

And Next, Darkness

Prologue

Fear. That was the word Dodds had been searching for. That Woman he had just seen was scared to death of something. He'd caught that look in her eyes the moment he had looked into them and even at that distance it had been tangible. It had only been a fleeting glimpse, but it was undeniable, it was a raw almost primal fear. And if there was one thing Barry Dodds knew about, it was the look of fear in a person's eyes.

During his twenty five years in the police he had seen it more times than he cared to remember, a gallery of nameless faces he had encountered with numbing regularity down through the years he'd spent on the force. Victims of violence and hate, loss and cruelty of every imaginable type which he had always viewed with a professional detachment, you had to or you would go insane. But now that he was entrenched in semi-retirement as a caretaker slash security guard here at Old Mill Studios, a film and TV post production house on the out skirts of Leeds city center. This had been the last place he'd expected to see that look again. And it had shaken him.

Dodds had taken the job because the studio was literally a stone's throw from the flat he shared with his Wife, Debbie. He could see the building from his front window and so didn't actually have to be on site the whole night. The alarms were all hooked up to a monitor in the flat, all the employees had swipe cards so they didn't need to bother him if they were working late and he would just give the place a cursory patrol every couple of hours if it was empty. It was an arrangement that suited everyone. The studio's owners got a nice reduction on their insurance premium without having to employ a full time security guard and Dodds got a nice supplement to his police pension.

It had been just after midnight then Dodds had looked out of his window to see the building lit up like a Christmas tree, it seemed every light in the place had been switched on. None of the alarms had been tripped, so whomever it was had to be an employee, but a quick glance at his schedule told Dodds that no late night production work had been planned in. Which wasn't that unusual, these film and TV types kept irregular hours at the best of times, so maybe a deadline hadn't been met which meant some poor soul was burning the midnight oil to finish editing the latest ASDA commercial or whatever masterpiece they were working on at the moment.

Still, just to be sure, Dodds had dragged his bones over to the studios expecting to find half a dozen headless chickens running around the place, but despite the lights on everywhere it seemed deserted. He had then made a cursory sweep of the lower floor which yielded nothing but empty rooms and so he made his way upstairs to the second floor where the sound department was located. Again, to coin a phrase, all the lights were on, but no one was home. Dodds was smiling to himself at the old joke when he passed a large sound recording studio, he glanced through a door left ajar which he saw led to the mixing desk/control room and beyond that the recording studio itself visible through a large observation window.

And there she was, standing in the middle of the studio, staring blankly ahead with her arms wrapped around herself as if for warm. It took Dodds a few moments to recognize the woman, who was in her mid-forties and although she was inside and it was the height of summer she still had on her long black coat. What was her name? Dodds racked his sleep deprived brain, something Welsh. Bromlyn, that was it, she was the head of the sound department if memory served. He came into the control room and was about to go through into the recording studio itself and announce himself when something about the look

on her face made him stop. Now that he was in the room he could see she wasn't actually staring off into space but was looking at a small old fashioned reel-to-reel tape recorder sitting on the table in front of her. She seemed transfixed by the spinning reels, her brow knitted in deep concentration.

He must have moved because she suddenly caught sight of him through the window out of the corner of her eye and she screamed out loud, or so it looked to Dodds who suddenly found himself glad the booth was sound proof. Judging by her face it was a full bodied scream of terror. Dodds tried to laugh as casually as he could muster at having startled her, he held up a hand in greeting and shrugged apologetically at nearly causing the poor Woman a heart attack, but the smile fell right off his face when he looked into her eyes, he gave an involuntary shudder. Yes, there is was, fear. This woman was terrified of something. It was as if she had been listening to the devil Himself on that antiquated tape recorder. And Dodds knew in that brief instant why she had turned all the lights on, for comfort. That childish need to banish the dark and what monsters may lurk within.

The spell broken, Bromlyn frantically looked around her surroundings as if re-orientating herself, then

remembering where she was she quickly grabbed the tape from the reel-to-reel player, stuffed it into a large canvas bag and left through the back door at the other end of the studio without a word.

