

# 1

“So what do you reckon? Old Ship? New Ship?”

“Don’t actually like either actually, Pete”

“Don’t actually like either actually’ that’s good English James” Suzi mimicked.

“Yeah alright Suzi, and yours is so perfect” James replied sarcastically.

I turned up the volume on the car radio as Madness ‘Our House’ came on to cover the noise of my two friends arguing over English grammar; a playful heated discussion which no one would win. Part of it I thought was because they had once dated, about three years ago, for several months and knew each other quite well. They never really split more drifted into being ‘just good friends’. They were a lot closer now.

I certainly preferred it as we were; all single and friends. All the time they had been together I had put up with them smooching. Physical chemistry was probably all they had going for them at the time and they didn’t worry about rubbing my nose in it. They didn’t seem to care that I had been mostly single. Anyone else and I might have taken offence, but I couldn’t with these two. I liked their company. James and I had been friends since we were twelve. Suzi joined us when we were in secondary school when the board of governors decided to mix the girls and boys schools; then we became a group within a group.

Suddenly James’s right arm flew up nudging my elbow. The car swerved to the right forcing me across the central white line. Panic swept through my mind for the briefest second but

luckily there was no oncoming traffic.

“Watch it!” I said in good humour, I knew it was accidental.

“Sorry Pete! Suzi flicked my ear.”

Glancing at James I caught Suzi doing it again.

“Don’t do that!” James was obviously getting agitated, each knew they were pushing the other too far, but it never stopped them.

“Otherwise what?” Suzi replied playfully.

“Pete, tell her to stop” James pleaded impersonating a child. He turned as best he could with the seat belt holding his bulky frame in place and I could make out the snapping noises as they started slapping each others hands repeatedly in quick succession, which is what they did when an argument was not going to be resolved. They started laughing and I knew everything was alright.

“You two are worse than kids” I smiled.

“Yes Dad!” they both said mockingly before sticking their tongues out at each other.

As James turned back he caught my shoulder. The car swerved to the right and I over compensated, veering towards the pavement. I heard and felt the car go over a drain cover in the gutter and only just avoided clipping the kerb.

“Sorry Pete” James felt abashed. Still Suzi mocked him from the back seat, where I could see her in my rear view mirror, her soft features looking so beautiful framed by her long hair.

“I would like to get to the pub in one piece you know” I responded sarcastically.

“Well I thought it’d be more interesting to go in pieces. You know it is Wednesday after all” James retorted.

“Yeah. And that means what James?” Suzi replied sharply, “you’re so stupid!”

“Oooh get you! Anyway I don’t know” James shrugged his broad shoulders.

“Well you can go in pieces if you want.”

I jerked the steering wheel sharply left causing the car to swerve but in my haste had been over zealous and the near side wheel hit the kerb spinning the steering wheel rapidly through my fingers and allowing the car to mount the pavement. Before I knew it the driver's side front wheel hit the curb and a split second later the wheel spun out of control. In my panic I pushed hard down on the accelerator instead of the brake, my inexperience kicking in; I'd only been driving three months. Desperately I grabbed at the steering wheel, a thousand reactions flying around my head. The far edge of the pavement loomed up and I could see the steep bank beyond getting closer. We were on an open stretch of road that ran down to Leigh Station from Leigh Broadway. On the right side of the road were neat well manicured gardens leading up to the houses above, on the left, the side we were about to head down, it was a rough waste ground littered with small trees and thorn bushes in amongst the tall uncut grass which hid other obstructions and discarded rubbish.

My friends were shouting and screaming. Taking my foot off the accelerator I stamped it on the brake. Everything was happening too quickly.

The car jolted as the rear wheels mounted the pavement. I couldn't make out what my friends were saying; I was concentrating too hard. Sweat formed droplets on my forehead. In desperation I yanked at the handbrake but we were over the brow of the steep grass bank and nothing could stop the inevitable.

The cars' momentum launched it down the bank at a terrifying speed. In vain I tried to steer the car but it just followed the course of the ground and we headed down the bank. Small bushes and trees appeared in front of the car before disappearing underneath. In vain I tried to bring the car to a halt, re-applying the handbrake and jamming my left foot on my right foot and pushing the break pedal even harder as if

that would make a difference.

