

*The  
Ghost  
of  
Lyskerry's*

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# 1 PROLOGUE

No one could survive a fall from this height. You'd have what? Three seconds? Four at the most. The thief peered over the edge of the waterfall and counted. Yeah, four seconds. Max. And then it was Game Over. Looking down had been a mistake. His new perspective caused the world around him to sway sickeningly. His legs shook and his pulse thundered through his head loudly enough for him to hear above the roar of the water. Christ, how much more adrenaline could one body produce?

Even in the darkness of the early hours, he could sense the unstoppable power of the water as the river plunged over the edge of the falls. He could hear it in the tremendous roar that blocked out all other sound. He could feel it in the deep rumbling that vibrated up through his feet, and he could taste it in the spray of mist against his face.

A fragile human body would stand no chance against that.

Curving smoothly over the edge of the falls, the river seemed unaware at first that anything had changed, and for a few moments it continued trying to be a river. But soon enough gravity took hold, tearing it apart and remaking it as a churning, unstoppable torrent, before attempting to slam it through the rocks at the base of the falls.

The thief shuddered. He could well imagine what would happen if gravity tried the same thing with him. Splitting him open like a piece of overripe fruit. Exposing his vital, secret biology to the uncaring night air in a spray of crimson.

A splash of chill water soaked into his trousers. He ignored it, it hardly mattered, and instead he carefully inclined his head heavenward. If he didn't look down, it was almost possible to forget for a moment where he was.

He swallowed and blinked away a sudden swell of emotion. No matter how many times he looked at the night sky here, he knew he would never become accustomed to it. Arching above him fragile veils of dust, thousands of lightyears across, twisted and rippled through the void, illuminated in glowing greens and reds. Incomprehensibly distant supernovae blossomed before his eyes, and died in an instant. The stars were astonishingly bright and clear, and they shone with a purity that illuminated the dark places in the man's soul.

Reminded of his insignificance in the unimaginable enormity of the cosmos, the man reluctantly returned his attention to the present moment.

On either side, thick glassy ropes of water slid past reflecting the hard, cold light of the stars. The flow was so smooth that the water almost appeared solid. He glanced to his left where other rocks, like the one on which he stood, protruded from the surface of the water like crenellations on a drowned castle. Each one was green and slick with algae.

That was a mistake too. Another sickening rush of vertigo overwhelmed him. The horizon tilted alarmingly and he struggled to regain his balance. The block of stone he was standing on, that had previously felt so solid, was transformed in his mind into an unstable floe adrift in a maelstrom of movement. Instinctively, he crouched lower, extending his arms out to either side.

But all was not as futile as it appeared, because the man tottering on the edge of the world knew a secret.

Forcing himself to take deep calming breaths, and keeping his attention locked on the horizon, the thief patted at his jacket pocket. A reassuring solidness, the reason he was here in the first place, met his touch. There was really no need to check; he could feel it pulling down the side of his jacket.

The weight of the stone in his pocket briefly returned the thief's thoughts to his dangerous journey along the lip of the waterfall to reach this precarious position. With each exaggerated step he had taken, as he leaped from stone to treacherous stone, the jewel had thudded heavily against his hip.

But hadn't there been a noise? Some kind of distraction as he had picked and slipped his way across the stones? A chill ran across his back and he shuddered. Could it be that he was not alone out here? The thief twisted around carefully, fearful that he had been followed. But as hard as he tried to focus on the thought, it seemed intent on eluding him, and soon, what had briefly felt so important, rapidly seemed less so. Anyway, what did it matter if anyone had seen him? There was only one way he was getting out of this situation. Let them follow him.

The thief slipped his hand into his pocket and closed his fingers around what lay within. For a gemstone it was surprisingly large. Withdrawing it, he gazed adoringly downward. His pupils dilated and his eyes became glazed and unfocused. He smiled as a feeling of utter contentment flowed through him. The jewel loved him; he had stolen it from where it had lain, for thousands of years for all he knew, and yet still it loved him.

Had there been anyone else present to observe the thief at that time, they would have seen him close his eyes in ecstasy as his face was bathed in the aquamarine glow that flowed languidly from the gemstone.

The Ghost of Lyskerry

Then they would have seen him step forward  
off the rock and plunge into the abyss.





## 2 THE FOUNTAIN

The face of the woman who had just run her finger gently and somewhat seductively across Jacob Trevorrow's cheek dissolved away to be replaced by the harsh glare of the sodium lamp that topped the stone fountain in Liskeard town centre. Jacob struggled to make sense of this bizarre transition as he gradually surfaced nearer to wakefulness. The soft caress that he had been enjoying resolved into a rivulet of cold water running down the side of his face as the midnight drizzle coalesced into droplets on his chilled skin.

Jacob closed his eyes again and curled into a tighter ball. Just a few more minutes, then he'd wake up and deal with whatever was happening. There was clearly something amiss with his current situation but he was still close enough to sleep to believe that it could all be solved by simply returning

to the delicious, alluring world of his dreams: a world where he was warm instead of shivering; where his back did not ache; and, most importantly at the moment, a world in which his pillow did not feel like a rock.

