

*DREAM*

*BOUNCING*

Forthcoming titles:

The Secret Heritage

The Amber Slides

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*To Joe and Max,*

*Tony.*

*To Paul*

*& Bethany,*

*my wonderful husband and daughter.*

*Thank you for your patience,*

*love, as always,*

*Jennie.*

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# PART I



## Opening time

London 2014

*Gotta run faster; the wolves are gaining on me. But the dense undergrowth slowed Ed down. He put his hands over his ears to shut out the ear-piercing howls of the ravenous creatures. I need to find somewhere to hide.*

A mound of grass loomed in the distance. An opening in it beckoned to him. *I'll have to find some way to block the entrance once I'm inside.* Stumbling on a protruding tree root he fell to the ground, gashing his knee on a rough piece of fallen branch. He crawled painfully towards what seemed to be his only hope of survival, but the closer he got the further it seemed to move away.

A creaking sound joined the eerie cries coming from behind. The trees began to encircle him, getting closer and closer. *I'm not gonna make it, there's no gap. Maybe the trunks will act as a barrier and keep those beasts out.*

Afraid he was about to be crushed, Ed found it increasingly hard to breathe. 'No!' The scream ejaculated from his mouth like it came from a fog horn. 'How did that wolf get through?' The beast's teeth, dripping with saliva, came leaping towards his neck...

Ed sat bolt upright, leaving a wet patch on the sheet where he'd lain. He glanced at the digital clock beside his bed: 3.46am. *No point in trying to get anymore sleep tonight.* He groaned within. *I really do need to*

*be at my best today.* He got up, scribbled in his diary and then showered.

After plying himself with coffee, Ed entered his private consulting room. Startled at the sound of the phone ringing, he looked at his watch. It was just past 7.30 am. He reached across the oak desk to pick up the cream-coloured handset on its first ring. Putting it to his ear, he realised he was appearing too eager and feared he wouldn't be giving a great initial impression. He began his well-rehearsed welcome, 'Dr Edwar—'

'Hello, son.'

Ed raised his eyebrows, allowing his father to continue.

'Thought I'd be the first to ring you, on the day you perform metamorphosis—'

'Very funny, Dad ... look, I'm sorry I've been a bit of a hermit lately, but today's the day I face the public. Assuming people want to come and see me, that is.'

'As long as you're fully human now, eh?'

Ed detected amusement in his father's voice.

'I'm really ringing to say that me and your mum are so proud of you. I know we've said it before but I wanted to tell you today. You *will* make a success of this, you know, although it may take a bit of time for your practice to get established.'

'Thanks, Dad. Thanks for believing in me and standing by me all these years ... you know it's my destiny!'

His father's amusement turned to laughter, 'Yes, as you've never failed to mention since you were eight years old, and look at you now. We all know how much this means to you. By the way how've you been sleeping?'

'I'm okay, Dad, honestly. I promise to see you



both soon.’ Ed shuddered at the memory of his most recent recurring nightmare.

After a slight pause his dad spoke again. ‘If only you hadn’t started—’

‘Not today, Dad, *please*, not today.’ He felt the blood drain from his face.

His father’s sigh reached his ear. ‘I’ll have a word with your mum and we’ll get your sister and Mark together to celebrate. Beth’s champing at the bit. Or maybe we could open a bottle of champagne at the clinic?’

*How could I have forgotten to tell Beth to come round!* ‘Great idea. I’ve really gotta go now.’

‘Of course, ready for the unsuspecting world! You’ll need to get a few more telephone lines installed.’

Despite himself, Ed chuckled. ‘Bye, Dad.’

‘You take care now, see you soon.’

While replacing the phone and musing over the extravagance of the desk, he felt something stir from the very core of his being; like when, at twelve years old, he’d won the hundred metres sprint. *Unbelievable!* He could picture it even now—the lithe Liam coming up fast behind him but not quite fast enough.

‘This is the real beginning of my life!’ Ed couldn’t believe he’d said the words out loud. He grinned. Suddenly, he realised all the sacrifices he’d made and taunts he’d suffered had been worth it. *‘I’ll show them; I’ve turned my “obsession” into a profession.*

Morning had long gone when the slim, dark-haired Ed stepped out of the heavy panelled door, the sunlight causing him to squint. *No wonder everyone has been accusing me of being a recluse.* Descending the four

steps to the short pathway leading to the Brompton Road, his restlessness for a consultation grew by the minute.

He wrapped his fingers over the top rung of the black wrought iron gate that separated the tall Victorian building from the busyness beyond, and then turned his head to admire the sign hanging on his left. The bold white lettering stood out from the blue background:

Edward Newman MD, MRC Psych  
Sleep Disorder Specialist

*Maybe I should have arranged for someone I know to pop by?* Ed shook his head. He'd practised on everyone he knew with a problem—those who'd let him. And he'd made the right diagnosis every time since he'd qualified.

Anything, even something as mundane as a circadian rhythm sleep disorder brought on by jet lag, would relieve Ed's boredom right now. *Alright, maybe that was taking it a bit too far.*

He drew in a deep breath, and then wished he hadn't as he coughed out the grime and exhaust fumes of a battered van, belching out its stream of black smoke. It made him wonder whether it had passed its MOT. *Probably not. The nerve of some people!*

Looking up, he took in the contrasting scenery. A plane left a steam trail in the almost cloudless sky. His gaze settled on a window cleaner across the street, half-way up his ladder, adding shine to the afternoon sun, Whilst the man cleaned he whistled a tuneful, cheery song, which brought a welcome refrain to the noise of the city.

Ed's eyes followed an elderly lady shuffling by.

He noticed she was relying heavily on her walking stick, her head bowed, like a forlorn flower nearing its end. She couldn't hide her look of annoyance as a car roared past, windows down, booming bass for the world to hear, the tune nothing that Ed recognised.

A man in a pinstriped suit rushed along, brushing against the old woman. Ed saw her scowl as she lifted her well-used walking stick off the ground, waved it in the air and shouted after him, 'Here, you mind your manners!'

Opening the gate, Ed managed to reach her as she swayed dangerously. 'Are you alright?' He put his hand out to steady her. Then called after the man, 'Hey, watch out! Call yourselves city "gents"!'

'Thank you, young man. I'm fine, no thanks to him there. Some people just don't have the time or the decency these days.' With her frown the creases on her aged face had become deeper but now softened as she turned to Ed.

'I know what you mean. Are you sure you're okay? Would you like a cup of tea?'

'I'm alright, really I am. Are you the new doctor?'

'Yes, Doctor Newman,' and never wanting to miss an opportunity, 'do you mind me asking if you have any problems with getting a good night's rest?'

'Who doesn't, Doctor? Especially at my age.'

'The truth is, you don't need to suffer.'

'Happen I'll make an appointment to come and see you sometime soon. I'm actually on my way to the dentists right now. I'm getting some new dentures.'

Ed glanced at the worn, gold band on her finger, 'You would be most welcome anytime, Mrs...'

'Mrs Harris, though me husband, sadly, is long gone. Good lad he was; one of the best,' she sighed deeply. 'Died in the war, he did. Awful times they

were. We had no time together, you know...'

'I'm really very sorry, Mrs Harris.' Ed's heart went out to this lady who had lost the chance to spend her life with the man she clearly still loved.

'Thank you, Doctor Newman. Please, call me Iris.'

'Well Iris, like I say, just drop in at your convenience. I'm operating an open appointment system until I get busy enough to book patients in.'

'Well, you're such a nice young man. I'm sure it won't be long before you're rushed off your feet. I won't keep you any longer. I'd best be on my way.'

*I'll not be such a "nice young man" if I ever set eyes on Mr Pinstripe again.* Ed watched him disappear out of sight, seemingly oblivious to his surroundings. 'Good day to you, Iris.'

As he leapt back up the front steps he checked his watch. *Just enough time for another injection of caffeine; I'd be scuppered without that stuff.* Rubbing his hands together he entered the olive-green door whilst scanning the opening times displayed in its glass.

The kettle was close to boiling when the sound of the doorbell caused the milk carton to slip out of Ed's fingers. He grabbed a tea towel to soak up the spillage on the counter.

He closed the kitchen door behind him. The bell rang again. He winced. *Wow! I must adjust that volume.*

## *The Stafford family*

With his heart pounding, Ed hurried past the two carefully chosen paintings of sailing ships that hung either side of the wide hallway: one, the calm of the Mediterranean, the other, a storm in the Pacific; both a reminder of past dreams.

He opened the door to a rugged faced man and a grey-haired woman he presumed to be husband and wife, standing with their fresh-faced young boy, or possibly their grandson. The woman finished straightening the school-boy's blue-and-red striped tie, and then told him to pull his socks up. Ed's eyes fell to the lad's bruised shins and scuffed shoes—the tell-tale signs of a youngster who enjoyed playing football.

'Good afternoon, Doctor Newman,' the man said, taking a dark brown cap off his head and then clutching it in his right hand. 'I hope you don't mind us coming without an appointment, but we saw you were opening today.'

'Not at all, please come in. I'm not asking people to book at the moment. I thought I'd just let patients come as they need to initially, as so often appointments aren't kept or they're cancelled. However, I'll need to make reservations for any necessary sleep monitoring.'

'We used to go to a regular doctor's surgery that operated a system like that, didn't we?' The woman turned to the man and then back to Ed. 'And it worked very well.'

Ed led them past the large, unveiled counter, feeling more conscious of his height beside the three

strangers, who'd obviously made an effort to look presentable. 'I apologise for not having a receptionist yet. But everything's in hand, I can assure you.' He wasn't about to admit he was stretching out his latest bank balance.

Ed showed them into his spacious consulting room. 'Please make yourselves comfortable.' He shook their hands, and then fetched an extra chair from the corner of the room.

Thanking him, the man and woman sat down on the cushioned leather seats, with the boy in the middle. The woman glanced towards the window behind him. He'd kept the blinds open today, to let in the light and to reveal a silver birch, displaying its new leaves.

'Would you like some refreshment, tea or coffee?' Ed asked. He turned to the boy, 'A glass of juice?'

'Got any pop?'

'Now don't you be so cheeky, young man.' The father said. 'That's very kind of you, Doc; two coffees and a glass of juice would be grand.'

Ed went back into the kitchen, finished wiping up the spilt milk and set about preparing the family's requests. He put custard creams on a plate, placed the drinks and plain-white serviettes on a tray, took a deep breath and went back into the room.

The woman moved his name-plate out of the way; not a totally necessary item but something he'd always wanted. The cups rattled almost imperceptibly on their saucers as Ed placed the tray on the table.

'First of all, I'll need to take down your particulars, starting with your names, please.'

'Me name's Ron Stafford and this's me wife Judy, and me son, Thomas; we call him Tommy.'

'I need to know which one of you is the

patient.'

'All three of us are!' interjected Tommy.

Judy Stafford glared at her son. 'Sit still and speak when spoken to.' She addressed Ed, 'I understand this must be a bit of a surprise to you, Doctor, but could you possibly see us together?'

Before Ed had a chance to reply Ron Stafford said, 'Don't worry, I intend to pay for us all.'

Ed's mind hurtled into full throttle. 'Normally, I would see one patient at a time, unless that patient's a minor of course, which I guess your son is?'

'Yes, Tommy's eleven. We'll do as you wish but ... you see, we all have exactly the same problem. Perhaps, if you saw the three of us first it would be easier for you to understand our peculiar situation.'

'This is most unusual.' Ed gathered his thoughts. 'I will agree to it on this occasion. However, I do have one condition. That is, if I need to ask one or two of you to leave, you must honour my decision; although, it goes without saying, Tommy will always have one of you present with him. I hope you understand why this may be necessary.'

'Of course, Doctor, we're most obliged to you, I'm sure.' Ron Stafford adjusted his tie.

'Could you tell me how you came to know about this clinic, just so that I can monitor what's the most effective form of advertising?'

'Actually, Ron asked the builders what was going to be here. Then I saw your advert in the local paper a couple of weeks ago saying when you'd be open. We've been waiting for this day and would have been here earlier if we hadn't had to wait for Tommy to get out of school,' Judy Stafford said.

'Allowing time for the paper work, the appointment will take an hour or so. Is that alright?'

'Yes, we really don't want to put it off any

longer; it might happen again tonight.'

'That's fine, I quite understand,' Ed spun round in his chair, slid over to the metal filing cabinet and extracted the necessary forms. He noted their address was just a few streets away. He opened the top right hand drawer of the desk and pulled out a pen and notepad, having chosen a less impersonal, non-threatening way of taking notes. The computer would have to wait.

'Now, how can I help you? What is it that's presumably been affecting your regular sleep patterns?'

The trio started to talk at once until Judy Stafford hushed Tommy. She then allowed her husband to speak first.

'It's like this. Some nights we all dream the same dream.'

'May I ask if they're dreams or nightmares?'

'Dreams; we love 'em.'

'How often does this happen?'

Ron Stafford spoke quickly. 'They can be as much as a week apart, but they happen most weeks, sometimes two or three nights in a row.'

'All three of you dream the same dream?' Ed wiped his brow with the back of his hand.

Tommy, who was now sitting on the edge of his seat with his face as red as a radish and his eyes wide open, appeared fit to burst. 'We're not lying! I looked it up on the Internet ... you know, that mutual dreaming stuff, but this is something else!'

'Each time it happens, we're all at St Peter's, the local Church of England, not far from where we live,' Judy Stafford said. 'It's just a short distance down the road from here, as a matter of fact.'

'I believe I've seen it in passing. I'm new to this part of Knightsbridge. But how is it that you know



you're actually there?'

'You don't believe us, do you?' Tommy's body twitched involuntarily.

'Please, don't get me wrong ... it's not that I'm saying I don't believe you. I just need to know all the details to build up a picture of what's going on.' His words belied the fact that he found the family's revelations incredible at their best and akin to science-fiction at their worst.

*Dare I hope this is really happening?*

'We dream that we're behind the wall where the pipe organ and choir chairs are. There's this big empty space, almost half the size of the church,' Tommy said, spreading his arms open wide, causing his mum and dad to move their heads backwards. 'Dad found out the new organ was put in after the war'. He turned to his father, 'Didn't you, Dad?'

Ron Stafford patted his son on the shoulder. 'That's right, son. I spoke to Old Ben, the curator, and he told me that to save on heating bills, with everyone being short of money after the war, the church area had to be made smaller when the new organ was put in. The one what was there before was blown to bits in The Blitz, and some kind geezer who loved the old hymns left some money to replace it. He told me I wasn't the only one asking questions and says we're all as "mad as hatters", so I don't blame you for finding this hard to make any sense of.'

Ed cleared his throat. 'So you're ...' he cleared his throat again, 'not the only ones who've experienced this kind of dream, then?'

'Not exactly.' Judy Stafford gave her husband a look like he'd spoken out of turn. Ron Stafford returned one of apology to his wife.

'It's okay. I can deal with that another time but what I have to ask is how you actually know you're

there at the church? You've established that there *is* an empty space but can you actually see you're at St Peter's during the dreams?'

'Oh yes, from the dream side you can always see the back of the organ and the blower box—funny thing that, but there's a bit of a gap there and one of the others looked through it the first time it happened and said, 'I know that church!' So I went and had a look. Although it was a bit hazy like, and I could only see a section of it, there was no mistaking that across from the organ I could see a part of the window showing the great flood. The church is famed for its stained glass, you know.' Ron Stafford smiled. 'I know it's a bit of a mystery but that's how it is. We're all wondering how it's possible. We hope you can shed some light on it.'

Trying to keep his excitement in check, Ed took a deep breath. 'Okay, let me make sure I've got this right. You say that you know you're at St Peters church when you're dreaming because you can see the stained glass window and you've confirmed the replacement of the organ. You also know you're definitely there from the fact that Old Ben confirmed there's still an empty unused space within the church. And you say there're others?'

'Yes, that's right; and everyone round here knows the story of St Peter's. Well, those of us who've lived around here for a while or whose family has. Though I went and checked anyway 'cos I needed to be extra sure. I also know the organist, so I asked him if he knew who was responsible for the upkeep of the organ. He told me it's "Seers and Son". I went and spoke to Mr Seers senior, who confirmed the curator's story about the space but said there's no way of getting to it. It's been sealed off. I went and paced out the inside length of the church and then the outside.

There's a difference of eighty paces by my reckoning.'

'The dreams are so true-to-life, with real people. It's like we're actually experiencing them,' Judy Stafford said.

Tommy bounced up and down on his seat. 'Mum's right, it *really does* happen. We've met some great people. I wish we could see them again and again!'

Ed looked up from the lines of deep blue ink on his notepad as he fought to keep his mind from turning somersaults. *How can I even consider being sceptical when this family seems so sincere?* 'I just have to make sure I have all the facts before carrying out the necessary sleep tests. Do you know how you get into the church, Mr Stafford? During the dreams, I mean? I wonder, has one of you tried staying up all night to find out if the other two actually stay in bed, or whether they sleep walk?'

'Funny you should ask that 'cos me and Judy took turns staying up all night till a dream night came. Only me wife and Tommy dreamt one night, and sure as I'm sitting here right in front of you, they never left their beds.'

Ed made a note that there was no clear evidence of how anyone got into the church area in the dead of night. He drew a star by it. 'Do any of you suffer from a lack of sleep the following day?'

The family shook their heads and assured Ed they didn't.

'That's the weirdest thing. I think it gives us more energy, it's just so exciting,' Judy Stafford explained.

Visions of Tommy with even more adrenalin running through his veins entered Ed's already crowded head.

'It gives Grandad a real spark, don't it?'

Tommy beamed.

'Grandad?' Ed included them all with his question.

'Yes. Arthur, my father, really enjoys himself,' Ron Stafford said.

'Mrs Stafford, what did you do the first time it happened?' Ed intended to deal with the matter of Grandad another time.

'Well, I mentioned to me husband that I'd had this dream. I told him what it was about and that he and Tommy were in it. Ron said he'd had the same dream and when we spoke to Tommy he told us he had as well!'

'What was the dream about?'

'We were at a covered market filled with stalls of futuristic stuff. Tommy had his heart set on this space kit. We'll not find anything like it round here, that's for sure.'

Ron Stafford shook his head.

'It had this rocket in it; it was out of this world,' Tommy added as he spread his hands, one low and one high, while desperately trying to keep his bottom on the seat. 'And, it said on the instructions that it really worked an' all, and I soooo wanted one of those spaceship-shaped chocolate bars.'

'Can you tell us why we're always out of time? We can't work it out. It's like time-travel, but that just ain't possible, is it?'

'It all sounds incredible, Tommy. But what do you mean exactly when you say it's like time-travel?' *I could be the one who "discovers" an unknown paradox; another dimension to dreaming. Wow!*

'It's never today, like the same time as now. If we went somewhere tonight, it wouldn't even be this year! It's always sometime in the past or future. The market was definitely in the future—never seen

anything like it before. Aaamazing! I want to be still alive when you get stalls like that!' Tommy said, wriggling his way to the edge of the seat again.