The noise was awesome as we grazed past a rock hidden by the long grass, gouging into the side panels of, this, my first car. We were being tossed around like rag dolls. It didn't matter which way I turned the wheel, I had no control. It all happened so fast yet it seemed like a slow motion replay. The ground underneath was rough, bangs and knocks made me think that any second now the car would break into pieces.

With an almighty crash we hit a tree stump, the back reared up like a horse before finally coming to rest. My seatbelt gave way under the immense strain and my head hit something hard before it was flung back as loud explosions filled the car and the airbags were deployed. At last silenced consumed us.

The full moon shone into our metal box making the twisted metal and shattered glass sparkle.

The air bags in my Renault Clio had done their job for James and I, but not Suzi. I couldn't see her. I desperately wanted to turn around yet something seemed to be holding me firmly in place, even moving my head was difficult. I struggled to look at James only managing to view him out of the corner of my eye, I saw the slow deliberate movements as my friend seem to check that he was still alive.

Quite suddenly I found myself free from whatever had been holding me but I was numb. Turning round I saw Suzi, blood streaming down one side of her face. From the stains on the rear side window I knew she had smashed her head against it. I tried to speak yet no sound came out. A second later I realised I heard nothing at all. Just silence. Suzi looked at me dazed, questioningly, almost as if to ask 'what had happened?' Her head then became too heavy for her neck and lolled to one side. A few moments later she raised it again placing one hand to the wound on the side of her head, lowering it she looked at the blood before her eyes rolled back in their sockets and her body went limp.

James was panicking, struggling to get free, scrabbling at his seatbelt. It wouldn't come undone and he shouted something at me, his mouth articulated his anger although I couldn't hear it. I was watching a dream sequence with the volume turned down. My body movements were sluggish and heavy, a haze started to cloud my vision.

The windscreen looked like a piece of frosted glass, a million tiny cracks. The passenger door was open slightly and James's feet were outside of the car, but the seatbelt still held him fast regardless of how much he struggled. Using his body as a dead weight he tried to break it, relentlessly jerking backwards and forwards; still it held tight, despite pure adrenalin driving him on. The car rocked gently under his efforts and finally the seatbelt tore free of its holder and James scrambled out tripping over his large feet in his haste to get clear of the wreck, panic finally subsiding.

Sitting down on a rock a few feet away he held his head in his hands, the moonlight highlighting his roguish facial features against the dark backdrop of trees. I could see his warm breath rising into the cold air, yet I didn't feel the cold.

Time seemed to be standing still.

After what seemed like ages James got up and came back to the car. Moving the front passenger seat forward he reached in to check on Suzi who was still out cold in the back. Undoing her seatbelt he lifted her almost effortlessly out of the car, I reached out to him yet he ignored me and I watched as he carried Suzi clear of the wreckage.

Lethargy made me feel that I was part of the wreckage, part of the car itself, numbness mastering my body. Mentally I checked my body; nothing seemed to work.

James was attending Suzi and slowly she came round, held tightly in James's arms. I knew she'd be alright.

A few minutes passed before they both came back to the car and eyed me up and down, they were talking to me; I could

see their lips moving but every word was silent. I was sure I was talking back to them yet they didn't seem to hear me. The more I tried, the more they ignored me. I pleaded for them to drag me free from the wreck but they didn't.

James got out his mobile phone and dialled a number.

In the moonlight the trees and bushes looked strangely ominous and threatening, James's and Suzi's shapes blended into the background. I couldn't understand why they were pretending I wasn't there. Slowly I resigned myself to the fact that I was stuck where I was. I couldn't feel cold, in fact I couldn't feel anything, my eyelids grew heavy and gradually they closed letting James, Suzi and the scene outside disappear from sight.

*"You can't let him get away with it" a young innocent voice spoke to me, seemingly from nowhere.*

*I looked around. I heard the voice again and replied "Let who? Let who get away with what?"*

*"You can't let him get away with it. You must stop him."*

*Trying to see where this voice came from I undid my seatbelt, opened the door and effortlessly got out of the car. The grass was wet. Turning around my car was gone, so were James and Suzi.*

*It was daylight. The sun beat down whilst the remains of the morning dew glistened. There were people sitting on blankets with picnic hampers. Children playing ball, flying kites. A plane roared overhead.*

*It was the Airshow, the Southend Airshow. I'd been to it many times, never intending to go as I wasn't particularly a fan, yet every year I went because various friends wanted to and rather than be left out it was easier to go.*

