

Remembering Hannah
Unedited version

Chapter 1

“Can you hear me?”

There was a pinch on Davy’s nose, pressure on his mouth, a long, stale breath. Davy felt his chest rise. Slowly, he exhaled; a mechanical reaction.

Again, pressure on his mouth, the forcing of air into his lungs. Exhale.

Davy breathed. His lungs burned with the effort.

“We’ve got him,” the paramedic said, “He’s breathing. David, can you hear me?”

Davy tried to reply, but his throat was burning.

“Take it easy, kid,” the paramedic said, “You’ve been in an accident. You’re in an ambulance now. I don’t want you to panic; you’re going to be okay.”

Davy swallowed, wincing at the pain. When he found his voice, it was low, cracked, barely audible.

There was the sensation of proximity; a tickle of movement on Davy’s lips.

“What’s that, David?” the paramedic asked, the voice loud and near, “Can you say that again?”

Davy’s lips moved.

“What’s he saying?” another voice asked. Davy opened his eyes to watch the paramedic look towards their companion

“He wants to know about the girl,” the paramedic said.

* * *

They lay on their backs. The air was cold, but neither of them noticed.

Below them, down the hill, they could see the lights of Hastings in the distance. Occasionally, they could hear the strains of music from the pubs and clubs; a faint whisper across the open grass. Behind them, the rocky cliff hurtled down to the sea, which broke noisily against the rocks below. They paid no attention.

Davy drew Hannah closer. She nestled into him, resting her head on his chest. As she moved, her foot hit the empty wine bottle and knocked it over. Neither of them moved to pick it up again.

“Want to know about the stars?” Davy asked.

“Sure.” Hannah put her hand on Davy’s stomach.

Davy pointed straight upwards.

“See that one there,” he said, “Bright, pinkish tint.”

“That’s Mars, right?”

“Good,” Davy said, “Now go a bit left from there... see the tiny star there? Bluish?”

“No. Oh, wait, yes.”

“That’s Cybertron,” Davy said.

Hannah laughed.

“You think I’m joking?” Davy asked, “I’m serious.”

“Sure you are,” Hannah replied.

“Alright,” Davy said, “Look there; the large star in the group of three. See it? That’s Planet Vulcan, home of a billion nerds. And over there is Kobol, but you can’t see that very well because it’s so far away.”

Hannah giggled.

“I’ve got one for you,” she said.

“Okay.”

“Up there: that little cluster. See where I’m pointing?”

“Yeah.”

“The bright star in the centre,” Hannah said, “That’s Krypton.”

Davy looked at her face in profile. In the moonlight, her eyes were bright. Her long brown hair bristled in the light breeze.

"Bollocks." Davy said.

"Why bollocks?"

Davy sighed theatrically. Hannah giggled again.

"Well," he said, "obviously, Krypton was destroyed when its sun exploded. So you couldn't be seeing anything."

Hannah rolled over to rest on Davy, her face centimetres from his.

"Krypton is light years away," she said, "We haven't seen it die yet. You're looking at the past. Just what kind of geek are you meant to be if you don't know that?"

"I'm twice the geek you are," Davy said.

"Just because you work in a 'real' comic shop," Hannah said, "that makes you geekier than me?"

"It does when you work in Sci-Fi Supermart," Davy said, grinning.

Slowly, she leaned in further until their lips almost touched.

"So arrogant," she said.

She kissed him.

"I love you," Davy said. It was the first time either of them had said those words to the other.

"I love you too," Hannah said.

Far, far above them, the star Hannah had identified as Krypton winked out. Neither of them noticed.

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"We're doing everything we can for her," the paramedic said.

* * *

Davy left the main exhibition hall, took a deep breath. Even out here, his nose itched with the tang of nerd-sweat. This was the first time he had been to Earl's Court Comic Con without having to work. It was odd just being a customer.

A few metres away, Boba Fett took his helmet off to reveal a female face. The woman sparked up a cigarette. She looked bored.

It was out here, Davy remembered, that he had first met Hannah. Last year's convention.

Davy removed the wrapping from a fresh pack of cigarettes, took one, put the rest of the pack back in his satchel. His fingers brushed against the little box, the one wrapped in pink tissue paper.

"There you are!"

Davy turned. Hannah had followed him out of the hall.

"You're smoking," she said, "You said you gave up."

"I did."

"I can tell."

"I just wanted a cigarette," Davy said, "I thought you were queuing for autographs."

Hannah shrugged.

"The line for Nathan Fillion is way too long," she said, "I'm not paying twenty pounds to stand there all day; not even for Captain Mal. So I got Tyson Houseman instead. No queue at all."

"Who's he?" Davy asked.

"Twilight, I think," Hannah said, "Minstrel can have it if she wants."

Davy nodded. He took a drag on his cigarette.

"Seriously," Hannah said, "I'm really disappointed. You said you gave up."

"I just wanted to smoke."

Hannah rolled her eyes.

"We met here," she said.

"I was thinking that," Davy said.

"A whole year," Hannah said.

"Yes."

"Try not to look too happy," Hannah said, "You've been looking grumpy all morning."

Davy sighed.

"Sorry," he said, "I'm not stressed, or grumpy, or anything. Promise."

He stubbed the cigarette out on the ground, trod on it to make sure.

"Come on," he said, "The wedding's on in twenty minutes, and I want to take advantage of not having to work today."

* * *

Neither Hannah nor Davy knew the happy couple. Neither did the rest of the crowd, save for a select few at the front. The bride and groom, for their parts, looked thrilled with the gawking Earl's Court crowd. Davy supposed that anyone willing to get married at the Comic Con while dressed as Han and Leia was probably okay with an audience.

When Darth Vader pronounced the couple to be man and wife, the hall erupted into a cacophony of cheering and whooping. A group of Jedi bowed and made complicated gestures with their lightsabers. On the other side of the makeshift church, Sith warriors hugged each other and cried.

"That was sweet," Hannah said.

"That was weird," Davy replied.

"Look at her," Hannah said. She pointed at the bridesmaid: a three-year-old girl wearing a Jabba the Hutt outfit that trailed along behind her. "I wish I'd been allowed to dress like Jabba for weddings."

"I'm sure we can find you a costume if you really want," Davy said.

"Tease."

Hand-in-hand, they moved away from the crowd, side-stepping a group of chubby Klingons who had stopped to see what was going on.

"The real work starts now, though," Hannah said.

"What do you mean?" Davy asked.

"Marriage," Hannah said, "The difficult bit."

"You think marriage is difficult?"

"I don't really get it," Hannah said, "It's such a big thing for two people. It's like a big pressure to stay in love, otherwise it all falls apart. It'd just be easier if no one bothered."

Davy looked at his shoes. He put his hand in his satchel. The little box was still in there, wrapped in pink tissue paper.

* * *

"David?"

Davy opened his eyes.

"Davy, it's me."

"Max?" Davy croaked.

"You want some water?" Maxwell asked. He was standing at the end of the hospital bed, dressed in a casual suit; standard attire as far as Maxwell was concerned. Where Davy leaned towards the scruffy side of life, Maxwell prided himself on his looks.

Davy nodded. Maxwell picked up a beaker of water from Davy's nightstand and held it to Davy's mouth. Davy caught a few sips, but it hurt to swallow.

"You okay?" Maxwell asked.

Davy looked up at his brother.

"Stupid question," Maxwell said, "Tell you what, though, there're some cute nurses here. I'm tempted to go and break my arm, give me something to talk to them about."

There was something in Maxwell's eyes. Even against the typical showman's bluster that his big brother projected, Davy could tell something was wrong.

"Where's Hannah?" Davy asked.

Maxwell's face tightened, and then Davy noticed how tired his brother looked.

"Do you remember the accident, David?" Maxwell asked.

Davy blinked.

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The traffic light went green.

"Davy," Hannah said, pulling out into the junction, "I lo-"

* * *

"I... don't," Davy said.

"You were on your way through London," Maxwell said, "Hannah was driving. Someone hit... You were in a car crash."

"Oh, God," Davy said.

"It was a drunk driver," Maxwell continued, stepping towards the bed, "The police have him in custody."

"Where's Hannah?" Davy repeated.

Maxwell looked around him, found the cracked plastic stool the nurses had provided. He sat down and looked his little brother in the eye.

"David," he said, "I'm really sorry. Hannah didn't make it. The doctors did everything they could."

Chapter 2

It was the first time Davy had heard the clock tick.

It was an ornate clock, painted gold with two plastic hummingbirds protruding from the sides, surrounded by the huge collection of model soldiers and superheroes, general ornaments and Kinder Surprise toys that shared the mantelpiece.

The clock had a very loud tick, and Davy wondered how he had never noticed before.

Because this room is never quiet, he told himself.

It was also never usually this tidy: the floor had been cleared so that Davy could get about in his wheelchair.

Davy hated the wheelchair. The doctors promised that he would be up and walking within a few days – he hadn't actually broken anything – but they were playing safe with his spine for the time being.

The floor might have been clear, but the rest of Davy's living room was still a mess. The bookshelves creaked under the weight of DVDs and comic books; the number of actual books was relatively low. Underneath the clock and the collection of figurines, the fireplace was blocked off. Davy's flatmate, Minstrel, used it as an ashtray. She cleared it out once every few months by way of a shovel and a black sack.

"How you doing?" Minstrel asked. Her voice was husky: a by-product of both smoking and Welsh ancestry. She stepped softly into the room: a tall waif of a girl, her bright red hair pulled into a collection of irregular pigtails. Her usual loose, light clothing had been replaced by a respectable black dress and jacket combination. She didn't look very comfortable.

"I'm good," Davy replied, wheeling round to face her.

Minstrel sat down and pulled a pre-rolled spliff from her jacket pocket. She lit up and Davy crinkled his nose against the smell.

The doorbell rang. Minstrel and Davy looked at each other.

"Want me to get up?" Minstrel asked.

"That'd be lovely," Davy said.

It was James; Davy's fellow shop assistant from Atomic Comics. James' weedy frame and habit of wearing oversized coats meant that he was often confused as being smaller than he actually was. Had he been born in '50s America, James would have been derided as an unsalvageable nerd. These days, hanging around Finsbury Park and living within spitting distance of Shoreditch, James was almost fashionable.

His suit didn't fit properly. Davy was impressed by the fact James even owned a suit.

"I'm good," Davy replied, "I think we're just waiting on my brother now."

"Are your parents coming?" James asked.

Davy shook his head.

"They're in Malta," he said, "I've been communicating with them through Max. Easier that way."

"Fair enough," James said. He flung a magazine off the settee and sat down. "I haven't spoken to my parents since the thing with my name," he said.

Six months before, James had found out his middle name was 'Tyberius'. He had not been impressed.

Davy remembered Hannah laughing about that.

"How you doing?" James asked.

"I'm okay," Davy said. The room went quiet again. Davy listened to the clock tick away. He wondered vaguely if James and Minstrel had ever noticed it.

"When's your brother getting here?" James asked.

"Any time now," Davy said, "Assuming he remembers."

"I'm sure he will," Minstrel said. She liked Maxwell.

More silence. Finally, a car horn blared outside.

"That'll be him, then," Davy said.

They trooped out the flat, James pushing Davy's wheelchair. Davy and Minstrel lived on the ground floor, but even so the front porch proved problematic. In the end, Davy got up, his legs aching as he traversed the step. Once out, he sat unhappily back down in the wheelchair.

"How's work?" he asked James as they crossed the road.

James shrugged.

"Quiet," he said, "The boss sends his regards. Says you can come back when you like. I think he's missing you."

Davy hardly ever saw his boss; his shifts tended to coincide with the boss' inordinate amount of time off.

"Oi!"

Maxwell was standing next to one of his two cars; a large silver 4x4 that his wife used for her daily commute.

"You coming, or what?" he asked, "We've got a funeral to go to."

* * *

Davy smoked outside the church gates after the service was over. Minstrel stood next to him, her eyes red.

"It was a lovely service, don't you think?"

The question came from an older lady, her head covered by a magnificent black hat and veil. The tone of her voice reminded Davy of his own aunts and uncles; more money than manners.

"Lovely," he replied.

It hadn't been, he thought. The service had been long and warm and empty.

He remembered Hannah chasing Jehovah's Witnesses down the street, yelling quotes from The God Delusion. He smiled a little at the thought.

"You must be that boy Hannah used to talk about," the lady continued, "The boyfriend. We were so glad when you were announced; I had her down as a lesbian, what with all those big boots and ripped shirts."

"That's nice," Davy said.

"It's such a shame," the lady said, "She was such a sweet girl. She would have made a charming wife one day, I imagine. Would have looked lovely if she ever wore a dress."

"I think she looked lovely anyway," Davy muttered. Minstrel shot him a warning glance.

"She was very boyish," the lady replied, "If it wasn't for the hair, she might have been a boy." She looked pointedly at Davy's wheelchair. "Weren't you in the car with her when it happened?" she asked.

"I was," Davy said. He started to say something else, but Minstrel interrupted.

"Have you finished your cigarette, Davy?" she asked, "Shouldn't we go find your brother?"

She took hold of Davy's wheelchair and pushed him back to the church. Davy managed to flick away his half-finished butt before they got too far away from the church gate.

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The wake was as bad as the service, in Davy's view. The pub that the family had chosen was a traditional North London boozier. Hannah might have drunk there, Davy thought, if every other bar in Britain was shut.

"Still," James was saying, "it was a nice service."

"No, it wasn't," Maxwell said, "It was dull."

"Hannah would've hated it," Davy said, "if she'd been there."

"Wouldn't we all hate our own funerals?" James asked.

"I wouldn't," Minstrel said, "My funeral will be fun, I promise. And non-denominational."

"The point is," James said, "It's something to send her off. A way of showing she'll always be with-

"She won't!" Davy snapped, "I don't care if she was Catholic or Jedi. There was nothing of her at that funeral; just a body in a casket."

He stopped. Some of the family members had turned round and were glaring at Davy.

"I'm going for a cigarette," he said. He pushed the wheelchair back from the table and made for the exit.

The fresh air was cool on his skin. Drinkers walked arm-in-arm along the pavement, skirting round Davy's chair without even a glance.

Davy rummaged through his pocket and found his crumpled cigarette pack. Last one. Feeling rebellious, he tossed the pack on the ground.

Hannah had hated his smoking. She'd put up with it, accepting that Davy was unlikely to give up for good any time soon – in fact, in the year they knew each other, Davy had given up three times, the longest bout lasting a week.

Silly really, Davy thought, considering how they'd met.

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"Have you got a light?" the girl asked. She waved a cigarette at him.

The girl was pretty: big eyes above a slightly sharp nose. Long brown hair fell loose to her waist. Her figure was hidden under a baggy Sci-Fi Supermart T-shirt, but Davy could tell she was cute, even so. A plastic card dangled from a chain round her neck, identifying her as a trader at the Earl's Court Comic Con.

"Sure," Davy said, rooting the lighter out of his pocket.

