

THE
DAEMON
PARALLEL

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ROY GILL



Kelpies

For RDP

Thanks to Ann Cook and Isobel Nesbit – who I hope would see the funny side

Mum and Dad – for tea and cake, and labradors on loan

Lindsey – who saw I was stuck, and managed to unstick me



This book is also available
as an eBook .

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1. An Offer Over Coffee

It was over coffee and biscuits that Grandma Ives offered to return Cameron's father from the dead.

"It won't be easy, of course. A resurrection spell is old magic, and quite unwieldy. You would have to be both strong and brave, and I'd have to speak to Mrs Ferguson, which is never pleasant. But I can do it. If you want me to."

Cameron stared at her. The old lady had made her proposal just as casually as she now pushed a plate of biscuits towards him.

"What do you mean, 'a resurrection spell'?"

"Revitalise. Bring back. Make as if he'd never died. I'd have thought the meaning was quite obvious." Her eyes narrowed. "Do you think I'm bluffing?"

You've got to be. Cameron's heart quickened in his chest. He looked away, choosing to examine Grandma Ives' living room rather than reply. The winter sun was poking over Blackford Hill and light flooded in the balcony window, picking out the gold spines on the books, and showing up dust swirls on the bulgy grey screen of the old television. In the corner alcove, a jazz LP spun on the ancient record player and a warm fuzzy voice sang of *love gone bad*, and *a man who done me wrong...*

He'd been living with the old lady for nearly a week now. She'd done nothing in that time to suggest she was mad, or likely to make up wild stories.

But she can't really mean it. She can't really be offering to bring Dad back to life.

"Well, young man?"

Cameron took a biscuit, put it in his mouth, and crunched it.

"It's good." It wasn't really. Nothing was, these days. The biscuit tasted of dry paper and the sort of marzipan he always picked off Christmas cakes.

This can't be happening..

"You do *miss* him, I suppose?" Grandma Ives spoke the word as if a hair had got stuck on her tongue. "Not that I know why I should bring him back; he was trouble enough the first time. Never listened to a word of my good advice—"

"Of course I miss him!" Cameron shouted, unable to help himself. "Can't you tell? Isn't it obvious?" The thing was, deep down, he worried all the time that he should've begun to miss his dad a little bit sooner..

It was now just over two weeks ago, that first night Dad hadn't come home. Cameron had come in from school, and slung his bag in the corner. He'd booted up his dad's PC and logged on. The computer was nearly as old as he was, and it'd crash if you put a game anywhere near it, but it did alright for checking message boards and downloading music. When it got to 7.30, and he'd still not heard the rumble of his dad's van in the driveway, Cameron went to the kitchen and got on with making his dinner. There was a stack of ready meals in the fridge.

“When I win the lottery I’ll cook,” his dad would say. “I’ll be like Number One Super Chef! Even Jamie Oliver won’t touch me.”

Cameron chose tuna and tomato bake. The label promised it was “delicious” and made to the “best ever recipe”, but somehow he doubted it. As he ate the stringy pasta he watched *The Simpsons* and then a bit of a talent show. Some of the contestants could sing, but they couldn’t dance or didn’t have the right look. Others had great hair or clothes, but screeched and wailed like angry cats.

He picked up his bowl, pausing on his way to the kitchen as he caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror over the fire. His best friend Amy said he wasn’t bad looking, if he’d only have a bit of confidence. Cameron didn’t see it. He was tall for his age, sure, but he was thin too, and not exactly broad about the shoulders. He ran his hand through his hair, which fell down in a dark thatch over his eyes. Maybe he should get it cut to look like one of the guys off the telly? Amy would love that. She’d go on about it for a week. Then again, interesting hair got you noticed, and he didn’t want to do anything to make himself stand out more at school...

He channel hopped for a while, then reluctantly went up to his bedroom to get on with his homework. He put his stereo on loud; perhaps the noise would help drive some particularly dull maths problems into his skull. The driveway was still empty when he went to bed at 11.30, falling asleep to the sound of his headphones whispering in his ears.

