

THE RELUCTANT PSYCHIC

# **THE RELUCTANT PSYCHIC**

**ANGELENA BODEN**

**And others**

## THE RELUCTANT PSYCHIC

Copyright @ Angelena Boden October 2018

Book cover by Mix Mash Music and Media.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author.

All rights reserved.

This book is a work of non-fiction based on the personal experiences of the individual. Guest contributions to The Reluctant Psychic have been included with their permission. They assert their moral right to be identified as the authors of this work.

No story in this book offers explanations for, or attempts to prove the paranormal or supernatural.

The full version of *Edna's Death Café* can be purchased from all good online stores.

Visit my website- [www.angelenaboden.com](http://www.angelenaboden.com)

Chat to me on Twitter @angelenaboden

***ON A PERSONAL NOTE***

All these paranormal accounts are true. Any embellishments have been edited out. Facts have been checked as far as possible and I've relied on the honesty and integrity of the guest contributors. Some are dated accurately, others not at all. Some names have been changed at the request of the individual. Stories that are not named are mine.

Each one will take about five minutes to read – ideal for a coffee break - but reflecting on its meaning might take a bit longer.

I confess to having psychics in the paternal female line of my family, but as a personal development consultant in behaviour and thinking processes, I look first for the most obvious explanation using the principle of Occam's razor. If that doesn't yield a satisfactory reason for a strange occurrence or event, then I consider that there might be another force at work.

I am indebted to the guest contributors, all of whom are rational, grounded people, who happen to have had experiences outside of what we consider to be normal, that have alarmed, confused and even frightened them.

Many of you, I am sure, could add to this collection with a rich seam of stories of your own. If you think there is scope for a second edition, please contact me by email, [bodenangelena@gmail.com](mailto:bodenangelena@gmail.com)

## **A PAIN IN THE NECK**

### ***Wolverhampton 1978***

Students have always flitted from one damp, chilly room to another, but if you were lucky, one with a decent bed and a desk. One of my many moves was to a cheap attic room opposite the Molineux football ground, home of Wolverhampton Wanderers, in a house owned by a hospitable Indian with an English wife. I'd managed to secure a last minute place to study languages at the Polytechnic, having returned from a two year stint working as a journalist in Canada.

Other occupiers included my boyfriend at the time, a girl from Kenya who was rarely there and a quiet young man from Libya. We shared a tiny kitchen but our host, Raj, would often throw open the door to his living room at six o'clock every evening to invite us for dinner: dhal, chapatti, salad and vegetable curry. It wasn't food I was used to but I welcomed the chance to escape the confines of my room for some company.

The house was chaotic, not particularly clean and I often wondered if his wife, Liz, was coping at times. Her children drifted between two languages which impressed me hugely at the time, although in front of their father they would only speak Gujarati.

Raj liked his parties. Dozens of his friends would pour through the front door with beer and whisky, conveniently forgetting that alcohol was not allowed in their religion but Raj, if questioned, would laugh and take deep swigs from a can of lager.

## THE RELUCTANT PSYCHIC

As the weeks passed, the Libyan student, older than the rest of us, appeared to be spending a lot of time chatting with Liz in the kitchen. He played with the children in the garden, saying it was nice to have a family around. Raj seemed fine with it all. He liked all the students and wanted to keep them as it was cheaper than advertising for new ones. I don't know which gods he worshipped but one of them was definitely money.

Feeling unwell one morning, I returned from college to recover. As I came in through the hall, I caught the Libyan kissing Liz in the kitchen when I went in to drop my laundry in the machine. Raj was always in and out of the house and I knew if he caught them, he'd go crazy. That evening, I came down for dinner to raised voices. Liz had an angry hand imprint on her face.

'You knew about this,' Raj screamed in my face. He grabbed the sleeve of my jumper. 'You should have told me.' The men pulled him away, telling him to calm down.

That was my turning point. I went on a room hunt and moved out. I hate shouting and unpleasantness. When my boyfriend heard the whole story he was shocked and wanted to come with me. He was going back home for the summer while I'd planned to stay in the city and get a job.

Later I heard from friends who knew Raj that he'd thrown his wife out of the house, and the Libyan had disappeared. Liz had gone back to her mother's but had not been allowed to take the children. Whilst I was sorry for her, I couldn't get involved. I knew what Raj was capable of since he'd spent a few months in prison for assault in his younger days.

## THE RELUCTANT PSYCHIC

Exams took all our time and energy but once they were over, I set off to see how Liz was faring. I remember it was a wet Monday morning but it wasn't just the external cold that was bothering me, unusual for May, it was an internal chill that was more worrying. It was like a warning sign.

While I hunted in a department store for some chocolate for the children, I felt a choking sensation as if someone was strangling me from behind. I ran out into the street and leaned against the wall to gulp in breath. People approached me to see if I needed an ambulance as I collapsed against a bus stop. I remember someone saying I was having a panic attack as they loosened my scarf.

A taxi driver with a red turban took me home and wouldn't take any money. He helped me into the house, handing me a card in case I needed anything. After a few hours of sleep, I woke up feeling normal again. My boyfriend arrived with a take-away curry and as we ate, I told him the story. He brushed it away as a product of my imagination.

That night, I was woken up by a window crashing open and when I went to secure it, for a crazy moment I was convinced I saw Liz on the pavement looking up. I called down to her but only a tramp, rifling through the bins searching for food, looked up. The lack of sleep and exam stress was causing me to imagine things.

An overwhelming sense of dread followed me around for most of the following day. The only thing the doctor could offer me was a prescription for sleeping tablets and advice to take a holiday.

From my study desk by the window, I looked down onto the street, through the shrubs and across to the local playground. One afternoon, I caught a glimpse of Liz's favourite *salwar kameez*, something she loved to wear when she went to Indian

parties, bright yellow with a matching scarf, a *dupatta*, hanging loosely around her shoulders.

She was pushing her youngest child, Maya, on the swing. I grabbed my coat and bag and ran down the stairs. It took two minutes to cross the narrow road but when I got there she was nowhere to be seen. I asked the few women chatting in a group by the slide, only to get a shake of the head.

On impulse I flagged down a black cab and gave the driver an address Liz had pressed into my hand. I assumed it was her mother's place. He looked puzzled but said nothing. When we reached the area, we were in the middle of an industrial estate with no residential buildings around. I couldn't understand why she'd give me a false address unless it was to make sure I didn't tell Raj. After a few tours of the streets the driver said he had another fare but he'd drop me in town on his way, saying this was a bad place to be alone. It certainly felt spooky.

Wolverhampton in the seventies was a divided town, thanks to the legacy of Enoch Powell. Nobody thought twice about using racist words against the Commonwealth immigrants that Powell himself had invited over to work, or attacking white people who happened to befriend them. Liz and I both suffered this with our respective brown-skinned partners although as my boyfriend was an overseas student pumping money in the local economy, he was not viewed as an immigrant. That didn't stop him from getting his fair share of nastiness. I think I must have been blind to much of it, or naïve, as I shrugged it off as ignorance.

I didn't really understand what Liz had had to endure from her own family and friends when she married Raj until one night, over a bottle of wine, she told me how both sides of the family threatened all manner of things if they went through

with it. Her father had witnessed Raj's short fuse when he couldn't get his own way and was understandably worried for his daughter.

It was on a Friday night when I was kept awake by a raging thirst and a burning sensation in the back of my throat. The obvious explanation is that it was an infection but my intuition told me that it was a sign that someone was in trouble. As it's not something you talk about with people unless you want to be considered deranged, I tried hard to distract myself by looking for work.

My boyfriend was stressed as his exams were on-going. The next day, we took a trip out to a pretty town called Bridgnorth which boasted a steam railway and a river. It was ten years since the drink driving ban became law but he saw nothing wrong in swigging beer with one hand, and steering his automatic BMW with the other.

As we watched the river flow past, I try to explain how I'd been feeling but he didn't understand. He said he'd felt very miserable too, wishing he could get finished and go home. It's not easy to explain these things to people who deal in facts and not feelings.

As the week wore on, I felt more unwell and became consumed by thoughts of death. Fearful in a way I hadn't been before. I was twenty-five years old, and every waking moment was spent reading books about death, dying, life after death – the whole caboodle. I couldn't shake off the sensation that someone known to me had died violently. By the following Thursday night, I was a nervous wreck. A second visit to the doctor to check my throat showed no infection and no inflammation.

## THE RELUCTANT PSYCHIC

I called home for the first time in weeks. As I leant against the grimy windows of the call box - remember no mobile phones in those days, I sobbed into the phone as I told my Dad everything.

‘You need to speak to your Aunt Grace.’ She was one of the psychic relatives.

All I wanted was for someone to reassure me I wasn’t going mad.

We talked for a while, ending with me promising to visit for a few days soon. My mother, as usual, was upset that I wasn’t going home for the summer.