'I'm afraid I can't answer your questions as to why the dreams don't happen in current time. Not yet, anyway.' Ed sat forward in his chair, leaned across the desk with hands clasped, and his mind whirling around like water before going down the plughole. 'Well, let me say right from the start, that I'll do my utmost to put your minds at rest. The first course of action must be to gather data at the test centre, while you're all experiencing a dream night.

'I have three sleeping rooms equipped with monitoring systems. But each night test comes at a cost of one hundred pounds per room, so it's going to cost you three hundred pounds per night, up to and including the dream night. Are these terms acceptable?' Ed would rather not have had to mention money.

Ron Stafford replied in a lowered voice, 'Six months ago, very sadly, me eldest sister passed away. She was a good bit older than me and had suffered for a long while.'

His wife stretched across the back of their son to rub her husband's shoulder. Ed noticed how dry and rough her hand looked.

'We all loved her dearly. We all miss her so much, but she left us a little bit of money that we didn't know she had. She must've ...' Ron coughed.

Judy Stafford continued, 'Ron's sister must have been putting a little bit aside and some of it's for our Tommy. But we're willing to use some of ours to try and find out why this is happening to us. She would have wanted that.'

'I'm really sorry to hear of your loss. Please accept my sincere condolences.' Ed handed Judy

Stafford a box of soft tissues, grateful that his girlfriend had insisted on him having some on the desk. 'Mr Stafford, I'd like you all to come back tomorrow and tell me more of what happens behind the organ.'

Ed drew his first consultation to an end, his mind full of questions firing their arrows but missing the target. He wrote out an account.

Mr Stafford paid with a debit card, 'Not one for debt me, not if I can help it.'

'Well, thank you very much for coming. Let me see you out.'

Ed went back to his desk and typed up the notes while the information was still fresh in his mind. Then he went up the carpeted stairs to check the sleep-testing equipment, passing an assortment of paintings depicting historical London; gifts from friends who knew of his love of art and interest in the locality.

He couldn't help but feel a sense of awe every time he looked at the pristine stainless steel units and state-of-the-art equipment. The surfaces gleamed back at him, catching the reflection of his oval face and his sigh.

Remembering the poor state of the building when he'd bought it and how he'd stood in this same spot, he pondered how the old lady had coped with living in such run-down conditions. Although he was glad he'd kept what fire places he could, along with some of the old tiles in the waiting room.

Preparing to leave the surgery Ed couldn't help thinking he was, undoubtedly, in the right place at the right time. He wondered about the other people he'd be seeing and their stories. *And what of people with regular disorders? All in good time.*

After Ed had locked up for the night he went down the stone steps to his self-contained basement

flat. He couldn't wait to change out of his stiff, dark-blue Italian-style suit and his now-strangling light-blue tie. He rubbed his feet and spread his toes as they found freedom from his new leather shoes.





## Parachutes

'We're in the army!' Tommy squealed. 'Looks like the soldiers are getting ready for something.'

'Not sure we're *in* the army, son, but it certainly looks like we're at some barracks or other.' Tommy's dad looked puzzled.

'But *why*? What are they doing here?' His mum asked.

'More like, why are *we* here?' Tommy looked around at the men putting on their khaki clothing and tying their boots. 'I'm gonna find out.' Tommy jumped up from the wooden bench and approached one of the soldiers.

He heard his mum's frantic voice behind him. 'Stop him, Ron!'

'Hey, what're you lot doing here?'

'Might ask *you* the same question, lad.'

'I guess it's a secret, huh.'

'Top secret.'

'Okay, but you can tell me the date.'

'You're having me on!'

'Just checking.'

'5<sup>th</sup> June 1944.'

Tommy went back over to his mum and dad who were still seated on the bench. He glanced at the other bouncers situated around the hut, in the shadows. None of them looked any less afraid. Tommy couldn't understand why; it was just a dream after all.

'This just doesn't make sense. We could be arrested for spying or something.' His dad's pallor had

grown ashen. 'These men are preparing for a mission.'

'Ron, you're scaring me. Our dreams have always been safe, with a good reason for them, or just for fun. Sit down here Tommy.' His mum motioned for him to sit between them. 'I can feel the war all around us. It's as if I can smell it.' Tommy told his mum and dad the date.

'Look at that soldier over there.' Tommy pointed to a young dark-haired man. 'He's got a parachute spilled open on the floor.'

He felt his mum cover his ears at the sound of swearing. In spite of the young man's clenched fists, Tommy ran over to him. He sensed his dad following him.

'What's happened?' Tommy asked.

'Got me rip cord caught on the hook for our kit. The Sargent'll kill me when he comes back.'

At that moment one of the other bouncers appeared and walked over to him. 'Here, take this.'

'What is it?'

'A new chute. Let me help you clear this mess up.'

'Th-thank you, Mr?'

'Mr Nichols. I'll take the old one away for you.'

'You take care now and come home to your family.' Tommy's mum had joined them now. 'I've just had words with that lad over there.'

At that moment the sergeant entered but, before he could utter a word, the bouncers found themselves back in their beds.

\* \* \*

'Thank you for coming back today and indulging me.' Ed addressed Ron Stafford. 'Tell me about another of

your experiences.'

'It happened last night! Can I tell the doctor? Please, can I?'

'You'll get your chance in a moment, son.'

'Okay,' the boy said, abruptly folding his arms.

'Well it was just hours before the boys were to load onto the boats for the D-Day crossing—you know, in the Second World War. One of the men was preparing to go in by parachute drop. Thing is, he got his rip cord caught on something and the silk chute spilled onto the floor. He was really angry with himself, right swore, he did, but another man stepped forward and gave him a new one.'

'How do you know it was that particular day? Again, for the record.'

'I asked a soldier the date. And we know who the man is who messed up his parachute!' Tommy said.

The family glanced at each other before Ron continued. 'Well, as it happens, that man, as he is now, has always been there on other dream nights, but last night he was away visiting his son and family. He came to see us before we came here. Turns out we actually met him last night as a young man.'

'The soldier last night obviously didn't know who we were. When we spoke to him today he said he knew there was something familiar about us, only he couldn't put his finger on it. How weird is that?'

'Indeed. What else did he say? I assume he lives around here?'

'Yes, two streets away from us. He told us he couldn't imagine what would've happened if he'd met himself. I said my guess is none of us would go to a place if we were already there. Anyway, he confirmed he did do a parachute drop on D-Day, but was surprised to find the new chute he'd been given was

square-shaped. He found out, in later years, it was like the modern skydivers use. His son has a high-diving school in Kent and uses the same ram-air filled kind.'

'So who gave him the new parachute?'

There was a long pause before Ron Stafford spoke. 'A chap called Brian Nichols.'

'So he experiences these dreams as well?'

'Yes.' Ron Stafford shifted in his seat.

'It's alright, Mr Stafford, I understand the need for confidentiality, but I would very much like to speak to Brian Nichols if he's willing to come and see me. And, if at all possible, Bob Jones.' Ed had the distinct feeling others would soon be added to the list.

'Mrs Stafford, have you anything to contribute to your husband's account of the dream?'

'Yes, Doctor, happen I do; I spoke to one young lad, who was very cocky like, and spouting off about getting those Germans good and proper. I won't repeat what he actually said. Well, I says to him he'd better be careful and make sure he gets back to his mum. I can't help but wonder what became of him and the others. You could feel the excitement and the fear of war all around us, if you know what I mean.'

'I want to join the army now!' Tommy's face shone.

'Hush, son,' his mum said, her voice soft.

'I'll ring you tomorrow to set up a sleeping schedule, if that's alright with you. Oh, and just one last thing, St Peter's—is it open at times during the week other than on a Sunday, do you know?'

'As far as I know, it's open in the afternoons for anyone to go in and pray. There're services and meetings on during the week but on free nights you can go in until about eight or nine o'clock,' Mrs Stafford answered.

## *Grandad*

Ron took his wife's coat from her shoulders and hung it on a worn coat stand that had become part of the family. It was one of the things Judy had insisted on bringing with them, when they'd had to move into the flat. He still felt guilty for having had to make the move, especially as it meant Judy and Tommy no longer enjoyed a garden. 'I'm glad we saw the doctor, aren't you, luv?'

'Yes, I know I had me doubts before we went. I wasn't sure it was a good idea for anyone but us who's had the dreams to know about them. But it's like you say, we do need to know why we're having them and make sure it's not doing us any harm. I reckon we gave him a bit of a shock though.'

'I daresay. I'm glad you've come round and he does seem like a good'un doesn't he? I'm sure he'll get to the bottom of it, and then he'll be able to explain it to us.'

'I wish I could tell my friends all about it!' Tommy yelled.

'You know we've told you before—you can't tell no one.' Ron threw his son an intense gaze. 'Only them that knows.'

'Yes, Dad. I'm gonna go to Grandad's. At least I can talk to him.' Tommy made his way back to the front door.

'Okay.'

'Give him our love, won't you, Tommy. Will you be back for tea?'

'I'll probably have fish and chips at Grandad's.'

'Don't slam the door! Tell him we'll be round to fetch you later.' Judy turned back to Ron. 'I'm a bit worried about us mentioning Bob and Brian, though, without them knowing, like. Do you think we should give them a ring?'

'I think that would be best, luv, and weren't George and Jean thinking about paying the doctor a visit?'

'I'll call them and you can contact Bob and Brian.'

'You mustn't go fretting yourself. I'm sure everything'll be fine.'

'You're right. It'll be easier when everyone's seen the doctor.' Judy sighed. 'You know, Tommy'll be after talking to Arthur about the war again, don't you?'

'We'll make sure Dad's alright later, and take him some money round.'

His wife relaxed into his arms.

'Shall we have some sausage and mash for our tea with that onion gravy you like?'

'You sure know how to please a man!'

\* \* \*

Tommy sprinted all the way to his grandad's house and hammered on the front door, knocking off bits of flaking paint. He pictured the deep blue colour he'd chosen and the wide brush he'd bought for use on it during his next school holiday. But most of all, he looked forward to using his dad's electric sander.

He rang the bell, just in case the aging man hadn't heard his knock.

\* \* \*

'Hang on a mo', Tommy, I'm just coming,' Arthur

shouted as he hobbled over the dull carpet to the front door. 'You know, I'm not as nimble as I used to be.'

He ruffled his grandson's hair as he let him into the dimly lit hallway.

'Aw, Grandad!' Tommy squirmed under his hand. 'Is that bread I smell?'

'Sure is; it'll be ready in about an hour.'

'Brown or white?'

'You'll just have to wait and see.' Arthur couldn't help teasing the lad whenever he had the chance.

'I'll love it anyway. Shall I make you some milky tea just the way you like it?'

'Yes, that'd be grand.'

'Do you want a biscuit?'

'Thanks, me boy, you sure know what I like. Your favourite chocolate bar's in the cupboard and there's a can o' coke in the fridge.'

'Can I stay for supper? Mum and Dad said I could.'

'Fancy fish and chips with a piece of that bread?'

'Great stuff.'

As Arthur entered the living room he, not for the first time, admired the work that Ron, with some help from Tommy, had recently finished: the repapering of the living room in neutral colours with a simple pattern and a new rug in shades of brown on the floor. But his favourite age-worn chair remained. It creaked as he lowered himself slowly into it.

Tommy entered the room with a tray. 'Let's talk about some of the dreams now, Grandad. You know I can't talk to nobody else.'

'As you like; they sure give me something else to think about these days.'

They'd been talking for almost an hour, when Tommy

said, 'I've been wondering. You know that enigma-decoding machine in Bletchley Park?'

'Yes, lad.'

'Well, with such a machine, how come there wasn't any warning of those suitcase bombs back in World War Two. You know the ones that got into the middle of London and New York's harbour.'

'I guess we'll never really know.'

'You're probably right. It's a pity we can't have a dream to find out. That'd be great wouldn't it?'

Arthur felt a shiver travel along the length of his spine, from top to bottom. 'Best not to delve too deeply.' He closed his eyes.

'I'll see to the bread and then go to the chippie while you have a nap.'

'You do that; you know where the money is. We'll talk some more when we've had supper.'

'Okay, Grandad.'

Arthur dozed with the sound of Tommy's tinkling in the kitchen fading into the distance, followed by the front door closing gently behind him. His thoughts drifted to a time long passed...



## Memories

LONDON – 27<sup>th</sup> April 1945

Arthur Stafford broke into a run. Questioning why he'd gone and overdone the luxury of his Friday lie-in, he flew up the street feeling the April wind ruffle his jet-black hair. He felt every crack and bump in the pavement through his ill-fitting, sole-worn boots, but he was determined not to let them slow him down. Sweat began to cover his body.

'You in a hurry, young man?' Mr Fletcher yelled, stepping down onto the pavement from his front door.

'What do *you* think?' Arthur asked as he hurtled past him. He left the man laughing loudly behind him. *Mr Fletcher would never be late, for anything. I wish my dad was still alive.*

After what seemed like a life-time, Arthur rounded the corner onto the Brompton Road where he breathed in the smell he always looked forward to: the mouth-watering aroma of baking. It spurred him on. *It always makes me feel hungry—even when I'm full. I wonder if there'll be any treats today. Mum needs something to cheer her up when I get back after me deliveries.* He grinned at the thought of his first attempts to balance the baker's bike.

With not far to go now, Arthur worried about what he'd do without a job and the extra bit of income it gave him and his mum. He wondered how the Vaughan's were managing to keep him on. He wanted to learn everything about baking. *I'll have a bakery of*

*me own after the war.*

He passed the cobblers' window slowing down just enough to wave to his Uncle Tom, who'd be opening within the hour. As Arthur glanced at the few cuts of pig on display in the butcher's window next to it, he remembered the black-belted pig he'd named on the farm he'd been evacuated to. He felt a pang of regret at the knowledge of never being able to see it again.

At that moment, he was brought to an abrupt halt. He felt sure the earth was moving beneath his feet. He decided to run into the bakery next door. 'What's happening? It feels like an earthquake!'

'We don't know, son.' Mrs Vaughan took the handkerchief from her apron pocket to wipe the sweat dripping from her brow, and then shouted to her husband, 'Sid! I think we should go outside. Come on, Arthur.'

A clattering sound came from behind her. She turned back and yelled, 'You alright, Sid?'

'Don't worry, just a couple o' loaf tins,' Mr Vaughan shouted back. 'I'm just coming.'

Arthur and Mrs Vaughan went outside with Mr Vaughan right behind them. A woman ran past, screaming. Another lady stood in shock across the street. An elderly man hobbled along the road blaspheming while a young man on a bike came hurtling round the corner.

'What should we do? There're no sirens.' Arthur looked from Mr to Mrs Vaughan.

Mrs Vaughan shrugged her shoulders and raised her hands, palms upwards with a loaf in one of them.

'Not sure, son.' Mr Vaughan scratched his balding head.

'I need to make sure mum's alright. You know

her nerves are no good.'

'Okay, Arthur, you get yourself home,' Mr Vaughan said.

'Don't you go worrying about us, Arthur.' Mrs Vaughan handed him the loaf. 'Take this.'

'Thanks a lot.' Arthur darted back in the direction he'd just come from as the sound of the air raid sirens now swarmed around him.

'Go steady now, Arthur,' his uncle called after him.

By the time Arthur entered the kitchen his clothes clung to him. He found his mum standing as solid as a piece of rock, with their ration of eggs on the floor at her feet.

'I'm sorry, Arthur ... so sorry.' She began to tremble.

'It doesn't matter,' he said as he fought for breath. 'Come on, we must get to the shelter. Maybe Len'll know what's going on.'

'Is it safe to go underground?' Her words were disjointed.

'We have to 'cos of the sirens. Could be bombs coming,' Arthur hated it when he had to shout at her.

'Just close your eyes like you always do. We'll stay with the neighbours for a while.' He placed himself behind her, grabbed hold of her arms and forced his mum into the back yard. 'Come on, Mum! We've no choice.'

Arthur managed to manoeuvre her out of the yard and round into their neighbours' one; grateful that Len, an ex-builder, had made a shelter big enough for himself, his wife Anne and his neighbours who lived either side of them. 'At least we won't be alone.'

He thought of others who would be less safe

than they would be—those who would be sheltering under tables or beneath the stairs.

‘I need to find out what’s going on,’ Arthur whispered into Len’s ear, once everyone was settled inside—shoulder-to-shoulder.

‘We’ll know soon enough, Arthur. When the all-clear sounds I’ll go and find me mate Derek. He’s in the Home Guard.’ Len kept his head down.

‘But we don’t even know if we’re safe in here do we?’

‘All we can do is sit it out, lad.’

Early that same evening, Arthur opened the front door in answer to a gentle rapping. ‘Come in Len; we’ll stay in the hallway, if that’s alright with you,’ he whispered. ‘I don’t want to worry me mum.’

But she called out to him, ‘Who is it, Arthur?’

He turned around as she joined them.

‘Come and have a cuppa with us, Len. I’ll get to know sooner or later what’s been going on. I would’ve had a bit of cake to offer you if I hadn’t spoilt those eggs. Make yourself comfortable.’

‘Thanks, Joyce. Well, you’ll need to brace yourselves.’ Len sat on the edge of the seat of the armchair.

Arthur and Len waited in awkward silence.

‘Here we are. Not as strong as I’d like but better than nothing.’ Arthur’s mum poured the steaming liquid from the pot.

Len took a small sip. ‘Something really terrible’s happened in Central London ... the Circle Line...’

Arthur gulped, and then squeezed his mum’s arm. They both stared at Len.

‘Let me say first, though, we’re gonna be alright here ... you see, a nuclear bomb went off in the

underground just short of Westminster. There've been reports of a small thick cloud of dust, and there's been some fall-out but it won't affect us here, thankfully. The wind blew it east, away from us ...' The stricken-faced man rubbed his free hand over his mouth.

Arthur turned to his mum, who now had her left palm over her mouth and tears spilling out of her eyes. He took the cup and saucer from her hand before she could spill any and placed it back on the table. 'That must've been why we had to stay in the shelter for so long. How many have died? ... Do they know yet?'

'No, they don't ... but it'll be hundreds, maybe a lot more with the effects of it an'all. The tube was quite full by all accounts, at that time in the morning, and the surrounding buildings had a number of people in them. The emergency services are coping as best they can but no one was prepared for this. They need all the help they can get.'

'How could a bomb like that have gotten so far into London?' Arthur frowned.

'I don't know and the likes of us may never know.'

Arthur gave his mum back her cup of tea, after putting a little extra sugar in it.

'Thanks, son,' she said, her voice a whisper.

'The Home Guard'll be posting leaflets—' Len paused at the flapping of the letterbox.

'Maybe that's it!' Arthur jumped up and ran to the front door. He pulled the paper from the flap. 'There're details of where we can and can't go and instructions of what to do, depending on where you live.' He handed it to Len.

'You would've been safer staying on that farm, Arthur.'

