

Her cold, dead eyes stared up at the night sky, and the men who stood looking down at her stopped digging. They had found what they had sought. Detective Inspector Edward Stanton smiled a humourless smile. He had found the woman after five months of fruitless searching, of wild goose chases and roads to nowhere.

Here she was, decaying in a shallow grave, the method of murder as yet unknown, but murder he suspected it was. One of the men pointed a flashlight at her face, making it startlingly white. He could see marks around her neck, and he was confident that she had been strangled.

He walked to the edge of the path that led into Hale bank, South Liverpool and got into his vehicle. It was 11:04pm. A rough trail cut through sloping fields until it eventually wound its way to a Mersey River bank nature reserve. It was popular with joggers and bikers. Around ten metres from the path, beneath an overhanging oak tree, the woman's body had been found.

With her husband being a suspect, now seemed like a good enough time as any to go and see him. He had been questioned many times while she had been missing, all the time protesting his innocence. As the house was only a ten minute drive away, he realised that his instant decision to confront the husband was taking a risk on his own. Yet, the man was not exactly Mr Universe, but he was capable, however, of strangling his wife. In the times Edward had seen him, not once had he been violent. In fact, if he was innocent, he would probably burst into tears, and that was something he could do without, being a shoulder to cry on and a tea-maker. It had to be done though, and he wanted to get it over with.

He pulled up outside the semi-detached, and saw that somebody was home. Everywhere was quiet, the moon behind wisps of cloud, a nearby street lamp casting the car in a muted orange. Edward left the vehicle and walked through the gate, up to the front door. He knocked quietly and stood back. After a few moments, the hall light came on and the door opened. The woman's husband recognised who it was instantly.

"Detective, strange time to be calling," said Peter Selden. Edward smiled that humourless smile again.

"We've found her," he said. "She's dead". Peter closed his eyes, slowly breathed in through his nose, then took a few steps back. He collapsed to his knees, his face in his hands.

"Alright, alright, it was me. I killed her," he said. Edward stared at him for a few moments. That was it, he thought. Case closed. He took from his pocket a mobile phone, and before he began the necessary procedures, there was one person he decided to call first. After a few rings, it went to an answering machine.

"Congratulations," said Edward. "You've done it again".

Curio Enchantment, real name Philip Harrison, played the message for the eleventh time, and it was still satisfying: 'Congratulations, you've done it again'. That was all it said. He had a huge satisfied grin on his face, knowing exactly what it meant, further understanding the status and significance of his role when it came to locating missing persons.

His talent was increasingly being proven, and people knew it. This was another string to his bow, another success, another blow to the sceptics who would find it all amusing. Philip was 34 years old, and lived alone on the fifth floor of a block of flats in Widnes. He was lean, 6 foot 2 inches, mostly wore black pullovers and trousers, and had long, curly hair that reached his shoulders.

The flat was sparsely furnished when he had moved in. It had basically consisted of a table, a TV cabinet, a bed with a stained mattress, a two door alpine wardrobe, and an armchair. All were second hand, maybe fifth and sixth hand. He had bought a couple of items himself, such as a bedside cabinet, a desk and a coffee table, but not much else. He used to have a girlfriend, and had lived with her for seven years in her parent's house. They had died of carbon monoxide poisoning in their beds, so it was left to her.

Yet, Philip's increasing involvement with learning about supernatural activity had led him to believe that he had a 'gift'. He had a mind like a radio. It could tune in to the spirit world. At least he thought it could. Soon his obsession had caused her to show him the door, and find a cheap flat in a threatened block. The council were always threatening to knock it down, but as is usually the case, not much ever happened at all.

It was all speculation, but Philip didn't care. If he carried on like this, he thought, then he'd make enough money to move out of the pokey little abode and buy a proper house. At this rate, he would start making money soon, he was sure of it. That's if his success rate kept up, which he was confident it would, because he knew his star was rising.