That night, sharp pains stabbed my neck, burning the back of my head, keeping me awake. I felt a metallic taste of blood in my mouth. Everyone I could think of who had stayed with Raj and Liz had been contacted but no one had seen Liz since she left. If only there had been email and text messaging back then, if not social media. The Libyan had gone back home suddenly, without finishing his studies. That felt suspicious. I knew nothing about him other than he went to Birmingham on the train every day. I could hardly contact every college in the city for a man called Mohammed.

I awoke very early on the Saturday morning with a sudden urge to go home for a few days as promised but as I headed for the station my plans got thwarted.

First it was an accident in the street which meant the traffic was bumper to bumper. Then came the smell of smoke from the kitchen where one of the students had left a frying pan unattended on the gas, but it was insistent banging on the front door that set my heart pounding.

Some friends who'd known Raj and Liz stood on the step, a local newspaper in their hands. They held up the front page so I could read the headlines.

**MOTHER FATALLY STABBED IN NECK BY EX –HUSBAND.**

There was Liz's face, beaming out at me, her hair covered with her scarf, her two children held close. No words could express the mix of horror and relief I was feeling. I wasn't mad after all.

My boyfriend staggered into the living room in his pyjama bottoms, surprised to see Gary and Joanne. He grabbed the paper and cursed. 'How could he do this?' He slapped the page with the back of his hand.

'Because he's a nutter,' said Gary, lighting up a cigarette. 'He'll get sent to Broadmoor.'

'Yeah, he's paranoid and jealous. Thinks all the men that's ever been in that house has had an affair with his wife. Bad atmosphere that place had. Couldn't wait to get out.' Joanne added.

I agreed with them about the atmosphere.

'What now?' I asked, still shivering from shock. I read through the sensationalised story, wishing I could defend Liz from some of the nasty insinuations.

Shrugs and sips of tea punctuated the silence.

'He's been arrested. He was lying in wait for her so he'd definitely planned it.'

'He'll get life.'

'Those poor children.'

## THE RELUCTANT PSYCHIC

No-one knew what to say, but as we dived into the secret parts of our minds to remember Liz and the fun times we'd all had over lentils and rice, I felt a pull on my earring. I guarantee it hadn't got caught on anything, nor was it from anyone in the room. It was like a playful tug. I froze and looked around. Liz, in a beautiful yellow sun dress, smiled and waved before disappearing into heaven knows where.

It's been almost forty years and I've never forgotten her. Raj was given life for murder and the children went to live with their grandparents.

I often wondered if what I experienced was a product of my over active imagination but I don't think so. Liz had come to warn me and to say goodbye. Could I have prevented it? No, because by the time I started to pick up on the sensations of death by something sharp through the throat, it was too late and I never imagined she could be in danger from Raj anyway.

*This story was reported in the national press at the time. All names have been changed.*

## **A MOVING BEER GLASS**

### **Douglas, Isle of Man**

This story might prompt you to think that I'd had too much to drink and was hallucinating but my tipples on this particular night were nothing more potent than a lime and soda, followed by a hot chocolate.

My work involved a lot of travel between Liverpool and the Isle of Man. Like most commuters, I had a favourite hotel with a stunning view of Douglas Bay. Depending on what time I finished work, I'd have a drink with the hotel owners who had become friends over the years. It was a chance to catch up with the *skeet* – a Manx word for gossip.

I'd love to set a dramatic background to this little tale and say it was a dark and stormy night but if memory serves me right, it was a warm September evening with a stunning sunset of molten copper tinged with pink. Joe and his wife Angie were great hosts, treating their guests as family and as we sat down to nibble on plates of cheesy chips and gravy, the chat turned to a motorbike tragedy that had happened in Ramsey, north of the island, involving the son of someone we all knew. Joe loved to talk motorsport and to be polite I nodded and pretended to be interested.

My attention soon wandered and I found myself glancing up at the shelves where the glasses were lined up in neat rows. Joe was careful to make sure there were a few inches spare between the last glass and the edges of the shelves. He'd once told me that there'd been an incident when a tankard had fallen off narrowly missing a customer's head.

What I saw made me blink several times. The end glass was creeping towards the edge as if it was being nudged along by a finger. The startling crash brought Joe to his feet, and a gasp of horror from Angie. We all stared at the smashed pieces on the wooden floor.

Riveted with shock, I told him what I *thought* I'd seen happen. He examined the shelf and checked for loose screws in the supports as that might explain how such a thing could have happened without human intervention. When he went off to fetch a dustpan and brush to clean up the mess, Angie confided that Joe had told her about other strange goings-on but she'd not really believed him. On one occasion, knives had been laid out on the bench in the kitchen during the night even though her husband knew for a fact he'd locked them away in a drawer. One of the bedrooms was difficult to let as guests complained about the extreme cold and said they felt 'something' watching them.

As we talked about it some more, I had a similar sensation; that someone was sitting at our table, quite close to me, exuding a strong smell of leather.

## A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE

### **Darren Hodson, Spain 1989**

Like many teenagers I wanted to leave home and work overseas in the sun for a while so when an opportunity to work in northern Spain came up, I grabbed it. Working in a bar gave me money and a good social life so I would have to say I was having a brilliant time and was chilled out. I missed home, especially my Nan who I was close to.

My short tale is about a nightmare that came true. I was sitting in my Nan's house in Birmingham at the bottom of the staircase and became aware that I was in the middle of a wake. My Nan was a devout Irish Catholic so everything had to be done according to the book. I must have thought that it was for my Grandad who had been in hospital. My Auntie Julie came down the stairs and said, 'Are you alright, Darren?' I nodded, wiping my eyes. 'Are you sure you're alright?' she said again, touching my shoulder. Then I realised the wake was for my Nan. I woke up in a blind panic.

As soon as I could, I scraped some money together and went in search of a phone box. I knew the call was going to cost a lot but I had to call home. My Mum said everything was fine so I put it down to one of those horrible dreams we have sometimes.

Four months later, in October, I decided it was time to go home. I'd had a great time but needed to get on with life and wanted to see everyone. On December 2<sup>nd</sup>, my Nan, who'd had a stroke, suddenly died. It was totally out of the blue. At the wake, I sat on the stairs and my Auntie Julie came down and said, 'Are you alright,

## THE RELUCTANT PSYCHIC

Darren?' Sure you're alright?' It was a replica of that nightmare. I don't have an explanation except to say I felt it was some sort of glimpse into the future and an early warning.

**ONE OUT, ONE IN**

**Derbyshire, April 1990**

They say medics make the worst patients. My mother, a trained nurse, was dying but she was in denial about it. The colon cancer was due to an allergy, she said. The pain was due to a pulled muscle. I wonder if her former training had included The Art of Dodging the Truth. Sadly for her, and for the family, she couldn't dodge it for long as the cancer had metastasised into the liver, giving her a few weeks to say her goodbyes. I admired her stoic acceptance of this news.

Despite being heavily pregnant, I travelled the eighty miles to see her and speak to the oncologist. It's strange how some news bounces off the sides of your brain refusing to hit the required spot marked comprehension. Intellectually I knew the score but I had to hear it from the consultant who was treating her. It was hard to take it all in.

He laid down his pen and folded one hand on top of the other. I was annoyed I couldn't pronounce his name correctly but he was gracious enough not to correct me. Four weeks of palliative chemotherapy was all he could offer. He was gentle and kind, asking about the baby and how I was keeping. Did I know if it was a boy or a girl? I told him that Birmingham Maternity Hospital had a strict policy of not revealing the sex of a child, even to a dying grandmother. He nodded slowly but made no comment.

Hovering by the door, I blurted out my due date in early April. 'Is there time? Please can you give her some time?'

'We'll do what we can.' I wanted to hug him there and then.

## THE RELUCTANT PSYCHIC

My mother was dozing in her hospital bed, her scrawny limbs sticking out of her oversized nightdress, bought to accommodate the swollen liver. We talked about the cold snap we'd been having and I showed her a picture of the rose bush I'd planted for her birthday last year. She'd not been to my house for many months. She gave me a weak smile and touched my hand before drifting off to sleep.

My husband was quiet and withdrawn on the way back down the motorway.

'I'm going to call the hospital tomorrow,' I said, swallowing my anger. 'They have to tell me if it's a girl or boy. This is cruel. What do they think I am going to do at this late stage?'

When I did they were understanding but no, they couldn't send the results directly to the hospital as it was against their policy.

As time passed, every day felt like a week. The extreme sickness I'd suffered in the first trimester was back with full force. There was talk about me going into hospital for bed rest and a glucose drip. My doctor was gentle but firm. 'Your mother wouldn't want you or the baby to suffer. Let's say a few days? I'm sure your husband can look after things at home.'

I was in the maternity hospital for over a week. A pay phone was trundled to my bedside twice a day so I could ring my father for an update.

'She's been moved to the cottage hospital,' he said, resignation in his voice. 'At least it means I can walk down there.' He sounded relieved. No more travelling twenty miles and back every day to Derby.