Dodds stood there for a full half minute staring thought the partition at the empty studio. He refocused his eyes and looked at his reflection in the glass. "Weird," he said to it. That seemed to sum things up perfectly.

Of course, if he'd known then that he was to be the last person to see her before she vanished off the face of the earth, he would have thought of something more profound to say.

ONE

To the casual observer Bloomfield Manor was the epitome of an elegant English stately home. On the surface it ticked all the relevant boxes. Built in the late eighteenth century as a country retreat for his beloved wife Laura by Lord William Bloomfield (the second). It was located in the heart of the Yorkshire dales, nestled in a modest twenty acres of rolling green countryside and had in it's time played host to Kings and Queens, and generations of the great and the good of British aristocracy alike. Up until relatively recently it's history had been as sedate as its surroundings, and had Lord Bloomfield chosen a spot closer to civilization, it would have undoubtedly been a magnet for tourists.

The outward appearance of the great house had changed little over the years since the Bloomfield line died out towards the end of the nineteenth century, but its occupants most certainly had. After laying empty for nearly twenty years Bloomfield manor was purchased by the Government in Nineteen Seventeen and turned into one of the country's first psychiatric hospitals devoted entirely to the study and treatment of soldiers returning from the

Great War suffering from the then little known condition, shell shock.

In the years since, the once crude treatment techniques born out of ignorance of the newly discovered condition had become more sophisticated, more humane if you like. And with that the influx of mentally damaged soldiers dwindled to nothing, housed now in more modern and suitable surroundings. Shell shock gave way to post traumatic stress disorder and a greater more compassionate understanding of its effects. And in nineteen eighty two, with no real pomp or ceremony. Bloomfield Manor became a NHS funded Psychiatric Hospital. The patients were no less numerous (thirty at the last head count) and no less damaged, than their uniformed counterparts. But now they were just civilian casualties of that war to end all wars. Life.

To the outside world it was Bloomfield Manor Psychiatric hospital and treatment center. To those who lived and worked there, it was known by a different name. The Monkey Farm.

The Monkey Farm hadn't changed much since Jenny Drayton had been released from it some twelve months ago now. She had been a 'guest' here for eight sometimes

harrowing months, and there had been times during her stay when she felt sure that she would die here. And others, during her more lucid moments, when she swore, if by some miracle she did get out she would never return. But yet here she was again.

Jenny superstitiously tapped the visitor badge clipped to her blouse which identified her as an outpatient. Even though it had been a year since she was released back into the community she still half expected one of the orderlies to grab her and throw her back into a padded cell, every time she can back for her quarterly evaluation.

She looked out of the large window of Doctor Kapoor's second floor office and down into the grounds below. Several patients were in the gardens, enjoying the change in the weather. Two were sitting on a park bench their faces upturned to the cloudless blue sky, another was strolling around barefoot on the lush grass. In the mid-summer sun it could have been a scene played out in any park across the country, people just out for the day enjoying the sunshine and pleasant surroundings. Were it not for the fact they were all dressed in identical light blue shirts and trousers, and the lack of children playing ball games, flying kites and the like. And of course for those white uniformed orderlies lurking around like ghosts

amongst the greenery. Keeping their distance but always never far away.

There was a minor commotion over by one of the flower beds, a Patient was arguing with one of the Gardeners, she was gesticulating wildly at the flowers he was in the process of planting. Jenny tensed, seeing two orderlies come jogging over to them and she was hit with a sickening wave of déjà vu as the scene played out like some silent movie below her. The Gardener was backing away from the mad Woman with his hands out in front of him, shaking his head. *'Don't stab me, crazy Lady'* he could almost have been saying. It would have been comical under any other circumstance as he was nearly twice her size, but not here.

In Bloomfield this little interchange screamed potential flash point in twenty foot high flashing neon letters. The Gardener glanced around to see the orderlies approaching and began talking to them animatedly. Jenny felt her heart race, and without realizing it she had begun mouthing to the Woman, *'Calm down, calm down,'* under her breath. Silently pleading with her not to lose it, as she knew only too well what could follow. She thought she recognized one of the Orderlies, a man named Myers. She wracked her brains trying to remember what he was like and came back with hard but fair, which was a good sign if she

remembered correctly. Then she recalled with a flash of recognition, that she had once punched Myers square in the nose and although it had shocked the Man, and broken two of Jenny's fingers, he had remained calm and hadn't reacted with a punch of his own. She just hoped he hadn't hardened with time served here at the Monkey Farm.