"You working here as well?" the girl asked, pointing at the Comic Con pass pinned to Davy's Superman T-shirt.

"Yeah," Davy said, "My boss set up a stall, but we couldn't afford it on our own, so we've kind of teamed up with a few other indie shops. It's a bit of a ruck."

"I'm with Sci-Fi Supermart," the girl said, "Does that mean we can't talk to each other?"

"I think we can talk," Davy said, "but I can't take anything you say seriously."

"That's a shame," the girl said, "Then I guess I really shouldn't ask for your number."

Davy mulled this over.

"We'd have to keep it a secret," he said, "No one could ever know."

"I'm Hannah," Hannah said.

"Davy," Davy replied, automatically holding out his hand. Hannah stared at it for a moment, and smiled and shook it.

"We're such a formal breed," she said.

Their hands lingered together for an awkward moment.

"You want that light?" Davy asked. He held out the lighter.

Hannah stared at it, and then remembered the cigarette in her hand.

"I'm sorry," she said, "This isn't my cigarette. I don't smoke."

* * *

The memory hurt Davy, far more than the physical ache left over from the accident. It was a mental scar, he supposed.

"Hello, David," Hannah's mother said.

Davy wheeled the chair round to face Hannah's parents, who had crept up on him.

"We saw you come outside," Hannah's mother continued, "We just wanted to see how you're getting on."

Hannah's mother was tall; almost a stretched version of Hannah, with steel grey hair and an angular face that betrayed a kindly nature. Her make-up had run slightly round the eyes.

Hannah's father was shorter, with a thick moustache and thinning brown hair.

"Hi, Mrs Bailey," Davy said, "Mr Bailey. I'm, ah... I'm good."

"We heard your speech at the table," Mr Bailey said, "It's okay," he added hurriedly, before Davy could interrupt, "It's a hard thing to come to terms with. Trust us; we know."

"We're all going to miss Hannah," Mrs Bailey said, her eyes welling up, "It was so... so sudden..."

Her voice tailed off. Somewhere in the distance, Davy heard a girlish giggle, loud against the night. Footsteps echoed along the road; irregular, a group of women wearing heels, maybe.

"The point is," Mr Bailey continued, "You're a good kid, David. We wanted you to know that. We don't hold any grudge or bitterness, even though you were... It wasn't your fault."

There was an awkward pause.

"Er," Davy said, "Thank you."

"If you need anything," Mrs Bailey managed, "just give us a call. Anything you need."

She burst into tears. Mr Bailey put an arm round her, nodded at Davy, and led her back inside.

Davy took a pull from his cigarette. He didn't know what to think.

He heard another giggle. Turning the chair, he looked along the dark street.

In the distance, a girl walked away. She had long, dark hair, all the way down to her waist.

"Hannah?" Davy said. He dropped his cigarette on the ground, started to wheel towards her.

The girl didn't turn. She was a long way away; twenty, thirty metres, maybe. It didn't matter; Davy was certain it was her.

"Hannah!"

Still she didn't turn round.

Davy started to push the wheels harder, speeding up the chair.

"Hannah! It's me!"

"David!"

Davy ignored his brother, accelerating the chair. He could feel sweat under his arms. One of his front wheels bounced into a crack in the pavement and the chair overturned, spilling Davy onto the ground. His legs burning, Davy picked himself up and hobbled onwards.

"Come back!" he shouted.

A hand clamped down on his shoulder, rooting him to the spot.

"David, you silly bastard," Maxwell said, "Get back here."

"Let me go," Davy said, trying to pull away, "She's there."

"She's not anywhere," Maxwell said, "She's dead, and you're clearly pissed. Get back in the pub before I take away what remains of your masculinity and carry you in."

Davy stopped struggling, looked at his brother, and then back at the girl. She was nowhere to be seen.

* * *

"You've got to talk to someone," Maxwell said.

Davy said nothing. He was slouching down in his wheelchair, nursing the whiskey shot Maxwell had given him.

"Not those two," Maxwell continued, gesturing over at the next table, at which James and Minstrel sat arguing passionately about something or something else, "and dear sweet Jesus not me, but someone."

"Good advice," Davy sneered, "Thanks, big brother."

"Take this," Maxwell said, producing a card, "It's a therapist. Psychiatrist. Whatever. A nice lady you can talk to."

Davy eyed the card suspiciously.

"Did you bring that in just for me?" he asked.

"I just happened to have it," Maxwell said, shrugging.

"Did you go to see her?"

Remembering Hannah by Geoff Scaplehorn

"I didn't go to a shrink," Maxwell said, "Take the bloody card." He reached over the table and shoved it into Davy's breast pocket. "Give her a call. Either that or call Mum. See how well that turns out."

Davy looked at him.

"I just want to talk to Hannah," he said.

Maxwell leaned forward.

"Yeah, well," he said quietly, "Guess none of us will be doing that any time soon."

Chapter 3

"Vampires," Hannah said with absolute certainty, "don't sparkle."

Davy laughed and put an arm round her.

"How do you know?" Minstrel asked, "Have you ever seen a vampire? Ever met one? They could sparkle, you know. And vampires are always pretty."

"Not always," James said, "They usually turn ugly when they haven't been fed. Or when they're feeding, like in Buffy."

"Anyway," Minstrel continued, "you don't know."

"Ever seen The Lost Boys, Minstrel?" Hannah asked.

"Yes."

"Well," Hannah said, "my vampires could murder your vampires."

* * *

"Davy?" Minstrel said.

Davy lifted his head.

"Yeah?" he muttered.

"You were talking. In your sleep."

"Oh," Davy said, "Sorry."

"No bother."

On the television, Edward proclaimed his love for Bella again. Minstrel's love of Twilight had, ever since the series had been filmed, always been a source of joy for Hannah, who found the teenage angst repulsive.

Davy blinked to get rid of the memory. The street was dark outside the flat, and the living room had the sweet aroma of Minstrel's drugs.

"I dozed off," Davy said.

"You did," James confirmed from his position on the other side of the room. He had a Nintendo DS open. The sounds of battle emanated from its speakers. James had practically lived at the flat since the funeral, three weeks before. He and Minstrel had been making a concerted effort to keep Davy occupied.

For Minstrel, this largely meant life as usual: sitting around the flat smoking joints and talking at Davy whenever they were in the same room. Her life had a background of bad films and video games, which meant that she either forced Davy into watching endless vampire films or cajoled him into bouts on Street Fighter or Tekken. James, on finishing work, would join in.

It was working, Davy supposed. Getting out of the wheelchair had helped, and not having any work responsibilities at least meant he was relaxed, though poor.

Maxwell had stuck around for a few days as well. He'd sat in the police station while Davy completed a written statement, making comments about the uniforms of female police officers.

"Can we do something else?" Davy asked.

"God yes," James said.

"Can't we finish the film?" Minstrel protested.

"No," James and Davy said in unison.

"Right," Minstrel said. She turned the DVD off with the remote. "Maybe play a game?" she asked.

* * *

"Do you know what I did today?" Hannah asked.

"What?" said Davy.

"I played Mario Kart. All day. Nothing else."

"Really?" Davy said, "That's it?"

"Yep," Hannah said proudly, "I am such a bum."

"You didn't leave the flat?"

"I didn't even get dressed."

Which was obvious, because she was sat in her pyjamas on the settee, a blanket round her shoulders.

"You're so sexy right now," Davy said.

"I," Hannah said, "am totally a man's perfect woman."

"You are," Davy agreed, leaning down for a kiss.

"How was your day?" Hannah asked.

Davy put his satchel down.

"Busy," he said, "First day of the January sales. How did you not have to work today? I'd have thought Sci-Fi Supermart would be rammed."

"It probably was," Hannah said, "They wanted me in. I told them I was ill."

"Cunning sickie," Davy said. He sat down and picked up a controller.

"I didn't just play Mario Kart," Hannah confessed.

"Really?"

"Well," Hannah said, "I did, but I went one step further. I wiped you off the scoreboard. Look."

Davy looked. The scoreboard only had Hannah's name on it.

"You see?" Hannah said, "There is no way you're knocking me off that now. I am the Mario Kart Queen."

* * *

"Davy," Hannah said, pulling out into the junction, "I lo-"

* * *

"No," Davy said, "No games. Let's go out."

* * *

London centre on a Friday night was always packed. Davy had never been much for crowds, but in truth he never found anywhere else in London that he enjoyed quite so much.

They started off in a pub by Embankment, but it took them twenty minutes to get served. This forced James to add tequilas to the first round of drinks, and there was nowhere to sit, so they drank everything within another quarter of an hour.

In honour of the first set of tequilas, the trio visited a tequila bar near Covent Garden, where they drank until Davy remembered that Hannah's name was on a plaque behind the bar as being one of the elite punters who had ordered one of the one hundred and twenty-five pound shots.

They ended up in a wine bar in Covent Garden itself. Davy remembered drinking here with Hannah several times, but he'd been coming here since long before they'd met.

The wine, coupled with the earlier tequila and various other drinks, meant that they were entirely drunk.

* * *

"I love you guys," Davy said.

James looked up from the napkin that he was slowly turning into a bird. He had a habit of making origami animals when he was drunk, which Hannah had found endearing until she'd woken up to find a tiny unicorn on her pillow after a long night out.

"Seriously, mate," James said, "I think you've been drinking."

"No, really," Davy said, "You're my best friends."

"That's sweet," Minstrel said. She'd been supplementing her drinks with herbal cigarettes, but her higher tolerance meant that she was the closest to sobriety of all three of them.

"This sounds awfully gay to me," James said.

"You need to get in touch with your feminine side," Minstrel told him.

"No, no," Davy said, "I'm not talking about gay things. Not that I wouldn't with you, James, you sexy beast." James laughed and rubbed his skinny chest. "No," Davy said, "I mean you're awesome; both of you. You've stuck with me, and I've been moping about and pining and I'm really sorry."

"Dude," James said, "Don't be sorry. Nothing to be sorry about."

"That's right," Minstrel said, "We miss her too."

"I miss her," Davy said, "Everything reminds me of her. But I feel okay, I think. Thanks to you guys."

"We do try," James said, finishing the bird and placing it gently on the table.

"I'm going back to work," Davy said, "tomorrow."

"Good news," James said, "It's not the same without you."

"I love you guys."

On the way home, Davy was sick on the Tube.

* * *

"You've forgotten me."

"I haven't."

"It'll be back to reality now, won't it, Davy? Back to life."

"I've got to!"

"Yes, but I won't be there."

"You'll always be here!"

"You don't believe that. Don't lie."

"But I'll always remember you."

"That's not enough, Davy. You said you loved me."

* * *

Davy woke up early on Saturday with a hangover. His head stuck to his pillow when he tried to lift it, and he could taste a noxious combination of vomit and the previous night's tequila in his mouth. He was tired; he'd slipped into unconsciousness rather than actual sleep, and he had a dim recollection of dreaming; bad dreams, but nothing he could pin down in memory.

He phoned Atomic Comics as soon as he could move his head without feeling too nauseous. The boss, happy to finally have a full staff again, told Davy he could start as soon as he could get to the store, so Davy put on his work T-shirt and a pair of jeans and made his way blearily into the city centre.

Davy had always enjoyed his job in the comic shop. Maxwell frequently accused his little brother of having a lack of proper ambition, but Davy had no particular desire to do anything else. The work was low paid, but it allowed Davy to mix with people who enjoyed the same things he did, and – more importantly – saved him a lot of money on his monthly comic habit.

At the shop, he exchanged a few awkward words with the boss, who then scuttled off into town, leaving Davy alone.

For most of the morning, the shop was quiet. Davy helped a few regular customers with their subscriptions, but for the most part he was left alone to catch up on the comics he had missed.

* * *

James came in at a little after two o'clock. He looked deathly.

"How's it going?" he managed.

"Good," Davy said. There were more customers in the shop, but they were browsing instead of buying, and Davy was sat next to a stack of comics that he had been reading throughout the morning.

"I feel horrid," James said, "Hey look: our customers are in the plural. It must be Saturday."

"Must be," Davy said.

"Are you okay up here?" James asked, "I might get on with sorting the stock room." He pointed to the tiny staircase that led down to the dingy room.

"Go for it," Davy said, turning a page, "I'm okay here."

The shop phone rang. Davy kept an eye on James' progress down the stairs, and then picked it up.

"Atomic Comics," he said.

There was silence on the line.

"Hello?" Davy said.

Nothing. Davy hung up. He checked the caller ID.

"That's not right," he muttered. The number was familiar. He'd dialled it enough times from this phone.

Doubting his memory, he double-checked the number on his mobile.

"Huh," he said.

Making sure no customers were in danger of actually buying anything, Davy got out of his seat and poked his head down the stairs.

"James?" he called.

"Yeah?"

"I've got to go out."

"Right," James said, "Oh, wait. That means I need to come back up and sit out front, doesn't it?"

"It does."

"Okay. Good. You couldn't have told me before I came down here." James emerged from the room. He looked pale as he climbed the stairs.

"I won't be long," Davy said, "I just need to do something."

"Right you are," James said, "I'll be fine. At least as long as no one talks to me, that is."

Chapter 4

"I haven't been in here in since I was twelve," Davy said, "I feel like I'm letting the side down."

"Don't get all Montague on me," Hannah said, "It's just a shop."

Davy looked at the rows of expensive models and racks of merchandise.

"Sci-Fi Supermart," he said, "It's a supermarket for nerds."

"Nothing wrong with that."

"I guess not," he said, "if you don't mind pushing out the local businesses."

Davy felt self-conscious in his Atomic Comics T-shirt. He wondered what his boss would have said if he was caught in here. He imagined it was a firing offence; maybe even a shooting one.

He felt like a village butcher buying sausages at Tesco.

"How much Manga can one shop have?" he asked.

"It sells," Hannah said, "So do the toys and the Pokémon cards and the Twilight picture books. People buy this stuff because they like it."

"People are stupid," Davy said.

Hannah put a hand down the back of Davy's jeans.

"Leave then," she said. She moved in close to him. Davy avoided the gaze of a waiting customer.

"No," he said.

* * *

Sci-Fi Supermart hadn't changed since Davy's last visit. Compared to Atomic Comics, the store was clean and full of open space. Customers filled the floor, and there was a queue at the front desk.

Davy joined the queue. It took him ten minutes to reach the head.

"Can I help you?" the teenager behind the counter asked. He was chewing gum.

"Uh, hi," Davy said, "I'm from Atomic Comics. Someone called the store?"

The teenager looked confused. Davy couldn't tell if it was confusion at the question or simply at life in general.

"You're not buying anything?"

"No," Davy said, "Someone called my store. On the phone. I didn't know if it was... if it was important, so I came over."

"Right. Who did you want to speak to?"

Davy and the teenager stared at each other for a moment.

"I have no idea," Davy said, "Is there a manager I could speak to? Someone who might have made the call?"

"I'll check. Hold on." The teenager picked up an intercom phone from behind the counter. "Call for Derek," he said, "Repeat: could Derek come to the front desk?"

