

INSIGHT: Fact or Fiction? You Decide.

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INSIGHT

Fact or Fiction? You Decide.

By

Gary Davies

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to everyone who wonders if I'm writing about them.

I am. (*Anonymous*)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gary Davies was born and has lived most of his life in Cwmbran in South Wales. Having served in the British Army, most of his working life has been in the manufacturing industry.

Insight is his first novel covering a subject that touches most of us. Having spent many years as an avid reader he decided it was time to dip his toe into the vast ocean that is writing.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, organizations, places, events and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

CHAPTER 1

ello, my name is Gary Channing, I'm 38 and my life is about to change drastically! Kind of like *The X Factor* but without the singing, from being a nobody to the most sought after person on the planet. Hopefully I now have your attention?

My wife, Sue, and I decided to go on one of those ghost weekends. You know the kind, you pay 3 times the price you would normally pay to stay at the place because you're on a haunted weekend. Yeah right, like ghosts only work certain weekends and charge more to haunt you because of it! But the wife thought our lives needed some excitement, having fallen into the usual midlife monotony, work, home, home, work. She had a point, after 12 years of marriage and 2 kids things weren't exactly what you'd call exciting, but boy oh boy was she going to get her wish, by the bucket load.

So the kids were sorted and off we went on our ghost hunting weekend, 2 hours later we arrived at the unusually named 'Hope Hall', it looked like your typical stately home, all windows and ivy, plus the must-have gravel drive. We parked up and walked into the reception, which to be honest looked like it had been knocked together by a 3-year-old. The young lady behind the barricade, (for want of a better description) took the usual details off us, booked us into room 12 and sent us on our merry way with directions, "Have a nice stay" and a rather forced smile. Good start.

Our room was on the second floor, at the end of a long corridor, filled with potted plants and ancestry paintings, which gave you that, you're being watched feeling, spooky! As we entered I glanced back down the corridor and noticed a group of about 5 people, all watching us enter our room! The weird meter started to twitch! By the time I shut the door Sue was unpacking and organising toiletries, nothing like good organising to make you feel at home and make your teeth itch. Having had a look around the room, I found the 'Planned Events' sheet, detailing events from ghost walks to table tipping! (Is that like cow tipping only with tables?) I know, a bizarre sense of humour, you're not the first!

Looking out the window, I finally found something to make me smile, one of the most beautiful views I had ever seen, I turned to mention it to Sue and looking back at me were about a dozen people! This was one of those close your eyes and shake your head moments, it worked, I opened my eyes and thankfully they had all gone, but were they really there in the first place?

Both myself and my wife shared a healthy interest in the paranormal, enjoying all the Ghost Hunting programmes and having our fair share of 'incidents' shall we say. A previous home had caused us to get help from a local paranormal group who worked their magic as their leader explained it. To be honest he was a little premature in his grand statement, but that's another story. So we were not novices when it came to unusual incidents. I decided to try out the bed whilst Sue busied herself, it really was comfortable, I closed my eyes and relaxed, I must have dozed off as I was startled by a male voice saying, "Welcome to our home."

Thinking we had a visitor I shot up off the bed and was startled to find the room full of people, males, females and children! I froze, what the hell was happening? Who were all these people? And more importantly what were they doing in my room, (well it seemed important at the time). Then a sense of calm came over me, a feeling of being in the company of friends, people I knew, although I did not recognise anybody, then I could hear Sue calling me, but I could not see her, a sense of panic started to wash over me and just as it seemed to peak I woke up! Bang, like being teleported from one room to another, no people, just Sue stood over me, calling me a lazy shit! Had it really been a dream? Had I really fallen asleep and dreamt it? I pondered it for a while whilst carrying out the 3S's, an old army saying, carried out before any social event, Shit, Shave, and Shower! In that order. The minds of men and there was me worrying about my 'Power Nap' dream!

So, suitably cleansed and attired, we left our room and headed for our first 'event' on the list, which was a social gathering of all the guests there for the haunted weekend. I couldn't wait, loads of false smiles and small talk, just my cup of tea. As you can tell I am one of life's great socialisers, not! So this was going to be one of life's little tests, which I had to pass otherwise Sue would kill me, no really, trust me. So deep breath, best smile and in I plunged.

