know that we don't quite have all the pieces of information for yet. Now don't worry, you're not in any trouble, but we need to go over those sightings you and your young lady friend have had of this man McNeil over the last few weeks."

Josh was speechless as was everyone else.

"But before I continue, that little bit of evidence I mentioned at the start . . ." Jim paused.

"Billy McNeil is *not* your father, Josh."

"He's not?" Josh's eyes widened, words failed him . . . how was he supposed to react to this? But he did feel almost instantly that at least one weight had been lifted. "How can you be so sure?"

Jim looked up at Sally again as if for assurance before continuing.

"Well to put it bluntly, something Billy reminded us of happened years ago and we checked it out. He was a sperm donor in his early twenties and one of the first things I ever did as a copper was nick him for a disturbance at the hospital when he got angry with a doctor who . . . er, well refused his donation so to speak . . . you see, to put it bluntly, Billy McNeil was firing blanks - always has done and can't ever be a father."

Silence fell throughout the kitchen.

"I'll put the kettle on," said Sally.

"You okay Josh?" Dan put his hand on Josh's shoulder.

Sam got up and went to her bag, she had the print out of the newspaper article as a result of her research last week at the museum.

"You don't have a photo, do you?" asked Sam.

“I mean, just so we can be sure you've got the right bloke . . . I know it sounds silly but this is him we are talking about isn't it?” She handed the police sergeant the article. The room hung in suspense as he paused to read it. Eight eyes focused on two . . . the two of Sergeant Jim Malwade as he scanned the information Sam had just handed him.

“That's the one, murder of the bloke Davidson outside the Cross Keys, Jan 1992 . . . and what's this . . . ? Police officer David Shearman also disappeared - I knew him well, we never did find . . .”

Jim Malwade was stopped in his tracks by the sound of breaking crockery, Sally had dropped a cup in the kitchen and yelled out. Dan looked up sharply and immediately went to her.

“You say you knew this officer? It says he disappeared, never seen again after that Sunday night?” enquired Sam.

“Well yes, that's right. It was a strange one that, nobody quite knows where, why or how, but he was a good mate of mine. He disappeared one Sunday evening, the night of great football success for the town - the night that Peterborough United beat, I think it was Stockport at Wembley in a play-off final. There were celebrations everywhere.”

Suddenly everyone in the room was listening intently. Josh felt a prickle run down the back of his neck but he didn't quite know why . . . he wanted to know, he *needed* to know why!

Seeing that he had the attention of everyone, Sergeant Malwade continued with what he knew of the disappearance of a close friend and colleague.

“Well, David was a great copper, always active and never really off duty. The town was full that night, blue and white flags were everywhere, people were out celebrating all over. All we know is that David, (PC Shearman), was

out for a run in the middle of the evening and had stopped in town to talk to colleagues who were on duty. It was the last time I ever saw him, down by the town bridge, just where it leads down to the river by the Charters boat public house. We had a laugh and a joke and then he went on his way off over the bridge. All we actually know is that he was seen in the dark of the night some time later around 10.30pm running frantically down Oundle Road near Orton Longueville School. There was then another report of someone running into the dark down Ham Lane and into Ferry Meadows, but that could have been anyone. He wasn't reported missing for a couple of days, he'd had some sort of relationship break-up and it wasn't clear who would be missing him, or where he was actually living at the time. One of those sad mysteries I'm afraid. Next day, from an anonymous tip off, we arrested Mr. McNeil in Ferry Meadows for the murder he'd committed four months earlier. Someone just rang in and said we'd find him there - and we did!"

"The Night Runner," murmured Sam to herself.

"Come again!" said Sergeant Malwade, turning towards Sam with interest.

Sam didn't have time to collect her thoughts before the next voice spoke. It was Dan's.

"I knew Dave Shearman." Everyone looked at Dan.

"We used to train together at Nene Valley Harriers - late eighties - early nineties, he was a keen runner until he disappeared - he was a good mate."

"You knew him?" Sergeant Malwade was surprised.

"I saw him that very night running past the Cross Keys pub . . . I saw McNeil that night as well about another 500 metres down the road, I drove past them both. I didn't know for sure he was a murderer then, though I had a pretty good idea. I knew the police were after him." Dan's voice became

louder, more defiant and he started to visibly tremble as he told them more. Everyone looked at Dan, waiting to hear what was coming next:

“You see, I put two and two together, but I made five . . . I thought Shearman was undercover chasing Billy McNeil in some covert operation, he was making hand signals to me when I passed him, like as if to say, *you haven't seen me, don't take any notice.*”

“Hand signals?” enquired Malwade.