I knew which one he meant. It was where they patched me up after a nasty cycling accident when I was fourteen. The one where my mother was nursing at the

time. In her blue uniform, white apron, cuffs and shoes, I could see her coming towards me, a slight frown creasing her forehead. 'You'll be as fit as a fiddle in no time,' she said, shaking out a thermometer with a professional flick of the wrist.

My obstetrician allowed me to go home on the strict understanding I was to avoid stress. Had they not read my notes? Even when you're on bed rest, it doesn't shut down the mind.

I did very little other than call the hospital, only to find my mother spent most of her days asleep with my father at her side. His voice was thin and exhausted. It's hard waiting for someone to die. Mixed emotions of guilt, for wanting it to be over, and relief when it finally happens grapple for precedence until shock dampens down all feelings so you can get through those mind-numbing first days.

It was about one in the morning when I heard the downstairs phone ring. I could pick up the low mutterings from my husband followed by the soft tread of his footsteps on the stairs.

'It was your dad. He said it won't be long now,' he said, squeezing my hands. Go back to bed. I'll make some tea.'

My six year old daughter, pushed her way onto my bed and snuggled into my arms.

'A lady came into my room. It looked like nanny. Is she here?'

'Lady?' I studied my daughter's face fear or surprise.

'She had some sweets in her hand. Black and white ones. She called them bullets. She's silly isn't she? You don't eat bullets. Where is nanny? Can I go and see her?'

It's a common phenomenon to 'see' images of a loved one around the time of their death but this was weird. My mother was a Geordie who occasionally slipped into her old dialect so unless my daughter had been dreaming, I had no reason to disbelieve her.

Some say it's a visitation to comfort the relatives, others believe it's nature's way of helping us to let go slowly and come to terms with the loss. I'd spared my daughter the detail of my mother's illness so she had no idea that her death was imminent.

Maybe it was the shock that triggered labour but when my waters broke, my husband called the neighbour who was on emergency alert and she came round to stay with my daughter.

'Nanny said I was going have a sister.' I gave her a big hug and told her to be very, very good and I'd see her later.

I was ushered into the labour ward and prepared for delivery. Even before I'd taken in any gas and air, I saw my mother in her nurse's uniform, walk down the corridor, a pile of towels in her arms. I called out but the lovely midwife urged me to stay calm and conserve my energy. She'd been told about my mum in advance.

The labour was quick with no time to do anything other than follow instructions, yet I was aware all the time of someone watching me through the window. I'll spare you the detail of the next couple of hours other than to say this: - exhausted and relieved to see daughter number two, I was left alone for a few minutes when I experienced the strangest thing.

## THE RELUCTANT PSYCHIC

I felt a big, snuggly blanket being wrapped around me before being lifted up from the bed – not literally I hasten to add. It was a light, floaty feeling as someone was taking me by the hand and out to the nursery where the baby was being settled down for the first night. It was as if I was leaving my physical body. It wasn't drug induced but no doubt some would say it was a hormonal imbalance.

Moments later, one of the junior midwives returned. I asked her what time the baby had been born. '7.04,' she said with no doubt in her mind. 'Baby scored very highly on the Apgar scale so no need to worry. Get some rest.'

She fluffed up the pillow and straightened the blanket. 'I'm sorry to hear about your mother but it's quite a co-incidence, isn't it?'

I struggled to sit up. 'What is? What do you mean?'

'Oh, Gosh. I'm so sorry. You don't know do you? Your father called and asked how you were doing? I told him you were fine and that the baby was well. I gave him all the details and he sounded really shocked. Your mum passed away a few minutes earlier. I'm so sorry. I thought your husband had told you.'

My jaw moved up and down but I was incapable of words. Half an hour later the obstetrician came to see me to apologise. It didn't matter. My mum had been there all along, doing what she did well – caring, reassuring, loving. As they say, *one out, one in* ...but not usually so close together.

You could find a number of explanations for this but when I told a friend about it recently she told me something similar had happened to her. So... you decide.

## **A TAP ON THE SHOULDER**

**December 17<sup>th</sup> 2004 6pm**

**Ludlow, Shropshire**

Ken told me this story about the last days of his mother's life. He is the least likely person to accept anything that can't be scientifically proved. His skills are in technology and logic which makes this account all the more remarkable. I've asked him to tell it in his own words. 'Don't use our real names, will you. I don't want people to think I'm going senile.' He laughed awkwardly and began to clean his glasses. He was quiet for several minutes while he put his thoughts in order.

'My mother was in her late eighties when she became seriously ill. The initial diagnosis was Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma but the hospital consultant came back and said it was, in fact, leukaemia. Her last week in hospital was distressing for everyone. I don't really show much emotion but to see her bruised badly from the blood transfusions, and comatose was something I found hard to deal with.

I'd visited her most days at City Road hospital, Birmingham, making the journey from my home in Shropshire. My long term partner, Emily was a tower of strength during this trying period. She was a very practical woman with no time for sentimental nonsense. A bit like me, really.

It was a Saturday when mother had been moved for the final time into a side ward and I was asked if I wanted to see her. It sounds bad but I really didn't and the nurse reassured me it was for the best. We want to remember our loved ones when

they were well and happy, don't we? She'd lost all functioning and was a bruised shell at this point. I didn't want that to be the last memory to stay with me.

Emily and I set off for home, not saying very much. I think we both knew it was near the end. Mum was eighty-nine and she'd had a good innings as we say but it still makes it hard to accept that when both parents die, you're next in the firing line. Strange to think of being an orphan when you're nearly sixty.

When we got back, I did what I always do. Open the big gates, drive in and wait for Em to get out to open the front door. Now this sounds very insignificant compared to other stories in this little book, but as I released the seatbelt, letting it retract into place, I was about to get out of the car when I felt the metal bit that fits into the buckle, tap me once on the back of my shoulder. It was so strange, as that's the first and last time in forty years of driving I'd experienced such a thing. I couldn't work out, technically, how it could have happened.

At that very moment, Emily came out of the house. 'The hospital's on the phone. Your mum's just died.'

'I know, I said, without any fuss, getting out of the car to take the call. 'She came to tell me.'

I explained to Em what had happened and she didn't argue that I'd imagined it. There are moments in life that seem so small yet so meaningful we often brush them aside as coincidence. I've thought a lot about that particular moment, pondering over all the possibilities of how that clasp could have tapped me on the *back* of the shoulder and even to someone like me, with no interest in the supernatural, life after death and all that stuff, there was no other explanation except it was my mother coming to say, 'I'm on my way and I'm okay. Don't worry.'

He pulled out his cotton handkerchief from the pocket of his work trousers and dabbed at the corner of his eye.

‘I’ve not told anyone else about this because I’d know what they’d say.

‘Unless they’d had a similar experience,’ I added, as we finished our tea.

There’s knowledge and there’s a *knowing*. The first is intellectual. We understand facts and that which can be proven. The second is more a feeling that comes out of a place we’re not conscious of on a daily basis, a personal truth or *gnosis*. When we know something deep down, then it is real for us and there is no need to prove it to anyone.



## ANGEL VOICES

**December 2001**

In case you stop reading at this point, this account is nothing to do with heavenly choirs or angel messages but it is a story about the organist of a small church choir in the West Midlands.

Stephen Turner had taken early retirement from his college lecturing post to concentrate on his organ playing. He could be found in the church, very early in the mornings, practising for the next service or an upcoming concert. Music was Stephen's whole life, after his family.

I was a long serving member of the choir, one of the few robed ones left in the city; blue cassock, white surplice and medallions from the Royal School of Church Music. It had a healthy compliment of men, women, and children who sang the morning communion services and a monthly evening service. Stephen was a traditionalist and turned his mouth down when any one mentioned the New English Bible or any hymn book other than Ancient and Modern. Anthems sung in Latin were preferred although it was more difficult to teach the proper pronunciation to those who hadn't much of a background in the language and our music director wasn't the most patient of men.

Like all groups, church choirs have their internal politics, much of it petty if I recall. As a regular soloist, I found myself many times in the middle of the favouritism slanging match. It wasn't as if I wanted the limelight but Stephen's policy was to choose the best voice for the music. He snapped many a baton in two when yelling at sopranos to stop screeching like scalded cats. It's not all beatific faces and godly thoughts in the choir stalls.

## THE RELUCTANT PSYCHIC

We used to joke about Stephen's blood pressure reaching the heavens when he got frustrated. One of my fellow choristers took me on one side and asked me to speak to him. 'He shouldn't be sweating so much in a cold church.'

'Why me? That's his wife's job.' We both knew that Mary wasn't interested in music, the church or him. Her life was competitive swimming and her grandchildren.

'He'll listen to you. He'll have a massive stroke if he goes on like this.'

Not being the sort of person who goes up to people and says, 'You look as if you're about to have a stroke,' I wasn't comfortable with the idea and I knew Stephen could be stubborn.