'I'm glad I'm here with you, Mum.' He sat down

again beside her. 'We need to look after each other.'

'You're such a good son.'

'I'll be getting back to Anne then.' Len got up to go.

'Yes, of course. Goodbye, Len, and thank you. Give my regards to her; tell her I'll see her soon.'

'You're welcome; and yes, I will.'

'I'll see you out.' Arthur sprang up.

On his way to the door Arthur's mind turned to the time he'd spent as an evacuee living with the hardworking Taylor family. Vivid recollections of the day he'd run away from them sprang into his mind.

Returning to his mum, he said, 'I want to take you there, to the farm I mean, when the war's over so's you can meet them. They took good care of me.'

'That's a lovely idea. It'll be something to look forward to.'

'It'd give me a chance to say sorry and that it wasn't because of them I left.'

The fire-fighters' hazmat suit slowed Arthur down. Unable to reach into the protective mask covering his face, he tasted the saltiness of his tears. He knew he had to do what he could, although he'd had a hard time convincing his mum he could easily pass for a man, telling her it was a case of "all hands on deck".

As he walked in line through the mass of dust and debris, his mind struggled to take in the scene before him. He glanced at the woman to his left and then to the man on his right and saw their emotion matched his own.

A crater with a diameter, Arthur estimated, of three-hundred yards gaped in front of him; where the tube station and adjoining shops and cafes had stood just twenty-four hours before and people had been going about their daily lives as best they could, there

was nothing but devastation. *A gift from Hitler.*

Although he'd been told of how bad it was, nothing had prepared him for this. Arthur knew this part of London would never be the same again, and he never wanted to see anything like this again ... ever.

*As if the Blitz hadn't been enough. All them nights of bombing. What must we expect next?* Arthur shuddered. A feeling of numbness crept over him.

He, like the other volunteers, was more than aware of how dangerous a place it had become but it was just too inhuman to leave charred bodies lying around, rotting in the place where they'd fallen. One thought dominated his mind: *What if some were still alive and in terrible pain ... even dying?*

Stumbling and picking his way through the rubble around the perimeter of the massive hole, he saw bodies with no clothes on them, burnt off in a heat too powerful for them to withstand. He couldn't tell the gender of some. Arthur was glad of the mask's protection now; it would be protecting him from the sickening smell of death and destruction.

With the utmost of respect, Arthur and the other volunteers put bodies and the remains of bodies in the bags they'd brought with them, knowing their fate to be in the hands of the government.

As he turned to look at the still-standing Palace of Westminster and the damaged bridge, he felt the lingering terror of the previous morning when, he'd been told, everyone in the Houses of Parliament had been immediately evacuated. Others had escaped the best way they could.

He couldn't help feeling grateful the bomb hadn't travelled further along the Central Line to reach them in Knightsbridge.

*Is that a totally selfish thought? Yes.*

‘Do you want to come to the cinema with me? I’m gonna catch up on the news.’

‘You go, son; you can tell me all about it later.’

Arthur rushed out the door.

He stared, transfixed on the screen listening to the well-spoken reporter convey the unbelievable news to the nation: ‘Across the Atlantic, New Yorker’s have suffered a similar tyrannical fate, simultaneously to those in Central London.’

Arthur had heard others talking about it when he’d signed up to help that very morning. But his prior knowledge did nothing to stem the shock permeating his body now, while the reporter explained that, like his fellow Londoners, no one knew how anyone could possibly have transported a bomb to reach anywhere near New York.

The fact that it had exploded in the harbour’s upper bay had offered a modicum of relief, but like here in Britain, speculation was rabid. Had it been meant for a destination further into America? Maybe it had been meant for Central New York but something had gone terribly wrong. Arthur pictured the crater described as being left in the water’s bed, the merciless tidal wave that had drenched Downtown Jersey City and the radioactive water following on like a downpour of rain.

The eerie quietness of the cinema forced him to sit rigidly as the reporter continued: ‘The colossal Statue of Liberty—the epitome of America—her forty-two-foot right arm raised holding aloft the torch of freedom, and her left hand clutching a book depicting knowledge, had taken pride of place for just over half a century. But America’s gift from the French, designed by Frederic Bartholdi, stands no longer. Over one-hundred and fifty tons of steel frame and moulded copper sheeting shattered into the seabed.



Liberty Island has ceased to exist.’ The reporter struggled to hide his emotion.

A modicum of relief ran through Arthur’s body when Winston Churchill appeared on the screen: ‘Hitler has deprived the Americans of their liberty in more than one sense of the word but let them and Britain rest assured that the man who sent these bombs cannot and will not be permitted to terrorise the free world any longer...’

Three days after the nuclear explosion Arthur arrived home, after finishing his second clean-up shift, to find his mum anxiously awaiting him with the news that Hitler had committed suicide alongside his new wife, Eva Braun.

‘Though, some say the mad-man was murdered,’ she said.

‘That’s terrific news!’ Arthur leapt up and grabbed his mum. ‘Whoopee!’

‘Arthur, turn the radio on!’

‘Sure thing!’

They both stood and listened.

“Nine days after the worst bomb blast this country has ever known, the war with Germany has been brought to an end...”

‘Now we can celebrate!’ Arthur put his arms around his sobbing mother.

‘I just wish—’

‘So do I, Mum, so do I.’

Arthur, like many others he knew, never trusted the tube again, nor had any intention of doing so for the remainder of their lives. He wondered how the Americans must be feeling and how it had affected their lives.

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Arthur cleared the chip papers away. Tommy followed him into the kitchen with the salt pot and bottles of vinegar and sauce.

‘Please tell me some more of your war story. About that little boy you found; Harry, wasn’t it?’

‘Yes, I remember it as if it were yesterday. He was very near to death; completely confused, poor lad. Didn’t know where he was or what had happened. There’d been nothing like it before. When I called to him he didn’t respond—’

‘Was he deaf?’

‘No, just completely shell-shocked. I’m not sure how he got there. It was as if he’d gone home only to find his house wasn’t there anymore. When he saw me he tried to get up and clamber away but he was too weak. I must have been a very frightening sight to one so young. I held out my hand to him, but he just sat there rocking back and forth in fear.

‘I offered him some fresh water. He grabbed it with both hands and gulped it down. Then he started to cry. Such a pitiful sound it was. “I want me mum!” he wailed. He must’ve only been around five or six.’ Arthur took the handkerchief out of his trouser pocket.

‘Let’s go and sit back down, Grandad. How come he was on his own, shouldn’t he have been evacuated?’

‘I’ve no idea. Perhaps he was like me and didn’t want to leave his mum. Perhaps his mum had fetched him back for some reason ... I’ll never know.’

‘Do you know what happened to him?’

‘He was taken to one of those makeshift hospitals where they cleaned him up and saw to his burns. I visited him until they found him a new home. They said his dad was killed over the channel one

night.'

'Do you know where he went?'

'No, lad, I just turned up one day and he wasn't there. They weren't allowed to tell me'.

'It'd be great to be able to find him again, wouldn't it? Did it take a long time to build the new streets and everything? It's different to round here, ain't it?'

'Yes. A good few years, and you know it'll never be the same as it was. Everyone just wanted to turn the clock back to prevent it from ever happening. All those buildings completely destroyed or damaged, some beyond repair ... I saw what it did to Westminster Abbey. It was a good job many of its treasures had been removed when the war started.



## *St Peter's*

Ed fought back the tiredness that threatened to envelope him like a blanket. He knew if he stayed in the comfort of his extravagant leather chair for much longer he'd fall asleep. And this was something he felt desperate to avoid; like a honey bee longing for nectar Ed craved an unbroken night's sleep. Exhaustion was the only way he knew of trying to prevent the memory of a troubled dream, or any dream for that matter.

The coolness of the late afternoon sun brushed against Ed's face when he stepped into it. He allowed others to rush past him in their frenzy to get home: crowding on buses, charging for the tube. Tooting horns, sounding from frustrated drivers, added to the urban noise around him.

As he walked, his eye took in an assortment of shops and eating places, and then another new development of flats across the street. He reflected on how cosmopolitan the area had become when he stopped to look at a menu in the window of "Pataker's". Looking down the list of spicy Indian choices, and making a mental note to add this one to his ever-growing list of restaurants and cafes he wanted to visit, his mouth became moister. A middle-aged couple exited from the door, allowing a pungent vapour to follow them. Ed resisted the urge to enter, choosing to continue on his journey to St Peter's.

Fond memories of his mum and her enthusiasm for food entered his mind. He and the family had never known what to expect next on their plates at meal times, with her regular encouragement

to try out a new dish. She said London was the ideal place to get hold of anything she needed, and her “guess the ingredients” games had filled many a meal time. The more expert at naming the flavours they’d become, the more she had tried to out-wit them with a piece of vegetable or a new combination of spices they’d not had before. Ed and his sister had tried to persuade her she would make an excellent chef or restaurateur, but she’d made it quite plain that her happiness lay in restoring and reviving antiques alongside their father.

Raising his eyes to look at the clock as the bells chimed the hour, he noted it had only taken him twenty-three minutes to reach the church; situated where the Stafford family had explained, on the Brompton Road where it met with Beauchamp Place.

Ed began to walk up the path, glancing at the old tomb stones set in the lush green on either side of him. Then he stopped to admire the impressive stained-glass windows as the evening sun bounced off the coloured panes. The bible stories they depicted seeped into his mind.

Walking around the right hand side of the building, he gazed over the one Ron Stafford had mentioned depicting the dove underneath the rainbow, returning with the long awaited olive leaf. Going back to the front of the building he found it to be open. The display board in the covered porch entrance showed opening times, services and meetings. Fortunately, nothing was on at the moment.

Ed’s preconceived idea of what the interior of the church would be like left him the minute he stepped inside. Chairs with blue-speckled, cushioned seats had replaced his picture of hard, wooden pews. Ed’s eyes were drawn to its up-to-date sound system and then to a large plaque with its long lists of soldiers

who'd died in the Second World War. He stood for a moment admiring the sand-coloured stonework in the arches and large pillars until his gaze rested on the altar and the large wooden lectern in front of it.

Just as he located the pipe organ with the choir chairs to the right, opposite the Noah window, he spotted a stooped, rather shabbily dressed man sweeping the floor. He ambled over to him and held out his hand. 'Hello, I'm Ed, Ed Newman.' The old man barely glanced at him.

'I'm sorry to trouble you, but may I ask, if I'm right in thinking there's an unused empty space behind the organ?'

Old Ben stood as straight as his bent back would allow. 'Are ya another one of them who claim ter go there?'

'Not exactly, but, I'm wondering how many people have spoken to you?' Ed waited while this wiry man scratched the top of his head displacing a few wisps of snowy-white hair.

'Getting on fer a dozen, maybe, an' it's beginning ter drive me round the bend! All an' sundry coming in 'ere asking the same questions, as if I'd got nothing be'er ter do than stand around an' talk ter them and get us all inter trouble.' Old Ben replaced his cap, gripped the broom handle tightly with his gnarled, bony hands and carried on brushing the floor.

'Thank you, I just need to—'

With not so much as a turn of his head Old Ben interrupted him, 'I've got plenty ter do before I lock up fer the nigh' so yer do what yer gotta do'. Then, with what seemed to Ed like an afterthought, he added, 'I'd take 'eed of what the good vicar says if I were yer and stay clear of this trouble. Nothing good'll come of it, yer mark me words.'

Old Ben carried on sweeping. He muttered,

'It's a waste of space if yer ask me ... needs filling in or opening up ter put a stop ter this nonsense once and fer all.'

Ed decided to brave another question before leaving. 'Could you just tell me if the church is open throughout the night at all?'

'Well, I'm always on call fer the key ter those I can trust, so's they can go in fer prayer. Most who come at night want the vicar, though. He lives just two doors away from the church, next door ter me down the road here.' Old Ben tilted his head to indicate it was down the side street.

'Thank you for your time and trouble.' Ed made his way over to pace the inside of the building, conscious of Old Ben's watchful eye. He imagined the old man tutting beneath his breath.

Once back outside Ed walked around the perimeter of the church grounds noting its small car park to the rear which backed onto a cul-de-sac. Then he paced around the building itself, adding the measurements to his notepad and calculating the church to be eighty paces longer on the outside than on the inside.

With hands in his pockets he strode back to his flat with a frown. *What is the significance of it all? I must stick to the facts.*

He opened the small white fridge in his clean, compact kitchen and set about preparing a cheese omelette. With his mother's help, he'd perfected just the right proportion of cheese to egg. The smell of melting mature cheddar threaded its way around the rooms. Beginning to feel quite at home now, he sprinkled on some diced scallion.

With the rest of the evening stretching out before him, he decided to surf the net. He leafed through some old notes he'd collected from the



surgery on his way back and then thumbed through some medical journals, searching for examples of mutual dreaming. It seemed there were no recorded cases like the one the Stafford family had told him about.

*But then I already knew that.*

He was about to call it a day when an article entitled "Gatecrashers", dated 1983, grabbed his attention. *Of course! It's been a long time since I've heard or read anything about this—stories about people being at celebrations and other events where "unknown people" had shown up.* But as far as he was aware, nothing had happened for the past twenty years or so, thus no further attention had been given to it. Another search on the net drew a blank.

After donning his pyjamas he took the diary and pen from the top of his bedside cabinet and placed them in its drawer, firmly shutting it before sliding into bed. Sleep came quickly.



## *George and Jean Roberts*

George took Jean by the hand as they left their ground-floor apartment for the bus stop on the Brompton Road. 'It's not too far, and we've plenty of time.'

'Thanks, dear, for breakfast in bed this morning.'

'It set us up proper, didn't it?'

'You're too good to me.'

'No more than you deserve, Mrs Roberts.'

George kissed his wife on the cheek.

After a ten minute wait at the bus stop, the advertisement-adorned, double-decker, London-red bus pulled up.

'Only a couple of minutes late,' Jean said, turning to him.

George smiled. 'Looks like there's room for two old'uns downstairs.'

A young girl allowed them to board before her, restoring their opinion of today's generation. The bus driver, who didn't look old enough to have left school yet, glanced at their bus passes and ushered them on. They just had enough time to make it to the worn seats before the bus began to move.

*A second later and poor Jean would've been on the floor.* George linked his arm through his wife's. 'Don't worry, we'll make our way off together. The driver'll just have to be patient.'

Jean nodded. 'I don't remember buses ever being this bumpy.'

'I guess it's just that we can feel it more

nowadays. At least me old joints feel a little easier after our short walk.

\* \* \*

The cold shower had done little to lift his tiredness. *Maybe I should stay awake for a week and then I'd sleep without stirring.* Ed took the steps up to the street two at a time.

As he lifted his heavy head he spotted an elderly couple approaching the surgery from the opposite direction and held the gate open for them. 'Good morning.'

'Are you Doctor Newman, the one who examines dreams?' the man enquired.

'Yes, that's a part of my profession. And you are?'

'Mr and Mrs Roberts; pleased to meet you, Doctor.'

Ed turned the key in its lock. 'As you can see from the opening times displayed here, I'm not officially open yet but I can make an exception for you both. Please do come in.'

He watched as they negotiated the steps to the front door, and made a mental note to offer them the use of the disabled access to the side of the building, on their way out.

'Judy Stafford rang us last night to tell us how understanding you are. We're both pensioners, as you can see, and me and me wife have exactly the same story to tell, so we were wondering whether it would be alright for Jean to stay in the waiting room. You see...' Mr Roberts faltered.

Ed sensed the poor man's embarrassment.

'...it's like this, we can't afford two consultation fees.'

‘Don't you worry yourself about that, Mr Roberts. Mrs Roberts is welcome to join the consultation, however, I'll only complete a file in your name. Will that be alright with you both?’

‘Oh yes, that's very kind of you,’ Mr Roberts said.

Mrs Roberts' face lit up. ‘Thank you, very much.’

While the kindly-faced couple, whom Ed wondered if he'd met before, enjoyed the refreshments he'd provided, he noted George and Jean Roberts lived in Brompton Place. They told him was just down the road from the Stafford family.

‘So, Mr Roberts tell me, were Mr and Mrs Stafford the first people you spoke to about the dreams?’

‘No, in fact, the first people we talked to were Kev and Pam Lewis. I asked them if they were having unusual dreams, like us. Turned out, they'd been planning to ask us the same thing. But we never go into any details, like.’

‘Why them in particular?’

‘Cos we've known them a long while and, like the others, they're always with us on dream nights. They said it was alright to give you their names. You see, the same people are there every time, providing they're asleep, of course.’

‘Do you know a man called Bob Jones?’

‘Only through the dreams; saw him once outside of the gatherings but only in passing.’

‘Could you tell me about the events which took place on the night before the D-Day landings?’

Ed noted how identical their account of the story was to the one he'd been told yesterday. ‘Have you talked to any of the Stafford family about that night?’

'No, we don't really know them outside of the dreams but their son seems to have taken quite a shine to us. Judy heard us mention we wanted to come and see you, so she rang us up. I know this may sound strange, but we're all a bit scared to talk to each other in the cold light of day. We don't want to do anything to prevent them from happening.

'But I did find out from Old Ben that Bob Jones still lives in the area. He knows a lot of people who live round here, and what Bob told me confirmed our dreams are real-life.'

'And, do you know Brian? I'm afraid I don't know his surname.'

'Nichols,' offered Mrs Roberts. 'We only know him through meeting him during the dreams as well, Doctor.'

'Do you ever feel scared by these experiences, Mrs Roberts?'

'Are you sure it's alright for me to talk?' She shifted in the chair as she spoke.

'Yes, of course. Are you comfortable enough?'

'I'm alright. I just can't sit for too long in the same position, but my knee'll be fine in next to no time, as long as I keep up with my exercises.'

'Are you at all frightened by these ... er ... unusual dreams?'

'Oh no, I love to go to sleep these days hoping that we'll go to the gatherings. They're so much fun. We enjoy the night more than the day now.' She turned her head to include her husband. 'On account of us feeling more nimble, eh George?'

'Yes, it's true, Doc. Seems to work wonders for the duration.'

'So I take it, Mr Roberts, that you enjoy these experiences as much as your wife?'

'Yes, with me hand on me heart. They're the

most vivid dreams we've ever had in the whole of our lives. Nothing bad has ever happened.'

'Could you tell me about another one of them?'

'During a dream night happening in the future, Sally Rawlings was there with her mother. She had been suffering with lung cancer—'

'I'm sorry to hear that. Please carry on.' Ed put a question mark next to "had been" in his notes.

'We were at a top-notch function giving thanks to a surgeon for his work on brain transplants. Fancy, Doc, the likes of us attending something like that! We've never been to anything like it in true life but often wondered what such an event would be like. Anyway, this surgeon, what was his name, dear?'

'Philip Hudson.'

'That's it. I've never been good with names. Anyway, this Hudson chap was highly esteemed. It won't be long before it becomes normal procedure, I shouldn't wonder. Fascinating stuff, and the room was done out all posh. We had more cutlery than we knew what to do with.'