*"Over here."*

*"Where are you?" I asked.*

*I was led to a thicket of brambles surrounding a small tree, too dense for me to walk into.*

*"I can't go in there" I said.*

*“You can’t let him get away with it. You must help us.”*

*“Help who? Do what?”*

*“Protect us. He can’t get away with it.”*

*Then I noticed a child standing in the midst of the brambles, she was no more than six or seven years old and wearing an old Victorian style child’s dress. It seemed completely out of context to the rest of the scene.*

*Spinning round I viewed the surrounding scene again, no one else could see what I could see; they were gleefully enjoying their day watching the aircraft. There was a family nearby that was familiar but I couldn’t understand why. I whirled back to the girl, she was pointing to the family. Staring at them I turned back to her, she was gone.*

*“He took me away and hurt me.”*

*Opening my eyes I was engulfed by flashing blue lights and busy people all around me. The roof from my car was missing three or four firemen were carrying it away. Masses of people were working in silence as I was pulled free and put onto a stretcher, which was then carried with difficulty up the bank to a waiting ambulance. James and Suzi clambered in after me and sat on the other side. A paramedic attended to me. I still couldn’t feel anything.*

*The journey was just images played out silently and I wondered if I was actually still alive. I could feel the rocking of the ambulance as it sped its way back to the hospital and the thud of the trolley as they wheeled me into the casualty department. But no associated sounds. Lots of bodies around me, men in masks, bright lights. It was like I wasn’t really there. I caught the glint of metal instruments and slowly shut my eyes. I had had enough. I didn’t want to see anymore.*

*“You must help us. You must stop him. Don’t let him hurt us.”*

*I was back on the cliffs. The Airshow was in full swing.*

*The familiar family were sitting just in front of me and didn’t seem to notice I was there. A mother, a father, two girls and a boy, two*

older folk, possibly grandparents, completed the happy unit.

*“Please, please” the voice pleaded with me.*

*I tried to think through the fogginess in my mind “I don’t understand. Who are you?”*

*The grandfather looked over at where I was standing. I stared deep into his intense eyes. Getting up he slowly walked towards me. For some unknown reason I felt terror and as quickly as the scene had appeared it was gone.*

*I looked straight into the eyes of one the nurses before slipping into unconsciousness.*

## 2

I woke early the next day on a hospital ward, the events of the previous evening sketchy in my fuddled brain. The sky outside was just breaking into daylight. Struggling to sit up a throbbing pain in my head caused me to wince and placing a hand to my head I found a bandage there. Gently I searched it with my fingers; I didn't know exactly what for, just searching. Then I felt the wound and was surprised that it didn't hurt, just felt warm under the slight pressure. Everything ached as if I'd gone twenty rounds in a boxing ring and lost.

In the ward there were twelve beds, seven of which were occupied including mine. I tried to recollect what had happened but nothing would come into focus. Remembering a little girl I wondered if I had hit her? It was a strange image that didn't seem to fit the whole picture. The Airshow! How did that figure into everything? That was months away.

My throat was dry and hoarse; I spied the water jug that had been left on the bedside table with a glass upside down next to it. Reaching over I tried to pour some water but my arms were too heavy, concentrating I managed to summon up the strength to lift the jug. I only drank a little as my head began pounding like a pneumatic drill from the exertion.

Warily I slunk back down and drifted into sleep as nausea made its presence known and every ill was magnified by the simplest task.

*"Help us. Don't let him get away with it. He hurt us"*

*The girl was standing in the thorn bushes again. I remembered! She pointed behind me to where the family were sitting, they were happy*

*having fun, enjoying the sunshine. I looked intently at them, they seemed so familiar, yet something just wouldn't click; why did they look familiar?*

*"You have to stop him, please." I turned to face the girl. She had long brown hair below shoulder length with soft curls tucking under, her features were soft and innocent, her complexion fair. She wore black children's shoes with a buckle on them and knee high white socks.*

*She put her hand in mine. It was cold. The chill penetrated me making the hairs on my arms stand on end. She squeezed gently. It was comforting in a strange sort of way.*

*"Please help us" her voice was soft, warm and pleading.*

*I turned to her.*

A nurse was standing next to my bed tapping my shoulder. Looking at her I said something, I wasn't sure if I was still asleep, my eyelids were heavy like iron curtains and I struggled to keep them open. Her lips moved but no sound came from them. I replied back to her, in my mind I knew what I had said, but I only felt the internal vibrations of a muffled, distant sound. I put my hands to my mouth to feel my lips and spoke again to make sure my mouth was moving and it wasn't just my imagination. Again the nurse spoke and I heard nothing. She made some hand gestures and then left.

