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| A Far Reaching Dream  By  Andrew Milner |

*Chapter One*

It looked as though she was looking straight at him through the mirror, but that couldn’t be possible although it didn’t stop him moving out of the way. He felt uneasy, spooked almost and had slightly moved to one side. He watched her as she brushed her hair. She had had the same bedtime routine since he had met her. He remembered the very first night that he had slept at her house and how he had waited for her to finish her bedtime beauty treatments before she even thought about getting into bed. He didn’t think that she needed it, she was beautiful enough, but it was part of her and he loved everything about her. As she sat looking into the mirror on the far side of the bedroom the moon shone through the window to her right lighting up the side of her face. He always thought that it was her best side so that was perfect for him. She slipped between the ivory coloured silk sheets and he could almost trace the outline of her body as she settled into a sleeping position. He listened to her breathing as it became more relaxed and he knew that she had drifted into sleep. This was the part of the night that he loved, a time he could be close to her, a time when he could almost touch her, and a time that he could almost reach out his lips and kiss hers. His defence was that when she was sleeping she didn’t know what was happening, and that was a damn good job.

Kate was waiting for Peter down the road and she watched as he ran to her. It was a very hot day as it had been all week. They went through a gap in the fence and headed down a steep grassy bank towards the stream. They sat down at the point where the stream and the river met so that they could hear the gentle trickle of water as it reached a stronger current making a sound like the waves as they turn over onto the beach. There were some big stones that had been put into the stream as though someone had built a dam but the water had overcome the obstacle leaving the first part deeper than the second section. The water found its way to either side of the stones and carried on its journey. Peter threw a piece of bread into the water and they both watched as it made its way down the stream, joined with the river and disappeared out of sight. Kate threw herself back onto the grass that they had claimed as their dinner table and nearly landed in the pile of sandwiches. Peter, unable to control himself threw himself on top of her. He kissed her. She licked his forehead with her tongue, the small beads of sweat whose journey had ended prematurely, found themselves in Kate’s mouth. He unbuttoned her blouse and whilst kissing her shoulders eased it over and off. He pulled her on her side and unzipped her skirt. It was only short and took him no time at all to peel it down her perfect legs. As she lay there he thought that she looked like an angel who had forgotten to go back to heaven. He couldn’t think of anywhere that he would rather be or anyone that he would rather be with. Kate lying naked on the ground was his life, his future and his destiny.

After making love to her and leaving her lying relaxed on the ground, Peter stepped over the stones in the stream to the other side. Some were slippery so he took his time until he reached the last one when he made the final leap to the bank. He turned and shouted to Kate to join him. He stood on the lower bank of the stream and watched as Kate sat up looking round for him before standing up still naked and slowly putting on her clothes. She slipped on her shoes and went to the side of the stream to step over the stepping stones. Kate was far more careful and slower than he had been, taking the time to put one foot onto the stone to test it before putting her weight on it. She stepped from the first to the second and then to the third. She saw something behind her that attracted her attention, it was a bird, a big bird and he seemed to be looking at her. At that very moment Peter watched as Kate slipped, she fell down the side of a rock and into the water. It wasn’t deep, but it was full of stones and rocks that people had put there over the years to make dams and stepping stones. She hit the rocks with such force that she felt a gash on her leg open up. Then she heard Peter scream.

Kate sat bolt upright in bed. Sweat dripped down her back soaking her nightdress. Her face felt hot and sweaty and her hair was as though it had been washed but not dried. She knew that she had dreamt what had happened, but the reality was almost too real. She could taste the water from when she had fallen in, she could feel the pain in her leg where she had cut it open, and she could smell Peter as though he had been with her that very night. But the worst part by far for Kate was the realisation that Peter was not there and he hadn’t been there now for some time, she was still alone, nothing had changed except another digit on the date. Another digit on the date taking her further away from the day that Peter went away.

The following morning Kate was up early. The birds had recently got into the habit of testing the strength of her roof of a morning, but this morning was early even by their standards.