'Correct me if I'm wrong, but you're saying this was actually taking place at the church?'

'Yes, could be in the future it's not a church anymore or that part of the building changes. I've no idea but the organ pipes were there.'

'Though they were a bit hazy, weren't they?' Jean added.

'Yes, I remember now.' George had a faraway look on his face.

'Sounds like it was quite an experience.'

'Too right! The food must've been Michelin Star, though it was a good job we weren't that hungry, eh luv?' George smiled at his wife.

Jean giggled. 'Yes, dear, although there were lots of courses. It was beautiful-looking and tasted

absolutely lovely. The tables had gleaming vases filled with gorgeous, mauve-coloured orchids and pure white tablecloths. I remember young Tommy asking for more of that chocolate dessert.'

'He's a live wire, that one. It's a wonder he wasn't sick,' Mr Roberts said with affection. 'Anyway, Sally was struggling a bit, trying not to cough, when a doctor sitting next to her offered her his inhaler. Sally told him it wasn't asthma, and he said he knew what it was and assured her that it would help. He said she must keep it and use it as instructed.

'Sally said, although she couldn't explain it, she knew it was safe. As if it was meant to be.'

'And did she carry on using it, do you know? Did she ask what was in it?'

'Yes, she did, and she had it checked out. The front of her pretty lacy blouse had some white floury substance on it, 'cos she spilled a bit the first time. Turned out it was bicarbonate-of-soda, like the doctor had told her.

'On her next check-up, her oncologist told her the test results showed for certain she was completely free of the cancer. She couldn't explain why, though.'

'How exactly did Sally find out it was Bicarbonate of Soda in the inhaler?'

'Cos she's a nurse. She got one of her colleagues to test it. I'm pretty sure she kept the inhaler and would show you if you were to ask her.

'She did a bit of research on the Internet and discovered that an Italian doctor actually uses ordinary bicarbonate-of-soda to treat lung cancer today. Apparently, this particular kind of cancer is like a fungus and will die if sprayed with it. It must become pretty mainstream in the future. Perhaps you've heard of it?'

'I'll need to carry out some investigations, not



that I doubt your word, Mr Roberts. Would you both be willing to attend the clinic for a sleep test, if I conduct it at a reduced rate?' Ed briefly considered doing it for free. *Too bad I need the money.*

'Yes, we would, and thank you very much. That's most generous of you.'

'Okay, I'll give you a call to make the arrangements. Could you, please, ask Sally to come and see me, and as I'm the one asking her to come, please inform her there will be a smaller charge than normal for the consultation.'

'It'll be our pleasure. I'm sure she'll be quite willing to cooperate. She's as eager as the rest of us to discover what's going on.'

'I hope this isn't too impertinent a question, but what do you wear at these events?'

'It's always something what's right for the occasion.' Mr Roberts turned to grin at his wife. 'We'd all look crazy in our pjs and nighties, wouldn't we? Kev Lewis was there, with Pam, of course, and he was in his old suit, bursting a bit at the seams, it was. I'm surprised I still got into mine!'

'Just one last question. Did you know Sally before the dreams or did you meet her there?'

'We met her there and we've become good friends since.'

Ed was about to shake hands and bid them farewell till the next time when Mrs Roberts said, 'Doctor, I hope you don't mind me asking but I've a feeling we know you. Are you the son of Jack and Rita Newman, who used to live in Blenheim Crescent? Came into some good fortune over an old oil painting?'

Ed smiled as he recalled the antique picture of a young man on a horse, waving to his voluptuous maiden as he cantered off. 'Yes, indeed I am. That's

how I was able to set up my practice here. All thanks to Uncle Charlie for spotting its worth. I thought I knew you. Didn't you use to live a few doors down from us?'

'Yes, we did. We moved not long after you and your family moved out. Fancy that, I should've known you'd end up in a job like this, what with your fascination with dreams. I guess you still have vivid ones?'

'Yes, I do.' Ed scratched the top of his head. *Mum and dad were right when they accused me of being addicted to them.*

At first he'd found it exciting to set alarms to wake him at the most opportune time for recalling and recording what went on his mind during REM sleep. He'd filled his bedroom with hoards of diaries packed with weird, wonderful and scary scenes. But now he felt plagued by his internal "ringer".

'Anyway, how's your mum and dad doing? Haven't seen them in years now and what about your sister?'

'The three of them opened an antiques shop in Covent Garden a few years ago, and then Susan's husband, Mark, joined them. You might remember him; they met at school. Anyway, he does all the fetching and carrying. They've two children, Luke and Beth. Susan loves every minute of it; never wanted to do anything else.

'Mum and dad obviously miss the market, but I'm pleased they're not out in the winter anymore.'

'We've fond memories of you, Eddie. I shouldn't wonder if your bellowing wasn't heard along the whole two miles of Portobello Road!'

Ed reflected on the confidence of youth, 'Me too, I can see it now—the long street filled with stalls and ours full of past treasures, although I often questioned why some of it was worth anything at all!'

‘You’ve grown into a fine young man. I knew you’d be handsome, always had a good head of hair. And just look at you speaking proper an ‘all. Mind you, you did always have a fine way about you. Your mum and dad must be mighty proud—’

‘You’re embarrassing him, dear.’ The corners of Mr Robert’s mouth turned up slightly as he took his wife’s hand in preparation to take their leave.

‘Well, you make sure you mention us to them, won’t you. But nothing about the dreams, now,’ Mrs Roberts urged.

‘Yes, I’ll give mum a call later. You can rest assured that everything spoken within these walls will be treated with the utmost of confidence. In fact, it’s something I’m insisting upon.’

As he let the couple out the side door, he hoped they’d enjoy a reunion with his parents. He thought fondly of his days at the world-famous market and how he’d enjoyed helping his dad sort out each van load: the many happy hours spent amongst the stalls and their own which was like no other. Ed knew his parents would have loved him to have taken over the family business but was grateful for their support, even though they didn’t fully understand the grip his passion had on him. He doubted whether he did himself.

After filing his notes he decided to ring a recommended local employment agency to sort out his staffing needs, telling them he’d like a receptionist and secretary to start as soon as the next day, if possible, on a month’s trial basis, with a view to making the position permanent.

He turned to the computer screen, Googled a medical site and discovered that a doctor in Italy was indeed using sterilized bicarbonate-of-soda as a spray treatment for lung cancer, with positive results.



## *A medical mix-up*

Ed stretched, allowing his legs to reach out under the desk, let out a deep yawn and then sank back into softness. Enjoying a second cup of coffee, he dunked a bourbon, careful not to lose any, and, with a pensive look, puzzled over what he'd been told so far. Bearing in mind he'd been told not everyone had known each other before the dreams, it didn't seem to him that any form of collusion was going on. Unless those he'd spoken to had lied to him. He thought that most unlikely.

Neither did he think any one person had been using powers of suggestion or manipulation like in religious cults. He chewed the top of his pen, wondering why only a select few were affected by the dreams.

The sound of the not-quite-so-loud but none-the-less still dissonant doorbell interrupted his thoughts. He rushed to the door.

'Good morning, I presume you must be Miss Sally Rawlings. Thank you for coming so promptly.'

Ed shook hands with a young woman who reached his shoulders in height, which, he figured, was just inside the realms of being tall for a lady. She had dark brown hair, cut into a bob, and was dressed lightly, with a yellow shrug over her cotton dress to guard against the slight spring breeze.

'George and Jean have been so kind to me. They popped in an hour ago, so I made sure mum was alright and then came straight away. They said you wanted to see me and would only make a minimal

charge, is that right?’

‘Yes. Please do come in. Would you like a tea or coffee?’

‘No, thank you. I need to get back to mum. She’s not happy about “these strange happenings” as she calls them.’

Ed took her into his consulting room and got straight to the point. ‘I need to have your permission to talk to your oncologist and validate the tests on the sample you got your colleague to analyse. Would you have any objections to this?’

‘Not at all, I’m as puzzled as you are and would like to know what’s going on. Though, you’ll understand I’m so grateful it is...’ She sighed, filling the depth of her lungs, and looked across at the window behind him.

‘I’ll need to have it in writing with a signature giving permission for the release of this information, in order for it to be ethical. Does that sound reasonable to you?’

‘Yes, that’s absolutely fine, Doctor.’

‘Do you mind if I type the letters up now? Everything will be so much easier and efficient once I have the staff.’

‘No, you go ahead.’

‘It won’t take a moment. Can I have your address?’

‘22 Beaufort Gardens’.

‘Is that near to where Jean and George Roberts live?’

‘About half a mile, I would say.’

‘If you don’t mind me asking, have you always lived there?’

‘No, do I sound like a do?’ Miss Rawlings laughed. ‘When I got a nursing post at the hospital, my mum moved in with me. I was born here, mind

you, but she wanted me to grow up somewhere “more healthy for a child”. She says it’s ironic we’ve ended up back here, after making sure I would talk “proper” and all that. Thing is we both know we’re where we belong now.’

‘Tell me, what you think of the dream nights?’

‘I owe my very existence to whatever’s going on inside that church. It’s been quite an experience for me. I feel so well now. Before I was cured, I was so short of breath. I wouldn’t dare to venture far out of the house. I’ve walked here today with no problems whatsoever. I’m building up confidence to get on with my life and my nursing career.’

‘Can you tell me about the best night you’ve spent at the church, apart from when you were given the inhaler?’

‘Oh, that’s easy. On one particular night there were rows of chairs towards the back of the area, with all kinds of instruments laid out on them. It was a night in the future. Perhaps the church gets opened up again so there’s no hidden space anymore—’

‘Excuse me while I replace the ink cartridge.’ Ed noticed Sally’s eyes sparkling. ‘Please carry on.’

‘Anyway, I was standing a little way from the players when they took their seats. I think it must have been a rehearsal as they weren’t dressed up or anything. A right mixed bunch they were too—men and women, boys and girls of all ages.

‘They started to play what I assumed was some symphony; I’m not very good at identifying music but I know I’ve never heard it before or since. Beautiful, it was. They must’ve practised lots before ‘cos they all knew when it was their turn to come in, except for a young boy who missed his cue. The woman sat next to him gave him a nudge.’

Ed waited for Sally to take her shrug off and

place it neatly on the back of her chair.

'How I wish I could hear them play again, but I don't think I will, as no night has ever been the same as any other. I talked to Zara, a lady who was playing the violin. I've decided to learn myself, now that I'm fit and well.'

'Have you any idea what year it was?'

'2071.'

'How do you know that? For sure, I mean?'

'I asked Zara.'

'Could I have your phone number should I need to contact you?'

Ed wrote it down.

'Why does your mother find it so hard to accept?'

'The thing is, during the course of my doctor and hospital visits due to my lung cancer, it came to light that my mother isn't my real mother.' Sally's brows knit as she struggled to get the painful words out. 'My blood type is AB negative, the rarest.'

Ed nodded.

'My mum is type O and so was my dad.'

Ed offered Sally a tissue. 'Allow me to get you a cup of tea.'

It was the young woman's turn to nod.

Trying to assimilate these latest revelations Ed made his way to the kitchen. For now, he decided all he could do was simply listen. *I'm gonna need some regular paying patients soon, however exhilarating this is.*

Taking a sip of the strong brown sugary liquid Sally continued, 'Doctor Dunn arranged for a DNA test but told me it was impossible for two parents with type O to produce a child with AB negative blood.'

'I told mum she would be my mum, no matter what; nothing could ever change that. She just burst



into tears and assured me I would remain her daughter.

‘Understandably, my mum just hasn’t gotten over it. She loves me just as much as before but blames herself for not realising she must have gone home with someone else’s baby, and that someone else has mistakenly got hers ... if she’s still alive.

‘Even though I’m a nurse, she has started to distrust the medical profession. I’m worried that it’s affected her mind.’

‘Thank you, Miss Rawlings. Take your time finishing your tea before getting back home to her. I’ll give you enough time to get there and, if you think it’s a good idea, I’ll ring your mother and try to reassure her that it’s virtually unheard of for this sort of thing to happen.’

‘Yes, thank you, Doctor Newman. That’s really kind of you. I would appreciate that. She may listen to you, though I’ve told her as much myself.’

The desire to help this young woman and her mother felt like a pulse rushing through his veins. He would have to find a way to help them. ‘Tell me, if you don’t mind. Were you there on the night before the D-Day crossings?’

‘Actually, no I wasn’t. I was away visiting my cousins in Sussex.’

‘Did you have a good night’s sleep?’

‘Yes, as a matter of fact, I did. It seems I need to be at home to have such a dream. Do you mind me asking if you think it’s some form of lucid dreaming?’

‘The fact that you’re all aware of dreaming seems to suggest it is. But I have to say, I’m not yet totally convinced of its true nature.’ *Oh boy, I don’t want to go down that road.*

Just before settling down for the evening, Ed picked

up his mobile to ring an old school mate of his. 'How's it going?'

'Hello, Ed. Great, thanks; haven't heard from you in a long time—too long, my old friend.'

'I know I can trust you to keep a secret—'

'You bet, mate, for old time's sake. The secrets we used to have ... sorry, please go on.'

'Well, you're the best statistician I know, Matt.'

'I'm the only one you know!'

Ed laughed. 'My hands are up.' Ed explained his dilemma using no names. 'I know I've only seen a few people so far but I know there are more to come. From what I've been told, a dozen or so people are experiencing this unprecedented anomaly.'

'Pheeeew, you've got me there. I've never heard of anything like it.'

'There've been documented cases of people dreaming the same dream. It's known as mutual dreaming. I gave an address on it at one of The British Sleep Society's meetings. Recorded incidences are usually between two people who are really close to each other and have been doing the same thing together that day.'

'Learning how to have regular lucid dreams is hard enough but to learn how to mutual dream is even harder, if not impossible for the majority of people. And it's definitely unheard of for a community to be experiencing it, let alone to be together, in a dream, in a local church at events that really took place or will take place in the future!'

'To be perfectly honest, Ed, if there are no cases like this, I have to tell you that I don't need to work it out because the chances of it happening are probably millions, if not billions-to-one. In fact, I'm not sure there's any real chance of it happening and yet from what you say, *it is*. I have to say you sure have

me baffled.'

'You and me both, my friend! Thanks for hearing me out. I just needed someone to talk to, to confirm my own thoughts and feelings.'

'No problem, call me anytime. We'll have to get together soon.'

'Will do.'

With a determination to use all the resources he had, and more, Ed replaced the phone. At least talking to Matt had helped clear his head.

Compelled to ring one of his former lecturers, he motioned to pick the phone up again but stopped himself, concluding that perhaps it would be wiser to keep quiet for the time being. Whether he would ever be ready for the public furore it was bound to cause, he couldn't be sure.



## *Sleep testing*

With the start of another day, and expecting his receptionist to arrive shortly, Ed rang the Stafford family. 'Mr Stafford, I know this is short notice but there's no time like the present. Could you and your family come to the sleep centre at eight-thirty this evening, ready to stay the night?'

'Don't see why not. Tommy can go to school, do his homework and then be almost ready for bed. I'll get Judy onto it right away.'

'If the dreams don't work from the clinic I would need to bring some equipment to your home and monitor events from there. We'll try it for a week, if you agree, and I'll reduce the rate if it becomes long-term.'

'That sounds grand to me. See you later.'

Ed answered the door to a tall, slim red-head whilst mentally preparing to work day or night. *She's right on time; a good start.*

'Good morning, Miss Galloway.'

'Good morning, Dr Newman.'

'What a wonderful new surgery! Where would you like me to start?'

Ed smiled. 'Let me take your details and get you to complete a confidentiality form first. After that I'll show you the paperwork and computer programmes you'll be using to book appointments and keep client details.'

After familiarising Julie with the rest of the building, Ed went on to explain her working hours and

the need for providing refreshments.

'I'm so looking forward to working here, Dr Newman. You needn't go worrying yourself over your teas and coffees. Have you many patients yet?'

'A family will be sleeping at the centre tonight and possibly for the next few nights to come. You'll need to prepare a file for them and others I've seen so far. My secretary will then carry on with these once she's here.'

'Have any of them been talking about their dreams?'

*Does she know what's going on?* Ed considered his response. 'Well, that *is* a part of what I look at here. Why do you ask?' *Don't be silly, Ed, it's a perfectly feasible assumption for anyone to make. I mustn't become paranoid.*

'Oh, I'm just fascinated by what people dream about. Would you like a coffee?'

'Yes please, white, one sugar, thank you. Oh, and just before you go, the front door can remain open whilst you're on reception, but I think it best to be locked when I've got patients in the sleep testing rooms.'

'Come in, Julie.' Ed responded to the knock on his consultation room door.

'There you go. I hope it's how you like it.'

He took the mug from Julie. 'Looks fine to me.'

'I need to make an appointment for a Mr Derek Pearce, who's having trouble sleeping. Or, more to the point, his wife is having astronomic problems with sleeping as Mr Pearce suffers with stertor, if that's the right pronunciation.'

'Ah yes, snoring.'

'Snoring of the extraordinarily loud kind it would seem. So loud, in fact, Mrs Pearce can't escape

it even when they sleep in separate rooms. She's worried about the neighbours.'

'I can see him after lunch if he's available.'

'Righty ho.' Julie turned to leave.

'Oh, and while I have patients during the night, I'll only take appointments between 2.30 pm and 6 pm.'

'Okay, Doctor Newman.'

*A "normal" patient at last!*

After Ed had seen Mr Pearce and booked him in for further overnight tests, Julie informed him he had an appointment to see the Lewis' at 4 pm the next day.

'That's fine. I'm expecting my secretary to arrive soon. Would you mind showing her through?'

'Not at all.'

'And I've a cleaner starting early in the morning. But don't worry, I'll let her in.'

Ed took an instant like to Barbara: a middle-aged buxom woman with a full round face.

'Please, sit down. I understand you finished temping at the solicitors this morning.'

'Yes, that's right. Their regular secretary's back off holiday tomorrow.'

'Tell me a bit about yourself.'

'I'm just finding my feet back in the workplace. I've spent several years bringing up three children who are quite independent now. I only have one more to get rid of, so to speak, my twenty year old son who's "in-between jobs".'

At four-thirty, Ed let Julie and Barbara go. He fixed a pre-prepared sign on the front door:

Clinic closed

Tel: 0845 653 8422

After switching the answer machine on, Ed went to get a couple of hours sleep, hoping it would be enough to see him through the night-shift.

At seven o'clock that evening, Ed made his way to Pataker's. He ordered his favourite dish, congratulating himself on his choice and size of venue: neither too large a place nor too small. And the low lighting suited him. With gentle music playing in the background, he began to relax, enjoying the privacy in one of the bench-like seats.

Whilst he savoured the mouth-warming pickles, he reflected on what he'd achieved that day. He now had a very enthusiastic, hard-working receptionist and, from what he could tell so far, a highly efficient secretary.

