

The Ring

by Matthew Ellen

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Susan woke restlessly. It was still dark, but she'd had a troubling dream. So much anger and noise. There was violence, the images seemed painful, but they were fading from her mind. She walked downstairs to her kitchen and drew a glass of water from the tap.

"It must be stress," she thought to herself, taking a mouthful.

Life was often stressful for Susan. Her job as an archaeologist, always with the university breathing down her neck to produce findings. Publish publish publish! That's all she heard. Then there was all the bureaucracy of getting permission to dig and the time limits and the hangers on hoping for slices of the prestige.

Of course, some of them deserved it, the postgrads especially. But the senior members of staff whose names always had to go on everything that went to press. They were riding the gravy train to their graves.

Susan tried to think happy thoughts to calm herself after the bad dream. She really needed to get some sleep. For a moment she wished Alex were there to comfort her. Then she didn't. Too much complication for that to be calming. She threw the remainder of the water down the sink and walked back up stairs.

As she lay back down in bed, she thought she saw something in the mirror across the room. Must be her mind playing tricks. She lay there for a few minutes, fighting the urge to think about work. Thankfully sleep took her back and her worries departed until morning.

Her day at university started with coffee in the staff canteen. She was browsing the local paper. Nothing of consequence presented itself, which is what she wanted. The calming thought that nothing was worth worrying about. A colleague approached her table and sat down.

"Hi, Monica," Susan greeted her with a smile.

"Hiya, Sooz," replied Monica. "How are you this morning?"

"Ugh. I've been better. I had a terrible night's sleep."

"Alex again?"

"No, just a really disturbing dream," she sighed.

"At least it's sunny this morning, eh?" Monica tried to cheer her friend up. "Everyone's still buzzing about our dig. I can hardly believe the haul we got."

"Yeah. For once all our hard work paid off," she said grimly. "No doubt Kevin will try to lay claim some how."

"Professor's rights, eh? Don't feel bad, though, he wouldn't steal from you if you weren't really good!"

"You're always so full of bright sides, Mon," Susan smiled. "I'm just in a real man hating mood today."

"All hail Queen Misandry!" The two of them chuckled. They got up and crossed the hall together, leaving the canteen, and wandered back to their department.

The archaeology lab was abuzz with students, earning course credit by cataloguing the finds. Some were even getting to work with the carbon dating instruments. The undergrads felt like Christmas had come early. It was the most surprisingly well preserved haul of Iron Age artefacts the university had ever excavated. The local press were coming by to interview Susan and her boss Kevin later on.

As Susan and Monica entered the lab, all eyes turned to them. "Dr. Rider!" "Dr. Kenyatta!" voices chorused around the room as eager students vied for attention.

"Well, Dr. Kenyatta," said Susan, "we'd best get to it." They started moving among the students, answering their queries and looking at the finds.

A few minutes later Monica piped up "be careful with the finds, the bones especially. Things seem to have become more fragile since we've moved them from the dig site. Also, please, please, don't mix up the strata!"

The team in the lab were working like a well oiled machine. Time seemed to fly by, and information started to pile up. By half eleven they were about half way through the artefacts. Susan looked up at the clock and walked over to Monica.

"Hiya," she smiled. "Can you cope here without me? I've got that interview to deal with."

"No problem. Let me know how it goes!"

Susan turned to leave the lab. She thought she saw someone in the corner of her vision, but when she turned her head no one was there. She shrugged it off as a trick of the light and carried on walking. The corridor was empty, and silent. No noise from the adjoining rooms or the lab behind her. Susan didn't notice at first, but the further down the corridor she went, the colder the air seemed to get. A shiver ran up her arms and down her spine. Then, all of a sudden, the noise came back and the warmth returned to her body.

"I need more sleep," she said out loud.

Susan got to her office and sat at her desk. She started to go through the papers on her desk, looking for her notes for the interview. "Gah!" she thought. "I really need to tidy up." She came across a photo of her and Alex. She'd been meaning to put it in a frame for weeks now. She tucked it back under the papers on the desk. She eventually found the sheet of paper she'd been looking for and stood up. There was a small mirror mounted in the corner of her office, she went over to make sure she looked presentable and adjust her make-up. She saw her face and saw there were tears down her cheeks.

"It's not that bad," she said to herself and started looking through her purse for a tissue. When she looked back up, the tears were gone. "I'll be glad when today is over." She said aloud.

"Things not going well?" A voice came out of nowhere. Susan shuddered internally.

"Things are fine, Kevin. I'm just not looking forward to dumbing things down for the general public."

"Well, come along, the quicker we get there, the sooner it'll be over." The older man tapped on his watch. "The interview is in the faculty room, are you ready now?"

"Yes. Lets get this over with."

They walked back down the corridor. Kevin held the door for her as they got to the faculty room. The reporter was already there, set up with Dictaphone, notepad and cup of tea. The reporter, "Hello, I'm Dennis McBride from the Local Echo," looked in his late fifties. He was wearing a tweed

jacket, white shirt and dark, patterned tie. He was sweating a little in the warmth of the sun coming through the windows. As the doctor and professor approached, he stood up and extended his hand. Kevin shook it, as did Susan. They both wiped the unwanted sweat off their palms.

“Good morning, Mr. McBride,” Kevin said as he sat down. “I’m professor Bowyer, this is my colleague doctor Rider, who was in charge of the dig.”

“Good morning,” said Susan.

“Right, that’s great. Do you mind if I record the interview? It saves a lot of note taking.”

“That’s fine,” Kevin replied. McBride switched the Dictaphone on.

“Let’s start with the easier questions. So, professor Bowyer, how long have you been at the university?”

“I’ve been here for about ten years now. I transferred from Hull, and previously UCL.”

“Great, great. And you doctor Rider?”

“I’ve also been here ten years, from undergrad through to this post-doctoral rôle.”

“OK, and what are you professor of, professor?”

“I’m dean of archaeological studies.”

“And yourself, doctor?”

“I am an archaeological research fellow.”

“OK.” Dennis shifted his mass into a more comfortable position. He flicked his notebook to the page with questions.

“Professor Bowyer, what led to choosing the site? What made you think that it would be full of archaeological treasures?”

“My associate and I have done a lot of research regarding the local area. It is of course one of our main concerns as an archaeological department. This is why I chose Susan for the post of fellow of local archaeology.” He paused for a moment, to collect his thoughts. “Indications were good when what looked like the tip of a Roman sword was handed to us by a member of the public. I sent out a small team to do a cursory survey of the site. They recovered several artefacts of interest, which seemingly worked their way up to the surface as foot fall wore the soil away.”

“Liar!” thought Susan, “I had to fight you tooth and nail to get any interest in the site.” She seethed silently, keeping a smile on her face as her struggle was consigned to the void of unrecorded history.

“Once it was clear that there was something of interest, we applied for funding for a geophysical survey of the site. That survey showed what looked, by shape, to be an Iron Age Celtic settlement. At that point I felt compelled to commission a proper dig, and find out what was really there.”

“Great, thanks professor.” Dennis crossed something off his notepad. “What do you think of the protest of some of the locals, regarding the dig?”

“We went through the requisite permissions process. They lodged their concerns with the council, but they were thought not to be substantive.” He said, dismissively.

“And yourself, doctor, what did you think to the complaints that you were desecrating a place of pagan significance?”

Susan shifted in her seat, sitting up a little straighter. "We take the concerns of the community seriously. Nobody could produce documented proof of the spiritual significance of the ley lines that we were reportedly digging through. I don't wish to offend, but we can't let mysticism hold science back. Most of the community is glad that we received permission."

"And what of the curse the mystics group said would befall you if you continued?"

"Poppycock." said Kevin.

"Curses only work if you believe in them," said Susan.

"Sorry, I have to ask," Dennis said in contrition. "So, doctor Rider, describe to me how the dig went."

Susan and Monica were stood at the pristine dig site, with a group of postgrads behind them, filling out paperwork before they could commence. They had a week to get their work done, the local council did not want the large public space off limits for too long. They directed the digger carefully remove the turf and take topsoil off the three initial dig sites. The geophysics had highlighted these spots as most likely to contain interesting finds.

A crowd had gathered around the barrier marking the full site. The postgrads, glad for something to do while they waited for the earth to open up, were fielding questions from the members of the public. Others helped finishing setting up the tent where equipment and finds would be stored. Susan saw a problem on the horizon, some VW campervans were on their way over.

"Great," she muttered. She tapped Monica on the shoulder and pointed.

"Ha!" Monica exclaimed. "This should be fun. Can't they be graceful in defeat?"

The campervans pulled up as they approached the site. The crowd at the barrier turned to look at what was going on. Several people got out. They were all dressed in flowing tie-dyed clothes, carrying protest standards. A leader emerged from the within the small group, carrying a loud hailer.

"Cease your desecration of our holy grounds!" His voice came through the speaker in a bellow. The crowd started booing him. "Get lost!" "Go smoke some spliffs!" "Get out of it you crazy weirdos!" the crowd jeered at them.

"You don't understand!" Came the voice. "This land hasn't been dug, farmed or built on for nearly two thousand years. It's kept itself preserved. Breaking this seal will have dire consequences."

"Where are you going?" Monica ask. Susan was walking towards the barrier, in the direction of the protesters. As she crossed the barrier the crowd let up a cheer. Clearly some of them were looking forward to a show.

Susan approached the leader. As she got close she could see he was old, still strong, but his face was gnarled. His hair was a mass of curls and he had a long unkempt beard. "Hello," she said. "I'm doctor Rider, I'm in charge of the dig." She extended her hand.

He looked her up and down. He ignored her hand. "People call me Tree Beard."

"Tree Beard?" said Dennis, somewhat surprised. "That name's got crackpot written all over it."

"I went there to placate him, calm him down. I didn't want to come back the next day to find that our work had been vandalised," Susan explained. "He said his group weren't the violent type, so I

went back to the dig, feeling a bit less threatened.”

“Were there any more problems from the protesters?” Dennis asked.

“Not as far as I know. There were some accidents on the site, but nothing linked to the protesters.”

“Fair enough,” he continued. “What were the highlights of the dig?”

The first pit was going well. Several items had been uncovered in the Iron Age strata. The undergrads were diligently scraping away at the earth, correctly storing everything that looked interesting. It seems they had hit upon the main dwelling of a settlement. They found crockery, scorched areas from cookery, a few trinkets. Oddly, they also found a grave in the middle of the room. In the grave they found a complete female skeleton and some belongings. It was a great boon for the dig, especially for the student who had come upon it.

Two other structures had been found at the site. One seemed to be some sort of animal house, judging by the size and bones found there, and the other was a small iron foundry and smithing building, at the opposite end of the settlement to the house. It was clear the inhabitants of the settlement had been quite advanced for the time. By the end of the fourth day, most of the three buildings had been mapped out and the artefacts had been put into buckets. Even the protesters had become interested. Despite still carrying the placards, they were watching intently all the discoveries and listening to the explanations that the students were sharing.

Susan was tired, but in her element. She'd never been so lucky as to find such a well preserved homestead as this. She couldn't recall a time when anyone had, for Iron Age Britain. This was just what she needed after the trouble she'd been having with Alex. Their last parting had been particularly unpleasant.

She was loading up the land rover for its daily trip to the archaeology lab, to take the artefacts to be processed and catalogued. There was so much stuff, it would take forever to analyse it all. She'd be writing papers on this find for months, years maybe! The body of the girl was strangest of all. She'd been sure to get plenty of pictures of it in the state it was found in. She had definitely been buried, but not in the traditional ways normally observed by Iron Age Britons. It was as if her buriers had been in a rush and just did the best they could at the spur of the moment.

“We're doing pretty good, eh, Sooz.” Monica came up behind her beaming like a kid in a sweet shop. “Sites are never normally this well maintained.”

“Maybe the protesters are right, Mon, maybe the site hasn't ever been developed since this settlement was first built. It seems really unlikely, but it would explain things.”

“Perhaps. I bet there's a paper in that alone!”

“Didn't something happen to the gent who found the skeleton?” Dennis asked.

“Oh, yes, the poor student tripped down some stairs and broke his leg. I've seen him at the hospital, he's making a good recovery,” explained Susan.

“Yes,” interrupted Kevin. “We're obviously taking this into account for his course work and exams.”

“Right, professor, I was more interested in how this relates to the curse.”

“One accident, or even a hundred accidents, doesn't prove there's a curse, Mr. McBride,” Susan said assertively.

“So you're not worried, then?”

“Not in the least.”

“Is the skeleton definitely from the same period? Are you sure it's not a recent burial?”

“We've carbon dated it and it's definitely Iron Age, from the beginning of the Roman invasion.”

“OK. That's great. I think I've got enough for a story. Thanks very much for your time.” Dennis stood up and gathered his belongings into his satchel. “I'll be sure to let you know when the paper comes out.” He smiled at the pair of them. Kevin and Susan got up and walked him to the exit.

“I'm glad that's over. Reporters always make me feel like I need to justify my work.” Susan said, as she and Kevin were walking back through the department building.

“Yes, they don't see us as purveyors of knowledge, more keepers of secrets and a waste of money. Quite disappointing, really.”

“Time for lunch, I think,” Susan said.

“All right. I think I'll join you. I'd like to hear how things are going. We're getting a lot of publicity from our work here. Good publicity too.”

“Great, I'll just get Monica and see you in the canteen?” Susan cringed internally, she felt like she was going to implode.

“See you there,” agreed Kevin and walked off.

Susan turned the opposite way and walked towards the lab. When she got there it seemed oddly quiet. There should have been noises of busy students. She entered the room to find it empty. She fished her mobile from her pocket to call Monica and realised it was still off from before the interview. She let it slowly load up. As it finally came to life, she saw that she had voicemail.

“Hi Sooz, it's Monica. The weirdest thing happened. Two concussions, at the same time. Things were going smoothly after you left, people were working their little hearts out, then these two guys, at opposite ends of the room, picked up some samples and started to walk them wherever and, simultaneously, tripped and whacked their heads on the bench tops, literally at the same time. It was the weirdest thing. I'm at the hospital now. Call me when you get this.”

Susan called Monica. “Hi, Sooz, you get my message?”

“Yeah, about the two concussed students? Are you still at the hospital? I'll come get you.”

“OK, thanks. They just woke up a few minutes ago, but they'll be kept in over night for observation.”

Susan drove out to the hospital and met Monica in reception.

“You alright, Mon?” She enquired.

“Yeah, a bit weirded out, but otherwise I'm good.” She gave Susan a weak smile.

“Who were the two who got hurt?”

“Simon Jones and Chris Smith. Two undergrads.”

"Do their parents know?"

"Yeah, I got the university to call them once we got here."

As they turned to leave, they bumped into Dennis McBride. "Care to comment, doctor Rider?"

"On what, Mr. McBride?"

"The curse. Three accidents now. Can you still call it a coincidence?"

"Yes. Yes I can," Susan said indignantly. "Stop being so insensitive about these boys' traumas."

"Well, I'll see what they have to say."

"Give them time to rest, at least, Dennis, they've just come out of concussion," Susan reprimanded him.

She was about to give him a mouthful about how the press don't respect people, when her mobile rang. She looked down at it. Alex. She paused for a moment and then cancelled the call. When she looked up McBride was already on his way. She groaned in frustration.

"Let it go," said Monica, soothingly. "Who was calling?"

"Guess."

"Ah, best left ignored."

"Exactly. Shall we go?"

Back on campus word had spread about the accidents, and rumours of a curse were rife, especially in the archaeology department. Monica gave a lecture on palaeolithic tools to undergrads in the afternoon. The theatre air was thick with gossip. She had to call her students to order on more than one occasion. At the end one student put up her hand and asked "Is it true there is a curse on the people who worked on the Iron Age dig site?"

"No, curses aren't real."

"Is it true that Dr. Rider's condemned us all?"

"No, child, that's a ridiculous idea." Monica's patronising tone deflated the room's buoyant rumour mill. "Goddamned hippies," she said under her breath.

Susan had gone back to analysing the site finds after their visit to the hospital. The students were steering clear of the lab since the rumours started.

"Damn that reporter," she cursed. "This will take forever." Susan carried on pouring over the various things still left to be dealt with. She was organising them into priorities, so that she and Monica could get to work writing things up and leave the less interesting thing until later. Publish or perish, as Kevin was wont to say. She worked straight through until five o'clock when Monica popped her head around the door.

"Hey! You ready to knock off? I'm done lecturing for the day."

"I guess. It's all sorted into priorities and I've started writing up some of it. This stupid curse nonsense has really taken the wind out of my sails."

"Yeah, stupid hippies. Lets get down to the pub and put the world to rights!"

"Stupid reporter, more like. I bet he's in league with those weird protesters. Yeah, a pint sounds great right now."

The two of them walked down to the local, The Kings Head. Monica got them a table and Susan got the round in. They both took long draws and slumped back in their seats.

"Today went from great to crap in the space of an hour. I can't believe it."

"These things happen." Monica tried to sooth her friend's frustration. "It'll be brighter in the morning, I'm sure."

"So long as I get a good night's sleep. I'm knackered. Anyway, anything fun happen in the lecture theatre?"

"Nah, other than trying to quash the rumour mill. Our students will believe anything. I thought they were meant to be smart! They're impressionable like clay."

"I can't believe there weren't any foolhardy undergrads trying to prove their cool, studying in the jinxed lab." Susan did air quotes.

"If they knew the number of accidents that routinely happen on campus, I'm sure it would put it in perspective. Or they'd stop turning up completely. Either way, I have to do less work!"

The two of them finished their drinks. "Would you like to get something to eat here?" asked Susan.

"Sorry, I'm fully booked this evening. I'm being cooked dinner, don't you know!"

"Oh really! Leroy must really like you," Susan smiled.

"Well, we'll see how it tastes," Monica chuckled. "But yeah, the boy's alright."

"I'd best get back and feed Mr. Tibbles. He gets grouchy when I'm late."

They walked out of the pub, arm in arm, and walked back to the campus car park.

"Leroy's picking me up from here in a few minutes. No need to wait."

Susan nodded and hugged her friend. She wandered over to her car and got in. It was oddly cool in the car. Susan looked up to her rear view mirror and adjusted it to suit, then she had that feeling from the night before, when she thought she'd seen something in the bedroom mirror. She turned around quickly, to see what was on the back seat, but it was just a pile of papers. Slightly perturbed, she pulled out of the car park, waving at Monica as she left. The drive home was uneventful, but after parking the car on the road and walking to the gate, she saw someone at her door. Alex.

"What are you doing here?" She called at him. "I don't want to see you."

Alex was a little taller than average, but with an average build. He was dressed in his suit. He must have come straight from work. His shoulder-length blond locks blew in the breeze.

"I want to explain," he said, pleadingly. "I'm sorry about Tuesday night. It won't happen again."

"Damn right it won't. Get going."

He started walking down the path, but stopped in front of Susan. "Sue, please, it was a mistake. I never meant to hurt you."

"I'm not ready to forgive you yet. If you want to earn my forgiveness, show restraint. Wait for me to call you."

"Come on babe, is this necessary?" He held her wrist in his hand.

"Yes!" Susan raised her voice. "No means No! I had to force you off me." She shook her hand free.

"If you can't understand that, then we're done."

Alex grabbed at her again, holding her wrists. "Please!" He tried to pull her closer. Susan resisted. There was a moment of confusion, Alex's legs went out from under him and he landed on his behind. Susan stepped around him and walked to her door.

"Don't make me call the police," she said flatly to Alex. She went inside. Susan dropped her belongings down and collapsed on to the sofa. She buried her face in a cushion as she began to sob. "This isn't how things should be", she told herself. A few moments later she sat up, took a few calming breaths, got up and went to the kitchen. She clicked the kettle on and put a tea bag in a teacup. While the tea was brewing she went up stairs and got into some comfy clothes. Back down stairs, with the tea made and the TV on, Susan settled down. All of a sudden a cat jumped up on her lap.

"Mr. Tibbles!" Susan smiled, stroking her pet. "You need feeding, don't you?"

Susan got up and went back into the kitchen. As she was reaching up to the cupboard with the cat food, she thought she heard a voice call her name.

"Hello? Is anyone there?" She called out. A shuffling noise came from behind the bin. Mr. Tibbles popped his head out. Susan put the cat food down for him to eat and walked over to the kitchen window. As she peered into the garden, a face appeared in the glass. She turned around with a jump, but no one else was in the kitchen. Turning back to the window she looked hard at where she thought she'd seen the face. Nothing. She decided to go into the garden and see if anything looked like a face. As she grabbed the handle, Mr. Tibbles let out an almighty yowl. Turning quickly, Susan saw the cat food fly across the kitchen.

"What on earth?" She said, in a whisper. She bent down to comfort Mr. Tibbles. He calmed down at her touch. Susan poured another bowl of cat food and cleared up the mess. Sitting back down on the sofa she started flicking through the channels. She stopped on the local news.

"Reports today of three injuries, seemingly coincidental, but all linked by the recent archaeological dig in the old pasture at the edge of Chipping Sodbury. Bath University states categorically that the events are purely accidents. Some locals, however, believe that the archaeology department has been cursed for desecrating sacred ground. Many students refuse to access the archaeology lab for fear of what will become of them. Philipa Fosdine is at the Royal United Hospital talking to the injured students. Phi--"

Susan switched it off in a huff. "Why is the general public so stupid?" She said, angrily. Now in a mood with the world in general, she decided to run herself a bath. Once the bath was filled, she sunk herself into its relaxing vapours. Slowly she drifted off into a gentle doze. As she drifted further, she started to dream.

The sun was shining in a sparsely clouded sky. The air was crisp on the mid-spring morning. A gentle breeze blew through the grass. Petiacus was in the village forge, smelting the ore into iron. The chief had procured some more ore after trading with miners from the east. He wanted Petiacus to smith his daughter a ring, as she was coming of age, so it was a time for celebration. Petiacus argued with Chief Doccus, saying the ore should be put to use making weapons and tools. Weapons especially since the overseas invaders were organising not far from the village.

Docius had agreed, but said that a small ring would not deplete the reserves substantially. Petiacus acquiesced, Docius was chief after all. The man's muscles rippled as sweat ran across them while he worked the bloom into wrought iron.

Susan came to, feeling quite relaxed, glad that her dream had not been of violence or rage. She'd seen quite enough of that today. She got out of the bath, dried herself and got into her pyjamas. When she was back in her kitchen, Susan sorted out her microwave meal for one. She remembered about Monica and hoped she was enjoying dinner with Leroy.

After dinner she felt like she should have an early night. The events of the day had tired her out and she was still shaken from her encounter with Alex. She took an archaeology paper guaranteed to soporify her up to her bed. As she was settling in, Mr. Tibbles came and sat beside her. After a few minutes of reading she started to feel the pull of her eyelids. Putting the paper down, she turned off the light and let sleep take her.

Susan seemed to have been searching for hours in these woods for the last deserter. She stopped for a moment, getting her bearings and listening for clues. There! To her left. A twig snapped. She ran in the direction of the noise.

"You can't hide, Sergius. I know you're here." She shouted. She stumbled forward, reeling from a blow by an unseen assailant. She turned quickly, drawing her sword. "Finally. You should come quietly, it'll be easier on you."

Susan saw her opponent. A Roman soldier, tall with long dark hair. He had a tree branch club as a weapon. He ran at her. She braced herself. At the last moment, she pivoted on her right foot and let the brute pass by. Turning around, she saw his back exposed. She took a chance, but Sergius turned and deflected her sword with the branch.

"Ha! and they made you commander, Falernus?" jeered Sergius. His jibe was ill timed, as Susan took a swing and sliced a hole in his shirt sleeve. Sergius jumped back, startled. He checked his arm for blood, but none was present. Suddenly his legs came out from under him. He found Susan's foot on his chest, her sword at his throat.

"Surrender and I will take you back to be judged by the Tribunus." Susan tried to reason with him. "You can't win here."

Sergius saw a moment of weakness and took it. He grabbed Susan's ankle with both hands and push it away. Susan stumbled backwards and prepared for more. Secretly she smiled to herself. She had wanted to kill this bastard for weeks now for the trouble he'd put her squad to. "So be it," she said as she charged him down.

Her first blow glanced off his leather armour. He swung at her, but she ducked and swung her sword upward, slicing his lower arm. She barged into his chest with her shoulder and shoved him into a tree. Sergius's club dropped from his hand as he stood winded for a moment, slightly dazed. Susan thrust hard with the point of her blade, piercing the armour. Sergius let out an almighty yell,

falling forward as she yanked the sword back out. Susan kicked him onto his back and plunged her sword through his throat.

Leaving Sergius to bleed to death or drown in his own blood, she started digging his grave

Waking from her violent dream, Susan felt oddly refreshed despite being a little disturbed. She hopped out of bed for a quick shower, got dressed and went down stairs to make breakfast. While the kettle was heating up, Mr. Tibbles was winding himself through her legs. "I know what you want," she said to him, affectionately. She reached up and pulled out some cat food, emptied it into his bowl and refilled his water. "If only all men were as easy to understand as you," she said, reaching down to stroke Mr. Tibbles. As she looked up she saw her reflection in the kitchen window. For a moment, it didn't look like her, darker hair, face not quite as elongated and a button nose. She blinked and looked again. She stared back at herself. Susan went out into the garden, the Autumn air was fresh on her face. "Hello?" she called. No answer came. Susan took a cursory glance around the small space. Mostly patio with a border of flowerbeds. Nowhere for a stranger to hide. Slightly puzzled, Susan went back into the kitchen. As the door clicked shut she suddenly remembered her dream. It gave her a strong impulse to investigate the wooded area not far from the pasture where she had been working last week.

"How would I convince Kevin, though," She thought to herself. "Oh, by the way I dreamt about another possible site? Ha."

After breakfast she made ready for work and set off into the terror of Bath morning traffic. Sitting at the exit to her road for ten minutes, Susan formulated a plan. She would need the help of Monica. And possibly some students. She rubbed her hands together like a particularly nefarious villain. She would have her way, oh yes!

When she arrived at the campus, she dropped off her stuff in her office and marched down to the lab. To her surprise there were several students in the lab working on processing the remaining finds from the dig. Monica was sat in the corner talking to a student. Once they were finished, Susan wondered over to ask where they'd come from.

"Well, after the kerfuffle that McBride raised, and the local news broadcasting from the hospital, the students' Society of Atheists got a bit annoyed and the ones who are taking archaeology agreed to come in and help. Apparently they can't stand to see nonsense holding back science!"

"Amazing! Maybe there is hope for humanity." Susan paused for a moment. "Mon," She started.

"Yes?" Monica replied in a sceptical tone.

"I need to do geophysics over a part of the wooded area near the dig site."

"Why, what have you found?"

"That's the problem. I've only got a hunch to go on, but I think there is a Roman soldier buried there."

"A hunch? Based on what?"

"Ah, well, just between you and me... I had a dream."

"A dream, Sooz? Come on! After all this ranting about superstition? A Dream?!" Monica was taken

aback. Susan never listened to dreams, let alone trying to conduct a dig based on one.

"I know. It sounds crazy, but it wouldn't be a large area, just a few square metres. I feel so certain about this."

"Did something happen last night, Sooz? This isn't like you."

"This has nothing to do with Alex. I am just so certain of this, and I can't explain why."

"What happened with Alex? Why would I think it would have anything to do with him?"

"Oh. Right. He was at my house last night. We had a fight, it got physical, he landed on his arse, I went indoors and cried. No big deal. The dream is unrelated."

"OK. And what was the dream?"

"I was a Roman commander fighting a deserter. I killed him with a sword and buried his body in the wooded area near the dig site."

"Unrelated you say? Catharsis, more like. Are you sure you're all right? Alex is a such a bastard. You should report him. I'm serious."

"Please Monica, I need your help to convince Kevin," Susan pleaded.

"No, Sooz. I won't get Kevin to spent department funds on something you dreamt about. This is totally unlike you. I really think you need to go home and get some rest. I'll tell Kevin you're ill. I'll come to the police station, if you like. We'd all be better off without Alex around. I can't support this dream theory though, that just doesn't make sense."

Susan froze for a moment. She felt like she was seeing herself from outside her own body. She snapped back, feeling a bit confused.

"Maybe you're right, Mon. This is really weird. It's not the only odd thing that's happened. Maybe I need a day to get my head together."

"Yeah. Go home. Read a book, watch a film. Just relax. I'll give you a call later and tell you about my dinner with Leroy, OK?"

"Oh Mon! I completely forgot to ask!" Susan felt so selfish.

"It's OK, you've had a rough night." Monica gave her a friendly smile and a hug. "I'll call you later, yeah?"

Susan nodded and made her way home. When she got back she sat down on her sofa. She went over what had been happening in her mind. Monica was right. This was totally out of character for her. The dreams, the voices, seeing the face in the window. Trying to get a dig approved based on a dream! This wasn't how Susan did things. "Why?" She thought. Nothing was getting any clearer and she still had a strong urge to examine the wood.

It was about lunch time, so she made a light meal and settled down to some midday telly. As she was watching a pointless talk show about stupid people making bad decisions the screen flickered, briefly showing a picture of a wood. Susan knew - it was The Wood, the one the Roman soldier was killed in. The picture went back to normal, just as the host said "You should go." Susan flicked channels. Each one was showing the picture of the wood. She turned off the television and tried the radio, some music to soothe her nerves. Every station she tuned to the presenter was talking about going. It was uncanny. Susan started to hyperventilate. She sat down on the sofa and passed out.

"Good morning, daughter," said Docius.