“No one should have to get up at six-thirty on a Sunday morning,” she said loud enough for someone to hear her, just in case one of the birds happened to be listening. She saw the picture of Peter on her bedside table and it hit her like a thunderbolt. Peter. It was as though she had suddenly seen him standing right in front of her. She remembered the dream that she had had about him. Gradually things started to come back to her. A picnic by the water, Peter was there, the stepping stones. As she remembered the stepping stones her leg began to hurt just at the place where she had gashed it open. It hurt so much that she pulled up her nightdress to check there wasn’t a cut. She almost let out a huge sigh of relief when there wasn’t, although she did surprise herself by expecting it to be there.

As she thought about it, the taste of the sandwiches entered her mouth. Cucumber, ham and cheese. Peter loved cucumber sandwiches. It was one of the many things that made Peter different and what had attracted her to him. Her first impressions of him were that she thought him a little posh; the cucumber sandwiches not helping at all. Kate thought that it was only posh people who ate them, and she didn’t realise that some people actually did like them. She found out very quickly that he wasn’t posh at all; in fact she was the one who came from the upper middle class family who thought themselves a bit posh. Peter’s dad had been a Sergeant with the RAF Regiment, and had died of a heart attack during the Falklands War. The family thought the stress had been too much for him. He had been involved in preparing the regiment for overseas conflict, organising exercises and survival weekends. He used to like to put himself up against the raw recruits and took it as some sort of victory, seeing them fail his challenges. One weekend whilst most of his Army and RAF soldiers were on their way to the Falklands, he died at his desk. One of the patrolling soldiers had noticed a light on and gone to investigate and found Sergeant Phillips at his desk. When he tried to wake him up he noticed he was dead. Derrick had been in the forces since leaving school and it was pretty much his life. He had never wanted to do anything else. Peter’s mother on the other hand had been a full-time housewife for all of their twenty-one years of marriage. She had prided herself on bringing up Peter and his brother Chris without a hint of trouble. Peter was seventeen when his dad died, but had seemed to take it all without too much trouble. There were a few incidents when he left school when he got sacked from working at a supermarket for fighting with a colleague, but nothing to cause his mother too much worry. They had lived in New York, Hong Kong, Germany and Yorkshire. Yorkshire was by far the best. They lived in a little village called Fulneck just between Leeds and Bradford. Peter’s dad Derrick had served at Catterick in North Yorkshire at the time. Gladys, Peter’s mum had always preferred to live in private houses instead of living on the base; she could never get used to sharing her life with hundreds of other wives.

Peter had had a good childhood, and although his father hadn’t really been there, it didn’t seem to have bothered him. Fulneck was the sort of village where everybody knew each other. It had one pub, a big boarding school, a shop, a golf course and plenty of farms. There was a stream that ran along the valley at the bottom of the golf course where Peter and his friends would hang out on the long summer days. Sometimes they would get one of the older lads to buy cider from the shop and they would hang out on the boys’ brigade steps. Other times they would take a stereo and sit on the golf course just drinking and talking. They used to like playing down in the valley where they would go beck jumping, finding wider areas of the stream to cross and seeing who could jump it and who couldn’t; they were great days. They would take off in the morning and not come back until after tea. He loved living there and enjoyed an overwhelming sense of belonging.