The first person we met was Ian, he was as he described it our Event Organiser. I thought he was a cock and he'd fail miserably over the weekend to prove me wrong. Having navigated past him with minimum fuss, the next to invade my personal space was Jeff and Sally, amateur ghost hunters as they introduced themselves and happy to tell the world and his dog how good they were. They would prove to be the Yvette and Karl of the weekend, (*Most Haunted*) her screaming and frightening the shit out of everybody with it, and him swearing and talking to himself at every opportunity. Fantastic viewing, well for me it was. Next was Bill and Mary, nice people if your preference was OAPs who smelt of fags and piss! I kid you not, it was enough to curdle milk, but I think they knew as they kept pretty much to themselves after that.

Next was Phil, 40-something and his 'friend' Clare who appeared to be attached to him by an invisible leash about 3ft long, pretty girl and I mean girl. Phil was a successful car salesman who used to have his own business! Begs the question if he was so successful why 'used to have?' The one question 'Mr I could sell sand to the Arabs' failed to answer all weekend. Next up on our radar was Evan and Beth, both appeared to be in their late teens and introduced themselves as brother and sister, both were students, (tax dodgers I thought) although both for no apparent reason sent a cold shiver down my spine, Sue decided she was going to mother them all weekend, suited me fine, that left me to do as I pleased to a point. Ian then introduced Rob, our medium or not as it would later turn out, who was to guide us through our paranormal weekend, by this time my smile muscles were beginning to cramp, this was going to be tough, if only I knew how tough.

So our first event was a guided tour and history of Hope Hall, built in 1840 by Henry Hope, wealthy land owner and businessman who left his fortune to the upkeep of the hall. He never married and had no children, but, it was claimed, he had the Midas touch when it came to making money. He died in 1875. So my first question was if this was the case, how come the Hall was supposed to be haunted and if it was then it would be safe to assume that it was the ghost of Henry Hope, not so was the surprising answer from Rob, he then proceeded to impart with the biggest croc of shit story about devil worship and human sacrifice etc, etc. This guy should have been working for *The News of the World*, but it appeared that everyone else had taken it hook, line and sinker, Suckers.

We continued with the guided tour, from downstairs to up, I will say one thing for Rob, he put plenty of passion into his delivery. If I hadn't been such a cynical old git I might have enjoyed it. As we moved from room to room there seemed to be other guests wandering around, taking an interest in our group, but for some reason nobody in ours seemed to notice them! I put it down to Rob's Oscar winning tour.

Having completed our tour, we ended up in a large dining room on the ground floor; I took this as an opportunity to vanish off to the toilet, more for a break from the group rather than a need to Pee! Having dragged it out for as long as I could, I made my way out into the hall pretending to adjust myself, as I looked up people were lining the stairs on both sides and along the landing, they appeared to be waiting for somebody. I thought, just my luck, I've walked out on a wedding party or some other formal occasion. Having given myself the 'double check' to ensure my fly was ok, I glanced towards the stairs and to my surprise the 'Honour Guard' had vanished! Things were becoming weird, very weird, I decided the first chance I got I was going to mention it to Sue; a "Gary, stop being a cock" response was just what I needed at this moment in time and I was sure my darling wife wouldn't let me down. Having arrived back in the dining hall to find, one I hadn't been missed and two, Rob and Ian were setting up the next event, I was so excited I thought I was

going to fart! Thankfully I didn't, well not then!

Rob, announced that the next event was ready, he was going to lead the group through 'Table Tipping'. He explained that the plan was to communicate with one of the spirits and get them to lift and tip/tilt the table. Jeff and Sally took this opportunity to inform the rest of us of the last time they had been involved in this, surprisingly it involved the table moving, Sally screaming and Jeff swearing, no surprises there then.