Davy moved to the side, and the teenager went back to serving customers. Derek appeared after a couple of minutes; a rotund, hairy man with an impressively thick beard.

"Hi," Derek said, "how can I help?"

"I'm Davy," Davy said, "I work at Atomic--"

"At Atomic Comics, right?" Derek said, "I know you. You're Hannah's guy, right?"

"Uh, yeah," Davy said, "Someone called the store?"

"Oh, really?" Derek said, "I'm real sorry for your loss, by the way. It was a total WTF what happened to her."

"Thanks."

"We were all totally blown away, I'll tell you that." Derek paused for thought. "You say someone called the store?" he asked, "Your store?"

"Yeah."

"You sure it was us? Can't think why anyone would call."

"I know the number," Davy said, "Hannah and I talked a lot."

"That would have been an abuse of the staff phone policy," Derek said, "Look, I don't think anyone called you, 'less by accident. I think you made a mistake. I'm real sorry."

"Right," Davy said, "I thought... I thought I'd check."

"No problem, man."

Davy began to walk out.

"Hey, Atomic Comics," Derek called.

"Davy," Davy said.

"Yeah, right," Derek said, "Did you see the thing?"

"No," Davy said, "No, I didn't see the, ah, thing."

Derek nodded.

"Round by the Manga section," he said, "I think you'll like it. It's very touching. Very tasteful, man. Real sorry for your loss."

* * *

Davy didn't like the thing. The thing was a shrine.

In the middle of the Manga section, one wall of the shelving had been cleared of books to make way for a poster-sized photo of Hannah; the picture had evidently been taken at a Christmas party years before, because Hannah was dressed up in a skimpy Santa outfit that barely reached down past her hips. Flowers and cards surrounded it; elsewhere, a zoo of stuffed animals showed their condolences.

A piece of card under the poster said 'Rest In Piece'. It was printed in Comic Sans.

"Oh, bloody hell," Davy said.

It was sweet, he supposed, if you'd never met Hannah, or indeed anyone with taste.

"She's hot," a spotty kid next to Davy said.

Slowly, Davy turned to face the kid.

"What?" he said.

The kid shrugged and blew his gum out to a bubble, popped it. He couldn't have been more than fifteen years old.

"The chick," he said, "She's a hottie. I would totally do her."

"She's dead," Davy said, "That was my girlfriend."

"Really?" the kid said, "Shit. I guess you ain't getting it any more. Unless you are, you know what I mean?"

The kid laughed.

"What are you?" Davy asked, "A sodding moron?"

The kid stopped laughing.

"Seriously," Davy said, "This isn't the internet. I can see you; you're not faceless on 4chan right now. This... this thing-" He pointed at the shrine. "-might have been tasteless, but she's still dead, and fuck how are you so ignorant?"

His shouting had brought in a crowd.

"Hey, Atomic Comics," Derek said, waddling over, "You might want to cool it there, man."

"Cool it?" Davy yelled, "Did you even know the girl? Have you seen this picture? It's a great photo, assuming you're decorating for a bloody hen night. How socially inept do you have to be to think it's suitable for something like this, you, you-" He groped around for the worst insult he could think of. "-you nerds!"

Derek stepped forward and took hold of Davy's arm.

"That's it," he said, "You got to leave, Atomic Comics. Come on."

"I mean, seriously," Davy continued, brushing away from Derek, "She's fucking hot? She was a goddess! She was what you bastards dream of when you're wanking over your hentai. She could out-geek the best of you, and still act normal in a room full of people."

"Yeah, well," Derek muttered, "She worked here."

The temperature in the room dropped.

Davy swung a fist at Derek. The big man sidestepped it easily, pushing Davy away as he did so. Davy toppled onto the shrine shelves, which gave way under his weight. The pictures and flowers and teddy bears hit the ground, and Davy clutched at the poster photo. It tore across Hannah's navel.

"Come on, dude," Derek said, his voice calm, "Get out of here."

But Davy wasn't listening. He was staring past Derek's bulk, past the snotty kids who were all looking at him. He stared at the short, pale, pretty girl with the long hair across the floor. She was wearing a shirt over a T-shirt, ripped jeans.

She was smiling.

"Hannah, is that you?" Davy asked.

"Dude," Derek said again, "If you don't leave, we're going to have to call the police."

Davy picked himself up off the floor. His knees were shaking and his arse hurt from where he had hit the shelves. He didn't notice.

Hannah turned her back, moved towards the shop door.

"Hannah!" Davy yelled. He took off after her, slipping on a discarded comic and rebounding off another customer. His forehead connected with a rack of artful key rings and he felt blood trickling down his face.

Hannah was gone.

"Shit!" he yelled. Ignoring the shocked stares and smirks on the people around him, he pushed his way out to the street.

There she was, way along the road, her back to him.

He sprinted towards her. She kept walking, but despite her even pace Davy couldn't catch up, no matter how fast he ran.

Davy followed Hannah up to New Oxford Street, then all the way along to Holborn. They turned left there, and suddenly Davy realised where they were headed.

* * *

They walked home regularly, Davy and Hannah: hand in hand all the way from Sci-Fi Supermart to Hannah's parents' house near Crouch End, not so far from Davy's flat in Finsbury Park.

It took hours, but it was something to do after a long Saturday shift that allowed them a certain element of daytime privacy. Sometimes they talked through their days, other times they gossiped about upcoming films or comics, and sometimes they just walked in silence, happy to be together.

* * *

Davy followed Hannah. He couldn't get any closer to her; every time he tried to speed up his pace, she matched him. She never ran; she always looked like she was walking like she'd walked all those times at his side. It was like an optical illusion.

Somewhere around King's Cross, Davy stopped, just to see what Hannah would do. She stopped as well, turned to face him. Waited patiently.

Davy began to walk. Hannah smiled, and walked away.

* * *

"Are you sure this is cool?" Davy asked.

"Of course it's not cool," Hannah replied, holding the window open, "I have a window that doesn't lock, and I live in Crouch End. It's not cool."

They'd just walked all the way from the centre of London; a long, meandering route that had taken twice as long to walk than it should have done, and that had been further extended by a stop for dinner.

"But if I'm caught..." Davy said, a grin on his face.

"Nothing will happen," Hannah said, "They'll just be surprised is all. Christ, Davy, my parents know we're sleeping together. Unless you reckon they think I've been staying at yours for all-night jigsaw puzzles."

"We should totally do that," Davy said.

"Another time," Hannah said, kissing Davy lightly on the cheek, "Come on."

Davy climbed through the window into the dark bedroom. Hannah's parents had the top floor of the house to themselves, leaving their daughter with a large ground floor room.

"Careful with the window," Hannah said, "It'll stay open until you least expect it, and then it'll come down hard."

She turned on the light on the nightstand. Posters of rock stars and comic heroes covered the walls. Comics and graphic novels littered the floor. There was a battered rocking horse in the corner, painted orange and far too small for Hannah now.

"Welcome to my boudoir," she said.

"I love your boudoir," Davy replied.

After a while, they turned the light off again.

* * *

Davy edged up the street. It was six o'clock, but still light. Parked cars lined the road. There were no people.

Hannah was waiting by the front door of her house.

He approached the front gate of the terraced house. She didn't move.

"Is that really you?" he asked, keeping his voice low.

She said nothing.

"I thought you were dead," Davy said, "I didn't forget you."

He stepped closer, put his hand on the gate. Hannah still didn't move.

"I just want to be with you," Davy said, "That sounds insane, doesn't it? But that's all I want. I miss you so much."

Hannah turned and walked through the front door. She didn't open it. She walked through it.

For a moment, Davy thought about what to do next. He couldn't follow her; he could feel the concrete beneath his shoes, and he was certain that trying to walk through a thick wooden door would hurt. Should he knock? What would he say if Hannah's parents were actually in? That he'd seen their daughter come into the house?

Somehow, Davy didn't think that would work. But he had to see Hannah. Hannah was here.

* * *

There was an alley that led to the back gardens of the row of houses, and Davy followed it round, let himself into the back garden of the Baileys' house. The lights throughout the house were all off. Dimly, Davy wondered if that meant Hannah's parents were out or not.

Hannah's bedroom window was still unlocked. As quietly as he could, he opened it and climbed inside.

Chapter 5

"Do you want bacon, David?"

"I'd love some, Mrs Bailey."

"Please, David; Mrs Bailey makes me sound like someone's mother. Agatha."

Davy grinned.

"You're Hannah's mum, Mrs Bailey," he said, "I hate to remind you."

"Oh, Hannah," Mrs Bailey said, "I like this one. This one has manners."

Hannah beamed. They were sat in the kitchen, across from Hannah's room. After the first few occasions, Davy had stopped creeping in through the window. The unspoken rule seemed to allow Davy to stay a couple of nights a week, as long as Hannah spent a couple of nights away. Everyone was happy with the unspoken rule.

"That smells good," Davy said.

"Creep," Hannah said with a grin.

"You should listen to him," Mrs Bailey said, "You could learn something. Maybe I'd cook more breakfasts if you minded your Ps and Qs."

"Mum, please."

Mrs Bailey winked at Davy, who laughed.

Mr Bailey folded up the paper.

"I think the Tories will get back in," he said, "unless that Clegg fella pulls his act together."

"Labour are buggered, though," Davy said.

"Labour have been buggered for years, David," Mr Bailey said.

"I quite liked Gordon."

"Then you weren't listening to him," Mr Bailey said.

Mrs Bailey put a plate down in front of Davy. There were eggs and bacon and slices of toast.

"You should eat fast," she said, "if you want to make it to work on time."

"And rush my breakfast?" Davy asked, "Not a chance. Thank you, Mrs Bailey."

"Any time," she said, "Any time."

* * *

When Davy opened his eyes, Mr and Mrs Bailey were staring down at him. Mrs Bailey had tears in her eyes. Mr Bailey looked disgusted.

"Hi," Davy said.

* * *

For a while, having crept into Hannah's bedroom, Davy sat in the middle of the room. Hannah was nowhere to be seen. He considered going out into the hall to look for her, but a nagging fear of getting caught stopped him. Fear and... something else.

He couldn't explain the something else. It was in the air. At first, Davy thought it was the air itself: a smell, maybe, that reminded him of Hannah. But it was more than that. There was – he couldn't really explain it – a presence.

Hannah was with him, in the room. He couldn't see her, but Davy knew she was there.

"You are there, right?" he said, practically under his breath.

There was no answer.

"I came to you," Davy said, "I'm here for you. We don't have to be alone."

There was no sound. But there was something else. Warmth, Davy thought; I feel warm, even though I didn't know I've been cold since she left.

He didn't say anything else. He didn't have to. Davy lay down in the middle of Hannah's room and remained, content, until he fell asleep.

* * *

"You need help, David," Mr Bailey said.

"I'm sorry," Davy said.

He hadn't told them about seeing Hannah, about being with her during the night. He didn't suppose that would help the situation.

"I had a bad day," he finished.

Mr Bailey grunted and poured hot water into a cup, began to stir a teabag round it.

"A bad day," he said, "That's what I have every time a politician mentions my pension. That's what I have when my boss starts talking about annual profit margins."

He poured milk in the cup and put the teaspoon on the counter.

"You know what I don't do?" he bellowed, wheeling round so fast that Davy nearly fell off his chair, "You know what I don't do when I have a bad day? I don't break into my deceased girlfriend's parents' house and sleep in her room!"

"I'm sorry, Mr Bailey," Davy said, "It won't happen again."

"Damn right it won't happen again," Mr Bailey snapped, "It shouldn't have happened this time, but it definitely won't happen again."

He coughed, composed himself.

He put the cup of tea in front of Davy.

"You really need to talk to someone," he said.

Davy shook his head.

"I miss Hannah," he said, "Talking isn't going to help."

"Of course you miss her," Mr Bailey said, "But I'm going to tell you this: you don't miss her half as much as I do, or as my wife does. Agatha's up in our bedroom right now. She's crying, of course. Partly because of you, but mostly – mostly – because she's cried every day since Hannah died.

"She was our daughter, David. Our baby. You knew her for a year. We knew her all her life."

"I loved her," Davy said.

"You know what," Mr Bailey said, sitting down opposite Davy, "I don't care. I should have you arrested for this, David. And I'm still tempted to call the police. I don't think you're a bad person; in point of fact, I thought you were a good kid, and I know what you've been through because I'm going through it too. So I'm letting you finish your tea, and then you can walk out of here."

"Thank you," Davy said.

Mr Bailey nodded. He leant back in his chair.

"Two conditions," he said, "First: you don't come back here. In fact, you don't call, you don't email, you don't send us Christmas cards; you cut off contact. I don't even want an apology in the post. I'm not having you upsetting Agatha any more.

"Second, and this is important: you hurry up and drink your damn tea."

* * *

Davy ambled back to Finsbury Park. He was hoping to see Hannah again. He felt like he'd had an argument; a falling out with Hannah. By getting caught by her parents, he'd jeopardised the relationship.

Maxwell's car was waiting outside his flat. David sucked in a big lungful of air, exhaled.

He walked in.

"Well," Maxwell said from his seat in the living room, "If it isn't London's favourite stalker. Dear Christ you have been busy, little David."

The living room stank of weed. Minstrel was sat in the room with Maxwell, rocking slowly back and forth.

"I should put the kettle on," she said, getting up. She was unsteady on her feet, but she practically ran past Davy in her effort to escape.

"She has some very potent marijuana," Maxwell said, "and bloody hell she can put it away. I had to call my wife and explain to him that my little brother has taken a turn for the mentally ill, otherwise I would have had to return to my family home off my beautiful box."

"I'm sorry for the hassle," Davy said, "I'm going to go lie down."

"You're going to sit down with me first," Maxwell barked, "You don't get out of this. I am under strict parental orders, David, brother of mine. Strict orders indeed."

"What orders?" Davy asked, his voice shaking.

"Sit, brother," Maxwell said, gesturing at the settee, "Sit, and I do believe that eventually your housemate will bring in that murky piss you two call tea."

Davy sat.

"Okay then," he said, "What do you want?"

"Do you know," Maxwell said, "I received two phone calls. One of them was last night, from your friend, co-worker and occasional lodger, James. He said that, following an impressive drinking session the night before, you left work at two o'clock. For a break, I do believe you told him."

"Yeah," Davy said, sheepishly.

"He received a phone call about an hour later from another comic shop; I don't know which one, but I'm given to understand that your dead girlfriend used to work in it. An employee of – Christ, what's the ridiculous name again? – Atomic Comics apparently went in, trashed the place, had a fight with the manager, before running out screaming the name of their former colleague. Can I assume, dear David, that this was you?"

"Uh," Davy said.

"Splendid," Maxwell said, "Of course, you didn't come home last night, and everyone was very worried that you'd finally regained your marbles and decided to end it all there and then."

"Sorry about that," Davy said.

"Apology accepted," Maxwell said, "although you might think about extending it to James and your lovely stoned housemate, whom I see has returned with two steaming cups of finest Yorkshire tea. Thank you, my darling Minstrel."