As luck would have it, I bumped into him in a music shop in the city centre. We were both browsing when he suggested we had a coffee. I watched him spoon in three sugars and stir it thoughtfully.

We chatted about the upcoming Nine Lessons and Carols. He pressed some sheet music into my hand and told me it was a piece he'd written specially for me.

'Learn it by Wednesday, he said, jabbing a finger onto the paper.

I tried gently to steer him away from talking about music for one minute so I could raise the choir's concerns over his health but he dismissed them.

'Nothing wrong with me. If people would only listen... especially those two tenors....' I sat back and hid a smile. You couldn't fault his passion and desire for perfection even though we were all amateur musicians.

My coffee had gone cold but it was the feeling of being detached from my surroundings that made me shiver. It was as if I was watching a play from the theatre

gallery. When I looked back at Stephen, I saw a pale blue light around his head and shoulders suffused with what I can only describe as sparks or flecks. I couldn't take my eyes off it for several seconds. I've only ever read about auras in reference to the glow around an object shown in Kirlian photography. Believers of the paranormal once convinced themselves that the corona seen around a shape was a spiritual aura. Unfortunately for them, they were proved wrong.

The café was dark inside and as it was a wet December day there was no light coming in through the windows to create a halo effect of this kind.

By the time Christmas approached, I'd been busy with work, family, shopping and the usual. Choir practices had been lengthened as some of the pieces Stephen had chosen for the biggest service of the year were proving to be too adventurous even for the most versatile of voices. His hand rapped out the alto parts on the choir stall causing the sheets of music to fly off. When I missed a top note he yelled, 'Flat. It's bloody flat,' I thought he was about to have a heart attack.

A few days before the big day, Stephen turned up at my house wanting to run through my piece on the piano in my front room. It was a strange request and the acoustics were awful but he insisted. Afterwards I made him tea and offered him a freshly made mince-pie, nervous about why he wasn't saying very much. That was, until he stood at the door, his raincoat over his arm.

'If I don't see you again, thank you for everything you've done. For the choir. For me.' He kissed me quickly and awkwardly on the cheek and slipped out into the fog.

An hour later, I felt someone standing behind me, blowing on my neck. Slapping the feeling away, I was aware of music coming from the front room.

## THE RELUCTANT PSYCHIC

Thinking I'd left the radio switched on, I went to check. There was Stephen sitting on the piano stool, his fingers moving gracefully across the keys; dressed in the same tatty jacket he'd been wearing an hour ago.

My hands went to my mouth. I wanted to ask what the devil was going on. How had he got back in the house? He turned to look at me and smiled then the next second he'd gone. I called out his name. This is ridiculous I thought as I looked under the sofa. I ran down the drive to look for his car when my phone rang. It was his number.

'Stephen? Is this some sort of joke?'

What I heard in reply made my blood freeze.

'This is Mary. I'm ringing round to tell you that Stephen has died. He came home and went straight into his study to play. I took him some black coffee and he was slumped over the keyboard. The vicar's on his way to discuss what we do about the Christmas services.' Mary was calm and detached as if she was reading out a shopping list.

The Nine Lessons and Carols went ahead with a substitute organist from the cathedral. Much as we tried to turn it into a memorial for Stephen, it was a subdued affair with many technical mistakes, even obvious to the untrained ear.

It was traditional in this service for the Director of Music to read the fourth of the nine lessons. On this occasion one of the senior girls stepped in for him. I watched her step up to the lectern but out of the corner of my eye I saw my daughter frantically pointing to the vestry door. I thought she mouthed 'It's him,' but you can turn amateur lip reading into meaning anything.

## THE RELUCTANT PSYCHIC

Then I saw him. Wearing his cassock and white organist surplice, Dr. Stephen Turner walked into church as if he owned it and sat at the end of a front pew. He appeared as tangible as you or me. He nodded approvingly at the delivery of the lesson before settling back to listen to the *In Dulci Jubilo*.

My scientifically minded daughter looked as if she'd been hit over the head with a rock. I felt him watching me, both of us nervous as I reached for a tricky top note. As the wondrous sounds soared to the rafters leaving us all breathless and exhilarated, Stephen must have gone with it. The front pew was empty once again.

After the service, one of the congregation called after me. She had her arm around my daughter who was almost in tears. Rowena was a well-known psychic who sometimes helped the police with missing persons' cases. Most of the congregation suspected she was deluded or on drugs.

'Did you see him? Stephen?' Her eyes bore into mine.

I nodded and we shared our strange experience but I was quick to point out that he wasn't really there. That no such thing was possible. Rowena wasn't having it.

'It was so wonderful that he came back just to hear you sing.'

'Me?'

'There was a real connection between you. Why do you think he used to play that hymn before the service started?' She hummed it. 'It was for you.'

'Angel voices ever singing, round thy throne of light? He liked it, that's all.'

## **A VERY SPECIAL ROSE**

This is such a lovely story that, although it might be hard to separate psychic activity from deep grief and longing, I wanted to include it for Rose's sake.

Rose and Harold's shared passion was gardening, especially roses, their favourites being, Shropshire Lad and Amanda, after their daughter.

Every June, they opened their garden up for private viewings to raise money for local charities and Rose would make scones the size of saucers, offering them with tea to visitors. They were active in their village and well known for their kindness and willingness to help out with community activities.

'People probably think we are do-gooders,' chuckled Rose as we sipped tea one autumn afternoon. 'Harold and I think it's important to keep busy into old age and do what you can for others. I don't care what folk say about us.'

I liked her enormously because she stood by her principles including always looking her best, even when she was in her wellies.

Placing a china cup carefully onto its saucer, she looked round quickly to make sure Harold was still snoozing in his shed, and leant across the table.

'I'm worried about him,' she whispered, checking over her shoulder. 'He's always tired these days and doesn't want to eat very much. Not even my fish pie which is his favourite.'

I assured her he was probably getting the bug that was going around and he'd be fine. Or, if not, I suggested she persuade him to make a doctor's appointment. She waved that idea away with a veiny hand.

‘Oh, you know what men are like. They tell you to stop fussing.’ She paused for a moment. ‘He’s been talking about creating a special rose for me. Got quite worked up about it. I said we’d run out of time before that could happen but if he wanted to buy me something special, then it had to be the Ingrid Bergman. I’ll show you.’

I followed her into the conservatory where she flipped open the pages of a catalogue and pointed to a deep red flower that looked velvety to the touch. Not crimson, or scarlet but a true red.

‘It’s a tea rose. I’ve always wanted one. It smells sort of spicy and it’s very hardy and resistant to all sorts of disease.’

Rose stopped her chatter and I sensed she had more to tell me.

‘Well, I’d better get on with my bread making and I’m sure you’re very busy too. Lovely to see you.’

As I left, I popped my head round the shed door to say goodbye to Harold. He was asleep and so I didn’t disturb him. I was fiddling with the stiff latch on the gate when a dark shadow fell across the path. I assumed it was from someone in the street but there was nobody about. Something made me retrace my steps back to the shed. Poor Harold wasn’t asleep. I could see immediately that he was dead.

A week later, the family travelled from all parts of the country for the funeral. Rose sat motionless in a chair whilst Amanda and her brother sorted out the arrangements. They’d never seen their mother in such a state.

Every seat in the nave and gallery of the church was filled with mourners, murmuring condolences as they shook Rose’s hand, trying not to let their tongues trip them up as we sometimes do at these sad events.

## THE RELUCTANT PSYCHIC

Some weeks later, I called into see Rose with a sponge cake. Sometimes we need the bereaved to know we are still around for them, long after the funeral tea, the flowers have wilted and the cards of condolence have been packed away in a memory box.

Although looking frail, her eyes were sparkling.

‘I’ve got something to tell you. Something big.’ she said, grasping my hands.

I waited for my tea to cool and for Rose to tell me what was troubling her.

‘It’s Harold. He’s been to see me.’

Her voice became a whisper.

‘It’s the rose you see. The Ingrid Bergman. He never got round to buying it himself but he still made sure I got it.’

Baffled, I waited for her to explain.

‘Last week, this catalogue, which was closed and weighted down with my crossword puzzle books, had flown open at the page. Can you believe that? It was a sign.’

I was beginning to understand. It’s so easy to read meanings into ordinary events. I didn’t want to remind her it had been very windy.

‘And then...’ she went on, her hands moving quickly over each other, ‘I could smell that spicy scent. I told you about that. It filled the kitchen and followed me everywhere for a few hours. It’s only the Bergman that smells like that, you see.’

Hallucinations can be a significant part of the grieving process too.

Rose pointed to a flower in a crystal vase. Like this one.’

Puzzled by what she was showing me, I got up to examine the single rose with its rich green foliage and bent to sniff the petals. Slightly aromatic.

‘Where has this come from?’

Rose took my arm and led me through the back door and into the garden.