This was the fourth missing person he had located by psychic detection. When the police were running out of leads, they called him for help, and out of the six times they had called, four had been a success. He didn't pinpoint exactly where they were, but it was usually within a fifty foot circumference.

The latest had been located within the area only by one of the officers spotting disturbed earth, thanks to Philip for his detective work for which his reward was the kudos and esteem it would bring. When called upon to help discover the whereabouts of a missing person, Philip would be picked up by Edward Stanton, as it had always been him who called, and driven to a secluded location where he could perform his work.

Edward would always provide a personal item from the missing person, borrowed from a concerned friend, or parent. Philip required as much silence as possible. He would grasp the item in both hands, raise them to his fore-head, close his eyes, and concentrate to see if he could pick up on traumatic brain-waves emanating from that person. If the person was alive, then no energy would be detected. If, however, the person was deceased, he could locate their whereabouts by the trauma that would still pulse like radio-waves from a distressed brain. The spirit may be gone, but there was still activity, especially if the person had recently passed away. Should they have been dead for a long time, then this energy would eventually fade, and he would not have been able to pick up on any waves.

He guessed that a traumatised brain could be active for up to eight months after a person had died. When Edward could find no indications as to their whereabouts, he would call Philip, as at that point he had reached the conclusion that the person was dead. He had always been correct. They had been murdered, and upon confrontation with the suspects, they had always confessed. Philip had picked up on the traumatised brainwaves, from which the personal item acted as a tuner to the correct frequency. He could trace it to its source, and give Edward an approximate location.

Many people had asked him for this technique which he had readily given, but he knew that it was difficult to achieve, so did not mind revealing his system. If it was easy, he had thought, then everybody would be doing it. He 'knew' he had a unique gift, and gladly told his method to anybody who inquired.

His successes had proven him to be talented in the eyes of the believers. Of course there were sceptics. On the few occasions when he had been invited onto radio shows as a guest, he would sometimes receive calls from the public, and while most of them believed, there was always somebody who thought it was 'a load of garbage'. However, they always rang off with their tail between their legs when Philip asked them how did he do it then, when on all four of his successes, all of them murder, the killer had soon confessed afterwards. How did he know where the bodies were? Long silence. 'Ah, loada garbage', click. Cue a grin from Philip. There was nothing like the satisfaction of being proved right.

His kudos had now been raised even higher, and he was sure he would be invited onto more shows now, maybe even onto local regional television. He knew he would sleep well tonight, his dreams of fame now much more realistic. His dreams could possibly now come true. Fame, celebrity status. Imagine that, he thought. Your body and soul may be gone, but your name remains forever. He wondered how long it would be before the police rang again for his help in locating another missing person.

After his third success, he had been invited onto a late-night phone-in with a local DJ who had only been in the business for nine months, and brought local people in who had had a modicum of success to discuss their work and take questions from the public. Curio's first interview had gone well, and he saw it as the first step in the path to fame. He gave out his contact details and stated that he is not only a specialist in finding

missing persons, but can give readings and predict people's future. It was basically anything supernatural, or anything that science had not proven. Philip always believed he had

some sort of talent when it came to the unexplained, the unexplained in scientific terms anyway, things that can be deemed paranormal or supernatural. He believed in it. He knew that not everything can be explained by science, and that evidence for the unknown cannot always be wrong. He never expressed doubt. There was no need for him to question.

If he could detect where missing bodies were then it would be highly likely he could tune his mind to the spirit world, a world which was parallel to ours, according to him.

We cannot see them, but they can see us. We have freewill in reality, so there was no reason to suggest that spirits do not, or that their personalities alter after passing over. Basically, they were and are invisible, and can spy on whoever they wish, because it is their choosing. However, they cannot interact with reality. To do that, they must attain a certain power from somewhere unknown within the spirit world, and thus become a poltergeist.