"Good morning, father," Lucilia replied. She handed him his breakfast.

"Thank you."

Lucilia sat next to her mother and tucked into her food.

As her father finished, he looked over to his daughter. "Do you know what day it is today, Lucilia?"

"Yes, father," she said solemnly.

"Yes. Today you come of age, like your cousin Searigis did last year. Do you know what that means?"

"I am an adult. You will start looking for a man to marry me to, so our house maybe become stronger."

"That is right! Don't look so sad. I will find you a fine man, in a great house. You are a beautiful woman, and you shall make a fine wife."

"Why doesn't Mini find a wife for Searigis? It's not fair. I want to be a warrior too!"

Docius laughed. "Oh child, women do not fight while there are men strong enough to do it for them. It would dishonour me to treat you that way." He leaned over to his daughter, arm outstretched. "I have something for you. I got the smith to make it. It is very valuable." He opened his hand and inside was an intricately patterned ring. It was tied to a leather thong. Lucilia took it. She looked at it for a few moments, in awe, studying it from all angles.

"Thank you father, it's most beautiful."

"It's nothing compared to you, my child."

Susan awoke feeling really tired. She checked the time. Apparently she'd been out for an hour. "This can't be good," she said to herself. She called her GP and got an appointment for a day's time. Not sure what to do with herself, Susan put on her coat and went out for a walk. She walked towards the town centre. Being around people seemed like a good idea right now.

The centre was full with people, as usual. Even though it was just entering the post-lunch lull, the streets were still packed to the brim with shopper, tourists and students. Halloween was coming up, so the shops were decorated with the usual jack-o-lantern, skeleton and witch garb. Susan thought it would be a good idea to pop into the sweet shop and get a selection for potential trick or treaters that could visit her house. The fresh air had cleared up her grogginess, and she was feeling better about how things were going. She decided to go back home, and warm back up. As she turned a corner she collided with an older lady, in her 70s or 80s.

"I am sorry," Susan apologised.

"No harm done," said the lady, as Susan helped her up. She looked up at Susan and froze to the spot. "You! You're cursed! Get away!"

Susan stared at her in disbelief. "What? Are you one of those crazy mystics that protested the dig?"

"I'm just an old lady. I can't help you. Leave me alone." She looked genuinely scared.

Susan let out an angry sigh and continued on her way. The old lady hurried away in the opposite direction. "Why are people so fucking crazy?" Susan muttered under her breath. Walking up the hill to her house calmed her down somewhat. She got in, hung up her coat and flopped onto the sofa. A moment later her phone rang. Monica came up on the screen.

"Hi! How are you feeling?"

Susan related her post lunch episode, and about the old lady.

"Oh no! Things are just getting weirder for you."

"Tell me about it. Actually, tell me something good. Tell me about your dinner with Leroy." Susan changed the subject to something less distressing.

"Oh, it was lovely. He's a good cook. He put out candles, we had some red wine. He'd made us some kind of roasted lamb with vegetables. It tasted so good. You know how I love my food. After the main course he brought out a cherry tart for dessert. It was heaven. After dinner we, uh, stayed up and talked for hours."

"Talked, eh? Are you sure that's all you did?"

"There might have been some slightly more amorous activities, but you know me, I like to take things slowly."

"Good for you. Don't let things get away from you. How are things going in the lab?"

"Oh, yeah, that's fine. We're most of the way through. The atheists had a really good work ethic. I guess they had something to prove. No more accidents. I told Kevin you were feeling ill, he seemed OK with that."

"Thanks. I hope the doctor can figure something out. I've never felt like this before."

"It'll be all right, chick. Alex is out of your life and you've got a career changing opportunity from this dig. You're on the up!"

"Yeah. Yeah! You're right. Things are going well. Once the stress of the last few days subsides, I'll be fine."

"Damn straight! I've got one more class before I knock off. Shall I come over tonight? I could bring a film and a bottle of red?"

"Maybe tomorrow? I've got the doctor's in the morning and I think sleep is the way to go right now."

"Sure, sounds good to me. Take it easy, Sooz."

"Thanks. You too."

Susan hung up and put her phone on the arm of the sofa. Mr. Tibbles came and sat up on her lap. He purred as she stroked him. He looked up from her lap, into the living room window. Something he saw made him yowl and dash into the kitchen. Susan looked after him.

"Mr. Tibbles?" She got up and followed him into the kitchen. "Mr. Tibbles?" She heard scraping behind the bin. "What's up baby? Why are you so scared? You've not got mummy's problems too, have you?" She reached down behind the bin, but he scratched at her hand. "OW! Damn it Mr.

Tibbles.” She pulled the bin away, but he dashed across the room. As she stood back up, she looked into the kitchen window and saw in the reflection a girl was stood behind her, the girl from the dream this afternoon. When she turned around no one was there. She felt something odd in her fingers, so she looked at her hand. There was a clump of cat fur in it.

“What is wrong with me? What is going on?” A look of utter confusion spread across Susan's face. She stumbled to her sofa and sat down, her mind rushing around, trying to figure it all out. “There's no such thing as curses,” she said to herself. She didn't feel convinced. She realised the time and went back to the kitchen to make Mr. Tibbles his dinner. She threw the clump of hair in the bin. Putting the food bowl on the floor, Susan called for her cat. “Right. Why would he come now?” Susan walked back into the living room and slumped onto the sofa. She started flicking through a magazine beside her. It was full of celebrity nonsense, real life stories and make-up tips. The emptiness of the stories comforted her somehow. Knowing that no matter how much money you had, you still did stupid things made her feel a little better. Susan fretted over Mr. Tibbles. She couldn't understand how she had pulled the hair out without even noticing. She looked through into the kitchen and saw Mr. Tibbles eating his food. “At least that's still normal,” she thought to herself. She flicked the TV on and started channel hopping. She remembered what happened last time and switched it off again. Her mind was so full of confusion and doubt she was on the verge of tears. The lights flickered. “What now?” Susan said in exasperation. She heard a voice “please help me.” “What? Who's there?” Susan called out, spinning around, trying to see someone in her house.

Suddenly Susan felt like she was in the wooded area where the Romans had fought, she shivered from the cold. The trees seemed younger. The ghostly apparition of a teenaged girl stood in front of her.

“I want what he has,” the girl said.

“Who are you? What is going on?”

“Come here. Do this for me.”

“Do what? Who has what? What is going on?”

The girl disappeared. Susan felt like she was running. Running as fast as she could. She looked up. She was crossing a field. She couldn't stop running. The feeling of exhaustion was strong, but the fear drove her on. She could hear the voice of a man behind her. She stumbled over a lump in the ground, she caught herself and kept going. She could feel herself slowing. Her body could only go so far. The sound of the man's feet catching up to her made her feel more scared than anything in her life. She felt a hand on her. She screamed in absolute despair, clutching her necklace.

Susan came to on the floor, clutching the neck of her jumper. Mr. Tibbles was in front of her, looking at her. She burst into tears. As she calmed down, she checked herself for injuries from her fall. She seemed to have avoided any furniture. A mirage of the wood flashed in her vision. She felt dizzy. She slurred a plea. “Please. Stop. I don't understand.” A knock came at the door. Susan was startled, she didn't know what to think. The knock came again. She struggled to her feet and stumbled to the door. She put the chain across and unlatched the door.

“Hello?” She croaked.

It had got dark outside. Her eyes took a moment to adjust. She heard a man's voice.

"Hello miss. I'm from next door. We heard some odd noises, I just thought I'd check that you're OK." The voice was kind and concerned.

"Oh. Thank you. There's no need really. I just fainted." Susan did vaguely recognise his face.

"Oh dear. That doesn't sound good. Are you sure you don't want me to take you to hospital? My name's Dave, by the way." He smiled at her through the small opening.

"Oh, hello. I'm Susan." Susan sounded as confused as she looked. "I'm not sure. I have an appointment with the doctor tomorrow. I'm sure I'll be fine until then." She tried to smile back. "Sorry, I'm not being very friendly. Perhaps in better circumstances."

"No problem," said Dave. "If you change your mind, I'm at number 53, on your left."

"OK. Thanks. Goodnight."

"Goodnight." Susan shut the door.

Susan shuffled over to the sofa and sat down. Mr. Tibbles brushed passed her legs, as if nothing had happened earlier. She screamed into a cushion, so as not to alert the neighbours. Not being able to think of anything to do Susan got ready for bed. She didn't know what time it was, but bed seemed like the safest place to be, physically if not mentally. Climbing the stairs seemed unduly arduous, the steps were twisting away in her vision. Slowly, step by step, she got to the top. She drew her curtains, avoiding looking in the windows or her mirror, got ready for bed and lay down between the sheets. Sleep was almost instant.

"Falernus!" The centurion yelled. "Pull your men into order."

Falernus cringed. His squad were always drawing the centurion's ire. "Sir! Men, attention!" He yelled at his squad.

"Do you know why your squad is in front of me, again, Falernus?"

"Sir, they were caught stealing supplies from the camp store."

"For this offence you shall all go without food for the next two days. When not on a mission you are confined to barracks. Dismissed commander."

"Yes, Sir. Men, fall out!"

The men marched back over to their tent. Falernus was clearly brimming with rage. Why had he been put in charge of such a motley crew? They were strong fighters, certainly, but they lacked the discipline of good soldiers. Stealing, plundering without permission, disobeying orders, being deliberately insubordinate. The list of charges kept growing. The main problem seemed to be Sergius. He was a ring leader of sorts. Falernus didn't understand what hold Sergius had over his men, but it was proving to be a drain on resources and his patience.

"Why do you persist in this dishonourable behaviour?" He directed his question at Sergius.

"Dishonourable?" Sergius seemed surprised. "What honour is there in this legion? In the whole of Rome? We invade and the state plunders. What is wrong with taking what we've earned?"

"We are here to civilise these savage lands. These are not yours to plunder wantonly."

"Savage? These people are farmers. They need us like a rich man needs charity. We've come here to conquer and what better way than to despoil the land and her inhabitants?"

"Whatever your opinions, you are a Roman soldier under my command. You will follow orders."

"Whatever you say, Falernus," Sergius said slyly.

"Listen up men," Falernus announced. "We're on early patrol tomorrow. We are expecting hostile activity from the natives. Get a good night's rest. You need to be strong tomorrow."

Falernus got one of his charges to dish out water for the squad. Unseen by his commander, Sergius put some ground henbane into Falernus' drink.

"I thought we were to go without food, commander." Sergius questioned Falernus.

"Just food, Sergius, dehydrating ourselves would be foolish. You're welcome to try, of course." Falernus chugged back his water.

"Certainly I would never accuse the Roman army of being foolish." Sergius's retort held a hint of sarcasm. The squad had surrounded the two of them, laughing and jeering.

"Watch your mouth, Sergius. Rome is mighty and right."

Sergius sneered, bowed low, saying "forgive me commander, I am humbled." Laughter erupted.

"You better be," said Falernus, his words started to slur. He sat on his bunk, feeling dizzy. "What's going on?" Sergius chuckled at the slurring. "What have you done Sergius?"

"Just lie down, commander. It's for the best. You need your rest for the early patrol."

Falernus fell backwards on to his bunk and passed out.

"Right," Sergius got the attention of his squad mates. "Listen to me. I'm quitting this crap hole. Their stupid rules about who gets what and who kills whom and when I can eat are pissing me off. Falernus is out for the night, maybe longer. Anyone who wants to come with me, meet me at the stores at dark. Bring empty packs."

The squad settled down, some of the men started to play dice games, others rested in their bunks. Sergius checked outside the opening to the tent for anyone who might notice, and then slipped away.

"I know who turned us in," Sergius muttered to himself. "Time for some pay back." He fingered a knife in his pouch. He slunk along, trying to look nonchalant, but very aware that the centurion could be anywhere, making his rounds. As he passed by the stores tent. While the guard was preoccupied he picked up some rope. "Just what I need." An unpleasant grin spread across his face. He snuck along the border of the camp, around to the tent where his quarry lay.

"Aniensis," Sergius hissed at the tent, in a horse whisper. "Aniensis." A head popped out of the tent.

"What do you want, Sergius?" he hissed back.

Sergius beckoned to his mark to come over. Aniensis to a furtive look around and jogged towards Sergius.

"Well?" Aniensis demanded, in a low voice.

"I have more herb if you've got the coin."

"Keep talking."

"I've hidden it in the wood outside the camp, so as not to get caught. Lets see the money before I take you to it."

Aniensis took a moment to walk to his tent, leaving Sergius skulking in the shadows. He was taking a big risk standing around. Anyone who saw him could raise the alarm. He was suspicious that Aniennis hadn't. Perhaps his addiction was curbing his senses. Aniennis returned, hastily.

"Lets see the money," demanded Sergius.

Aniensis got out a small pouch and showed Sergius the coins.

"Fine. Lets go."

"Lead the way," Aniennis gestured.

The two of them started walking away from the camp into the wooded area.

"I thought your squad were confined to barracks," Aniennis piped up.

"How did you hear about that? I didn't think the centurion announced his punishments."

"You know how rumours spread around the camp," Aniennis covered. It was true, when the soldiers were in a group they gossiped like excited canaries. Nothing stayed secret for long.

"Well, I have my means. You know me. I always find a way to get what I want."

The men walked on in silence for a while.

"Much further, is it?" Asked Aniennis.

"Not long now," said Sergius, looking for a good tree.

Suddenly Aniennis jumped at Sergius, from behind. Sergius heard him and turned just in time. He dodge the knife thrust and clubbed Aniennis on the back of the head with his fists. Aniennis went down like a sack of potatoes. He rolled over, dazed from the blow. A boot to the head knocked him out.

Sergius picked up the bulky body and put it over his shoulders. He carried on looking for a good tree. A gentle moan came from Aniennis. "This would have been easier if you'd just followed, Ani." Sergius tutted.

Heaving the body around for a few more minutes he spotted a tree suitable for his needs. Lumping the body down next to the tree, he then put Aniennis on his knees, pushing him back up against the tree. He gently lowered him to the floor, so as not to rouse him yet. He walk behind the tree and used the rope to bind his feet around the tree. Back around the front of the tree he tied the rope to his left hand and pulled him back up to the trunk of the tree, tying his hands together behind the trunk, finally securing the rope to his feet again.

Satisfied that Aniennis was secured he got out his penis and started to urinate on the man's face. He fumbled in his pouch pulling out his knife. Aniennis spluttered as he came to, the warm liquid trying to enter his mouth and nose.

"Blark?" he garbled. He closed his eyes to keep the piss from making them sting.

In one swift movement, Sergius lent forward and stabbed hard into Aniennis' adams apple. Blood spurted forth as he withdrew. "Much as I'd enjoy your screams, I don't want the camp to hear." He explained matter of factly. "I understand that you're the rat who got us put on lock down."

Aniensis shook his head vigorously.

“Really? I doubt you more than my source.” Sergius' face was emotionless. “Either way, it's too late now.” His urine depleted he walked over and smacked Aniensis' cheeks with his penis. “Ha!” he laughed. “You will be a lasting reminder to those who would think to betray me.” Sergius started to stroke his member. Aniensis was struggling against the rope, but the knots were good and tight, and the tree was strong. Sergius' penis became turgid. Excitement was building within him. “Oh yes! This will be good.” Soon he ejaculated into his hand, letting out a lustful satisfied sigh. “Are you hungry, Ani?” He taunted his victim. His hand slapped into Aniensis' mouth getting some of the liquid into his mouth, Sergius smothered the rest down Aniensis' neck and into the wound. Aniensis convulsed in pain, unable to scream.

“I am Roman,” said Sergius, matter of factly. “I am mighty. I am right.” He roared with laughter. He took his knife and ran it along the cheek of his victim.

“Please,” Aniensis tried to say, but only a rasp came out. “Don't kill me,” His rasp was barely intelligible.

“I can't hear you, Ani. Cat got your tongue?” Sergius chuckled as raspy sobs emanated from Aniensis. “Don't cry! Roman soldiers don't cry. Cheer up! You're my first man, you know? It's surprising how you're so similar to the women and children.” Sergius spat in Aniensis' face. He hooked his knife into Aniensis' right eye and yanked it out of its socket. Aniensis wailed in voiceless agony. “You won't see any more of the things you're not meant to,” he said as he did the same to the left eye. The eyes hung down by the nerves, resting on the tops of Aniensis' cheeks. He sliced through the nerves and put the eyes in his pouch. “It must be very dark for you now.” Aniensis had fainted. Sergius sighed. “This will make the next part much harder.” He looked at Aniensis' mouth, thoughtfully. “Maybe not.” He parted the mouth with his finger and pulled the tongue between the teeth. Holding the tongue in place with one hand, and the head still with the other, he heaved his knee with great force into the lower jaw. Aniensis's pain spasm thrust his head back so hard that he knock himself out on the tree. The end of his tongue fell to the floor as his head lolled forwards. Blood started tickling down his chin. “You know what, Ani,” Sergius said, in a friendly tone. “I've enjoyed our time together.” He hugged Aniensis' head, kissing the crown. “Maybe we'll meet again.” Sergius started walking back to camp as the sun dipped behind the horizon.

Four men were waiting at the camp stores. They were feeling quite exposed, despite being well concealed.

“He better show. I don't want to waste my time. If we get caught-”

“Shut up, Fabius,” growled Pomptinus. “Sergius will get here. Then we'll hear this great plan of his.”

The men cast shifty gazes around them, making sure of their invisibility. The torches lining the alleys formed by the tents were the only sources of light. The only way anyone would spot them were if they were to go around to the back of the stores tent. Any interloper would be face by four large men, they'd be lucky to get off an alarm shout, or so the men told each other. Two of the men went down with muffled yelps as someone pounced on them from the edge of the camp. Their assailant let them get up and they turned to face him.

"Sergius, you bastard, I should kill you," Pollius said in a threatening whisper.

The rest of the men turned to face him. His other victim, Paririus, just glowered at him. "What, no insults, Paririus? I'm disappointed."

"Why are we here, Sergius?" Paririus demanded.

"For supplies, of course!" Sergius shook his head. "You want to follow me? Well we'll need to eat until we find a village to take stock from."

"I mean, why are we following you?" He jerked his thumb behind him. "Pomptinus says you have a great plan."

"I do, I do. But for now we should get supplies and get out. We waste time with this needless chat." He looked over at Pomptinus. "Did you bring the rope and gag?"

"Yes, boss," he replied eagerly.

"Good, good. You four will go around the right of the tent. I'll go around the left and distract the guard. You grab him, gag him and bind him. Drag him into the tent, then we'll take our fill and get out without anyone noticing."

The men formed up and snuck to the front edge of the tent, just out of sight of the guard and waited for Sergius, as he made his way around the opposite side. He walked out in front of the guard, and stood there.

"Halt!" The guard raised his sword.

"Well done," said Sergius. "Very effective, telling a stopped man to halt."

"You're Sergius, aren't you? I've heard tell of you. You'll not get in here again."

"Well, you could be right. You've got a sword. I'm just an unarmed man." Silently Pomptinus crept up behind the guard.

"Don't make a move, I'll raise the alarm!" The guard threatened, a slight tense edge to his voice.

"Well, we can't have that." Sergius smiled. Pomptinus pounced, getting the gag around the guard's mouth. The other men quickly caught up and bound the guard. "Carry him into the tent." The men obeyed. Sergius sauntered in behind them. He pulled an apple from a barrel and took a bite.

"Mmm." He savoured the flavoured. "Falernus will have to wait two more days to enjoy such a thing." The thought stretched a grin across his face. He started filling his bag. "Hurry up!"

Once the men's bags were full, Paririus took a scouting look out of the tent. "It's clear." They filed out after Paririus, Sergius at the back. They walked towards the edge of the camp. When they were a decent distance from the encampment they stopped.

"Where now, Sergius? We can't just walk into the middle of nowhere." Pollius' voice was barely hiding a well of anger.

"We head south. I know of a village in that direction where we can obtain supplies." Sergius took the lead, looked up to the stars and started marching.

Back at the camp the centurion's rounds had taken him to Falernus's tent. He looked in to see the commander passed out and half his squad missing.

"Falernus!" he bellowed. The commander didn't move. The centurion shoved him. Nothing. "Get the medic," he shouted at one of the men. A few minutes later the medic came running in. "Do you have smelling salts, or anything that could induce a man to wake?"

"Yes sir," the medic hurried off to get the medicine.

A short while after the medic applied the stimulants, Falernus came around. The medic handed him a brine preparation. "Drink this," he said. "It will help you vomit up the poison." Falernus went outside the tent and did as he was told. After he had finished retching he came back inside, taking another glass of water from the medic. He drank long.

"Better?" asked the centurion.

Falernus looked up in surprise. "Yes, sir!"

"Where is Sergius?"

"I don't know, sir. The stores, perhaps? They'll be quite hungry by now."

"You," the centurion pointed at a soldier. "Go to the stores and see."

"Sir!" The soldier saluted and ran off.

"Right, Falernus, I doubt, even if Sergius did visit the stores, he will still be there. Organise what remains of your men and get out and find him."

"Yes, sir. Form up men." Falernus and his squad prepared to leave the camp.

Susan woke from her sleep. The dream had left her feeling violated. The things she'd seen. It was still dark outside. She got up and made herself a glass of water. She checked the clock in the kitchen. Four a.m. "Damn" she thought, "why can't I get a good night's sleep?" She went back up to bed and lay down. At least the room wasn't spinning around her. Her eyes remained open, despite the darkness. Still six hours before her doctor's appointment. "What am I going to do until then?" Mr. Tibbles had snuggled next to her. She was reluctant to touch him, considering what had happened before. His warmth was comforting. Slowly her mind stopped racing, her heart beat slowed to a normal pace, her eyes got heavy, and she drifted off to sleep again.

She woke as the sun, creeping through the hastily drawn curtains, fell on her eyelids. Still feeling groggy from the previous day's events, Susan made her way to the bathroom then down to the kitchen where she fixed herself some tea and set Mr. Tibbles food out. She stared out the window into her small garden, lost in thought. She started to worry what the day might hold for her. Was it safe to drive to the doctor, given the visions and fainting? She decided to find bus times.

Susan cleaned herself up and put on some make-up. Putting on her coat and picking up her purse she made her way outside and down the road to the bus stop. Thankfully the shelter had seats. At least if she fainted she's have less far to fall. Waiting a few minutes for the bus, Susan contemplated how things were going at the university. She really wanted to be writing up the dig findings. She made her way onto the bus and sat down. "So far so good," she thought. She had to take the bus to the edge of the town centre and then walk a few streets along to the surgery. The waiting room was full of people as she entered. She talked to the receptionist and took a seat to wait to be called.

Flicking through an old magazine while waiting, Susan thought she heard her name called, but as she looked up no one was there. Then the doctor appeared at the entrance to the reception.

"Susan Rider?" she said. Susan got up and walked to the door. As she got to the doctor's office she

asked, "did you have to call my name twice?"

"Oh, yes," the doctor replied. "Did you not hear me the first time?"

"Yes," said Susan, taking a seat. "It's why I'm here really."

"What seems to be the problem?"

"I've been seeing things and hearing things that aren't happening. Also, I've passed out a couple of times. Yesterday I accidentally tore some fur off my cat. I'm very worried, this has never happened before."

"How long have you had these symptoms?"

"Just for the last few days," Susan thought back. "It all started on Monday."

"I see, and you've not had these symptoms before?"

"No, as I say, this is the first time I've experienced this sort of thing."

"How much alcohol do you drink a day?"

"Oh. None normally. Maybe a couple of pints a week." She tried not to sound defensive. "The doctor's just doing her job," she reminded herself.

"Are you on any psychoactive medication?"

"Not unless someone's been spiking my drink!" Susan chuckled awkwardly. The doctor smiled thinly.

"Any other kind of medication?"

"I'm on the pill," Susan admitted.

"I think we should do some blood tests, to see if there is anything odd going on."

"Oh, is that really necessary?" Susan dread the thought of needles.

"I'm afraid so. Don't worry, the nurse is very good." The doctor tried to sound reassuring. "There's an appointment available in an hour, if that's suitable?"

"Oh, yes, that would be fine."

"If symptoms persist, I can sign you off work. It could just be a severe reaction to stress. We'll know more after the tests."

"OK, yes. I've had a lot of pressure at work recently."

"Make an appointment to see me again in a week. We'll have the test results back by then."

"Thank you." Susan got up.

"See you," said the doctor.

Susan went to the reception to make the appointments and left the surgery. She decided to wander around town until the nurse's appointment. Time seemed to pass slowly as she strolled the streets, lined with shops and packed with people going about their business. For a moment she started to feel normal. Then the memories of the past days came flooding back. She was filled with dread. She couldn't be sure of anything she saw or heard. Whatever was causing the hallucinations hadn't gone, it was just temporarily silenced. She couldn't fathom what would have triggered the episodes and that made it all the worse. The doubt. Not being able to trust her own judgement. It all seemed so arbitrary.

She decided to stop for a coffee and a small bite to eat. There was a little café a short way off. She went inside and put her coat on a chair. It was warm inside and smelled of roast coffee beans and chocolate. Susan ordered a latte and a slice of carrot cake. She sat down and tried to let each of the muscles in her body relax. With her elbows on the table she rested her head in her hands. The smells were making her feel better, but she was still troubled. Parts of the dream were flashing before her eyes. The empty eye sockets of the Roman soldier. The image stuck in her mind, the horror and torment of the soldier eating away at her.

"Here you go, madam," the waiter said, presenting her coffee to her.

Susan looked up. "Oh! Thank you." She smiled at him. As he walked off, she took a bite from her cake.

Blowing on the coffee to cool it, she inhaled the aroma. Susan was terrible at making coffee, so she relished the chance to enjoy a well made cup. She took a tentative sip. "Mmmm," she murmured. She focused on the moment, letting everything else slip from her mind and just relished the smells and tastes. For a few minutes she felt like herself again. Once the food and drink were gone she checked her watch. It was time to get back to the surgery. She stood, put her coat back on and walked out of the café.

Susan walked swiftly toward the surgery. She didn't want to be late, as much as she was apprehensive about the needle, she needed to find out what was wrong with her. Getting back to the surgery, she reported to the reception. The receptionist directed her to the nurse's room. As she waited outside to be called in, she felt her heart rate begin to rise.

"Susan Rider?" The nurse popped her head around the door.

"Uh. Yes." Susan got up and went through the door.

"Apparently we need to take a little blood to find out what's wrong with you, is that right?"

"Yes, the doctor wants to test my blood." Susan's voice wavered a little with nerves.

"Don't worry, love, it'll be over quickly." The nurse beamed a reassuring smile at Susan. "Roll up your sleeve for me."

Susan sat down and rolled up her left sleeve, to just past her elbow. The nurse approached with the needle. Susan felt herself become tense all over.

"Just relax, it's a lot easier if you're not tense."

Susan took some deep breaths. "OK, I'm ready." She let her left arm rest on the arm of the chair, but gripped hard to the right arm rest. The nurse expertly inserted the needle into her vein.

"Now, pump your left hand for me, love." Susan did as instructed and the blood flowed up into the needle. She noticed something in the corner of her eye. She turned her head to take a better look. For moment she saw the girl.

"All done," pronounced the nurse. She stuck a plaster over the needle hole. "You alright, love? You look like you've seen a ghost."

"Thank you," said Susan, hurriedly gathering her things and dashing out of the room. The ghost was two steps ahead, waiting in the reception area. Susan rushed through, not looking at it. Back on the street she headed quickly to the bus stop. She sat down and took a deep breath. The ghost didn't seem to be near by. The bus turned up soon after and took her back to her street. She walked quickly down to her house, ran up the short path to her door, fumbling with her keys. The door opened. She ran in. She closed the door.

Leaning back on the door, her head was hung as she caught her breath. Slowly she raised her head. Facing her was the ghost. She let out a short squeal of fright, pushing herself against the door. The ghost was just staring at her. She started to relax and looked at the ghost.

"Are you real?" Susan asked. "You must be an hallucination. There's no such thing as ghosts." The ghost looked puzzled, as if she were trying to understand Susan. The ghost stepped towards Susan. Susan braced herself. She felt a weird sensation as the ghost passed through her.

Susan awoke in an unfamiliar bed. She felt bruised all over and very disoriented. She sat up and took stock of her surroundings. Solid grey walls surrounded her. There was a small window above her bed and an immovable door in the wall opposite the bunk.

"Hello?" Susan called inquisitively. No response came. Susan sat back on the bunk. Time passed at an unknowable rate. Susan's watch appeared to be missing. After what seemed like forever she heard a sound like the door opening.

"Good morning, miss," the constable greeted her. "Are you able to talk today?"

"Yes," Susan replied in a puzzled tone. "Am I in a police station?"

"Definitely, miss."

"How did I get here?"

"Can you come this way, please miss?" The constable was being quite polite.

"Uh... OK." Susan was still very puzzled. She felt rested, though, which was a nice change. She rose from the bunk and followed the policeman to the processing desk.

"Good morning, miss," said the desk sergeant, as Susan approached. "She give you any trouble, Bob?" He looked over her head to the constable.

"None, Chris. Good as gold this morning."

"Good, good. Could you tell me your name, please miss?"

"Susan Rider. How did I get here?"

"In a police van, miss Rider. Can I have your address please?" Susan gave her address.

"What was I doing in a police van?"

"You really don't remember? You fought three male police officers last night. Not small men either. Ring any bells?"

"I what?" Susan asked, stupefied by the news.

"Take her back to the cells, Bob, the arresting officer will question her when he gets in."