Kate had had a totally different upbringing. Both of her parents were doctors. She had always been second fiddle in their lives. She had got used to being left when her parents had to go out on call. Her father Patrick worked in the local hospital as a gynaecologist. Her mother Moira worked as a GP in Dublin. They moved to Leeds when Kate was twelve years old because Patrick managed to get transferred to Leeds General Infirmary. It was a teaching hospital and that suited Patrick’s style. He liked to share his knowledge; it boosted his once faltering ego. Kate’s mum had got a job as a GP in Pudsey and practised there until Patrick decided to return to Dublin. Kate stayed in Leeds, she was doing a job that she liked and wanted to stick at it. She worked for Precious Promotions for three years organising pop concerts, dealing with the advertising and promotion. She really enjoyed this and moved to Aaron Advertising as PR manager. It was whilst working at Aaron’s that she first found love. One of her clients was an engineering company that wanted to improve its image as part of a recruitment drive. Kate was sent to meet the manager and it was whilst she was having a tour of the factory that she saw Peter. He was talking to another lad. He smiled at her. She was gorgeous; all the lads were looking at her. Peter was commenting to his workmate how beautiful she was. Slim, attractive, lovely figure, gorgeous eyes, she made quite an impact on him. She, however, noticed Peter for his athletic build, his height, he was about six foot two she thought, and his good looks. They exchanged smiles before Kate disappeared into the office for a meeting with the boss. Peter tried to keep busy, but he kept looking towards the office trying to see her again. It was nearly home time before Peter noticed that she had gone. The office was empty. How could he have missed her? He had only taken his eyes off the office to sign for a delivery. Mr. Harlson the manager came walking towards Peter. He thought he was going to get told off for the amount of work he had done, or lack of it, but he gave Peter a piece of paper. On it was written in beautiful writing: **Kate** with a telephone number and **after six xx** written at the bottom. He couldn’t believe it. He was staring at a bit of paper that contained the phone number of his dream woman. How lucky was that? The next two questions that came into his mind were, ‘Dare he actually phone her?’ and ‘What if it is a wind up?’ He thought there was only one way to find out.

It was about ten seconds past six when he picked up the phone. He dialled the number carefully, and then put the phone down. He was so worried of getting the wrong number or somebody on the other end saying, “Sorry, you’ve got the wrong number.” He dialled again. Slowly, he double-checked every digit. One ring. Two. Three… she wasn’t in.

“Hello,” said a voice. Peter was too dumbstruck to say anything. He tried to make a sound. His mouth was dry. He couldn’t even whimper.

“Hhhhhhhello,” he finally managed to get the word out although it didn’t sound much like hello to him.

“Who is this?” His first thought was that she couldn’t even remember. He felt such an idiot.

“It’s me, Peter; we met at Ripley’s today.” He felt like his life was draining out of him. He felt like a twelve-year-old again when at the school disco your mate tells a girl that, “My mate fancies you.” It went silent for what seemed like forever.

“Hi, glad you phoned.”

Peter’s ear was sore when he put the phone down. It was eleven-thirty. He had been talking to Kate for nearly five and half hours. She had told him everything. About the time when she was a little girl and she didn’t tidy up her toys. Her Mother had told her that if she didn’t tidy up she would throw her toys on the fire. Kate was an only child and very spoilt. She had called her mother’s bluff and Donald the squeaky dog had been burned right in front of her eyes. She had always tidied up after that. She also said that her mother had always felt guilty about it and had bought her a new squeaky dog for Christmas last year. She also told him about going to the seaside when she was a child. Her father gave her some pocket money to last all day. She had headed straight to the beach and spent all her money on the donkeys in one hour. Her father didn’t give her anything else. Apart from those little incidents, she had had a brilliant childhood. She didn’t miss Ireland. There was too much trouble there nowadays. He noticed only the slightest hint of her Irish accent, which she informed him, got stronger the more that she had to drink. She talked about her best friend Amy. They had done everything together, but Amy had moved away to lecture at university; Kate tried to get up to Edinburgh as much as she could, but it wasn’t feasible to go up often. Her work kept her busy and every time she talked to Amy she was always going somewhere with Mr Perfect. Kate didn’t believe in Mr Perfects, at least not prior to meeting Peter, but there was doubt now.