‘It was here. Tucked away in the corner. Not planted but just lying here.’

‘How strange. Neighbours? Rose Society?’ I grappled for some reasonable explanation. Flowers don’t just manifest out of the ether.

‘Nobody I know has the Ingrid Bergman and more importantly, nobody, except you, had the slightest inkling that I wanted one... and Harold,’ she said quietly as we picked our way back across the wet lawn.

Rose paused to look skyward. ‘Thank you, my love,’ she said, blowing him a kiss. ‘You never let me down.’



## **YOU NEED TO GO HOME**

**SUMMER 1993**

A lady called Jayne G emailed me her story when I put out a request on Twitter for guest contributions. I've amended it slightly to hide her identity as she is a public figure. Here's her story.

Things were fraught at home as my husband's business was causing him a lot of stress which he dumped onto me. His pride wouldn't allow him to accept help from anyone, yet he was getting deeper and deeper into debt, denying that there was a problem. This had gone on for several months and it was taking its toll on my physical and mental health and that of my family.

To get away for a few days, I scraped some money together and took my children to Scarborough where we stayed in a musty bed and breakfast that smelt of frying pans and pine disinfectant. It didn't matter. The sharp sea air filled our lungs as we ran along the beach with our kites, giggling as the cords got tangled together. We walked along the cliff tops, pausing to lick our ice creams, then pile into the cliff lift to be whooshed down to the south bay where the girls could spend a bit of money in the amusement arcades.

Getting some space helps you to think about problems in new way. I was whittling away at the same old thing and not getting anywhere. My husband had started drinking, stashing whisky bottles in the garage in places he thought I wouldn't spot. It was a bad sign as he wasn't a drinker other than the odd cold beer on a hot day.

I had to admit that his behaviour had started to frighten me. Not only was he yelling and crashing around the house, he believed that he was the victim of industrial espionage, citing examples that were so far-fetched I once burst out laughing. Even when he called the police, I could tell they thought he was a bit crazy.

I wouldn't mind betting that many of you reading this have once wished you could predict the future – to get reassurance that something you were really worried about would work out in the end. This was all I wanted. Peace of mind.

We ambled by a wooden hut on the promenade that offered Readings by Zoe, International Clairvoyant. It needed its pale blue and pink paintwork touching up but once I was behind the curtain, I was drawn to Zoe who looked as normal as you and me – no flowery bandanas or crystal balls. In fact she wore a smart, black business suit and pearl studs in her ears.

The girls sat in the tiny waiting room reading a magazine. I asked Zoe not to talk too loudly as I handed over the cash. Allegedly she was from a long line of psychics who used the tarot cards as a channel for their readings. Once we'd got past the ritual of card shuffling and selecting, which I found rather melodramatic and boring, she laid out the cards and sat very still.

'You need to go home. Now,' she said, tapping a card with her French polished finger nail. 'He's ill. It's a head condition.' Her hands pressed on her forehead and she moaned slightly. It was getting ridiculous and I was mad with myself for spending money that was meant for special dinner that evening.

'Is that all?' I said, snapping my bag shut.

‘It answers your question.’ I realised I hadn’t said a word about why I was there. ‘The money problem will sort itself once you realise what is happening with your husband. Your new child is a son. He will be of great comfort to you in the years ahead.’ Then I knew she was making it up as she went along.

I stamped out into the late afternoon sun, the girls running behind me.

‘Who was that lady?’ asked the eight year old.

‘A lady who tells lies.’ The more I thought about being duped, the angrier I got with myself. I would have never considered consulting a psychic to sort out problems. The money would have been better spent on a counsellor.

The train journey home was agonisingly slow. I tried to read but my mind kept going back to Zoe and how certain she’d been. As we headed for our once idyllic country cottage, the dark fears crowded in again. What mood will he be in? How do I keep things normal? All those questions that I’d packed into my suitcase and taken away to resolve, now sat in a jumble on the floor.

‘Doug,’ I called, going through the house, wondering why it was so clean with everything tidied away. I kept calling out as I pushed open each door, fearful that he might jump out at me. I ordered the girls to their rooms.

Biting on a nail, I paced the kitchen floor waiting for the kettle to boil. It was then I saw the note. ‘Can’t do this anymore. I’ve got a brain tumour.’ A pile of unfolded letters from the hospital were laid out on the table.

Head problem, the psychic had said. Go home, now.

‘Doug,’ I screamed, shaking, as I flung open the garage door where a shape of a man could be seen hanging from one of the beams.

I'll spare you the terrible detail but leave you with the big question. I had no idea that my husband was suffering so much because he tried to fight it himself. If I didn't know, then how on earth could a strange woman, in a seaside amusement park, know?

Even in the midst of this tragedy, which deeply affected Doug's parents and my children, I recalled another prediction about a child. No chance. We'd hardly spoken in months, never mind anything else. Except for one time when we tried to get close again. In a Cotswold hotel.

I'd been tasting metal whenever I drank tea and had taken cheeky naps in the middle of the afternoon when I finished work early on Wednesdays and Fridays.

Sure enough, I was pregnant and yes, today my grown son, a fully qualified doctor, has brought me so much joy. He has Doug's pale blue eyes which crinkle when he smiles.

However Zoe connects with universal truths, I will never understand but I can't deny I was meant, at that moment, to step into her pastel pink booth to receive a message that was to completely change our lives.

## **THE HILL**

**Lol Owen**

**Peak District, Derbyshire 1980s.**

*Lol and I met by chance in a village hall in Castleton, where he and his wife were selling crafts. Told in his own words (unedited), here is one of his many true experiences for your enjoyment. I warn you it's creepy.*

Imagine if you can a hill. Nothing fancy, just a large almond shaped mound of earth when viewed from above. It's covered in houses where once there were trees, which have been pushed to the edges of the hill, but they wait to see if this thing called "man" will stay for long because they were here before him and hope to be here after he has gone.

Some of the woodland is sparse, reduced to rows of single trees but some, the darker, denser places where no bird ever sings are much older. If you could ask the trees they would have a story to tell, for the hill has history.

Old habits, practices and lore have soaked the very soil and this new-fangled Christianity has arrived, bloomed and now faded, yet still the old ways survive.

If we look at the hill now it has a road running up and over it to the other side and beyond, not in the middle but just to the right it cleaves the hill in two unequal parts.

The houses have been built through the years from when the hill was surrounded by moorland right through to the modern day, grasping developers sticking tiny houses on postage stamp sized plots.

## THE RELUCTANT PSYCHIC

Some of them are beautiful, built for local important figures such as doctors, magistrates, factory owners. Around them like so much flotsam and jetsam are the workers houses, rows of back to back terraces, new houses crammed in where they can, and all sharing a common trait.

It isn't sadness, or even gloom, but something more tangible, a sense of an impending explosion of darkness that you can sense here –like a faint heartbeat we can hear in the quiet moments in our lives.

The old ways are still practiced in the village. Not openly as centuries before, but they have continued to exist, and it is an open secret in the village. Those that acknowledge their continued practice do so in hushed tones and with furtive glances, and only to those in the village not considered “newcomers”.

The children play in the woods left surrounding the village but are warned away from certain parts; the dark parts where the only footprint is man's. Birds will never sing but some nights are alight with flames and human voices rising and falling in ecstasy and invocation.

If we look at the hill to the left the houses are arranged into uneven chunks divided by a series of intersecting roads. There are three roads running off the main road, itself imaginatively titled “The Hill” and depending where the branch off the Hill depends upon their name.

So we have Bottom Road, Middle Road and of course Top Road. All three run parallel to one another across the left hand side of the hill until the last 50 yards when Top and Bottom roads taper down to meet Middle and they flow into one new road going towards the next village and beyond.

## THE RELUCTANT PSYCHIC

Further dividing the houses on the left hand side of the hill are streets running from Bottom Road to Top Road, about six in all so you end up with some sort of lop-sided chess board when you look at it.

Our story began when the hill was created but our small part, a footnote in the history of the hill happened in the mid-1980s. This was the decade of hope, barring Chernobyl, of new fashions and music, houses for all and all the rest and an ideal environment for love to flourish.

My fiancée, Janet, who is now my wife had come over from the other village for the evening. It was only 1 1/2 miles away and she had caught the bus which stopped where Top, Middle and Bottom roads met.

We'd both been at work, she in a bakery and I in a foundry and it being warm we were very thirsty. We took a leisurely stroll up Middle Road, up the hill and into the pub on the corner of Top Road. After a few drinks, against a backdrop of fine 1980's pop on the jukebox we ambled down the hill to Middle Road and my parents' house a few houses from the end. Before we know it it's gone midnight, the last of the buses have run and we have no money for a taxi.

Ordinarily she would have stayed the night but her widowed mum had expressed a desire her daughter sleep under her roof that night so we had to get her home.

