

What had called them, and where was it?

Her fear of these things was quickly replaced by a desperate need to know. If they meant her harm, they could easily have done it by now.

Sam followed them. She kept her distance, but kept them in sight. She saw that more were joining the hundreds that had passed by her, and the hundreds were becoming thousands. They were moving as one, like a migrating herd of wildebeest, or a colony of ants on the hunt.

Suddenly, Smantha knew exactly where she was. After more than twenty years she recognised the house on the hill. The hoard passed by it, and through it, and over the brow of the hill, down to the valley, and the canal below.

Everybody back then called it the house on the hill. Its real name was St Marys Nursing Care Home. Looking like something from a Charles Dickens Novel, stark and bleak against the night skyline, it's where both Sam's grandparents had spent their last years, and where, as a child, she would visit them from time to time with her mother.

She came to the brow of the hill, looking down as the horde of grey things reached

the canal. They stopped suddenly at the water's edge. She watched as a thick mist arose from the canal and spread into the air, covering everything in its path, like a London smog of old. The throng of grey things moved forward into the mist.

Samantha sat and watched as, eventually, every one of them disappeared into the mist that had settled over the canal. Then the mist dissipated, as if blown away by a light breeze. Then there was nothing. No mist, no grey things. Just the night, and the moon, reflecting in the middle of the bottom lock.

Samantha sat for a while, trying to process what she had just seen. She couldn't, of course. In her world this was impossible, it couldn't happen. In her mind she was trying to put the pieces together, like a jigsaw puzzle where, no matter how hard you try, the pieces just didn't fit.

She decided that she would spend the night in the old care home, try to get some sleep, and go down to the canal in the morning, to see if she could find anything to explain the things she had just witnessed.

It wasn't difficult getting into the old building. None of the doors were locked. In

fact, they were barely on their hinges after many years of people breaking in, exploring, looking for ghosts, making out, or whatever.

Sam found herself a couch. It smelt and was a little damp, but she really didn't care at this stage. She just wanted, needed, to sleep.

She slept soundly, and dreamt of times gone by, when she would visit her grandparents in this place. They weren't happy times. Towards the end neither of her grandparents knew who she was, or who her mother was. Her mother insisted on going to visit, and insisted that Sam went too, in some vain hope that one day the dementia would be better, and they would miraculously be recognized once again.

The dream disturbed her, and Sam woke suddenly. The half-light of early dawn was beginning to creep into the room. She was aware now that the couch she had slept on actually smelt of pee. She was aware that she was cold. She was aware that something or someone was standing next to her. Mostly she was aware that the pointy end of the screwdriver she had taken from the garden shed last night, was being pressed against her throat.

“Who the fuck are you, and what the actual fuck is going on”, said a female voice, angry, not frightened.

Samantha didn't answer. Instead, her army training kicked in. In a sweeping movement, her right arm knocked the screwdriver away from her throat, while at the same time her left threw a punch, connecting with the solar plexus of her assailant, knocking the wind out of her and dropping her to her knees.

Samantha stood up, picked up the screwdriver and spoke quietly to the girl, now struggling to breathe on the floor in front of her.

“Sorry about that, just breathe slowly. Deep breaths. You'll be fine in a few minutes”.

Samantha waited, sitting on the couch, for the young lady to regain both her breath and her composure, before speaking again.

“My name is Samantha, what's yours”?