The constable escorted Susan back to her cell and locked her in. Susan suddenly felt very alone. She tried to recall the last night. The last thing she could remember was standing at her front door. "Come on brain," she coaxed. "There must be something." Nothing. She lay on the bunk. At least the ghost wasn't here. She missed Mr. Tibbles. Who was going to feed him? She walked to the door. She called out.

"Hello! Hello! I'd like to make a phone call. Is that possible?"

Bob came along and unlocked the cell. "Sure, miss. Follow me."

Susan called Monica. "Hi Mon, sorry to disturb you."

"It's alright Sooz," Monica yawned down the phone. "What's up?"

"I've been arrested. I'm still trying to understand what's happened. Could you pop over to my house and feed Mr. Tibbles?"

"Wait. What? Arrested?"

"Yes. Apparently I've assaulted some police officers. I don't remember any of it. I'll call you again when I know more."

"OK. Are you OK Sooz?"

"Not really Mon. I'm really scared and confused, but I'm still in one piece, so I hope whoever arrested me can tell me what's going on."

"Alright. Sure, I'll feed Mr. Tibbles. Don't worry. Call me when you know more, OK?"

"Thank you so much. I will. Take care."

"You too."

Susan hung up. Bob walked her back to the cell.

Susan sat in her cell, waiting for the arresting officer to come and interview her. She got back to trying to remember the previous night. Her body ached. She looked over herself and found bruises on her arms, legs and torso. "What happened to me?" Susan was beginning to feel helpless, like her life was totally out of her control. She tried to remember getting to the cell last night. She tried to remember leaving the house. She could almost... but no, nothing.

Bob knocked on her cell. "Breakfast." He shoved a tray through a hole in the bottom of the door. Susan grabbed it and started eating. She suddenly realised she was starving. She glugged down the tea. She grimaced, it was very badly made. But, liquid was liquid. She was quite dehydrated, by her reckoning.

A long time seemed to pass in the featureless cell. Susan spent the time trying to recall, but she could get no more idea as to what she'd done than the desk sergeant had told her. Her door unlocked and the constable ushered her to an interview room. Two officers were there, one male, one female.

"Take a seat miss Rider," the male officer gestured. Susan walked over and sat down. "I'm detective constable Figgis, this is detective Jones. I'm sure you remember me from last night."

"I, er," Susan hesitated. She looked at him for a moment. "Sorry, I don't remember anything about last night."

Figgis switched on a recorder, announcing the start of the interview.

"You don't remember, miss Rider?"

"No. I'm sorry, I'm in quite a state. Please can you provide me with a solicitor or something?"

Figgis suspended the interview. "As you wish, you weren't being very talkative last night, so you'll understand that we didn't expect anything from you now. You'll have to wait in the cell while your brief arrives."

They escorted Susan back. She waited. More time passed. Still nothing came back to her. Figgis's face was as unfamiliar as anyone else she'd seen this morning. After what Susan assumed to be an hour, she was escorted to the interview room where a solicitor was waiting greet her.

"Can I have a few moments with my client, please, detective constable?" He requested.

"Sure." Figgis and Jones departed to let the two of them get acquainted.

The solicitor stood up and reached out his hand. "Hello, miss Rider," he said. Susan took his hand and shook it. "My name's Percy Smith. I'm here to advise you on your rights and make sure the police don't over step any boundaries."

"Hello," said Susan. "Can you tell me what I've done?"

"You really don't remember?"

"No. The last thing I recall is standing in my hallway. Then I woke up here." Susan voice was very matter of fact. "I've been racking my mind all morning, but nothing is coming up."

"You've been charged with breaking and entering, attempted burglary and three counts of assaulting an officer."

"Where did I break into?"

"Into the university."

"What? But I'm allowed in there. That doesn't make sense."

"Well you certainly didn't use any key."

Susan was abjectly dumbfounded.

"What was I trying to steal?"

"Apparently some artefacts from the archaeology lab."

"I- But I've spent hours recording the finds there. I don't want to mess that up. None of this makes sense. I don't have the strength to wrestle three police officers."

"This is what occurred at around 8pm last night. There is CCTV footage of you, if you'd like to see."

"8pm? I got into my house at about midday. What was I doing for the eight hours in between?"

"That I don't know miss Rider. So, you truly don't remember any of this?"

"No! None of it." Susan's nerves were fraying.

"Then I suggest we ask for medical and psychiatric examinations."

"I- I- I-," Susan stuttered. "I'm awaiting results of a blood test. I've been experiencing hallucinations and fainting recently."

"OK. Well, this seems like your best bet then."

"OK. Sure. I mean, I don't know. Psychiatrist?"

"If you're sure you don't remember anything then you'll need proof that you weren't acting of your own volition."

"Oh." Suddenly it hit Susan. Her face fell. Everyone believed she did these things. "Fine," she said, feeling defeated. "Yes, I suppose those are my best options."

"I'll inform the officers." Percy got up and left the room.

The three of them came back in at once. "I'm afraid you'll need to wait in the cells while the doctors arrive. I'll come back when they're here." Percy left the room to make arrangements. The two officers escorted Susan back to the grey walls of her cell. Susan was restless. She moved about the cell, sitting, standing, lying down, leaning, on the bunk, on the floor. She called out to the constable on duty.

"Can I have another phone call?" She asked.

"I'm afraid not, miss. One a day."

She sat back on the bunk. "Monica must know by now what's happened," she thought to herself. "Am I allowed visitors? Poor Mr. Tibbles. Maybe I can get Monica to take him in until this is all over." Susan suddenly realised she was still assuming there would be an outcome in her favour. "Oh god. What if I have to go to prison?" She started to panic. "I'll be marked for life, lose my job. How will I keep my house?" "Calm down, Susan" She told herself. "You're making a mountain out of a molehill. Something will happen, the doctors will find something or it will turn out to be a case of mistaken identity. Stay calm."

Time seemed to crawl along. Susan became ever more frustrated at not knowing what was going on outside her cell and at not knowing what had happened last night. Sure, she had been told what happened, but she couldn't verify it internally. She had to trust other people to tell her what she had done. It was a very alien feeling. Could this be a conspiracy? Who would conspire against her? Alex? The mystics from the dig? How would they make this happen? Something was against her. What if it was her mind? She'd been experiencing some really weird things recently. Why? She'd never succumbed to stress before. She'd always dealt with Kevin's opportunistic nature without trouble before. She'd not been in the spot light like this before. Maybe all the publicity this had drawn was pushing her over the edge.

The locks on her door slid open. The constable was stood there. "Time for your examinations, miss Rider."

Susan got up and followed the constable to the exam room.

"Good morning, Susan," a nurse greeted her. "I'm here to take some samples from you. I'll need a blood sample and a urine sample. OK?"

Susan nodded and took the urine sample cup. The constable escorted her to the toilet. Susan felt so inhuman. Like some kind of lab animal, being tested and studied under a microscope. The indignity of a urine test always annoyed her. There was no easy way to fill the cup. Once she was done she rinsed her hands and followed the constable back to the exam room. Back in the exam room she sat in the chair and braced for the needle. This nurse wasn't as good as the practice nurse. It took her a few attempts to find the vein. Susan winced with pain.

"Sorry," she apologised. "Have you had a sample taken recently?"

"Yes, yesterday," Susan replied solemnly.

"That explains it." The nurse packaged up the samples. "That's that then." She looked at the constable and smiled, leaving the room.

Susan sat in the chair for a while, waiting for the next examination. "Do you know when the psychiatrist will get here?" She asked the constable.

"She's here somewhere, probably just chatting with your brief."

A few minutes later the solicitor and a woman walked into the room.

"Susan, this is doctor Hart," Percy introduced her. "Doctor, meet Susan Rider."

Doctor Hart extended a hand. Susan stood up and shook it.

"Excuse me, constable," doctor Hart enquired. "Is there a private place I can talk with miss Rider?"

"Yes, doctor." The constable lead them to an interrogation room. "Are you sure you'll be safe with her, doctor? Apparently she can be quite violent."

"I don't think miss Rider will try to hurt me, will you miss Rider?" She addressed her last comment to Susan.

"No, doctor."

The two of them entered the room, the door closed behind them.

"Right, Susan. I'm here to assess your state of mind. To see if you're really telling the truth about your memory, and find out if you're really a violent thief."

"I- I really don't remember a thing. Please. This whole week is one confusing mess."

"Why don't you start from the beginning. When did you start hallucinating?"

Susan recounted her tale of the last few days. The voices, the visions, the dreams, Alex. She even mentioned the old woman. Doctor Hart listened and took notes.

"So," said doctor Hart. "That brings us to last night. What do you think you went there to steal?"

"I don't know. There's nothing there I would want to take. I want it left where it is, so it can be studied."

"What about this ghost? What might it want?"

"Uh... The only thing she's asked me for is to visit a wood. I don't even know why. Something about a Roman soldier. The one I told you about, I think, that cut out that man's eyes."

"Right. The pattern I've noticed is that this ghost is getting stronger. Maybe it took control of you."

"What, like possession?" Susan was incredulous.

"Well, that's what it would have been called in the eighteen hundreds. These days we realise that these things are attributable to psychological conditions. For example, schizophrenia, or multiple personality disorder."

"You think I'm crazy?"

"Well, there are three options. One: you're being haunted. Two: you're a liar. Three: You are having a series of psychotic episodes." The doctor let these idea sink in for a moment. "I'm disinclined to think you're a liar. I certainly do not believe in ghosts. So, that leaves me with one option."

"I see. When you put it like that." Susan sounded totally dejected.

"Did you expect some other outcome?"

"I- I just thought- I still find it hard to believe I did what people say I did last night. It must have been someone else."

"Perhaps if you see the CCTV you'll start to understand?"

"Is there anything that shows my face?"

The doctor got the constable to bring the footage in. She hit play and observed while Susan watched the film. Susan was on the edge of her seat. She recognised the clothes the woman on the screen was wearing. Same coat, same shoes, same trousers. She jumped when the woman smashed the glass door to the department's building with a bin. There was no sound, but it was so violent that it shook the pole the camera was on.

"It looks like me, same build and clothes, but I can't see a face. It's too blurry." Susan didn't sound convinced, still. Something dawned on her. "Is there any footage of what this person was doing before reaching the university campus? There are eight hours of my life I can't account for. Maybe my movements prior to this tape can help me remember?"

The doctor queried the constable and came back. "They don't have any. I might be able to get it at a later date. I believe you, Susan. I want to check you into a psychiatric clinic." Doctor Hart looked at her, trying to see assent.

"OK," Susan agreed reluctantly. "I suppose that's better than here. Can I have visitors there?"

"Yes, people will be able to visit. You will be released into the custody of the clinic, until you are either sentenced, or the charges are dropped. I'm going to push for the charges to be dropped."

"Thank you." Susan did feel a little relief to hear that.

While the paperwork was processed, Susan was left in her cell. She would be happy to get beyond these grey walls, and the confinement of the police station, to see the world again. She didn't realise how much she took her freedom for granted. She was glad she'd be able to talk to Monica. She supposed she would have to tell her parents. That would be a big bag of shame. A tray came in under the door. Lunch.

A short while after Susan had finished eating, doctor Hart came for her. They visited the desk sergeant and retrieved Susan's belongings. Doctor Hart drove them to the clinic. On the drive Susan looked out of the window. The sky was cloudy, but the sun was shining. Susan realised that she'd not had a dream or hallucination all day. Or, at least she assumed all this was real. The journey to the clinic was thankfully uneventful. When they arrived, doctor Hart showed her to the ward and set her up with a bed.

"The recreation area is just through those door. If you need to know anything, ask at reception, and they should be able to explain things to you. I'm afraid you're currently under the custody of the clinic, so you can't leave the grounds, but you can make a phone call any time, should you need to. Either from the payphones in reception, or just ask the receptionist and they have a monitored line that patients can use. It's only monitored to make sure no one is calling inappropriate numbers, we don't record anything. How are you feeling?"

"OK. I'm coping, thanks." Susan smiled at the doctor.

"Alright. We'll have our first proper session tomorrow, after breakfast. I have things to do, so I'll leave you to it." Doctor Hart started walking off.

"Thank you, doctor," Susan called after her.

Susan was a bit apprehensive about visiting the recreational area. She'd never had to deal with mentally ill people before. "I'm one of them now, I guess." Susan still couldn't believe it. She decided to brave it and see what company she was keeping. As she walked through the doors into the rec room, everything stopped and all eyes turned on her. Then, most eyes turned back to the TV. An orderly walked over.

"You're the new admission?" he said, kindly.

"Yes, I'm Susan."

"OK, let me show you around." He put his hands on her shoulders and tried to direct her. Susan shook him off.

"Sorry," she said, surprised at her own actions.

"It's OK. I should know better than that anyway. Many of the people here don't like to be touched. Follow me!" He issued the command jovially.

Susan followed him from the seating area.

"That was the TV area, obviously. This is the library." He pointed at the books. They carried on walking. "This is the silent space, here we have some bean bags for relaxing away from any noise." He walked them through some doors. "This is the physical recreation area." There was a punching bag and a table tennis table with equipment. "It's not much, but we do alright," he said, as they walked back to the TV area. Columbo was on the screen. "Dinner isn't for a few hours. Try introducing yourself to some of your room-mates." He left her among the congregation and went and sat at a desk.

"Er... Hello," she said to no one in particular.

"Shhh." An old man near the TV reprimanded her. "Columbo's asking one more question."

"Sorry." Susan took a seat.

"Don't mind him," the man sat next to Susan piped up. "He doesn't hear so well."

"Oh, right. Thanks."

"My name's Dave." He smiled at Susan.

"Hi. I'm Susan." Susan felt quite defensive. She didn't feel comfortable not knowing how any of these people might react.

"You don't have to worry here. No one here is violent or sexually perverted."

"Oh. That's good to know."

"Well, apart from Claire. But she's not violent to others, if you get my meaning."

"Oh dear." Susan felt bad for Claire.

"Hmmm. You're not a sociopath, then. That's good."

"No. I don't think so."

"Well, you showed spontaneous empathy for Claire, so it's unlikely."

"I guess so."

"You don't seem sure. Trust me, a sociopath wouldn't worry like that!" Dave smiled. "I'm recovering from a stroke. They're just checking me over, making sure my brain is in working order. I've had a whole bunch of scans." Dave almost seemed proud.

"Oh dear. That can't have been nice," Susan replied.

"The fMRI is the worst. It's like being strapped into a noisy tunnel. But, better safe than sorry." He shrugged.

"Yes. I wonder what they'll do to me. I've already had two blood tests."

"What are you in for, if you don't mind me asking?"

"Oh, I can't remember eight hours of yesterday. Apparently I assaulted three police officers and broke into the university."

Dave whistled in amazement. "Three cops? You're not dangerous, are you? They said there'd be no violent patients."

"No, it's not something I would do."

"But apparently you did."

"Yes. So I'm told." Susan paused. "Do you think it's possible? To lose eight hours of memory?"

"I don't know. Some stroke victims lose all sorts, the ability to know they've seen something, motor control, inhibition, their mother tongue, so anything is possible I suppose."

"I just wish I could remember."

"What if it's really bad? You can't have been assaulting police officers for eight hours!"

"Either way, I need to know. I can't stand all this doubt."

Columbo got the bad guy. Adverts came on the TV. Susan decided she should tell Monica what was going on. She excused herself and made her way to her belongings. She pulled some change from her purse and walked to the reception. Inserting the coins into the phone, she dialled Monica's number.

"Hello?"

"Hi Monica, it's Susan." Susan waited for the reaction.

"Hey bruiser. What the fuck's going on? Are you still at the police station?"

"So you've heard then, about what happened last night?"

"Yeah, and I'm having to clean up this mess you made."

"Sorry, Mon. I don't remember any of it. What's it like?"

"Like a twister blew through here. Samples are everywhere. Kevin wants your head."

Susan explained what had happened since their last conversation.

"Jesus. Can you have visitors? Do you want me to bring you anything?"

"Yes, I'm not locked up, just confined to the clinic until further notice. If you could bring a change of clothes that would be amazing. I don't suppose you can take Mr. Tibbles in until I'm out of here?"

"Yeah, Sooz, don't you worry. I'll look after him. I'll pop over as soon as I'm done at uni."

"See you soon."

"See you, Sooz. Hang in there." Monica hung up.

Susan put the phone down and looked for more change. She was sure this incident would make the news. Weird crime in Bath often did. She had to phone her parents before they found out second hand. Dreading the reception, she put in the coins and dialled the number.

"Rider residence." Her mother's voice greeted her.

"Hi mum," Susan replied.

“Susan! What a lovely surprise. We've not heard from you in a while. How are you?”

“I have been better, mum. You might want to be sat down.”

“Why love, what's up?”

“I'm in custody in a mental health clinic.”

“Oh. Ah- oh.”

Susan explained the past few days to her.

“Oh. Well. Congratulations on the big find, dear. I'm not sure what to make of the rest of it. Shall we come over? Can you have visitors? I suppose prisoners get visitors. I'll wait until your father is back and we'll come down to see you.”

“You don't have, mum, I'm sure it'll be fine.”

“Don't be silly, love, you need the support of your family.”

“OK. Thanks, that's really kind.”

They said their partings and Susan hung up. She felt exhausted after talking to her mother. Susan walked back to her bed and lay down. For once the world wasn't swimming around in her eyes. She didn't get it. If stress triggered the episodes, why wasn't she having any today? This was the most stressed she'd ever been. With Dave mentioning scans, horrible thoughts of brain damage and tumours circulated in her mind. She remembering hearing about people's behaviour changing drastically after such an event. “Maybe I should make a will? I could leave everything to Mr. Tibbles. People think I'm mad anyway.” She chuckled. Having seen the video, Susan tried to recall any of it. Still blank. She tried desperately to remember anything after she got home after her visit to the doctor. “The ghost walked through me... then... then...” Susan sighed in frustration. “Where's this ghost, so she can explain herself?”

Time went by in fits and bursts. Susan got to know some of the other patients. Most of them were not as scary as she feared. It was only when Calvin started to lose lucidity and became agitated that Susan remembered she was in a clinic for the mentally ill. Luckily an orderly stepped in and looked after him. After that Susan was sat by herself. She was worrying about her parents coming. She didn't want them to see her this weak. Monica had seen her in all states of disrepair, there was very little the two of them hadn't gone through together since they met at university. She hoped this wouldn't change things between them. This was off the other end of the scale of weirdness. Especially given how much trouble she'd caused for Monica, asking her to mind Mr. Tibbles and making the mess in the lab. Susan was beginning to accept other people's accounts of the night before. There was nothing else for her to go on. Talking to some of the the other patients was beginning to allow her to accept that maybe she has a problem. Especially since it allowed her to believe there might be a way to control or even fix it.

The warm sun was falling on her. Susan felt relaxed. She slowly drifted into a doze.

Susan awoke in the police cell. “What?” Susan felt anger pass through her. She walked to the door. “HEY!” she shouted. “HEY! I shouldn't be here. I'm meant to be in the mental health clinic.” She waited, but there was no reply. Susan turned back to go and sit on the bunk, but she was faced

with the ghost of the girl that had been haunting her. "You! What have you done now?"

"Please," said the girl. "I need your help."

"You've landed me in prison. You're dead. What possible help could I be to you? Why would I want to help you, after what you've done?"

"I'm weakening. But I can't move on until you help me. You're the only person I can contact. Once I have it back, I will leave you in peace, I swear."

"What happened last night?"

"I summoned all of my strength to try and find my ring myself, but I don't know where I am. I was drawn to my bones."

"No. That's not all. It doesn't take eight hours to walk from my house to the university. Where did you take me?"

"I followed your soul. You had unresolved pain. We... resolved it."

"What? What are you talking about? What did you make me do?"

"Please. I'm getting weaker. I have helped you, please get my ring for me. I just want to rest."

The girl faded away before Susan's eyes.

"NO!" She screamed. "Tell me what happened!"

Susan felt a hand on her shoulder. "Miss Rider." The voice called gently. "Miss Rider." Susan came around, feeling a little groggy.

"Wha? Huh? Oh."

"You looked like you were having a nightmare," the orderly said to her.

"Thank you," Susan replied. "Where could I get a glass of water?"

The orderly showed her to the water cooler. Susan knew it had been too good to be true. A whole day without a visit from the ether? Not a chance. What had the dream meant, if anything? She decided to write it down, in case doctor Hart would be interested. What was this thing that got "resolved"? Susan dreaded to think. Nothing good happened in her dreams of late. She went back to her bed and sat for a bit, mulling the dream over. An orderly came over. "Miss Rider, you have a visitor." Susan looked up.

"Monica!" Finally after this entourage of strangers, a friendly face. "I'm so glad to see you." Susan beamed at her friend.

"Hiya, Sooz." Monica smiled back, sitting down on the bed next to her. "I've brought a few things from your home." Susan took the bundle and put it on the floor. She reached over to Monica and embraced her. As soon as Monica's arms were around her, she started to sob. "Ahhh, hey Sooz," Monica said soothingly, stroking her head. "It's OK. It's OK."

Susan released her friend and straightened up. "Sorry Mon. I think I've been holding that in all day."

"No worries, love. Is there a canteen here, or something? We can grab a cuppa and chat."

"I think so," Susan had wiped the tears away with a tissue. They got up and went to reception to ask about a canteen.

They sat themselves at a table, with a cup of steaming tea each.

"Tell me how bad it is then, Mon. What damage did I cause?"

"The lab wasn't too bad, actually. You didn't break any equipment, just threw the artefacts around the place. The odd thing was that the bones of that girl were piled all together. Any idea why?"

She described how she had seen the girl walk through her, and that was the last thing she remembered. She then mentioned about the dream she'd had earlier.

"Resolved?" Monica said, curiously. "And you can't remember anything you did?"

"Nothing. It's as if I was asleep the whole time."

Monica sipped her tea. A look of minor annoyance crossed her face. "You know what I forgot to do?"

"What that?"

"I brought your tea with me. If I'd thought, we could be having some now."

"Oh, you star, Mon. I'll save it for later. I've been taking what I can get all day."

"I know how you hate the generic stuff, I guessed you'd be gasping for some of your posh bags."

The two were chuckling when a third voice entered the scene. "Hello you two." They looked up.

"Dad!" Susan got up and hugged him. Susan's mother emerged from behind him. "Mum!" Susan hugged her mum. "Thanks so much for coming. I know it's such a long way."

"Don't be silly," her mum said. "You need your family around you at times like this."

"Yeah, love, it's no bother," her dad chipped in.

"Thanks so much for looking after her, Monica," Susan's mother said.

"Oh, what are friends for? She'd do the same for me." Monica dismissed the compliment with a wave of her hand and a smile.

"Where's that Alex fella you were seeing? Why's he not showing his support?" Susan's dad enquired.

"Oh, right. I've not called in quite some time." Susan tensed up. "We broke up a couple of weeks ago."

"Oh, sorry love, I didn't mean to bring up bad memories."

"It's OK dad."

"You should tell them, Sooz." Monica piped up.

"What's that?" Susan's mum looked concerned.

"Oh, it doesn't matter, really. It's over now."

"You can tell us, love, whatever it is."

"Alex-" she sighed, trying to bring herself to say it. "He forced himself on me."

"He raped you?" her mother was aghast.

"No. No, he just didn't stop when I told him to. I stopped him, though."

"My poor girl." Her mother took Susan's hands in hers.

"That shit. Where is he? I'll knock his teeth out the back of his skull." Susan's dad was fuming.

"Calm down, dad, please. He's out of my life. I've cut all ties to him."

"Do you think this had anything to do with yesterday?" Her mother asked the obvious.

"I don't know, mum," Susan smiled weakly. "It could be anything. I don't know why it would take two weeks to manifest. I think I'll know more once I start therapy with doctor Hart."

"I can't believe I shook that bastard's hand," Susan's dad muttered, mostly to himself.

"Let it lie, Len. Susan's dealing with enough, without you going off the handle." Susan's mother chided her husband.

"Sorry Barbara, I can't stand anything bad happening to our little girl." He calmed down.

"I know, love, but you can't do any more than Susan's done. He's out of her life. You've got to watch your heart, remember."

The four of them conversed for a while longer, Susan learned about the goings on in her parents' lives. Susan's parents learnt about Leroy. Then an orderly came over. "Sorry ladies and gents, it's dinner time for the patients. Visiting hours start again at ten tomorrow."

"Oh, right," Susan's mum looked disappointed. "We'll stay at yours, if that's OK, Susan love?"

"Yes, mum, of course." She smiled at her folks. "Thanks so much for coming, all of you. I don't know what I'd do without you." Susan hugged them all, and they departed.

Susan walked to the queue for dinner. Her appetite was strong. Seeing her family had lifted her spirits. They were still by her side. She sat with some of the patients she'd been chatting with earlier.

"You look happier," said Dave.

"Oh, thanks," Susan replied. "My family visited."

"Lucky you! I haven't seen my son in a week. He's just had a kid, so he's really busy."

"I can imagine."

"You have any kids, Susan?"

"Oh, no, not so far. Just my cat, Mr. Tibbles."

"Well, no need to rush things, eh? Kids are great, but there are times I've just wanted my life back, you know?"

"Nothing worth having is ever easy," Calvin interrupted.

"Thanks Mr. Cheerful," retorted Dave.

The table was silent for the remainder of the meal. All the patients seemed to be in contemplation about something or other. Susan was no different. She was still worrying about what the tests would reveal, and what it would be like with doctor Hart tomorrow. The patients took their trays back to the counter and retired to the TV area. The clinic was going to show a film. This evening was going to be Avatar. Some of the patients preferred to sit in the silent area, rather than be

subjected to the bright lights and loud noises. Susan decided to make herself a cup of tea from the nice teabags that Monica had so thoughtfully brought with her.

Susan sat back down to watch the film, placing the tea near by to let it cool. Susan looked forward to enjoying something from before all this started. "I can't drink tea this late. Keeps me up all night," said Dave, out of the blue.

"Oh, that's too bad. I love a good cuppa before bed," replied Susan. "Sometimes I think it's the only thing that keeps me sane."

"Shhhh," the old man reprimanded them.

"Sorry," whispered Susan. She and Dave chuckled.

Once the film was over the patients went to the dorms. Susan took a trip via the canteen to drop off her cup. Everyone was going through their night time routines. Some more vigorously than others. Once Susan was ready she hunkered down under her sheets. The orderlies called "Lights out!" and it went dark, apart from the emergency exit lighting. It felt odd, to Susan, sleeping in a room full of strangers. Susan relaxed her body, letting each muscle untense in turn. She let her eyes close and fell asleep.

Minura's face was worried. "Are you sure you can trust these invaders, Doccius?"

"No, my love, but we have to try, else we will have to fight them. They are better armed and friendly forces are too far away to reinforce us in time." Doccius had a grave expression on his face as Lucilia entered the room.

"What's up father?" She asked. "Are the villagers up the river sending thieves down again? You should put them to the sword."

"Nothing so simple my sweet. Do not worry, though."

"Is it these invaders from across the sea? Searigis says you're going to go to war with them."

Doccius' brow furrowed, he passed his hand across it. "Please my child, I have a lot of thinking to do before I depart tomorrow. Can you go and help your aunt milking the cattle."

"Yes father." Lucilia obeyed.

Once Lucilia had left the room, Doccius beseeched his wife. "Whatever happens, do what you can to protect our daughter. She is strong of spirit, the people will need someone to look up to if it all goes wrong."

"Yes my husband. But I prefer to think you will come back to me." She took him by the hand. They kissed in a tender embrace.

Several miles from the village, several entourages were journeying to the meeting with the invaders. The local chiefs were gathering to understand what the invaders wanted. They were to meet with the prefect of the force that had come this far west. The meeting was to take place a few miles outside Doccius' village, in a clearing in the forest to the north. The men of Doccius's village were to provide security for the British contingent.

Lucilia was carrying the milk to the storage area when she met her cousin, Searigis. "Hello Luci,"

He greeted her. "How are you?"

"I'm fine, cousin. What are you up to?"

"I'm preparing my kit for our journey tomorrow. I'm taking my sword to the whetstone right now."

"Do you think you'll have to use it?" There was a glint of excitement in her eyes.

"I don't know Luci. I've been training for weeks, but father says we should hope for a peaceful solution."

"Well, whatever, make sure you come back. Only having mother to talk to would be tiresome." She pecked him on the cheek.

Cunovina was in the cowshed, filling another bucket of milk. "You tug those udders with great expertise," a voice came from behind her.

"Ha! Next you'll tell me my bucket carrying skills are second to none!" She said, sarcastically.

"At least you know what you're good at," the taunt came back.

"I don't know what I see in you, Mini."

"Perhaps it is my dashing good looks?"

"No, you are ugly as sin."

"Then, maybe my startling wit?"

"No, you're as dull as a rock."

He grabbed her from behind and they tumbled to the floor. He kissed her passionately as she pulled him close.

"Then perhaps," he said, drawing breath. "It is my passionate lovemaking skills?"

"I can't quite recall," she said with a grin.

They kissed and pawed at each other affectionately for a short while.

"I have to get back to preparations, my sweet," Mini said with regret.

"Do you have to go?"

"I must follow my brother. We are family. We have pledged to protect the envoys."

"Do you have to take our son?"

"He is of age. It would be a dishonour to not let him come. He is strong, and a good fighter. Plus I will be at his side, no harm will come to him."