He went over the three accounts relayed to him by the Stafford family, the Roberts and Sally Rawlings. He had no reason to doubt what they'd told him except that he found it extraordinary. He kept coming back to the fact they were genuinely good people with nothing to gain from making any of it up.

He'd checked the answer phone just before leaving and managed to speak to Bob Jones, who'd put him in touch with Brian Nichols. Both men confirmed the stories Ed had been told. He'd asked Brian how he knew he needed to have a parachute with him and where he'd acquired it. Brian had said he'd worked in a parachute factory for several years and kept a collection of them. As to how he knew he needed to take one, he really couldn't explain; it was just a very strong feeling he'd had at the time.

Ed raised his hand in the air to attract the waiter's attention. 'That was one of the best chicken sagwalas I've had in a long time and the peshwari naan was cooked to perfection.'



He drank the last sip of a good strong coffee when the alarm on his watch reminded him he needed to make his way back to the control centre. *Perfect timing.*

'We've never slept apart since the day we were married,' Mrs Stafford said. 'Except when I had Tommy and his older sister in hospital, and I've never been wired-up before. I do hope I can sleep proper for you.'

'It'll seem strange, Judy, but I'm sure we'll be alright. We're usually tired enough,' her husband said, squeezing her arm.

'It may take a few nights, though.' Judy Stafford's voice wobbled. 'I just don't want to mess it all up for everyone.'

'The main thing is to try and relax, Mrs Stafford,' Ed said. 'Maybe read a book, have a milky drink. I'm sure it'll be fine. Your eldest daughter, I assume she's not living at home?'

'No; she left a few years ago. Oh, please do call us by our first names. What with us staying here, like,' Judy said.

'I think it's gonna be suuuuch fun!' Tommy said.

Ed patted him on the head. Tommy ducked away, laughing.

Having got the preliminary questions and checks out of the way, Ed, his eyes shining with pride, showed them his cutting edge, diagnostic equipment.

'Wow! I've never seen anything like this in real life before. You must be real clever. How do you know all this stuff?'

'I just love what I do. I'll show you all how it works, if that's alright?'

'Yes, thanks. I'm sure it'll help us all settle

down,' Ron said.

'I'll be monitoring your brainwave patterns, which will come up on this screen here in the control centre. The EEG will show what stage of the sleep cycle you're in at any one time and will be unique for each of you. Your heart rhythms, depth of breathing and restlessness are recorded by thermal imaging in real-time and will be saved to my own personalised program.

'I wrote it myself as part of my doctorate thesis at university. My first degree is in computer science, coupled with extensive research in sleep disorders and dreaming patterns.'

'Was it hard learning how to use all this technical stuff?' Tommy asked.

'I took a polysomnography course—'

'Poly *what?*'

'Don't worry ... it just means I'm qualified to monitor people while they're sleeping. You're quite welcome to look at my certificates displayed in the office. You may've noticed them already.' Ed showed them into one of the three sleeping rooms.

He picked up a rubber dome in one hand and some wires in the other, 'This cap is placed on the head and these sensor pads are attached to the relevant parts of your body. The necessary data is then transported through the attached wires.

'Let me show you the en-suite bathroom and kitchen facilities.'

'You sure've thought of everything and it's so spic and span.' Judy managed a smile.

'Has anyone used this before—like checked it out, I mean?' Ron asked as he ran his fingers through his hair.

'Yes, of course. I'm indebted to my niece, Beth, a very bright young girl. She acted as my guinea

pig, so to speak. And it's all been passed by the medical board,' Ed explained.

'We'll be fine, we trust you, Doc, mum and dad are just fussing like they always do!'

Ron grinned. 'The lad's right, Judy.'

'I just want you to feel at home and get a good night's sleep.' Ed assured them. 'The results, hopefully, will follow.'

Ron expressed his appreciation as they went to their separate rooms to change into their nightclothes.

Seated in the control centre in preparation for the night ahead, he flicked through an old copy of a well-known medical journal and smiled at the article spreading the centre pages: "Sleep Apnea, by Edward Newman MD, MRCPsych".

He reflected on the business advice he'd been given, and the fact that it would probably take a couple of years for him to build up a sizeable patient base, as he was setting out to reach a limited range of people. Combining this fact with starting a brand new practice in a new location, he wasn't expecting to break even financially for as long as four years. On the other hand, he hadn't expected things to take off the way they had. He may need to employ another specialist to work alongside him sooner than he'd predicted. He realised that his mind was racing ahead. He needed to pull it back and take one day at a time.

He resolved there and then to get the top floor flat rented out as soon as possible; Julie might be willing to help him finish it off with a rug or two and maybe a lamp for the bedroom.

Ed looked over the resulting traces as the Stafford family slept. They showed normal results for anyone sleeping in a new location. *Just as I expected.*

The next day Ed showed Mr Kevin and Mrs Pam Lewis into his office, along with their teenage daughter, Tracy. They'd arrived a little late but appeared to be a very smart middle-aged couple, who reiterated the same experiences as the others.

'Have you any ideas about why this is happening?' Ed asked.

'We really don't know,' Mrs Lewis said, 'except it seems to help some of us out in the most amazing of ways. But the queerest thing is, it's only me and me husband that it's happening to. Tracy's here 'cos she wants to know all about it and what she needs to do to come with us.'

'Does Tracy live with you?'

'Yes, that's the strangest thing about it.' Mr Lewis raised his eyebrows. 'We just don't understand it.'

'That's very interesting,' Ed said as he offered them another custard cream.

'Can you tell us why it doesn't happen to me?' Tracy asked with a glum look on her face.

'To be perfectly honest, Tracy, I need to do more investigations before I can make any kind of comment. I'll test you all at the sleep centre, if you're in agreement. Let me assure you I'll be able to explain it to you one day. I just need a bit more time.'

The Stafford family's second night at the sleep centre produced the same results as the night before.

Ed took the mobile from his jacket pocket and thumbed a text message, "I'm missing you Janice. Hope to see you soon". The ideal plan to give him the space he wanted to get his practice up and running didn't seem so ideal anymore. He swiftly changed the message—"NEED to see you soon."

## *First-hand*

Ed dunked his fingers into the glass beside him and flicked water over his face. Then he smacked his cheeks. He hoped a third night wouldn't have to turn into a fourth. Having had a few dream free sleeps he found himself aching for one, yet the darkening circles under his eyes hadn't gone unnoticed.

The clock displayed 3.34 am and the traces so far had shown only what Ed would have predicted. Within a few minutes of each other the family had been moving up and down the cycles of non-REM sleep into REM. The thought of another coffee made his stomach turn. He dragged himself from his seat and began to pace back and forth.

But it didn't take long for the chair to beckon him back into it. *Please let this be the night.* He watched the EEG traces move into a similar pattern to wakefulness, indicating another REM stage of sleep for each of his patients. The dream stage had been getting progressively longer as delta sleep had decreased. *Perfectly normal.*

As expected the EOG showed a pattern consistent with rapid eye movement. Still, each patient's printout was unique. He folded his arms and rested his head on them. He dozed but something inside him forced his lids to lift.

When Ed next looked across at the monitor he sprang from his chair, nearly losing his balance. He ripped off the three sleep traces and gawped; all showed exactly the same pattern but of a sort he'd never seen before. He sat back down to scrutinise the

evidence of unusual electrical activity. *These must be accurate. All three EEG's can't be malfunctioning. Even if they had they wouldn't be producing exactly the same traces.*

He checked the EMG monitors which were recording what he could see via the thermal image camera in each room: no body movements, apart from the slight rise and fall of the family's chests as they breathed slowly and deeply in complete synchronization. It was as if the three bodies had become one. Their heart rates and blood pressure were normal.

'Yes!' Ed mouthed as he punched the air with his fists. *I have, on hard data, proof of something that's incredible to believe! Something that's happening right here!* Ed's passion for a good dream stirred within him. *Oh boy, sometimes I think I crave dream over reality.*

He began typing notes directly into the computer and thought about the impact his revelations would have. *All in good time, Ed.*

At 5.32 am, Ed watched the traces return to normal—each patient's read-outs had returned to unique ones. Within seconds of each other, the family awoke and immediately turned their bed lamps on. Via the intercom from each sleeping room, Ed heard various forms of: 'Hey, Doc, did you get that?'

He pushed the corresponding buttons and replied, 'Yes, I most certainly did. I'll be through to check your vital signs and get those caps and sensors off each of you, starting with you, Tommy. I'll speak to you after you've washed and had some breakfast.'

An hour later, Ed seated the family in the control centre. With notepad in hand he said, 'Well, I've never been a witness to anything like this before. And none of you appear to have suffered any ill

effects.'

'It was great! We were at a wedding party!' The words shot out of Tommy's mouth.

'Thank you, Tommy. Whose wedding was it?'

'John and Kath. They were rock-n-rollers!'

'A lovely young couple, they were,' Judy said. 'He was very handsome. It was genuinely in the fifties—not a modern version. Kath had a gorgeous silk dress on, handed down from her mother, she told me. John was in his Teddy boy suit. Not a big affair but just lovely—'

'The rock-n-roll music was ace! I'm gonna download some when I get home,' Tommy said.

'Ron, who else was there?'

'Oh, the usual crowd, I'm sure you'll get to meet most of them soon enough.'

'These people, the one's whose wedding it was and the guests, weren't they surprised to see you there? It's something I've been wondering about. After all, you're strangers to them, aren't you?'

'That's the beauty of it. We're always made welcome, like they've been expecting us. Though, I don't see how.'

'Well, thank you for coming. I'll need to correlate the information I've gathered. I'll be in touch shortly. Take your time gathering your belongings and enjoy the rest of your weekend.'

'And you, Doc,' Ron said.

Ed and Ron shook hands. 'I most certainly will.'

Deciding to make best use of his Saturday night off, and as Janice was spending the weekend with her family, Ed lifted the phone and called Beth's number.

'Hi, Uncle Ed, 'bout time you called.'

'I know, I'm sorry. I've a favour, though I would

have rung you anyway.'

'I know, I know.'

They both chuckled.

'Go ahead.'

'I need you to monitor me while I sleep.'

'Are you alright? Is it becoming more of—'

'Don't worry. I'll explain when you get here, around fourish sound good to you?'

'Great, see you later, then.'

Beth, a petite girl with wavy golden hair reaching a few inches past her shoulders, flounced into Ed's office. She had on black leggings and a grey patterned tunic top. 'Hi, how are you? You look a bit rough round the edges, if you don't mind me saying so.'

'I'm fine and it's always great to see you, but then you know that.'

Beth fell into his arms. 'I'd be here every day from now on if I could, but I'm up to my eyeballs with my 'A' levels.'

'Yes, and you'll have to do well if you want to be anything like as good as me.' Ed grinned. 'I hope coming here won't jeopardise your grades. I know what it's like making that final push.'

'I've brought all my books with me and plenty of supplies to keep me awake!' She allowed Ed to peer into her bag. 'Do you want some?'

'No! I need to sleep!'

'Of course you do!' They both laughed. 'I'll save you some. Correction—I might save you some. Don't want to make a promise I'll probably not keep.' Beth smiled at him.

Ed sighed and felt himself relax; she was good company and always managed to relieve his tension.

'Before we start, how's my sister and your



dad?’

‘They’re both fine.’

‘And Luke?’

‘Yeh, he’s still loving it up in Scotland. I’m definitely staying closer to home. I’ve applied to local Unies.’

‘That’s great. Come with me and I’ll show you everything you need to know.’

‘Okay.’ Beth raised her eyebrows at him.

‘Alright, I’ll remind you. Or perhaps *you* could teach me?’ Ed motioned for her to go before him.

‘You’ve yet to tell me what this is all about,’ Beth said as she went through the door.

Ed relayed everything. She sat with her eyes wide open, taking it all in, as she always did.

‘This is amazing and could be something I choose to focus on at Uni; my own unique research!’

‘Once I’ve,’ Ed paused and cleared his throat, ‘once we’ve brought it out into the open.’

‘I’m so looking forward to working with you one day.’

‘Me too. Now, I know you’ve brought some work with you but you mustn’t take your eyes off the traces for too long. You need to spot when they change. *If* they change that is.’

‘You can trust me.’ She paused as unaccustomed creases formed on her oval shaped face.

‘What’s the matter? What’s that frown for?’

‘If I get a bit worried about you,’ Beth ventured, ‘should I wake you up?’

‘Only if my vital signs give you cause for concern, or if I stop breathing of course.’ Ed held his breath and put his hands to his throat.

‘Don’t tease me. I’m just a little anxious about being responsible for you ... for your life.’

'I know.' Ed put his arm round her. 'Everything will just look normal to you. I'll be asleep and the traces, like I said, will show when I'm dreaming. You really don't need to fret. I've witnessed it myself and nothing abnormal happens to the body.'

'But, you really could be anywhere, couldn't you?'

'Yes, I guess I could.' Ed hoped his excitement wouldn't prevent him from sleeping.

'Just one other thing ... how will you know the difference between one of these group dreams and one of your regular lucid dreams?'

'It'll be at St Peter's. Well, at least my dream will be.'

He lay himself down on the bed and put his thumbs up to indicate, through the monitor, that he was ready.

Beth's voice came over the intercom, 'Okay, here we go.'

Ed's mind filled with the faces of the people he'd seen and the stories he'd been told. *Typical.*

'It's no good, Beth, I just can't get to sleep. I guess it's because I'm trying too hard.'

'Imagine yourself in a calm tranquil place, somewhere where you've been really happy. With Janice, maybe?'

He wondered what she was doing right now, and how she would react if he let her know how he felt towards her.

Ed spotted Sally Rawlings jumping off her seat, and waving frantically at him as she made her way through the merry crowd.

'Hello, Doctor Newman. Well, I never would have believed it. Did you sleep somewhere different tonight!'

'Em ... hello ... please call me Ed. I slept in the sleep centre.'

'That must be it, then and call me Sally.'

'I guess so.'

'It's always weird the first time, Ed, and then you just get used to it and can't wait for it to happen again. Come and say hello to George and Jean. They'll be so excited to see you and my mum's with them. You can join us if you like. There's a spare seat.'

Ed felt like he'd stepped back in time. He recognised the 80's clothes and hairstyles of the decade in which he'd been born. A chatty DJ announced the next song, 'Enjoy the romance of Lionel Ritchie's: "All night long"'.

He caught a glimpse of the Stafford family, along with, he assumed, Arthur, who were across the other side of the room. Judy caught his eye and waved at him with a large smile on her face. As he scanned the room, Kev and Pam Lewis raised their thumbs at him. He managed to toss a nervous smile across to them.

After greeting George and Jean, who grinned with delight to see him there, Sally introduced him to her mother, Margaret Rawlings. By this time Ed felt more than ready to sit down in the empty chair opposite them. He scanned the hall. *I'm in a dream! But how?*

His eyes were drawn to a yellow-iced birthday cake decorated with small lilac-coloured flowers, brightly wrapped presents and coloured balloons with "40" on them.

Tommy came bounding over, 'It's just great, ain't it, Doc? Who needs history lessons when you have it here? It's like real life, ain't it?'

He gave no time for Ed to answer.

'Have something to eat, make yourself at home.' Tommy disappeared, as quickly as he'd arrived, to join a young lad on the far side of the room.

'I'll fetch a plate for you,' Jean offered.

'Thank you very much, you're so kind; there's a lot of food and it all looks very appetising. I'm not really used to parties though. Whose is it?'

'See that lady over there, in that black dress with a sparkly choker? Her name's Brenda; it's her fortieth.'

'Yes.' Ed nodded. 'I see the balloons. I think I *am* rather hungry.' Faced with the prospect of some appetising food, in comparison to the snacks he'd been living off the past couple of days, Ed had realised he was famished. Once he'd started eating he found he couldn't stop. He thought of the article "Gate-crashers" he'd read the other day.

'You enjoy it,' Jean said as she spooned something fishy onto his plate, 'You deserve it. I think it's something from across the Atlantic, with her being American.'

'I guess this confirms we were telling the truth,' George said.

'Yes indeed. Indeed it does.' Ed said, grateful for a bit of time to focus his mind and turn away from greeting everyone. 'Well, the food's excellent, very tasty. I believe this is clam chowder, I had some once, one of me mum's "new" dishes,' he said, as he wiped some of the creamy sauce from his chin. 'Everyone seems to be having a good time.'

A bloated feeling forced Ed to ease up a bit. He reached for a drink to cleanse his palette, whilst looking around and wondering how many more of the people here would become his patients. He lifted his glass as the cake was cut and everybody cheered.

Party poppers went off all around him and

that's when he caught a glimpse of the back of the organ. He went to find Sally. 'I need you to help me.'

'Yes, of course. I guess this is a bit of a busman's holiday for you.'

'I want to see if I can get into the church through the pipe organ.'

'Are you sure? No one has ever tried that! We're always too preoccupied. Don't you just love this song?' she asked, referring to Michael Jackson's "Billy Jean".

'Yes, I do, but I have to admit I haven't had a lot of time to follow the pop scene.'

'You do look a bit like a fish out of water. Don't you worry now, let's go.'

Ed located the box housing the electric motor. 'This operates the blower and feeds air into the organ pipes.'

'I see.'

He knelt down to look through the safety cover.

'Can you see anything?'

'Just some light and I can see part of the Noah window. Here you have a look.' He turned around but Sally had gone. *She must've woken up!*

The ladder to access the top of the fattest and longest pipes for maintenance looked scary, but proved to be less so. Nevertheless, he still could find no way through to the church side. He turned to look back at the party only to find that everything was being tidied away. It seemed he was the only "gate-crasher" left.

Awakening with a start, Ed looked at the time: 6.05 am.

Beth helped to free him of the wires. 'Well, according to the EEG trace, you've certainly been up

to something.'

'Let me take a look.'

Beth handed him the print-out.

'These peaks are similar to the ones for the Stafford family.'

'Yes, I compared them. What was it like?' Beth said, her face a picture.

Ed told her all about the party and the people he'd met. 'It just feels so unbelievably real, Beth. It doesn't go all weird on you like regular dreaming often does.'

'How exciting! I would love to have a dream like that myself.'

'I'll arrange for it one day soon. You go and get some rest now. Thanks for your time, you've been a great help. I hope I haven't disrupted your revision too much. We'll look at this together some time, and you can work for me on a part-time basis during the summer.'

'That's great, you know I won't let you down *and* you know I can always do with the money.'

Ed opened the fitted wardrobe. He fingered through his assortment of ties and found his favourite blue one hanging in exactly the same place where he'd hung it—the one he'd been wearing at the party, now smeared with a creamy-looking sauce. He opened the drawer by his bed, took out the diary and, starting from the back, recorded his latest dream.