Laying still I contemplated the situation, pinching myself to make sure I was awake and not having a nightmare. Sitting up again I tried to ignore the aches and pains. Picking up the glass I had drunk from earlier I banged it against the glass water jug, no sound. I did it again, and again, each time my panic intensified, but still no sound. The person in the next bed stirred and looked at me as though I were crazy. I tapped the metal bed head, clicked my aching fingers all to no avail. A mild hysteria swept over me as the realisation hit. I looked for other things that I knew made a noise, I didn't want to believe the truth that I couldn't hear.

Panic made me forget about all my injuries and the throbbing in my head. I still needed proof so got out of bed, almost

immediately my legs gave way and I was forced to hold onto the edge of the bed to steady myself before making my way to the end of the ward looking a little drunk. At the seating area, I switched on the TV and after finding the remote turned up the volume until the gauge on the screen wouldn't go any further. I changed channels in quick succession, wondering if it was just that particular channel, maybe there was something wrong at the TV station and the sound was not being transmitted.

I felt a firm but gentle hand on my shoulder and turning saw the nurse. She eased the remote from my hand and switched the TV off. I had tears in my eyes and each one slowly travelled down my cheek. Taking my arm she led me to her desk and sat me down. I was visibly shaking.

She sat down next to me and proceeded to scribble on a pad.

PETER, A DR WILL BE WITH YOU SHORTLY.

I said something and hoped it was what I thought it was, "What's happened?"

NOT SURE YET. A DR WILL SEE YOU. THEN A NURSE WILL TAKE YOU TO THE E.N.T SPECIALIST.

I must have looked puzzled because she then wrote:

EARS, NOSE, THROAT.

I was guided back to my bed, not sure what to do or make of this new situation. Frightened. I curled up in a ball and stayed like that until the doctor arrived.

Ten minutes later I was in a wheel chair and being wheeled out of the ward. Wild thoughts started to whizz through my head a continuous bombardment of feelings and anxieties, pictures of my life so far and pictures how my life might be.

The rest of day was a whirlwind of various examinations, physical and mental, pulling me this way and that. No one explaining what was going on and I didn't really care, still absorbed and lost in my new world.

By early evening I was back on the ward where James and Suzi came to visit me. We sat there, not sure what to say to each other and when they did speak they tried to communicate by gesticulating. I watched intently, staring at their mouths and trying to decipher their hand movements but I couldn't follow the shapes their mouths made, frustration started to build up inside and I became more detached. In the end they resorted to pen and paper which Suzi went and bought from the shop whilst James and I sat awkwardly in the gulf that was opening up between my old hearing world and the silence in which I now found myself.

James looked uncomfortable. I wanted to know what he was thinking as he watched Suzi do all the writing, the pen would hover for a while before she would scribble a question, I would give one word answers and with the accident a moot subject this left us with very little to talk about which was unusual for the three of us. Suzi wrote that she had spoken to my parents and they were coming in later. Soon James and Suzi left as it became obvious that I didn't really want to talk.

My parents no longer lived locally, choosing to move to Norfolk almost as soon as I decided to leave home into a small one bedroomed flat which they helped finance by paying the ten percent deposit. It wasn't much but it was mine.

I was kept in for one more nights observation, despite the fact that other than my hearing and the cut on my head there was nothing really wrong with me.

Underneath the bandage, my hair was matted with dry blood and a nurse eventually took me to the bathroom to help wash it carefully, avoiding getting the thirteen stitches wet.

Walking was very strange, the loss of hearing was making me unstable on my feet, my sense of balance skewed.

When I left with my parents the following day I was given a list of appointments and places to attend: various specialists and therapists to help ascertain whether my hearing loss was permanent or temporary and then, if necessary to help me adjust to this new life style.

Inside my flat it was like a new world. No longer could I hear the knocking of the pipes when the heating was on, the boiling of the kettle, footsteps across the laminated wooden flooring. It was like solitary confinement despite both parents being there. We communicated using notes or obvious symbols like one hand held horizontally over a vertical hand for the letter 'T', which meant either 'Did I want a cup of tea? Or Tea was ready, it was cumbersome but we could get by.