Mini rose to his feet. He offered his hand to Cunovina, but she got herself up. Staring him in the eye, she kicked his shin. He hopped in mock pain. "You'd better come back. I won't forgive you if you don't."

The village was abuzz with chatter about the meeting with the invaders and the large number of chiefs in the area. No such gathering had been seen in anyone's recollection. Many had heard various bits of news from other parts of the country. Some about how violent the invaders were, other about the things the invaders were offering, wealth and technology, in exchange for fealty. Some of the villagers were fervently against any kind of change of government, while others thought it might be preferable to extended bloodshed. Most of the men were concentrating on preparations for the coming day's duty of protection, while the women took to the task of keeping

the village running.

Through out the day, camps started to be set up around the village. Many new faces were seen. Many old acquaintances renewed. A feast was prepared for the night, to honour the guests. The villagers and the visitors made merry. As night fell a great fire was lit for celebrations to continue.

“What did I tell you?” Sergius pointed to the flames. “We can get supplies here. Maybe even a little something else.” A grin spread across his face.

The deserters were stood about half a mile from the village.

“We've been wandering in the forest for two days, Sergius. You had no idea where you were going.” Fabius' voice did not hide his scorn.

“Sergius said he'd get us here, and he has, Fabius. Quite whining.” Pomptinus butted in.

“Quit your butt licking Pomptinus, Sergius is just making this up as he goes along. He has no great plan.”

“Shut up both of you,” Sergius ordered. “Lets make our way down. We can indulge in local delicacies. They're all so drunk they won't know we're not meant to be there. These are all the local dignitaries, they're gathering here before meeting with our former legion tomorrow. I knew today would be the best day to pay a visit.”

“I don't know about the rest of you, but I don't speak their language. We'll be found out in moments,” said Paririus.

“Ha! Didn't they teach you anything? Just smile, nod, laugh when they laugh, and sing along in a drunken slur.” Sergius felt confident. His gamble was paying off. The men started their trek to the village.

When they got to the edge of the encampment, they dropped their packs at the back of one of the tents and, at Sergius's command, strode confidently into the village. “Just look like you're meant to be here.” The men started enjoying the food and drink that was on offer. Then they wandered over to the fire where the remaining festivities were taking place. Nobody seemed to pay them any mind. They nodded, laughed and sang in slurred voices long into the night.

Cunovina, Minura and Lucilia were back in their home, making sure that Mini, Docius, and Searigis' equipment was ready for the morning.

“Why can't I go with the men, mother?”

“Because the men must do men's things. We must look after the village while they are gone.”

“That doesn't make any sense. I practice fighting, just like Searigis. I've even bested him once or twice.”

“Maybe when you were younger, Luci, but Searigis is stronger than you now,” Cunovina defended her son.

“Maybe. I'm still faster than him, though.”

The two mothers laughed.

“Your father is right, Luci, my love. You have great spirit. Maybe one day you will be a fine warrior. But tomorrow you will stay with us, and you will help us prepare for your father's triumphant return.” Minura kissed Lucilia's forehead.

Minura and Cunovina made a final inspection of the packs and judged them sufficient. “The men

will be up late, making sure our guests are entertained," Minura stated. "I am going to bed now, so I can wake early to prepare a good breakfast for our men."

Cunovina grinned. "I think I will go and see how jealous I can make Mini."

"You two are terrible," Minura smiled back.

"Mother, can I stay out too? I want to see all the chiefs and spend some time with father."

"All right, Luci, but don't be too long. I'll be waking you up to help with breakfast."

As Minura started getting ready for sleep, Lucilia and Cunovina step out into the village and walked towards the fire. The men were singing drunken songs and laughing with each other. Luci noticed some new comers sat together. Her father was sat, deep in conversation with a couple of the chiefs from villages west of hers. She wondered over to Searigis. He was singing songs with the new comers.

"Your mother thinks you're stronger than me. I'm not so sure." Her voice was challenging.

Sergius caught Paririus ogling the young lady. He shot him a stern look. Any fraternising of that sort would have to wait until tomorrow. It was too risky with all these men around.

Searigis swung his eyes in Lucilia's general direction. "You're not stronger than me, Luci. I'm a man. I'm older too!" Lucilia was surprised he wasn't slurring more.

"I'm definitely stronger now you're drunk," she taunted him.

Searigis swayed. "I'm sober. I shouldn't get durnk, my father said I have to get up early."

"You shouldn't have had so much to drink then." She poked out her tongue. "Do these fellows even know what they're singing?" She glanced over at the new comers.

"I 'spect so," Searigis replied. "They singing as good as me," He smiled in their general direct. The new comers smiled and nodded, carrying on their slurred singing.

Cunovina wandered over. "Searigis! Have you been drinking before the big day?"

"No mother!" Searigis suddenly became sober. "Father said not to. I'm just pretending."

His mother smiled. "Good boy." She started to flirt with the new comers. "Hello gentlemen. I hope you're having a good night." They nodded and smiled. She tried to not-so-surreptitiously improve her cleavage. The new comers were captivated.

Sergius was uptight. The men's libidos could get them in trouble. He wished the women would just leave them be. He chuckled as a thought crossed his mind. Were the circumstance different, he would be making her feel that. He noticed one of the locals was staring daggers in their direction. He whacked Pollius and pointed him out. Pollius clipped Paririus and Pomptinus around their ears and smiled in the man's direction.

Cunovina looked up and made a show of being disappointed. She smiled inwardly and walked the long way around towards her husband. Greeting various men on the way.

"Your parents are weird, Sear," Lucilia commented.

"I know. It's like a constant battle, but not one they want to win or lose. I don't understand it." He paused for a moment. "It's alright for you. You'll be found a man to look after you. I have to figure this all out for myself."

"I don't want to be looked after by some man," Lucilia pronounced indignantly. "I'm strong enough to look after myself. I'd be coming with you tomorrow, if I didn't have to help mother."

“Doesn't matter, though, does it? Your father will find you suitable son of a chief or something, and you'll be married off.”

Lucilia kicked him in the shin and walked back to the house. Searigis was hopping on his good leg, rubbing the bruise he'd just got. He heard the new comers chuckling behind him. Feeling ashamed he went off to sit with his uncle.

“Ah! Nephew! Good to see you,” Docius welcomed the boy into the small group of men. “What's that grimace on your face? Have you been talking to my daughter?” Searigis nodded, feeling foolish. “Don't let her trouble you, she is full of fire, but she means no ill with it. Sit, sit.” He patted the log next to him. “These are the brothers of your aunt Minura. Great men indeed.” The three of them crashed their mugs together. “Gentlemen, this mighty warrior is my nephew, Searigis. He will be joining us in guard duty tomorrow.” The men cheered a salute. Searigis brightened with the praise and attention.

“Thank you uncle,” he said. “It will be a great honour to be beside you and my father tomorrow.”

“Ah yes! Mini, another great man. Although, don't let him hear me say it! My brother's head is big enough.” He roared with laughter.

Sergius relaxed as his group was slightly separate from the rest. “Don't let up the drunken singing, men, if our spirits look doused, someone will come to raise them, and we might have to explain ourselves.” The group got into a slurred version of some tune they'd heard in the evening.

Men and women around the fire continued the festivities for a few more hours. The fire began to die down, and the various parties began to retire to their tents. Searigis had gone to bed much earlier, by his father's advice. Docius and his brothers in law had remained to the last, swapping stories about Minura and listening to tales of their respective villages. Mini and Cunovina had departed unseen, but had not immediately returned to the house.

Sergius kept his men singing until they had been seen to be at the fire long enough. They walked away leaning on each other, as if very drunk.

“Why'd we have to remain sober, Sergius?” Paririus protested once they were out of ear shot.

“Because you're a damn fool and would try to talk to one of the locals. We'd be found out in moments.”

“More importantly,” Pollius butted in. “Where are we sleeping tonight, or is it another cold night under the stars?”

“Sleeping in the midst of the camp should be warmer than nothing,” replied Sergius, bitterly.

“We could just kill a tent full of the locals. They're too drunk to know cheers from screams,” Fabius suggested.

Sergius pondered on what Fabius had said. “It isn't a totally terrible idea.” A grin crawled across his maw.

Pollius piped up. “Stay your blood lust, Sergius. We'd be found out almost immediately in the morning.”

“I would sleep well after such a kill, that is true. No, we shall rest in style tomorrow. Tonight we shall have to rough it once more.”

Susan woke up feeling groggy. She thought with the girl gone she'd be able to rest. Such a vivid dream. She wrote as much as she could remember into her notepad and decided to look for a shower before breakfast.

The clinic seemed much larger on the inside than the out. She wandered around for a few minutes before she finally gave in and asked an orderly the way. Picking up a towel from the towel store she headed upstairs for a quick clean. The shower was soothing, it helped relax her after the night of involved dreaming. She let the stream of water gently massage her body, while the heat penetrated her skin. Such a rudimentary thing seemed so enriching. As Susan left the shower, she wrapped the towel around her and walked over to the mirrors. They were somewhat covered in steam. Susan thought she heard footsteps behind her. "No, not again," she thought in frustration. She turned, and saw one of the patients stood near by. She sighed with relief.

"Hi," the lady said shyly.

"Morning," Susan said, warmly.

The patient walked off to the cubicles. Susan turned back to the mirror. She froze with shock as she was greet with a ghostly apparition. As she slowed her breathing, she stared hard into the ghosts eyes.

"Why are you here? I thought you'd run out of energy or something?"

"I have been temporarily rejuvenated through some miracle." The ghost was smiling. "Perhaps if you let me take you again, I can find what I am looking for."

"No!" Susan stepped back and ran out of the shower room.

As the door swung back behind her, Susan realised that she'd left her clothes in the changing area. She braced herself, took some deep breaths and marched back into the room. The ghost wasn't visible. Susan felt a chill behind her. She crept warily over to the changing area. Steam was flowing from the room the shower cubicals were in, the whole changing area was flooding with fog.

Susan reach her belongings and started to change.

The lockers lining the changing area were nothing more than cupboards. They were not lockable. They seemed in good repair, if quite old. The benches along the middle were of similar quality, painted green, but not bolted down. Susan heard a creaking noise around her. She assumed it was the pipes to the showers. The lady who had gone in seemed to like her shower hot.

Susan finished putting her clothes on and started drying her hair. The volume of the creaking was increasing, it was becoming practically unbearable. Suddenly, with an almighty bang, the locker doors all burst open and the benches went flying. Susan screamed out in shock. She ran from the shower room with her hair still towelled up.

Susan was travelling at such a rate that she nearly sent an orderly flying.

"Alright, miss? Why are you in such a rush?" She smiled reassuringly.

"The- The- The doors all burst open and the benches went flying!" Susan tried to catch her breath.

"Oh! Yeah, that happens when it gets hot in the showers, the hot water pipes all run behind the lockers. Must be a large crowd in there."

"No, just one woman, as far as I know."

"Hmmm." The orderly sounded concerned. "I'm going to go in and check that everything is OK."

As the orderly opened the door steam started to billow out around her. She walked into the murky depths, trying to see what was before her. Susan stayed at the door, too frightened to go in. The orderly made it to the changing area and put the benches back in place. More steam was coming out from the shower cubicles. She carried on into the cubicle area, practically blind.

“Hello?” She called. “Is everything alright in here?”

All the showers were on. Knowing only one could be occupied, the orderly started to turn them off, hoping someone would protest.

“OW!” she sharply pulled her hand back from the first shower. The water had scalded her arm. More carefully this time, she reach around the stream of water and gingerly switched turned the tap off. She continued down the row, using the same caution as before. The orderly came to the end of the showers, but nobody had protested her interference. “Hello?” She called again. The steam started to clear as the temperature decreased. The orderly methodically walked along the row of showers, pulling back the curtains of each cubicle and poking her head in. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing... Three quarters of the way back she found the patient. She had passed out and was slumped between the walls of the cubical. The patient's body was bright red, like a lobster. The orderly feared to touch her, in case it sent the patient into shock. The orderly could see the chest rise and fall, so she decided the patient was still breathing. She turned the shower on cold, to try to soothe the scalded body. Leaving the patient for a moment, she rushed to the door to the shower room.

“Miss, can you got to reception and get them to call an ambulance.” Once Susan was on her way, the orderly went back to the patient to monitor her.

Susan rushed down the stairs and found her way to reception.

“Ambulance-” she gasped at the receptionist, trying to catch her breath. “Accident in shower.” Susan held herself up on the reception counter.

“Sorry, miss?” the receptionist queried. “Try to calm down.”

Susan paused to let her breathing slow back down. “There's been an accident in the showers. An orderly has asked me to get an ambulance to help the accident victim,” Susan tried to be as eloquent as possible.

“Oh, right! What kind of accident?”

“I'm not sure, the showers got very hot, so burns, maybe?”

The receptionist got on the phone immediately. Susan walked back up to the shower room. She poked her head around the door.

“Hello? Is there anything else I can do to help?” She called into the room. It appeared empty.

“Thanks miss, that's all you can do for now.” A voice called back from the cubicle area.

Susan walked down to her bed and made notes about her encounter with the ghost earlier. Still feeling shaken from the accident, Susan made her way to the canteen to join the others at breakfast. It was a bustling place, filled with life. Apparently everyone had breakfast. Susan made her way to the queue, she picked up a tray and shuffled her way along to the people serving food.

“Morning, whatcha having?” the dinner person asked.

Susan's appetite was somewhat diminished from her experiences earlier. She requested some bacon and eggs, and got herself a mug of generic tea. “Damn,” she thought, “I could have brought

along some of my nice stuff." Susan took her meal and sought out a place to sit. She found some familiar faces and ask to join them.

"Yeah, sure, sit down." Catherine piped up. "The more the merrier." She shuffled a long the bench a little. "Normally Louise joins us, but I've not seen her since she went to get a shower."

Susan put her tray down and her face went pale. "Is Louise a sort of shy, stocky, brunette?"

"Yeah, do you know where she is?"

Susan explained the story of the shower to the table. Everyone's faces fell. Their shock was almost palpable.

"Holy crap," said Catherine. Just then the sound of a siren could be heard approaching. "That must be the ambulance, now." Half of the room got up to see what was going on. Susan stayed seated, she didn't want to see what the ghost had done.

"You not coming to gawp with the rest of us?" ask Catherine.

Susan shook her head.

The medics got to reception and asked for directions. The receptionist pointed them up stairs, and gave directions to the shower room. The medics ran out of reception and up the stairs. The orderly was in the shower room, still monitoring Louise.

"Hello," one of the medics called as he entered the room.

"Through here," the orderly called.

The two medics dashed across the floor, to the cubical area. They made a brief assessment of the scene.

"Thanks for your help, uh..." the medic hesitated, not knowing what to call the orderly.

"Kathleen," she smiled.

"Thanks for you help, Kathleen. Good thinking with the cold water. We'll need some room, though."

"No problem," Kathleen replied. "I'll get out of your hair." She got up and walked out of the shower room. She breathed a sigh of relief now that the trauma wasn't her responsibility.

Back in the cubicle area the medics were deciding what to do. Frank leaned over the body. "Looks like first degree burns."

"Yeah," Marcus agreed. "We should be able to move her to the hospital. Lets get the stretcher."

The two of them marched out of the room. The orderly saw them go buy. "Will she be alright?" she enquired.

"Yeah," said Marcus as he walked by. "A few days in hospital and her skin will be fine."

The two medics marched through reception, passed the on lookers with wide eyes and mouths agog. Quickly and efficiently they grabbed the stretcher from the ambulance and marched back upstairs. They barged through the door and moved to the cubicles. Getting the stretcher to Louise was difficult, as there wasn't a lot of space. The medics didn't want to move her by hand too far as that might be more painful for Louise, especially since human bodies are difficult enough to lift when they're dry, let alone when they're drenched in water. In the end the two of them had to carry her to the exit of the cubicle area and put her on the stretcher there. Louise started to stir as they gently placed her down. Frank went back to turn off the shower.

"Can you hear me, Louise?" said Marcus.

Louise groaned a little, but said nothing. Frank got back. The two of them hoisted up the stretcher, and started the careful walk back to the ambulance. The audience in the reception area had thinned somewhat as the medics had taken some time in getting Louise on to the stretcher. Catherine and a few others who socialised with Louise were still waiting. Catherine walked out with the medics

"Is she going to be OK?" Catherine seemed wrought with concern.

"Yes, love. She'll be back in no time," Marcus replied reassuringly.

Catherine sighed with relief and made her way indoors. Frank closed the back of the ambulance after Kathleen got in to ride with Louise to the hospital, so she'd have a friendly face there if she woke up en route. Marcus got in the cab and started the engine. Frank made his way to the front and hopped in. The crowd of onlookers dispersed as the ambulance pulled out of the drive.

Susan was sat in the canteen while all this transpired. She was feeling very shaken from the whole experience. The ghost seemed to be getting stronger and more violent. She dreaded to think what would have happened if she'd been possessed. Those missing eight hours bothered her immensely. What had she done? What had been resolved? She sat, looking at her breakfast, sipping her tea.

"It's all over now." Catherine and a few others came back to finish breakfast. "You alright? You've not touched a thing!"

"Yes, I'm fine, just worrying about Louise," Susan said, hiding the real issues worrying her. Here wasn't the place to discuss missing portions of one's life. She certainly didn't want people knowing how crazy she was — ghosts are not something a sane person sees, Susan was sure of this. It must all be in her head. There is no such thing as ghosts. Then what set the shower going? Why did she keep hearing and seeing her? What was with all the dreams? Why did she break into the university?

"Susan?" Catherine stared at her.

Susan came back from her introspection. "Oh, sorry, my mind was wandering."

Doctor Hart approached the table. "Hello everyone. Susan, once you're done here, please can you come to my office. It's in the annex on left of the silent area as you walk in."

"Yes doctor. I can come now if you'd like. I've lost my appetite."

"Oh, great. Yes, please."

Susan took her tea with her and, saying goodbye to the others, followed doctor Hart to her office.

The office was a reasonable size. Doctor Hart's desk was in the corner, next to a wall sized window. To the right of the centre there was a sofa, and in the middle there were a few chairs. The walls were wallpapered in a calming brown pattern and had some landscape paintings hung on them.

"Take a seat Susan," said doctor Hart as she pulled a chair to be in front of her desk.

Susan pulled one of the other chairs to be opposite doctor Hart's. Doctor Hart picked up a notebook from her desk and came and sat down.

"How have you been since yesterday? I saw you had some family visit."

"Oh yes, that was a breath of fresh air yesterday. I was so glad to see Monica, she somehow

always seems you buoy me back up when I'm feeling low."

"And your parents?"

"Oh, yeah, it was nice to see them too, of course." Susan felt very self-conscious.

"Are you close with your parents."

"Fairly. I mean, they live at the other end of the country, so I don't see them often. But there's no animosity or anything. We chat quite frequently. Although the dig I mentioned yesterday has meant I've been a bit too busy to call for a while, with preparation and execution, and now this." Susan felt she was justifying herself.

"OK." The doctor made some notes. "I see you were sitting with some other patients. That's good. Do you find it easy to make friends?"

"I suppose. It's not something I really think about."

"Do you have many friends?"

"Not close by. We've sort of drifted apart after graduating. I have a few in Bath, you know how it is."

"This morning, I didn't see you in reception with the others. Were you uninterested in the emergency?"

"I... I think I caused it."

"How so?" Doctor Hart remained calm.

"While I was in the shower room, the ghost wanted to possess me, but I refused her. She must have made the showers boil out of anger."

"You really think that?"

"Well, she was there and why else would the showers malfunction like that? Actually I have been taking notes of her appearances and my dreams. Can I show you?"

"This session is more exploratory. I will look at them next time, though." Doctor Hart got up.

"Would you like some water? I'm getting myself a glass?"

"Oh, not right now, thank you. I have this cup of tea." Susan responded, showing the doctor her polystyrene cup.

Doctor Hart sat back down with her glass of water. "Susan, I have to tell you that the ghost isn't real. You do understand that?"

"I- Yes- I mean no. I mean, how else is this happening?" Susan shifted uncomfortably in her chair. Confusion shifted across her face.

"Yesterday, Susan, you seemed to understand that you were suffering psychotic episodes. You knew the ghost was an hallucination."

"Did I? Yesterday is so fuzzy." Susan sipped her tea nervously.

Doctor Hart made some notes. "What's changed?" she thought to herself. "Susan, do you remember meeting me at the police station yesterday?" She started to probe Susan's memories.

"Yes, you were talking to my solicitor."

"That's right. And do you recall what we talked about?"

"I told you about the ghost possessing me and making me do those things."

"No, you told me about the hallucinations you were having. You didn't recall what had happened the night before. Do you remember the night before, now?"

"I... I thought I did, but now I can't seem to put my finger on it. I'm sorry doctor, I'm feeling rather strange." Susan rubbed her hand across her forehead and down her face, trying to revive herself.

"It's OK. You're safe here," said doctor Hart, reassuringly.

"I feel quite nauseous," Susan said urgently. Doctor Hart handed her the bin. Susan vomited up mostly tea and a little of last night's dinner. Doctor Hart went over and felt her forehead. The temperature was normal.

"I don't think you've got a fever," she said. "How were you feeling when you got up?"

"I felt a bit groggy, but I've been feeling that way for the past week, whenever I wake up." Susan paused, trying to recall something. "Except. Except yesterday morning, when I woke up in the cell. I felt refreshed."

Susan took the water doctor Hart offered. "Thank you." She washed her mouth out.

"Are you all right?"

"I don't know, I feel all off kilter."

"OK. I don't think we'll get much more done right now. You should have a lie down and we'll try again later."

Susan struggled to her feet. She tried to walk to the door, but it was more of a directed stumble. Doctor Hart caught her before she fell. The doctor called one of the orderlies to take her back to her bed.

Susan lay back on her bed. The world was spinning around her. Noises were crashing and booming everywhere. Her senses were reeling. She heard a single voice amid the chaos. "You're mine." She passed out.

It was around lunch time and Susan's parents arrived to see their daughter. Barbara asked the receptionist where she was.

"I'll get one of the orderlies to find her," the receptionist smiled. He picked up the phone and called the orderlies' office. "Hi can you find Susan Rider? Her parents are here to visit. Thanks!" He hung up. "Someone will bring her along in a moment."

"Thank you," said Barbara. She and Len sat on the seats in the reception area. The two of them waited. Time seemed to be passing but Susan did not appear. They waited for a while longer. Len checked his watch. It had been about twenty minutes and Len was getting visibly impatient. "Can you go and check, Barbara?"

"Yes, alright love, I will." Barbara stood up and walked to the reception. As she got to the desk two medics walked through carrying a stretcher. Coming in the opposite direction was an important looking woman who directed the medics where to go. She looked over at the couple, recognition seemed to flick on behind her eyes. She walked over to them.

"Mr and Mrs Rider?" She asked.

"Eh, yes?" Barbara said, surprised that anyone would recognise them.

"Hello, my name is doctor Hart. I've been treating your daughter for the past two days."

"Hello, doctor," said Len, standing up. They shook hands. "I'm Len and this is my wife, Barbara. Where is our girl, if you don't mind me asking?"

"Well, that's what I've come to tell you." The doctor looked concerned. "We had been having a session earlier when Susan became unwell. I sent her to lie down. It appears she has slipped into a coma. The medics who just walked by are going to take her to the hospital to try to diagnose the problem."

Len and Barbara both sat down in a hurry. Their faces were awash with confusion.

Len looked up at doctor Hart, some semblance of sense had made its way back to him. "Could you give us directions to the hospital, please doctor."

"Certainly Mr. Rider." Doctor Hart got the receptionist to write them down.

As the Riders were on their way out, they saw Monica approaching from the bus stop opposite the clinic.

"Monica, love!" Barbara called at her.

Monica wandered towards them. "Hello Babs, how're things? You looked like you've seen a ghost!"

"It's Susan, Monica, she gone to hospital."

"Oh god! What's happened?"

"Get in the car, love," Len instructed her. "We'll tell you on the way."

The three of them got into the Riders car and drove off to the hospital. The journey was uneventful, but getting a parking space was a nightmare. Len almost lost his rag at people cutting in front of him. Luckily Barbara was on hand to keep him calm.

Inside the hospital it was like a maze. The three of them wandered the halls, looking for some sort of reception. Eventually they came to an official looking desk.

"Excuse me," started Len, with an impatient edge to his tone. He felt Barbara's hand on his arm and calmed down a notch.

"Hello," said the receptionist. "How can I help."

"We're looking for my daughter, Susan Rider. She's just been admitted. She's in a coma." Len's voice was maintaining its reasonability.

"Give me a moment to find her on our system." The receptionist started typing arcane sequences on her keyboard. "I'm sorry," said the receptionist. "I can't find any Riders here at the moment."

"But the doctor at the clinic sent us here. She said this is where they sent her."

"Do you know how long ago that was?" Asked the receptionist, preparing to work more computer wizardry.

"Oh, I don't know. Actually, the ambulance guys had just arrived. Maybe she's still en route?"

"That's a distinct possibility. I will call the ambulance team to see if they're carrying your daughter. If you'd like to take a seat, I'll come over when I have some information."

The three of them sat down and waited. The wait for information seemed to drag on for longer than recorded history, despite only being a few minutes. Len started to pace.

"Sit down, Len," requested Barbara. "You're making me worry more."

"Sorry my love. I'm really worried, I can't sit still."

Monica had gone outside to cancel her dinner date with Leroy. His disappointment was curbed by understanding. She came back in and saw the distraught parents.

"Hey, you two, why don't we go and grab a coffee. I bet she'll be checked in by the time we get back."

"Aye, a drink sounds grand," agreed Len. "Lead the way." Barbara got up and followed along.

The cafeteria was just down the hall from the reception. The three of them got drinks to go. Len had decaf, to keep his blood pressure down. They wandered back as slowly as they could manage, hoping that Susan would have arrived when they got back. When they arrived, the receptionist was dealing with other people. Every second seemed to stretch on for an eternity. Their longing to know the fate of Susan sapped every gramme of patience from them. As the queue began to clear at the reception desk, Len started to periodically look over at the receptionist for some glimmer of an indication that she'd heard something. The minutes dragged out. Once the last new comer had been dealt with, the receptionist signalled to them to come over. The three of them approached the desk.

"You're the group looking for Susan Rider?" She asked.

"Yes," said Barbara.

"OK, well she's been booked in, but they've rushed her off for an MRI scan. She's been booked into ward F. It's on the fourth floor of the west wing."

"Thank you," replied Barbara. "Do you know how long she'll be having the scan for?"

"Sorry, I don't. If you go up to the ward, one of the nurses will be able to tell you."

"Thanks again." The three of them set off to the west wing. Thankfully the wings were well sign posted. At least they seemed that way, the route they were taken seemed very circuitous. Eventually they reached the lifts at the bottom of the west wing. Len hammered on the button in an agitated fashion.

"Don't worry, love," offered Barbara. "She'll be fine."

The three of them rushed into the lift as its doors opened. Monica pushed the button for the fourth floor. Another couple got in with them.

"Which floor you after?" Monica enquired.

"Oh, third please," one of them said. Monica pushed the button. "Ta."

The lift chugged and grinded its way to the third floor. The couple got off. Some people looked in. "Are you going down?"

"No, we're up," Monica replied. The doors closed and they continued on up. The lift finally arrived at the fourth floor and the doors opened. The hallway was empty, so the three of them looked around for a sign. They found some directions on the wall.

"Looks like we should head down here," said Monica. The Riders followed her lead as they walked through some double doors and into the ward. As they got further along they could see beds and various areas for caring for people. Len spotted some nurses and walked over.

"Excuse me," he said in his politest voice.

"Hello sir, how can I help?" One of the nurses engaged him.

"Hello. My daughter is apparently having an MRI scan, or something. She's been rushed over there. Do you know how long it might take until we can see her?"

"OK. What's your daughter's name?"

"Susan Rider,"

"Ah, right. From the mental health clinic. I imagine she'll be up here in about an hour."

"Thanks very much."

"No trouble sir."

Len walked back to Barbara and Monica. "About an hour, she reckons."

"I don't know about you two, but I could do with some lunch," suggested Monica.

"Yes, I suppose there nothing we can do but wait, no need to have an empty stomach," agreed Barbara.

The three of them made their way back to the lift and found their way to a cafeteria. It seemed everyone else visiting the hospital had the same idea. The cafeteria was packed. Luckily, the queue was equally as long. By the time the three of them had got their meals a table had freed up.

"What do you think's going on with our Susan?" Barbara raised the question.

"I don't like to speculate. That doctor Hart seemed none to certain either." Len kept a tight reign on his imagination.

"I've never seen Sooz like this before. We've had our fair share of dunk nights out, but she's never hallucinated before. That was all a long time ago, too." Monica realised Susan might have kept the stories from university she told her parent more PG than reality. "Oh well, too late now," she thought. "It's not like we did anything too outlandish."

The three of them tucked into their meals. Their minds filled with wonder at what might be wrong with Susan. Susan, however was completely unaware of their worry. She was still comatose. The MRI machine was making its characteristic whirs and clicks. Susan didn't respond to the noise at all. The neurologist was monitoring progress from a distance, hunched over the screen, waiting for the images of Susan's brain to be composed. The technician was in the room with Susan, making sure it was operational and that Susan couldn't come to any harm.

"She still asleep, Tony?" The neurologist called.

"Not a peep, Kit", Tony called back. "All looking good here."

The imaging process took a while. The computers receiving the signal from the instruments were reliable, but old. The neurologist waited patiently. He was used to the lag by now. The instrument shut down.