The truth was, his dad was so often home late, Cameron had stopped finding it unusual. He ran Duffy's Quick Clearances, and spent his days emptying houses after their owners died, or moved away, or went bankrupt. He would sort out the things worth selling, and take the lumpy old furniture nobody wanted to the dump. When Cameron was small, his dad sometimes took him along. He would run wild round strange, slowly-emptying spaces. Sad-eyed relatives of the departed would look at him fondly, and slip him fifty pence. Other times he'd get shouted at for being a nuisance and making too much noise.

Now his dad hardly ever wanted to take him, even if the jobs were at a weekend.

"You've got to study. Find out what you want and how to get there," he'd say. "Don't just fall into something like I did."

Cameron would ask what he meant, but his dad would always push the question away.

Sometimes emptying a house meant working late into the night. People would leave it to the last minute to call the clearers. Malcolm Duffy and his lads would have to put in long hours to get the job done. If a client's house was far away, Cameron's dad would sometimes even bunk down in his van. When he came home the next day, he'd shake his head sadly and say, "You wouldn't believe how much stuff people collect."

Cameron would nod, thinking how his dad kept loads of odds and ends, all packed into the spare room; stuff he hadn't been able to shift but insisted might be useful. The garage was crammed too, and the van usually had to

sit outside. On cold mornings, the engine would cough over and over before it shuddered back to life...

On the second day his dad did not come home, Cameron had gone round to Amy's. Annoyingly, all Amy wanted to do was talk about some boy in the sixth year she'd got a crush on. Cameron hadn't been sure what to say. He concentrated on checking out which new tunes Amy had added to her laptop, and waited for her to change the subject.

"Stay for dinner, Cam," said Amy when her mum got in from her shift at the hospital. Her mum's eyes were red around the corners, and Cameron didn't think he should push his luck. He caught the bus home instead.

Fireworks popped and crackled above his head as he walked along Scott Street. People were getting ready for bonfire night early this year. As he turned the corner, he saw that the van was still not back in the drive. In the kitchen, his dirty plates lay untouched in the sink. If Dad had been in during the day, he'd have expected to find a clutter of mugs there too.

Cameron wasn't sure what to do. The odd evening on his own was kind of fun; after a day in school, with its overheated cabbagey corridors, he enjoyed the space.

If Dad wasn't going to make it home tonight either, Cameron told himself he wasn't bothered. He would make the most of it. He'd raid the fridge, have a fry-up, and pig out in front of the telly. He'd put on that music channel that played nothing but rock and indie, the one that always made his dad glare and plug his ears...

He grinned. It was an excellent plan! But when he sat down on the sofa, with his skilfully cooked plate of

food – bacon brown and crispy, eggs running into the beans – it didn't seem to taste right.

He tried his dad's mobile. He hadn't bothered before, when it had just been another late night. Two days without a message or text was definitely odd, though. When an answering *Brrrupp!* came from the old donkey jacket hanging up on a peg by the door, Cameron thumped his hand off his head in frustration. His dad was always leaving his phone in the wrong coat.

He looked up the tatty address book by the hall phone. There was no one permanently on the payroll of Duffy's Quick Clearances, but there were a couple of guys his dad used regularly. Big Joe had the biggest beer belly you've ever seen. Scribbled in the phone book was "Try Black Bull" next to Joe's name, so Cameron called the pub.

Big Joe hadn't heard a thing. "Dinna concern yersel', lad. It'll all come oot fine in the wash." He was keen to get back to his drinking.

Cameron called Eric next. Eric was trying to make it as a singer, when he wasn't shifting furniture. Dad said Eric was sensitive, which Cameron took to mean his songs tended to go on a bit.

Eric was on the way home from band practice. "I haven't been out on a job in weeks, Cam, and I'm noticing it. Listen, are you alright there, mate? Do you want me to head over?"

"Nah. It's cool. I'm ok."

Cameron went back to the living room to worry. Not long later, the doorbell rang.

"I'm fine, Eric, really—"

It wasn't Eric on the doorstep. The two policemen invited themselves in, asked a load of questions, and made several cups of tea Cameron didn't want. They spoke on their radios, looked at each other gravely, and offered to make more tea.