Finally, Tuesday, my parents left knowing I was as well as could be expected. Work had been contacted on my behalf and a card arrived wishing me a speedy recovery. There was plenty of food in the fridge, though sooner or later I would have to leave my haven and venture to the supermarket. I had internet access but preferred to shop physically rather than online, although internet shopping was looking more attractive now.

In the afternoon, I sat on the settee staring out of the window, the TV was on, subtitles flashing up on screen. I couldn't be bothered to read them and wasn't that interested in what was on either.

The silence was deadly, a man made prison. I lay down on the settee and tried to remember all my favourite songs and films, trying to fill my head with as many sounds as I could.

*"Please, help us"*

*The girl was there again holding my hand. It was cold, my breath forming clouds in front of my face. We were standing at the corner of the road that ran down to Leigh Station. It looked different. The road was single track with grooves cut where it had been used so often. The bank that my car had gone down the previous night was now well kept, with neatly cut grass, flower beds full of colour, trees of different*

varieties, small bushes. It looked nothing like the overgrown mess of the previous night.

A man dressed in a collarless shirt, leather waistcoat, and grey trousers was working the gardens, tending to their every need. The little girl pointed to him.

“He must be stopped” the girl tugged at my hand, her voice pleading.

“But I don’t understand.”

“He hurt us all, you must stop him.”

“But I don’t know what I can do. How can I help?”

The little girl walked me over to an area near a group of trees about twenty feet from the man; an area I had never seen this neat and tidy. It had always been waste ground ever since I could remember.

The girl pointed to the ground.

A small well clipped Holly Bush occupied the ground under the canopy of a Birch tree, next to them were some Chrysanthemums and Rose bushes of different colours.

The girl spun me round gently on the spot to take in the view. The scene changed and I was standing near where my car had come to a halt the night of the crash. Again she spun me round to see the view and it changed back to the neat gardens.

Suddenly I was back in my flat and puzzled by what the little girl was trying to explain. None of it made any sense. Why was she talking to me? What had I done? I’d never been one for believing in ghosts or spirits. I’d never even seen a ghost before. I always sat on the fence in discussions whenever the subject came up. What was the reason behind the visions and voices? Whatever it was it had something to do with the crash. It had to! Maybe I was hallucinating, a mild concussion. But in a sense the visions and the little girl’s voice drew me in, compelling me to believe and know that I was not going mad. It eased my frustration of being in a silent world. I didn’t know what I should be doing or even what my next course of action should be. Maybe I was meant to go and investigate where we crashed. Maybe something

there would answer my questions. According to the girl there was obviously something that I was supposed to see or do.

Leaving the house did pose its own set of fears. Everyday situations scared me now; crossing a road, walking along a pavement, not being able to hear what was going on around me. I knew there would come a time when I would have to bite the bullet; I just wanted to put it off for as long as possible, isolated in my flat. I couldn't use the phone, I didn't know if the doorbell rang. Even cooking dinner wasn't the same, I used to be able hear the 'ping' as the timer stopped on the microwave, now that had changed.

I wanted to contact my two closest friends, wanted their company, but the few times they had been round, in the last few days, had been awkward; communication was slow and frustrating. They had ended up talking with my parents instead.

I loafed around on the settee for the rest of the afternoon just letting the night-time draw in, making me feel even more dejected and depressed.

A vibration in my pocket disturbed my contemplation and pulling out my mobile phone I saw I had a message.

#### **CAN U LET US IN PLEASE SUZ**

Sluggishly and reluctantly I got up to let Suzi and James in who looked pleased with themselves. I made tea for us all and we sat down in my small front room. James immediately went over to my computer and flicked the keyboard, the screen sprang to life.

Opening up Word he began to type. Conversation became much easier now as we could all type efficiently, they could hear my replies and as we barged each other out of the way to type, it became a sort of game and for the first time since the accident we were all laughing. I finally asked if my friends would drive me to the scene of the accident as I wanted to see the area. They were

hesitant and curious about my request and to my reasons, which I didn't want to tell. They obliged after a little convincing.

I trusted these two people and felt safe going out in public with them, they would keep me safe. It was early evening and light was still good. Possibly another hour and a half before dusk, and it was warm.