On his way back to the control room Ed mused over what to call this new scientific discovery, and once inside made a list of what he'd been told and what he'd confirmed for himself:

1. *Space behind pipe organ at St Peter's*

- confirmed.
2. *It's possible to view but not enter church from dream side.*
  3. *Have hard data showing evidence of multiple, unusually electrically-charged, brain patterns in synchronization.*
  4. *Not all people living in the same accommodation "bounce"—those recorded so far live no more than a mile away from the church.*
  5. *Most "gatherings" are not in present time.*
  6. *Sally's experience with regard to the bi-carb of soda checks out, meaning that—*
  7. *Other stories are most likely to be true—all patients appear totally sincere.*
  8. *Personally experienced a "dream bounce".*
  9. *Appropriate clothes worn in dreams—tie to be tested for Clam Chowder.*

Whilst printing off a hard copy, ready to place in his file downstairs, he decided to ring an old university friend, who was an up-and-coming forensics expert. He explained the situation to him.

'Just bring the tie over. It's what friends are for'.

'Thanks; we must have lunch sometime. My treat.'

'I'll look forward to catching up with you.'

Ed could hardly believe it was Monday morning again—the start of his second week. Rounding the corner to his clinic, with carrier bags of food in each hand, he came to an abrupt halt. *Are all those people waiting to see me?*

As he drew nearer, he counted a total of eight men and women, along with a young girl, waiting

patiently. Walking up to the gate, he wondered if they'd been there long; it was a good twenty minutes before the surgery was due to open.

A policeman crossed the road from the other side of the street. 'My, my, your practice seems to have taken-off. You've not been open a week yet have you? Is everything alright?'

Ed hoped his shock didn't show as he looked the officer in the face, noticing how pock-marked it was. 'It's always a surprise to realise how many people have problems with sleeping.'

'I daresay.'

'Word has certainly got around. I'll let everyone in and get them off the street.'

'Well, good morning to you, Doctor Newman.'

A slow breath of carbon-dioxide exhaled from Ed's mouth as the policeman turned around and walked away. He showed everyone into the waiting room, with the firm assurance that his receptionist would soon be attending to them.

Entering the corridor Ed saw Barbara and Julie arriving together. 'Come through to my office, please.'

Barbara and Julie exchanged quizzical looks.

Julie, now looking frantic, faced Ed. 'You're not going to say you can't afford us any longer, I—'

'No, nothing of the sort. Let me explain.' He ushered the two women into the room. 'I arrived to a queue of people. The waiting room's full. Julie, please arrange for two or three appointments today and then spread the others over the next couple of days, leaving some time for any other patients who may turn up to see me?'

'Of course, sorry. We'll have to get another kettle if it carries on like this.' She made her way to the kitchen.

'Barbara, would you mind taking a few



preliminary details from each patient today, if they don't mind waiting?'

'Not at all, don't you worry. We'll make sure everyone's looked after.'

'Oh, and just one other thing.'

'Yes, Doctor.'

'Would you mind taking these bags into the basement?' Ed handed Barbara the keys.

*How on earth am I going to keep this under wraps?* Ed slumped in the chair. *I need to be able to explain this before it goes public, else my colleagues will think I'm nuts!* He picked up the phone, 'Janice can we eat together as soon as I'm free? Tully's restaurant, it's Lebanese. I came across it the other night, thought it looked pretty good—'

'Slow down, Eddie! Yes, I'd love to. Sorry not to have been around this week-end, but I thought we'd agreed ... well never mind, I'm glad you rang. I miss you too. Are you alright? You sound a bit breathless.'

'I just need to see you. You can park in one of the spaces here and then we'll walk. I'll text you as soon as I can.' *I'll take a night off if necessary.*

Ed put the file he'd just completed in the second drawer down of the cabinet; it held details of a girl who regularly sleep-walked and had been brought in by her father. He then took from the top drawer all the "dream bouncing" records to which Barbara had added a further seven files. Before making his way upstairs to check that everything was ready for Mr and Mrs Roberts' second night of sleep testing, he decided to flick through them. He left the room smiling at the thought of George and Jean treating their time here like a little holiday.

Back downstairs he passed Julie, who was on the telephone; they nodded their acknowledgement of

each other. He entered Mrs Cummings' office. 'I have some notes I'd like you to type up for me and there'll be some more after I've seen Mr Watts in a moment. I have Mr Roberts' file upstairs. Do you have the records for Mrs O'Brian, the lady with sleep apnoea? She's my first patient in the morning, right?'

'Yes, that's correct.' Barbara handed him the file. 'How are you feeling? All this sleeping in the day and working at night. Those shadows under your eyes are getting darker you know.'

'I'm fine, thank you.' Ed stifled a yawn. 'I'll snatch a couple of hours sleep a bit later. I'm enjoying the variety. It's all very encouraging. And you seem to be settling in very well.'

'Yes, I'm finding my work so fascinating. It's a fabulous job, I can't wait to have a "dream" myself but only when you're ready, of course.' Mrs Cummings face looked aglow.

'I'll arrange for it soon. Beth and Julie can join you.' Ed turned to take the paperwork into his office but spun back around to ask, 'When you have a moment, could you compile a list of all those patients who have dream bounced and whether I've seen them or not?'

*Lucid dreaming, dream bouncing, whatever next?*

## *Time off*

Janice had arrived home late for the *third* evening in a row. Holding the dryer as near to her long, rich auburn hair as she could bear, willing it to dry quicker, she grappled with the frustration of it all.

Her thoughts ran over the day she'd just had and hoped she'd never repeat. *Why had everything gone so wrong? How could I have mislaid that document my manager had needed "pronto"?; I've never seen Mr Barnes so angry. Can't believe I spilt coffee on that important letter, ruining both our lunch-times. And then on top of it all, I upset the PA...*

There and then Janice decided to file the entire work-day under "one of those" and to start afresh the following morning. As for now, she just wanted to concentrate on looking her best for Eddie.

*I can't turn up in my jeans and t-shirt even if they are good quality.* She took out a dress she'd bought on a whim in a sale, and then almost forgotten about. Holding her taupe espadrilles against the cream-coloured print, she saw they were a good match.

Janice's flatmate entered the bedroom. 'Do you need a hand with your make-up?'

'Yes, *please*. You do it so well.'

'It's my job.'

'But you're wasted in that broom-cupboard of a room. You should be dolling up the stars.'

'Hopefully, one day, but for now the olive complexioned, pretty, angular faced Janice needs a light covering—'

Janice laughed. 'Just get on with it!'

'Why don't you wear that plaited band to show off your face?'

Janice sucked in her lips and squinted. 'Good idea.'

'He obviously means something to you, this Eddie.'

'Yes, I think he does.' Janice felt the heat in her cheeks. 'I'm so glad he contacted me. When I agreed to give him some time to focus on his surgery I didn't know how much I'd miss him. Then I thought he was letting me down gently, just like—'

'You'd best get going. But be careful. You know what you're like—one date and you hear wedding bells. It's what puts them off.'

'But it's been more than one date.'

'Alright, but you have to admit you'd say yes to the first man who asks you.'

'I *do* try not to appear too eager.' Janice bit her lip.

'No danger of that this time; you're running late!'

'Oh yes, so I am!'

Janice grabbed her handbag and keys, yelled "see you" to Sadie and then rushed out the door to set off on her journey across London. She passed over the Thames via Lambeth Bridge wondering if she should've taken the tube. *But then it's safer travelling back at night by car.*

With anxiousness pulsating in her temples, she checked her watch for the fourth time. She tried telling herself that it wasn't such a bad thing to be late, but failed to believe it.

\* \* \*

Ed decided to finish work a bit earlier so he'd be ready for his date. He rose to go but checked himself at a knock on the office door.

'Sorry to disturb you, Doctor Newman. I know you're extremely busy.'

'That's okay; we're all a bit rushed off our feet aren't we? How can I help you, Julie?'

'I'm a bit mystified.'

'I'm all ears.'

'You know the young couple that came to see you the other day, Pete and Emily Green?'

'Yes.'

'What I don't understand is why me or my family haven't had any dreams like they have, when they live in a flat just down the road from us.'

'I don't know the answer to that one, not yet anyway, and you're not the only one who's posed that question.' Ed still didn't know why he'd experienced a dream bounce when he'd slept in the practice, but never had when he slept in his own bed, or when he'd napped on the couch in the office.

'Have you told your family, Julie? About the dreams, I mean.'

'No, I haven't. They'd think I was bonkers. I thought we might've had one of them ourselves by now, so then they'd know, but like I say, we haven't.'

'I can't seem to put my finger on why it happens to some and not others. By the way, do you live in a house or a flat?'

'A house.' Julie looked puzzled. 'Why do you ask?'

'I'm not sure yet...'

'Okay.' Julie hesitated. 'Doctor Newman?'

'Go on, Julie.'

'I hope you don't mind me asking. But I would like a place of my own. I love the work here and I

know I can't be presumptuous ... me and Mrs Cummings work really well together and...'

'Yes.'

'I was wondering, with our house so crowded like ... if I could rent the flat up the top here.'

'Well, I have to admit that would be most convenient. You could move in on a temporary basis, see how it goes.'

'That would be perfect. Thank you so much.'

Ed thought she was going to jump over the desk and hug him. Thankfully, she didn't.

'I'll show you round in the morning, and then you can move in as soon as you want to. You may need a bit more furniture though.'

'That's not a problem. Can I tell Mrs Cummings now?'

'Go on ... and tell her I need you both ready for tomorrow night. Beth's coming round for a couple of nights so, hopefully, you'll get to have a dream bounce together.'

'Sure, thanks again, you won't regret it.'

He grinned at the sound of a "whoop" as the door closed behind her.

Facing the mirror above the sink in the bathroom, Ed's mind went to-and-fro between concentrating on getting ready to see his girlfriend and reflecting on the amazing stories he'd been told during the past week: Muriel Butler had stirred his heart. She was another who'd made new friendships, a vital lifeline since her sister had not long passed away.

Ed felt glad that her dreams of learning how to read and write had been spurred on, when she'd found herself "bounced" into an adult-education class. The regular bouncers there had helped other adult-students, and now she'd made friends with Tommy,

who was helping her to “read and write proper”.

The thought of the two young working colleagues, Lauren Mitchell and Kerrie Jarvis, both in their twenties, made him smile. They’d said they didn’t need reality TV anymore. Probably didn’t need the TV at all.

Ed felt privileged to be the one whom they’d told their incredible tales to. He applied his after-shave, picked up the razor he’d neglected to rinse, and then held it up and spoke into it as if he were a newspaper reporter: ‘There’s no going back now for sleep-specialist, Doctor Edward Newman.

‘His stunning revelations are shocking the world. People in the Kensington area of London are meeting friends and relatives who they haven’t seen in years—in a dream! In some cases, people who are no longer alive.

‘He has stories of people not knowing who they are with at parties and venues they’ve “gate-crashed”. Perhaps, some of them are actually meeting future descendants. But whatever’s going on, it’s fairly evident people are being made very happy, are fulfilling real desires and solving some major problems.’

Suddenly, as if the thought had come from nowhere, Ed wondered whether the dreams would always have a positive outcome.

His heart leapt when he noticed the time. *She’s late. I’m late!* He picked up the antiseptic bottle, swilled the blue-coloured liquid around his mouth, gargled and spat as he heard Janice’s tap at the front door.

‘Sorry, time got the better of me.’ Janice sounded slightly out of breath.

‘No, you’re fine. It’s just so great to see you, Janice.’ The strain of the day drained away as he

drew her into his arms.

Advancing along the Brompton Road at a comfortable pace, Ed took hold of Janice's hand. 'Let's make a pact not to talk shop until we've at least finished our meal.'

'That's fine by me.' Janice's face broke into a smile.

As he held the door open for her to enter into the low-lit interior, Ed hoped the restaurant would live up to its advertisement

'It looks lovely,' Janice said in a voice soft and low.

Ed breathed a silent sigh of relief.

A waiter, dressed in pressed black and white, showed them to their seats in a quiet corner at the back of the restaurant at Ed's request and asked them if they would like a drink. He came back with their choice of red wine and poured it for them at the table. He then opened the menus with a recommendation to try the falafel and pitta bread with salad and a tarator sauce.

'I love the warm colours in here. Have you seen that huge fern over there in the corner?' Janice said turning her head to it.

Ed's gaze followed hers, 'It's great, isn't it? Maybe I should get one for the practice? It'd look good in the hallway. It seems everywhere you go there's a flower or greenery of some sort.'

'Oh, Eddie, I did tell you to. I'll help you choose some plants. They'll make your patients feel more at home.'

'If you say so.' Ed grinned. *What do I know? I'm just a man?* 'How'd your weekend go?'

'We had a lovely time, although exhausting as usual.'



Ed couldn't take his eyes off her. He watched her push her hair gently back over her shoulders with strong lean fingers.

'It was so good of Aunt Clara to meet us in Paris this time. We'll visit her in Dusseldorf in the Autumn, when we'll all have a bit more time. She always looks so fantastic; nothing like her age.'

Ed pushed the events of the past couple of weeks firmly to the back of his mind while he and Janice savoured their order.

'I'd love to try food all over the world,' Janice said, licking her lips.

Ed finished his mouthful. 'I'm with you on that one.' He wiped the corners of his mouth on the starchy-white napkin. 'Baklava for dessert?'

'Yes, please. Who, in their right mind, could resist a treat like that?'

Ed leant across the table. 'C'mon, spill the beans.'

'How'd you know?'

'Call it a man's intuition!'

Janice laughed, took a deep breath and then said, 'I've applied for a job at this new sports centre opening up in Southwark. There'll be training facilities there. I've applied to teach mountain climbing full-time. At last, I'll be able to leave my boring old office job in the city. That's if I get it, of course.'

'That's great, you're sure to. You're a great climber Janice. Just think, we'll both be doing the job of our dreams.' He hadn't intended the pun, which she was currently unaware of.

Janice grinned at him. 'That would be fantastic, wouldn't it? This has been so lovely, Eddie, thank you. I didn't know how hungry I was till I got here, and these after-dinner mints are scrummy; good-quality dark chocolate.'

'We'll have to come again.'

'Yes. That'd be really nice.'

Ed swallowed his last sip of coffee. He'd been trying to pluck up the courage to ask Janice if she would accompany him to St Peter's, and now the time had come. He went for it.

'It's only a street away. You'll love the stained-glass windows. A real piece of history I'm told.'

\* \* \*

Janice replied in almost a whisper, 'Okay, if that's what you want, Eddie.' Her heart beat harder and her mind raced at the thought of what this could mean.

*Surely Eddie would've proposed to me in the restaurant if that were his intention. Has he started to go to church? We've known each other seven-and-a-half months. Is that long enough to be expecting the most important question of my life?*

*It's not like him to be so obscure.*

She reached for her purse.

'My treat.' Eddie squeezed her arm.

'Thanks. I'll pay next time. I'll just go and powder my nose.'

In a few moments she was back with Eddie. He led her outside where the warmth of his kiss on her lips made her feel like she was melting. Despite Sadie's words shimmering through her mind, Janice had no doubt that if this man did propose to her she would have no hesitation in saying yes.

## *Confidential*

Ed squeezed Janice's hand as they walked straight into the church. *I hope I haven't worried her too much.* Two women and a man were seated separately, with heads bowed in prayer under the low lighting. He walked Janice straight over to the organ where he showed her the blower box to the right of it. 'This produces the air which runs the organ,' he whispered.

As he reached for the torch in his pocket Janice put her mouth close to his ear. 'What's got into you, why are you so interested in this organ?'

'Hush, sweetheart, I'll tell you when we go back outside.' Ed pointed upwards. 'If you look straight up, you can see the fat pipes have gaps between them.' She nodded at him with a puzzled look on her face. 'Before we go outside, we need to measure, in paces, the size of the church.'

'Ed, you're really scaring me.'

'Please, bear with me. As we go around the corner of the building we need to pace out the width and length, again.' He hoped she would stay with him.

'Right, so what's the difference from the inside width of the church to the outside?'

'Eighty paces.'

Ed put his arm around her. 'Let's get back to my flat and I'll explain everything. I know I've been acting a bit strange. I'm sorry if I've spoilt your evening.'

'I'm just a little confused. I *have* had a great time though. The meal was delicious.'

With another hundred metres to go it started to

rain. They ran the rest of the way. He gave Janice the keys to the basement as he went into the practice to pick up the files he needed. She was sat amongst the varying browns of the cushion-backed couch when he re-joined her.

He lit the fire. 'Any excuse will do for me! Would you mind putting the kettle on? Or you could heat some milk?'

'Sure.'

Ed threw two beanbags down onto the mat in front of the fire. He loved to watch the changing flames. Janice joined him with two warm mugs of hot chocolate.

'Great choice.'

He waited for her to make herself comfortable. 'First, I have to say you can never tell anyone I've shown you data from my patients' files. I would be severely sanctioned by the medical board or even struck-off if they ever found out. The only reason I'm going to show you these is because I think it's only fair you should know the whole story before I ask for your help. I really need and value your opinion.' Ed regretted having to sound so business-like.

'Alright, I knew there was something wrong.' She brushed his cheek with the back of her hand. 'You've been working too hard. I knew you would.'

'I knew you'd understand.' *She possesses such agility and strength, yet has a lovely gentleness about her.*

He showed her the files, allowing her time to digest the information. Then he gave her the list that Barbara had compiled for him with his jottings added:

*Ron, Judy, Tommy and Arthur Stafford -  
plus grandfather*

*George and Jean Roberts – elderly couple*

*Sally & Margaret Rawlings – Sally, a nurse cured of lung cancer & her mother Bob Jones - retired – D-Day – given new-style parachute*

*Brian Nichols – retired - gave Bob Jones the parachute*

*Kevin and Pam Lewis – couple in their 30's - daughter hasn't dream bounced*

*Pete and Emily Green – young professional couple - friends of Julie*

*Fred Watts – middle-aged – runs a newsagents*

*Muriel Butler – elderly lady – learning how to read and write – Tommy helps her*

*Lauren Mitchell and Kerrie Jarvis - work colleagues/friends – each have a bedsit at the same address*

*Myself – tie smeared with clam chowder*

*Sally to undergo sleep testing*

*Barbara, Julie and Beth to dream bounce together*

*Janice to dream bounce with me*

'It's incredible! If it weren't you telling me about this, I'd think it was totally insane. I see my name's at the bottom of the list.' Janice pointed to it.

'Yes, I have something to ask of you in a moment. This is the definitive list. No one else from 2014 has been seen during any of the dream bounces and I've now spoken to everyone either in person or via a phone call.

'I'm determined to find out exactly what's causing these people to experience a previously unknown phenomenon, no matter what it takes. There must be a common factor aside from them all living in

some kind of a flat, as it doesn't happen to everybody who lives in one.'

He fetched his blue tie. 'David analysed this for me and confirmed there's clam chowder on it. I have the lab results here.'

'Well, you could have just tasted it!'

'I know, I know,' Ed said, turning a little pink. 'But I had to be sure. It's all so crazy.'

'Come here. You need to unwind for a bit.'

Ed lay down beside her. Janice leaned over him and began rubbing his temples.

'The dreams sound great fun ... but at the same time a bit alarming. I now understand why you took me to the church first.'

'Nothing bad's ever happened...'