"Thanks, Tony. Can you get a nurse to take her back to her ward?" Kit called out.

"On it."

Kit stayed behind in the lab, waiting for the data to be processed. On occasion the software need some hand holding to get all the data through to the end.

Susan was in her house. Was that right? Something made her think she shouldn't be there. She hung up her coat and went through to the kitchen. Mr. Tibbles was waiting for her.

"Hello," she said, looking down at him. He mewed back up at her. Bending down, she petted him. She fixed herself a tea and sat down on the sofa. She flicked the TV on, but all she got was snow. On every channel. "What?" Susan was surprised. "I've got digital TV." Suddenly the screen went blue. There was a knock at the door. Susan got up to answer it. Her passage to the door was somewhat hampered by her sandpit. She really should get that moved.

"Who is it?" Susan called through the door.

"It's Monica," a voice called back.

Susan opened the door. "Hiya Mon.," she greeted her friend.

"Hello Susan," Monica replied. Something jarred in Susan's mind.

"Come in then!" Susan beckoned as she walked back through the sand pit. "Sorry for the mess, I'm quite busy, as you know."

"Ah, yes. The dig. How is it going?" Monica enquired.

"Oh, as good as can be expected. Mr. Tibbles keeps walking through the pit, though. He thinks it's his litter tray."

"Oh no!" exclaimed Monica.

The two of them sat down on the sofa.

"Oh, how rude of me," said Susan. "Can I offer you a drink or something to eat?"

"Yes, please. I would like a cup of tea, please Susan."

Susan thought there was something not quite right about Monica, but she couldn't quite put her finger on it.

"Is everything alright, Mon?"

"Yes, I am fine, thank you."

Susan still wasn't sure. She went into the kitchen to make Monica a cup of tea. She went to the fridge to grab the milk, but she found there was none there. "Oh!" she exclaimed. "I had some a minute ago." She looked around to see Mr. Tibbles drinking from the carton. "Oh! Mr. Tibbles." She chastised him. Mr. Tibbles carried on regardless. "Sorry Mon., we're out of milk." Susan called through to the living room.

"That's all right, thank you Susan, I'll have mine without."

"Are you sure? I can pop out to the shop, it won't take a mo."

"No. Don't go to the shop." Monica almost sounded like she was commanding Susan not to leave.

"If you're sure," Susan replied. She took the tea into Monica.

"Thank you," said Monica.

Susan reached down and picked up a photograph of her and Monica that she kept on the table beside the sofa. "Do you remember this, Monica?"

"What is it?" Monica asked.

Susan looked down at the photo and back up at Monica. The problem was on the tip of her

tongue. "It's when we were at that beach in Cornwall a few years ago. That was such a great day." Susan remembered fondly. She looked back at the photo, then back at Monica.

"Are you all right, Susan? You seem to be concerned about something," asked Monica.

"I don't know. There's something about this photo," said Susan, her consternation growing.

"I really shouldn't keep you," said Monica. "You've got a lot of digging to do if you're going to find that Roman soldier."

"What?"

"Your work in the pit, to find the soldier. Remember?"

"Oh, yeah, right. I do have a lot of digging to do."

Monica got up to leave. Her long dress and long dark hair seeming to flow as she moved. "What's happened to your hair, Mon?" Susan asked.

"It's always been this way," Monica replied.

Susan looked at the picture again. Her mind struggled intensely to see something.

"You..."

"Me?" Said Monica.

"You..."

"What is it, Susan?"

"You are not Monica."

"Oh? Then who am I?"

Suddenly the memories of the past days came back to Susan. "I shouldn't be here. I should be in the clinic. I need to talk to doctor Hart." Susan walked to the door. The other woman cut her off.

"You can't leave, Susan. Not yet. You need to dig up the soldier."

"Who are you?" asked Susan.

"Don't you recognise me?"

"The ghost!"

"My name is Lucilia," said Lucilia.

"I don't care what your name is, I'm not going to dig for you." Susan pushed passed Lucilia.

"But I cannot rest. I long for rest. You released me from the ground. Please, help me with this one final task."

"But what you did in the shower. You nearly killed that girl."

"I am sorry."

"And I am leaving." Susan went to open the door. It wouldn't budge. "What have you done?" she insisted.

"I can't let you leave. Not until I have my ring."

Susan turned around and walked though to the kitchen. Mr. Tibbles hissed as Lucilia walked in.

Susan stared through the window. She couldn't see anything. It was totally black. She tried the kitchen door. It wouldn't open.

"Why can't I leave?" Susan demanded.

"There's nowhere to go," Lucilia replied.

"What do you mean?"

"I've given you this so you can be comfortable while I... while I dig up the Roman soldier."

"You're a ghost, you can't touch things. You don't even know where you are or how to get there."

"You will tell me. I will find a way."

"I'll never tell you anything."

"Oh this part of you won't. That's why you're in here. The rest of you is far less resistant."

"What?" Susan's frustration was bubbling over into anger.

"Oh, I've been learning my way around you. Since the last time, I've learned how to access so much more."

"Access? What are you talking about?" She practically spat the words.

"You wouldn't give yourself willingly, so I am having to take you into my own hands." Lucilia's voice was taking on an edge of enjoyment at Susan's bewilderment. "Do you not see what is happening?"

"If you're going to possess me, why can I still see you?"

"Going to?"

Susan ran at Lucilia. She barged into her and knocked the wind out of her. Lucilia double over.

"Get out!" She shouted. "Get out of my mind! Out of my house! Out of my life!"

Lucilia shook herself back into shape. "I can see you're stronger than I anticipated. I've had a very long time to wait. You freed me. You will help me to get to rest."

Lucilia came at Susan, she seemed to fly across the room. Susan ran, first to the front door, still immovable, then upstairs. She locked herself into her bathroom.

"Interesting, but it won't help you," Lucilia taunted. "I gave you this place, remember?" The door started to fade in front of Susan's vision. Susan bolted out and smashed Lucilia into the wall. She tried to push her down the stairs, but Lucilia grabbed her and carried her with ease into the bedroom. Lucilia lay Susan on the bed, took a pillow and began to smother Susan.

Susan felt like she was losing consciousness. "But isn't this my dream?" Susan heard an odd sound, a whirring. She thought she heard some men's voices. Susan ceased feeling anything.

Len, Barbara and Monica were back on ward F after eating their lunch. They were tense, but hopeful that Susan would be back from her scan. Barbara approached one of the nurses.

"Excuse me, do you know if Susan Rider has come back from her scan?"

"Let me find out which bed she's in," the nurse smiled. She checked her list and wandered over to one of the sections of the ward with beds. She walked back towards Barbara. "Yes, she's still in a coma, but she is here if you'd like to see her."

The three of them followed the nurse to Susan's bedside. She looked so peaceful, despite the wires coming from her chest and the drip line going into her arm.

"They're monitoring her, to make sure she remains stable," explained the nurse.

"Do you know how long until the scan results are back?" asked Monica.

"Sorry, not exactly, could be up to another couple of hours before the doctor comes to see you."

"OK, thanks," Monica looked forlorn.

"She's in good hands," the nurse tried to reassure them before leaving to attend to another patient.

"What do you make of all this, Barbara?" asked Len.

"I don't know love. I really don't."

Len stepped over to her and gave her a hug. "She'll pull through. Our Susan's a fighter. She'll not let whatever's going on win."

Monica took Susan's hand in hers. "Come on Sooz, we've got first years to haze." She was wearing a smile, but tears were running down her face.

The three of them sat around Susan in a silent vigil, hoping that she would wake up at any moment, and life could go on as normal.

Susan didn't move. If it weren't the periodic beep from the cardiac monitor, you might think she was dead.

The three of them waited for the doctor to arrive with the results. Len had to go outside to make a call to his work, to tell them he'd have to miss a few days. Monica phoned Kevin to tell him about Susan's state.

The seconds ticked by, each one more slowly than the last. Asking the nurses for updates was futile. They did know anything more than Susan's family. Eventually, after their nerves had been worn to shreds, a doctor arrived to talk to them.

"Hello," he announced himself. The three of them looked up in unison. "I'm doctor Jenkins. I'm Susan's neurologist."

"Lay it on us, doc." Monica tried to sound up beat, but clearly she was strained.

"Well, the good news is that the scans have detected no signs of tumour or blood clot."

"Oh, that is good news," Barbara visibly brightened.

"What's the bad news then, doctor," Len enquired.

"Well, we don't know why she's fallen into a coma. I understand we're waiting on two sets of blood tests. Doctor Hart and I have tried to hurry the lab along, but they are swamped, as I'm sure you can understand, with hundreds of tests a day. Her scan shows that she isn't in a vegetative state. Activity was registering in all the areas associated with dreaming. There was a lot of activity in the amygdala, which suggest a nightmare."

"When do you think she'll wake up, doc?" Monica didn't mince her words.

"I can't say for sure. Signs are good that she will wake up, though."

"So you've no idea how long she'll be in this state?" Len seemed slightly panicked at this idea.

"Sorry. We'll know more once we've got the blood test results back," doctor Jenkins said apologetically. "I'm afraid I have other patients and families to see. You'll have to excuse me."

"Thanks, doctor," said Barbara.

Doctor Jenkins walked out the way he came.

Once the doctor had gone, the three of them looked at each other. "What now?" asked Barbara.

"Even knowing all this, we don't know any more about what's happening to Sooz, than we did. I guess that's why he called it bad news." Monica sighed and slumped in her seat.

Len got up and started to pace. He kept rubbing his hands through his hair. "There's got to be something we can do."

"I think this is it, Len. We just need to be here for her," Barbara saw the worry working at his face, sapping his life. "Sit down, love. Working yourself up isn't good for you."

Len took the advice, but his demeanour didn't change. "I feel so powerless, Barbara. I'm not used to this feeling."

"I know, Len. We're all feeling it. We are in this together." She rubbed her hand across his shoulders, trying to soothe him. Len turned to her and they hugged.

The three of them sat around the bed quietly. Finally Monica piped up. "We've left Susan's stuff at the clinic."

"Oh, right, we should probably go and get it," said Barbara in a hollow voice. "Well, we don't all need to go. I can stay with Susan."

"OK, Mrs Rider. Shall I come with you, Mr Rider?"

"If you like, love. I could use the company."

The two of them got up to go to the car park, leaving Barbara to watch over her daughter. "See you two soon, then," she smiled weakly.

"Would you like us to bring you anything?" Monica offered.

"Oh no, I'm fine, ta."

Monica and Len started off to the car park.

The trip to the clinic was uneventful. Monica and Len got out of the car and ascended the steps into the reception area. Len approached the receptionist.

"Hi, I'm Len Rider, Susan Rider's father. She's been moved to the hospital. I was hoping we could pick up her things and take them to her."

"Oh, right. Let me just check with doctor Hart." The receptionist picked up the phone and dialled a number. Len and Monica sat down, expecting a bit of a wait.

Their wait wasn't as long as they'd feared. Doctor Hart appeared in reception a few minutes later.

"Hello Mr. Rider." She smiled at him. "You must be Monica," she said turning to Monica.

"Hiya doctor. Doctor Hart, is it? The neurologist mentioned you."

"That's me, yes." She smiled appeasingly at Monica.

"Right, well doctor. We don't need to keep you. We'd just like to pick up Susan's things, so she's got them when she wakes up." Len stated his plan.

"Yes, that's fine." Doctor Hart paused. "You are aware of the circumstances that led Susan here?"

"Yes, she's told us about breaking into the university."

"Well, she's still technically in custody until the police decide what to do about her charges."

"I see," said Len, not sure what the doctor was getting at.

"So, when she wakes up, don't be surprised if police turn up, that's all."

"Understood, doctor." Len resigned himself to the fact.

Doctor Hart went back the way she came. Monica and Len walked into the ward where Susan had slept. One of the orderlies showed them to Susan's bed. Monica and Len gathered up Susan's things and made for the exit.

The sun was beginning to set on their return trip. "It's getting dark earlier," commented Len.

"Yeah, typical of autumn, eh?" Monica attempted to chuckle.

The two of them travelled on in silence. finding a space to park was easier at this time of day, so Len managed to keep his cool. They walked the long route back to ward F and came to Susan's bed.

"Any news, Barbara?"

"Nothing yet, Len."

The three of them took up their places around the bed and waited.

A hour or so had passed. No news had come from any quarter. The three of them were sat, not knowing what to say.

A blip of inspiration crossed Monica's face. "I know, I'll go to the newsagent's and get us a pack of cards. We can play snap or something, while we wait."

"Oh, that's a nice idea, dear," said Barbara.

"Alright. I'll see you in a minute." Monica got up to leave. As she turned towards the corridor she was met with an unpleasant sight.

"Dennis McBride," she muttered angrily, under her breath. She marched over to the middle aged man. "What do you want," she asked angrily, her finger jabbing towards him.

"Ah, doctor Kenyatta. Any comment on your colleague's condition?"

Monica ignored him and turned to a nurse. "Can you get him out of here. He only wants to stir up trouble so he's got something to write for his tumble down rag."

Dennis side stepped Monica and proceeded to Susan's parents.

"Hello," he said to the parents in a faux voice of concern. "You must be poor doctor Rider's parents. My condolences on your daughter's condition."

"Who are you?" Len reacted defensively, having seen Monica's response to this man.

"Dennis McBride, the Local Echo. I've been covering your daughter's dig and its repercussions."

"He's done nothing but try to undermine the research, encouraging the idea of a curse whenever he can." Monica had raised her voice and come marching back with a nurse in tow. "He's visited various accident victims trying to get them to back up his ridiculous claim and now he's here to gloat."

"Please, miss, keep your voice down. Patients are trying to rest."

"Sorry," Monica reigned herself in.

"Mr. McBride, is it?" the nurse said calmly. "I don't think it's a good idea that you remain here. You're clearly upsetting these people."

"I'm just trying to report the news," he tried to bargain with her.

"I'm sure, but these people deserve peace, Mr. McBride, as do all the patients here. Please can you move along?"

McBride could see he was outnumbered. "Fine, fine. I'll leave you in peace." He retreated back out of the ward.

"Thank you," Monica said to the nurse.

"Oh, no trouble, really. Reporters need to learn about boundaries." She walked back to her station.

Monica sat back down. She couldn't go and get cards just yet, not until she thought McBride was out of the way.

"How did he know where to find her?" Barbara asked.

"Probably bribed someone," suggested Monica. "I can't believe what depths people like him will sink to."

"This is probably the biggest thing that's happened in his entire insular life," said Len.

"What's this curse thing, Monica love?" Barbara asked.

"Oh, nothing but folklore and nonsense," Monica replied dismissively. "Some group of mystics thought we shouldn't be doing the dig, started talking about a curse. It's all mumbo jumbo from the tie-died-in-the-wool committee."

"Oh, right. They wouldn't have *done* anything, would they?" Barbara asked, slightly worried.

"Nah, I doubt it, they're hippies, not terrorists." Monica seemed quite certain. "It's not like they didn't get listened to. They just weren't heeded. Noses out of joint no doubt, but that's nothing worth worrying about."

"Still, I don't like the sound of them," said Barbara. "People shouldn't go around cursing others. Especially now that reporter's got his claws into it. People just won't leave it alone."

Len put his arm around his wife. "It's not right, Barbara, but we'll get through it." He kissed her forehead. She leaned into him.

Monica got up to get a glass of water. She asked the Riders. As she was reached to get the jug she thought she saw Susan move.

"Sooz?" She studied her. Nothing. Monica let out a sigh of disappointment.

"I was doing that every five minutes while the two of you were out at the clinic," Barbara confessed.

The day wore on, but nothing changed. No news from the neurologist. The blood tests were still in a queue. The three of them got well acquainted with the rules for various card games. Susan laid in the same state from moment to moment. Eventually time caught up with them.

"It looks late," said Monica, checking her phone. "We should get something to eat."

"You have a point, Monica," Len agreed.

"Yeah, if we waste away here, Susan will wake up to three corpses," Monica said encouragingly.

"What do you think Barbara?" Len looked for approval.

"I suppose there's nothing we can do here. But if she wakes up and there's no one here she knows, what will she think?"

"Don't worry Babs, we'll only be a little while, we don't even have to leave the hospital."

"Yes, OK. I suppose I could do with something to eat," Barbara agreed.

The three of them got up from Susan's bedside and made their way to the lift in the centre of the wing.

After she was sure they had left Lucilia opened her eyes. She looked about and checked her body. She pulled the drip feed from her arm. The docile parts of Susan informed her that the wires were monitoring her heart. She pulled them off and heard the rhythmic beep to her left turn into an alarm. A nurse rushed to her bedside. Seeing that Susan was awake, she switched monitor off.

"Gosh, you gave me a shock there!" the nurse exclaimed.

"I am sorry," Lucilia said, with an unexpected slur.

"You're probably feeling a bit groggy from being asleep for so long." She handed Susan a glass of water. Lucilia drank from it gladly. "Shall I get your family?"

"Oh. No, thank you. Do you know where they went? I'd like to go and surprise them." Lucilia tried to stand. She found that she could.

"Oh, sure! That'll be nice. They went to the cafeteria." The nurse let her be.

Lucilia put Susan's clothes on, so she would blend in. Hospital attire was a bit conspicuous. According to Susan, Lucilia could get back to the house via a taxi. She had calculated it would be possible to then use Susan's car to find her way to the wood in Chipping Sodbury. She made her way to the lift. Back on the ground floor Lucilia followed the signs to the taxi rank. She let Susan guide her to the right cab and give the address to driver. Lucilia climbed in and left the hospital.

Susan became aware. She was in her bedroom. Tied up. She was spread eagle on the bed, bound by each limb. Somehow Lucilia hadn't been able to kill her. Perhaps because she needed Susan to find her way to the wood. Sill, Susan wasn't able to do anything to stop her. She tried pulling at the ropes. They wouldn't budge. She shouted in frustration. Her freedom of movement was very small. Susan looked around for something, anything she could use to free herself, but everything in the room was out of reach. Susan lay back down. She began to wonder why she had awakened. Surely this was dangerous for Lucilia. Any semblance of self that Susan still held on to made her harder to subdue.

Back at the house, Lucilia let herself in. Mr Tibbles ran over, but immediately hissed at Lucilia. "Stupid cat," said Lucilia. She crossed the living room, went through the kitchen and out into the garden. She found Susan's box of gardening implements and selected for herself a trowel. Back inside the house Lucilia searched for Susan's car keys. For some reason this piece of information was not readily available. She pulled apart the sofa, looked through her dresser, the kitchen counter, the pockets of her coats, her handbag. Eventually Lucilia found them on the key hooks by the front door.

At the hospital all hell had broken loose. Ward F was in partial disarray. Doctor Jenkins had called the police after Susan's family had returned to the ward to find her missing. The nurse was defending herself on all fronts. Len was livid. How could they just let a girl in a coma walk out of the hospital? Monica was concerned that Susan might do something like she had done the night before. Barbara was trying to calm Len down. Doctor Hart had come from the clinic, knowing that it was her neck on the line now that Susan had absconded.

"Please, Mr. Rider, I understand your frustration, but there's no reason to blame the nurse for incompetence," doctor Jenkins was trying to defend the nurse.

"Yes, Len love, she can't have known Susan wouldn't come to find us. Maybe Susan's still in the hospital?" Barbara tried to reason with Len.

"I'm afraid that's not the case, ma'am." A security guard had appeared. "I reviewed the CCTV footage for the last hour. It looks like the patient got into a cab about half an hour ago."

"What?" Doctor Hart was fraught with worry for herself as well as Susan. "She could be anywhere by now."

"Don't worry, doctor, we're onto the cab company now, to find out where she was taken," guard explained.

Two police officers entered the scene. "Excuse me. Who here is doctor Hart?" detective Figgis enquired.

"Hello, detective. I believe we met the other day."

"Ah, yes, I do remember. So you've let our suspect walk out of the hospital?"

"I know how this looks, detective--"

"Suspect? Hey, you watch your mouth, mister!" Len's temper flared up.

"Now, Len, the detective didn't mean anything by it," Barbara tried to keep her husband in line.

"You're right sir," Figgis turned on Len, "my mistake. I saw her assault three officers. I don't suspect her of anything, I know exactly what she did."

Detective Jones stepped between the two men. "Please gentlemen, bickering won't find Susan any more quickly." Len and Figgis backed down. Len and Barbara sat down next to Susan's bed.

"We've got a car on its way to her house. Hopefully whatever's causing her behaviour is normal in some sense. Home is the first place most people go when they're confused."

"She didn't seem confused," interrupted the nurse. "She said she wanted to surprise her family."

"I'm not sure it was Susan," said doctor Hart. "I think that this ghost she keeps hallucinating might have finally got control of her."

"A ghost? Are you serious?" said Len.

"No, Mr. Rider, I don't mean a real ghost. Susan thinks it is a ghost, but really it's the manifestation of whatever is causing her psychotic episodes. Susan isn't any more aware of what she's doing now than when she was in a coma." Doctor Hart's explanation left everyone silent while they thought it over.

Lucilia had never driven a car. Susan had, and Lucilia hoped that meant she would be able to. She unlocked the car. So far so good. Recognising the steering wheel, from Susan's memories, she walked to the other side of the car and got in. Patiently she waited for the next step to make itself apparent. Her arm guided itself to put the key into the ignition. Lucilia turned the key and the car started. She jumped a little. She felt the power of the car. Driving was going to be different to being a passenger. She searched Susan's mind for what should happen next. Her feet and arms moved, putting the car in gear. Lucilia looked ahead. There was a car parked just in front. Her arm made an adjustment to the gear stick. She looked behind. Her feet moved and the car started to reverse. Panic hit her. She broke suddenly, and the car stalled. She repeated the movements from before. She allowed the car to reverse enough so that she could move forward and passed the car ahead. She slowly made her way to the end of the road. Sitting for a moment, she searched through Susan's memories for how to get to her village. She turned left onto the main road and drove off. At first she was going slowly, cautiously. As her confidence increased Lucilia was able to drive faster. Soon she was tearing down country lanes as fast as Susan's old car could carry her.

Susan felt a burst of strength. Lucilia must have been relying on her somehow. She pulled at the ropes. She heard the bed strain but still she could not escape. Mr Tibbles walked. He jumped up on the bed and curled up beside Susan. "Hey baby, you come to keep me company?" Mr Tibbles mewed at her. Susan laid back down and waited. Lucilia was getting weaker. It was only a matter of time.

The police turned up at Susan's house. They knocked on the door and called out her name. The door in the house next-door opened up. The old lady who lived there came out. "What's all the commotion?" She enquired.

"We're looking for the lady that lives here ma'am."

"Well, she's not in. I saw her drive off about twenty minutes ago."

"Thank you kindly, ma'am," The policeman doffed his hat. "I don't suppose you saw which way she went?"

The old lady pointed down the street in the direction Lucilia had driven off.

"Thanks again," said the policeman. "Have a good evening." He and the others got back into their cars.

"I've just heard from the station. Susan isn't home, but she was there. Apparently she has driven off. Anyone any idea where she's gone?" She appealed to the crowd in ward F. Blank faces all around. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, Monica spoke up.

"I think I know," she said.

"Where?" demanded Jones.

"During the day before she attacked the university, she talked about wanting to dig up a Roman soldier, near the dig site we'd just finished. Well, she had no evidence, so I told her not to be so silly."

Jones got on her phone immediately. "Where is the dig site?" Monica explained how to get there and Jones relayed the information to the dispatch at her station.

Jones and Figgis left the ward.

"Do you really think that's where she's going?" asked Barbara.

"It's a good bet," said doctor Hart. "Susan mentioned about digging something up to me as well."

"I think we should go along," said Len, eager to find his daughter.

Barbara looked at Monica. "What do you think, Monica?"

"I'm game. Anything to get Susan safe and home."

"Now this seems to have calmed down, I have patients to attend to," said doctor Jenkins.

"Yes, I should be getting back to the clinic. I've missed several appointments as it is," agreed doctor Hart.

The two doctors left the ward, leaving the Riders and Monica to decide what to do. "Following the police seems a bit rash," said Barbara.

"What else are we going to do, love?" implored Len. "I can't just stay here and do nothing."

"Yeah, Babs. We should try and help Susan."

"But what if we make things worse? She's not herself."

"We'll never know if we don't try," reasoned Monica.

"We can drop you at Susan's if you don't want to come, but I have to go, Barbara." Len made his position clear.

“Oh, all right. I suppose I'll be dying of worry if I don't go.”

The three of them made their way to the car park, and drove off towards the dig site.

She seemed to be driving forever, turning this way and that. Lucilia was following the directions she could get out of Susan. Communications were beginning to break down. “Damnit, why now? I've got so close.” She passed a sign for Chipping Sodbury and something told her she was on the right track. She looked around her, trying to see something familiar, some landmark from her childhood. All the hedges and roads made everything so difficult. Nothing looked like she remembered. She carried on at her breakneck speed, hoping the directions wouldn't run out before she got to her destination. Her twisting and turning route eventually ran out of road. Lucilia switched the lights off and got out of the car. She looked around for a familiar sight. She decided to venture forth into the field ahead. The grass smelled good. The smog of the city had made her feel nauseous. The sky was clear and illuminated by a full moon. She walked aimlessly, hoping she would be drawn to where she wanted to be. Needed to be. Lucilia closed her eye and listened, straining to hear echoes of her past. Something drew her on. Slowly the feelings grew in her. She could feel the days gone by, hear her mother calling her, her father and Mini working the land. Suddenly she was home.

The knot holding Susan's left wrist loosened a little.

Lucilia felt momentarily faint. “No time for reminiscing,” she told herself. Lucilia looked around, trying to orientate herself to the pasture. In her mind's eye she could see the house her family lived in, the near by houses of the other villagers, the smith's, the stable. The woods she was looking for were in the opposite direction to the forest her father had departed towards. She turned again, seeking out the horizon. There. A blob vaguely resembling trees. Lucilia set off on her path.

Susan's left hand slipped free. She reached over and set about untying her right hand. The knot was still tight. She started working on it with all her strength.

Monica was in the passenger's seat, trying to give directions from memory. "It's times like this I wish I had a smartphone," she said.

"Don't worry, love," said Barbara reassuringly. "We've got maps to get us to Chipping Sodbury, you just have to remember where the dig site is."

"Ha!" Monica laughed nervously. "Maybe if we get there soon enough, we'll see the blue flashing lights. They'll have proper directions."

Len was concentrating on the road. He tried not to be too hasty, an accident was the last thing they needed. "It's straight along this road for a while, anyway, Monica. You've time to think it over."

Detectives Jones and Figgis were haring along behind the other cars that had left Susan's house not long ago. No signs had been seen of Susan. Their directions to the dig site were vague, but once they were in Chipping Sodbury finding the site shouldn't be too hard. "Locals will be able to help us, it's been the talk of the town for the last couple of weeks. Especially with all the furore over the mystic nature of the site," Jones sounded optimistic.

"Locals? Help cops?" Figgis sounded incredulous. "I'll believe it when I see it."

"You just have to know how to talk to people Figgis. I realise interpersonal skills are not your strong suit."

"Very funny," retorted Figgis, mocking being hurt.

"Eyes on the road Figgis," instructed Jones. Their car hurtled along, with the precision inherent in a well trained police driver.

The sound of several sirens blaring into Chipping Sodbury alerted the locals to some sort of drama. Several people came out into the streets to see what was going on. Their first stop was the local police station.

"Oh, gosh, you've woken up half the town. Did you have to be so noisy?" The desk sergeant greeted the posse.

"Good evening sergeant," said Detective Jones, flashing her badge. "I'm detective Jones, this is my partner. We're looking for Susan Rider. You might have heard of her. She's the lady who broke into the university the other day."

"Oh yes, well, she's not here."

"No, we have reason to believe she's at the site of her dig the other week. Can you direct us there?"

"Oh! Well, yes, that won't be a problem. Let me find a constable to cover for me."

The three of them got into the car and set off under the desk sergeant's directions.

Lucilia had reached the edge of the grove. She paused and tried to feel the ring call to her. The last link between her and her father before the end. "I know that psychotic rapist is buried here somewhere." She closed her eyes, let her rage come forth and probe for the seat of her hatred. It was a risky decision, the more energy she used, the weaker she became. Susan could break through at any moment and take the body back. A thread of pain reached out to her through the trees. She reeled back in fear for a moment, then realised it was pain she'd already experienced. There was nothing to fear. She dragged herself along the thread, letting her pain lead her on into the grove. The thread grew thicker as she went on, deeper and deeper, until it ploughed into the earth. "This is it," she thought to herself. She pulled the trowel from her coat and started to dig.