So Rob got Phil, Claire, Bill and Mary to sit with him at the table, the rest of us picked a spot where we could view what was going to happen, suffice to say mine was a little further away than the others. So Rob got everybody sat at the table to form a circle using their hands and to concentrate, Rob called on any spirits present to communicate with them by moving the table, nothing happened, again Rob carried out the same request, again nothing happened, Sensing a little disappointment Rob asked the group to concentrate more, again Rob requested for any spirits to move the table, again nothing, I then noticed two females appear from the shadows behind Rob and they made their way to the table, it appeared I was the only one who had noticed them, they got to the table and started to rock it gently at first then lift it slightly, everybody seemed genuinely startled by this and I'm thinking are we not supposed to see them?

You could feel the excitement rise as the table moved more and more, I thought to myself, they're taking the piss. I stepped forward to say something and as I did the table dropped to the floor and the younger of the two females looked at me and with some venom put a long thin finger to her lips and just glared at me. Startled by this reaction I took a step back to my original position and, feeling like a naughty schoolboy, I looked up and the same female was giving me the most beautiful smile I had ever seen! The weird meter was now off the scale and the hairs on the back of my neck were stood to attention. The 'activity' carried on for a couple of minutes, much to the delight of the group, as both females disappeared back into the shadows they turned and smiled at me, which made me feel even more scared.

The lights were turned back up and Ian announced it was time for tea and biscuits, I was thinking of something a little stronger than tea and this was from a man who did not drink! I managed to get Sue over to a quiet corner of the room and proceeded to tell her about what had gone on so far, the response was predictable and kind of comforting, well as comforting as being called a 'cock' can be. But I did feel better for having spoken about it and made Sue promise not to tell anyone about what had happened.

Ian appeared from nowhere and asked if everything was ok, we confirmed it was, he then asked what we thought of the table tipping? Sue answered with enough enthusiasm for both of us and seemed to have the desired effect on Ian, as he buggered off to annoy someone else, me? I could feel my smile muscles starting to cramp again.

Next on the agenda was group experiments, we were split into teams of two and allocated a room in the hall to carry out a vigil, I was paired with Claire, much to the disgust of Phil, who was paired with Mary! Now that brought a smile to my face and Sue got paired with Evan. Claire and I were given a camcorder, a motion detector, plus a digital thermometer and sent to Henry Hope's bedroom, wonderful. Claire seemed overjoyed by the decision and seemed a changed person even in the short space of time after being surgically removed from Phil, who by now was well pissed. So off we went to old Henry's room for two hours of paranormal fun, Ian's words not mine, I can assure you. Claire was like a bottle of pop and couldn't seem to stop talking all the way to Henry's bedroom; my teeth were beginning to itch again!

We entered Henry's bedroom and set up the motion detector to cover the floor, we sat on the bed and I gave Claire the camcorder and told her not to film me, at all, which didn't seem to dampen

her enthusiasm at all. I did manage to convince her that being quiet was a good idea. After about 15 minutes the detector went off and frightened the crap out of both of us, Claire managed to drop the camcorder in my lap which only added to the embarrassment of me squealing like a girl. I picked it up and gave it her back, got off the bed and reset the detector, as I returned to the bed I noticed that Claire looked as if she was asleep, I shook her by the shoulder but she remained, for want of a better description, fast asleep. Just then I heard a deep male voice say, "You won't wake her, she's in a kind of psychic sleep, it will do her no harm but will allow me to communicate with you!"

At this time the fart I told you about earlier was well and truly out! I turned to the sound of the voice to see Henry Hope sat in a chair in the far corner, I recognised him from his portrait. I tried the close your eyes and shake your head trick, but this time it did not work, I thought to myself, you cock, you've fallen asleep again and you're dreaming.

"I'm afraid you're not dreaming," stated Henry. *Fucking great*, I thought, with all rational thought out the window by now, I decided to go with it, so to speak.

"Come on then, Henry," I said, "what's this all about? Let me guess, we're in the twilight zone, or I have a brain tumour that makes me fall asleep and have weird dreams?"

"Close," he said. The man has a sense of humour, I thought! A sense of humour? He's a bloody ghost or a figment of my imagination what the hell was I on about?