The Woman bent down and pulled out one of the flowers, this made Jenny wince and for a moment she thought the Woman was going to throw it at Myers and the other Orderly. But she just knelt down and replanted it in another place. Evidently she didn't think much of the Gardener's planting skills. Jenny could almost feel the tension down there dissipate, the Gardener nodded and said something to Myers then joined his new best friend on his knees and together they went about replanting the entire flower bed. The two Orderlies exchanged a smile and backed away to a more discrete distance to observe. Crisis over.

The incident, however harmless in the end had brought too many bad memories flooding back, Jenny touched her top lip with the tip of her finger and it came away wet with sweat, she wiped her face with her hands and exhaled waiting for her heart to stop racing. She closed her eyes and let the sun warm her face through the window.

She could hear a faint tap-tap tapping behind her and realized that the commotion outside had made her forget that Doctor Kapoor was still in the room. The tap-tap tapping she could hear was him tapping his pen on his notepad the way he always did when he was thinking. Jenny knew he was studying her even without turning around.

"Doctor," she said still facing the window. "I can feel your eyes burning a hole in the back of my head?"

"I was looking at your arse actually," came the reply.

Jenny finally turned around to look at him. There he was, dressed in his trademark smart tweed suit, in direct contrast to his perpetually stubbly chin and unruly salt and pepper hair. Sitting in his massive office, behind his massive desk, massive ego to match. And thank Christ, all of that dwarfed by his massive heart. She didn't try to hide her grin.

"No, really," he said with a school boy smirk.

"You know, I could have you struck off for that?"

He rolled his eyes. "Tut, again!"

Her grin turned mischievous. "I'm sure Doctor Freud would have something to say about the size of this office. Not to mention that desk!"

"Who's the psychologist here, anyway?"

"That's a matter of opinion." Jenny said and walked across and casually perched herself on the edge of the desk, it was massive indeed, she was still some three feet away from the Doctor. She looked down into his eyes, he was sixty one at the last count and you could see every day of it written on his face, but he still had the eyes of a twenty year old, always full of mischief and the Devil's twinkle. That was one of the first things he noticed about him, that and the irreverent sense of inappropriate humor.

"I'm supposed to look down at you during these things," he told her. "It's a power thing." He threw his notepad down on the desk and picked up his coffee cup.

"So, how did I do on the whacko test? You going to re-admit me to the Monkey Farm or what?" It was joke, but still some irrational part of her still waited for him to click his fingers, say 'yes' and two Orderlies to come bursting through the door with a straight jacket. She watched him as he took a gulp of coffee and wince theatrically at the taste.

"Well," he replied and carefully replaced the cup back on a coaster on the desk. "It has been a little dull around here since we let you out. Which I still think was a clerical error by the way." He smiled warmly at her, just in case she didn't get the joke.

Jenny stood back up and paced a little. "What about Mad Maggie? She was always good for a shit fit or two."

"She's just fine, she was asking after you."

"Ha! I bet." Mad Maggie had taken an instant dislike to Jenny the moment she'd arrived. Once she had actually called her the Anti-Christ. It made her sick to think about it now, but during those first few dark weeks here, the sport of Mad Maggie baiting had been all that had kept Jenny going. She physically cringed at the thought, even all these months later. And when she was finally slated for release Jenny had tried to reconcile with the Woman, she could finally see just how deeply ill Maggie was, but all she had got was the regulation verbal abuse in return. Still, Jenny mused, at least she was alive and in good hands here. Even if chances were she would never get out.

She must have been frowning because Kapoor coughed, bringing her back to reality. Jenny smiled, old ghosts she thought, Bloomfield certainly had it's fair share of those.

"You okay? Kapoor asked.

"Sure," Jenny shrugged it off. "Just the old place, y'know?" He nodded, he knew only too well. "So," she changed the subject. "You were saying about the whacky test?"