"No problem," Minstrel muttered, handing Maxwell both mugs and slinking back out the room before Davy could say a word. Maxwell passed a mug to Davy, and then continued:

"The second phone call came in this morning. It was – this is just priceless – from the father of your deceased girlfriend. Can you guess what this call was about?"

"Uh," Davy said, wrapping both hands round his mug and staring at his feet.

"Splendid," Maxwell said, "I think the bright side is that you didn't commit suicide, but you are rather concerning everyone with your newfound penchant for breaking-and-entering, stalking and outright weirdness. I was so worried I phoned our mother and father, who were themselves so worried they nearly rolled off their sun loungers." He rubbed his eyes. "Holy hell, I am entirely potted," he concluded.

"Look," Davy said, "it seems bad, I know-"

"I honestly don't think 'seems bad' sums the situation up adequately," Maxwell said, "I think this qualifies as 'major psychotic episode'. Am I to assume you haven't followed my previous advice and booked yourself an appointment with the lovely female psychiatrist of my acquaintance?"

"I didn't think-"

“Well, no bother,” Maxwell said, “I’ve done the work for you. On Monday afternoon – that’s tomorrow, if the days of the week seem confusing to your enfeebled brain – you will have the pleasure of her company, at her office.”

“But-”

“I won’t hear any arguments, my dear chap,” Maxwell said, “I am so enthused about this opportunity, I will even turn up at one o’clock on the merry dot tomorrow to pick you up and transfer you to the venue. All I ask is that you manage to find some form of soap before we meet. You stink, little brother.”

Chapter 6

Lorna Waine didn't look like a psychiatrist, Davy thought. For a start, she was significantly beardless. Her business suit made her look more like a corporate manager than a shrink.

Right now, Lorna was sat holding a notepad as though she were about to take dictation.

"Is the notepad necessary?" Davy asked, "I thought you guys didn't use them."

"Do you find the notepad intimidating, David?" Lorna asked.

"It's Davy," Davy said, "Only my family and other grown-ups call me David. Not that you're not a grown-up. You know what I mean. And about the notepad: no, not intimidating."

"In which case, it's a useful tool," Lorna said, "So, Davy then. Maxwell's little brother."

"Uh, yeah."

"You look like him. Your face, that is. You have very different fashion sense."

Davy looked down at the T-shirt he was wearing. It had a picture of Pac-Man and the phrase 'Nom Nom Nom' on it. Maxwell would probably have worn a suit; at the very least, he'd have worn a proper shirt.

"I've worked on Max's dress sense before," Davy said, "He's doomed, I think."

Lorna smiled.

"I think he's very dashing," she said, "but don't tell him I said that. His ego's already sizable enough as it is. Do you two get on well? I notice you call him Max and he calls you David."

Davy narrowed his eyes.

"Are we here to talk about my relationship with my brother?" he asked, "I figured this was about Hannah?"

"I'm just making conversation," Lorna said, "but we can talk about Hannah if you like."

"Not really."

"Why bring her up then?"

"Because that's why Max wants me to be here?" Davy said, confused.

"You shouldn't really be here unless you want to be here," Lorna said.

"Can I go, then?" Davy said, "I'm really not sure this is for me."

"Your brother did pay for the full hour," Lorna said, looking up at the clock, "We've been here for about four minutes. Do you really want to squander his money – or his goodwill?"

Davy laughed.

"What's funny?" Lorna asked.

"Sorry," Davy said, "It's just the idea of Max and goodwill. No, you're right. He paid; I'm here now. How does this work? What do you want to know?"

"Well," Lorna said, "Let's start with the basics. Why did Maxwell bring you to me?"

"Long answer or short?"

"Either."

"Because of Hannah."

"So you said," Lorna said, "Who's Hannah?"

"Did Max actually speak to you?" Davy asked.

"Assume he didn't," Lorna said, "I want to hear your version. Tell me about Hannah."

Davy looked down at his cracked boots.

"She's my-" he started, but he caught himself and took a deep breath. "She was my girlfriend," he said, "She died."

"Sorry to hear that," Lorna said, writing in her notepad, "When did she die?"

"Five weeks ago," Davy said, "Around that. I was with her, in her car."

"Were you driving?"

"She was. I don't drive."

"Where were you going? What happened?"

"We'd been to an event at Earl's Court. It was a comic thing: a convention. We were both into that sort of thing, comics and science fiction and stuff. Hannah was driving us home and, on the way, some guy smashed into us. He was drunk. He hit Hannah's side. There's a court date for him, I think. I haven't paid much attention, except when I've had to do something like fill out a statement."

"You're not going to the trial, then?"

"Why?" Davy said, "So I can gloat? The system will take care of him, and whatever they give him it won't be enough for me or Hannah's parents, because it never is, right? So why go? It was an accident. A stupid, avoidable accident, but an accident. I don't need to be there."

"Some might suggest," Lorna said, "that it would be a way of closing this whole thing off. A final goodbye; of justice being served and so on."

Davy shrugged. "Good for some," he said, "People said that about the funeral, too."

"What about the funeral?"

"You know," Davy explained, "Funerals are meant to be a last goodbye to the dead and all that. And that's not right. We sat through this long church service that told us about how Hannah was one with God and how she was at peace, and that's just not true. She wasn't even religious. There wasn't anything of her in that church. Nothing."

"I don't think it's meant to be a literal presence," Lorna said.

"I get that," Davy said, "I do. But it was so... so empty. Hollow words designed to make us feel better. Hannah would have laughed her head off."

"And there was a shrine. Hannah used to work in a comic shop in the middle of London. Big place. They made her a shrine in the shop; kind of a mini Princess Di thing, with photos and pictures and cards and stuff. It was... just bad. There wasn't anything of her on the shrine; just of what other people thought they should put on a shrine. Any shrine."

"Isn't that all we can ever do?" Lorna asked, "Imagine what the person we lost would have wanted?"

"Hannah wouldn't have wanted any of this," Davy said, "Imagining's fine, but it's like no one really remembers who she was or what she stood for except me."

"What did she stand for?"

"I don't know. Not religion. Not Manga. Something fun. Not to die."

"I think you're being hard on the people at the funeral, and the ones who made the shrine," Lorna said, "They were only trying to express their grief, just as you are. They might not have known Hannah as well as you, but that shouldn't stop them trying, should it?"

"Of course not," Davy said, "It's just... I don't know. Something. Something's missing."

"What's missing?"

"Something important," Davy said, "Something... intrinsic. All this show, and the person at the centre just isn't there."

"You sound angry."

"I am angry."

"Yes," Lorna said, "but you sound angry instead of upset. It's natural to be upset, Davy. What have you got to be angry about?"

* * *

"Davy," Hannah said, pulling out into the junction, "I lo-"

* * *

"Nothing," Davy said, "I didn't kill her."

"Has anyone accused you of killing her?" Lorna asked.

"No," Davy said, "I've had nothing like that. Everyone... everyone knows it wasn't my fault. Even Hannah's parents don't blame me. I mean, they're the ones that count, right? If they believe you, and a court of law believes you, then that should be good enough, right?"

"Maybe," Lorna said, "I would add that it's quite important you believe it too."

"I know I didn't kill her," Davy said.

"Good, good," Lorna said. She scribbled in her notepad. Davy waited, checking out the office. It was scrupulously tidy.

"Is it true," he asked, "that you have to undergo regular psychiatric evaluation to be a psychiatrist?"

"Do you think I need it?" Lorna asked, not looking up.

"I think your office is very tidy."

Lorna smiled, looked at him.

"Do you prefer a bit of mess, then?"

"I do," Davy said, "Max doesn't."

"What about Hannah?" Lorna asked, "What did she prefer?"

Davy considered this.

"She liked people being people," he said, "She was interested in what makes us think, you know? Like, she always enjoyed mind games and stuff."

"Do you want to clarify that a bit?"

"Clarify?"

"Give me an example," Lorna said.

* * *

"Do you know what's best about central London?" Hannah asked.

Davy put his satchel on the table, sat down in front of her.

"Tell me," he said.

"People watching."

"Right."

"I've been here an hour already," Hannah said.

Davy's eyes went wide. He checked his watch; it was five minutes to one.

"We said one o'clock, didn't we?" he said, "I thought I was early! I'm so sorry if I got it wrong!"

Hannah laughed.

"Do you think I'd still be here if you were an hour late?" she asked, "You clearly don't know me very well. I'd track you down and firebomb your house. I'm very clever on the internet. I'm a Google Black Belt. See how quickly I found you on Facebook, armed only with your first name and place of employment?"

"That's worrying," Davy said, "considering this is the second time I've ever met you. And the first time, you faked being a smoker just to get my attention."

"Just laying my cards on the table," Hannah said, "People watching."

"Yes."

"There are lots of people here."

Davy looked around him. The good weather from the week before, when he'd met Hannah at the Comic Con, had held, and Southbank was filled with people and families taking an early afternoon stroll along the Thames. The café Hannah and Davy were sitting at was exceptionally busy; there were no spare tables.

"There are," Davy said.

"Watch them."

"That's it?" Davy said, "'Watch them'? That's the best you've got?"

Hannah sighed.

"I have to explain?" she said, "Look, it's perfectly simple. Why are they here? Today? On Southbank?"

"It's a nice day."

"Okay," Hannah said, "Good start. Unimaginative, but good. Why here? Southbank's okay, if it's not a sunny Saturday and it's not too busy. Everyone knows how crowded it gets here, so why come?"

"If they didn't," Davy pointed out, "it wouldn't be busy."

"Self-perpetuating argument," Hannah said, waving her hand in dismissal, "Give me something decent."

"Do you do this on all your dates?" Davy asked, "Interrogate the men?"

"This is how I decide whether or not you get a date," Hannah said, "We're just doing lunch right now."

"How am I doing?"

"You turned up five minutes early," Hannah said, "but you haven't answered any of my questions. On the bright side, you've provoked discussion. On the downside, the discussion is about my tactics, which is all a bit fourth wall, and definitely unfair. Flipside again, we are at least talking about me, and it's fun, and – best of all – you actually showed up. So far, you're doing okay."

* * *

The hour, Davy thought, passed quickly. He didn't feel like they had accomplished much, but he was in a better mood.

The psychiatrist's office was across town from Davy's usual area, all the way over near Sloane Square. Maxwell, unable to vacate his gainful employment for an entire afternoon, had only been able to drop Davy off, not pick him up again, so Davy caught the Tube along to Embankment and headed across the bridge to the café on Southbank.

There was a light drizzle in the air; not actual rain, but a lingering sense of damp. The only seats outside the café were underneath an awning, but they were all free, so Davy took one facing the river. A tired looking waitress took his order and returned with a cup of tea.

The promenade wasn't busy today, at least by Southbank standards. There were still plenty of people, mostly tourists and their children. Some joggers, the very occasional City worker, a few homeless people.

Davy sat and drank his tea and watched.

He noticed Hannah after fifteen minutes. She was sat next to him, watching the people, a tiny smile on her face.

"Hi," Davy said.

Hannah looked at him. Her smile widened.

"I missed you," Davy said.

Chapter 7

"Let me get this straight," James said, "You had tea with Hannah."

"Yes," Davy said. He checked the file he was holding was the right one, and put in two copies of the latest Captain America comic.

"Like, a month ago?"

"Bit longer, maybe. Six weeks."

"And you didn't tell us about this," James said, passing another file across to Davy, "You thought this was sufficiently normal that you could just pass us by on it?"

Davy considered this.

"Yes," he said eventually, "I did." Three copies of Captain America.

"Oh, well, good then," James said, "I'd hate to think you were going nuts."

"To be fair," Minstrel said from her position on the floor in front of the shop counter, "he was nuts at the time. Wasn't that after the whole Hannah's parents thing?"

"Thanks, Minstrel," Davy said, "Good support there."

"Uh huh," Minstrel said, turning the page on her comic.

"Did you have a nice chat?" James asked, "What exactly did you talk about?"

"We didn't talk," Davy said, "Well, she didn't. I talked a bit."

"She didn't say anything at all?" James asked. He looked at his checklist. "That's all the files."

Davy nodded and put the rest of the Captain America comics into a box.

"I don't think she could talk. Nothing she did made any noise. Like, she was breathing, but you couldn't hear it. Minstrel, could you put these comics out on the shelf for me?"

"I don't work here," she replied.

"She was breathing?" James asked, "but you couldn't hear it? How close did you get?"

"Pretty close."

"Did she have a pulse?"

"I didn't check," Davy admitted, "I didn't touch her."

"Why not?" James asked.

"I don't know," Davy said, "What if my hand had gone straight through her? Wouldn't that have been rude? Minstrel, if you're not helping us, would you mind transferring your hippy bottom to a more convenient location? One not in front of the counter?"

"Am I getting in the way of all your customers?" Minstrel asked. She was the only customer Atomic Comics had seen all morning, and she'd yet to buy anything.

"You sat with your dead girlfriend on Southbank, and you didn't want to touch her just in case you came across as rude?" James said, "Well, that seems normal then."

"Do you think," Minstrel asked, not looking up from her comic, "that Hannah was like Patrick Swayze in Ghost, or was she more ectoplasmic, like Slimer?"

"I didn't touch her!" Davy said.

"Maybe it would have been useful to find out," Minstrel said, turning another page, "If she had substance, you could have had a quickie."

"Come on, Minstrel," Davy said, "Don't go there. This is Hannah."

"Yeah, Minstrel," James said, "Tact when we're talking about dead girlfriend's creepy ghost."

"Just saying," Minstrel said, shrugging, "At least a slimy hand job would have been something."

"Do you still see her?" James asked.

"What, now?" Davy asked.

"Is she here in the shop?"

"No," Davy said, "Of course not. I haven't seen her since Southbank. Come on, guys, I thought you'd at least have an open mind about this."

"I think you're crazy," James said.

"I believe him," Minstrel said.

"I think you're crazy too," James said.

"Seriously, James?" Davy said, "All the comic books and Fox TV you can eat, and you can't even entertain the notion of life after death?"

"I believe that a man can fly," James said, "I believe that, despite all evidence to the contrary, M Night Shyamalan could make another decent film in my lifetime. I believe Scully could have held on to her cynicism after season two. I even believe that the Battlestar Galactica writers knew what they were doing from the start." He sighed. "I believe in special effects, Davy, not ghosts."

"I saw her," Davy said, his voice quiet, "I swear I did."

"Look," James said, "I have no doubt you saw what you wanted to see. Needed to see, even. You had a rough time of it, and you've been getting better and happier since you started with the shrink. Which is great, by the way. But I want you to remember what's real and what isn't."

"What's real..." Davy said, "I know what's real. I saw Hannah. I promise you I saw Hannah. She was close enough to kiss."

"And yet you didn't kiss her," James said, "No proof. What happened to that Dawkins streak you used to maintain? That Hannah used to attack bible bashers with?"

"What about faith?" Davy asked, "Can't you just trust me on this?"