“You know, like waving - both hands above his head. The thing is . . .” Dan looked around at the ashen faces before continuing. “I saw both of them up by Orton Waterville village as well, ten minutes later. Dave Shearman was definitely chasing McNeil who'd stopped running, there was only about 200 metres between them now. I knew where McNeil was heading - to the dark of Ferry Meadows. I hadn't seen any cop cars so I thought I'd better tell the police anyway even though I guessed they'd be waiting to catch him once Shearman chased him into Nene Park.”

There were gasps all around as Dan finished his testament. Sally looked at Dan, he looked back at his sister and tried to reach her hand, but she backed away, staring at her brother helplessly before walking out of the room.

“There was no covert operation that night, I can tell you.” said Malwade.

“What you are telling us here is new information, it is the first time anyone has been able to link the disappearance of Dave Shearman to Billy McNeil.”

“Look I haven't done anything wrong,” screamed Dan now quite animated and upset. “I didn't realise there was only Dave on the hunt that night and that he was acting alone, I just wanted McNeil put away and out of our lives, I was only trying to . . . to protect . . .”

Dan couldn't finish his sentence.

"It's all right uncle Dan," Josh spoke now with the calm quietness that had come over him in the last few minutes as he'd listened and taken in the whole story, "you were only trying to protect my mother and me from the harm he might cause us, and you weren't sure were you. You really weren't sure who my father really was."

"No," replied Dan. "Josh I'm sorry, I'm sorry it had to be like this."

"I'm not sorry," said Josh rising to his feet, a pale but concentrated look upon his face as he gazed out of the window into the twilight across Botolph Green.

"Are you okay son? You look like you've just seen a ghost," said Malwade. Josh turned and looked back at him.

"Oh I have, Sergeant. I have, and I'm glad I have, and now I know who my father really is. Come on Sam. I need to tell you something. It's okay for me to go now isn't it, Sergeant?"

"Well, yes," replied the officer, somewhat puzzled.

"Thank you for your help tonight everybody. Oh, and Sergeant, when you put all this in a report, make sure you bother to actually *search* the lakes at Ferry Meadows."

Sergeant Malwade was at first puzzled, in fact everyone was confused by this remark. But Josh had spoken because he knew, and now somehow, Sergeant Malwade knew that he knew.

Josh looked at Dan and, as if under some kind of spell, Dan followed him and Sam out onto the green.

“You don't have to say anything Dan, I know you know who Dave Shearman was, I knew the minute his name was mentioned and by Mum's reaction. Did she know him long?”

Dan nodded sheepishly.

“About a year before bloody McNeil got his foot in the door. You see, the thing is, I think Dave knew about Billy and your mum but never said. The tension between them grew, she said that she suspected him of having a bit on the side and threw him out. Whether that was really true or not was immaterial. Once that fateful evening of January 12th 1992 had taken place, Dave decided he'd do whatever it took to get Billy McNeil behind bars. I couldn't ever speak to Billy again and it was difficult because . . . well because at the time your mum was convinced he was your father, so it seemed just easier and better all round to keep quiet.”

No one spoke for a full thirty seconds.

“Oh why do we do it? Why do we weave such a tangled web when we know it will come back to haunt us one day?”

“Human nature I suppose,” remarked Sam.

Dan could see this was a good moment to leave them and so he swiftly bid goodnight, thanking Josh for being so understanding.

“So your father was David Shearman?” checked Sam. “You seem so calm Josh. I thought the shock of what we've discovered tonight was enough to send anyone mad.”

“Oh, don't you see Sam? It's a good thing, the ghost of my real father has saved us from the danger of the false one.” There was a pause as this sunk in for both of them.

“The Night Runner,” said Sam. “There's apparently a tale . . . I learned about it at the local history class; a runner disappears into the night in Ferry Meadows . . . seen on late spring evenings.”

“Well there you are, the ghost of David Shearman, my dad, seen for the last time doing what he always did best - apprehending a criminal.”

A sense of fulfilment came over them both, as if everything was now all right. For Josh it was as if he'd had a great weight lifted from his shoulders.

11. Rest in Peace

“You said you needed to tell me something,” said Sam presently.

“Yeah, you know that day about three weeks ago when Posh won the play-offs at Old Trafford?”

“Yes,” replied Sam.

“Well that's when I first saw him, only, you see I didn't realise, I don't think I even told you.”

Sam looked surprised and a little hurt that there had been something perhaps so relevant that Josh had kept from her.

“There were dozens of people out around the lakes that evening, but I saw someone waving with both hands, it looked like someone waving - but it was *not* waving - it was *warning*. None of the lads saw it, only me, and then he was gone. It was as if the guy was almost in Gunwade Lake, it didn't really make sense then but now it does.” Sam still looked slightly puzzled.

“You mean that was . . .”