Philip was gullible without doubt. His reasoning behind a lot of what he had learned was taken from books, articles, and newsletters. He thought that because it was published, because it was in a shop, for sale, then what was between the covers must be true, must have some basis in fact, not realising that a lot of it was probably self-published by the author who just had to tell people he had crossed over and came back, had an out of body experience and spoke with his long dead relatives.

He believed newspapers, even the tabloids that were aimed at the less intelligent people in society. He was a believer who rarely questioned what he read, like a devout religious person who reads their holy book and does not question what is written. It must be true, and that is that. Deep down within the person, there was a conviction that it was true.

They could 'feel' that it was correct. They just 'knew'. They didn't need proof. Philip didn't need scepticism. What was the point when he knew ghosts existed? When he knew the reality of telepathy and aliens? He just needed more practice in performance and understanding. He wanted to explain the unexplained. He wanted the unknown to become known. He wanted to pioneer the proof of supernatural activity. He wanted to go down in history as the man who finally silenced the sceptics, who made them embarrassed and apologetic. He wanted them on their knees, begging his forgiveness, worshipping him as an idol. A man to be looked up to, to be respected, a pillar of society. A man whose kudos was full to the brim, whose portrait hung in believer's houses, especially in houses where once there was misgivings, where they looked at his picture in awe.

They would thank him for showing them the reality of paranormal activity, for turning them into believers. Where once there was doubt, now there was fact, and Philip would show them that. He would shove it in their faces until they could ask no more questions.

Here is my proof, show me yours. No-one would doubt him. They would beg him for his advice and wisdom.

By that time he would probably be rich. Nice car, nice house, glamour model girlfriend. His rewards for his knowledge, and his sharing of it with the world. He had changed his name to Curio Enchantment. Not by deed poll, but by simply referring to it when strangers asked. That was what he would be known as when it circulated further. For now though, his dreams of fame and notoriety were simply that, dreams.

He had a mountain to climb, and he just wondered how much further he had to go. His attempts at seeing the future where he was lifting an award was somewhat clouded. He had to practice precognition, and many other abilities. Now that he was known to the police as a possibility in helping with their investigations, they should help his career no end, and he hoped that the telephone would ring more often, as sometimes months would pass where it remained silent.

Malcolm Selden wasn't listening to a lecture about electronic and computer engineering at Widnes university. His mind was elsewhere. Perhaps if the lecturer was saying something interesting, he would still be in a world of his own, as he had come to try and take his mind off his concern, but it was no use. He was sat at the back of the lecture theatre, slouched in a chair, his arms folded, staring at the back of the chair in front, but not seeing it.

He was 27 years old, single, wore casual clothes that always bordered on old-fashioned, and had a 'business man's cut' hairstyle. He was studying for a first degree with honours in Information systems development. His friend, Tom Parker was sat in a seat diagonal from him. He was watching Malcolm with curiosity.

"You still worried?" he whispered. Malcolm looked at him, breaking from his stupor. "Worried?" he said. "I can't stop thinking of it. It just doesn't make sense. My dad isn't like that. He wouldn't just kill my mum like that. I'm sorry. It doesn't add up. I know he did it. He admitted it, and all the forensics have confirmed that it was him who strangled her, but it just doesn't make sense. He was never violent. As far as I know, he never lifted a finger to her. I don't remember him even shouting at me. He just would not suddenly decide to kill my mum like that". He clicked his fingers, and noticed that the theatre was quiet. He saw that the lecturer had stopped speaking, had folded his arms, and was staring up at Malcolm. Other faces looked in his direction. His face went red and he went back to staring at the back of the chair.

The lecturer continued:

"After their establishment, both systems become peers". Malcolm and Tom exchanged glances, which basically said: 'I'll speak to you later'.

The building was a modern structure, with orange bricks and oddly angled windows, reflecting an attempt to come into modern society by basically resembling what was probably a student's architectural design project. In the foyer, where there was always a constant stream of students, coming and going, and standing outside, smoking, Malcolm and Tom walked slowly to the exit, their day over in the place. It was 12:00 noon.