James looked disgusted.

"Unless you turn into Jodie Foster and show me a seventeen hour video," he said, "I'm going to say no, I won't take this on faith. As far as I know, practically every ghost sighting has been proved either to be a hoax or a psychotic breakdown. Proof or no dice."

"I can't prove this," Davy said, dejected, "There's no way."

Minstrel poked her head over the side of the counter.

"Yes there is," she said.

* * *

The Ouija board was made out of polished wood. The letters of the alphabet, written in an ornate copperplate style, formed a circle on the board. The words 'yes' and 'no' were written in the middle of the circle.

"It smells like the Body Shop in here," James complained. Minstrel had lit a whole bag of scented tea light candles.

Minstrel turned out the living room light and joined her friends sitting on the floor round the board.

"Where'd you get the board?" Davy asked.

"From my mum," Minstrel said, "She used to use it to talk to Granddad, until the thing with Grandma happened."

"Right," James said.

"You can't approach this with a closed frame of mind," Minstrel warned him.

"I'm being as open minded as possible," James said, "considering it's a crock of shit."

"How does this work?" Davy asked.

"It's easy," Minstrel said. She put a wine glass face down on the board. "Okay," she said, "we all put our fingers on the glass. Index and middle fingers of your right hand. Okay? Now rest your left hand on the shoulder of the person to your left."

"This really is a lot of bollocks," James muttered. He had to stretch his arm to reach Minstrel's shoulder. "Don't you have to bless the circle or something?" he asked.

"I can if you like," Minstrel said, "but I don't have any blue candles."

"I think we're good," Davy said

"Okay," Minstrel said, "Now we close our eyes. Both of them, James. I mean it."

"How do you even know?" James asked.

"I'm either psychic," Minstrel said, "or I'm really smart. Take whichever you've got proof for. Right, now breathe. In. Out. In. Hold it. Out. Keep going."

They sat, breathing slowly, for a minute. Davy felt light-headed.

"The board will only accept positive energy," Minstrel said, "I want you to expel your negative thoughts and feelings. I want you to create a channel to the afterlife. I want you to picture Hannah. Remember Hannah? Such a pretty girl, and so full of life and questions and positive vibes. I want you to picture her as accurately as you can."

Davy did as he was told. It wasn't difficult.

"Spirits of the afterlife," Minstrel said, "Are you there?"

They waited patiently.

"See?" James said, "Nothing."

"Shut up," Minstrel said, "You're getting negative energy all over my board."

They waited some more.

"Try again," Davy suggested.

"Spirits of the afterlife," Minstrel repeated, "We seek an audience with Hannah Bailey, who joined you such a short time ago. Can you hear me?"

For a few seconds, there was nothing. And then the wine glass began to move.

"Something's happening," Davy said.

"Stop pushing it," James muttered.

"Quiet," Minstrel said, "both of you. Let the spirits answer. Keep breathing."

Slowly, the glass settled over 'yes' on the board.

"We thank you for your presence," Minstrel said, "It is a great honour. We seek an audience with our friend. Is this Hannah?"

The glass shifted again. It settled over 'no'.

"Of course not," Davy said, "Sod's Law."

"Is Hannah there?" Minstrel asked.

The glass moved back to 'yes'.

"She's there, Davy," Minstrel said, "She's really there."

"Hannah?" Davy said, "It's Davy. I miss you. I haven't seen you since, since we sat by the café. Have you forgotten me?"

The glass moved to 'no'.

"I love you, Hannah," Davy said, "I really love you."

The glass moved slowly, shifting away from the centre of the board. It came to a halt over the 'i'.

"I?" Davy said.

"Minstrel," James said in a low voice, but Minstrel hushed him.

The glass moved again, this time to the 'l'. Faster now, it kept going, onwards to 'o'.

Davy felt a breeze on his face. The candles seemed to flicker for a moment.

'v'.

The breeze grew stronger, bending the candle flames. Davy could feel a chill through his T-shirt. His heart was racing.

"I love you," he said again, "I want you back; I really miss you."

'e'.

It was difficult to hear now, the wind was so loud.

'y'. 'o'.

"Hannah?" Davy said, "Are you there?" His voice was lost to the roar of the hurricane.

'u'.

The wind stopped.

"I'm here," said Hannah.

The glass broke.

Chapter 8

"What's it like?" Davy asked.

"What's what like?" Hannah replied, looking down at Davy. He was laid on his bed; she was stroking his hair.

"Being dead."

"It's dark."

"As in you can't see? There's no light?"

"As in there's nothing," Hannah said, "Nothing at all but Limbo. You can't feel anything, because there's nothing to feel. You can't even feel time passing, because there's no time to pass."

"It sounds terrible."

"It is," Hannah said, "And the greatest torment of all is not being here. Not being with you."

"I saw you," Davy said, "At your wake, and at Sci-Fi Supermart. I followed you home. And then the café."

"I can't leave the spirit world without you," Hannah said, her eyes sad, her voice low, "I need your belief. And when you saw me, you believed strongly enough to bring me to you."

"This is a dream, then?" Davy asked, "This isn't real."

Hannah bent down, touched his injured fingers with her own. He had cut his index and middle fingers when the wine glass shattered.

"Does it feel like a dream?" she asked.

"No," Davy said.

She kissed his lips.

"How does it feel?"

"It feels real," Davy said.

"I'll always be here for you," Hannah said, "I promise. As long as you believe in me, I'll always be here."

There was a bang on the door.

"Davy?" James called, "You in there?"

"They can't know," Hannah told Davy, "You can't tell them about me."

"Why not?" Davy asked.

"Davy?" James called again.

"I'm here," Davy shouted back.

"They won't be able to see me," Hannah said, "They won't believe you. They'll find a way to separate us. Do you want to lose me again?"

"No," Davy said, "No, I want to stay with you. I love you."

"I love you too," she said, leaning down and kissing his cheek.

"You okay?" James asked, "You want a cup of tea?"

"I'm good," Davy called, "No thank you."

"You sure?"

"Sure."

Davy listened. He heard James walk away from the door.

"Never tell them?" he asked.

"Never," Hannah said, "Not if you truly want to be with me."

"I do," Davy said.

Hannah smiled.

* * *

"That was intense last night," Minstrel said over breakfast.

Davy looked up from his cereal. Minstrel was wearing her tattered old dressing down. If she followed her usual daily routine, she would be wearing it for most of the day.

"It was," he said carefully.

"James wanted me to tell you something," Minstrel said.

"What?"

"He wanted you to remember it wasn't real."

"What wasn't?"

"The Ouija board."

"It felt real."

"Lots of things appear real," Minstrel said, "After a good smoke, I believe in lots of things too. But the Ouija board..."

"The glass broke," Davy said, "It smashed under our fingers."

"You were the only person who got cut," Minstrel said, "You broke the glass."

"What about the wind?" Davy asked, "What about the way the glass moved?"

"What wind?" Minstrel asked, "There wasn't any wind. The glass moved, and James wanted me to be sure to tell you that the movement was an unconscious decision by you, and maybe by me, because I got a little overexcited."

"Do you believe him?"

Minstrel shrugged.

"I'm just passing on the message," she said.

"She believes him," Hannah said, "Don't listen."

"Okay," Davy said.

It took Davy longer than usual to get ready for work. Every time he tried to put his T-shirt on, Hannah would press herself against him and kiss him, and he'd drop the shirt and hold her tight.

"Are you going to come with me?" he asked.

"Do you want me there?" Hannah said.

"I always want you with me," Davy said, "I don't want you out of my sight."

"Then I'll come to work with you. Just remember the golden rule."

"I'll remember," Davy said, "Zip."

"Are you talking to yourself in there?" Minstrel called through the bedroom door.

"Yes," Davy called back, "Sorry."

They left the house together. Davy held the front door open for Hannah, and they held hands once they were walking out of sight of the living room window.

"It's like old times," Hannah said.

"Except only I can see you," Davy said.

"Look on the bright side," Hannah said, "You've got me all to yourself."

On the Tube, someone tried to sit on Hannah. She moved and sat on Davy's lap for the rest of the journey.

* * *

"You're late," James said as Davy walked through the door.

"I overslept," Davy said, "All the excitement from last night."

"All a bit intense for me," James muttered, "Did Minstrel speak to you?"

"About the Ouija board?" Davy asked, "She passed your message on."

"Good."

Hannah moved past Davy and sat on the floor at the far end of the store. She had chosen to wear her old Sci-Fi Supermart uniform, which made Davy smile.

"He's not happy," she said, pointing at James.

"I know," Davy said.

"Phew!" James replied, "I thought it was all a bit mental. I love Minstrel to bits, but some of the shit she comes out with is just plain weird."

"Just play along," Hannah said, "It'll be easier in the long run."

"Totally agree," Davy said, nodding vigorously, "A hundred percent."

"Cool," James said, "Right, we've got a delivery in. Do you want to hold the counter or sort the stock room?"

"We'll take the stock room," Davy and Hannah said simultaneously.

* * *

Davy took four hours to unpack the delivery and organise the stock room. After two hours, James poked his head round the door to check up on him, pointing out that the job shouldn't have taken more than an hour, and by the way would he like any lunch from the shop?

Davy, giggling like a schoolboy, said yes and went to take over on the counter while James went for food.

James was gone for twenty minutes. During that time, two customers came into the shop and left without stopping to browse, seeing Davy talking to himself enthusiastically behind the counter.

When James returned, Davy thanked him for the sandwich and disappeared back into the stock room.

He spent the afternoon sorting out the customer subscription folders and making out with Hannah. He nearly got caught by James twice, and faked blowing his nose. It wasn't very convincing, which made Hannah roll around in fits of laughter.

"You know what this is like?" she said, "It's like those new couples that can't keep their hands off each other and make everyone else uncomfortable with all the groping and snogging, except as far as anyone else can see it's just you. It's like you've turned wanking into a full-on relationship."

Davy laughed so loudly that James had to come in and ask him to keep it down for the sake of the customers.

* * *

At six o'clock, James walked in to the stock room.

"Today was not cool," he said.

"What do you mean?" Davy asked. He was lying on the floor on a bed of new comic books.

"You haven't done anything today," James said, "We all have our lazy days, but you're just taking the piss."

Davy did his best to look serious. It was difficult. Hannah was flashing at him.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"Sorry doesn't cut it," James said, "I've been working my arse off, and you've been having an episode in here all day."

Hannah backed off. Davy sat up.

"Look," he said, "I'm sorry. Really. It's been a really odd day."

"Yeah, well," James said, "Don't have any more odd days. I can't cover for you all the time."

"What do you mean?" Davy said.

"It's not just today," James said, "I know you lost your girlfriend – God knows I know – but she was my friend too. It didn't just affect you."

"I know that!"

"You wouldn't think so," James said, "I'm sorry if I sound unsympathetic, and I really don't mean to, but you've been acting like a freak ever since she died. Well, get over it, Davy. Get over it, and then we'll be cool again."

"Get over it?" Davy said loudly, standing up, "I got over it! I've tried as hard as I can to be normal again, and it was working, even though there was always something missing. And then I get Hannah back and--"

"Get Hannah back?" James shouted.

"Oh boy," Hannah said.

"What the hell are you talking about?" James carried on, "Is this about that damn Ouija board? It's a fucking lie, Davy. A game. The only people who believe in it are freaks and religious kooks. Hannah didn't talk to you last night: you pushed a wine glass around a piece of wood for half an hour, spelling out a message from your subconscious. Magic forces didn't break the glass, Davy. You did."

"Don't rise to it," Hannah said, "Don't take the bait."

"That's bullshit," Davy said, "You're just pissed off because I got Hannah back and you were wrong. Don't you understand? I lost her and she came back to me!"

"That's just ridiculous," James snapped, "You must see how crazy that is."

"Crazy?" Davy said, "Well, why don't you just call my brother again, if I'm so crazy? That's your usual answer, isn't it? Call him so you don't have to deal with it?"

The room went silent.

"I am not having this argument," James said after a few seconds, "I'm a grown man and I refuse to argue with you about ghosts and sodding goblins. Life isn't Harry Potter, Davy. Grow the fuck up."

He stormed out, slamming the door behind him. A moment later, he opened the door again.

"And you owe me four quid for the sandwich," he yelled.

He slammed the door for the second time.

"That went well," Hannah said.

* * *

"He's not going to come round," Davy said.

"He will," Hannah said, slipping her arm round his waist, "You watch. You guys have had arguments before. Remember the time he broke your Iron Man mug?"

"He blamed it on Minstrel," Davy said, "Not exactly in the same league, though, is it?"

"Maybe not."

"He won't come round," Davy said, "I suppose it's simpler this way. Just me and you."

"Always."

* * *

"You're not going to fight with me, are you?" Minstrel asked.

"Of course not," Davy said, letting Hannah into the flat and shutting the front door, "Why on earth would I want to fight you?"

"You had a fight with James," Minstrel said, "about the Ouija board. He told me."

"It wasn't just the Ouija board," Davy said.

"He said it was mostly the Ouija board."

"It started with the Ouija board."

"You had a fight with James," Minstrel repeated, "and now you're coming for a fight with me."

"She's been doing well since I left," Hannah said.

"I'm not," Davy said, "I don't want a fight. I promise."

"You promise?" Minstrel said, "You completely promise and hope to die and have your heart trodden on by a horse?"

"I guess so."

Minstrel looked relieved.

"James had me convinced," she said, "I knew he was wrong. He said you were turning into a psycho."

"That's grand of him," Davy said.

"Isn't it, though?" Hannah said, smirking.

"But it's been a strange day," Minstrel said, "what with the Ouija board last night and Hannah's parents moving and all that. I figured you were just in a funk."

Hannah and Davy looked at each other. Minstrel didn't notice. She'd already retreated to the living room.

"Minstrel?" Davy called.

"Yes?" she called back.

"What did you just say?" he asked. He followed her into the living room, where she had already flopped into a chair and started skinning up.

"I figured you were in a funk," Minstrel replied, "Like a depression or something. I would be, if the last living links to my dead partner were leaving, especially after the way they told you never to speak to them again."

"My parents are moving?" Hannah said.

"Minstrel," Davy said, crouching in front of Minstrel's chair, "what are you talking about?"

Minstrel paused her rolling.

"Their house was in the newspaper adverts," she said, "Didn't I tell you this morning?"

* * *

"They left a while ago," the old man said, "Two or three weeks, right Mavis?"

"Oh, I'd say a month," Mavis replied, "They couldn't bear to live in their anymore. Not after what happened to their daughter. All the memories."

Davy looked down at the Baileys' former neighbours.

"So they haven't sold the place yet, then?" he asked.

"Oh, no," the man said, "The property only went up at the estate agent yesterday. I guess they finally got round to working it all out."

"So where did they go?" Hannah asked.

"Do you know where they went?" Davy asked, "Did they leave a forwarding address?"

"Didn't Agatha say something about her sister?" Mabel said to her husband, "The one in Tuscany?"