As in all the best paranormal stories it was a warm summer's evening, humid in fact and as we set off walking heavy, lazy spots of rain started to land and thunder started to rumble. Undeterred under a handbag broly we tottered on, our pace limited by Janet's stiletto heels, but we were happy, arm in arm, as loved up as any couple has the decent right to be.

It was when we got to the end of Middle Road and set off towards her village that it happened. We'd just been exposed to a severe bout of thunder overhead, the rain was landing in fat drops and there it was. A howl. It sounded like a dog or even a wolf.

I shrugged it off as machinery noise. Over the last century a large industrial area had sprung up in the woods to our left and now we were separated by a thin standing of trees that led off to the thicker parts of the woods still surrounding the hill.

Janet was unconcerned, she was with me, a veritable brick outhouse from swinging the big hammer in a foundry.

We carried on walking and it happened again, another howl but now it was slightly closer and it seemed to be keeping parallel with us.

It's just a machine I kept telling myself as I smiled at Janet and clutched her fractionally closer. And so it continued.

We walked this lonely road carved out of rock and woodland and our new "friend" walked along with us, directly to our side, its howl the only clue as to progress and possible intent. Eventually we reached a T junction in the road, left to the industrial estate and right toward the next village and it was here our friend left us, or so we thought.

Immediately across from us and running parallel with our route for the next half mile was the densest part of the wood remaining, and it was fifty yards into our path that this thing re-appeared. We had even spent a few minutes at the junction searching for it but to no avail. Somehow, though, it had followed us.

## THE RELUCTANT PSYCHIC

We passed a row of terraced houses on our right, most in darkness, some lit dimly and not once did it occur to us to knock on a door and ask for help, but from what, or who? Undaunted but increasingly worried we carried on and our companion matched us stride for stride. To our left the woodland cleared back twenty yards leaving scrubland but still it followed us, invisible to the eye but very, very loud.

We pressed on, the thunder still rumbling, the rain still heavy. Janet clutched my arm tighter and tighter while my peripheral vision working overtime and adrenaline preparing for whatever came across the road to finally confront us. Nothing came. Only its call, scary, worrying, carrying threats of violence and menace unknown.

Still we walked and in the distance we can see the outskirts of the next village, our goal, our safe haven of Janet's house and still our friend kept abreast until suddenly – nothing.

We carried on to Janet's house where at 2am in the morning I was told I was not able to stay that night as according to her mother "the neighbours have been talking". After what might have been a final kiss I set off in the rain and the rumbling from the dark sky.

I had eschewed the offered umbrella, as it was more hindrance than help if I had to get physical, and strode off into the darkness. Nothing. Only the dimly lit houses of families still awake until suddenly – there it was, right where we had parted company. Right at the end of the housing on my right hand side it picked me up once more.

## THE RELUCTANT PSYCHIC

Once more I strode on, quicker this time on my own, I began to sweat from the exertion and still it followed, howl after howl, matching me stride for stride, still invisible yet very, very much there.

I reached the T junction where we thought we had lost it last time and experienced a brief respite from its menace but there it was once more, almost touchable yet invisible, stride for stride we matched one another only I was silent.

I could see the end of the road where Top, Middle and Bottom split into their own right and where our friend had originally found us.

I set off up Middle Road towards home sure I had left it behind and yet here it was, now travelling along Bottom Road, surely visible from any one of the side streets that ran from Top to Bottom. I pressed on and so it followed but there was a problem. I was running out of road and side streets, sooner or later something had to give.

I don't know if my friend knew the layout of the streets, perhaps in daylight it lived there amongst us and so knew them as well as anyone, perhaps not but I was taking no chances. As I breached the final side street I ran for my life.

Around fifty yards covered in seconds, down a dark passageway, keys in the door and inside. Safe at last.

I never knew what followed us that night. I told the tale to many a soul but most looked at me as though I was not quite right and those that believed in the paranormal had no explanation. It was some twenty-five years later and I was arranging the funeral of a family member and got chatting to the Methodist minister

## THE RELUCTANT PSYCHIC

conducting the funeral. Apparently he performed exorcisms and so I told him my story.

He looked at me steadily and said, 'Whilst at Bible College in the Peak District I went out to the pub one evening. I was walking up the drive to the college and exactly the same thing as happened to you happened to me. Whatever it was kept pace with me, howling yet not approaching so I could see it, and as I entered the college grounds it eventually stopped.'

A word of advice. When you walk your loved one home keep an ear open. You never know what might be walking alongside you.

## **THE CANDLE**

**Suffolk**

**Lillian W.**

This story inspired the book cover. It's simple but poignant and came to me via a contact on Twitter. These are Lillian's own words, edited to fit the space.

I love candles. They ward off the gloom of short winter days. My favourite thing is to squeeze a stump of a church candle into an old wine bottle and watch the wax drip down its sides to form thick lacy patterns. When my family were at home, dinner parties took on a special warmth in candlelight although, being clumsy, there was always a risk I'd knock one over and set fire to the paper serviettes or Christmas crackers. I rarely have open flames these days after my curtains once caught light.

For the past few years I've lived alone in a picturesque cottage in a busy market town. Plenty of people pass the house on their way to a row of timber-framed shops – a bakery, butchers, mini supermarket or to the church hall for one of the many activities on offer. Anyone who comes to my home says it's got a lovely atmosphere - friendly and welcoming and often joke about buying it from me.

Two years ago, one Friday evening in November, I came home from work, anticipating a relaxing weekend and followed my usual routine; fed the cat, perused the fridge and pantry for ingredients for an evening meal, and cranked up the heating. With the curtains drawn against the rods of rain hammering on the window, I lit a white, household candle and placed it carefully on the table.

The flame struggled to take hold, flickering slightly in the draft from under the door. Seconds later it went out. I checked the wick and as it felt a bit damp I went in search of a replacement.

Shutting the door and wedging a draught excluder against it, I lit the second candle and started on my soup. The flame flickered again, more vigorously this time before going out. I put down my spoon, convinced I'd heard someone outside the window. Foxes often pranced across the lawn so I thought no more about it. I usually ate my meal in the kitchen whilst flicking through a puzzle book or the paper but that night I was distracted by something I couldn't put my finger on. I'm not by nature an anxious person but I felt very uneasy that night.

I locked up and settled down in the living room to watch some TV. I wasn't going to give up on my candlelight evening so I chose a different sort, thinking the basic white ones were duds. This one was made of beeswax and expensive. I'd bought it on a trip to Canterbury Cathedral.

No sooner had I put a match to the wick, when a flame shot up, big and strong but was all over the place, like a dinghy on a high tide. I was so alarmed, I jumped back, almost knocking into the cat who was standing stiff, his eyes fixed on the coffee table. They say cats in particular are sensitive to anything paranormal and their fur stands on end. Believe me, that was a good description of Tibbs.

Mesmerised I watched the flame bob around for a few seconds, then settle before doing it again. I blew it out, and wiped my moist palms down my trousers. I can see myself doing it as I write this. If you wanted to send a message to someone via paranormal means, this would be a good way.

## THE RELUCTANT PSYCHIC

The incidents with the candles had left me a bit unsettled over the weekend. I rationalised it by believing that there must have been a breeze from somewhere, even though the rooms were warm and insulated. I definitely didn't believe in paranormal activity.

On the Sunday evening of the same weekend, I was in the kitchen, ironing clothes for the next day, when the lights started to flicker then went off. Annoyed, I grabbed the small torch I keep for emergencies and checked the fuse box. Everything was normal. I flicked the switch a couple of times and the lights came back on but kept flickering, intermittently. Not having anyone in the house to talk to, I felt the need to call my sister in Scotland.

'Is Dad any better?' I asked. He'd had a fall and was still in hospital.

'You must have read my mind. I've got the phone in my hand to call you. Dad died an hour ago. Bill and I sat with him since Friday night. It was strange though. He kept drumming his fingers on the bed, saying your name. I think he wanted to say goodbye.'



## **PSYCHIC JUNKIE**

The stories you've read here about strange experience are based on facts, with no attempt to interpret them or persuade you that they prove psychic or supernatural phenomena. All contributors were asked to share their story as it happened to them. Most were alarmed, confused and a bit scared at the time but they didn't actively seek out mystics, mediums or psychics. Instead they were passive recipients of events.

Many people, mainly women, do make contact with psychics via hotlines, often because their anxiety over a situation has become intolerable and they feel powerless. They want to know in advance if things are going to work out. My second novel, *The Future Can't Wait*, addresses this issue.

One of my clients talked to me at great length about how she become hooked on phoning psychic helplines many years ago and she's kindly agreed to share her story as a warning to others. I have edited her words.

### **Why I got hooked on psychics.**

If I were writing an account of a friend who admitted to being a psychic junkie, I would be less judgemental and more understanding towards them than I am towards myself. This is my personal story of getting addicted to what's loosely described as psychic services. I have no idea if some of these people are truly gifted but I do know I was pretty sure many were reading from a script.