Peter also had talked. He told her about his brother Chris and his mother and father. After Peter’s father had died his mum found it hard to cope. She went downhill very quickly. She suffered from clinical depression and grew old before her time. She had also spent time on a psychiatric ward after having a nervous breakdown, but had gone into a nursing care home when she came out. She loved it there. There was always something to do. Two of the staff even used to do a singing afternoon. Gladys liked to sing. It had always helped her when she felt lonely. She was okay now. Peter used to go and see her every week. She recognised him now. She hadn’t for a long time when she was ill. He had found that time hard. It had got to be the worst thing ever, to stand in front of your own mother and be asked, “Who are you?” She wasn’t so bad these days. She liked to sit in her chair in her room and watch TV and listen to the radio. She liked to listen to the Archers on Radio 4 every day; it reminded her of life in Fulneck.

Sometimes on a Sunday afternoon Peter would take her for a ride in the car and call in on some old friends in Fulneck. Gladys loved those sorts of days and it was even better when Kate came on the scene. It meant that she could tell the same old stories again to new blood, fresh ears, but it was never the same because Kate didn’t understand village life in Yorkshire. Summer afternoons sat in the garden at the nursing home with a Gin & Tonic with Peter and Chris were everything to Gladys. Her two boys together, talking over old memories. It was times like these that they would confess to things that they had done all those years ago.

“Do you remember Mum about the time when Mr Short’s greenhouse got smashed and the Police were called? Well that was Chris and me. We did it from my bedroom window with that catapult that I used to have.” Gladys was sometimes a bit shocked as to what she heard, but there was nothing too horrendous.

Peter liked to surprise Kate and once arranged for her to have time off work without her knowing and met her one dinnertime. She thought he was taking her out to lunch. It was only when they got out of the car at the airport that she realised something wasn’t quite right. He flew her to Majorca for a week’s holiday. Night after night, hand in hand walking alongside the marina with all the expensive boats, she knew that life had become precious; he knew that he wanted to spend every second with this beautiful woman beside him.

# Chapter Two

It was just beginning to get dark as Kate returned home from work. If she was in the office she officially finished at five o’clock, although sometimes it was gone seven when she finally tore herself away. She had been known to stay as late as nine some nights but she tried to use seven o’clock as a rough guideline for being too sad. As she walked up the short paved path she was greeted by the next door neighbour’s cat carefully balanced on the small wall between her and next door’s houses. At her feet she could see what once had been a mouse, although it resembled more a red splodge.

“Go away Thomas,” she bellowed at the gingery grey cat. He was always leaving ‘presents’ on her doorstep or on the pavement outside her gate. She angrily got her keys out of her pocket and went inside shutting the door in the face of Thomas the cat who had decided to follow her into her house.

She picked up the pile of letters that had been used as a doormat upon her entry and sat on the sofa opening them.

She pressed the button on her answering machine next to a display showing the number 1 flashing away merrily. The announcer proudly informed her that there was one message on the answering machine. Kate settled down to listen to it thinking it was her mum or Moira as she called herself when she phoned. She had never called herself Mum when phoning. She said it made her sound old, so she called herself by her name. Kate likewise when phoning her mum called her Moira. She heard the voice start and was surprised not to hear a female Irish voice come from the speaker.

“Hi Kate, it’s Chris. Listen I’ve got to talk to you whenever you get five minutes. Give me a ring. See you.”

‘What did he want?’ she thought. It had been a while since she had spoken to him. The last time they had met was at Gladys’ birthday party at the care home last year. It was her sixtieth and the home had put on food and music to celebrate their youngest resident’s birthday. All the family had been there, but they couldn’t hide the huge gap where Peter should have stood. Gladys had done well not to let it show, but Kate had found her crying when she had gone to the toilet. They both missed him desperately.