"So what are you going to do?" asked Tom. Malcolm was deep in thought.

"What can I do? Tell the police I think my Dad just had a moment of madness? He won't do it again, promise". Tom had no answer.

"I'll have to go and see him," Malcolm continued, "There's nothing else I can do. I have to understand why". They walked outside.

Tom was 25, three inches shorter than Malcolm, always wore clothing that was white, or cream, with a cap that seemed perfectly suited to him. He was one of those people that easily suited headgear.

“Hey, there’s that girl you fancy,” he said, looking in the direction of a group of girls, chatting near a metal bench. One in particular had long black hair and was wearing a dusty pink sequin neck dress. She had her back to them.

“Where? This uni’s is full of girls I fancy. It must be a prerequisite of entry. All girls must be fit,” said Malcolm. He saw her.

“She’s with her mates,”. Tom frowned, and said:

“I bet even if she was on her own, you wouldn’t talk to her”. He smiled, but Malcolm’s sour expression reminded him of what was on his mind, and it vanished. They both walked away.

When his father appeared, he looked as though he had just woken up. He had a stubble and his hair was dishevelled. Sitting down opposite Malcolm, and folding his arms, he regarded him like an unwelcome stranger.

“What?” he asked. Malcolm leaned forward on the desk.

“Dad! What are you doing? Why d’you suddenly decide to kill mum? It doesn’t make sense. That’s not like you at all, now what were you thinking? Why Dad, why? Tell me”. Peter Selden’s expression did not change. He took a few moments to answer, and shrugged.

“I wanted to”.

“Is that it? You just felt like. Suddenly you just decided to strangle my mum, drive her out into a field and bury her. From the moment you put your hands round her neck, you knew exactly what you were doing. What I don’t understand is why. What did she do? 38 years you’ve been married. 38 years, and now you just decide to kill her just because you felt like!”. Peter nodded.

“I just killed her. That’s the way it is. It’s what I did”. His expression became introverted, thinking back to the event.

“Yep,” he nodded. “I killed her, I drove her out into the field, strangled her, buried her, drove back. Then I watched that soap opera that I like”. He smiled, thinking of that.

“Bobby started an affair with the bar-maid. When it finished, I went into the kitchen to make a cup of tea, but while the kettle boiled, there was a knock on the door. I answered it, and...”. Peter’s face changed to one of concern, with a slight hint of fear.

“Then I...I don’t know”. Malcolm shook his head.

“That’s not a reason. You just wanted to. You just decided to kill her! Come on dad, tell me. Make me understand. It’s not like you at all. You wouldn’t kill her for no reason, just ‘cos you felt like. It doesn’t make fucking sense”. Peter just sat there, as though he wasn’t listening.

“What happened Dad? What happened? Why didn’t you just tell me to mind my language? The Dad I knew would have done”. Peter shrugged. Malcolm quickly stood up, the plastic chair clattering backwards. He banged both his palms on the table. “For fuck’s sake Dad, tell me why?” Malcolm felt hands grab his arms and pull him backwards.

“Time’s up son,” someone said to him. Peter still looked introverted. He wasn’t looking at Malcolm.

“She had to die,” he said, “She had to die”.

Malcolm was sat in a paved shopping area, on a bench, staring at a few scruffy pigeons searching for food. It had begun to rain slightly, and his face and hair was covered in light drizzle. All he could think of was his father's words: "She had to die". What did he mean by that? and why did she have to die? He had no answers, but knew he could not function properly without knowing, without understanding. It was no use in persisting with Dad, he was useless, he thought, but what else can I do? Maybe it would be worth trying him again though, and the police are going to grill him anyway. They should be able to prise a proper answer out of him. Then I'll have to get the answer from them, he thought.

It wasn't simply a case of just walking into the police station and saying: 'So what did my Dad say? Why'd he kill my Mum?'. It might be even harder to get an answer out of them. Still, it would be worth going back again sometime, just in-case he's gone back to being the Dad I once knew.