About an hour later, another police officer arrived. She was young and pretty, with dark hair pulled back into a ponytail. When she opened her mouth to speak, Cameron noticed an odd little gap between her bottom teeth. As she told him about the way they'd found the van by the caves on the beach at Weymss, the body on the sand, he found himself focussing on that gap, as if concentrating hard enough could keep him from crying.

The next week and a half passed in a painful sort of blur. Amy's mum put him up at first. Amy hadn't known what to say. She kept apologising, saying she was there for him, and asking if he wanted to talk. Cameron just wished she'd shut up and leave him alone.

Moving in with Grandma Ives hadn't been Cameron's idea. He barely knew the old lady. He had only vague memories of a woman with steel-grey hair, who'd turned up once on his seventh birthday. She'd given him a wooden music box, then sat in the corner, watching him intently. Cameron's dad had been angry for some reason, and had taken the box away.

"He's not going to be like you. You and your daft old ways! You keep your hands off!" he'd said, before showing her the door.

Cameron's dad never made any secret of the fact he didn't get on with his mother. There were cards that came

through the post at Christmas, but no more visits. So Cameron had been amazed when his dad's will said Mrs Isobel Euphemia Ives-Duffy of 24 Observatory Road, Edinburgh was to be his guardian.

Cameron had tried to explain to Carole the social worker that he didn't know the old woman at all. She hadn't listened.

"Crises like these, they have a wonderful way of bringing family together. You're only thirteen. There's no way you can live on your own."

Cameron's house turned out to be owned by his mum and dad together, but no one knew where Elaine Duffy was these days, Cameron included. There were only a few precious things he remembered about her, she left so long ago.

"There are all sorts of complicated legal things to be sorted before the will can be settled," Carole said. "You're best off with your gran. And your school has agreed to send work home for now."

She helped the boy pack some of his possessions, and drove him in her battered Volvo to Grandma Ives' house in the south of Edinburgh. Even though it was only fifty minutes away from his home in Cauldlockheart, Cameron had never been to her house before. As they sat in Grandma Ives' living room, Carole promised she'd drop in soon. Grandma Ives insisted that would not be necessary. Her tone suggested she was used to getting what she wanted.

"I can see you'll both get on famously!" Carole said, as she packed up her notes in her leatherette briefcase.

Cameron had exchanged a wary glance with his newly acquired Gran. “Grandma Ives” – that’s what he was supposed to call her. She looked smart in an old-fashioned sort of way, and thin, and more than a bit stern.

Not like a proper granny at all...

A proper granny would never offer to bring her only son – his dad – back from the dead.

“I can tell by your face you don’t care for the biscotti. That’s alright. You don’t have to eat them.”

He looked down at the plate she’d pushed towards him. Dad wouldn’t have put out biscuits like that, with their posh paper wrappers and icky-acid almond taste. You’d get a torn-open packet of Hobnobs, or maybe some Jaffa Cakes. The coffee wouldn’t come in a glass pot with a plunger either...

Cameron’s hands went to his stomach. Everything normal, everything he had grown up with, had been taken away. The pain of losing Dad felt like someone had cut a vital muscle from his guts, and it wasn’t getting any better. He still went about, day by day, walking and talking and eating as if he were normal and healthy, but all the time he was trying to hold himself together, to stop the gap from spreading. He blamed himself for all sorts of things: for not noticing something was up with his dad; for not calling the police sooner; for not starting to worry when something still could’ve been done. And now the old woman was offering to put that missing part back, to give him the chance to find out what really happened, to magically make it all better...

“Did you mean what you said, about bringing him back?” Cameron hardly dared to believe it.

“I always mean what I say.” Behind Grandma Ives’ wire-framed glasses, her eyes were calm and steady, without a hint of doubt or playfulness.

“Yes,” he said quietly. “Please. Bring him back.”

“What was that?” The old lady leaned closer.

“Bring him back. Just tell me what I have to do.”

Grandma Ives smiled. “Good boy,” she said.