'What is it?'

'Nothing. As I told you, I've been on the other side of that blower box and had an amazing experience. Everyone wakes up feeling absolutely fine.'

'But?'

'It's nothing. Honestly.'

'So, you want me to experience a dream bounce?'

'Yes, and then, if you're up for it, I really need you to do something important for me. Do you think you could climb those pipes I showed you? Because from up there you'd be able to see the entire empty space I've been talking about. I need to know if you can see the "dream" from the church side.'

'What if I got caught climbing them?'

'The church would most likely want to keep it quiet. They'd probably just reprimand you—get you to attend church for a while.'

'Very funny ... but, if I'm honest, it makes me feel a bit nervous.'

'After you've been on a dream bounce I'm sure you'll feel a lot easier about it. You'll be as anxious as I am to find out what's going on and you've always got some holiday owing, haven't you?'

'Yes, I have. Having a dream bounce with you first is a great idea.'

'I'll ask Sally if she would mind sleeping at the centre for a few more nights so she can monitor us. You'll really like her. I would ask Beth but she's coming up for exams.'

'When Beth's enjoyed one with Julie and Barbara, I'll arrange one for us.'

'Alright ... let's savour the fire for now.'

'Sounds good to me.' Ed allowed Janice to nestle into him, welcoming her closeness, though wondering how he was ever going to tell her of his frequent nightly struggles. *Why do I have to have so many bad dreams? The good ones are so great.*





## Young Tommy

After a surprisingly restful night, Ed decided to enjoy an early morning browse through the latest Lancet magazine. An article on sleep apnoea grabbed his attention until a knock at the door caused him to jump. His knee knocked the coffee table, causing some of the dark liquid to spill from the mug.

‘Alright I’m coming! No need to wake the dead!’ *If that’s the postman, I’ll give him a piece of my mind.*

A very dishevelled, unshaven Ron Stafford stood at the door. ‘I’m sorry, Doctor Newman, but you have to come quick!’ He spoke, struggling for breath. ‘It’s Tommy—he hasn’t woken up!’

Ed hurriedly took his jacket from the hook and grabbed his medical bag. ‘Is he ill?’

‘He was okay when he went to bed. We were on a dream bounce last night and he was alright there too, but he just didn’t wake up when we did.’

‘C’mon, we’ll take the car.’

‘Sit down on the chair by his bed, Doctor,’ Judy Stafford said as she twisted a handkerchief in her hands. ‘Would you like a cup of tea?’

‘I’m fine, thank you.’ Ed gave her a half-smile. ‘Please, call me Ed.’

‘Yes, of course, sorry, we’re so stressed.’

Ed nodded and then turned to check the young boy’s pulse. He lifted Tommy’s eyelids. ‘He’s in a deep sleep. Has he taken anything, have you given him any medication?’

'No. It's like I said, there weren't nothing wrong with him.' Ron's face contorted.

'Please make him wake up.' Judy wept.

'I'll stay till he's fully alert, Judy. It shouldn't be long now. What was the year of the dream?'

'1945,' Ron said. 'Tommy seemed very excited about it, but I'm at a loss as to know why. It was a young girl's birthday party. Not his cup-o'-tea at all.'

'Did anything unusual happen?'

'No. It was just like any other.' Judy kissed her son's forehead. 'If anything, I'd have thought he would have woken up before us.' She laid her hand on his arm.

\* \* \*

### *The previous evening*

Tommy ran to a table of men in the corner of the room. 'What year is it, Dad?'

Ron Stafford lowered the newspaper just enough to peer over the top. '1945.'

'What's the actual date?'

'June 12th!'

'Yes!' *I can't believe it—just what I wanted.*

Ron Stafford shook his head and smiled back at him.

Tommy moved away, feeling for the four sleeping pills in the pocket of his best jacket. To his relief they were still there, wrapped in a tissue. *Good job I clutched them in me pjs.*

He took a tumbler, filled it with juice and then downed one of them. He whispered, 'Thanks, Grandad, I know you won't miss a few.' *He'll thank me anyway when he knows what I used them for. Then he'll sleep better.* He grabbed a jam sandwich.

Focusing on a young girl surrounded by other young girls, all of whom could easily be mistaken for jumping beans, Tommy walked over to them.

‘Lucy, open my present first,’ one of the girls shouted.

‘You’re all spoiling me,’ she yelled back.

He tapped one of the girls on the shoulder.

‘How old is Lucy?’

‘How come you don’t know?’

‘Just tell me!’

‘Ten!’

Tommy could tell that everyone had brought what they could to make it the best day ever for the beaming girl. Each time she opened a present Lucy squealed with delight—some were wrapped in plain brown paper and most of them were hand-made. Tommy couldn’t help but think he would quite like his next birthday to be filled with presents his friends and family had taken time to craft, just for him.

With his impatience rising he looked at his watch, knowing he had no choice other than to wait for all the other bouncers to wake-up and be gone. Then he could find out what had happened to Harry. *Wouldn’t it be great if he was here then I wouldn’t have to leave the church.* His heart thumped at the thought of doing what no one had done before—the other bouncers had only dare take a peak.

“What if it changes things?” some had said. “Why spoil a good time?” others had urged.

*But I’ve wanted to find out about Harry ever since the first time Grandad told me about him.*

‘Too much of a risk to do anything about it,’ his mum had said. ‘Can’t risk changing history,’ his dad had reiterated. But when he saw the last of the bouncers leaving he walked over to a huddle of women in the far corner.

'Excuse me, me name's Tommy and I was wondering if you know of a boy called Harry, who comes from round here? He was orphaned during the war. You know, when the atomic bomb went off.'

The women visibly shuddered before him.

'Well, there were lots of kids who suffered that fate, son. By the way, me name's Mrs Humphries, pleased to meet you.'

'I'm Glenda. I helped in the Brompton Hospital. I may have seen him.' She paused to think more about it. 'Daisy might know.' Glenda called her over.

Daisy had the sort of face that just cheered you up. 'Yes, I do remember a Harry ... Harry, oh what was his name? Harry Butcher? Yes, I'm sure that was it ... he said he was nearly six. Would he be the one you're looking for?'

'What happened to him?'

'Family down Ovington Square took him in temporary like. But I think he's still there. Why do you want to know?'

'Oh, I just heard about him and thought I could help, somehow. Where's Ovington Square?'

'Keep going left from here and you won't go far wrong, Tommy.'

'Thank you, you've been really helpful.'

Tommy made his way towards the outside door. He looked over his shoulder to be totally sure none of the other bouncers were still around. All clear.

The women from the party were busily tidying everything away, whilst the children played. His heart fluttered. *C'mon, Tommy, don't go losing your nerve now.* He rubbed his clammy hands down the front of his trousers. The door creaked open and he slipped out.

He ran onto the Brompton Road, turned left and headed for the next left, like Daisy had said. Not

far to go now. A ford car passed him. *That's just like the one in the museum! There's not so many shops and restaurants around.*

His head began to feel light. He put his hand to his stomach as he fought back a bout of nausea. *Maybe this wasn't such a good idea after all. But what about Harry?*

At that moment Tommy's legs felt like there was lead in them. It was all he could do to drag them along. *Oh man! I'll have to try and go back to the church. I can't move! What have I done? I'm so sorry, Harry! Why's everything turning blurry, or is it my eyes? There's something wrong with my eyes?*

'Help! Can someone help me?' The noise coming from his mouth was as if it were coming from inside a bubble.

\* \* \*

Judy's hand, still resting on Tommy's arm, squeezed it gently. 'I think he's trying to wake up.'

'But why's he struggling?' Ron slipped to his knees beside Tommy's bed.

'I'll give him a mild stimulant, if that's alright with you both.'

'If you think it'll help, Ed, please do.' Ron looked at his wife for reassurance.

Judy nodded her head, vigorously. She sniffled into her handkerchief. 'Why do good times always have to turn sour?'

\* \* \*

'You alright, son? Let's get ya on ya feet.'

Tommy heard a young male's voice coming through the thick, shimmering air.

He tried to stand up but his whole body felt like a dead weight, 'I ... juuust ... need tooo geet ... tooo ... St. Peeter's churrch.'

'What for? Is your mum there?'

'Yees...yees...sheee iis.' *It's nooot a totaaal lie.*

'Okay, son, but I think you need an ambulance. I'll get you to your mum, then I'll run to the phone box up the Brompton Road.'

As Tommy drifted off to sleep he felt himself being lifted up and carried along at a fast pace.

\* \* \*

'He's beginning to respond,' Ed stood over the boy. 'Tommy, Tommy can you hear me?'

'Please don't let the ambulance take me!'

Tommy opened his eyes, leaving the teenage lad scratching his head. 'I thought I was going to be stuck there forever. I'll never do that again. I promise!'

Ed took the remaining three pills Tommy held out to him, 'What are these?'

'Sleeping pills.'

'Where did you get them?'

'Out of Grandad's cupboard.'

'I'll speak to you later, son,' his dad said.

'What happened, Tommy? And why did you need to use them?' Ed asked.

After Tommy had explained his reasons Ed spoke to the family, 'I can only conclude that none of you must ever leave the church, the dream obviously doesn't extend any further. We still don't really know what we're dealing with here.'

## *Investigation*

The display on Ed's mobile showed 8:00 pm 2049.

'Janice.' Ed kept his voice low, 'Look at this.'

'Wow! I knew we were in the future.'

People were seated upon large square cushions, placed in the form of a circle that Ed estimated to be about eight metres across. The audience's eyes were focused on a hologram advertisement for "the latest in lighting for your home".

'It's like the holograms in the Star Wars movies you like so much,' Ed whispered into Janice's ear.

'It's so beautiful ... mesmerising,' Janice said, her eyes transfixed on the inner circle as the main performance started. 'It reminds me a little of "A Midsummer Night's Dream".

'Yes, and the scenery's so real. It doesn't look at all projected.'

'The trees and grass look like they belong here!'

'I'm gonna call it an "on-set movie". I just need to take a look at the blower box to make sure I'll be able to remove the cover from this side.'

'Okay,' Janice kept her eyes focused on the performance.

Ed returned to Janice and sat down beside her as they both witnessed a man get up and walk into the scene. The actors didn't appear to mind or indeed take any notice of the intruder.

'That's Fred Watts,' Ed said.

They watched Fred bend down and break off a

piece from one of the plants and take it back to where he was sitting. Conscious of his mouth being as wide open as Janice's was, he didn't want the well-loved, revamped epic to come to an end. When it did the room erupted in a standing ovation. Ed put his arm around Janice as they enjoyed the excitement buzzing around them, whilst he noticed some of the audience disappearing.

'Thanks, Ed, for bringing me here.' Janice said before she vanished from his embrace. For a moment he just stood there. The next thing he knew he was back at the surgery. Almost forgetting the wires attached to him, he sat up, disconnected himself and hurtled to his girlfriend's room.

'Janice, slow down, honey, let me relieve you of these wires.' Ed hugged her. 'I'm so glad you've seen what it's like...' *I really have fallen for this wonderful woman.*

'I'm such a fool. I should have taken some photos with my mobile.' Ed could have kicked himself.

'I took some with mine! You were too preoccupied with what you needed to do to take any notice.'

'Brilliant! Show me!'

But all they could see was a blank screen.

'Don't be too disappointed, Janice. We know what we saw. You go and tell Sally, I'll make us both a coffee.' *Then I'll have to come clean about my obsession with dreams—I can't leave it any longer.*

'I don't quite know what to say, Eddie.' Janice twizzled strands of her long hair between her fingers.

'I understand how you feel.' *What woman would want to be saddled with a man who not only struggles to have an unbroken night's sleep, but actively encourages it?* 'I do intend to beat it, though.'



'You shouldn't feel so bad. There must be a lot of people out there with loads of different problems. And you obviously see a lot of it in your profession.'

'Yeh.' Ed gently brushed a piece of stray hair from her face. *If only I could help myself.*

Let's just take it as it comes, eh?'

'Good idea.' *At least she's still willing to give it a go.*

'For now, I've decided to observe a dream from the main church side, like you suggested. We've proved it's possible to take a mobile, so it must be possible to take anything else we'll need.'

'Yes. I'll put a screwdriver in my pocket and hang onto it just to be sure. You'll need to stay at the control desk with Sally until the traces show the dream has bounced. Then you'll need to go to the curator's house which is just down the road from the church. I'll show it to you before-hand. You'll need a screwdriver too and your climbing gear, of course.

'First, we'll try to contact each other by taking the safety covers off the blower box but, if we can't see enough through there, you'll need to climb the base pipes. I know this hasn't been an easy decision for you to make, Janice. I wasn't sure you would agree to it at all. I really do appreciate it and, I have to say, you've got real guts.'

'Don't make me blush! I've been wondering though, why we can't just look through the gap like Ron Stafford did.'

'It's very small and you can only look straight across. You wouldn't really be able to see much from there.'

'I've got one condition, Eddie ... you must let me dream bounce again!'

'I've nothing against that. I want to do it again myself, just for the pleasure of it, but what I really

need to do is find out what's causing it.'

'I think we're in for some great fun.'

'Me too! And I guess we could really make a difference to some more people's lives. Let me show you what traces to look out for, then *both* you and Sally will know.'

Ed thought of Sally and her mother and how difficult it must have been for Margaret Rawlings to agree to Sally helping him, though he'd felt her warm to him when he suggested he was determined to help "put things right". 'Not sure that you or anybody else can mind you,' she had said.

\* \* \*

Janice and Sally didn't move a muscle, their eyes fixed on Eddie and the traces.

'It's time for me to go.' Janice embraced Sally as she felt the adrenalin rushing through her veins.

'You take care now, you hear.'

'I will. Please look after Eddie for me, Sal.'

Janice left the practice to a cloudy, moonless sky. She stayed in the shadows away from the lamplights. *A lone figure on a mission. Janice, who on earth do you think you are!*

She broke into a jog and, fifteen minutes later, tapped on Old Ben's door. With no response, she rapped a bit harder. As she raised her hand to ring the bell Janice heard movement, and then grumbling coming from within. The door opened just enough to reveal the man's tired looking face.

Janice spoke in hushed tones, 'I'm so sorry to disturb you at this late hour but I need to get into the church and pray. My boyfriend—'

'Alrigh', alrigh' yer don't need ter explain, love. Yer just take care now. Shall I fetch the vicar fer yer?'

'No, there's no need for that. I just feel like I need to be in the church.'

'Well, if yer change yer mind I'm right 'ere. Put the keys back through the letter-box when yer're done, but take yer time now.'

Janice detected a trace of sympathy in his eyes in contrast to the moans she'd heard before. 'Thank you so much. I *really am* grateful.'

She turned the large key in the lock and pushed the heavy door partly open before squeezing through. She left the key on the inside.

\* \* \*

After two nights of sleeping in the clinic's room number one, Ed found himself back at St Peter's. He made straight for the blower box, not taking any notice of what was going on around him, and peered at the Noah window through the small gap. The blower box cover was easy to remove. He would have to wait for the other side to be taken off. *Be patient Ed, Janice needs time to get here.*

It was then he realised how unusually quiet the room was. A chill ran down the centre of his spine as a sense of foreboding filtered through the air and entered his brain. *Get a grip Ed!*

He looked over his shoulder to take a glimpse at what the other bouncers were totally absorbed in, and to reassure himself he wasn't alone. He could just make out they were sewing.

'Hey, sorry to disturb you, but what year's this?' He shouted to them.

'1941,' Trevor yelled back. 'And it might not stay this quiet for too long,' he warned.

Palpitating, he turned back to look through the blower box again. Janice still wasn't there. He

wondered whether he would be able to see her through the fan belts when the cover had been removed. He waited. *I've been here twenty-two minutes. Plenty of time for her to have jogged from the clinic and collect the keys, unless she's had trouble rousing Old Ben ... what was that?*

He looked through the slight gap again until he thought his eyes would pop out of their sockets. The cover on the church side shifted to one side. He breathed a sigh of relief. 'Janice! I knew you'd make it.'

Ed watched as the cover disappeared. *Is that Janice's head?* He called her name again. *Why can't she hear me?* Then there was nothing. *Where is she?*

He climbed the ladder and shouted to her again. It was as though he could feel her and sense her anxiety. *I know she's there.* Relief smothered him again as he thought he could see her through the gap between the fat pipes but he still got no response. *Am I just imagining it because I want it so much?* He remembered Ron Stafford saying that it was a bit hazy when he looked through to the church, so he shouldn't be too surprised that he couldn't see her very well. He wondered if she could detect anything of him.

All of a sudden, a strange feeling came over him, like he was on the edge of time itself. *Tommy, on his quest to find Harry, must have reached time's edge in the opposite direction.*

A piercing noise penetrated the muted atmosphere, interrupting his thoughts. *Was that the sound of air-raid sirens?* He turned around and saw the other dream bouncers 'disappear' simultaneously while the people who belonged to the dream bounce time left the building, donning their gas masks. One or two of the people had spotted him and were yelling to him above the tumult, 'What are you doing up there?'

Get out!

The earth shattering sound of bombs reached Ed. Very quickly they seemed to draw nearer and nearer. The screwdriver slipped. He just managed to stop it from falling to the ground. *I must warn Janice before I wake up. But why haven't I yet?*

Ed shielded his eyes against the most dazzling light he'd ever seen as he felt himself being thrown into oblivion.



## *Where's Eddie?*

Janice entered the church eighteen minutes after the traces had changed. It was 2.14 am. She tried to rid herself of the creepy feeling crawling through her body. *Don't be silly Janice ... you're just not used to being in a church in the dead of night on your own.* Her fear remained.

With her heart thumping like a hare's back legs on parched ground, which forced her to wonder if it was about to jump right out of her chest, she approached the wire grill. She barely managed to place a pen light in her mouth and remove the blower box cover. 'Are you there Eddie?' Her voice rasped. Nothing but deathly silence returned.

Although she was fairly sure that Eddie had removed the cover from his side, Janice struggled to see anything through the small chink.

*He must be there; he surely hasn't woken up already.* Her mind raced as she strained her eyes and ears for any sign of life. *Where is everybody?*

She gave up trying to look; she didn't believe they were going to see each other, certainly not clearly enough, anyway. *I need to cut those two belts that drive the blower, and then I could squeeze through to get a better look. To heck with being done for vandalism!*

It remained unnervingly quiet. Shining her light into the darkness still revealed nothing. Donning her special rubber foot wear and climbing gloves she hoped she'd get a better view from higher up. She hooked a leather strap between her feet adjusting it to

the correct length. Grateful for the rubber material she'd sewn onto the inside thighs of her trousers, she climbed the large pipe the same way you would a coconut tree, knowing her time at the top would be limited. She needed Eddie to be there right now.

With her body trembling and streams of perspiration running down the middle of her front and back, she called out, 'Eddie ... Ed, where are you? Please answer me!' But again, only stillness surrounded her.