The telephone only rang twice in the following two days. One was a wrong number, the other was from 'Kickin' FM radio who wanted to invite Curio onto one of their shows with DJ Space Hoppa. He always had guests on to answer calls from the public, interspersed with the latest chart tracks. It was basically aimed at teenagers. Hoppa's guests were never truly famous. They were people who had made a fragment of a name for themselves locally, and saw that coming onto Hoppa's show was an amazing career boost, even though the airwaves only covered half of the north-west. Basically, when Hoppa announced who the guest was, it was usually a case of: 'I've never heard of them'.

However, Curio's appearance on the show was the following day. As the body was not headline news, its discovery by Curio only warranted a small section in the corner of page seven of the local free circular. They used his real name and no picture.

Today, he had to suffer the embarrassment of walking into the jobcentre and signing on. He could not yet tell them where to go, where they could stick their girocheques, but he was quite sure he wasn't far away from doing that.

A balding man in his late forties looked at Curio across the desk as though he was wondering whether or not he was serious.

"OK, Mr Enchantment. You wish to have your name altered to Curio. Is that right? You want me to change what it says on the system".

"I don't want to be known as Philip anymore. Could you change it please?" The man shook his head.

"No, I can't do that. I'll have to book you in to see an advisor. Tell them, they'll do it". Curio frowned, disbelieving.

"An appointment? Are you serious? Look, forget it. Just give me a pen". The man did so, trying desperately not to grin. Philip signed his name and went to stand up.

"Er, hold on, Mr Enchantment. What have you been doing to look for work?"

"This and that," he muttered. He hadn't done a thing lately, so enamoured and convinced was he that riches were just over the horizon, that finding a job was pointless.

"What?"

"Sent some letters off to a few supermarkets". The man nodded, and typed something on the computer.

"There's no vacancies for psychic detectives yet, but I'll keep you posted", the man said, not hiding his grin.

"Glad to see you know who I am," said Curio. He was handed his card, and got up and left. Outside in the cold air, beneath a white sky and gathering wind, Curio nodded at what he had just said in the jobcentre. The man knew who he was, it seemed outside of the records. He headed home, people around him passing by like robots, as they always did to everybody who looked normal. Soon they would recognise me, he thought. They would stop me in the street and want autographs and a chat about anything. No-one gave

him a second glance, though, but they would, he guessed. Soon they would know his name.

'Guess wt I bought?'

'Wt?'

'Go on, guess'

'A sex change operation. Ha ha ha ha ha'

'Hilarious. No. I tk ur advice, remember, bout tht place, now I've bought an Alfa Romeo 156 1.8TS Brand new. 9K'

'Ace. C? I told you it ws ripe 4 th taking'

'Damn right it ws, anyway got 2 go. C U L&r'. Thomas Parker nodded, and ended the email conversation. He sat back in his chair and shook his head. Alfa Romeo, eh. Maybe I'll change my car, he thought. Get myself a Porsche Boxster. That'll show him. He grinned. Let's see what he thinks when I pull up in that. Not yet though, let him have his fun, driving round in his new car, showing off.

Tom lived with his mother at their elaborate detached home in Halton view, east of Widnes. He had bought it himself from his 'gathered funds'. He basically didn't need to work. His income was regular and more than sufficient. All he had to do was preserve it, keep it balanced, and adapt with any changes it made.

He and his email friend, Anthony Kendrick, both lived lavish lifestyles, and could afford most luxurious items. His mother was not wise to what Tom did. She just thought that he had earned it somehow over 'those computer thingies'.

Yet, she was right. He was studying Networks and telecommunications engineering. His bank balance was healthy due to his knowledge of computer systems and modern technology. He had hacked into the mainframe of a bank by creating a virus, which he had sent via anonymous email. The only unstable and unknown factor with regards to it was whether or not it would be opened by the recipient.