But it was already too late. Rationality was seeping through his mind like water through worn shoes, asking inconvenient questions about why his clothes felt damp and pointing out that simply going back to sleep would not actually change his situation in the real world.

Jacob scowled and half opened one eye. The flat, starless sky that framed the fountain reflected back the yellow glow of the street lights. The whole scene was tipped over onto its side.

Unyielding granite pressed hard into the side of Jacob's head, and reluctantly he raised himself up off the pavement onto one arm. His chilled muscles protested at the movement. The fountain rotated in his vision into its more usual orientation and Jacob shivered as night air flowed into his lungs, unexpectedly cold and fresh. With returning consciousness came the realisation that he had been sleeping on the ground in the centre of town for what felt like some time. He had not started the night out here, he could clearly remember climbing into bed in his flat.

Staggering to his feet, Jacob was forced to grasp the edge of the stone fountain for support. His body, it seemed, was still some way behind his head in its return from sleep. He swore and groaned as

the act of standing up brought new areas of clothing that had not been warmed by his body heat into contact with his skin; the night's rain had soaked him through. At least he was dressed, that was an improvement on the last time this had happened.

As full consciousness returned, new worries began to clamour for attention. He had obviously been sleepwalking again, what if someone had seen him? How long had he been out here? Had he locked the door? Had he even closed it?

Thanks, in no small part, to the antics of his father, people already considered his family odd. It was hardly surprising. Claiming that Liskeard harboured a gateway to an alternate reality was bound to raise a few eyebrows. For Jacob to compound that by gaining a reputation for sleepwalking through the town was the last thing the family needed.

Turning in unsteady circles, Jacob was relieved to find there was no one around. The town was eerily quiet and empty. A glance across the road towards Pike Street dropping away opposite him allowed a good view of the illuminated clock face on the guildhall tower. Three thirty in the morning. That was good. The chances of anyone being around at this time were remote, and even if they were, now he was up off the ground, and especially as he was fully clothed, he would attract little attention.

Shivering, with his arms tightly folded and his hands tucked under his armpits, Jacob searched his

memory for clues as to how long he had been lying beneath the fountain. A late evening double espresso, and a particularly intense game of Call of Duty, had between them contributed to a late night. It had been at least one o'clock, late enough on a weekday when he had to be up for work, but that was actually a good thing: Liskeard would have to wait until Saturday night for the weekly two a.m. surge of drunken revellers onto the street from the town's only nightclub. Although now that he was more awake he realised that, had anyone encountered him as they were leaving, he would almost certainly have been aware of it before now.

Jacob was about to cross over to Pike Street hill, the quickest route back to his flat, when he realised that the town was not as empty as he had thought. On the opposite side of the road, at the far end of the street there was movement. His initial jolt of fear soon subsided as the rush of adrenaline faded. He would be safe enough, as long as he kept well out of sight.

It was only the Queen of England.

## 03 THE NIGHT WHEN EVERYTHING CHANGED

Afterwards, Peter Trevorrow would wonder why he hadn't been more unsettled by the strange and, in retrospect, rather disturbing events that were to occur that evening, but the only ominous thing about the morning had been the sound of heavy rain lashing against the bedroom window. Parting the curtains a crack so as not to wake Catherine, he had peered out to be greeted by the sight of the farm and the rolling fields beyond cowering beneath swollen black clouds hanging low in the sky.

Peter spent the day reluctantly labouring on the farm, wishing that he could be somewhere, anywhere, else. The relentless rain had turned the fields into soft sticky mud that sucked at his Wellington boots and tried to pull them from his feet.

After a while he had given up trying to stop the dirty water flowing over the tops of his boots and soaking his socks and had resigned himself to a miserable day of being wet.

Arriving home in the late afternoon, he had spent much longer than he intended in the shower warming himself up and had to grab something quick to eat from the freezer before hurrying out again to work his shift at the pub. Having already worked for a full day on the farm, he hadn't particularly wanted to work in the evenings as well but with two children at home the extra money would certainly help, or so Catherine told him. It generally didn't do to argue with her, not on matters of domestic finance, and especially if he didn't want to spend another night on the sofa.

As it turned out, he found that he didn't mind the work at the pub too much. It was a quiet sort of place, there was rarely any trouble, and every now and then a band would be booked to play which made the evening more interesting. There was no band playing that night though, in fact there was not really much of anything going on, the rain had taken care of that. Peter could not blame his customers for staying at home; if it had not been for work he would not have gone out either.

By nine thirty the bar was empty and Peter was alone in the pub. Well, alone if you didn't count the man in the hooded sweatshirt sitting at a table in a darkened corner close to the fireplace. Which was odd in itself. Peter could not recall the man coming in, and with so few customers tonight he was fairly sure he would have noticed. And, now he came to think of it, that corner of the room was not usually in shadow either, perhaps a bulb had blown. Still, the firelight did make it look rather inviting, perhaps that was why the man had chosen to sit there. Peter was trying to work out how long the man had been there, and thereby determine what would be a reasonable

time to wait before suggesting that he consider buying a drink, if he was planning on staying that was, when he realised that the man in the hoodie was no longer at the table in the corner and was instead now standing on the other side of the bar. Well, that was one awkward conversation he no longer had to worry about.