2. Night-time Stories

Cameron's trainers scrunched along the beach. The night sky above him was dark blue, and the waves that hit the shore sounded oddly muffled. Where was he? How had he got here? The answer seemed just out of reach, like when you try to name a song half heard on the radio, and the lyrics nag you all day long.

He turned his questions into a rhythm, beaten out by his trainers on the pebbles. Where – am – I? I'm – on – a – beach. Which – beach – where? I – don't – have – a – scooby. No. No, that wasn't helping. He stopped and looked all round him. He could see water, sand and pebbles, and a scrubby sort of headland with a yellowish glow breaking through the grass. The air smelled of salt and of something slightly rotten. Perhaps a dead bird or animal was lying on a rock somewhere, just out of sight. He decided to head towards the light. As he scrambled up the shallow cliff that separated the beach from the land, the glow resolved itself into the headlamps of a familiar white Ford Transit. Cameron broke into a run.

“Dad? Where are you? Dad?” His voice seemed to vanish into the night, the words coming out dull and flat. The driver's seat was empty, the inside of the cab its usual mess of newspapers, roadmaps and old cassette tapes. He tugged at the door handle but

it refused to click. He had more luck round the back: one of the rear doors was unlocked. Cameron yanked it open and ducked into the darkened interior, taking in the familiar scent of mothballs, oil, and old fish-supper wrappers.

The back of the van, usually crammed to the roof with furniture, was almost empty. A crumpled shape slung in the corner turned out to be his dad's duffel bag. Kneeling, Cameron unknotted the bag's drawstrings and examined the contents: a pair of his dad's jeans, some T-shirts, a jumper... Tucked in-between was a scattering of photographs he recognised from the walls at home. Here he was as a wee boy, building spaceships from Lego. Then a shot of him and Dad on the dodgems. Next, him and Mum at a picnic, back before she left. She was holding out a plate of sandwiches, her face pretty but sad. What were the photos doing in the bag? Where was Dad going that he needed to take them?

A movement in the corner of his eye caught Cameron's attention. Something had passed the windscreen, breaking the light from the headlamps. It might have been an animal, but the shape felt all wrong for that. He peered through the gap between the front seats and out of the windscreen. This time he saw it: a figure in a long dark cloak – its hood pulled down to hide the wearer's face – hurrying towards him across the sand.

Suddenly terrified, Cameron scrambled to the rear of the van. He grabbed the door and pulled it closed as quietly and quickly as he could. There was no way to lock the rear doors from inside, but he figured if

he hunkered down by the duffel bag then maybe he wouldn't be seen in the shadowy interior.

There was no sound from outside. On the beach Cameron's every footstep had been reported by the pebbles, but up here on the grass there was nothing to let him know if someone was coming. He shifted slightly in his crouch and his kneecap cracked. Cameron swore under his breath. It sounded like a gunshot to him – would anyone have heard outside?

There was still no indication of movement. What was he to do? He could pull himself over the seats into the front of the van, but he didn't know whether the key was still in the ignition. The front door had been locked, so it didn't seem likely... He had to chance it. If the key was there, he'd start the van, and try to drive it. If not, he could open the driver's door and make a run for it into the night. He tensed himself for action.

A creak from the rear door gave him his cue. It eased its way open, and Cameron just saw a set of long white fingers creep their way around the edge before he flung himself at the gap between the front seats and the roof. The leg of his jeans caught on the gear stick as he vaulted over. He tugged it free. Something grabbed at his other foot. Hoarse breath rasped in his ear. He struggled and yanked, but the bony grip was tight upon his ankle...

Cameron woke, drenched in sweat. All at once he knew where he'd been: the beach at Weymss where they'd found his dad. He tried to sit up, and found the bedsheets had wound themselves into a knot around his legs. His feet fizzed with pins and needles. He

shook them free, drew his knees up to his chest, and hugged himself.

Cameron had dreamt a lot about his dad since he'd died. Those dreams were usually vague and sad, but this one seemed so real. He could still half smell the sour and salty air in his nostrils...