Kate had to search out her diary to look for Chris’ number. He had moved to Worksop to live with his girlfriend Natasha. Kate hadn’t had the pleasure of meeting her, but had heard loads from Chris about her. She was a family liaison officer with the Police and always seemed to be working when Chris came up to Leeds. She dialled the number. There was no answer. She let it ring just a few more times, but still no answer. She and Peter had bought an answering machine for Chris some years before for Christmas, but to her knowledge he hadn’t used it yet. She wished he had because it was really puzzling what he wanted her for. She read through her letters and threw the leaflet for a loan in her bin. A bank statement told her that her wages had been paid in, and the last letter was from Amy asking when she was going to try and get to Edinburgh. Amy liked to write letters. She said the art of writing had got lost in the world of text and email. Kate looked again at her bank statement and thought that it would be nice to try and get there at the weekend. She got up and went to her mahogany desk in the dining room, which was a present from work for working such long hours. It was more of a joke from Aaron because Kate had claimed that she had so much work to do she even worked at home most nights. He had even had a brass plate made and inscribed with the words ‘**Genius at work so bugger off’.** She had put the plate on the wall just at the side of the bookshelf so that it was sort of hidden from view unless you went looking for it. Kate looked for her work diary to check her availability for the weekend. She had so many diaries. One for work, one for personal and one for her phone numbers. She found her work diary and checked the weekend. She had a meeting with Aaron on Friday afternoon but she could bring it forward to Thursday afternoon with a bit of careful persuasion and that would leave the way for her to travel to Scotland on the Friday afternoon. She would be there for about teatime and then she could come back on Sunday night. Kate looked in her phone number diary and pressed the numbers next to Amy’s name. The phone hardly seemed to ring when a male voice answered.

“Hello.” It was Mr. Perfect.

“Hi it’s Kate, is Amy around?”

“Yes I’ll go and get her. She’s in the garage painting.” Amy had always been a bit of an amateur painter. She was actually very good. She had done about three exhibitions in Edinburgh and received very good reviews. One of her favourite pictures was an image of Kate as a porcelain doll inside a green bottle. From a distance it seemed to be a normal painting, but on closer inspection Amy had done most of the colours in felt tip pens. The borders of the picture were done in silk finish gloss. She had also drawn a faint pair of eyes on the bottle, so that when someone got close to look at the picture it almost seemed as if they could see their own reflection. It had attracted plenty of attention in the public showings that she had done and had got brilliant comments in the local press from the art critics. She had even received about five offers of money to sell the picture, but she would not accept any of them. Kate and Amy talked for over an hour, catching up on all that had happened. Suddenly Kate told Amy that she had to go and she would see her on Friday. She had just remembered that Chris had phoned her. All the suspense came flooding back as if it had tripled in number since the last time it had troubled her. She dialled again. There was still no answer. It was like a cruel joke when somebody starts saying something and then stops with the words, “Oh it doesn’t matter.” It obviously wasn’t that important, it would keep, and she could try him again tomorrow. Kate reached inside the fridge for a bottle of wine, got a glass from the cupboard and headed upstairs to run a bath. Kate missed Peter at times like these. It was quiet, she was lonely, she had a bottle, her neck was stiff, she needed a massage but Peter couldn’t do it. She started running the bath and kneeling down at the side watching the water fill up, stirred it around with her arm as the bubbles piled up on top of one another until it was ready. She put her glass, now empty on the back of the bath with the bottle, let her items of clothing fall one by one to the floor and stepped into the bath, naked and tired.

Peter had watched her every move from the moment she came up the stairs. She almost seemed seductive as if she was tempting him into bed. If he had been there in body he would not have been able to keep his hands off her. He slowly moved into the bathroom. He looked at Kate laying in the bath alone and longed for her. He wished he could have become at one with the water to surround her body and caress her. He wanted to move into every inch of her curves and to wash over her from head to toe. He fell to his knees. He was laid in the pile of her clothes. He had never felt so close to her since the accident had prevented him from taking his proper position in her life. He felt like an alcoholic unable to reach out for the last drink, like a drug addict unable to find the fix, like a millionaire who couldn’t access his money and like a lover unable to touch his dream. Kate started to feel cold in the bath, even though she kept topping up the bath with hot water and the room was filled with hot steam; she decided to get out. She finished the bottle of wine whilst she got her dressing gown on, then she went downstairs to try Chris’ number one last time. There was still no answer so she went back upstairs to do her nightly routine of brushing her hair and applying her creams. There was still a noticeable chill in the air but she carried on with her nightly tasks and then got into bed. Within minutes she was asleep, and Peter knew he could enter her dreams again and be with her, he needed love and she was the only person he wanted it with.