Like many women I've had a bit of a fascination for my daily horoscope but I've dismissed it as a harmless bit of fun. Those basic forecasts for all Geminis – that's me - are part of a growing, multi-million pound industry operating from hotlines, online and face to face 'consultations', there seems to be no decline in a need for services of mediums, psychics, tarot readers and even coffee grain interpreters.

The Fraudulent Mediums Act 1951 which protected 'genuine' mediums was repealed in 2008 following an EU Directive to protect the consumer, leaving the psychic industry to prove there was no intention to deceive or take money under false pretences. This is probably the reason why you see the disclaimer on websites: *For entertainment purposes only.*

I don't want to talk about the rights and wrongs of these activities but more to look at how people can get hooked on psychics in a similar way to getting hooked on alcohol, drugs and gambling. The first two are substance addictions which act on the brain while gambling, shopping and consulting psychics are about behavioural addictions which provide a comforting adrenaline rush.

Research coming out of the USA about this alarming phenomenon, albeit scant, indicates that psychic addiction is becoming an epidemic with no boundaries. Once someone gets drawn in they find it difficult to stop, especially if it's made easy by ringing a hotline which gets charged to the phone or handing over credit card details which are stored for future use.

What sort of people does this happen to? It can be anybody but there is usually some incident or vulnerability that triggers that first call. Bereavement, break up of marriage, loss of job and in my case, a shocking family revelation. Most people

## THE RELUCTANT PSYCHIC

would find more conventional coping strategies; talk to a trusted family member or friend, consult a counsellor or if things were very difficult, seek medical help and therapy. So what made me pick up the phone and call a local clairvoyant?

On reflection I'm ashamed and embarrassed because I should have known better but I was confused, desperate and impatient. I couldn't wait for the situation to work itself out. I felt a compulsion to know immediately what was going on and why. Every day I dissected what I'd done to cause or add to the situation, not just once but it was on my mind all the time.

It started to become a problem is when I consulted several people over a short period of time about the same issue. Psychic dependency is now classified as having more than two readings in the **same year** about the same issue. Something kept happening in my head like a mini explosion and it was only when I heard the soothing words of the clairvoyant that I began to calm down. It was beginning to look like obsessive-compulsive behaviours if not a disorder.

Like many others with co-dependency I took to 'psychic-hopping.' If I didn't like what I heard from one, I found someone else and on I went. I gave out more information than I realised. If you must consult a psychic say absolutely nothing and don't make a face to face visit. They are experts in reading body language and using leading questions. A good example is 'Your father is here with me.' Ok. Not a bad opener. 'Is he in spirit?' Er... you should know.

However if the father had died then the mention of the word sends us into a tail spin especially if you are still grieving and that can mean we are vulnerable and are open to believing as we dance blindly into the psychic's sticky trap.

This brings me to cold reading. A practiced cold reader can pick up all sorts of information about you in the way you dress, carry yourself, tone of voice and so on but they are all high probability guesses. Something comes near to the mark which settles in your conscious mind and you begin to trust the person. It's a form of selective hearing. For the one accurate guess, it's easy to dismiss the rest as aberrations. Derren Brown is a mentalist and an expert in explaining this in his many videos. Thing is, I know all this stuff and I don't have an addictive personality per se.

Once I'd got something I heard as hopeful from a reader, I felt better. For twenty minutes. Then I started to question what I'd heard and kicked myself for engaging too much. The problem with me is I'm too polite. Half way into a conversation I know is ridiculous, I didn't have the guts to hang up thus saving myself a lot of money, and I do mean a lot.

Sometimes I'd ring two or three people in a morning to see if their interpretations matched. For days I'd check out tarot readers on line and if there was a Mind and Spirit fair coming up I'd travel miles for ten minutes with an aura reader, handwriting analyst, runes and tea leaf interpreters but end up feeling sick and angry with myself. Overwhelmed by a deep sense of shame and guilt I knew what was happening but I felt powerless to stop. It's like over-eaters and compulsive shoppers.

Should there be a 12 step programme to help release us from these behaviours? In the US there are moves to create something along the lines of AA. In my case, it took a long time to recognise I had a problem but once I did, I used a simple distraction technique. Every time I had the urge to pick up the phone, I forced myself out of the house and walked briskly into town leaving my mobile behind. By the time I got home, the urgency of the moment had dissipated.

## THE RELUCTANT PSYCHIC

I took up gardening to calm my overactive mind and focus on something which used a different part of the brain. My journal became my best friend. Jotting down my thoughts and feelings helped to break a behaviour pattern once I'd acknowledged it. Seeing it in black and white is a salutatory experience. It's not easy and it's not an overnight fix. There are no support groups because who wants to admit this problem? Unlike with substance abuse, there would be no sympathy or understanding. The psychic industry, whatever you think about it, needs to take some responsibility for this growing trend and help stop people becoming boomerangs.

When you feel overwhelmed by life's problems and you want a quick fix it's important to remember that only *you* have the power to make things happen even if that is only by changing the way you see things.

I did recover and learned a powerful lesson in patience and acceptance that we can't force or predict the future.

*If this personal story resonates with you and you are spending a lot of money on 'consultations,' I urge you to discuss your situation with a qualified professional.*

I hope you enjoyed these stories. You might like my latest novel, *Edna's Death Cafe*. Read on for the first chapter.

*Available at all good online retailers.*

**EDNA'S DEATH CAFE**

**CHAPTER ONE**

**Hope Valley, Derbyshire**

‘It was the ice cream that killed him.’

Olive tapped Nigel's arm with her gloves, telling him not to be so daft.

Mourners were gathering in sombre clusters after Ted Eyre's funeral, unsure of what to do next. Edna had been clear that they were to go back to the Happy Oatcake for the wake, while she would go to the crematorium alone. Conversations were laconic, stilted, punctuated by the odd burst of forced laughter.

‘I'm sure Edna said he didn't like ice cream.’

‘*She* doesn't like it, but he'd asked for two flakes, because Edna likes chocolate. He was good to her like that.’

A cheeky October sun lit up a dip in the hills, reminding them that life was forever present.

‘I reckon he ate it too quickly.’ Nigel was determined to press home his point.

‘Now you're being ridiculous.’

The chatter fell away. Ruth tutted at the streak of mud on her black court shoes, wiping it off with a tissue. It was only the second time she'd worn them. She referred to them as her sad shoes, bought for their Deborah's Requiem Mass.

‘You alright, love?’ asked Lionel, taking her hand.

‘Fine. Why shouldn't I be?’

Olive frowned at the snappiness in Ruth's tone. Poor Lionel. Always the butt of his wife's unhappiness.

Gordon slackened the knot of his tie to scratch his neck. Tugging it off, he folded it into a parcel and handed it to Nigel.

'Give that back to Bert, will you? I've got t'sheep to see to,' he muttered, eyeing up the church clock.

'Edna will be expecting you at the do. You can't let her down. I'm sure the sheep can wait.'

Olive left Gordon grumbling about women knowing nowt about sheep. She inched her way towards the church porch to hurry Edna away to the waiting car.

'Lovely funeral, vicar,' she said.

Edna adjusted the lilac veil on her hat which bobbed awkwardly on her freshly permed hair. Olive thought the lilac rinse was a bit over the top, even though it was Ted's favourite colour.

'Are you sure you don't want any of us to come with you? I mean, the crematorium's not a very happy place.'

'I'm not in a happy place either.'

Olive accompanied Edna through the lych-gate to help her into the car.

'Give Alisa a hand with the tea. Silly girl wanted to do it all by herself. For me.'

Olive watched the black car glide down the narrow street to the main road, before reminding everyone to head back to the cafe.

‘I’m telling you. He collapsed with a double cone in his hand. Made a right old mess of his trousers.’

‘You lot should stop listening to rumours.’

‘Died in the ambulance. Edna said she didn’t get chance to say goodbye. She’s barely said a word since then.’

‘Pity he didn’t have a lolly instead.’ Nigel stuck a cigarette between his lips and flicked his lighter.

‘For heaven’s sake, Nigel, show some respect, and can’t that wait? Disgusting habit.’ Ruth waved away the smoke and stamped down the path, leaving Lionel to follow.

The elderly Pryce twins, in their mauve coats from the thirties, stepped to one side, whispering to each other. ‘Ted says he’s settling in fine on the other side, and Edna mustn’t be sad for long.’ Lettie Pryce was nodding as if listening to someone.

‘I bet he’s left her a bob or two.’ Gordon rummaged around in his pocket for half a scone he’d not had time to finish before the service.

‘Look at your grubby hands,’ said Mavis Street, handing him a wet wipe.

‘Ted’s got a daughter, don’t forget.’

Several pairs of eyes fixed on the back of Lionel’s head. A line of ancient yew trees threw long shadows over their path back to the village.

‘Susanna? That little madam.’

‘Not so little now.’

Mavis Street embedded herself in the huddle, to suck in the gossip.