Henry, or rather Henry's ghost, proceeded to explain to me that I was here for a purpose, which would be made clearer in the coming months and that I was being "prepared" to carry out what was required of me. Very cryptic, I thought. Henry explained that all that had happened tonight had been real; I was not going mad, although I felt like it, it was part of the preparation process to help me understand. He also explained that over the next couple of months I would receive visitors who would supply me with information to help me, but now was not the time to reveal it all. He asked me not to discuss what was happening and that I needed to try and keep a clear mind to allow 'things' to happen.

I looked at the floor to try and understand what was happening; my thought process was interrupted by Claire asking if she had fallen asleep. I looked at Henry's chair and it did not surprise me to find no one sitting there, I told Claire she must have dozed off for a minute or two.

The rest of the vigil passed without incident, so we preceded back to the dining room, with all pairs back, Ian asked each pair to share with the group any experiences they had. Bill and Sally were the first to pipe up; they claimed to have captured orbs on film and heard voices! Also Sally claimed she had been touched, brave ghost! This was naturally accompanied by the obligatory scream. Bill stated he nearly pissed himself, which I found highly amusing considering my previous description of him, but I did get the stern teacher look off Sue which made me feel like a naughty schoolboy. Ian planned to review everybody's video and share any findings with us all during lunch. This was the first time since my little chat with Henry that I'd thought what might be on the camcorder, Claire was clutching it to her like it was a prized possession, no chance of getting my hands on that then I thought to myself.

Jeff and Beth were next to contribute. I thought, this is going to be fun, if it's down to Jeff to explain we're all going to spend the next 10 minutes listening to him effing and blinding! But to my surprise Jeff seemed very subdued and it was down to Beth to explain, she claimed Jeff had been possessed! Now under normal circumstances a "bollocks" under the breath would have been my usual response, but after what I had been through so far, this was quite believable. Beth claimed

that as soon as they entered the attic room Jeff started "acting weird," now I know what you're thinking, how could she tell? She claimed that the spirit of Henry Hope had possessed Jeff! This would have been around the same time I was having my conversation with Henry. Now I know he's a ghost, so does that mean he can be in two places at once?

"No" was the response whispered in my ear. This convinced me that Jeff was pulling a Derek Acorah episode. But, as before, the rest of the group were hooked, this was one piece of video I couldn't wait to see. That was pretty much it as far as the experiences were concerned, Ian called an end to the proceedings announcing to my surprise that it was 5am and time to get some sleep; he asked us all to meet back up at 2pm for lunch for some camcorder classics! Boy, that man kills me, so witty and funny!!!! Again, NOT!

To say it had been a strange trip so far was an understatement and certainly not what I expected. I sat on the edge of our bed trying to make sense of all that had happened, what worried me more was the fact that I didn't really seem that phased about what had happened, curious yes. My thoughts were interrupted by Sue coming out of the bathroom, a quick pee and a brush of the teeth then bed, good plan! You know what they say about the best laid plans?

Having done the business I left the bathroom ready for bed, Sue was already asleep and I was planning to join her very soon! So it came as no surprise to find you know who sat in the chair next to the bed.

"Come on Henry," I said, "you're taking the piss, I'm on my chinstrap here, and I need to sleep."

"All in good time, Gary. We need to make plans, you need to understand what this is all about before you leave, later your friend, the medium, plans to show everybody his talent, he does have a talent but not for talking to the dead! Reading people's thoughts? Yes, but communicating with the dead? No. So you need to understand how to "draw out" the thought readers and learn how to expose them for what they are, so listen very carefully and no falling asleep!"

"Yes, Dad." A smartass ghost to boot, lord help me.

So Henry proceeded to explain it all to me. "People like Rob read people's thoughts, they cannot communicate with the dead or ghosts or spirits, they get snippets of what people are thinking hence the, 'I've got a Bill or a Bob here, someone's dad or grandfather' and so on. They don't get all the information, then as the people who this info relates to think harder, and those who it doesn't relax, then they home in on their thoughts until they have narrowed it down to one or two people, then they are able to get more information as they think more about Bill or Bob, basically they tell people what they are thinking and they don't even realise it, as simple as that. So they're not telling them anything they don't already know. Now to prove this, later I want you to think of a name, someone you don't know, and concentrate really, really hard on it. You're going to need to be picked out, then once he's taken the bait you need to reel him in so to speak, all of it needs to be false information then you'll know for sure that I'm right. Mind you, you should already know that because people who communicate with ghosts do it just like we are now, it's as simple as that, they see them and they can hear them, but also the ghost must want to be seen and heard also. Have you got all that?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Good, now time for sleep and keep an eye out for some of my guests."