He had written as the subject: 'IMPORTANT INFORMATION'. The workers had been told to be suspicious of email, because they may cause viruses, but Tom had altered the address of the sender so it looked as if it had come from another branch, from a person superior to them, so without thinking, they opened it, only to find an advert:

'Protect your computer from viruses. Updated software shield 'Viralguard'. You can purchase for just \$49.99'.

There followed a list of benefits for this package. It basically looked like a normal advert, and was therefore ignored. However, the very opening of the email had sent the virus into the bank's mainframe computer where it had been programmed to hide. It was not a virus that had been made to simply cause damage. It was to dismantle part of the bank's security firewall.

He only needed one puncture. The engineers would need to look microscopically to see any anomalies. To them, the shield was still active, and security was still strong. Once it had been breached, the virus had to self-destruct. Basically, it deleted itself, leaving no trace whatsoever. Tom then had a direct link to the bank mainframe, and had sent another virus, again, not to be destructive, but to gather data about people's accounts and send them to him via the firewall gap. He obtained pin and account numbers, and the amount of money each account holder had. He also had the ability to alter those numbers.

Therefore he could give people money, or take it away. Tom had two bank accounts, one with this bank, under the name Floyd Bracewell, who was a sales manager for a health food company, and one with another branch, under his normal name. This one had his funds from income support, and was basically his front. When he had to undertake financial dealings, then this was the account he referred to, as everything about it was above board, but the Floyd account was where his riches had built up.

He discovered that many of the accounts people held were consistently in the four figure bracket. The person took out money, it went in, and this was normal. People spent their earnings, and then they were paid their wages until their jobs ended. Tom had found this with many of the accounts. The amount they had was never stable. It meant that he could siphon off a few pounds from each into Floyd's account. The person would not notice a few pounds missing. They would trust the bank to be reliable. If that's how much they had left, then that was that.

Maybe there was a slight extra charge for something. A charge for sending out a letter. A direct debit bill payment with slightly added expense for something the account holder failed to do. It didn't matter, because Tom knew that should they even notice anything missing, they should cease their questioning after reading his ready made message that would be relayed to the inquirer upon investigation:

'System error. Information unavailable. There may be technical difficulties for this setting, PCT.3.0.'

It looked important, but had absolutely no meaning. Its job was to simply put off any further probing. He had not needed it yet. Of 1097 bank accounts that Tom had picked, because of the four figure reason, two pounds per week from each transferred into Floyd's account, and with the statements not declaring where the money had actually gone to, he was basically an anonymous cyber-thief.

However, as with most people who had considerable funds, they always wanted more. There was no cap they would put on the attainment of wealth. As there was no highest number, there was therefore no limit to greed. They would be unlikely to find out where two pounds had gone, even if they bothered to check.

Only Malcolm, Anthony, and his girlfriend knew how he acquired his money. The seed of his skills was planted in night school the previous year. The computer course he had taken, 'Digital applications', gave him the realisation and the knowledge to build upon.

His first success came when he hacked into the university finances and diverted some of the student grants into his account. He got away with it, but knew it was dangerous putting the money into the account in his name. It wasn't long before Floyd came along.

Following him was further riches. A nice house in an expensive area, a Mitsubishi Colt, a £500 watch, gold bracelet, and many high quality brand name clothes. He knew that his girlfriend was a gold-digger, that if his money ever stopped, then she would find some other man whom she would pretend to love, when her real love existed in the bank. He didn't care. She wasn't very attractive, and had an attitude problem. He would leave her soon, he had told himself, let her find some other mug. She would be more upset at the stopping of the money he spent on her. She'd get over it, he thought. She would have to. He had other things on his mind, as well as further boosting his bank balance, his interest had been piqued by the proposal of a new building being erected fifteen miles from where he lived.

It was set to become a research facility for medicine and vaccinations. Tom wasn't a malicious person. In a physical fight he would be the first to run away, but he had every intention of bringing the company to its knees.

“That was Bob Funk with: ‘My Baby’s left me for a custard pie’” The psychedelic jangles faded away across the airwaves.