Don't think about it. He forced himself to lie back down. From his pillow, he could see 01.24 in blue glowing numbers on his mobile. There was still an awful lot of night to go. He reached for his headphones, but of course they weren't there. His mini-system was stranded on a table by the window, near the only free socket. When he'd moved in, Grandma Ives had given him this huge upstairs room to himself. Unlike the ordered neatness of the rest of her house, it was clear she'd been using it for storage. There were boxes and books piled on every surface. He'd even found a stuffed mongoose – its furry limbs raised up, ready to pounce – lurking in the clutter on top of the bed.

“That's Monty,” Grandma Ives had explained. “Came from India. He's been in the house for years and I can't bring myself to throw him away. You don't mind sharing?”

Cameron had examined the dead animal's glassy eyes and yellow teeth. “I'll cope. As long as he doesn't bite.”

“You're quite safe, unless you're a snake.” She put the mongoose on top of a bureau, and Cameron later chucked a T-shirt over it. It snagged on the creature's claws, but at least he didn't have to look at it.

“It'll take us a while to sort things out,” Grandma Ives had said, “but I hope we'll find a way for you to be happy here.”

Over the course of the first week, they'd set to and cleared the room. Bit by bit Grandma Ives' junk went out, and Cameron's things moved in. Bags and boxes of CDs, books and clothes arrived, and his posters were stuck up over the old flowery wallpaper. His dad's PC sat in the corner, gathering dust. It was doubly useless now, as Grandma Ives didn't show any signs of getting broadband. There were still tons of things back at the old house, his dad's stuff mainly. But Grandma Ives said that was a problem for another day.

Cameron turned over in bed. His mouth was dry, and every time he closed his eyes he had the feeling he was going to end up dreaming about the beach again. He decided to get up and get a glass of water. He swung himself from the bed, and grabbed a sweatshirt off the back of a chair.

Downstairs the kitchen light was on. Grandma Ives was up too. The old woman was wrapped in a green velvet dressing gown, her hair hanging loose about her shoulders in long silver strands. She was shaking flour into a large mixing bowl on the table.

Cameron didn't know where to look. This was nothing like him and his dad in their T-shirts on a weekend morning, grunting at each other over their teacups and cereal bowls. He turned to go, but she'd already seen him.

"Good evening, Cameron. Or should I say good morning? What brings you down here?"

"I need a glass of water."

"Well, help yourself. There's cocoa on the shelf if you prefer. I find it calming after bad dreams."

“Who said I had bad dreams?” A flush of anger ran through him. If anyone was to blame for his nightmare it was her, with her mad outrageous promise of bringing Dad back. She’d clammed up after he’d agreed to her plan, but the idea had been festering away at the back of his mind. It wasn’t the sort of thing you could easily forget.

“I just want a drink, that’s all. I’ll get it and go.”

“Bad dreams wouldn’t be unusual, given what you’ve gone through.” She held out her hands in a calming gesture. “That was all I meant.”

There was an uncomfortable pause. Cameron sipped his water and watched as she began to stir the mixture in the basin.

“What are you doing?” he said eventually.

“I’m making dough for bread. I suffer from sleepless nights too. A little activity helps me relax.” She held out the wooden spoon to him and smiled. “You could stir this for me, if you like.”

“I guess.” Cameron took the spoon. It wasn’t like he was in a hurry to go back upstairs anyway.

“I don’t usually have a helper for my nocturnal bakery.” Grandma Ives collected a wooden board from the cupboard and began to cover it with flour. “Would you like a story, to help time pass?”

“If you want to,” he said guardedly. “Don’t you think I’m a bit old for bedtime stories?”

“Oh, this story won’t send you to sleep, far from it. It has a little to do with our earlier conversation. Shall I begin?”

Cameron shrugged.

“I’ll take that as a yes.” Grandma Ives tipped the dough onto the board, and as she told her story, she began to knead. “The last trial for witchcraft was in 1727, did you know that?”

He shook his head, a little surprised at her choice of subject. Did she really think talk about witches was going to cure his insomnia?

“It’s more recent than people think,” the old lady continued. “Not long after, all of Europe began to look to Scotland and to Edinburgh for inspiration. There were new ideas about science, about philosophy, about engines for movement, about how the Earth came into being. They said it was a period of enlightenment, and superstition and the old belief in magic began to recede. Why do you think that might be?”