“Well, I think it was the ghost of my father warning me on the anniversary of a type - of the day he died . . . don't you see . . . he died that night in Ferry Meadows nineteen years ago when Posh won at Wembley, and his ghost warned us of McNeil these last few weeks. He appeared to *me* on the night of *this year's* play-off final!”

“Ah!” said Sam, suddenly fitting all the pieces together in her head. “And you followed in your father's footsteps that night when McNeil chased you up by the river when you were in a bit of a drunken state.”

“Yes, that's right. You know, I hadn't thought of that. I didn't really know where I was going, I was just kind of led to safety. And do you remember that dream? It was as if I *was* my father triumphantly running down the Oundle Road, but I didn't understand why - now I do.”

“What will happen to McNeil now?” wondered Sam.

“The police have got him. They will reopen the case and he will most probably serve for the other murder he committed - if they can prove it!”

“Other murder?” queried Sam. Josh stopped and turned to look directly at her.

“My father, David Shearman - he never came out of Ferry Meadows that night. The only logical explanation is that he eventually confronted McNeil only to meet his death. Probably a struggle. We now know there was no help, no back up, no covert operation being run by the police, he was on his own. There's only one place you could hide a body in Ferry Meadows for that long.”

* * * * *

Josh and Sam decided to go for a walk into Nene Park that evening before the sun finally set.

They sat together on the bank of the lake, gazing into the sunset.

“Tomorrow's going to be the first day of the rest of my life,” announced Josh.

“Always there are fingers from the past stretching out to reach us,” Added Sam. “It's up to us to listen, to watch and to keep an open mind. You never know when you are going to need the help of a spirit from the past. Let's say goodbye properly. Come on, show me where.”

Josh pointed;

“There, at the edge of Gunwade Lake,” he said.

So then they walked down to the water's edge hand in hand.

Josh had a lump in his throat and a tear in his eye. He picked up a stone and hurled it into the lake.

“To the father I never knew but feel I’ve always had.” He called. “So long Dad, wherever you are.”

A few days later the body of David Shearman was recovered from Gunwade Lake, his work now done, he could knock off duty for good . . .

The Night Runner can finally rest in peace.

* * * * *

Fact or Fiction?

This is a story seen through the eyes of one young man who's life was changed when a past event triggered the investigation to discover who his father was. The story is set in the suburbs to the south of Peterborough, mainly Orton Longueville, but including Woodston and Nene Park. The football matches involving *The Posh* (Peterborough United FC.) are central to the story.

The Facts:

On May 29th 2011 Peterborough United beat Huddersfield Town in the Division one play-off final at Old Trafford.

On May 24th 1992 Peterborough United did beat Stockport County in a play-off final at Wembley stadium.

References to actual places and events relevant to known historical figures are correct unless listed below.

All references to *known* historical characters are factually correct.

In the early 1960's a train driver was killed in a manner similar to that described in the story, and two brothers also drowned in a boating accident on the River Nene a decade or so later.

It's Fiction:

All the story line characters are fictional and any perceived close representation of people alive or that have lived is purely unintentional.

The *Night Runner*, and the 'ghostly' story associated with him never happened as described in the story, and neither did exist the character Billy McNeil, or any of the historically occurring facts associated directly with him.

All the settings, place references, and circumstantial scenarios are deemed to be authentic, although none of the crimes described ever actually took place . . . (as far as we know . . .)

About The Author



Tom Goymour was born and raised in Cambridgeshire UK. and has lived in Peterborough for over forty years. He writes mainly in the mystery and suspense genre about what he sees, thinks, and instinctively feels.

Being part of a large family has given him many powerful experiences from which to draw inspiration.

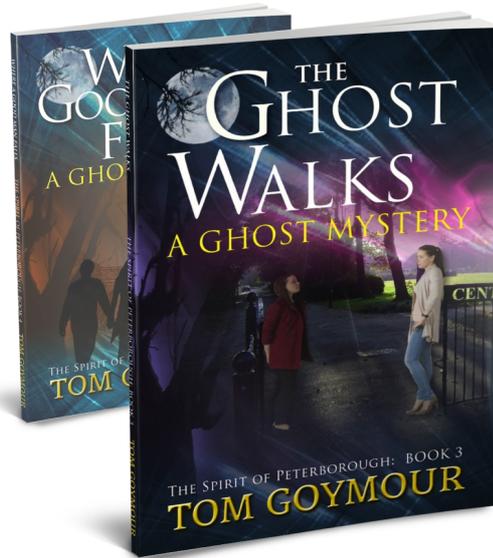
He is an exponent of art and design and a composer of piano music, but tries hard not to inflict any of this on others!

Empowered by his many, and sometimes strange experiences, he has found writing to be his voice-piece. He is a meticulous studier of life, and his stories nearly always contain a twist or a strong moral message that hits home hard . . . designed to make the reader think.

* * * * *

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