“I’m joined by my guest, a Mr Curio Enchantment. That’s a ‘curious’ name” said DJ Space Hoppa, bursting into laughter. Curio just smiled out of sympathy, wearing his headphones, across the desk from Hoppa, a microphone before his mouth.

Hoppa was ten years younger than Curio, but he acted even ten years younger. His radio persona was of a ‘wacky guy’, who was down with the street kids, rather like some of the children’s TV programme presenters whose ego swells to massive proportions and think they’re the funniest thing on the planet, who talk down to the viewers, and are subconsciously saying: ‘Look at me, I’m on TV, and you’re not. I’m just so crazy’. That was Hoppa. He thought he was a big personality because he was on the radio. Yet Hoppa had settled for now on one of the steps to fame, and Curio had not reached that height yet, but he was close.

“Later on we’ll be having a phone-in, so you can put your questions to him, but he might know already what you’re gonna ask.” said Hoppa. He looked across at his guest. “So, Curio. Mr Enchantingment. You’re a psychic detective, you hunt down dead people with your mind”. He said it as a statement.

“You could put it like that. I’m out to prove the existence of paranormal phenomena. No longer is it speculative and unprovable. I focus not just on finding missing persons, but on all things that science cannot prove”.

“Phernominaaaaa! Maybe you are a ghost, Curio. How am I to know?” There was a pause. Curio didn’t answer.

“I saw a ghost once” Hoppa continued. “At the time I was eating an ice screeeeeeem!” Hoppa yelled the last word, and suddenly Curio got the urge to punch Hoppa hard in the face. He’s not taking this seriously, he finally realised.

“So can you speak with ghosts, like?”

“I do believe I can commune with the spirits of the deceased. I can feel their concerns and emotions”.

“What do they say? I ain’t got nobody?”. Hoppa laughed again, and waved up to the webcam.

“Smile, you’re live worldwide”.

“What? I didn’t know that”, Ah, a bigger audience, thought Curio.

“I also believe there’s...”

“I’ll stop you there Curio lad. Time for a choon”. A hard-house track came on, and all Curio heard was the warblings of a woman, who, he found, actually had a nice voice. The music she sang to however, was undoubtedly made on a cheap keyboard in some wannabe DJ’s bedroom.

Hoppa never looked at Curio during the track. Instead, he busied himself by staring at a monitor and clicking a mouse. Curio guessed he was rifling through tracks to play later.

When the song finished, Hoppa became more animated and went back to the microphone. "That was DJ Stevie with Heartbreakin' lover. My guest this morning is a Mr Curio Enchantment. Psychic detective and ghost hunter extraordinaire. He can read minds and tell you your future. He's an all round mystic". Curio smiled without humour.

"Tell me Curio, what's my future hold?"

"What's your date of birth?"

"I ain't tellin' 'cos you should tell me. What's my date of birth?"

"Well..."

"OK, I'll help you out. My star sign is Sagaquarius. Ha ha ha. Fooled ya".

"Astrology is fast becoming more and more recognised as a genuine phenomenon.

What's the point of the stars being there, if they're not for our benefit?"

"Phernominaaaa! Tell me Enchantingment, you claim to read minds, what am I thinking now?" He closed his eyes and put his hands over his headphones.

Curio then had an idea. It would raise his profile, create some controversy, and embarrass Hoppa.

"OK," said Curio. "You're thinking these exact words: I'm a pathetic, talentless little cunt". It felt good to say that, Curio found. Hoppa's eyes opened and he looked shocked.

Curio stood up and took his headphones off. He pointed at the buttons beside Hoppa, who was speechless.

"Is that what you're looking for? The delay switch. Uh oh! too late. It's gone out. Ha, it's into the bosses office for you. You're sacked". Hoppa's face reddened and he stood up angrily.

"Get out!" he shouted, pointing to the door. Curio duly obliged.