“I thought this was a story, not a history lesson,” Cameron grumbled.

“It’s always good to ask questions, Cameron. That’s how you find out how stories work.”

Cameron rubbed his eyes and reluctantly engaged his brain. “Ok. When you’re a kid, you believe in things like the tooth fairy and Santa and monsters under the bed. But when you get older, you stop. You realise they’re made up. Maybe that’s what happened? People just sort of grew up.”

“Good thinking. Completely wrong, of course, but nicely reasoned. How about this... Perhaps it wasn’t the people that changed. Perhaps it was the world?” She gave Cameron a very direct look.

“Go on.” He folded his arms across his chest. “You’re not boring me.”

“I’m so pleased.” Grandma Ives attacked the dough with renewed vigour. “There was once a great and powerful man called Alexander Mitchell. You won’t find him in the official history books. His family had for years held great power in their hands, both in this world and in the daemon world beyond—”

“The *daemon* world?”

“*Where dwell those creatures that are not man, no nor angel either,*” she recited. “Where do you think the monsters people used to believe in came from?”

“Ri-ight.” Cameron had the distinct impression this conversation was running away from him. “And this daemon world would be where exactly?”

Grandma Ives took her hands from the dough, rinsed them, and plucked some fruit from a tray on the counter. She set an orange on the table in front of Cameron.

“Imagine the Earth as a spinning sphere.” She added an apple, right next to the orange. “Imagine the daemon world as another sphere, occupying a fractionally different space.” She walked her fingertips from the top of the orange across to the apple. “The two were so close, at times you could step from one to the other.”

“But the world’s not really like that,” said Cameron dubiously.

“Oh? And how do you know that?”

“There’ve been spaceships up there. Satellites take pictures all the time. We’d know if there was another world nearby.”

Grandma Ives sighed. “Lower your head, so your chin touches the table.”

“Why?”

“Indulge me.”

Feeling a little daft, Cameron did as he was asked.

“How many fruits can you see?”

“Two.” The orange looked large and juicy, right before his nose. She lifted the apple, and put it directly behind the orange.

“And now how many?”

“Just one.”

“Which is what your rocket-ships and sputniks would see: the Earth alone in outer space.”

“But I *know* the apple’s still there!” he said stubbornly.

“You’ve just hidden it.”

“Just as I *know* the daemon world exists alongside ours.” She stuck a finger under his chin and lifted it up.

“You simply need the right perspective to see it.”

Cameron glowered, and rubbed flour from his neck.

“That’s not fair.”

“Life rarely is.” She returned to kneading her dough.

“Alexander Mitchell – of whom I was about to speak – didn’t care for the idea of dual human and daemon worlds at all. Far from being part of the natural order, he believed the daemon world was exerting a corrupting influence on its partner. He reasoned that if there was some way to free us from it permanently, we could evolve along a uniquely human path of science and rationality, and leave the dark days of magic well behind.

“Over in the daemon world, a mage called Astredo had been plotting along similar lines. He believed daemonkind would flourish best in a world of magic alone, untainted by man’s ideas. Together, Mitchell and Astredo contrived a plan to separate the worlds.”

“But if they’d always been so close,” said Cameron, toying with the orange, “wouldn’t that be really dangerous?”

“Insanely, stupidly so,” agreed Grandma Ives.

“So how were they going to do it, this mad plan of theirs?”

“They used their dark skills to find a fissure point, a magical fault line where the connection between the worlds was weak. By exerting enough force, they hoped to separate the worlds entirely. Mitchell’s fissure point was right here in Edinburgh, above Salisbury Crags on Arthur’s Seat.”

Cameron knew those hills. “Arthur’s Seat used to be a volcano, didn’t it? Millions of years ago.”

Grandma Ives nodded. “Whatever subterranean clash threw it from the Earth also uncovered the fault line the conspirators would exploit. With Astredo and his coven ready to channel their power from the daemon world, Mitchell called together his followers. It was a dreadful night, the sky black and moonless, and the wind howling around the cliffs. The men clutched their hats to their heads, and the women wrapped their shawls tightly. The air was so cold it chilled you to the bone.”