## THE RELUCTANT PSYCHIC

‘She vanished thirty years ago, after her mother died. It was terrible what she did. Poor Ted was left on his own to deal with the shame. He never forgave her.’

‘What did she do? I only remember her as having a terrible temper.’ Mavis jiggled her hearing aid.

‘Stealing money for drugs. She was a wild child.’

‘That’s why she scarpered.’

‘Good riddance.’ Nigel stubbed out his cigarette and rubbed his stomach. ‘I’m famished.’

## CHAPTER TWO

### Late January

Edna was sure her mind had gone walkabout. It would be simple if she could forage through her knicker drawer to find it, but life no longer co-operated so willingly.

The days tumbled on top of each other, with no meaning other than to keep the loyal customers of the Happy Oatcake, satisfied. The café had been closed since the funeral, meaning Alisa had been able to go home for a long holiday. Edna missed her youthful energy and silly jokes so, giving in to pressure from the locals, decided to reopen for a few days a week. She'd promised her mother to keep the business going as long as she could, but promises to the dying were often driven by duty to stop them fretting.

She looped her bedroom curtains into their tiebacks, wiping the moisture from the window with her right palm. A blancmange was wobbling about in her stomach. Ted had been gone thirteen weeks, two days and – she looked over at the church clock, adding up on her fingers the number of hours. She hoped that, one day, she'd stop counting.

The street below was damp and deserted. The rain trickled along the gutter, over mounds of rubble, towards the overflowing drain. A chain of puddles reflected the light from the two Victorian lamps guarding the patch of grass the locals called the Triangle. It hosted the memorial to the war heroes, including her father.

Chilled to the marrow, Edna shuffled into the bathroom in her dressing gown, for a quick wash and a tidy up. No matter how badly she felt, Ted wouldn't want her to neglect herself. Two dark hairs had sprouted on her chin, so, pulling the skin tight, she plucked them out. A smudge of lilac eyeshadow sank into the creases of her eyelids, which were sore from all the non-crying. She'd have to see Sandra about a fresh perm when she was ready to cope with her non-stop nattering about her new chap.

It was the fawn polyester slacks that broke her resolve that morning. Dismayed to see her legs looking like undercooked sausages, she allowed herself a silent weep. Not one to feel sorry for herself for long, Edna slipped her arms into a clean overall, puffing as the two sides failed to meet across her chest. Grief had left a hole in her belly that only fig rolls could plug. In her mind's eye, she saw Ted's finger wagging at her.

Edna smiled to herself as she fixed a catering net over her hair, sliding in hair grips to keep it secure. Down in the kitchen, the wind had found its way through a crack in the wall. Waiting for her tea to brew, she tuned an old transistor to Peak radio. A bowl of oatcake batter was resting in the industrial fridge, which was making a strange zizzing noise. Something else that would have to be fixed.

Adding more liquid to the biscuit coloured mixture, she paused, whisk in hand, to listen to a breaking news flash.

Another accident on the Sheffield road had caused a pile up. She prayed no one had been killed. A wave of grief ambushed her, as it often did when she was least expecting it. Resting her hands on the worktop for support, she took slow breaths, in and out, until it subsided.

The radio host cut back in with a foot-tapping song from the sixties. Herman and his Hermits soon distracted Edna from her brooding.

Oil sizzled in the blackened frying pan on the stove, ready for the first batch of oatcakes, a cross between a pancake and a crumpet. They were special to Derbyshire, though not according her rivals in neighbouring Staffordshire. ‘Them’s like satellite dishes,’ was the usual complaint. ‘They’re supposed to be saucer-sized.’

Edna pondered on rivalries between people wanting to show their way was the right way. Did it really matter? Course it did, Ted would say. It’s a question of pride. It’s about who we are.

She poured in the right amount of mixture and let it spread across the bottom of the pan, watching it assume the shape of Greenland, before flipping it over to brown the other side. The two broken tiles above the cooker were her daily reminders that the café needed an upgrade, but she had no energy for that.

The breakfast rush left her breathless with no time to think about the big questions of life. Getting and keeping local help was impossible when Sheffield and Manchester offered so much more to the local youth. When Alisa, the young Estonian with the waist-length ponytail, had wandered in the previous summer, asking for work, Edna wanted to hug her.

The breakfast customers stood under the awning, rain dripping onto their shoulders. One of them knocked on the window and pointed to his watch. She flipped the sign from closed to open and eased back the security bolts, standing out of the way as the local quarry workers dived in to pick up their prepared orders.

‘Mornin’, m’duck. ‘Bout time you were open again for some decent grub.’ They ripped open their foil packages, demolishing the contents in two bites.

‘Anyone’d think you’d not been fed for a week,’ she called out after them, a tease buried in the brittleness of her voice.

An out-of-town walking group were the first booking of the day. In preparation for them, Edna squirted the tables with lemon disinfectant and filled up the serviette dispensers. Some boxes needed to be moved away from the fire exit but she’d leave the heavier work to Alisa. Lionel Baker stood awkwardly in the entrance.

‘You’re making me nervous with all that foot tapping. You’d better come inside.’ Edna flicked her cloth over her shoulder and pointed to a chair.

‘Coffee?’

Nursing his trilby hat in both hands, he hesitated for a moment, then shook his head. Edna noticed scabs on his balding head.

‘You’re up early. Been out walking the dog?’

Lionel’s lips twitched as if reluctant to release his words. Edna’s pencilled-on eyebrows drew together.

‘Is it Ruth? What’s happened?’

He cleared his throat and looked over his shoulder.

‘It’s her nerves. Ever since our Deborah’ – he picked up the salt cellar from the cruet set and twiddled it between his fingers – ‘was knocked off her bike and left to die by that monster... I shouldn’t be burdening you with it.’

‘Go on.’ Edna took it back from him and wiped off the dab of brown sauce.

## THE RELUCTANT PSYCHIC

‘She’s not been herself. Ruth, I mean. Not Deborah. Well Deborah isn’t herself, is she? Not anymore. Ruth thinks she’s an angel.’

Edna warmed his hands with her own and forced him to look at her.

‘Tell me what’s happened to Ruth. Slowly.’

‘I found her wandering around down by the bus station in the middle of the night. Said she was looking for Debs because she’d not got off the last Sheffield bus. It gets in a few minutes before eleven.’

‘You need to call her doctor. Tell him about this and other incidents.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘The night she ran down the street in her nightie with a candle, singing “Oh Praise Ye the Lord”? Remember?’

Lionel’s earlobes were ablaze.

‘She won’t see anybody but Father Patrick. Says there’s nothing wrong with her. Ruth doesn’t open up easily, not even to me. She’s in a world of her own, most of the time.’

Edna tuned into his pain. ‘It must be hard for you. She sounds depressed. It’s not unusual after any death, but especially after such a tragedy.’

‘Couldn’t you talk to her? I mean, you’ve got a lot of experience of these things. I’d better go back in case she wakes up and finds me not there.’

She followed him to the door and waved to Mavis Street, who was being dragged down the road by Zeus, her overexcited dachshund.

‘I don’t think I’m the best person to talk to her. She thinks I’m a lost soul because I don’t share her religious views. I’m thinking of organising a get-together for the village so we can share our experiences of loss. It’s called a death café. Tea, cake and a chat about dying.’

Lionel face resembled a blanched walnut. ‘I don’t know if she’ll come to that. I’ll mention it.’

‘I’ll let you know more about it when I know myself.’

As the day rumbled on, Edna allowed her idea to brew. With the visitors outnumbering the locals and the workers locked in their cubicles for so many hours, any community togetherness was limited to nights in the pub, or the occasional festival. She remembered a time when, following a bereavement, the women would be in and out of each other’s houses, bringing food or calling in to simply sit with the person when in the depths of paralysing grief.

The murkiness of the winter mornings dampened down the mood of her customers who shook themselves out of damp jackets and scowled at the menu. It was the time of year when the world waited in hope, for the springing up of snowdrops and crocuses from their graves, trumpeting a new cycle of life. Apart from Ruth, Edna didn’t know anyone who anticipated a similar resurrection from the dead.

Murmurs of carefully crafted condolence accompanied the Lavender Ladies Lunch Club. Edna thanked them, saying that she was bearing up and that people had been very kind.

‘Good, good,’ said Grace, who behaved as if she was holding a basket of hot chestnuts and needed to drop them.

Skirting the truth, they talked in hushed voices about Ted and others in the village who’d recently passed over or departed the mortal coil. The euphemisms irritated Edna.

‘I’m starting up a death café. A community service to talk about death and dying. Will you come?’

From the looks on their faces, she may as well have said she was setting up a porn café.

‘Oh, I don’t know about that. I mean, it sounds so *morbid*.’

‘Oh, no, Grace. It’s fascinating. I went to one in Derby. Tea, chocolate cake and a laugh.’

‘Or, in this case, my lemon curd tarts. I’ll let you know the details.’