The sun was threatening to come out from behind the clouds, and the wind had lessened to a slight breeze. Curio had decided to walk home, as it was only three miles away. As he did, he found himself passing by his old university, where his academic aspirations nearly came to fruition.

He had wanted to be a doctor, and had managed four years until he realised that he did not have the audacity to see it through. From there he had found himself in various jobs that were not exactly brain taxing. At that time he had had many friends, mostly from university with medical ambitions, and his social circle could have been seemed to be normal.

When he found that he had 'the gift', that he could commune with spirits, could hear voices in his head, he found that the telephone had rang less and less. They're far too busy, was Curio's delusion, and to this day he believed that.

Further towards his home, he passed by a library, and decided to do some further reading up on the paranormal. It wasn't long before he was sat reading about ancient astronauts.

He was drunk, but he didn't care. Redundancy was hanging over his head like a grey cloud, and he found himself more and more at his local pub than at home with his wife. He was 43, and worked at a vehicle manufacturer whom he knew was having financial difficulties. He also knew that should it get any worse, he would be one of the first out of the door and into the dole queue. Today wasn't much better.

He'd been told what he already knew, that there was a possibility he might lose his job. It was basically affirming his beliefs, but he wasn't alone. The trade union wouldn't take this lying down. He guessed that at some point there would be a strike, and he would join the picket line, but until then, he drowned his sorrows with some of his other workmates who were in the same boat.

David Morley was the type of person who couldn't work out their levels of intoxication, and always ended up drunk, but thought they were 'fine', when his colleagues knew exactly that he wasn't. He had spent more time looking at the bottom of a pint glass, now that the cloud above him didn't show any signs of leaving. He had started to occupy the same place in the pub, and was certainly a regular face. He knew it wouldn't be long before all the bar staff would simply say: 'Usual Dave?'

He downed the last of his lager and put it down on a cardboard coaster. He nodded, more to himself than his colleagues.

"OK, time for me to go," he said. He mimed a talking puppet with his right hand against his ear.

"Yak yak yak, that's all I'll get now off the missus. Where've you been? How much 'av yer spent?". He sighed a sigh of despair and he looked longingly at the empty glass, wishing it would refill so he could put off going home, but he knew he had to get it over with, so stood up, put on his coat, and bid farewell to his friends whom he knew would stay for that extra pint.

A biting wind met him when he stepped out onto the pavement. There were not many street lamps, and he was bathed in the light from the pub windows behind him. Besides these lights, the village was gloomy and quiet, and David set off towards his house, feeling the effects of inebriation which desensitised him to the cold, but meant he had to take it slow.

He'd done it before, but it didn't get any easier. His jagged sauntering eventually led him along his garden path. He fumbled with his key for a few moments, and was soon stepping into the hallway. He closed the door and stood there, trying to focus, trying to keep his composure. He took off his coat and hung it up beneath the stairs. He walked into the living room and saw his wife standing in front of the unlit coal fire. "I know what yer gonna say," he said to her, "but I didn't spend too much". Sheila Morley turned and looked at him. She grabbed a bread knife which had been on the mantle-piece. She

said nothing, instead walked across to him and stabbed him in the neck. David tried to yell but it came out as a gurgle. She sent the knife again and again into his neck, and then turned the blade around and started stabbing his chest. She made no sound as she repeatedly plunged the blade into him. He collapsed back, crashing the door shut.

Still she would not stop. She kept stabbing until his chest and neck became a bloody pulp. After a few minutes, she stepped back, blood soaking the carpet, door and wall, and looked at him to see if there was any signs of life. There wasn't. He was dead. Her face and front dripped crimson, but she didn't seem to notice, or care. Dropping the blade, she grabbed his hair and pulled him around so she could drag him. It was too difficult. Instead, she pulled him by his mouth, her hand over the upper teeth. It was tough, but she was physically capable, and had prepared the pathway to the garden earlier. Just as the knife had been specially placed, so had the spade. She dragged him onto the grass, then began digging.

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