Susan felt the knot slip. "Yes!" her arm came free. She started to work on the knots around her ankles. They came away much more easily. "She's losing control." Susan smiled to herself. She got up out of the bed. Running down the stairs, she remembered the doors were locked, or something like locked. Susan had to try and think of a way out. Perhaps the doors would be open now that Lucilia was weakening. If this was her mind, where would they lead? She got down to the front door. The handle still wouldn't budge. Susan tried throwing a paper weight through the front window. It just bounced off. She walked into the kitchen to see if there were any clues that might allow her to find a way out. Nothing jumped out at her. Susan went back into the lounge and sat on the sofa. She tried the TV. It started showing something. Susan started with surprise. She looked hard at the screen. It looked like someone was digging a hole. Was that her trowel? Lucilia must be in the wooded area near her village. The window in the kitchen started to let light in. She could see her garden. Susan went over to the kitchen door and tried the handle. It moved. The door opened. Susan walked through it into her back garden. She looked around. It was dark over head. She went to the gate that led to the alley at the back of her house. The handle was loose, but the gate wouldn't move. "Just a matter of time," she thought. She wandered around the garden, looking for anything that might speed the decay of the hold that Lucilia had on her. She didn't really know what to look for. Susan went back inside and decided to watch the TV for signs of weakness. She could see dirt flying. Lucilia was working up a sweat. She had broken through the top soil with Susan's weedy trowel. Susan worried that the soldier wasn't buried far beneath the surface. She remembered from her dream that the commanding officer had gone to dig a grave, so it was a reasonable bet that the soldier was a metre down or so. The land hadn't been changed by human hand in almost two millennia, so it was possible that the body had risen somewhat. The screen captivated Susan, it was a strange sensation, watching your body do things, but not being able to feel them. Lucilia stopped to breathe, the work was tiring her. Susan wondered if this was a sign. She went to the front door and tried the handle. It moved. She pulled the door open and stepped outside.

"Come on Sooz," Monica called. "Why are you dawdling back there?"

Susan felt the sand beneath her feet. She looked up and saw a clear blue sky with a bright sun on high.

"Sorry, Mon." she called back, and started to run up the beach. She had a feeling of déjà vu, but this was the first time she'd been to Croyde. She dismissed it. She caught up with Monica and the two boys. They were setting out the beach equipment around them. The wind breaker was up and the towels were down by the time Susan reached them. The lads had set the deck chairs they'd brought with them and were lounging. Monica was feeling restless. "Hey, wanna play Frisbee?"

"Yeah, go on then," Susan smiled. She was rubbish at catching the Frisbee, but she would try to blame it on the wind. Not that there was any in the bay. She dropped her shawl on the towels and ran to catch up with Monica who was a short way out from the camp. Monica threw the disc with precision, flying it just above Susan's head. Susan jumped and tried to reach it. Her fingers tips caught it and it went floating off to her left. Susan picked it up and made an attempt to throw it back to Monica. Monica started running in the direction of the Frisbee, but stopped short as it landed in Craig's lap. "Careful! You nearly had me balls off!" he yelled in mock protest.

"Come and join us then!" Susan called back. "It's easier to dodge when you're stood up."

Craig and John joined the girls to make a square, and they started throwing the disc between them. The boys were trying to show off, diving for the disc and doing fancy throws. Susan slowly got more confident with the Frisbee, and even caught a few that came her way. After a while, the four of them sat down, exhausted. Craig offered around beers from the cooler. Both girls took one and cracked them open, drinking from the cans as they lay back on the towels. Susan lay back and stared at the sky. John and Monica decided to go out on their body boards.

"Are you alright for lotion," asked Craig. Susan could almost believe he was being sincere.

"Oh, yeah, I put some on earlier, thanks." She smiled wryly.

Craig leaned back in his chair. He'd been flirting with Susan, back on campus, for a couple of weeks now. Susan was enjoying it. He was pretty cute, and they had good fun when they hung out. She liked to be a tease, though. Make him doubt himself just enough to make him enjoy it all the more when she finally gave in. Susan sat up and stared out at the waves, watching Monica and John on their boards. Craig came over and sat by her.

"They look good out there," he commented.

"Yeah, Monica's got a real knack for boarding."

"Do you think John's a good match for her?"

"Maybe, they do seem to have a bit in common." They both sucked on their beers.

"You don't think he's good enough for her?" Craig seemed a bit defensive.

"Oh, it's my job as her best friend. I have to disapprove of all of her suitors." Susan let out a giggle.

"Oh I see," Craig said in mock annoyance, chuckling.

Craig looked over at Susan staring out at the surfers. "What's your type, then, Sue?"

"My type of what?" She played dumb.

"Suitor."

"Well, I don't usually pick boyfriends for Monica." Just a bit more irritating, she smiled to herself.

"Not for Monica, for you." Craig played it cool, no signs of irritation. Susan was impressed.

"Oh, whatever do you want to know that, Craig?" Susan turned to look at him.

"Oh, no reason. I thought I might know someone you'd be interested in," Craig played the innocent.

"Touché," thought Susan. "Oh, really, what is this gentleman like?" Susan inquired.

"Oh, well," started Craig. "He's about your age. Handsome, intelligent, good at Frisbee."

"How intriguing," said Susan. "I don't suppose he's studying structural Engineering at Bath

university?" It was good to give a little ground.

"Why yes!" Craig was getting a good feeling things were going his way. "Do you know the fellow I'm talking about?"

"I think so." Susan moved a little closer, so as to whisper in his ear. "Is it Kevin Peterson?" She rolled back to see Craig's face. He was somewhat crest fallen, then he caught the twinkle in Susan's eye.

"No," he said slowly. "Kevin's not quite the engineer I had in mind."

"Oh then, please do pray tell to whom you are referring." Susan pulled off pretentious with aplomb.

Mr. Tibbles crossed the towels.

"What a weird dream," Susan thought, as she got up. She could hear shouting downstairs. Her mum and dad were fighting again. Susan walked to the top of the stairs and listened in.

"This is shit, woman!" Len bellowed. "You expect me to eat shit?"

"Please Len, you're scaring me." Barbara was cowering in her seat.

"What do you expect if you can't even make a descent breakfast?"

"I'm sorry. Please. Keep your voice down, you'll upset Susan."

"Oh yeah, that's right. Hide behind our daughter. You spoil her, Barbara. I bet she won't have to put up with this crap."

"What's wrong, Len?" Barbara tried to reason with him.

"This food is shit, Barbara, as I've been telling you for the last five minutes."

"No, there's something else. You weren't this way when we met. You weren't angry for all the years we've been married. Why are you so angry now?"

"You're talking nonsense woman. I'm the same as I've always been. Nowt wrong with how I am. You've only got yourself to blame."

"No, Len, I won't believe it. I didn't used to be afraid of you."

"Fuck you, Barbara." Len threw his plate across the kitchen where it smashed in the sink.

Barbara flinched as he walked by and left for work, slamming the door. Barbara started crying. Susan could hear her from the stairs. She walked down to the kitchen, worried about her mother. Susan stood next to her mum and put a hand on her shoulder. Barbara looked round at her daughter. She tried to quickly wipe the tears from her eyes.

"Oh! Good morning sweet heart." She said in a cheery voice.

"Are you alright, mummy?" Susan asked, earnestly.

"Oh, yes, mummy's just being silly," Barbara dismissed the worries. "Did you want me to make you something for breakfast?"

"Can I have some toast, please?" Susan smiled sweetly.

"With butter and honey?"

"Yes, please!" Susan poured herself a bowl of cereal. "Don't listen to daddy, I think you make great breakfast."

Barbara smiled at her daughter. "Thank you sweetie, that's a lovely thing to say. Don't worry about daddy and me, though."

"Well, he was very mean, and I don't think that's fair."

"No. No, it's not fair." Barbara came over and gave her daughter a kiss on the head. "Don't you use any of those nasty words that he used, either."

"What? Like shit or fuck?"

"Susan!" Barbara frowned at her. "Yes. Never say those words."

"Why can daddy say those words? I've heard kids at school using them."

"I don't know why daddy says those words. The children at your school shouldn't be using them."

"Can we get a cat?" Asked Susan.

"No, honey. Not at the moment. What with your dad the way his is and all."

"If he gets better, can we get a cat?"

"Maybe, honey. I don't know."

Susan smiled. Now all she needed to do was fix her dad. Her mum put down some toast and honey in front of her, and a glass of orange juice.

"Don't be too long, Susan. You've got to get to school. You can't be late again. I'll get a reputation."

"What's a reputation?"

"Oh, just something adults don't want to have."

"Do I have a reputation?"

"Not yet, sweetness. Not so long as you're a good girl."

"Does daddy have one?"

"Eat your breakfast, Susan." Barbara deflected the question.

While Susan tucked into her toast she tried to play the game on the back of the cereal box. She had to find as many monkeys as she could in the picture. The answer said there were eight, but she could only see six so far. She double checked her counting with her finger. "One, two, three, four, five, six." She mused as she crunched on her toast. The she saw that two of the monkeys made a bigger monkey, and the whole picture was one big monkey. "Big monkey," Susan laughed.

"What's that dear?" Barbara asked.

"The picture's a big monkey," Susan said while laughing.

"Like you you mean?" Barbara said with a grin.

"Yes!" Susan confirmed her mother's suspicions.

"I thought so. You've got those long arms."

"For swinging through the trees!"

Susan finished her toast. "May I leave the table?" She asked, politely.

"Yes, you may." Barbara replied. Susan carried her plate, bowl and glass to the sink and handed

them to her mother. "Thank you," Barbara said. Susan walked out of the kitchen and up the stairs to her room, to get changed for school.

Downstairs, Barbara put out Susan's ruck sack and packed lunch, found Susan's shoes and coat and laid them ready for her.

Susan pulled up her socks and ran to the bathroom to brush her teeth. She enjoyed how foamy it made her mouth. Susan tried to pull monkey faces in the mirror after she washed her face.

"Come on Susan, hurry up!" her mother called her. Susan rushed down the stairs, nearly tripping on the bottom step. "Careful, love. I don't want to have to take you to hospital with a broken arm! People will think I don't take care of you."

"Sorry, mum," said Susan. She picked up her pack and lunch and started putting on her shoes. She didn't like her shoes much. They had laces that kept coming undone, even with a double knot. All her friends had Velcro shoes. "Why can't I have Velcro shoes?" Susan whined.

"I've told you before. Velcro shoes are common."

"But these shoes are so hard to use."

"It'll make you smarter. Now hurry up." Barbara used her firm but fair tone.

Susan obeyed and got her shoes tied. She stood at attention, coat on, pack on back, ready for her mother's inspection. Barbara looked her up and down, giving her a smile and a kiss. "Perfect. Now where did I put my keys." Susan sat on the bottom step while her mum sought out the keys to the house and car. Out of the corner of her eye Susan saw something. She got up and ran after it.

"Susan, where are you going? Come back here, we're nearly ready to go." Susan didn't hear her. She was at the Kitchen door, staring at a cat.

"Mr. Tibbles?"

Susan shook herself. "Why had that popped into my head?" she thought.

"You alright?" asked the man beside her. Susan turned to see who it was. Alex. Of course, they'd been chatting for a while now. Something felt a bit off, but she couldn't put her finger on it.

"Oh, yeah, just a moment of *déjà vu*. You know how it is. Long days, short night. Eventually it starts catching up."

"You need another drink. That'll perk you up!" Alex suggested, with a wink.

"Go on then, I'll have a vodbull." Susan flashed a smile in his direction.

Monica walked past and gave Susan the "lets chat in the toilets" look. Susan got the message and hopped off her stool. "Just need to visit the ladies. I'll be right back." Susan squeezed through the crowd and caught up with Monica. "What's up?"

"I don't like that guy."

"What? I've only just met him." Susan followed Monica through the door. The two of them walked to the sinks. Monica turned to Susan.

"He looks like bad news. I have this vibe."

"A vibe? You haven't even talked to him."

"I know, but the barmaid keeps giving him shifty looks, like she doesn't trust him."

"Are you sure she's not just boss eyed?"

"I don't know exactly what it is, Sooz. Just be careful, yeah?" Monica implored her.

"Don't worry," said Susan. "He's no match for these dukes." She put her fists up.

They both reapplied lip gloss. Susan adjusted her bra and patted down her dress. They left the toilets behind them and went back to the pub. When Susan got back to the bar, Monica carried on, back to the group of friends they'd come with.

"Do you know her?" asked Alex.

"Yeah, we're practically sisters," Susan replied.

"Oh! That would explain the dirty look she gave me. She trying to ward me off?"

"Yeah, she says you're up to no good."

"Oh, well I am. But only the good kind of no good," He laughed.

"Uhuh." Susan seemed unimpressed.

"Get that down ya," he said, handing her the vodka and redbull.

Susan took it from him. "Thanks." She took a sip. Susan's eyes widened. "Is that a double?"

"Yeah. Alright?"

"I shall have to keep my eye on you, clearly." She smiled at him.

"I wouldn't want it any other way."

Susan like his bravado. He seemed quite lively. Her last couple of boyfriends had been a bit boring and stale. Alex's attention shifted for a moment. Susan turned to see a man walking towards them.

"Alright, Dave, mate. How's it going?" Alex beamed at him. They shook hands.

"Not bad, mate. You alright for a drink?" Dave looked Susan up and down.

"Yeah, ta," replied Alex.

"Cool. See you in a bit, yeah?" Dave looked over at Susan. "Watch out, eh, he's a lively one." He winked at Alex.

"Shut it you!" said Alex, still smiling. "Yeah, later."

Dave wandered back into the crowd.

Susan and Alex started chatting the about stuff and things and all of a sudden Susan felt something rubbing against her legs. She looked down. It was Mr. Tibbles. "What are you doing here?" She asked. Susan bent down and picked the cat up. Alex seemed oblivious to this, carrying on the conversation as if he were talking to someone else. "Typical," she mused. Susan carried Mr. Tibbles to the table with Monica and their friends. They didn't seem to notice her. "Am I invisible?" Susan stood still for a moment, trying to figure things out. "No, because Mr. Tibbles can see me. Can't you?" Mr. Tibbles mewed in reply. "Then why can't anyone else?" Susan tried knocking things over and hitting people, but she seemed to have become insubstantial to all except Mr. Tibbles. She started to walk back to wards Alex. All of a sudden she saw an image of a hole in the ground. She could see her trowel. It was in her hand. She looked up, and she was still in the pub. But then the bar shifted, and things started to fall away from her. Slowly things started to come back to her. "Lucilia." She said.

"Who's Lucilia?" Alex asked. Susan was outside his flat block. Mr. Tibbles was gone.

"She's..." Susan tried to remember.

"So are you coming up for some coffee then?"

Susan wasn't sure. "Yeah, that sounds good." She smiled at Alex.

She followed him as they went up the stairs to his floor. Something was pulling at her mind. Hadn't they only just met? How long had she known Alex? They'd been together for a while now, hadn't they? She went through his doorway, behind him.

"Make yourself at home," he said as he walked to the kitchen area.

Susan looked around. "At least it's tidy today," she thought. "Your flat's looking nice," she called over to him. Susan took her coat off and put it on her bag on the floor in front of the sofa.

A few minutes later Alex came over with some coffee. He handed one to Susan. "Careful, it's hot." She blew across it to cool it. Alex told some corny joke. Susan tried to look like she was lapping it up. Truly though she wasn't sure about Alex. He had a sort of charm, but it wore thin after a while. He seemed to be a bit of a jack the lad, getting drunk, having fights. Not what Susan had hoped for when she longed for excitement. No ambition or dreams.

Alex had put his coffee down and moved closer to Susan. He took the coffee out of her hands and put it beside his. He moved in to kiss Susan. She reciprocated. She tried to think of a way out. Alex's hands were moving around on her back. He seemed to be searching for something. He was kissing her neck, she felt his hands move down to her waist. "He must have given up on the bra," she thought. He pulled her up onto the sofa so she was on her back. Susan didn't like this. She heard a zip go. Alex's hands were in her top, groping her breasts. One hand moved down to go up her skirt. "Stop," she said.

"Come on. This is why you came up here." Alex's hands started to pull her pants down.

"No. Really stop." Alex ignored her. He started manhandling her around her labia. Susan tried to push him off. He wouldn't budge. He held her waist with one arm and rolled her skirt up with his free hand. Susan tried to pull her knees together. She was suddenly able to sit up. Alex came on her top. Susan slapped him. She grabbed a cushion and wiped the semen off. Putting on her coat she hurried to the door.

"Wait," called Alex, but she was gone.

Susan stepped out onto her front door step. The disorientation of not being in a block of flats made her stumble. Susan realised that she had been in a block of flats a moment ago. How was that possible? More hallucinations? She started walking. "Wait," she thought. "Where am I going?" The thought didn't stop her legs. She let the motion continue and tried to piece together what had just happened. That night with Alex had happened weeks ago. But before that she'd been in a pub, with Mr. Tibbles. And before that at her parent's house. And before that on a beach. And before that... "Fuck," she said aloud. "This is a dream." With that realisation, she stopped walking. "I'm reliving memories." Susan tried to rewind the memory, to see what day this was. She couldn't get past the front door to her house. It all started there. There was some sort of conflict if she went back further, like her mind couldn't pick what to show her. She decided to let it play, all the while looking for clues as to what memory this was. She felt a bruise on her arm. Rolling back the sleeve of her coat, Susan saw a plaster on the inside of her elbow. "The blood test?" Susan wondered. "Is this my missing eight hours? What if Lucilia is using this as a distraction." Susan didn't care, she had to know what had happened.

Lucilia had to pause. She was feeling tired. "No! I cannot stop," She told herself. She caught her breath and carried on her dig. She had made a sizeable hole, where she felt the Roman was buried. She was already down to her knees. With every moment she felt herself waning and Susan growing stronger. "I must find my ring, so that I can rest." Lucilia redoubled her efforts. She began to feel helpless. No matter how far down she got, she couldn't see any evidence of the Roman. Harder, deeper, faster, she dug with all her might, tears running down her cheeks. Then out of the gloom she saw something, another stone? No this had a hollow sound when she tapped it with the trowel. A skull! Finally, some reward for all the hard work. Lucilia stumbled backwards as she realised who the skull belonged to, and the memories of what had transpired before his death flooded back to her. Finding her feet, she set about scraping around the skull, to dig it out. Lucilia was close now, she could feel it. Her ring would be with the body, somewhere. She just had to persevere. She just had to hold on. As the skull became loose, she jiggled it out by the eye sockets and threw it aside, then continued her frantic dig, searching for the rest of the body.

"You disturbed my bones, Susan" Susan heard Lucilia's voice. "Now you must help me be laid to rest."

"What? What's going on?" Susan heard herself say. Her body was continuing on its way.

"I need to find my ring. You are going to help me do that."

Susan didn't hear any reply from herself. She must have been subdued by Lucilia.

"It has taken time, but I have learnt to navigate your mind. I think I can find where my bones are kept. The ring should be with them." Lucilia went quiet.

Susan guessed they were on their way to the university. "But something happened on the way. I didn't get to the university for hours," she thought to herself.

"You have interesting memories," mused Lucilia. "People seem a lot more peaceful these days. I see no animal husbandry or tilling of fields. There is so much of everything, too. I think I would have enjoyed living now. I wouldn't have been beholden to my father. Much as I loved him, I wanted more freedom than he would give me."

"Is she talking to me now, or to the subdued me?" Susan wondered. "It must be the me from then. This is a memory."

"Oh yes," said Lucilia. "This is a memory, but I am still in charge of you. We can both manipulate your mind."

Susan jumped out of her skin.

"No need to look so alarmed." They were both outside Susan's dream body. "I want you to see what we did together." "This other memory," Lucilia said, looking at something Susan couldn't see. "It's very raw. I recognise something similar in myself. I was never allowed true revenge for what befell me. Perhaps if I get vengeance for you, it will heal me in some way."

Susan's body stopped. She seemed to be calculating something. "How to get to Alex's flat." Susan

realised what had taken so long now. Her body set off on a new course. "So Alex is what got resolved?" she asked Lucilia.

"Yes," came the reply. "We made amends for the wrong he had done you."

"What did you do?"

"Wait and see! You'll be please, I'm sure."

Susan was not sure at all.

Susan lived in Combe Down, Alex was up in Weston, all the way up across the city. Lucilia seemed to enjoy the walk. Not having seen such modernity, everything was a wonder. Pavements, cars, houses, traffic lights. She enjoyed the sensations the news things brought her. Susan fast forwarded the long walk from where she lived to Alex's flat. "Oh," sighed Lucilia. "I enjoyed that. So many new things," she said wistfully.

"I want to know what you did." Susan said sternly. The streets flew by.

"What we did, Susan." Lucilia emphasised their partnership. "I couldn't have done this without your knowledge."

Susan slowed the memory, slightly afraid of what she might find. She was walking along Weston high street and caught a glimpse of herself in the window of a shop. She looked so spaced out. People must have thought she was crazy. Maybe she was crazy. After the problems her dad had had, perhaps she had inherited it somehow. The doctors had said that was impossible. The condition wasn't genetic. But scientists were finding genetic links to all sorts of things. Maybe her dad had suffered a similar fate. Been tormented by a supposed spirit all those years ago. The pills he took now kept everything under control, but put a strain on his heart. Susan started to feel a tinge of normalness. She remembered about the mental health clinic and doctor Hart. She hoped this would all be over soon, and they could find out what was wrong with her.

Susan's body carried on up the high street, taking the road that led off in the direction of Alex's flat block. Susan couldn't remember any of this happening. She wondered if she would when she regained control. If she could wake up. There was no knowing what was wrong with here. What if she were in a coma? Susan dreaded to think. Lucilia was moving her around now, Susan held firm to the belief that once she was gone that would be the end.

"Yes," confirmed Lucilia. "I do not intend to remain once I can go."

Susan wasn't sure she could trust her. She knew very little of the whimsy of ghosts. They were nearing Alex's flats. Susan remembered the neighbourhood. She remembered thinking that Alex could afford to own a place if he was more careful with his money. She must be getting old. They reached his flat block. Susan's body pushed the buzzer.

"Hello?" a voice came out of the speaker.

"Hello Alex, it's Susan. Can we talk?" Susan heard the buzzer and saw Lucilia pilot her through the door. The walk up the stairs was eerily familiar from the dream before this. Susan had a sense of foreboding and dread. At the top of the stairs, Lucilia knocked on Alex's door.

The door opened. "Alright, babe?" Alex sounded smarmy and drunk. "Come to beg to get back with me?"

"Something like that." Lucilia smiled evilly.

Alex mistook it for a come on and approached her. Lucilia put her hand on his shoulders and

looked him in the eyes. Alex tried to lean in to kiss her. "Fuck!" Suddenly he had fallen to the floor. He was laying in the foetal position, grasping his groin in agony. Lucilia lowered he knee.

"What did you do that for?" Alex managed to gasp out the remonstrations.

Lucilia pushed him out of the way with her foot. She walked into the kitchen area and started to look around.

Alex had managed to climb to his knees. He was coughing, as his wind came back to him. Lucilia kept an eye on him as she continued to scan the kitchen for something. She heard him mutter "bitch" quietly. Alex slowly got to his feet and rested himself on the kitchen counter. He was shaking his head to try to clear it and make the pain subside. "Shit piss balls," he muttered some more, as he reached inside his trousers to assess the damage. Lucilia momentarily had her back to him as he walked up to her, keeping his cool. "Look. I know I was in the wrong yesterday. I should have let you come back to me. I pushed things, and I am sorry." His apology sounded very matter-of-fact, like he didn't understand why he was being punished, but it seemed like there might be a reason, so he'd best apologise for something.

Alex got about a half a metre away and Lucilia turned on him, with a knife at his throat. "Stop right there," she ordered.

"Whoa!" Alex threw his hands up. "No need for this. Violence never solved anything, right? That's what you've been telling me."

"I have never told you anything, you worm," Lucilia corrected him. "Trousers!" She barked the command.

"W- what?" Alex stammered.

"Take them off!" Lucilia ordered.

Alex unzipped his trousers and pulled them down. He pulled them over his shoes, hopping on the spot as he did so. He stood back up, his pink, skinny legs covered in goose bumps.

"Pants!" Lucilia barked again. Alex didn't need to be told twice this time. Lucilia took off her coat. "Go and sit on the sofa." Alex hot footed it to the sofa. "Make one false move and I'll have your balls, do you understand?" Lucilia came and stood in front of him. "Do you?"

"Y-yes. Yes." Alex nodded hastily.

Lucilia put her beshoed foot into his crotch. "You like these breasts don't you?" She indicated by stroking them with her free hand.

Alex looked puzzled. "Er. Yeah." He started to look around for something to explain what was going on. He let out a whimper had Lucilia lent forward, putting her weight on his tender testicles. His attention focused on her. She started to take off her blouse. "Is this some sort of kinky sex thing?" He asked.

Lucilia paused for a moment, searching Susan's mind for what he meant. "No," She stated. Her blouse fell to the floor. She unhooked her bra and let it slide down her arms. She picked the knife up from the coffee table and removed her foot from his crotch.

"Now." She looked him in the eyes. He looked confused and scared. However he was aroused. That's all she needed. "Touch yourself."

"What?"

"Masturbate, you stupid fuck." She shouted at him.

"This is some weird sex thing." Alex started stroking his penis. He wasn't sure it was safe to smile.

"I assure you," Lucilia countered. "Sex has nothing to do with this."

"Can you play with yourself a bit?"

"No, you dumb bastard. Get on with it. Any more words from you and I will change my mind. I don't need you alive." Lucilia pointed the knife at him.

Alex's face went white. Alex's penis started to go limp. He closed his eyes and tried to think of something to turn him on. Lucilia lowered her knife and watched him. What a weak man. Seargis could have bested him easily. "You have poor choice in men," she remarked to Susan.

Susan just looked on in horror, not sure what to make of the whole thing. Alex was finally erect again. He didn't dare open his eyes for fear of what he might find. He cupped his balls to add to the sensation, pursing his lips and keeping out all thoughts of what was actually going on.

Alex was finding it difficult to come to a climax. He worried that Susan was about to stab him. He tried to put her out of his mind and let his mind wander the strip clubs he frequented. Lucilia watched, curious. She wondered if this is what her uncle looked like when her and her aunt were cavorting. Alex's strokes were getting faster. His breathing was getting heavier. Suddenly he let out a groan and ejaculated in to his palm. Slowly he raised his head from the back of the sofa and opened his eyes. His euphoria was cut short as he found Susan with the knife at his throat. She had put her bra and blouse back on while he'd been elsewhere.

"Eat it." Her face was serious.

"Wh- Wha-?" He stammered.

The knife flicked from his throat to his left testicle. He felt the point touching it. "Eat. It." Lucilia enunciated thoroughly.

Alex lifted his hand slowly to his mouth. The slimy substance started wandering on his palm. He paused as his palm reached his lips. The knife point pushed further into his ball sack. Quickly he flung the semen into mouth and swallowed it down. He grimaced at the bitter, salty taste. Lucilia smiled and straightened her back. "Well done."

"Is that it?" Alex asked, a note of fear in his voice.

"Almost," The same evil grin crossed Lucilia's face. "Stand up for me." Alex stood up. "Take your shirt off." Alex proceeded to undo the buttons on his shirt. He looked up as his arms were coming out of his sleeves, to see what might be coming next. He heard a crunching noise as Lucilia cracked him across the face with a strong right hook. He fell, spark out, on to the floor. "Now that you're unlikely to stop me, I can make sure everyone knows about you. Lucilia proceeded to search the flat. Susan stood above Alex, worrying about him.

"What are you worrying for?" asked Lucilia. "He's just unconscious."

"This is totally fucked up. Were you really going to stab him in the balls?" Her voice was racked with fear. What kind of spirit had stolen her body?

"No. If I were to stab him, it would be to kill him." Lucilia said simply.

"I don't feel reassured."

Lucilia found was she was looking for and walked back to Alex's prone form.

"What are you doing now?" Susan asked.

"Oh, just leaving a message." She had with her a marker and Alex's phone, which he'd left unlocked.

"How do you know about mobile phones?"

"I know what you know, remember? Well, I can find the information if I look for it." Lucilia was scrawling something on Alex's chest. When she was done she took a photo. She then proceeded to tweet the photo with the tag line "It's all true."

Susan looked over to Alex's body. Much as the torture had been unbearable to watch, she couldn't deny the message was accurate. It read "I am a shit who sexually assaults women." Short and to the point.

"Now the world knows about him," said Lucilia. "That's how it works, right? I put this thing on the Twitter and it will get everywhere."

"An image like this? Yeah, I expect so. Even Alex's friends are his enemies."

"Good, then my work here is done." Lucilia picked up Susan's coat and left the flat. Susan remained for a moment, trying to understand what had happened. It was too big. She would never do something like this.

As the dream was frozen Lucilia's ghost form came back to the Susan. "It's OK, our debt will be paid once I have my ring back. If you let the dream continue, you can see what happened at the university."

"I know what happened there."

"You know what you were told."

"I've seen footage. You attacked the building and three police officers."

"But wouldn't it be better to experience what happened? Watching a battle from a far is no fun. There is only fun in the midst of combat."

Susan was curious to see for herself, to really remember what had happened. To no longer have to rely on the accounts of others.

"OK," she agreed. The dream started rolling forwards again. Susan followed her possessed form down the stairs and out of the flats. It had become dark outside. The street lights were lit and Susan could see the breath coming from Lucilia as she passed under them. The journey to the university would be as long as the journey to Alex's.

Susan decided to fast forward, to skip the dull bits. She paused for a moment in the city centre. The Halloween lights were on, so she paused to enjoy them, as the crowd bustled around her, completely unaware of her presence.

"Oh, so you can appreciate things," jibed Lucilia. "This wealth of yours."

"Don't be so surprised. The city can be so pretty this time of year."

"Yes, but there are so many people! I can't imagine living with so little room to breath."

"The quiet spots are hard to find, it's true," agreed Susan. She carried on following herself through the winding streets towards the university campus. Slowly the shoppers thinned out and the streets were easier to navigate. Not that Susan needed to worry about keeping up. She fast forwarded the memories until they were at the university entrance.

"Evening doctor Rider," the security guard called. "Bit late for you, isn't it?"

“Hello Bernie,” Susan called back, only to realise he was talking to Lucilia, who walked blithely passed without showing the least attention to poor Bernie.