"Something like that," the old man said, "They just wanted to get as far from London as they could.

Too many memories."

Davy nodded.

"I know how they feel," he said.

"You look familiar," the old man said, "Did you know them?"

"I knew their daughter," Davy said.

"Oh, that was a terrible business," Mabel said, "That horrid car crash. Did you know she had a boyfriend? He was in the car when it happened, you know. Terrible business."

* * *

"Davy," Hannah said, pulling out into the junction, "I lo-

* * *

"I love you," Hannah said to Davy as he dropped off to sleep, "I really, really do."

Chapter 9

"You didn't come in last week," Lorna said, "or the week before."

"Yeah," Davy said, "I meant to call. I was busy."

"It's fine if you want to miss a couple of weeks," Lorna said, "I can't force you to be here, and you should always feel free to go and do what you want to do. But I have to bill your brother if you don't give me twenty-four hours' notice."

"He can afford it," Davy said.

"It's still a waste of my time," Lorna said, "If I'm going to bill Maxwell for an hour, I want to make sure he's getting his money's worth."

They stared at each other for a moment. Hannah, from her perch on a spare chair in the corner of the room, raised an eyebrow.

"You know he's married, right?" Davy said.

"So what were you up to last week?" Lorna asked.

"Nothing much," Davy said, "Hanging out at home, I guess. I've been pretty cheerful recently."

"Really?" Lorna said, "That's good. Why do you think that is?"

Davy shrugged and tried to ignore Hannah's crude hand gestures.

"Life's just good right now," he concluded.

"And yet you're here this week," Lorna said.

Davy rubbed his forehead.

"Well, yes," he said.

"Davy," Lorna said, "One of the concerns I have about our time together is that I don't think you see therapy as a way of fully expressing yourself, but as some kind of mental quick-fix surgery. I always got the impression that you only came here because you thought you had a problem – a point that's held up by the reason you just gave for your absence over the last fortnight. Well, you're back now. Talk to me. What's the problem?"

Davy sighed, deflated a bit.

"There's no problem," he said, "Not really. It's just... well, it's James."

"Your friend at the comic shop?"

"That's him," Davy said, "We're not so friendly now. Not for the last two weeks or so."

"What happened?" Lorna asked.

"Just an argument," Davy said, "A stupid, petty argument."

"What about?"

"That doesn't matter," Hannah said.

"It doesn't matter," Davy told Lorna.

"Are you sure it doesn't matter?" Lorna asked, "I thought you and James had been friends for years. For you to stop speaking would take something pretty drastic."

"Are you just going to contradict me for this whole hour?" Davy asked.

"If I have to," Lorna replied.

"Oh."

"So why did you and James have a fight?"

"You should just walk out now," Hannah suggested.

"It was about Hannah," Davy said.

"You suck," Hannah said, folding her arms.

"What about Hannah?" Lorna asked.

Davy leaned forwards, rested his head on his hands.

"We did this thing," he said, "A Ouija board. It was Minstrel's idea – my flatmate. I guess I played along because it seemed like a bit of fun. We got the idea because I'd seen- because I'd said I'd seen Hannah. I thought I'd seen her. James didn't believe me, so Minstrel suggested the board.

"Anyway, the board worked. Or it felt like it. I saw Hannah again. And James, he didn't believe me. He thinks I'm crazy. But I'm not crazy, am I?"

Hannah blew out her cheeks.

"I'm doubtful," she said.

"That's an interesting experience," Lorna said, "Can you tell me why you think you saw Hannah after you used the Ouija board?"

"I don't know," Davy said, "She was just... there."

"Is she still here?" Lorna asked, "Is Hannah here now?"

Davy's eyes flicked to Hannah.

"Of course not," he said, "I said I'm not crazy."

"But you've been happy since then?"

"Careful," Hannah warned.

"You make it sound like a bad thing," Davy said, "Like somehow it's a negative if I'm happy."

"Of course it's not a negative," Lorna replied, "Don't be silly. But by your own account-" she referred to her notepad now "-you've been in a good mood since the last time we spoke, which was two weeks ago, and two weeks ago you used a Ouija board and fell out with one of your best friends. So I want to know where Hannah fits into all of this."

"Apart from being my dead girlfriend and the girl I wanted to marry?" Davy asked.

"Marry?" Lorna said, "You've never mentioned marriage before. Did you propose to her?"

"Badly," Hannah muttered.

"No," Davy said, "Well kind of. I let slip that I meant to."

"When?" Lorna asked.

* * *

"Please tell me," Hannah said when the silence got too much, "that this isn't your idea of a proposal."

* * *

"In the car," Davy said, "Just before..."

* * *

"Davy, I lo-"

* * *

Davy bit down on his lip. The memories came flooding back, unbidden and unwanted. Just the mention of that word was enough.

'Marriage.'

* * *

"So you don't want to get married, then?" Davy asked.

"Whoa," Hannah replied, grinning more out of shock than humour, "Where did that come from?"

She shifted down to second gear, slowed the car for a traffic light. It changed to green as they approached; Hannah switched back to third gear and accelerated again.

"It's just what you were saying earlier," Davy said, "about the wedding."

"Well," Hannah muttered, "It was fun and all, with the Star Wars thing, but it was still ridiculous. It was, though, wasn't it?"

Davy looked over at her.

"That's not what you said."

His hand was in his satchel. He could feel the tissue paper around the engagement ring box against his fingertips.

"What did I say?" Hannah asked.

"You said it was a big pressure," Davy replied, "You didn't think marriage was worth it."

"That's not quite how I meant it," Hannah said, her gaze flicking along the road where someone was trying to pull out of a junction, "I just said that it would be easier if we didn't bother. So much hassle."

"Isn't the hassle worth it?" Davy asked.

Hannah looked cautiously at Davy, then back at the road.

"I don't know," she said, "Maybe. One day. Not yet."

"Not yet?"

"I'm twenty-two," Hannah said, "I've got time. What would I do with a husband now? Have kids? Buy a house? I can barely afford rent, and I live with my parents."

Davy raised an eyebrow. He looked out of the passenger side window, and said:

"A husband? Not necessarily me, then?"

There was a pause.

"Davy," Hannah said, "You know I love you, right?"

"Not enough to want to marry me, though."

"I'm not marrying anybody," Hannah snapped. The light ahead went red and she braked a little too hard, stopped the car with a jolt. "Talk to me again in ten years – even five years," she said, "Not now."

Another pause.

"Please tell me," Hannah said when the silence got too much, "that this isn't your idea of a proposal."

Davy said nothing.

"It was!" Hannah exclaimed, looking at his face, "You were going to propose today! Our one-year anniversary."

"Hannah," Davy said, "I just want to be with you."

The traffic light went green.

"Davy," Hannah said, pulling out into the junction, "I lo-

* * *

"She's causing you pain," Hannah said, getting up and walking over to Davy, "You should get out now. Don't let her pick apart what we've got."

"She's not," Davy snapped, "I'm just talking about it, that's all. I'm just... remembering."

"Who are you talking to?" Lorna asked, "Is that Hannah? Can you see her?"

"She thinks this is some kind of fantasy," Hannah said, "She's psychoanalysing you, she thinks. Is that what you want?"

"I need to talk about this," Davy said, "I wanted to marry you!"

"Why wouldn't she marry you, Davy?" Lorna asked.

Davy looked at Lorna like he'd only just realised she was in the room.

"She said she wasn't ready," he said, "and I was being a dick about it. And then she was going to tell me she loved me, but she- she didn't. She didn't get the chance."

"Do you blame yourself, Davy?" Lorna asked.

"No," Davy said.

"Because you should," Hannah said.

"I didn't kill her," Davy said.

"I know," Lorna said.

"She doesn't know anything," Hannah said, "She wasn't there. She wasn't there when you wanted to act up while I was driving."

"It wasn't my fault," Davy said.

"Imagine if I didn't have to look after your precious feelings all the time," Hannah said.

"I know it wasn't your fault, Davy."

"I'd have seen the other car running the red light."

"You mustn't blame yourself."

"I don't!"

"I'd still be alive, Davy. We'd still be together."

"I'm so sorry!" Davy shouted, his face bright red, veins bulging from his neck, "I'm sorry, Hannah!"

But Hannah had disappeared.

Chapter 10

When Davy got home, he looked so tired and bedraggled that Minstrel didn't even bother asking before she put the kettle on. She plonked Davy on the settee, covered him in a blanket, handed him a mug of tea and called James.

"I think I'm losing it," Davy told them, "I argued with Hannah today."

"She's not real," James said, "Just focus on that. She's not real. You'll get through this."

Chapter 11

For the next two months, life carried on as normal for Davy. It was a certain kind of normal – not a normal he would have picked out for himself – but he didn't see Hannah at all. He went to work, he came home, he ate with Minstrel and James, and he attended his therapy sessions with Lorna.

He thought about Hannah all the time.

Lorna was of the opinion that a major breakthrough had been made. She constantly asked if Davy could see Hannah, and was constantly disappointed when Davy told her Hannah wasn't around. The sessions, as far as Davy was concerned, had become like a broken record, stuck on whether he blamed himself for the car crash, but Lorna said they were making progress, so he kept going.

Davy took James' advice very seriously. Whenever he thought about Hannah, he told himself that she wasn't real. If no one else was around – or, to add to Minstrel's concerns, when he thought no one else was around – he would repeat 'She's not real, she's not real' over and over as a self-hypnotising mantra.

At night, however, it was a different story. Davy never looked rested any more, and he told his friends that he was having trouble sleeping. This was a lie: Davy slept very well, although he often wished he didn't. When he slept, he dreamed, always about Hannah. The dreams felt like memories, but he couldn't tell anymore. In the dreams, he argued with Hannah a lot, and sometimes they made up and Hannah held him, and sometimes they didn't. Regardless of the outcome, Davy's sleep ceased to be restful in any form whatsoever.

For all the normality, Davy knew one thing. He knew he was unhappy.

* * *

"I think he's getting worse," James said.

"I'm not sure," Minstrel replied, "He just seems constantly down these days."

Davy stopped, his hand on the living room door handle.

"True," James said, "but I think he's more down now than he was."

Their voices were low.

"What can we do?" Minstrel asked.

"Same as we've been doing, I suppose," James said, "Stand here and support him. The sooner he gets over this silly ghost rubbish, the better."

"I thought he was over it," Minstrel said.

"He says he is," James said, "but I don't think he really believes it. It's like he's in shock, but all the time. Post-traumatic stress, or something. Christ, some days I'd have more luck getting a conversation out of an actual ghost."

"He is very quiet," Minstrel agreed, "but I don't think he wants to be. I think he wants to say something, but he just doesn't know what."

"Yeah, well," James said, "the sooner he says it, the better."

* * *

"You left me!"

"I left you? You left me! Where are you now? Haunting some other ex-boyfriend?"

"How many exes do you think I had? You're the one I loved, and you left me! After everything we went through, even after I was killed, you just walked away."

"I didn't! You're not real!"

"And you're still walking away, Davy. Keep walking, I dare you."

"You can't stop me, Hannah. You're not real."

"Watch me."

* * *

Davy rested his head on Hannah's chest and sighed.

"Was your day that bad?" Hannah asked, "Would poor little Davy like some sympathy from his lovely lady?"

"Yes he would," Davy said, "Davy's had a very long day, and he's had James constantly asking him 'are you okay?', which as we all know is the phrase most likely to drive Davy round the bend when it's asked too many times."

"Apparently," Hannah said, "Davy has had such a bad day he's going to refer to himself constantly in the third person."

"Are you laughing at me?"

"What gives you that idea?"

"You are laughing at me. That's just mean."

"Are you okay?"

Davy cracked a smile.

"See?" Hannah said, "I'm the best thing that ever happened to you."

* * *

The phone rang.

"This is Lorna Waine."

"Hi, Lorna – this is Davy here. I know we don't have a session till--"

"I'm not available right now, so if you'd like to leave a name and number, I'll call you back as soon as possible. Thank you."

"Hi, Lorna. It's, ah, shit, it's Davy again. Just trying to book an appointment. I'll try later."

Davy hung up.

"Shit."

He'd known that Lorna had other clients – of course he'd known that. And Lorna had told him to leave a message because she hadn't got around to finding a receptionist for her office. But he'd now left four messages on her answering machine, beginning with one at eight thirty that morning. It was now almost two o'clock. Davy was worried. Something didn't feel right.

He was also late for work, by nearly four hours.

* * *

Lorna didn't call Davy back.

By the time Davy's pre-booked appointment came round, he felt a little hurt, but mostly he just felt annoyed. The feeling pushed him further into reclusion, and he hardly spoke at all to James or Minstrel.

He turned up at Lorna's office nearly thirty minutes early, at half past twelve. Her office was locked, so he waited for her.

She didn't show.

* * *

Davy dialled a different number on his phone. It rang for a few seconds.

"Yeah?"

"Max? It's Davy."

"I know, you plank," Maxwell said, "What do you want?"

"Where's Lorna?" Davy asked, "The therapist you've been paying for?"

Maxwell went quiet.

"What do you know about that?" he asked.

"About what?"

"About me and Lorna."

Davy paused.

"It's actually true?" he asked, "You're sleeping with Lorna?"

"Sleeping with' is such an odd phrase, isn't it?" Maxwell said, "I mean, we say 'sleeping with', when really we mean 'doing anything but'."

"Max, you are such pond life."

"David, please, do me a favour. Don't tell my wife."

"Look," Davy said, "I don't care. I mean, I do because I've got a brother who can't keep his trousers on, but right now, I just need to talk to Lorna."

"What about?" Maxwell asked. Something in his voice left Davy cold.

"I just want another appointment. I just want to stop being unhappy, Max. So I'm booking more appointments, like you told me to."

"David," Maxwell said, "this probably isn't... Christ, you don't know, do you? This was a genuinely random call. I knew I should have called you, but I felt I was always having to give you bad news."

"What don't I know?"

"She's in the hospital, David. She was on the way back from my flat. She came round on the nights my wife was out shopping. Late night Thursdays."

"What happened, Max?" Davy asked, his voice shaking.

"She was hit by a car," Maxwell said, "Some drunk driver just came out of nowhere."

Chapter 12

"Hannah!"

The shout echoed up and down the promenade. It was raining on Southbank, hard enough that even the usually ostentatious London Eye was nearly invisible. The Thames was a murky brown-grey. Those few tourists that remained eyed Davy suspiciously as they walked past under umbrellas bought for obscene prices from the local street venders. Some of the tourists made sure their cameras were switched on, unsure whether Davy was some kind of Anglo street artist or just a genuine nut.

"Hannah, we need to talk!" he yelled.

The café that he had first sat with Hannah, both as a potential girlfriend and as a ghost, was open, but the rain meant that there was no outside seating. Davy didn't care. He carried on shouting at the empty space. His clothes were soaking wet, his skin cold. He was shivering, but he didn't notice.

"You were right," he shouted, "I take it all back! I should have stuck with you! Come back!"