“I’m sick of being on this coach now,” said Kate. The seats were a bit uncomfortable and she needed to stretch her legs. She wasn’t really dressed for travelling on coaches. She still had her work clothes on. Her knee-length black skirt was riding higher and higher up her legs and her black tights were shining from the lights on the roof of the coach. She couldn’t sit comfortably enough to rest her legs. She was warm and she took off her dark green suit jacket and watched as Peter put it in the overhead luggage racking. He noticed that he could see her bra strap through her white blouse and when she turned to look out of the window he could see inside her shirt between the buttons. He wanted to do it there and then even in front of all the people, he didn’t care. People do it on aeroplanes and get praised for it. He wanted to do it on a coach bound for Blackpool. He pulled Kate’s head down onto his knee and started running his fingers through her mousy brown hair. She loved having her hair played with. He started to rub her neck and her shoulders. She could feel the tension of the day’s work leaving her body in every direction. He pulled her blouse out of her skirt and gently rubbed her back from top to bottom. Everything and everyone around them had paled into insignificance; this was pure sexual arousal. Peter sensually undid her bra, it wasn’t easy, it was a new one and the catch was a bit stiff, but he managed it. He started moving his hand to the side so as to go underneath her breasts. This was heaven on the M62 motorway. Whilst everyone around them either slept or stared out of the window the two of them entered paradise.

There was a loud screech of brakes and Kate was thrown against the seat in front of them and then onto the floor. She was sent sprawling down the aisle down the middle of the coach. She fought for enough strength to pull her blouse around her chest. As people came flying down on top of her Peter could only watch as she disappeared down towards the front of the coach. He lost sight of her and could only call her name in vain into the darkness.

Kate woke up again sweating and out of breath, her hair was stuck to her face and her pillow and nightdress were soaking wet. She remembered that dream vividly, as if it had really happened the day before. This dream had really troubled her. She felt like she had really escaped death. She could still feel the panic, hear the brakes and feel the thud as she landed on the floor. She again had heard Peter call her name. It was so real. How could she distance herself from something that had felt so real? She looked at her clock. Six-thirty. Something hit her. It was exactly the same time as it was the last time she had dreamt about Peter and woken up in a sweat. This dream was the worst one. Kate was still shaken up even after an hour had passed. She phoned Amy.

“What bloody time do you call this?” said Amy barely able to speak.

“I need to talk to you Amy,” said Kate. She told Amy all about the dream, and also told her about the last one. “They seem to be about once every two weeks at the moment,” Kate told Amy. The only advice that she got from Amy was to go and see the doctor.

“It’s probably all the stress at work,” Amy said soothingly, “but at least he’ll give you something to make you sleep.” That was the one thing Kate was scared of; she didn’t ever again want to go to sleep.

# Chapter Three

“Kate, is there something wrong?” she looked up in a daze.

“Oh sorry Aaron, I was miles away, I’m alright honest.” That last dream had really been troubling her. She couldn’t forget about it. It had been so real.

“Take the day off if you’re not well,” Aaron said trying to sound supportive, but obviously not really wanting her to go.

“No, no I’m okay, just didn’t sleep well last night that’s all.” It wasn’t a lie, she hadn’t slept well, she just didn’t want him to know why.

“Have you been burning the candles at both ends again? I’ve told you about that. Home is for living, Work is for working.” Kate just couldn’t help taking work home with her. Ever since Peter had died she had needed some sort of therapy, well that was her excuse. She had always worked at home, even when Peter was alive. It used to drive him mad. He would sit down to watch The Bill and all he could hear was Kate typing away, opening folders, shutting folders, opening drawers, closing drawers, it would drive him mad but he never said anything to her for fear of upsetting her. He knew how much she liked her job; he envied her in fact because he hated his job. Engineering was for Peter what the Berlin Wall had been for the people in East Germany.