He threw her a stern look. "You did fine, and it's not a test, just an evaluation. I'm going to write you a new prescription."

"God bless the happy pills. You know I actually rattle when I walk?"

Kapoor took a prescription pad out of a locked draw and started scribbling on it. "It's a much lower dose," he said with his face buried in the pad. "Practically nothing in them in truth." Then he looked up to make sure Jenny was paying attention. "But you still have to take them, okay?"

She saluted him. "Anything to get away from your ugly mug, Doc."

He grunted in response and tore off the prescription slip. A sharp rapping on the door made them both start. "She does that on purpose," Kapoor said to Jenny, then gave a brisk, "In!" To the door.

Mrs. Hargrove, Kapoor's secretary came into the room. A stern looking woman in her mid-fifties wearing a very formal grey suit. Jenny had never seen the Woman before today. Kapoor seemed to go through secretaries at an alarming rate, there always seemed to be a new one whenever she came back to Bloomfield. Which if she was honest wasn't in the least bit surprising. Kapoor being Kapoor.

"Sorry to bother you, Doctor," Hargrove said in a clipped tone. "But you wanted me to let you know when Doctor Taylor was out of his meeting?"

"I did?" Kapoor looked puzzled, then the light when on above his head. "I did, yes. Thank you Sarah." He looked at his watch. "We've run over by twenty minutes." He said to Jenny as Hargrove began clearing the coffee cups from his desk.

"Tempus fugit, Doc," Jenny replied.

Kapoor nodded. "Indeed, shame I'm not charging by the hour," then he turned to Hargrove who was already half way to the door with the coffee cups. "Tell Richard I'll be through to see him in a sec'."

Kapoor got to his feet with a grunt of effort. Signaling the end of the evaluation. And Jenny couldn't help thinking that she had escape the Monkey Farm's clutches once again. She tapped the visitors badge again for luck. Kapoor caught the action and gave her a sideway glance. "Nutter," he said and Jenny shrugged apologetically as Kapoor shoved the new prescription in her hand.

Although when she had these evaluations, Jenny was never actually in the secure part of Bloomfield, she was

always glad to see the great entrance hall which housed the hospital's reception area and beyond that the inviting sunlight flooding through the two massive front doors as she and Kapoor came down the stone steps from his office. Kapoor always insisted on walking her out, she was in no doubt that he did this for all the out patients he saw, but still it was just one of those little touches he had of making you feel like you were the only patient he had.

"How are things with Reece?" Kapoor asked as they reached the bottom of the long stone steps that lead down from the office area of the hospital. "You two kids married yet? And if so, why wasn't I invited?"

"Good, he's good. And no we aren't married; don't hold your breath on that one, Doc." Jenny had been with her Boyfriend Reece for coming up to two years now, he had been everything to her through the darker days, but lately she had a niggling doubt about where things were going. And she voiced it to Kapoor now. "He still feels like he has to look after me."

"Don't knock it. He's a good fella,"

"I know. But..." Her voice trailed off, and she examined her shoes as they walked, and listened to the click of them on the highly polished stone floor of the reception area.

"But?" Kapoor prompted.

She looked up at him and tried a smile. "Oh, I'm sure it's just me." She was surprised how hard she found it articulating what was worrying her, especially to Kapoor, the one man in the whole world who really knew her, more than Reece, more even than her own Father. Jenny shrugged. "Dunno, relationships, eh?" She said lamely suddenly feeling awkward.

"Things not going so well?" Kapoor inquired.

"Oh, no, things are fine." She said lightly. "It's just. Lately..." She fought to find the right words. "I know it's probably me, but lately I've been wondering. What if Reece is one of those types who needs to be needed, y'know? Part of me can't help but think that once I'm well maybe he'll just sod off." It was strange but once she'd got the thought out of her head and into the open, she could see it for the folly it was. Reece was a good man, better than her petty paranoia was giving him credit for. Weight lifted somewhat, she shook her head. "Of course I could just be talking bollocks."

"Firstly. You are well, Jen." Kapoor said with his serious face on. And she knew him well enough to know he meant it, which felt good. "And secondly, yes, you are talking bollocks. I've seen you two together, it's

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