*What was that?* She thought she could hear a faint scratching noise. *Please don't let it be mice ... or rats! Calm down—you know they can't harm you.* Pointing her light in the direction of the sound, she almost lost her grip at what she saw. *Surely, this can't be real!*

Every nerve and fibre of her being told her something was dreadfully wrong. A ghostly screwdriver, just like the one Eddie had taken with him, hovered in mid-air as it scratched a message on one of the wooden panels. 'Oh Eddie, where are you my love? I can feel you, but I can't see you.'

She squinted in an effort to read the message, which had suddenly become covered in grime and cobwebs. Some of the lettering wasn't very clear but there was no mistaking what it said:

The Blitz Love you  
Eddie X

*This is what we'd feared. I'm only seeing what's here, right now, and Eddie can only see what's around him. We're on the edge of two separate time zones. Eddie wrote that message just over seventy years ago!*

Tears ran uncontrollably down Janice's cheeks



as the lactic acid in her muscles forced her to slide slowly back down the pipe. Halfway to the ground a massive explosion blew her and most of the organ into the middle of the church. Bits of organ pipe scattered at obscure angles.

As the dust began to settle Janice, fighting back the disorientation that threatened to overcome her, scrambled from the rubble. She ran her hands over her aching body thanking God she knew how to fall and that she'd been thrown away from the largest pieces of fallen masonry. Her hand rested on her throbbing left leg. Cutting some material from her old t-shirt she bound it around the injury before any trace of blood could be left behind.

Janice pushed aside the strange feeling inside her head, allowing thoughts of Eddie to take prominence in her mind. *Was he safely back at the clinic or was he trapped in The Blitz? Could he have actually died?*

She knew she had to get back to Sally before anyone saw her. Eddie just had to be there. To her surprise and relief the church door miraculously still stood. She extracted the keys, limped to Old Ben's house and placed them in the porch, trying not to make a sound. Hearing his panicked voice coming from behind the door she assumed he was talking to the vicar, or the police.

Preparing for the worst, her progress slower than normal due to her pulsating leg, she kept to the shadows. The searing sounds of the emergency services reached her ears. She feared she'd be spotted by people being roused from their beds. A caterwaul made her jump. Sheer panic and adrenalin spurred her on.

Within a half-hour of the blast she shouted to Sally as soon as she'd shut the front door behind her.

'Janice, come here. Quickly!'

Janice limped up the stairs, 'I need to see Eddie!' Trance-like her gaze homed in on the empty bed. 'Where is he?' she screamed. Almost on her knees she approached the loose cap. 'We're in the wrong room!' She turned round to go into one of the other testing rooms.

'Janice, stop! I'm so sorry, but Eddie just disappeared.' Sally looked at her watch. 'The traces stopped twenty-nine minutes ago and when I looked over to Ed, he was gone. I searched the building but I knew he wasn't here. There was nothing else I could do. You need to sit down.'

'What if he's still under the rubble?' Janice said, her whole body shuddering, causing the chair to wobble.

'What rubble?'

'The church ... it was The Blitz ... Sally, there was a bomb ... I ... I just hoped Eddie was still here,' she wailed. 'I'll have to go back and see if they find him.' Janice stood up feeling her body sway. 'Normally, everyone stays in their bed, so why isn't he here? He must be at the church.'

Sally gently helped her back into the chair. 'I'll fetch you some water. Please stay there.'

'Okay,' she croaked, nodding her head slowly.

'Did you see anything of Eddie?' Sally handed her a half-filled glass.

Janice grasped it, anxious that she might drop it. The water sloshed. 'No, no ... I didn't, but ... there was this ... message.' Janice, still struggling, told Sally about the etching in the wood.

'But the bomb was dropped back in the war. How could it possibly have happened here and now?'

'I ... I ... don't know what to say, Sally. I'm so sorry. I really don't know any more than you do. I just

heard all the sirens and wondered what had happened. We've been meddling with stuff we don't understand and it seems that we're facing the consequences, now.'

'But we mustn't assume Eddie's dead. Perhaps he's still alive somewhere.'

'But where? And even if that's true, he still could've been seriously injured, couldn't he?'

'Well, yes, but let's not think the worst, not yet, anyway. If he's hurt then he'll probably come back when he's better. Let me see to your leg first, and then we'll listen to the news. If they find him, we can go together but mustn't arouse any suspicion. I'll fetch the first-aid kit and the radio from the kitchen.'

As Janice told Sally what she could, Sally attended to her injuries. 'So, you see, I don't know where Eddie really is or whether we'll ever see him again. He could be lying, unconscious somewhere which could be the reason why he's not here.'

'And, what about the others? Eddie won't have been the only one from 2014 who was there in the church, would he? What do you think has happened to them?' Janice asked, knowing her friend was unable to answer. 'Oh Sal, what are we to do?'

'I really don't know. None of us, not even Ed, have understood what's going on. You've had a real shock, Janice. We both have. Let me fetch you something to calm you down.'

'I *don't* want to sleep, Eddie might come back. Do *you* think he'll come back? I shouldn't have agreed to it. It's all *my* fault.'

Sally came back with a pill. 'This won't make you sleep. It'll just calm your nerves and we both know Ed would have found some other way of investigating what he needed to know, if we hadn't helped him.'

'Yes, you're right. But we can't just sit here can we?'

'I don't see what else we can do at the moment ... save hope and pray he's safe somewhere and we'll see him again.'

Janice felt a modicum of comfort in Sally's arm around her shoulders.

'I don't know whether I need to go back to the church or stay here.'

'Look, I need to get a needle and surgical thread from my emergency kit at home to see to that leg of yours properly, before you even think of going anywhere. I knew I should have brought it with me.'

'We must try not to worry. If they mention that anyone's been found, then we can find out what hospital they've taken him to. Chelsea and Westminster hospital, where I work, is the most likely.'

'How could things have gone so terribly wrong? I thought only good things happened, things that *help* people.'

'Hang on a minute, Janice, listen, there's a news flash.'

A woman's voice came over the radio, 'Reports are just coming in that there's been an explosion at St Peter's Church on the Brompton Road in Knightsbridge, South West London. Residents in the vicinity were brought out of their beds and out onto the streets at the terrifying sound of the blast. All emergency services arrived at this horrific scene minutes after.'

'No one appears to have been hurt. No bodies have been found but fire-fighters are still making their final search through the resulting debris. Police would like to speak to a young girl in connection with the blast, which is believed to have been a bomb. She requested permission to enter the church around 2.30

am to pray for her boyfriend. A number will be given out after this broadcast for you to give any information you may have.

'Terrorism has not been ruled out, although no one would have been expected to be in the church at the time of the explosion. However, there's speculation the bomb should have gone off at a time when people would have been in the church. The overriding question is why? Stay tuned, we'll keep you updated as more news arrives.'

'We need to stay put for the time being. We can't have the police asking questions. At least there's no evidence of Ed being there. Except that we know he was. I guess the etching must have been destroyed.'

Janice agreed with Sally that they should try and contact the other bouncers, who must have been there last night. *Surely Eddie would've been seen?*

'Thank you, Sally, thank you for being here. I don't know what I'd do without you. We'll have to tell everyone Eddie's gone away, that he got a last minute cancellation for a medical conference.'

'If we need more time, we'll just have to say he's unwell.'

'I really hope we don't need more time,' Janice paused and began to weep again. 'But if we do I'll extend my time-off.' All she wanted to do was stay here, right in this room, to wait for Eddie to reappear on the empty bed.

'You know I'll do anything I can to help. I could take a few days off too.'

'Thank you, but what about his family? If he doesn't come back, they'll hate us for not telling them straight away. We can't lie to them. It's just not right!'

'If he's not back tonight, we'll have to explain everything to them and then it'll be their decision

about what to do. But without a body, there can't be a death can there?'

'I suppose not.' Janice's head hurt.

'You need to go and have a lie down; then we'll try and think of something. I'll fetch that needle and thread and something for breakfast. When I get back, I'll make the necessary phone calls. You can stay in this room. Use the camp bed Ed's got for a parent who needs to be with their child, I'll make it up for you.'

'Please don't take long, Sally.'

'I'll whizz there and back on my bike. You'll hardly notice I'm gone.'

Janice counted the stitches as Sally sewed the gash in her leg. She reached the number five.

'That was the last one, you'll be glad to know,' Sally said. 'What are we going to do about Barbara and Julie? Can they be trusted if we tell them what's happened?'

'Eddie trusts them and that's good enough for me.'

'What about the cleaner?'

'I've never met her. I think she comes and goes before anyone else is around.'

'I'll get Barbara to talk to her, and keep her off this floor for the time being.'

Janice lay down again but couldn't settle. Her mind replayed the nightmare over and over. When sleep did come, it was short.

At 6.08 am Janice got up. She couldn't stand the tossing and turning any longer. She went over to the empty bed and rubbed her hands underneath the duvet, willing Ed to be there. She recalled when they'd first met at the engagement party of her best friend, and the fact that they'd never really got to the bottom

of whether or not there was a bit of match-making going on.

Sobs racked through her whole body. She sank to the floor. *This man really must mean a lot to me—it can't just be my usual case of hearing wedding bells too soon.*

Barely conscience of Sally coming over to her, she heard her friend say, 'I know it's hard for you, Janice. We'll sort this out together ... I promise. I've been slipping out to listen to the news and make some phone calls. They've not found a body. Ed *can't* be dead, Janice. He must be stuck sometime in 1940 or 41.'

'What else have you found out, did anyone see Eddie?'

'Come and sit down. I've made you a cup of tea.' Sally pulled a chair over to sit opposite her. 'When the bouncers arrived at St Peter's, they got stuck in right away helping members of the Women's Institute repair some of the community's clothing. Some of the men found it a bit tricky. They had to endure a crash course in sewing.

'The bouncers said there were lots of clothes, material, some cottons and scissors all over the place. But, as it turned out, it was the shortest trip of them all. The women who were already there scattered some of their clothes and sewing materials in their rush to get to the air raid shelters, when the sirens went off about thirty minutes into the dream.

'George and Jean saw Ed, so did Ron and Judy and Tommy ... others saw him, too, over by the blower box with a screwdriver in his hand. They said it was the whistling sound of the bomb that had made them wake up, obviously not knowing the bomb was about to drop right on top of them till they found themselves in their beds with the emergency sirens

ringing in their ears. No one has been injured. So we can only hope that Ed hasn't been either.'

'I still don't get how the bomb dropped now, in 2014!'

'Did we ever get how we could be in the past or the future when we went to bed at night? Anything could have happened and now it seems it has. Though, none of us could have foreseen this.'



## *Charlie Sykes*

The following morning, Janice took the newspaper from Eddie's secretary as soon as she entered the room. 'Thanks, Barbara.'

'How're you coping, love?'

Janice fought back her emotion.

'Thanks for calling me. You know, I'll do anything I can to help; in and out of work hours.'

Sally joined them.

Let me give you both a big hug,' the older woman held her arms open wide.

Like a flood, Janice's tears ran freely down her face. Sally's followed.

'It's alright. We'll sort this out together, don't you worry,' Barbara said with a wobble in her voice.

Janice turned her head at the sound of the heavy front door closing.

'Hi, I went to a great party last night,' Julie shouted to the world.

'We're up here, Julie,' Barbara shouted down the stairs.

'How did you get on ...' Julie stopped in the doorway to the room. 'What's happened? Where's Ed?'

Barbara explained the situation to her. Then she gently took the newspaper back off Janice, 'I'll give it back to you as soon as I've read the report to Sally and Julie.'

Janice nodded.

'The caretaker, known as Old Ben, raised the alarm. He informed the police that a young lady had

been in the church but no questions were ever asked, as praying is a private affair. However, the vicar is always available.

‘It was an exceptionally dark night and, coupled with his failing eyesight, he told them he couldn’t really get a good look at her. He also told the police that she was wearing a woolly hat, so he couldn’t see what colour hair she had, but was able to describe her as being of about medium height and of slight build.

‘He said it could have been anyone. All he could say was that he didn’t think she was a regular attendee at the church, and then he complained she’d left the keys in his porch, rather than posting them through his letter box like he’d instructed her to. He said she must have left before the bomb went off.

‘It says a police dog was sent into the rubble and it spent some time sniffing around the organ area, convincing officers there must be somebody there. Although, nothing was found—no body, dead or alive—confirming the girl had obviously left before the explosion.

‘It goes on to say the vicar is completely grief-stricken. He’s offering to pray with anyone who needs him to, either at the vicarage or in their homes. It finishes with the fact that the police have broadcast their wish to question the woman who entered the church that night, in order to enable them to eliminate her from their enquiries.’

‘Thank goodness there’s no mention of people spending time at the church behind the organ. Old Ben and the vicar mustn’t have said anything,’ Janice said as they all looked at one another, filled with a tangible relief.

‘You can be sure if they did say anything, it’d be all over the papers and on the news,’ Barbara said.

‘So you think it’s probably safe to say the police won’t come around here?’ Sally asked.

‘They’ll question those who live near the church and everyone involved knows not to say anything. So there’s no reason they should is there?’ Barbara gave them all a reassuring smile.

‘But what if Old Ben and the Vicar do decide to say something?’ Janice wasn’t so convinced she’d got away with it. ‘Do you think I should give myself up so they can eliminate me?’

‘That’s a bad idea, Janice,’ Julie said. ‘The police will only come snooping around.’

‘We’ll just have to deal with whatever comes our way, when, and if, it comes.’ Barbara said.

‘But they won’t want a whole bunch of reporters and police hanging around the church, will they? The church can be restored with no unused space to worry about, I suppose; no more “goings on”.’ Sally indicated the inverted commas with her fingers.

‘I’ll be in the control room if you need me; I need to ring mum again. I can keep an eye on this room from there.’

‘I’m sorry, Sally, you should be with her. She must be really worried.’

‘It’s alright. She understands we need to find out what’s happened to Ed ... I had to tell her to explain why I need to stay. I’ve promised to ring her regularly. I’ll give her a call now.’

‘We’ll be downstairs if you need us,’ Barbara took Julie by the arm and left the room.

Janice allowed her head to fall. *What’re we to do?* Everything seemed impossible. She wanted to lie where Eddie had lain but daren’t. More than that, she wanted to lie beside him with his ring upon her finger.

Sally came back into the room. ‘Mum’s fine. I

rang my gran, who's lived round here all her life. She told me she was in the church that very night, sewing with the other women. She remembers others joining them. Can you believe that?'

'So she may have seen Eddie?' Janice wasn't sure whether this filled her with hope or dread.

'Yes, only she wouldn't have known him, of course.'

'What does she remember about that night?'

'Well, she said that a bright light lit up the church as the bomb descended. She and another woman saw it as they were scrambling down a nearby shelter. Blinding, she said it was. But nobody else took any real notice of them afterwards, as it seems it was only the two of them who'd witnessed it.'

'Has your gran never mentioned this before?'

'No. She said no one has ever really believed them.'

'I'm sure Eddie won't mind me telling you now—he was going to share this with everyone in a day or two. There're reported accounts, which tell stories of "gatecrashers" that correlate with the recent dreams.'

Sally's mouth fell open, 'Wow!'

'The light may have been something to do with the time warp. I really felt Eddie was there but that doesn't tell us where he is now, does it?' She felt the tiny piece of hope she'd had slipping away from her.

'It could be connected with Ed's disappearance though, couldn't it? It could be why he didn't get back.'

'But the others came back, so why didn't Eddie? It doesn't make sense, does it?'

'I know, but he wasn't in the same part of the hall, was he? The light and his position in the hall could be the reason.'

Janice sighed, 'Did you ask her if she knew who rebuilt the church?'

'Yes. The firm, evidently, folded a long time ago. Although, gran said she fancied one of them rotten! Says if we find him to let her know!'

Janice managed a small smile, reminiscent of the Mona Lisa. 'Does she remember his name?'

'Charlie ... Charlie Sykes, if her memory serves her well, she said. Started up a building firm of his own. Oh, and she also said the church's restoration was completed in 1947 and has stayed the same ever since.'

'We must try and track him down.' Janice felt another glimmer of hope rise within her.

'He'll be around eighty-one years old ...' Sally tailed off.

'I know what you were about to say – if he's still alive.' *Please let him be.*

'Let's get onto it. We need to find his last known address. You never know, he may never have moved.'

Janice mustered all the energy she had left. 'Okay, it might help to unfuddle my brain.'

9.30 the following morning found Sally arriving at the house she hoped Charlie Sykes still lived in. At the very least, if he'd left, she hoped the present inhabitants would know where he was now. *What if he's in an old people's home? With a failing memory!*

Willing herself to think positive thoughts she raised her hand to the doorbell. *I'll know soon enough.* The door opened as far as the chain on the inside would allow.

'Do I know you, love?' a wavering voice came from an elderly looking gentleman. She could just see part of his reddish-coloured face, long nose and

whiskered chin as he peered through the opening at her.

‘No, but I think I know who you are, Mr Sykes.’  
*I’ve got nothing to lose.*

‘That’s the trouble these days. Everyone knows everyone else’s business.’ Charlie Sykes pushed the door towards her.

‘Look, I really am sorry to bother you, but I need your help ... *please* ... it won’t take a moment.’ Sally knew she sounded quite frantic but couldn’t stop herself.

‘You look like a nice young lady, you’d best tell me just what is it that you think I can help you with?’

‘My name’s Sally. I’m researching the war and the effect it had in the area. The bomb that landed on St Peter’s—’

‘I thought the war was long gone ... now people like you will be dragging it all up again—’

‘I’m sorry, I don’t want to cause you any distress, but I really do need your help. It’s a matter of life and death.’ *Oh dear I’ve probably gone too far and really scared him off now.*

The door closed. Sally turned to go. *I’ll have to find someone who knows him and come back with them. Maybe gran would—*

She turned her head as she heard the chain on the door jangle. The door opened wide.

‘You are in a bit of a state, love, you’d best come in. I’ll tell you what I can, but I’m just an old man now, as you can see.’

Sally explained she needed to know if the damage that had been caused last night was the same as the damage caused in 1941. ‘I need to know so that I can write an accurate report.’

‘I’m a bit curious, meself, I have to admit.’

‘Would you allow me to drive you to the church

Mr Sykes? Now?’

‘Let’s get it over and done with then. Call me Charlie.’

‘We can only view it from a distance.’

‘That’s just as well, love. You couldn’t get close back then either.’

‘Charlie ... was the destruction anything like this in 1941?’

‘Young lady, it sends shivers up and down me spine. As I remember it, the damage you see now is exactly the same as when I saw it as a young boy. It sure is eerie. I can’t believe what I’m seeing. It’s as if it’s The Blitz all over again.’

Sally noticed the poor man had lost some of his ruddy complexion, so she tightened her hold on his arm. ‘Thank you, Charlie.’

He dabbed the moisture from his eyes.

‘Let’s get you home. I’ll make you some hot, sweet tea.’

‘Okay. And you’re welcome to come and visit anytime you know. It’s nice to have a bit of company.’

‘I *will* come to see you again, Charlie, I promise.’