Now that the man was out of the shadows, Peter could see that he was not wearing a sweatshirt after all. It was a hooded cape, the sort of thing a highwayman would wear or an elf from one of those video games his son loved to play. Did you even still get highwaymen? There probably wasn't much call for them these days what with motorways and fast cars and such. By the time the shout of *stand and deliver* had gone out any car would be little more than a memory. Peter shook his head; his mind was wandering and his eyelids were starting to droop. These long days working must be getting to him.

“Care to join me in a drink?” said the man in the cape.

Peter's head spun, whatever was making him feel so tired was certainly doing a good job of it; inexplicably the words the man said were a deep shade of indigo, and mostly softly curved but with hidden barbs that would bite deeply and hold before you even noticed. They smelled of cinnamon.

“Sorry,” said Peter, “I'm feeling a bit strange all of a sudden. What did you say?” The man smiled. Did his eyes just flash violet? That couldn't be right, violet was not a normal eye colour was it? Perhaps it was.

"I said," said the man as he lowered his hood and leaned in close across the bar, "that you look like you could use a drink."

Peter had to concede that he had a point. He was pretty sure he did need a drink, although for some bizarre reason he felt as though he should have been the one asking the question. He smiled at the thought, he had no idea where it had come from, surely the man must know what he was doing.

"Yeah," he said, "you're not wrong."

"Glass?" said the man. Peter blinked and shook his head to clear it, his mind had been drifting again. He focussed on the man on the other side of the bar. Those pointed ears certainly suited him; you don't see ears like that too often. The intricate line of silver tracing the upward sweep at the back and extenuating the tip must be some kind of jewellery, although he couldn't see how it was attached. And those tattoos curving across his cheekbones, that was some high quality ink work. Must be some new kind of dye to change hue like that with each word he spoke.

"Sorry, what?" said Peter.

"You'll need a glass. Only a small one."

"Oh yes," said Peter, reaching down below the bar, finding two shot glasses and placing them onto the counter in front of him. The man produced an engraved silver flask from a pocket within his cape and unscrewed the lid.

"Go easy with this my friend, it's powerful stuff." He leaned even closer to Peter and decanted a dark ruby liquid into the glasses. Gazing into it, Peter was reminded of documentaries he had seen on television of the life that lives in the deep oceans; all alluring, glassy iridescence and lethal, needle-like



teeth. Was that something he should be worried about? He shuddered and looked up.

The man in the cloak was staring intently at him, and without breaking eye contact he lifted one of the glasses and consumed the contents in a single swallow, daring Peter to do the same. The man smiled, and Peter was struck by his fine features: perfect white teeth; high, sharp cheekbones; flawless skin and those startling violet eyes. He was starting to feel a little uncomfortable. He had never understood what it was that men who liked other men saw in each other, not that he had an issue with it, just didn't understand it, but whatever it was, the man behind the bar must have been right at the front of the queue when they were handing it out. Mentally retreating from the unfamiliar thoughts he picked up his glass and drank. The man was right about one thing; the drink was very strong.

The rest of the evening proved even more difficult to maintain contact with than the first half had been. Peter was dimly aware of flickering firelight and drinking more of the dark liquid and listening to the man's musical voice. Oddly, when he thought back on the events of the evening later, these vague memories were interspersed with flashes of moonlit forest tracks picked out in silver, of moving at a graceful loping run through the night between dark stands of trees, of dancing along branches high above the ground, of crossing walkways strung between the trees and of drifting ribbons of fireflies.

At the end of the evening, Peter had reached for his wallet to pay the man only to be reminded that he should be the one receiving payment. That

was right wasn't it? The man in the cape produced a coin and placed it onto the bar. As it clicked down onto the counter everything seemed to snap back into place. It was as if Peter had been looking at the world from slightly the wrong angle all evening, and he had suddenly got a fix on something that he recognised and the rest of the world rotated back into place around it.

When he looked up again the man was gone, in all probability he had never been there at all. Of course, there couldn't have been an elf in the bar; everyone knew that there were no such things as elves, were there? Smiling to himself at his own foolishness and shaking his head he reached down to slide the old worn coin off the bar, his fingers brushed across the illegible markings that might have once been words. That was the point when everything changed.

Suddenly Peter was aware of a connection, some sort of a portal between this world and, well, somewhere else. It was not something he could see as such, but he knew where it was, and at the moment it was in a secluded dell somewhere outside St Keyne; far enough away that he would not have time to investigate during the working day tomorrow.

Over the course of the next few days Peter found that his newly acquired awareness of the location of the gateway, as it seemed most convenient to think of it, wasn't always in his mind, but that he could summon it at will. And also that although there was only ever a single gateway, it could not be relied on to stay in the same place. Rather frustratingly it relocated frequently enough

that he was never able to find enough time to reach it before it moved on.

Until the evening that it appeared at the Pipe Well, only a few minutes from the pub.

Of course, that had been years ago. His children were grown now, Jacob even had a full time job. And Catherine... Well, Catherine was long gone.