“Kate, go home, that is an order,” said Aaron who had been watching Kate’s mind wander again. He realised that he was fighting a losing battle and that her mind was miles away from the job. “Take the rest of the week off and go to Edinburgh to see your friend; you were going to go anyway on Friday.” Kate thought for a while. She knew Aaron was talking sense.

“Maybe you’re right, I do need a break. I could take the Dewdrop file with me and call in on my way.”

“Don’t you dare,” said Aaron looking at her very sternly “this is time to take some of your holidays and forget about work for a few days. Go and don’t come back until I say so.”

Within two hours, Kate had packed a few things into her car and was ready to head off.

“Water checked, oil checked, tyre pressures checked, just need petrol and I’m away.” Kate threw a few things into her bag’ had a final check around the house and locked the door. As she approached the gate Mrs Benson shouted from the doorstep next door.

“Cooee, where are you off to?” She always was a nosy old bag Kate thought to herself.

“Edinburgh to see my friend, you remember Amy the blonde one drives a Volvo.”

“Oh I remember, I’ll keep an eye on your house whilst you’re away, let me know when you’re back.” Mrs Benson was a schoolmistress-looking woman in her sixties or seventies and had, like Kate come from Ireland. She thought that gave her the right to snoop into Kate’s life. Kate didn’t really know all that much about Mrs Benson. She took far too much time talking about other people that she didn’t talk about herself. Kate didn’t know if she had been married, except from being called Mrs. She often pondered the question of whether she had family or not, but had to admit to herself that if Mrs Benson was a relative of hers, she wouldn’t bother to go and see her. So she wouldn’t blame Mrs Benson’s family if they had had the same thought. Actually, Kate told herself, Mrs Benson had been pretty supportive when Peter died. She had gone round and cooked for Kate and cleaned, just so Kate could do other things, but after the funeral there had been less and less for Mrs Benson to do and she had taken her leave.

She was finally on her way. She thought she would call Amy at about the halfway point and just make sure she was going to be in. The journey seemed to pass quite quickly. Her mind was like an occupied land; her thoughts were the occupying forces, moving slowly from one town to another breaking through defences and advancing forward. Her defences were second rate and the surrender wasn’t long in coming. Her thoughts, the invaders, had conquered. She started to think over the dreams that she had had. There had been a few, but the last one was horrific. She wondered if it was some kind of anniversary, but it was none that she could think of. Peter died two years ago in April and it wasn’t his birthday or anything.

“It must just be that I am feeling guilty for getting on with my life,” she said to herself. She talked to herself a lot but had only noticed it since Peter wasn’t there to listen to her. Once again she talked away the miles, she did it often when she went out on the road to meet clients. She arrived in Edinburgh after what seemed like minutes, as if she had gone shopping to the local supermarket. She looked in her street map to find Amy’s street and followed the route carefully. Thirty minutes later she arrived at Amy’s house. It was an old- style town house, about fifteen minutes from the town centre. Amy came running out to meet Kate

“I’ve been waiting for you to ring,” said Amy, “I’ve been ringing your mobile, but it’s switched off.” Kate got her bags out of the car and went into the house.

“This is Scott.” Kate shook his hand whilst looking him up and down. He was quite dishy she thought. He was a handsome man, very businesslike and quite stocky. Amy showed her up to the spare room where she was going to sleep. It was at the back of the house. It was quite a deceiving size. Kate thought it would be pretty small, but it was in actual fact quite big. There was another bedroom in the attic that had been converted before Amy and Scott bought it. Kate put her bag on the bed and sat on the end. “It certainly feels comfortable,” she thought to herself. Amy followed Kate up to the room and asked the question that Kate had been expecting.

“What do you think of him then?”