They crossed the campus and came to the door to the archaeology department. Lucilia pulled and pushed at it, but it wouldn't budge without a pass. She paused for a moment and tried to coax Susan's memories into explaining how to get the door to open. Eventually she understood that the pass was back at the house, in Susan's bag. Frustrated by the potential delay, Lucilia started to look for another way in. Susan knew what would happen next. She'd seen the video. Eventually Lucilia tried the bin, to see if it was loose. It came up from the floor with ease. She walked back to the locked doors and rammed the glass with a strength Susan didn't realise she could possess. The glass shattered on impact. Susan shielded her eyes instinctually. The glass went in inward. Alarms started beeping, Susan assumed the police would be along any minute. She straightened herself and followed Lucilia into the lab.

Lucilia walked with purpose. She surprised Susan with how well she knew the corridors of the department. Even Susan got lost at times. They eventually arrived at the lab. Still carrying the bin, Lucilia tried the door. The bin seemed to be the skeleton key to the whole campus. She looked around, searching Susan's memories for her bones. She turned and marched towards a set of draws at the edge of the room. Lucilia pulled the first one open, throwing each sample away after glancing at it. “No. No. No. No!” She was getting more and more frustrated. “Your memory is useless, Susan.”

“I'm hardly in my right mind, am I?” She retorted.

Lucilia went on to the next draw. The samples kept flying. She repeated the process on draw after draw until — “Me! Mine!” Lucilia picked up another, a smile on her face, eyes wide with amusement. Carefully she started to pile the parts of her on the floor after inspecting each bag thoroughly for her ring. She got through the whole draw. Her face fell. No ring. She moved on to the next draw. The samples started flying again. Susan cringed, seeing all the hard work of Monica and the students going to waste. “Where is it?!” screeched Monica. “Where is my ring?!” She ransacked all the sample draws until they were empty. Some of the hold that Susan had on her own body must have prevented Lucilia from emptying the equipment cupboards. Lucilia marched to the lab door and left the room. She turned and hurried deeper into the department. She found Susan's office. The door was locked. She screamed in frustration. Lucilia started kicking at the door, but to no avail. The office doors were solid wood.

“Hey! You!” Lucilia and Susan heard a man's voice down the corridor. Then a clatter of an army of boots started coming towards them. Susan froze, forgetting for a moment that she was safe, in a manner of speaking, from the incoming onslaught. Lucilia considered her options. She was brimming over with rage at not having found her ring. Running didn't seem like the right thing to do. These people owed her. She was in the right.

“Go! Run!” Susan urged her doppelgänger. Lucilia looked over at her and smiled. She stood still and awaited the army.

The three policemen arrived. They regarded Lucilia. She regarded them, from side on. The policemen paused to catch their breath. “Come along quietly, please,” said the officer in front.

“Can you get me into this office, please?” requested Lucilia, pointing at the obstruction in front of her.

“No miss, you've got to come with us.”

“I'll do no such thing.” Lucilia said defiantly.

"Please, miss, we're not big fans of subduing people, but it is our job when it comes down to it."

Lucilia turned to face them, her eyes a blaze. "I'm not coming with you."

The first policeman started to approach her, confident that his weight advantage would be more than sufficient. He got within reach of her and stretched out his arm to grab her. Lucilia tutted at him. She spun herself under his reach, grabbed his arm and used his weight to topple him down. He rolled over to get up and she brought her foot down into his stomach. He let out a strained yelp and curled up. The other two policemen watched on amazed. Lucilia saw the downed man's baton and took it. Holding it with the longer part parallel to her forearm, she jumped at the other officers. Taking one out with a swift upper cut to the jaw, hitting him with the butt of the baton.

To Susan this all seemed to be going on in slow motion. She couldn't believe what she was seeing. The memories wouldn't speed up. Part of her couldn't stop watching.

The third policeman had already drawn his baton. He stepped back, assessing his combatant.

"Calm down miss. This doesn't have to get worse for you."

"Worse? You mean I'll run out of opponents." The glee in her voice was unnerving. She lunged at him, bringing her full weight to his chest though her shoulder. The policeman's eyes bulged as the air was forced out of his lungs. Lucilia used the full length of the baton to sweep out his legs. As he fell she cracked him on the back of the head.

"No!" Susan called in panic at the damage being done to the policeman. Once he hit the floor he didn't move.

Lucilia looked at the three men and started to run towards the exit.

Susan's legs were frozen, so the dream dragged her on with its relentless pace. Susan heard a police radio in the background. "-s coming your way. Dangerous-". "Dangerous is an understatement," she thought.

Lucilia reached the exit after running through the twisting corridors. She saw ahead of her a semicircle of six police with batons raised, prepared to stop her as she tried to leave. She pulled up short of the door.

"Don't make this any harder." Susan recognised the voice from behind the line of hi-viz jackets. Figgis.

"You afraid for your men?" taunted Lucilia. Her face was covered in sweat, she was breathing hard, but her demeanour was like that of a juggernaut. Behind her she heard boots running in her direction. She couldn't catch them off guard this time. She charged the line. The men of line braced themselves for her. She smacked into the middle, splitting the men apart. She regained her balance and charged at Figgis. Figgis froze for a moment, not sure what to do. He doubled over as Lucilia's shoulder connected with his stomach. She turned around to see the six policemen running towards her. She roared and ran to combat the man at the edge. As she caught his legs with her baton he went up on his arse, but the other five men surrounded her and beat her to the ground. Once she was down, they cuffed her hands and legs. Figgis read her her rights as they carried her twisting, wriggling form to the waiting van.

It was dark in the field. Figgis and Jones were trying to organise the police so that they had a good chance of finding Susan.

"Be aware," said Figgis, with gravitas. "She might look weak, but she beat three of our men, and took on six more. Alert everyone when you find her."

Jones smiled to herself, noting how Figgis had left out the part about Susan beating him, too.

The police started to spread themselves out on the pasture, their torches illuminating the scene. It didn't take them long to walk from one end of the dig site to the other.

"Has anyone found anything?" radioed Figgis. Everyone came back negative.

"Well, we found her car, so she must be around somewhere," Jones radioed. "We need to spread out."

"We need more eyes on the ground," piped up the desk sergeant

"Let's call in a chopper," said Figgis.

"That's your answer to everything," joked Jones. "I'll call it in."

The police broadened their search area while the chopper was on its way, combing the field from one side to the other, then carrying on to the next field. The light from the torches criss-crossed the ground like excited puppies. Lucilia looked up from her dig for a moment, thinking that she'd heard something and seeing the lights in the distance. She had uncovered the soldier to his shoulders, but still hadn't found her ring. She knew she was running out of time, and started to worry about being caught before she finished.

"Losing your grip?" Susan taunted.

"You should help me, not hinder me," Lucilia was surprised Susan was able to talk to her.

"Why should I help you? You've left my life in tatters. My family are beside themselves with worry and half the police in the county want to lock me up and throw away the key."

Lucilia swayed uneasily as she felt herself lose a little more control. "This is your job, isn't? Digging up dead people? Disturbing their spirits and desecrating their graves?" Lucilia pulled herself together and got back to work. Susan did have to admit a modicum of curiosity at what was being uncovered.

Monica, Len and Barbara had found their way to the pasture. They were alarmed to find a horde of police cars at the entrance. Just in front of the cars they saw Susan's car. They felt a brief burst of relief, knowing she couldn't be far.

"You think she's digging in the field somewhere?" Asked Len to Monica.

"I think so. She said something about digging up a soldier."

"Alright," said Len, getting his torch out of the car. "Let's get looking." The three of them went over the stile and headed to the pasture where the dig had happened.

"I suppose the good thing about the other cars still being here is that they haven't found her yet, either," offered Barbara, as they walked on.

As they got to the pasture, they looked and saw the torches in the distance, combing the next field.

"I don't think we'll have much luck here," said Len.

"I'm sure there's something I'm forgetting," said Monica.

The three of them scouted around the dig site, calling out for Susan. Unlike the police they wanted her to know she was being sought out.

"No sign of her here," said Len. "What shall we do now?"

"That's my family now," said Susan as they heard the calls from afar.

"What's that noise in the background?" asked Lucilia.

Susan listened for a moment, trying to pick out what Lucilia was talking about. There. In the distance. A dull whump whump whump. It was getting closer. "I think it's a helicopter."

"That won't help them in this light," scoffed Lucilia.

"I think they have infra-red cameras," pointed out Susan. "Best get digging. They'll be here soon."

Lucilia felt so tired. She persevered, digging out ever more of the skeleton. "Help me," she pleaded with Susan.

"Do you hear that, Jones?" said Figgis over the radio.

"Yeah, sounds like our eye in the sky is nearly here. Shall we head back to the pasture, so we can follow their lead?" she suggested.

"Yeah, good plan. Lets get back, everyone." Figgis issued the command over the radio.

The police started the slow walk back to the pasture, after a fruitless, frustrating search. They had no idea exactly how far behind her they'd been or what direction she'd run off in. It was all guess work. She could be walking back to bath, for all they knew.

Monica and the Riders could hear the chopper clearly now. It was not far from them, flying over the houses that bordered the fields.

"They've bought out the big guns," said Len. "Susan must've really pissed them off!" he chuckled.

Monica laughed to. "Yeah, that's Susan. Never does things by halves!"

Barbara was worried. "Where's my little girl?" It was all she could think about.

The helicopter slowed as it got to them. A voice came over a loud hailer.

"Please clear the area. A police operation is under way."

"I know!" Shouted Len, back at the helicopter. "I'm trying to get to my daughter before you do."

He knew they couldn't hear them over the racket the helicopter was making, he could barely hear himself.

The police were arriving back at the pasture. Jones saw the chopper light illuminating the three others in the field. They didn't seem to be heeding the chopper co-pilot's message, so she radioed to the chopper that she would handle it. The helicopter flew on, continuing the search, with the rest of the police force behind it.

Jones walked towards the small group. As she approached she could make out who it was.

"Good evening Mr. Rider," she called.

"Hello to you," he called back. "I hope you don't expect me to leave finding my daughter in the hands of your lot?"

"It's what we're here to do Mr. Rider."

"You have a vendetta against her. She beat your lot up!"

"We will not harm Susan if we can help it. Regardless of her past behaviour." Jones tried to reassure him.

"Either way, I think it would be helpful if we all searched together. Susan would be easier to handle if there were familiar face for her to see, don't you think?" said Len.

Jones could see he wouldn't leave without a fight. "Fine, Mr. Rider. Please don't obstruct us, though. Your daughter is still technically a fugitive, regardless of her mental state."

The helicopter scanned the fields, its huge searchlight making short work of the areas. Susan's family were walking at the back, out of sight of the police. Monica looked around. She tried to remember what Susan told her. She tried to imagine where Susan would go in times like this. The she remember what doctor Hart had said. It probably wasn't Susan in control. She couldn't be sure of anything she knew about Susan's behaviour. She looked where the helicopter had just passed. Some bushes in the field they were in. Hiding in trees would be a good idea, if it weren't for the infra-red cameras. "Trees," muttered Monica.

"What, love?" asked Barbara.

Monica scanned the horizon, trying to see something. "Over there," she whispered to Barbara, pointing in the direction of the grove of trees.

"You think she's over there?" Barbara whispered back. "What's over there?"

"I can just make out some trees, can you see the shadow that's being cast by the moon light?"

"Oh, yes, just about." Barbara pulled on Len's sleeve and they nonchalantly broke away from the search party.

Figgis and Jones were at the head of the party and far too engrossed in the search to see the three stowaways leave. The chopper was following the fields parallel to the road. It was relatively slow going, as they had to point the light in each part of the bush, and do the same with the infra-red camera.

"Do you think she's still this near by?" Figgis asked Jones.

"I've no idea. All we've got to go on is that she wants to dig something up in this area." Tiredness was becoming evident in her voice.

Len played the torch across the ground as they made their way towards the grove. He tried to

keep the beam narrow and short, so they didn't alert the police.

"So you think the police are going off in the wrong direction?" Len asked Monica.

"I'm sure she told me the Roman soldier was in the wooded area near the dig site. The forest that used to be here has long been cut down, but this grove seems to have been protected in the same way that the pasture was."

"You can't think this mystic nonsense is real?" Asked Barbara incredulously.

"No, no. But it makes sense that whatever is making Susan do these things would think that."

Lucilia had uncovered the soldier down to his knees. "Why can't I find my ring?" she almost wept the words.

"Seems you've got a little longer," Susan said. "The helicopter has gone in the wrong direction."

The soldiers bones were strewn about the place like some macabre nicknacks thrown around in search for some keys. Lucilia supported herself on her hands, her arms out stretched. She coughed. Shook herself. "It might not matter," she said in despair. "I don't know how long I've got till all my strength is gone."

Susan felt a twinge of sympathy. "Look," she decided to impart some expertise. "What don't you try digging deeper into where you got the ribs from? You've only got the front half, maybe the ring ended up inside his rib cage."

Lucilia took the advice and started to dig again. The amount she was shifting was pitiful. Each movement was a herculean effort. Susan looked on feeling ever more sorry for the being holding her hostage. Lucilia fell forward in exhaustion. She pushed herself up and turned to Susan, holding out the trowel. "Please," she whispered. Susan found herself holding the trowel. Lucilia was lying next to her, in her ethereal form.

"This is getting us nowhere." The frustration sprang out of Jones mouth.

"What else can we do, though? Dogs?" Figgis tried to be pragmatic. "We'll find her eventually, even if it's not tonight."

"All this to find one person. It's ridiculous. Why'd she run anyway?"

"She's crazy, Jones, don't take it to heart."

"Maybe her family have thought of something." Jones walked around to the back of the search party. "Figgis," she called over the top. "Have you seen the Riders?"

"Nope, not for a while, I assumed they were just tagging along behind like you told them to."

"Damnit." She started scanning the horizon for evidence of the group of interlopers. Far in the distance she saw a small light, it could be a torch. "Can you hold the fort here, Figgis?" she called again.

"Sure," he called back.

Jones started to march in the direction of the light.

"These trees are further away than they look, eh?" said Len, slightly out of breath.

"Do you need to rest a minute, love?" asked Barbara.

"Oh no, we'd best not stop in case the police catch wind of us."

The three of them trudged on in the dim moonlight.

"Hey!" They heard a call from behind them. "Hold on."

"Just pretend you've not heard her," said Len. They kept walking towards the grove.

"Mr Rider!" the voice called. "Mrs Rider! Doctor Kenyatta! Please wait a moment." Detective Jones caught them up at a run and got in front of them. They came to a halt.

"Oh, hello detective, we didn't hear you," Len lied expertly.

"Right," detective Jones didn't believe him. "Where are you off to?"

"Well, we didn't think we were wanted in your group, so we thought we'd search off in this direction."

"Wait here, we'll get the rest of the party over," detective Jones thought they knew more than they were telling.

"Oh, I'm sure fit police people as yourselves will catch us up," said Len.

"She could be dangerous, Mr Rider."

"Maybe, but she's my girl, detective. I'm going to help her."

"Fine, but I'm coming with you." She radioed to the rest of her team to catch her up.

"Are you sure that's a good idea, Jones?" Figgis radioed back. "This could just be a distraction."

"They know something, Figgis, I can feel it. She's this way."

Susan held the trowel in front of her. She wondered what to do. She also felt exhausted. She hadn't had anything to eat or drink since she left the hospital. Lucilia had been right, there was something here. It could even be Roman. She dug down into the soil, searching for the remains of the rib cage. She scraped the layers away carefully, methodically. She relied on her training, not wanting to damage the finds any more than they already had been. Digging where she expected to find the bones, Susan slowly uncovered them. Remarkably well preserved, like the other site. Something caught her eye. She scratched around it. It could just be a stone. No, it was hollow in the middle. Part of it glinted in the moonlight. Lucilia looked up, aware of Susan's excitement.

"Do-" Lucilia strained to speak. "Do you have it?"

Susan gingerly plucked the artefact from the ground and held it up to the moonlight to inspect it. A ring. There were Celtic runes inscribed on it. "What does it say?" she asked Lucilia.

"Strong like you," Lucilia said, weakly, reaching out and passing her hand through the ring.

There was a bright flash of light. Lucilia vanished. Susan passed out.

Dawn broke through the windows of Lucilia's family home. The men were up and about, loading themselves up with the equipment they thought they'd need in order to meet the Romans and keep themselves protected from any double cross. Minura, Cunovina and Lucilia had prepared breakfast for them. "Eat up," commanded Mini to Searigis. "Today will be long. You will be carrying all this," he indicated the pack and weapons, "for a long while before your next meal." Searigis tucked in heartily.

"Are you ready to head off, Mini?" Docius asked.

"As I'll ever be, brother."

"Good. I shall check the camp and see how far our countrymen have got. We must set off soon if we are to meet the invaders on time."

"Worry not for the invaders timetable," Mini showed some bravado.

"Foul as they are, I do not wish to anger them. We must avoid conflict if possible."

Mini grunted. Docius knew he was disguising how worried he was for his son's safety on the road ahead. He left the house and headed towards the camp.

"Are you well fed my darling?" Cunovina walked up to her husband.

He took her in his arms. "Oh yes, thanks to your kind ministrations." They kissed.

Lucilia was sat opposite Searigis, eating with him. "It's good, isn't it?" She smiled at him.

"Yes, really tasty." Searigis was wolfing down his food.

"Careful you don't get indigestion," Cunovina warned him.

"I can't slow down, mother. The others are waiting for me."

None the less, he slowed to a more considered pace. Cunovina stepped behind him and stroked his head. "Your uncle will be a while rousing the drunkards from last night. I wonder if they really understand what is at stake."

"Especially those ones Searigis was entertaining last night," said Lucilia. "They were the worst of the lot. They could barely speak."

"Who is this?" asked Minura.

"Oh just some men from last night. Aunt Cunovina flirted with them for a bit," Lucilia said for the pleasure of annoying her aunt.

"What were they saying?" Minura continued, ignoring the salacious remark.

"Oh, just singing some of the songs that everyone else was."

"Did they actually say anything?"

She directed the question at Searigis. He swallowed his mouthful hastily. "I didn't hear them speak, even to each other. They were very drunk."

"Even when I saw trying to annoy Mini, they didn't actually say anything to me, not even jeers," Cunovina confessed.

"And they stayed in the same group, they didn't meet any of the other delegates?" Minura started to sound worried. Searigis shook his head.

"What do you think, Minura?" Mini asked her.

"It feels wrong, like they were watching us, not actually joining us."

"Spies?" A worried expression crossed Mini's face.

Minura looked to her sister-in-law. "Cunovina, please can you find my husband and tell him of our suspicions. You will remember these men the best."

The atmosphere in the house was tense. Mini sat next to his son, trying to understand the implications of spies in the village. "Why would they send spies?"

"Knowing our number before we meet would mean they could arrive with ample force to overwhelm us." Minura sat next to Lucilia. "I've heard rumour that the size of the invader's force is immense. Well beyond what we can muster."

"Will the women have to come and help in the fight?" Lucilia's eyes lit up.

"No, daughter. This is serious. We might have already been betrayed. All could be lost."

"Sorry, mother,." Lucilia deflated.

"One of us is worth ten of the.", Searigis piped up, trying to mirror his father's bravado.

"I admire your bravery, son, but it could be worse than that." Mini tempered his son's enthusiasm.

"I see," said Docius. "Five of them. And they didn't speak to anyone at all."

"Yes, Searigis thought they were drunk, as did I," Cunovina explained.

"Do not worry, I do not blame anyone. Our guard was down last night, we were in high spirits. Truth be told, I didn't expect the invaders to betray us. If it weren't for Minura's observations, we could be doomed." Docius stood and thought for a moment. "I am loathe to ask this of you, my brother would kill me if he knew."

"What is it?" Cunovina asked expectantly.

"I need you to search the camp. See if the potential spies are still here. Come and find me if you find them." Cunovina nodded and walked off inspecting all the faces at the camp.

Slowly but surely the various members of the camp were assembling at the edge of the village. The men of the village were joining them. There were many sore heads among them. Docius approached each of the chiefs and asked them to inspect their men, telling them of the story of the spies. The men started to form into ranks and the chiefs made their way along, looking for

unfamiliar faces. Docius inspected his own men. Cunovina came back to him.

“Any sign of them?”

“No, I could not see their faces among our allies.”

“Thank you, go back to the house.” Cunovina walked away.

A few moments later Mini and Searigis approached Docius. “Did you get the news from Cunovina?” Mini asked.

“Yes, quite disturbing. It seems as though the men have already left, back to the invaders.”

Mini and Docius exchanged a worried glance. “Searigis,” said Docius.

“Yes, sir?” Searigis replied obediently.

“Can you wonder among the men forming up here? See if you can spot the men you were singing with last night.”

“At once.” He walked off.

As Searigis marched off, Docius turned to his brother. “Are you worried about your boy? Your face is full of lines.”

“I-” Mini tried to think of an excuse. None came. “Yes, I will confess I am worried for him. We can't trust these invaders. We could be marching to our doom today.”

“I worry for Lucilia also. She and her mother will have to lead our village if we do not return. Who will defend them from these invaders then?”

“I don't think you need to worry about Lucilia, Docius,” joked Mini. “She's strong enough to take on the entire legion.”

“You're not wrong, that girl has fire in her.” He clapped Mini on the back. “We'll be alright. Minura's probably worrying over nothing. It could just have been some thieves who thought it was their lucky night. Free food, free drink.”

The two men walked towards the other men of their village. Searigis came running over. “What's up, son?” Mini enquired.

Searigis paused to catch his breath. “The men aren't here.”

“That's fine. Good work,” Docius praised his nephew.

“There's more,” he gasped. “Some of the men saw the others walking off towards the forest at the end of the night.”

“Hmmm. That is the direction of the invaders' camp,” commented Mini.

“Thank you, Searigis. Go and join the rest of the men,” Docius directed. Searigis ran off. He turned to Mini. “Well, if they were spies, the invaders have the information now, anyway. I will send some scouts on ahead to check the meeting place. If we stay here, then the battle will come to our village. We must still go to the meeting.”

The women of the village came to see their men off. Minura and Lucilia walked up to Docius. Minura could see the worry on his face. “Do not worry, my husband, we will be fine while you break bread with the enemy.” She pecked him on the cheek. Lucilia tried to hide her face from her father.

“Are you alright, daughter?” he asked her.

"Yes," she sniffed, not looking up.

"Let me see your beautiful face before I go," he said gently to her.

Lucilia raised her head, trying to wipe away tears.

"Sweet girl," her father said, "do not cry while I am still alive."

"But the spies, father!"

"We can outsmart anything these invaders have planned. Your mother is not the only one with intelligence." He smiled down at Lucilia. She smiled back up at him and embraced him with all her might. "It is time for me to lead these men." Lucilia released her embrace. Docius lent forward and kissed Minura full on the lips. "We will be back in two days time."

"We will have a feast waiting for you." Minura bowed to her chief.

Docius walked through his men and to the front of the throng. He raised his hands. "Men. Respected visitors. Please listen." The crowd slowly fell silent. "You must be on guard at all times. It is possible that last night we were infiltrated by spies." A murmur went through the crowd. Docius calmed them with a gesture. "Do not worry. I have sent scouts on ahead to see the meeting place, and find any evidence of treachery. It is also possible these men were just thieves from up river. We will still go to the meeting. It is the best hope we have to negotiate with these invaders and secure peace in our lands."

Docius gave a signal to Mini. "Form up men!" he ordered the men from the village. The men formed in ranks ahead of the other chiefs and their aides. The women stood at the side of the village and looked on. Docius marched forward. Everyone followed him.

Minura had a tear trickling down her cheek. "Mother?" Lucilia asked her mother. She had never seen such emotion from her.

"Oh, it's nothing my child. I worry needlessly." She wiped the tear away.

The women stayed and watched until the procession had gone out view, then they filed back into the village and went about their business.

Pomptinus woke, uncomfortable on the ground. "A bed of sticks and dirt doesn't make it easy to sleep," he mused to himself. He opened his pack and took out some fruit. The sun was low on the horizon, just beginning its journey for the day.

"You're an early bird too," Sergius said from behind him.

"Oh, yes, I suppose." He hid his discomfort, so as not to upset Sergius.

Sergius was drinking from one of the skins. He stared out at the horizon. "The first day of our freedom from the Roman tyranny. We will make much of this day."

"What is the plan, then?" They heard a dissenting voice.

"Good morning, Pollius," said Sergius, with a hint of contempt. "You are free to do as you choose. I am going back to that village to make it mine."

"Oh? And how do you plan to do that I wonder."

"The village is empty of warriors, as they have gone to meet our generals to discuss peace," Sergius spat the last word as though it were a curse. "I will simply subdue the women and get them to do our bidding."

"And when the warriors return?"

"Do you really think the warriors are off to a peace negotiation?"

"Do you think our former legion will let you keep your village?"

"It matters little. We can take any nearby village. All the chiefs are at this meeting." Sergius didn't want to rule a village any more than he wanted to work for the Roman Empire. He wanted to run amok. His urges were not against anyone except those who would restrain him. The men following him were slowly falling into that category. He had come on this invasion as a way to see another country, one the Empire hadn't defiled, so that he might defile it in his own name.

"Pomptinus, go wake the others. We need to eat and move on."

"Why the rush?" asked Pollius.

"The legion won't have let us go. Their will be someone along soon enough to spoil our fun."

"Who do you think?"

"Falernus, of course, to make up for his failings as a leader." Sergius got up and walked back to the camp. Pollius followed him back.

The other two men were relieving their grogginess with some water around the ash of the camp fire. Pomptinus was tucking into a bread roll. Sergius and Pollius took seat on opposite sides of the ashes.

The men ate in silence. Fabius, Pollius and Paririus exchanged glances. Sergius noticed, but said nothing, he finished his meal and stood up. "Come on. We should get a move on before Falernus figures out where we're going."

"Falernus?" said Fabius.

"Yeah, Sergius thinks he's been sent to track us down," chimed in Pollius.

"Him and the rest of our squad," said Sergius. "The centurion will want our heads for deserting." He started packing his things.

Pomptinus was ready to go. The other three lounged around the ashes. "Do you three want to be hung?" Sergius said to them. "I'll happily do it myself, if you want it so badly." The loungers felt a chill down their spines. The way he said it sounded less like a threat and more like a genuine offer.

They slowly got up and put their things in order. Several minutes passed. Sergius didn't seem to become impatient. Perhaps he was playing with the idea of being caught. It seemed like something he might do, just for fun. The three men seemed to come to the same conclusion simultaneously.

"Well done, you really waste time with panache and flourish." Sergius made fun of them.

"Lead on, then," Pollius demanded.

"Follow me," Sergius walked off, not acknowledging the man's input.

The men set off at a good pace. Sergius was in the lead, winding through the trees, like a blood hound on the hunt.

The sun was well off the horizon by the time the group got back in sight of the village. They could see some people tilling the field behind the village, making way for fresh crops. Sergius signalled that they should go along the tree line. They went around the edge of the forest. It was a long route. Fabius, Pollius and Paririus started to whinge.

"Can we not just go straight across this field?" said Fabius. "They won't see us."

"The entrance is on the other side," Sergius said calmly. "We need to arouse as little suspicion as possible. We don't want them sending a messenger to their warriors in the forest. That would significantly cut short our fun."

"Your fun, most likely, Sergius," Paririus said.

"You are not looking forward to our conquest?" asked Sergius.

"I'm having my doubts this will be the big score you lead us to believe."

"Yeah, what do we hope to achieve here?" Pollius was annoyed and curious. "Why is this better than the army?"

"You all want power, don't you?" asked Sergius, thinking on his feet. "Think of this as a step on the road to greater things."

"What things? How is raiding a peon's village getting us closer to being kings?" Fabius was beginning to sound indignant.

"Each village we raid, we will get to take the plunder. Eventually we will be able to hire men of our own until we are as strong as those we left behind, only we won't be languishing at the bottom. We'll be on the top."

"That's a long game, Sergius," said Pollius.

"It's a shorter game than trying to move up the ranks in our legion. You able to change who your parents are?" Sergius countered.

The men fell quite and continued walking. This wasn't the glamour and wealth they had been hoping for. Building an empire of marauders and mercenaries would be a difficult task. It sounded good, but in this country of paupers how would they get anything? Perhaps there was hidden wealth that Sergius hadn't mentioned. "It seemed likely he'd hold back such information, the greedy swine," Fabius thought to himself. The dissenters carried on following Sergius, for now. The moment that they thought they were being cheated, he would have hell to pay.

They finally finished their long walk around to the other side of the village from the field workers. Sergius started leading them towards the village's outer wall. They could see smoke coming from the iron working area.

"I thought you said all the men were off in the forest," said Pollius.

"I guess these people don't need men to make their iron," suggested Sergius. "I bet these women work harder than any of you ever have."

"Then, how are you so sure that just us five can take the village?" Pointed out Paririus.

"Because we have the element of surprise and weapons."

The men got to the wall surrounding the village and started to sneak around to the side with the opening. They could here a lot of work going on, the usual bustle of a small village. They crept along the base of the wall, careful not to be seen. Eventually they came to the opening. Noöne was guarding the outside.

"Pomptinus," whispered Sergius. "Stick your head around the corner and see what people there are."

Pomptinus crawled to the head of the line and stuck his head around the corner. "There are women all around, going about their business. There's no way to get in without being seen," he whispered to Sergius.