One of the waitresses poked her head out the café door.

"You alright, mate?" she asked.

"Yeah," Davy said, "Yeah, I'm good. Hannah!"

"Look, mate," the waitress said, "You got thirty seconds to piss off or I'm calling the old bill."

Davy looked at her.

"I'm not here to cause trouble," he said, "I'm just looking for-"

"Hannah," the waitress said, "Yeah, I got it. You been screaming her name for fifteen bloody minutes, and it's doing my nut in."

"Look," Davy said, "I need to find her. It's important – someone might get hurt if-"

"Your bird ain't here," the waitress yelled, coming out of the café. She walked right up to Davy and pushed him. Clear off!" she shouted, "Scram!"

"I'm not leaving," Davy said, his teeth gritted as he tried to stand his ground. He caught the waitress's arm and held it.

"Let go, you asshole," she shouted, "Get out of here!"

She pushed him again, but Davy still had hold of her arm and she lost her balance. Davy moved to catch her, but in doing so he instinctively let go, dropping her onto the wet concrete arse-first.

"Everything alright here?" someone asked.

"You bastard!" she shouted, "Oi! You coppers! This man attacked me!"

Davy felt strong arms grab hold of him. Two reflector-jacketed officers restrained him.

"No," Davy shouted, "You don't understand! I've got to find Hannah!"

"I don't think she's here," said one of the officers, "I don't see no one but this woman you knocked down. You going to calm down, mate?"

"He's nuts," the waitress added helpfully, picking herself off the ground.

"Of course you can't see her," Davy shouted, "She's dead! Hannah's dead, you idiots! Let me go!"

* * *

The police officers, on hearing about a dead woman called Hannah, didn't let him go.

* * *

"On the bright side," Hannah said, "There's very little the police can do."

Davy opened his eyes. He was sat on the hard cot against the cell wall. The cell was lit only by a tiny window. Even so, the limited light from outside coupled with the greasy beige wall colour was giving Davy a nasty form of snow-blindness.

"It stinks of piss in here," Hannah said.

"It does," Davy said, "What do you mean, there's very little the police can do?"

"Oh come on," Hannah said, "I thought we were in some kind of Tyler Durden situation here. I thought that whatever I know, you know? Where's the gun, Davy?"

"That's harsh," Davy said, "Put yourself in my shoes. Would you believe in ghosts?"

"I'd believe my senses," Hannah said, "In answer to your question, that waitress's story won't hold any water, and I would put money on her dropping the charges. She pushed you first, Davy, whether or not you're off your box. And given that, despite what you may have been shouting, you didn't actually kill anyone in the past few weeks, the worst that will happen will be your brother getting a phone call to come and pick you up."

"Great," Davy said, "Just what I need."

"He can't criticise," Hannah said, "not after what he's been up to with your psychiatrist, the dirty boy."

"Lorna," Davy said, "You killed Lorna."

"'Killed' is a strong word," Hannah said, "She's in the hospital."

"She's critical!"

"I'm dead," Hannah said, "She'll get over it."

"Why?"

"Because she was taking you away from me!" Hannah snapped, "Why did you think? That I'm a murderer now? I didn't set out to kill her. I just wanted to be with you, but she twists your brain against me. She plots and argues, Davy. She makes you doubt me. And I can't be with you if you have even the slightest doubt in my existence."

"I don't doubt your existence," Davy said, "I tried to. I listened to Lorna, and she told me how you were just a figment of my imagination. And I couldn't prove otherwise, even to myself, because you disappeared."

"I was here," Hannah said, her voice calm. She walked over to Davy, sat next to him on the cot, put her arms round his shoulders. He leant into her. There was no warmth to her, but somehow he felt better just by virtue of proximity.

"If you want to be with me," Hannah said, "we need to take away the risk. Other people – alive people – they don't believe in me, and that means you doubt me. We need to be alone."

"How?" Davy asked.

"You'll be out of here soon," Hannah said, "Your brother is on his way. Come and find me."

"Where?"

"You know where," Hannah said.

"Don't go," Davy said, but she had already disappeared.

* * *

True to Hannah's word, Maxwell strolled into the cell two hours later.

"Honestly," Maxwell said, "Kids these days."

"I didn't do anything," Davy said, standing up.

"I know," Maxwell said, "If you did you'd have an interesting story to tell. As it is, you're just panicking the parents. I might enjoy that phone call."

"I'll keep that in mind next time."

"Yeah, yeah," Maxwell said, "Come on."

Chapter 13

It was midnight. Davy knelt down by Minstrel, packed bag in his hand.

"Minstrel," he said, his voice a whisper, "Minstrel, I just want to say sorry."

The girl let out a snore.

"You shouldn't have had to put up with me," Davy said, "It was unfair. I needed one of two things: Hannah, or professional help. There was nothing you could do. Well, I've got what I need now. You can stop worrying about me.

"I'd do this when you were awake, but you'd only talk me out of leaving. At very least, you'd try to find out where I'm going. You're smarter than you look." He thought about this. "Mind you," he added, "you look like a hippy."

He got up.

"You're the best housemate I could have ever had," he said, "but I'm moving in with Hannah."

For a moment, he just stood there. Cautiously, he bent down again and kissed Minstrel lightly on her cheek.

She snored again. Her breath stank of pot.

Davy left.

* * *

The Baileys' house was empty.

Davy snuck round to the back garden. Hannah's window opened easily. He climbed through.

The room was almost empty. The bed remained, stripped of sheets, as did the orange rocking horse in the corner. There were a few old coats in a creaky wooden wardrobe. A cardboard box by the door held an assortment of metal Marvel character miniatures and other trinkets. But the posters were gone, as were the rest of Hannah's furniture and belongings.

"You there?" Davy said. He shivered; the room was cold.

"I'm here," Hannah said.

Davy turned to face her. She seemed to light up the room.

"We're together," Davy said, "Like I promised."

* * *

With heat or electricity, the first few days in the house were miserable. But Davy and Hannah stuck it out, and soon Davy was finding ways to make the cold more bearable. He walked around with a blanket round him, wore two pairs of socks, a woolly hat. He bought food; junk food and sandwiches, mostly; things he didn't have to heat up.

Hannah couldn't help with Davy's body temperature, but she could make him feel warmer. That made the place worth living in.

* * *

The front door opened.

Davy poked his head round the bedroom door, bleary eyed. Voices echoed down the empty hallway: a group of people.

He looked back at Hannah, who was lying under the blanket on the bed.

"We've got trouble," he said.

Hannah raised her head. The blanket slipped, revealing a naked shoulder.

"Nothing we can't handle," she said, "Just the two of us, remember?"

Davy nodded, and looked back out the door. He could make out three people: City types, two men, one woman. One of the men stood apart from the other two, and was talking and gesticulating, pointing out the features of the hallway.

"I do believe the placement of the rooms was slightly different for the previous occupants," the agent was saying, "They converted one of the upstairs bedrooms into a living room, and used the living room down here as another bedroom. It gave their daughter some privacy. Obviously, you could keep that arrangement, or return it to a more standard layout. Do you have kids, Mrs Taylor?"

"No," Mrs Taylor replied, "No, not at the moment."

"But we hope to," her husband added enthusiastically, "one day."

"Well, that's just great," the estate agent said, "Why don't we start upstairs?"

"This is bad," Davy whispered to Hannah, returning to the bedside, "What can we do?"

Hannah remained silent.

The estate agent managed to drag out the upstairs tour to five minutes. By the time he returned downstairs, Davy was hiding in the wardrobe, trying not to move lest it creak and give him away.

"And this was the living room," the agent was saying, "It became a bedroom, as I said, and – oh, yes, there's still some bits and bobs in here. The clearing process for this house is still an ongoing process; we're carrying it out on behalf of the owners. This room would have been especially hard for them; I would guess it contained some difficult memories."

"How do you mean?" Mr Taylor asked.

"Well," the estate agent said, his voice low as though he was delivering gossip of the highest order, "the daughter, a charming child that was well loved in the community, had an unfortunate accident in her car. She died instantly. Apparently, her boyfriend was driving, and he went mad and killed himself. Tragic."

"That's terrible," Mrs Taylor said.

"On the other hand," the estate agent said, "Good thing there're no such things as ghosts, eh?"

"Very good thing," Mr Taylor agreed, "This place isn't built on an ancient Indian burial ground, is it?"

The three of them laughed.

"What about this old furniture?" Mrs Taylor asked. Davy heard her footsteps getting closer. Something brushed the front of the wardrobe.

"They'll be gone within the week," the estate agent said, "Unless you would have any reason to keep them around? I suppose we could hold on to it all if you were to consider an offer."

"Oh, no," Mrs Taylor said, "Not this old junk." Her footsteps receded. "That old rocking horse is staring at me, I'm sure of it."

* * *

"That's it, then," Davy said, "We'll be thrown out."

The estate agent had stood for half an hour in the hall with Mr and Mrs Taylor. The couple had sounded very enthusiastic.

"Maybe," Hannah said.

"What do you mean, 'maybe'?" Davy asked, "There's nothing else we can do."

"There's always something."

* * *

The estate agent was back that evening. Davy put down the cold pasty he'd been eating.

"Won't we get in trouble?" the woman with the estate agent asked.

"Of course not," the estate agent said, "No one's here. Only the ghosts."

"Ghosts?"

"Figure of speech. The owners certainly aren't going to care."

"There's no light," the woman said.

"There's no power."

Davy peered round the bedroom door.

The woman was pretty. Young, too; maybe half the age of the estate agent, who looked like he was the wrong side of forty. His suit was expensive, but he wore it badly. The woman was less well-dressed: a short skirt, a cut off top, blonde curly hair.

"She smells the money," Hannah said.

Davy just nodded.

"Hey," the estate agent said, "Get a load of this."

They started to walk towards Hannah's bedroom. Davy ducked back inside.

"They're coming," he said.

"Stay calm," Hannah replied.

The footsteps halted.

"Hey," the woman said, "Hold on. Come here."

The hallway went quiet.

"Are they-" Davy started.

"Probably," Hannah said, "They're not here just to explore. Hide, Davy."

Davy grabbed his food and blanket and clambered back into the wardrobe. He shivered; Hannah put her arms around him.

"Look at this," the estate agent said, finally coming into the room, "The girl whose room this was came back here to die, I heard."

"This was the house you were telling me about?" his date asked, "Why would you bring me here?"

"Because, Melissa," the estate agent replied, "no one's coming back here in a while. The house is officially off the market for the time being. It's haunted. It can't be sold. The people I showed around earlier thought they were being watched the whole time they were here."

Davy furrowed his eyebrows.

"What's he talking about?" he mouthed at Hannah, who stood grinning next to him.

"Why?" Melissa asked.

"The owner died," the estate agent replied, "His heart stopped this morning. Just time for one last breakfast in France. We got the call this afternoon. His wife doesn't want to sell any more, not yet. But she doesn't want to live here either."

Davy's mouth opened, closed. He couldn't swallow; he didn't seem to have any saliva.

Hannah remained silent.

"How did the girl die, Barry?" Melissa asked.

"Car accident," the estate agent replied, "I heard her boyfriend was driving. She was sweet sixteen, never had a chance in life."

"He's full of shit," Hannah said, "Does he really believe all this?"

"That's horrible," Melissa said.

"I think she's here right now," Barry continued. There was a rustle of clothes as he drew Melissa close, "Watching us. Or maybe her psycho boyfriend, who killed himself."

"Stop it," Melissa said, unresisting, "That's just weird."

There was a loud bang.

"What was that?" Melissa asked.

"The window," Barry said, "I think it was the window. Look; it's shut."

The bedroom window, Davy thought. Watch out, he thought, it has a tendency just to slam shut.

"Do you really think there's a ghost?" Melissa asked.

"Of course n-" Barry started, before remembering where he was, "Well, what do you think?"

"Can we go to another room?" Melissa replied, "I don't like it in here. It's too dark."

"Sure," the estate agent said. The confidence was back in his voice, but it sounded like a façade. There was a note of fear, barely audible.

Davy looked over at Hannah. She had disappeared.

"It's creepy in here," Melissa said. She was over by the bedroom door now. "I think I know what those people meant. I feel cold. I feel like I'm being watched."

"It's just a room," the estate agent said.

Davy grinned.

Carefully, he reached down and found his pasty, crushed it in his hand, wiped it over his face. He got a grip on the inside of the wardrobe door, pushed it open slightly, shifted his weight. There was a loud creak.

"What?" the estate agent managed, but Davy hadn't finished. He slammed the wardrobe door shut again. The noise bounced off the walls of the nearly empty room.

"There's somebody here!" Melissa screamed.

"Don't be silly," the estate agent said, "that's just stupid." But he didn't move. He could hear something else.

"Barry..." Davy breathed, "Melissa..."

"Can you hear that?" Melissa said.

"There's someone here," Barry said. He sounded equal parts annoyed and terrified. Davy could hear him walking towards the wardrobe.

He let Barry's fingers touch the door, and then pushed it open as hard as he could. It smacked Barry in the chin.

Barry screamed.

Dressed in black T-shirt and jeans, his pale, tired face visible in the dim moonlight through the window, Davy lurched out of the wardrobe. Dark sauce from the pasty leaked down his face and neck; the pastry and meat adhered to his cheeks like rotting skin.

Davy gave an almighty groan and held his arms out in front of him. He took another step forward and Barry fell backwards, landing on the box of figurines. The man yelled out in pain, brought his hand out in front of him. It was covered in blood; Davy could make out the glint of Wolverine's broken claws embedded in Barry's palms.

Again, Davy lurched forward. Barry and Melissa needed no further encouragement; they ran out of the room, Davy limping behind them, emanating the most frightful moan he could muster. Barry's fingers scrabbled at the lock on the front door and finally he got it open, and the two of them ran out into the night.

"They would have got away with it," Davy said, putting his arms by his sides, "if it hadn't been for those pesky kids."

"You know what?" Hannah said, taking Davy's hand, "you should have told them you wanted to eat their brains."

Chapter 14

The next day, there was a hammering at the door.

"Davy? Davy! It's James! Are you in there?"

Davy sat up on the bed in Hannah's room. Grey morning light was peeping through the closed window.

"Don't answer it," Hannah said. She sounded sleepy.

"He knows I'm in here," Davy said.

"No he doesn't. He's guessing."

"You think the police are with him?" Davy asked, pulling on his jeans, "Think the estate agent has figured us out?"

"He's not going to want to say too much," Hannah pointed out, "What's he going to say? That he took a date back to the house he's not allowed to sell – that he shouldn't even have gone into – and that he was scared away by a ghost or a zombie or something?"

"Davy!" James shouted.

Davy left the room and made his way to the front door. He peeped through the spy hole. James was standing outside, alone. Davy could see the neighbours standing out by the gate, curious about what was going on.

"Don't let him in!" Hannah hissed. She was fully clothed now.

"I have to," Davy said, and he cracked open the door, put his hand through and grabbed James' wrist. He pulled his friend inside and slammed the door shut again.