Cameron shot the old lady a quizzical glance. “You sound like you remember it...”

“Cameron Duffy, I may be a little past my prime, but really! Now, where was I?”

“On the crags,” he prompted. Grandma Ives was giving a great performance, her eyes flicking round the room, and her floury fingers gesturing as she brought the story to life.

“Now, as the two covens focussed their magic, the tortured worlds screamed out their protest. The covens pushed and pushed, but no matter how much power they threw in, the worlds resisted. Rather than the clean separation they hoped for, they merely forced open a rift: a howling void neither of one place nor the other.

“When Mitchell’s coven saw the terrible void they’d created, their confidence left them. One by one, their nerves broke, and they fled screaming into the night. Mitchell tried to hold on, but he didn’t have the strength. He was sucked into the rift, and it swirled closed behind him. We can only assume a similar fate befell Astredo, for neither of them have been seen alive since.”

Cameron realised he’d been holding his breath, and slowly let it out. He could almost *feel* the chill of the storm-swept hillside, and see Mitchell’s terrified followers running away, leaving him alone to be drawn helplessly into the void. “So what happened next?”

“Well, for a start, movement between the worlds became a lot rarer. The daemon world’s influence on ours began to decline, if not as completely as Mitchell might have hoped...”

“And that’s when all those new ideas about science and engines and so on started to happen.” Cameron began to understand. “From then on, there were no more goblins, witches and ghosts for us.”

“Fewer, certainly.” Grandma Ives nodded with approval. “Most of the old magic left the human world that night, leaving behind only the occasional pale glimmer that leaks across the gap. In time, people found other things to be scared of.”

Cameron thought about the TV news. It was full of terrorists and pollution, bank crashes and job losses. Nobody had time to care about *proper* monsters any more.

“The story’s not over though, is it? What about the void? Is it still there?”

“Do you know the expression, ‘nature abhors a vacuum?’”

“Yeah, I think.” Cameron racked his brains. “We did something about it in school. It means empty spaces aren’t normal, doesn’t it? Amy kidded on she thought it was something to do with Hoovers.”

“Amy sounds like an amusing girl. Remind me to ask her to dinner,” said Grandma Ives, her eyebrow raised. “Yes, that’s what it means. The gap that opened up couldn’t remain empty forever. It had to be filled.”

“What with?”

“Whatever it could draw into itself. It snatched echoes, and stole distorted reflections from the worlds it bordered. It fed on memories of leftover places that were knocked down or forgotten. All the old creatures and things otherwise lost to time found a new home there. Slowly the in-between place became a mixture of human Edinburgh and daemon Edinburgh, all churned up into one. It is the route by which those who still can pass between the worlds. It’s a wonderful place in its own right.”

“*Those who still can.* But who are they, exactly? Who do you mean?” Cameron gripped the table.

Grandma Ives gave him a half-smile. “Are you sure you don’t know?”

“Tell me.”

“The people who were in Mitchell’s coven that night – some went mad, some became mystics, some never spoke of it again – but they all shared one thing. That little glimpse they had of the void *changed* them. From that moment on, they always knew how to find their way back, to pass into the in-between place, and to use it. Their children had the gift too, and their children’s children, and so on, right down to the present day. People like you and me, Cameron. People like your father, although he never wanted to admit it.”

Cameron stared at her. “But I’m normal. I’ve never seen anything mad like that. I’ve never been anywhere but here.”

“Perhaps. But that might not always be the case.”

Grandma Ives lifted the dough, and smoothed it out into a tin she took from the cupboard. “This can rest for a while, and in the morning I’ll bake the bread.” She stretched her fingers. “I’m quite tired after that little workout. I think I shall sleep well.”

“You can’t go to bed now! You need to tell me more!” Cameron protested.

Grandma Ives leant forward and kissed him gently on the forehead. “There’ll be time enough tomorrow, Cameron.”

“But...”

“Turn the light out when you go up.”

She swept out, leaving him in the cold kitchen with his long-forgotten glass of water, very much awake.