Near the scene of the accident it all became quite clear in my head as the night before replayed in my mind, a recollection that made my heart pound inside my chest and my hands become clammy. We parked up on the opposite side of the road, got out and stood on the footpath that the car had crossed before careering down the bank. It was a strange moment as we stood mesmerized. It had been quite an event and now, looking down the bank we realised how lucky we were. The deep gouges my car had made were still visible although the police had had the car towed away.

It was eerie not being able to hear all the everyday intrinsic sounds that I had taken for granted in the past.

My legs began to tremble as I remembered how it felt. I took deep breaths to calm myself inside. All three of us took in the scene for a few long minutes until I felt a hand on my shoulder, it was Suzi's, I looked at her and she smiled, I reciprocated.

Without sound to help me my legs were still a little wobbly as I made my way down. James put his hand on my arm to steady me, I looked at him annoyed and he let go. He meant well, but I wanted to do everything as normally as I would have done before the accident. My friends followed me down. The grass was damp and I slipped a couple of times, my deafness seemed to confuse my brain making it misjudge distance and I twisted my wrist as I put my hand down to break my fall. Arriving at the point where the car had stopped a chill ran down my spine. In my mind I could see some of the images how the moon had made everything appear.

scanning the area I tried to map out the image I had seen in my

dream of the little girl, figure out the positioning of everything, the bushes and trees, where she had been pointing to, and where she stood. I searched the ground diligently, not sure what I was looking for, just an overwhelming confidence that this was what I was meant to be doing. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary; earth, rocks, twigs, and odd bits of rubbish and debris from my car. The cliffs, as they were affectionately referred to had been the subject of two landslips, only minor ones but enough to change the landscape and expose some giant boulders.

*“This way” The little girl took my hand and led me to a spot a few feet away “Help me” she said pointing to the ground*

*“What! I don’t understand” but she was gone*

Turning and looking at my friends they were puzzled by my actions. Had I just fallen asleep standing up? Had I really seen the girl and felt her hand? I pointed to the ground and my friends made their way to where I was standing. Pointing to a spot on the ground I told them ‘she’s here’. My friends looked at me as though I had gone mad. I ignored them, feeling compelled to carry on, so grabbing a thick stick from nearby I knelt down to started digging, pulling the dirt out of the way and within a few inches hit something solid. Throwing the stick to one side and I started to clear the area with my bare hands. It was just a rock, quite large, but just a rock. I could feel my friends’ eyes piercing my back wondering ‘What the hell I was doing, had I gone insane?’ I dug round the rock to get a purchase on it so I could heave it out of the way. It was too heavy to move on my own and I asked James to give me a hand. He looked uncomfortable, first glancing at Suzi, looking for her approval. She said something to him before he reluctantly helped, between us we managed to move it out of the way.

Underneath was a hessian sack which I stared at for the briefest of moments before lifting it up. It was dirty with something loose inside. The sack only came away so far as a corner was snagged on something. James and myself yanked at it and suddenly it

*Craig Phoenix*

came free, throwing us backwards and scattering bones on the ground as it ripped open.

James looked at me, then I at Suzi, none of sure what to make of it. James and Suzi suddenly became very wary of me, physically taking a step back, their faces questioning me.

# 3

I stared at the bones strewn across the ground whilst still holding the sack in my right hand, fighting the queasy feeling in the pit of my stomach. Morbid curiosity drew my attention to the bones which were small, and for a moment I was relieved as I thought they might actually be from an animal, inside I knew they were not. Something heavier still remained in the bag and I hesitated for fear that I knew what it was. A skull.

Impulse after impulse shot round my body but not one of them could make me move, all the documentaries I'd ever watched about gruesome discoveries, human remains buried, paled into insignificance now I was actually confronted with the very situation that I always believed would never affect me. I looked to my friends for support.

They had retreated a safe distance not sure anymore what to make of their friend, who seemed to know where to locate bones. Suzi had her head on James's shoulder, his arm around her for comfort.

I understood their reluctance to take any further part, yet they were my friends. Was I asking too much? It seemed so. A moment later they appeared to be arguing with each other. James angry and upset, his long arms gesticulating emphasizing his mood. He turned to leave and Suzi grabbed his arm which he easily shook off shouting something at her. She watched as he went back up the bank to his car and drove away.

She looked directly at me and I held her gaze for a few seconds before returning to what lay in front of me, still unsure of what to do, whether to look in the sack or put it down.