A smile crossed Sergius's face. "Well then," he said. "I suppose there's only one thing for it." He drew his sword. "Come on. Time to put your training into action for your own benefit."

The rest of the men followed suit. They stood beside the opening. Sergius looked over to Pomptinus. "Go around to the back and kill the women working the field," he ordered. Pomptinus ran off obediently.

Sergius stepped through the gap. "Good morning villagers," Sergius announced. Many of them turned to see what the noise was. None of them understood what he was saying. "I am here to claim you." He laughed aloud. The three remaining Romans blocked the exit.

"We should find Minura, this could be related to the meeting in the forest," one woman said to another. They walked off to the chief's house.

Sergius brandished his sword at some of the onlookers. They shrank back, not sure what to make of this invasion. After a short while Minura emerged from her home, Cunovina was by her side. "Take the children in doors," she commanded the onlookers. The women took their children to their various homes. "Who are you?" she asked Sergius. "Can you even speak our language?"

Sergius laughed. "I think she is trying to bargain with us, men. What shall we ask for?"

"They can't understand us any better than we can them," shouted Pollius. "This is fruitless."

"These are the men from last night," Cunovina informed Minura.

"I suspected as much. Is this all of them?"

"No there was one other."

Pomptinus was at the corner of the village wall, looking out on to the field. There were four women working the field with ploughs, two to a plough. Pomptinus wasn't sure of the best approach. Could he take them all at once? "Maybe if I walk up and stab them, they won't be expecting it," he mused. Pomptinus started to walk at a normal pace towards the women.

"Hello," one of the women called. "Can we help you?" Pomptinus continued his walk towards them. "Do you think he can't hear us?" she asked the others "Hello!" she shouted. Pomptinus didn't react. He got within reach of the woman who had been calling at him. "What do you wa-" Her question was cut short, turned to a bloody gargle as Pomptinus's blade pierced her abdomen. He withdrew it quickly, swiftly moving to slice the throat of the woman stood behind her, before she had time to react. The other two turned and ran towards the forest. Pomptinus knew he couldn't let them leave, Sergius would be displeased. He gave chase. One of the women paused and picked something up. Pomptinus tried to reach her before she got up. As he reached her she swivelled around her hips, striking him with great force. Pomptinus staggered back, from surprise as well as the strength of the blow. She drove forward, holding the shovel ahead of her like a pike.

Pomptinus deflected her attack with his sword and swung it back around to strike at her. She regained her balance and dodged the blow. He swung again, this time catching her arm. She screamed in pain.

Minura's ears pricked up. "Was that a scream?"

Cunovina nodded. "I think so."

"Sulicenna," Minura called. "Go and check the field, see what is going on." She kept her eyes on Sergius.

Sulicenna made her way to the opening. She was blocked by the three men. She tried to push by. "They won't let me through." She called. Fabius pushed her to the ground.

"Women, arm yourselves!" Minura shouted.

"I think we've upset the lady," Sergius chuckled.

The women started moving about the village.

"What are we waiting for?" asked Pollius.

"Good question. I think I was just weighing up the options. Cut down their number." Ordered Sergius. "Start with the one at your feet." Sulicenna screamed as the sword cleaved her chest. Her body fell limp.

She fell to her knees, dazed, her left arm hanging from her body. Pomptinus raised his sword for the final blow. As he began to swing down he was hit from the side and knocked off his feet. The other woman stood over him. She picked up the shovel and stabbed it down towards him. He rolled away just in time. He grabbed his sword, but a blow came down on his head, knocking him onto his face. Dazed, he rolled onto his front. The woman stood over him again. This time she did not miss. The shovel penetrated his chest, sending blood spurting up into the air. "We must get you to the village," she said, turning to the injured woman.

"No, listen," insisted the other woman. They were silent for a moment. They could hear confusion erupting from within the village. "You must try and find the men. We have been betrayed."

"Let me at least bind your arm, first." The injured woman nodded. She let the other woman help her to the village wall, so she could lean against it. The other woman then set off towards the forest.

"You dodge well," said Sergius, swinging his sword at Minura, "but you cannot dodge forever."

Minura was looking around her opponent, trying to find a way out, so she could get to Lucilia. "Cunovinna," she called. "Make sure Luci is armed."

Across the square, Cunovinna was looking for her own weapon. She heard Minura's call and remembered the tools in the house. She ran towards the house. For a moment she was torn between helping Minura and protecting Lucilia, but her eyes met with Minura's and she knew what had to be done.

Across the village the other three men had cut down several of the women. The bodies lay behind them. "Do you think Sergius cares if we die?" Paririus asked.

"I doubt it," Pollius replied. "He hasn't given a second thought to the fact that Pomptinus hasn't returned."

"Well, we can't go back to the legion," pointed out Fabius, sensing the other's desire to leave this mess. "What would we do if we left Sergius to it?"

"I'm not sure we'll get the chance," said Pollius, pointing toward the newly armed women approaching them.

The women were surrounding them with knives, pitchforks, and any number of other tools they could lay their hands on. The men looked from one to the other, standing in a triangle, back to back. "Maybe they will treat us better than the Romans?" suggested Fabius.

"After what we just did?" countered Paririus.

"Good point. Nothing else for it then."

The three of them charge at the ring of women. Fabius was first to fall, knocked off his feet by a pan to the head and pinned to the floor with a fork through his neck. He struggled to free himself as three women took it in turns to bash in his skull.

Pollius slashed wildly at his opponents, keeping some at bay, but his back was unguarded. He felt the first knife pierce his lung and let out a scream as it was twisted and pulled free. He fell to his knees and remained upright just long enough to be decapitated by a scythe.

Paririus tried a blind dash for the exit. He got half way when something hit him in the ankle. He tripped and fell, unable to catch himself. He started scrabbling to get up when he felt a club to the back of his head. It was the last thing he ever felt.

Falernus and his squad broke camp at the first light of dawn. They continued marching through the forest, on the trail of Sergius and his deserters. He pushed his men hard, as they travelled further and further from camp. He couldn't be sure of the exact direction Sergius had travelled, but he knew Sergius would need to find a settlement to scavenge at some point. Once they were at the edge of the forest, it would be just a matter of time before they found someone who had seen him. That is, if his accomplices didn't turn on him first. It wouldn't take long for them to figure out that whatever he had promised them was a lie. Sergius was smart, but he never thought ahead.

Minura grabbed at Sergius' sword arm and held it long enough to stamp hard on his foot and smash her forehead into his nose. He reeled back, snatching his arm away from her, blood dripped onto his top lip. "How come none of the Roman women are like you?" he sighed. He thrust his sword towards her exposed midriff, but he was too far out. Minura easily dodged to his right, planting her fist firmly in his side. Sergius winced and lashed out with his leg, sending Minura flying towards the wall. Momentarily she fell to her knees, getting to her feet just in time to side step his sword point.

Inside the house Lucilia was getting worried. She could hear battle outside. Her mother had instructed her to stay in the house, to remain safe. Minura had given her a knife and gone out unarmed. She heard the door being opened and braced herself. "Lucilia?" It was Cunovinna.

"Yes aunt, I'm over here." Lucilia called from behind the containers.

"Good, I will keep watch at the door. Your mother has instructed me to protect you."

"But who will protect her?" Lucilia asked.

"Do not worry, your mother is a cunning woman, she will outsmart this beast." Cunovinna tried to reassure Lucilia. It seemed to work. "I will be outside the door should you need me. Stay put for now."

Sergius noticed the other woman exiting the house from the corner of his eye. "She must have been checking on something," he thought to himself. "Something of value, no doubt." The woman was beginning to bore him. He could hear behind him the other three failing miserably. So much for their training. He wouldn't have long to find out what was going on in the house, he could find way to have more fun later.

His shoulder barged Minura and slit her throat while she was stunned. The sorrow he saw on the other woman's face made him smile. "Priceless," he said. He started walking towards her, his sword raised. The look of anger on Cunovinna's face soon turned to anger and she raised her sickle. Sergius snorted derisively. "She will not be a challenge."

Lucilia strained to hear her mother fighting, but couldn't hear anything. The noise of her aunt shouting caught her attention. She crept to the window to see if she could glimpse anything. Near to the entryway to the village she saw her mother lying stricken on the floor, blood pouring from her neck. "No!" she screamed and ran to the door.

Cunovinna tried to draw the invader away from the house, but whenever she let him spy the door he would move to get around her, rather than engage her in combat. From behind she heard the door go. "Stay inside, Lucilia," she shouted. Lucilia ignored her and ran to her mother, tears streaming down her face, sobbing with each step.

Sergius saw now what they had been protecting. The chief's daughter. His prize. Oh, this would be a sweet conquest. He turned his back on Cunovinna and started to stalk towards Lucilia. "Come back here," demanded Cunovinna in a voice like thunder. Sergius was enraptured, he couldn't hear anything but his own beating heart. A gruesome smile covered his face. "Run Lucilia!" Cunovinna's voice was urgent as she ran to slow the brute. Lucilia couldn't pull herself away from the body of her mother. Then, in a flash, anger seized her. Greater than any hatred she had felt before. She turned to see the invader bearing down on her. She saw her aunt running.

Cunovinna pounced driving the sickle into his shoulder. She held on, pulling down on him. "Run!" she screamed at Lucilia. Sergius fell to one knee under her weight. Lucilia felt a moment of

confusion. She obeyed her aunt and fled the village.

Sergius tried to stand but Cunovina's mass prevented him. His hand searched for the sickle handle, careful not to grab the blade. He felt wood beneath his palm and yanked hard to pull it out of his shoulder. Cunovina held as tightly as she could, hoping that the other women would arrive in time. Sergius tried to lower himself away from the blade. It started to come loose. Finally his shoulder came free. He dropped the sickle to his side and stood tall. Turning, he faced the woman who was delaying him in giving chase. "Thank you," he said. "You have made this much more interesting." He slashed at Cunovina. She managed to block the blow with the sickle, but the shaft shattered under the force of it. "Damn," Cunovina cursed under her breath. She just needed to distract him long enough for Lucilia to get a head start towards the forest. His sword swipes were coming quickly, but he seemed distracted. "Is he considering just going after Lucilia? Am I no longer a threat?" Cunovina swung at him with her fists, trying to find a weak spot. He caught her on her arm. She cried out in pain. He pushed her away and landed a knock out blow with his left hand. Cunovina fell, immobilised.

Lucilia ran as fast as she could through the grass. She looked back for a moment. Noöne was coming. Maybe her aunt had been victorious. She kept up her pace, she needed to reach her father and tell him of the betrayal by the invaders. Her heart was racing. She closed her eyes, ignoring the pain in her legs and chest. The forest seemed so much further than she remembered. She stumbled over the uneven ground, flailing for a moment. She felt herself slow. Looking back, Lucilia saw a shape emerging from the village. She regained her stride.

Sergius stood at the exit to the village. He looked around to find his quarry. "There, in the distance," he said to himself. He set off with great speed. Lucilia wondered if she could lose him in the forest, or would he still be faster than her? Sergius's heart started to thump in his chest. Getting to the prey before it got to the forest would make things easier. He didn't have to hide this one, it could happen out in the open, a thought he relished. It almost put a spring in his step. He was gaining on Lucilia. She could hear his foot falls. Her energy was running low, but she forced herself on. Sergius felt each centimetre as he slowly closed the gap between them. He felt giddy like a young boy courting his first crush, mixed with the excitement of a hunter chasing his first kill. It had been so long since anything had excited him so much. He could smell her fear on the wind behind her. Closer, ever closer. She was almost within his grasp. He roared with pleasure in the pursuit. Lucilia jumped in fright and froze for a moment. Sergius's hand clamped itself to her shoulder. She screamed, clasping her necklace in both hands.

At the edge of the forest Falernus and his men saw the wall of the village. "When we enter the village, be on your best behaviour," he commanded his men. "We are in negotiations with the natives, there's no call for trouble." Then he thought to himself, "unless Sergius has been here, then likely they'll attack us on sight." The squad continued its march, aiming for the field at the back of the village. When they reached the field Falernus saw the woman sitting at the wall. He noticed her blood soaked clothes. He sent a man to tend to the injured woman. Scanning the horizon he saw the bodies of the native women, and a man in Roman clothing. He sent another man to see who the Roman was.

"Pomptinus," the soldier informed him upon his return.

"Damn, we're too late." Falernus was pleased that at least he wouldn't have to try to take all the

men into custody. "On the double men, we must see what damages have been done, and apprehend any of the deserters left alive."

The squad set off hurriedly. They rounded the corner of the village and kept up the pace to the opening. As they reached the entrance they heard a rumble coming towards them. The squad was confronted by a mob of women wielding weapons and tools. "Fall back men, try not to engage," ordered Falernus. None of his squad were able to communicate with the natives. They had no choice but to slowly retreat from the women.

The women confronted by this new menace broke from their chase and turned to face the squad. They marched towards them, but slowed as they saw the men were retreating.

"Put down your swords, men," Falernus ordered. The men looked amongst each other and started to unsheathe their swords and put them on the floor. The women started to charge at the swords were drawn, but slowed to a walk as the swords hit the floor. One of the women called something out and two of the group went back into the village. The two groups remained motionless eyeing each other. Falernus's keep his breathing slow and steady, making sure not to seem scared or aggressive.

After a few minutes had passed the women seemed to relax a small amount, but had not backed off at all. The two women who had been sent to the village returned carrying a body. They dumped it at Falernus's feet and returned to the village. Falernus regarded the corpse. "Fabius." He said to himself. The stand off continued until the women had brought out the two other corpses. The women said something to the commander but he couldn't understand it, then they turned and walked back into the village. "Well, that settles that, with the exception of Sergius." He couldn't imagine Sergius being harboured in the village, he was too rambunctious for that. He organised some search parties.

Sergius pushed his victim to the ground. It started to crawl away from him. He stamped his foot down on its leg. It let out a yelp, and tried to wriggle free. He knelt down and held it with one large hand pushing down on the small of its back. He slowly drew a knife from his belt and stabbed it into the ground for ease of access. He flipped the squirming mass on to its front.

Lucilia slashed at the invader with her knife. In a brief moment of clarity she wondered why he hadn't just killed her. Her knife caught his face. The blood dripped down on to hers. She spat at him to try to disorient him.

Sergius grabbed the arm and forced it to the ground. He placed his knee firmly on the abdomen and used his free hand to take the weapon from the prey. He admired it, and stabbed it into the ground as well, to allow himself room to manoeuvre. He held the body in place by the neck, balancing most of his weight through his arm.

Lucilia began to choke and started to scratch at the arm, trying her best to unbind herself.

Sergius removed one of the knives and placed the tip just below his hand.

Lucilia screamed, fearing for her life.

Sergius smile. "Yes!" he said. "Scream and make the gods themselves wonder at this act. Louder!" He drew the knife down the prey's clothing, ignoring the blows assailing him. He was too high to

feel anything.

Lucilia lashed out with hands and feet, screaming, tears starting to form around her eyes. Her voice started to give out. Screaming wasn't going to bring anyone anyway. She continued to squirm, trying to free herself from the grip, like being trapped beneath a tree.

Sergius replaced the knife in the ground. He used his free hand to open the clothing out. He stared at the body. The breast was small. The skin was smooth, well looked after. "You are indeed quite a prize." His voice was respectful. "I bet you're still unbroken." His free hand felt its way between the legs.

Lucilia tried to pull her legs shut, but the beast's own leg was in the way. She knew now what he wanted. She determined not to give it to him, she started to writhe vigorously, trying to free herself and escape being raped.

"Yes," Sergius arched his eyebrow. "The women of the Roman empire are whores, it seems. By your age, so many have been broken." He was struggling to hold the prey. The hole in his shoulder was starting to bother him. "I will break you." His voice sounded reasonable. "Then you will know you were taken by a real man. You are mine now, anyway." His free hand unclasped his tunic and freed his groin.

Lucilia took the chance to swing her leg at his testicles. She made contact. A feeling of hope rushed through her as she scanned his face for pain, for a chance to break free. His hand around her throat didn't flinch. His eyes rolled back in his head for a moment, then a gruesome smile crossed his face.

Sergius felt the pain course through him as his prey engaged him. He smiled, invigorated by the feeling. His penis grew in size and became erect. He pulled the body closer, its weight nothing to him.

Lucilia scratched at his chest, her legs forced apart as the brute pulled her towards him. "Always fight," she thought to herself. Tears streamed down her face as infuriation welled up from inside her. He couldn't take this from her.

Sergius grabbed the body by her waist and forced it close to him, ignoring the blows and scratches. Nothing could distract from this lust. His lust for domination. His lust to demonstrate that he was in control. He forced his penis inside.

Lucilia screamed. She was so tense that he was practically ripping her apart. She felt her hymen break. She had lost. "No!" She screamed. She wailed unintelligibly, thumping her fists upon his chest.

Sergius, satisfied with the position of his conquest, grabbed it around the neck, his hands easily meeting. He jerked the body up and down on his penis, enjoying the pleasure of the friction. He hummed in hedonism, his hands growing tighter as he neared climax. As his body shuddered with ejaculation, he heard a great crack and the prey went limp.

Looking up, Sergius saw the Roman soldiers in the distance. He ripped the necklace from the lifeless corpse as a token of his conquest. He looked for a suitable place to hide for the time being. The forest would likely be crawling with soldiers soon, one of the villagers would almost certainly have gotten to the delegates by now. In the distance he spied a young grove. He would risk capture either way, but at least the grove would be the last place they would look. He watched the soldiers start to break off into groups and waited for the right moment to move off.

The search party found Susan's body lying unconscious in the hole she had dug. The police radioed for an ambulance. Barbara ran over to Susan and fell to her knees, taking her daughter up in her arms, sobbing over the seemingly lifeless form. Susan coughed, but remained unconscious. "She's still alive!" Barbara exclaimed with joy. Monica and Len ran over to provide warmth to Susan.

"Look at this," said Monica with surprise as she looked at the hole. "She's been on a dig!"

"Just like you said she would," said Len. "Even when she's not herself, she's still herself."

"We'll have to get Kevin to send a team here to finisher her work."

"Let's get her to hospital before we start worrying about that, eh?" suggested Len.

"The ambulance should be here soon, Mr Rider," said Detective Jones. Len nodded appreciatively.

The Riders and Monica were bathed in light from the helicopter. Most of the police were heading back to their cars. Detectives Jones and Figgis and the local desk sergeant remained in the field and waited. The desk sergeant was mostly concerned with a lift back to his station. Soon they could hear a distant wail of ambulance sirens, then the lights appeared on the horizon. Quite some time passed as the paramedics had to walk from the edge of the pasture to the grove.

"Detectives, sergeant," Frank greeted the police. "Where's the body?" They directed him to the group on the floor. He and Marcus laid the stretcher out and negotiated with Barbara to get Susan on to it. Once she was secured they all started the long walk back to the ambulance and cars. The helicopter flew back to where it had come from.

When they got to the exit to the pasture, they decided to leave Susan's car until tomorrow. "Can I ride in the ambulance?" asked Barbara to detective Jones. "I know she's still under arrest, but she's my little girl."

"That's fine, Mrs. Rider. We'll see you there. We have to drop the sergeant back to his station."

She turned to Len. "Be sure to drive carefully, Mr Rider. Susan isn't going anywhere." Len nodded his assent. Barbara followed the paramedics into the ambulance. Len and Monica got into the Rider's car. The three vehicles set off.

When Jones and Figgis arrived at the hospital Susan was still unconscious. She was attached to a drip, with her family in vigil around her. Len looked up and acknowledged the detectives. They walked over.

"We'll have to leave two officers here, as a precaution," Jones explained. "We can't have her run off again."

"We understand," said Len and returned to watching his daughter.

Monica, the Riders and Susan's guards waited for Susan day and night. On the first morning doctor Hart visited them. "Good morning," she smiled at the family. The group welcomed her. "I have news regarding Susan's condition."

"What's the word, doc?" asked Monica.

"We've got the results from Susan's blood tests." She paused while Mr and Mrs Rider gave her their attention. "Susan's been taking hallucinogenic drugs," she said flatly. The Riders looked to Monica, shocked.

"What?" said Monica to doctor Hart, in quiet disbelief.

"Yes. In normal doses, the chemical is metabolised over the course of a day. It can build up in the system and users often suffer from psychotic episodes."

"But she was in the clinic then the hospital. How did she get any of the drug?"

"It could be that the drug persists in her system for longer than the average person. It seems more likely that she was supplied with the drug while in care." Doctor Hart pointed the remark at Monica.

"Hey!" she exclaimed. "Don't look at me, I just bought her her tea bags."

"Tea bags?" enquired doctor Hart.

"Yeah." Monica fished them out from under Susan's bed and handed them to the doctor.

"Have you been using these while Susan's been comatose?"

"No, we've been subsisting on the hospital's builder's tea," Monica replied.

The Riders stared on, not sure what to think. They were exhausted from worry. They didn't want to think that Monica was the root of all this trouble.

"I will take this to the forensics team to be analysed," doctor Hart informed them.

"Do you know how long that will take?" asked Barbara.

"We'll know something in the next couple of days," replied the doctor. "I'll be back then." She turned and walked out.

Susan remained in her serene state, unmoved by the events surrounding her. While she was unconscious the medical staff would go to and fro, taking samples and removing her to have various scans on her brain activity.

For the neurology department it was a boon, they rarely had a patient they could take so much information from. For the Riders and for Monica it was agony, not knowing if Susan would ever wake.

The neurologist, doctor Jenkins, kept assuring them that she was not brain dead, and that her systems were likely just recovering from the toxic hell her body had been put through over the last week or so.

Doctor Hart had said that it seemed likely that Susan had been taking the drug for at least a week to incur such a build up of it. Doctor Hart's return had also brought the news that the tea had been

laced with the hallucinogen that Susan had been ingesting.

The police had arrived with a search warrant for Susan's house a few minutes later. Mr Rider took them to the house, so that they could search it for traces of the substance. At the same time, another group of officers produced a warrant for Monica's flat. She went with them, to prove her innocence. Barbara was left alone to watch over her daughter.

At Monica's flat she made sure to watch the police's every move, demanding they take more care. The police tore through her flat, looking for any trace of the substance or evidence of some of the equipment necessary to produce it.

The search dragged on, but the police turned up no evidence of drugs or drug manufacturing paraphernalia. Once they were gone, Monica let out a huge sigh of relief and set about tidying her flat. She decided to leave off going back to Susan's bedside. She needed time to relax after such an ordeal. She called up Leroy to get him to take her to lunch.

The same police process occurred at Susan's house. Len watched in dismay as the officers rampaged through the house in search of evidence against his daughter. He stayed and cleared up after they had left, remembering to give Mr. Tibbles his lunch. He returned to the hospital to see Barbara in the same place as when he'd left.

"Do you want to get some lunch, love?" he suggested, gently.

"Oh, hello," Barbara seemed in a daze. "Yes, that sounds grand."

The two of them got up and walked down to the cafeteria.

"No sign of Monica then?" said Len.

"No, well, she won't be able to get back unless the police bring her. I can't imagine it's their job to deliver people around."

"Or maybe they've arrested her."

"Don't be silly, Len. Monica's a good friend to our Susan. She'd never do that. Don't say another word about it." Barbara was quite stern about the matter.

The two of them sat quietly at the table, eating their food. Len's face was trying to calculate something. Barbara was too worried about Susan to notice. Eventually Len looked up from his meal. "Then who could it be?" He asked Barbara.

"I don't know love. But why would it be Monica? It's more likely to be someone she's upset. Monica's dependable, sensible and has always cared for our little girl. There's no reason to it." Barbara continued her lunch.

"What about that Alex fella? He'll have had it in for her."

"Will you stop going on about it? Let the police figure it out and we'll just worry about Susan." Barbara was quite agitated.

"Sorry, love," Len hadn't realised how upset his wife was about their daughter's situation. "She'll be fine, you know. She's a strong girl." He reached across the table and placed his hand on hers.

It was later in the evening when Monica arrived back. "Hello," she called as she walked back over to the bed.

"Monica! We were beginning to wonder what had happened to you," said Barbara.

Len smiled over at Monica, not saying anything.

"Oh, I just needed a bit of time to relax after the police ransacked my flat. It was really unsettling, you know?"

"Of course, dear," said Barbara, giving Len a look of "I told you so". "Did you do anything nice?"

"Oh just had a meal with Leroy, my boyfriend and chilled out. No change here then?"

"No, love," said Len. "Still as a log."

As Monica sat down Susan began to move. Barbara suddenly became alert. Len joined her at Susan's head. "Susan love?" she said softly. Susan groaned and started to free her arms from the bed. The police guards turned to see what the commotion was. One officer pulled out his phone and made a call. Susan reached her hands to her eyes and started to rub them to wake herself. She looked around.

"Mum. Dad. Where am I?" She said hoarsely.

"You're in hospital, love. Give her a glass of water Len," Barbara ordered.

Len reached over with the glass. Susan took it from him and wetted her mouth and throat. "How long have I been here?"

"About three days. Well," Barbara hesitated. "I suppose it's been four if you include the time before you escaped."

"Escaped?"

"Yes love, you're still under arrest."

"How did I get anywhere?" Susan's memory was still blurry.

"Doctor Hart said you'd have a bit of trouble with your memory," Monica piped up.

"Mon! You're here too!"

"Course, Sooz, where else would I be?"

The three of them looked down at their confused loved one. Susan seemed happy enough, no signs that she was anyone else but herself.

"Do you remember what happened?" Barbara asked.

"A little bit. I remember a really bright light, and voices." She took another sip from her water. "I feel like I've not slept in days."

A while went past and the family chatted and caught Susan up on the events of the last few days.

"I'm so sorry for all the trouble I've put you through."

"Don't worry about it, love. We're just glad you're awake again," said Len reassuringly.

"I'm so glad. I've been so worried that'd you'd never come back to us," Barbara started to cry. She

and Susan hugged.

“And doctor Hart says my tea has been poisoned? Who would do that?”

“We were hoping you could tell us, miss Rider.” Detective Figgis appeared at the edge of the ward.

“She's only just woken up detective,” said Len. “Give her some time before you give her the third degree, eh?”

Doctor Hart and Susan's brief, Mr Smith, followed detective Jones into the ward. “Yes, detective, I think you should wait until miss Rider is well enough to visit your station before we resume questioning,” Percy butted in.

Doctor Hart walked over to the bed. “How are you feeling, Susan?”

“I feel like a wreck,” Susan confessed.

“How is your memory?”

“I remember Figgis, now. I have a recollection of Lucilia, the ghost, showing me the missing eight hours to keep me distracted.”

“You realise Lucilia wasn't real? She was just a symptom of you psychosis.”

“Oh, yes, doctor. That was just how it seemed. Oh!” Susan felt shocked and embarrassed. Her face flushed.

“What is it?” Doctor Hart's voice was full of expectancy.

“I remember what happened. I'm so ashamed.”

“Well, we can talk about this at your next session. Don't worry about your confessions now. We need to understand how you came to have tea laced with the hallucinogen.”

“I don't know. I've bought tea from the same place for years. It's a bit more expensive, but I didn't think that was because of the drugs in it.”

“Your ex-boyfriend couldn't have tampered with it at all?”

“No, I bought my latest box after we broke up.”

“Can you give us the address of the shop you got the tea from, please,” requested Figgis. Susan gave the address and the name of the shop. “Thank you, we'll get a warrant to search the premises.” The two detectives left the hospital and got on with their work.

“It's important that you rest,” said doctor Hart. “The drug will slowly be leaving your system over the next few days. Don't be surprised if you suffer flash backs.” Susan nodded her understanding. “I'll leave you to it for now, once you're strong enough to be back on your feet we can move you back to the clinic.”

“Thank you, doctor,” said Susan. “What are my chances of having the charges dropped?”

“If the source of the drugs is found out side of your control, then I would say the chances are high.”

“Thank you.”

“See you soon.” doctor Hart smiled at Susan and left the ward.

The police guards remained in place, as did Susan's parents and Monica.

“Things are finally looking up, eh love?” Len said, trying to show enthusiasm.

"Yeah," Susan smiled at him. "I just can't wait to feel normal again."

"I'd get you some tea, but that might not be the best plan," joked Monica. Susan laughed.

Figgis and Jones entered the tea shop in Bath centre.

"Hello, sir. We're police officers investigating the assault of a woman." Figgis held up a photo to the man behind the cash desk. "Do you know this woman?"

"Oh, yes. Doctor Rider. She's in here every so often to buy her tea."

"The last box of tea you sold became tainted with a hallucinogen. You wouldn't know anything about that, would you?"

"Oh my, no!" the cashier seemed genuinely surprised. "Is she OK?"

"Who boxes up the tea bags?"

"Oh, it comes in like this. We don't open the boxes."

"We'd like to see your CCTV for the Saturday before last," Jones requested.

"Certainly, officer. Follow me."

The officers went into the back of the shop with the proprietor and he sat them in front of a monitor to review the videos on. They skimmed through the video until they saw Susan enter the shop. She waved hello to the proprietor. There was someone else in the shop, browsing the various teas. As Susan placed her selection on the counter top, the proprietor slipped into the back. The man in the corner came over and picked up the tea on the counter. Susan was taken aback by the impropriety, but the man replaced the tea and left the shop. His head was always looking down, so the officers couldn't get a look at his face. The only thing they noted was his crazy, matted, curled hair.

They took the video with them, to the station and searched for a similar looking man on the Bath CCTV around the same time.

"There," said Figgis as they trawled through the video. On the screen was the gnarled old face of a man, with an incredibly long, unkempt beard.