“He’s nice, seems really nice. Look I smell, can I get a shower or a bath or something?” Amy showed her to the bathroom,

“Help yourself,” she said. “Are you hungry? Scott’s going to get a Chinese for tea, so have your bath and then it’ll be ready.” Kate enjoyed the shower. It made a nice change to have a shower that worked properly. Kate’s shower only worked occasionally, and quite often left her stood with a towel around her desperately trying to get the shower to heat up. She was just getting out of the shower as Scott came back.

“Food and bed that’s the order of the day.” Two bottles of wine later and stuffed with beef and green pepper in black bean sauce (with fried rice) Kate took herself off to bed. She hadn’t been asleep long, when she was awoken by shouting. It sounded like Amy and Scott were having an argument. She couldn’t tell what was being said, but it sounded nasty. It took some time for it to quieten down and Kate could finally think about going to sleep. She was looking around the room, watching the curtains moving in a slight breeze that was finding its way through the window frame. It was pretty dark at the back of the house. It overlooked a yard and beyond the yard gate was an alley where all the bins were kept and a few cars were parked. There was a street light, but too far away to give much light. Kate went to the window and looked carefully in the yard; the gate was open. She couldn’t think of why anyone would leave a gate open at night-time. There was an eerie chill in the air; she felt as though there was somebody stood behind her, it was the same chill that she had felt in the air at home. “Peter,” she said slowly. As she whispered his name her breath left its trace on the window.

“I’m going bloody mad,” Kate said to herself. “I’m talking to a dead person,” she backed away from the window and went back to the bed and peeled back the covers and climbed inside. It was the sort of cold bed that makes you snuggle up and try and get warm. She certainly felt a bit spooked, but reality had escaped her for a moment, she was okay now. She got comfortable and started thinking about the noise from downstairs, it had all gone quiet now. “I hope Amy is okay.” She wanted to go downstairs, but didn’t want to interfere. She would leave it until morning. Kate was just about on the point of going to sleep when she felt someone again in the bedroom; she could hear someone breathing, right at the side of her bed. She was too scared to open her eyes; she could feel a real, deep presence within that room. She slept only slightly; she couldn’t stop thinking about the presence that she had felt. It was real enough and something that she didn’t want to feel again. It wasn’t an alien presence, but she didn’t feel either that it was a friendly presence. Many broken sleeps later she knew she had to get up. She looked at her watch. Six-thirty. A chill went down her spine. “Six-thirty again. This is weird. Every time I have a bad dream or interrupted sleep I wake up at six-thirty.” She felt really spooked, but tried not to let it bother her. She reached inside her bag under the bed and pulled out a book that she had been trying to get through. The words didn’t make sense, they seemed all jumbled up and the pages didn’t seem to follow one another. She gave it up as a bad job and went to look out of the window instead. The gate was now closed. Kate didn’t know what the hell was going on, but she intended to find out. She lay there for what seemed like an eternity with all sorts of things going through her head. She didn’t even believe in ghosts and here she was thinking that she had one following her around. Things certainly didn’t add up. Why had she started dreaming about him and why were the dreams so real? She couldn’t figure it out.

Morning came suddenly. Kate sat up and had to do a double take of her surroundings. Amy knocked quietly on the door and peered round.

“Nice cuppa for you Kate, sleep okay?” Kate wiped her eyes.

“Yes eventually. Took some getting off though.” She paused. “Amy, is everything alright with you and Scott? I couldn’t but help hearing you row last night.” Amy looked confused. The sort of look that you may give when a stranger greets you like an old friend, but you don’t have a clue who they are but are too polite to say so.

“We didn’t have a row last night. In fact we have never had a row in all the time we’ve been together. We came to bed about five minutes after you.” This is so weird she thought. I could have sworn that the voices were coming from downstairs. “We are having a girlie night in tonight; Scott has got to go to London for a conference. We’ll get a few bottles in and have a catch-up chat. Kate had to agree that that sounded like a fantastic idea. In fact anything that involved drinking alcohol was a fantastic idea in Kate’s mind.