Quite suddenly I was disturbed from my questioning thoughts by a hand on my shoulder, turning I saw Suzi's face, her hazel eyes reflecting the light from a distant street light that had come on as dusk fell. She pulled her mobile from her back pocket; pressed a few buttons and then showed me.

**POLICE?** Is what it simply read. Nodding my agreement she duly rang. I placed the sack back on the ground where I found it and then stood up.

A squad car turned up within minutes followed shortly after by another. Within an hour a forensics team had appeared and the whole scene was cordoned off.

The scene resembled one out of the murder documentaries I so enjoyed watching, men in white overalls wearing masks, surgical gloves, and rubber boots. Tape was used to make a perimeter fence then setting to work they scoured the ground looking for other remains.

Back on the pavement above two policemen took us to one side to ask their questions, eyeing us both suspiciously. From the actions of Suzi I guessed she had explained that I was deaf and therefore was not being obstructive by not answering any questions – this calmed one particular officer who had been getting annoyed by my apparent indifference. I found myself struck dumb so let Suzi do all the talking, although she couldn't answer the questions fully because she didn't know why I had brought them to this site so unexpectedly. Standing there I almost felt like a bystander.

Suzi typed another message on her phone.

**STATION US 4 QUESTIONS. OK?** I agreed with a nod of the head.

In the sterile interview room we were each given a requisite cup of instant coffee from the machine. It was obvious from the way we were being treated they didn't really suspect us of anything sinister, but were merely intrigued by our discovery and what we might know. Questioning lasted for nearly two hours, partly due to the fact they had to write down any questions for

me. Eventually though, they had a statement from both of us, which we duly signed and dated before they released us. It was now midnight and we were both tired.

From the look on Suzi's face she also wanted answers although I knew she would leave these for another day. She typed another message on her phone, **STAY AT MY PLACE?** I agreed. I didn't fancy a night in my flat on my own not after tonight, it also made me feel as if she hadn't lost faith in me, as a friend. James, I wasn't so sure, discovering the bones had obviously rattled him.

Suzi lived at home, like James, her parents were relaxed about her having guests stay over in her room, male or female, and preferred the fact that they knew where she was and who she was with. Suzi had a spare mattress which she slid out from under her bed. It was already made up. Normally we would have talked but under the circumstances this was not going to happen. My mind was in turmoil but even that couldn't keep me awake any longer.

*"Don't let him hurt us, please stop him".*

*The little girl took my hand, we were still standing on the cliffs, as she turned we moved at breakneck speed to another location. I didn't quite recognise it at first, but after a short while it came to me and I knew exactly where we were. There were less houses than I knew it to have but it was definitely Highlands Boulevard, and a small grassed area about half way along. Today it was a neatly kept council garden with a bench. Here I was viewing a scrap of land, not even the side street existed. The waste land stretched up to Belfairs woods, which in my time did not come this far. This was obviously before the development had taken place. She pointed to an area and turned to face me.*

*In an instant we were standing in St Clements church in front of a grave stone, it read 'Lillian Francis Hall – Aged 8, taken from this world on 9th June 1886'.*

*If I didn't understand before, now I was even more confused.*

*"If you don't help us more will go".*

*"I don't understand. I don't know how I can help you?"*

*"You must stop him from hurting us".*

*"But how? Who? This is the past you're showing me".*

There was a tug at my shoulder, I opened my eyes and saw Suzi staring at me. She had put on the bedside light, her eyes were weary and bloodshot, she said something to me and then remembered I couldn't hear her. She got up and grabbed a pen and paper from her desk in the corner by the window.

*WHO R U TALKING 2?*

She wrote.

Looking at her I thought of what to say without sounding as though I had completely lost my mind. I had managed so far to avoid any explanation, to both the police and my friends, of everything up to now, how I knew where the bones were buried on the cliffs. I knew the questions would start soon. In my dream I could only surmise I was being shown another burial, what was confusing was that there was a grave as well. None of it made sense to me.

Suzi pointed at her piece of paper again. I still didn't know what to tell her

"It was just a dream" I whispered.

*WOT GOING ON PETE?*

Suzi dabbled in spiritual things but I still didn't feel comfortable talking to her, telling what was really happening. It was new to me and I was feeling uncomfortable with it all.

"It's just a weird dream. Don't worry about it".