"Christ," James said, "Easy on the duds, Davy." He looked at Davy's face. "You look like shit."

"What are you doing here?" Davy asked.

"Are you kidding?" James asked, brushing himself down and stepping further into the hall, "We've been out looking for you ever since you left." He looked around. "Don't know why we didn't think to come here first," he said, "Seems obvious now."

"He needs to leave," Hannah said.

"You should go," Davy said, "I'm fine here."

"Really?" James asked, "Is there even any electricity? No? Didn't think so. Where're Hannah's parents?"

"Gone."

"Where?"

"France," Davy said, looking at his feet, "At least, that's where Mrs Bailey is."

"And Mr Bailey? You remember what he said last time you were here?"

"He's dead," Davy said, "I heard... I heard he had a heart attack."

"Oh, Christ," James said, "I'm sorry." He regained his composure. "But you can't live here. What are you going to do? Squat?"

"If I have to," Davy said, "I didn't break in. That's the law, right? If you can get in--"

"Then they can't just walk in and arrest you, yeah," James said, "Yeah, I remember. That was how we were going to find our perfect house back when we were kids. We were joking, Davy. Like the whole thing with Hannah and ghosts. It was fiction."

Davy said nothing.

"Oh, don't think I don't know," James said, "You told Minstrel that you were going to live with Hannah. You think she's here, don't you? Well? Don't you?"

"She's here," Davy confirmed.

"Idiot," Hannah said.

"I hate to break it to you," James said, but she's not. She's not. You wish she was, and now you're sat in an empty house and wasting your life."

Behind Davy, Hannah sat down on the floor. She put her hands on her stomach and moaned softly.

"I'm not wasting my life!" Davy said, "I'm doing the opposite. I'm fighting to be with her!"

"Fighting?" James said, "All I can see is a scared boy who can't even face reality. You're chasing a memory."

"Make him stop," Hannah said. Davy looked round at her. She was doubled over, clutching her gut. There was a flicker, a second where she disappeared.

"I can't," Davy said.

"Make him!"

James followed Davy's gaze.

"Is that her?" he asked, "Is that where you think she is?"

"Don't do this," Davy said.

"Because all I can is an empty hallway, Davy."

Hannah retched.

"James," Davy said, "Stop."

"Want to see how real she is?" James asked, "Watch." He pushed past Davy, walked to where Davy had been looking. He stood over Hannah, his feet practically touching her. "She's not real, Davy. I don't see her and you know what? Neither do you!"

"James," Davy said, "Please!"

"Can we both occupy the same space, Davy?" James asked, "Does that make sense? What are the physics of that?"

He sat down.

Hannah faded, but her outline remained, a translucent frame. Sparks of light flashed where James' body intersected hers.

"See?" James said, "Nothing. Not even a ripple. No slime here. This is your imagination."

"Davy?" Hannah said. Her voice was so quiet Davy could barely hear it.

"Come back to us," James said, "Come and get better again. We're your friends. Let us help."

Davy looked down at him, and then across to the pinpricks of light in Hannah's fading eyes.

"James," he said, "I..."

"It's okay," James said, "There's nothing for you here."

Barely a shadow remained of Hannah.

Davy offered his hand to James. James took it and Davy hauled him to his feet.

"She's real," Davy said.

Davy pulled back his fist and launched it at James' face. He felt a crunch as James' nose shattered under the blow.

"But..." James managed. He fell backwards, hit the floor hard. Next to him, Hannah re-materialised, gasping as though for air. Beads of sweat shone on her face.

"You believed in me," Hannah said, "You saved me."

Davy reached down again. Hannah took his hand. He helped her up and held her close.

"I'll always believe in you," he said, "I love you, Hannah."

"I love you too," Hannah said.

James groaned. His body shifted as he brought his hands to his nose.

"I'm sorry, James," Davy said, "I really am. But I need to be with Hannah, and that means I can't be with you."

He looked at Hannah.

"Come on," he said, "We've got to go."

* * *

"Where are we going?" Hannah asked.

Davy walked fast, his feet moving with a purpose they had lacked for months. Finsbury Park station was crowded, and he had to knock past people to create a big enough gap for both him and Hannah. He didn't think Hannah would be harmed if someone else stood in her, but he didn't want to find out either.

"Davy," Hannah said, "Why did we leave?"

"We can't stay there," Davy said, surprising a couple of businessmen who were buying tickets, "James was right. Someone will come back for the house. Whether it's the estate agents or your mum or the police, we'll be evicted sooner or later. We need to go somewhere we can be together forever."

They reached the platform just as a Victoria Line train pulled up.

"So where, then?" Hannah asked.

"See?" Davy said as they stepped onto the busy carriage, "This is how I can prove you're not Tyler Durden. You don't know what I know."

* * *

It took forty minutes to reach Victoria Station.

Davy spoke only to buy his ticket, holding on tightly to Hannah's hand. They rushed to their train, his face fit into a determined expression. Their direction meant that there were few other passengers, and they found a table seat in the middle of the train. A couple of other people went to sit opposite Davy, but either the look on his face or the stink of his clothes persuaded them otherwise.

As the train began to move, Davy rested his head back.

"We're on our way," he said finally, "We can be together."

Hannah put her head on his shoulder. Outside, the first droplets of rain hit the carriage window.

"This is the nine forty-seven Southern Train service to Hastings," the train manager announced, "I repeat, this train calls at all stations to Hastings."

Chapter 15

Below them, down the hill, through the rain, they could see the fug of Hastings in the distance. The noise of the rain beat down most of the noise from the town, except for the sound of the sea breaking against the rocks at the bottom of the cliff.

They paid no attention.

"Are you sure?" Hannah asked, her cheek pressed against Davy's chest, "Is this what you want?"

"It is," Davy said, "I want to be with you, Hannah. I love you."

"I love you too," Hannah replied.

They kissed, holding each other tightly. The rain lashed off their clothes, threw their hair into knots against their heads. It hardly registered to Davy.

A rumble of thunder rolled across the sky.

"T'was a dark and stormy night!"

Davy looked up, over Hannah's shoulder.

Maxwell stood just down the hill. His suit was drenched, his arms folded.

"Seriously, David," Maxwell said, "This is such a cliché. I mean, it's the middle of the day, but the edge of a cliff in a storm? Bad poetry."

Davy turned to face his brother, clutching Hannah's hand.

"Leave me alone," he said.

"And so selfish, too," Maxwell noted, as though ticking off items on a list, "You always had a creative streak, but I've got to say: this is pathetic."

Davy took a step backwards, moving towards the cliff edge. Another peel of thunder sounded.

"Wait," Maxwell shouted, his hand moving to reach towards his brother, "Sorry, David. I didn't mean it. Can we just talk for a moment?"

"There's nothing to talk about," Davy shouted back, "I've made up my mind."

"I'm going to come closer," Maxwell said, "Don't move."

"Stay back," Davy said, but he remained where he was as Maxwell moved forward.

"Christ," Maxwell muttered, his black patent shoes slipping in the mud, "negotiators on TV never get this kind of weather." He stopped two metres short of Davy and Hannah. "See?" he said, "I just want to talk. Nothing else. If you get bored, go ahead and jump. I can't stop you."

"That's not funny," Davy said.

"No," Maxwell agreed, "it's not. What are you doing, David?"

Lightning ripped across the sky. Thundered hurled after it; the storm was right over them now.

"What does it look like?" Davy asked.

"It looks like suicide," Maxwell said, "It looks like the easy way out. You're lazy and a wet fish, David, but I never had you down as a coward."

"I'm not a coward!"

"So why do this, then?"

"You know why," Davy said, "It's Hannah. It's always about Hannah."

"Ah," Maxwell said, "your ghost."

"Don't start," Davy warned, "I've already listened to James today."

"I know," Maxwell said, "he's the reason I'm here. Damn it, David, I wanted to be the one to punch his face in."

"He called you," Davy said, "Again."

"Of course he did," Maxwell said, "I'm just pissed off he didn't call me sooner. It took him and Minstrel days to figure out you were at Hannah's house. Not a brain between them."

"How did you find me here?" Davy said. He found himself relaxing, his shoulder muscles unknitting.

"How many times did you brag about your big love affair?" Maxwell asked, "I guess you thought I wasn't listening. Well, I wasn't, but when you hear the same story enough times it sinks in. If you were going to

end it all in the name of Hannah, where else would you go? A hill near Hastings next to a cliff. You might as well have been marked on the GPS: Davy and Hannah's old haunt, excuse the pun."

Davy shook his head.

"You followed me," he said.

"Well, all right," Maxwell said, "I had to narrow it down further. I've been behind you since the train station. Easy enough. But I got the Hastings part right, right?"

Davy let out a laugh. He couldn't help it.

"Right," he said.

"Come on," Maxwell said, holding out his hand again, "My suit is ruined. Buy me a cup of tea."

"No."

Davy stared at his brother.

"No," he said again, "This isn't a cry for help, Max. This isn't some morbid impulse. I know what I'm doing." Hannah gripped his hand; his knuckles turned white.

"I can see your hand," Maxwell said, "and I know who you think is holding on to it. Think that's Hannah, David? Because I've got to say, I don't."

"I'm getting bored, Max," Davy said, stepping slowly backwards again. His feet were inches from the edge; he could feel the wind against his back. "I already told James how real she is."

"She's real," Maxwell shouted, "I believe you, David."

"What?" Hannah gasped. The sky flashed brightly, and the noise of the rain was lost in the thunder.

"You can see Hannah?" Davy managed.

Maxwell shook his head. Water splashed off his hair.

"Then what're you talking about?" Davy asked.

"I can't see her, but I know she's there," Maxwell said, pointing at Hannah, "The bitch trying to lead to you over the edge. She's real, but she's not Hannah."

Davy stopped. He stared wild-eyed at Maxwell.

"He's lying," Hannah said, "It's me. You know it's me."

"What's she saying?" Maxwell asked, "Is she denying the charges? Of course she is! She wants you to trust her."

"Not funny, Max," Davy shouted.

"I'm not being funny," Maxwell shouted back, "This can't be Hannah! Hannah wouldn't want-" He gestured at the cliff. "-this. I knew her too. I only met her, what, four times? Enough to know that she loved you."

"You know nothing about love!" Davy spat, "You can't even decide who to screw!"

"Oh, grow up," Maxwell said, "I love my wife. Everything else is just sex. What's your Hannah done since she's been dead?"

"She's been with me!" Davy shouted.

"Really?" Maxwell asked, "because your live doesn't seem to have too many positives right now."

"Because of them," Hannah said.

"Because of you," Davy yelled, "You and James and Minstrel and Lorna and everyone else, making me doubt her so that she'd go away. She did- We did everything we could to fix it. To stay together."

"Like what?" Maxwell asked

"Like Lorna," Davy said, "She tried to get in the way, and look what happened."

"What exactly did Hannah do?" Maxwell asked, his voice quiet again, his face calm, "Throw a drunk driver at her? Lorna's going to be fine, David."

"Hannah's father," Davy managed, the sob welling up inside him, "She... We needed to keep people away..."

"She induced a heart attack in a man still stricken with grief at the death of his only daughter?" Maxwell said, "Tell me David: if this is all true, which part sounds like something Hannah would actually do? The Hannah we both remember?"

The sky blazed with electricity; a triple boom shook the cliff. Davy felt the vibrations beneath his feet.

"He's lying!" Hannah shouted.

"That's not her!" Maxwell yelled.

"Who is it, then?" Davy shouted back, "If that's not Hannah, who is it?"

One last ear-splitting roar of thunder, so loud that Davy lost his balance. He fell to one knee, his foot over the edge of the cliff. His fingers dug into the mud, and he tried to pull himself forward, but he couldn't grip on to anything.

Maxwell stepped closer.

"I don't know," he said.

"He's lying, he's lying, he's lying!" Hannah screamed. She started to beat her hands against Maxwell's back.

Maxwell turned, looked directly at her.

"I see you," he said, "You're not her." He batted an arm at her; it clipped Hannah in the chest and she fell sprawling next to him.

Maxwell looked back at Davy.

"That's not Hannah," he said, kneeling by his brother, "The Hannah I met, she cried when she stepped on a spider. How do you get from that to patricide?" He pointed at the girl, who hoisted herself onto all fours. "How do you get to that?" he asked. He held out his hand to Davy. "Come on," he said, "remember who she really was."

"Hannah?" Davy said, looking up at the muddy, wet face of the ghost, "Do you love me?"

"I do," she shouted, "Don't listen to this monster! I love you, Davy!"

"Will you marry me?"

Below him, the waves beat against the cliffs. He could smell the salt, almost taste the spray on his tongue.

"I will, Davy," she shouted, "We'll be together forever, man and wife! Forever!"

Davy shook his head.

"I think you were right," he said, "I don't think we're ready."

He took Maxwell's hand.

* * *

They sat shaking in the mud. There was a lot to say, but neither of them wanted to talk. They'd talked enough.

Davy hugged his knees. He began to cry, the tears invisible at first against the now diminishing rain. It was the first time he had cried since Hannah had died. Slowly, the sobs built up into a torrent of unspent emotion. Finally, he mourned.

He felt Maxwell's arm round his shoulders, and for a time they sat together, alone.

Hannah was gone.

Chapter 16

Lorna smiled as Maxwell walked into her office.

"You came back," she said, "I figured you were gone for good."

"Yeah, well," Maxwell said, perching on the end of her desk, "My brother had a car thrown at you to save his relationship with a dead girl. Least I could do was say hello."

Lorna smiled.

"How is he?" she asked.

"They released him from the hospital," Maxwell said, "Minor bout of the flu; he'll be shivering for the week, I suppose. Wondered if I could book him in for a session?"

"I can book him in now," Lorna said, "If you don't mind waiting."

Maxwell stood up. He straightened his tie.

"Could you just email him with the appointment," he said, "I need to go."

"Back to the wife?" Lorna asked.

"Back to the wife," Maxwell said, "I've got some lost time to make up for."

Lorna nodded.

"Sorry to hear that," she said, "but good luck. And thank you for not being an asshole about it."

"That's what happens when you have to talk your little brother out of killing himself for love,"

Maxwell said, a lopsided grin on his face, "You stop being such an asshole."

Lorna smiled. Maxwell turned to leave.

"By the way," he said, "if he tells you that I actually talked to the ghost, just agree with him. I haven't got the heart to disappoint him."

* * *

Davy sat on his bed. Pink tissue paper lay next to him, creased and tattered. In his hand, he held the little box that had been inside it.

"Davy?"

He looked up. Minstrel stood in the doorway.

"Hi," he said.

"James is here," Minstrel said, "Want to come for a drink?"

Davy nodded.

"Be right there," he said.

When she had gone, Davy opened the box, looked at the ring inside. Light reflected off the slim diamonds set into it.

"We'd have been ready someday," he said, "I won't forget that."

With that, he closed the box and wrapped it back up in the pink tissue paper. He placed it carefully in the drawer on his bedside table, and then he left.

--END--