She put her finger to my lips to quieten me down.

*IS MORE. U NEW ABOUT BONES. HOW?*

There it was. The question that I knew was coming. I couldn't

fob her off anymore. I sighed and although we were both tired I made myself comfortable and began to explain the missing details. Occasionally, when getting too loud she would put her finger to her mouth then I would go to the other extreme, it was very frustrating trying to gauge ones own volume when you couldn't hear. It was nearing four in the morning when I finished. Suzi had listened intently and not laughed, or disbelieved me, which deep down I knew she wouldn't and talking did actually give me a sense of relief. Now I didn't feel like such a freak. We settled down for sleep.

In the morning, after breakfast, I headed home, whilst Suzi went to work although she'd contemplated phoning in sick as she was tired, but decided against it as she had a few errands to run. I spent the day surfing the net looking for any relevant information regarding 'Lillian Francis Hall, 1886' trying various searches: 'St Clements church' 'newspapers 1886' 'Southend library' 'history' 'murders in Southend' and endless others strings of characters. Nothing I entered brought up any information of use, just thousands upon thousands of irrelevant pages about anything except what I was looking for. I knew a visit to the library sieving through hard copy information was probably my next port of call.

Being at home was starting to make me restless; I had been out of school nearly three years so had broken the routine of short days and in truth I enjoyed my job. I missed the friendly faces and daily banter. My appointments with various specialists had been scheduled and they would help me come to terms with my deafness and with nothing specifically wrong, no physical reason for it, I just had to learn to live with it. There was a possibility it was temporary, but the longer it remained the more likely I would stay deaf the rest of my life and would need to adjust my lifestyle accordingly.

I was stuck in a kind of limbo, not working, not studying, just, existing. Suzi was keeping in contact with me via text, this at least

made me feel part of the real world. Everything else was just... nothing. Emptiness. A sense of being a stranger in a foreign land, unable to speak the dialect.

It was late afternoon I knew the library would still be open and so that was where I was heading. 'Who was the little girl that was haunting my mind? Was it Lillian?

The Library proved surprisingly fruitful. Backdated copies of local newspapers gave enough information to determine that Lillian had been murdered in 1886, the culprit was never caught but her grave was found September 1886 by local workman turning a bit of wasteland into a public seated garden area in Highlands Boulevard. The girl disappeared on June 9th that year. They showed a sketch of the girl, and although it was rough I could see it was not the little girl in my dreams. How did this girl fit in with the one in my dreams? Why show me Lillian's gravestone? None of it made any sense.

Suzi came over that evening and I told her all that I had found out. James preferred to keep his distance.

There appeared to be no logical reason for thoughts of the girl intruding in to my subconscious. The deaths had occurred so far in the past there was very little that we could actually do to prevent them, or even bring the culprit to justice. So why the pleas for help? We toyed with various scenarios but none could offer any sound basis to work from. It was all history, past. What affect could the present have upon it? As much as we would like to help, we couldn't, our hands were tied.

Suzi retrieved from her shoulder bag a little box barely three inches square and gave it to me and opening it I saw a small pendant hung on a short silver chain. She wrote on a note pad:

*AMULET HELP PROTECT FROM EVIL SPIRITS. GARNET*

"What? I don't understand".

Holding it up I studied it closely, in the light it looked beautiful,

an orangey red crystal that had many different levels within it. This sort of thing I was always sceptical about. What power could an Amulet have?

Suzi wrote some more;

*AMULET WARNS OF IMPENDING DANGER, RE-ENERGIZES CHAKRAS.*

I grimaced even more confused.

Suzi was doing her best to make me feel easier and she knew that I was worried by this sudden talent for being able to talk with the deceased. She had experienced similar things many times in her life. She stated that her Nan had told Suzi she was a channel. Her special gift was something to be treasured as not everyone could harness such a gift or even handle the power that comes with it. Her Nan had given her the Amulet in order to protect her through her early experiences in case evil spirits tried to toy with her.

I looked at her thankfully, if a little hesitant. The little girl was disturbing my dreams but not in an awful way, in a strange way she kept me sane; if only I could figure out the purpose and why she had chosen me. If this was in part due to the car wreck, why hadn't she chosen Suzi who already possessed this gift and knew how to use it wisely?

I gave Suzi a hug, in the last few days she'd proven to be more of a friend than she had ever been before and because of that felt closer to her.