I put my head in my hands and said, "Thanks Henry." I looked up and he was gone. Thank fuck for that. Boy did I need to sleep.

CHAPTER 2

I

awoke at midday to the sound of Sue showering. I felt strangely refreshed and full of energy, which was very unusual for me. Sue and I swapped places in the shower, I really did feel great, having showered and dressed we headed downstairs for some food, I was starving. Everybody else was already there, some looking a little worse for wear to be honest, much to my amusement, which was swiftly curtailed by an elbow to the ribs from Sue. We grabbed some food and coffee, found a table next to Phil and Claire, now he really did look like shit! With pleasantries exchanged I proceeded to work my way through the equivalent of a small banquet that I had on my plate.

Having finished my food, I looked across to Phil and he really, really did look like shit, it turned out that he'd had the room from hell to sleep in. Again, Claire had heard nothing, but Phil had been pulled out of bed, had the quilt pulled off, he'd seen shadows and heard voices, he was not a happy camper at all, Claire was gutted she had missed it all, which cheered Phil up even more. Everybody else had seemed to have had an uneventful sleep, suffice to say I included myself in that category.

Ian arrived like Dale Winton on acid, all smiles and fake tan; he asked us all to make our way to the dining room where he had set up the equipment to review everybody's 'evidence' from last night. First up were Phil and Mary, they had been sent to the kitchen. They had captured a couple of orbs, which Ian kindly explained were spirits! This was met with a loud bang from the room above, which made everybody jump, including Ian. And that was pretty much all they had. Mary explained that their battery had run out after 10 minutes and the spare didn't last much longer, she tried to get Phil to agree with what she had said, but he was definitely 'off planet'.

Next up were Sue and Evan, they had picked up some strange temperature readings in the library and caught on video what looked like someone walking through the closed door at the other end of the room, the cameras weren't the best and had seen better days so the footage could have been better, but even so it was pretty good, neither of them had seen it at the time so the footage came as a bit of a shock. Bill and Sally had been given the wine cellar, they had nothing to show for their night's work apart from Sally screaming at everything and anything, which frightened the crap out of Bill every time.

Jeff and Beth were next, they had been given the attic space, I wanted to see how long it took for Jeff to swear on camera and I didn't have to wait long as he tripped up the stairs leading to the attic, classic. Now I did say there was something about Beth and Evan, well Beth to be precise, as soon as they were in the attic she changed, Jeff had set up the camera on a tripod so they could walk around, they had been given a digital audio recorder to try and get EVPs, (Electronic Voice Phenomena). All you could pick up on the camera was "muttering" no real words as such, you could hear Jeff asking questions in the background. As Beth passed the camera the picture seemed to distort and the camera shut off. The next thing you see is 55 minutes later and Jeff looks like he's been dragged through a hedge, Ian stops the video and asks Jeff and Beth what had happened,

Jeff was about to answer when Beth announced that the battery had run out without them knowing and Jeff had fallen over some boxes!! Jeff seemed a little surprised by this explanation and was about to respond, then Jeff fainted!! I kid you not; he just passed clean out and fell off the chair he was sitting on, followed by the customary scream from Sally.

Jeff came round after a couple of seconds, no real harm done apart from his male pride, Beth on the other hand had a strange look of satisfaction on her face, very bizarre I thought. Anyway, drama over and back to the show. Last up were Claire and myself, this brought me back to reality with a thump, I was quite worried what Ian had found on our video, my fears were unfounded, it showed the motion detector going off, Claire falling asleep, the battery running out and that was it! Thank god for that. Ian asked if anybody had any personal experiences that had not been recorded on video that they wanted to share with the group. Phil put his hand up and proceeded to explain what had happened to him in his room, he had decided to 'ham it up' a bit from the version he had told us earlier! Any glimmer of sympathy I'd had for him vanished instantly, the word cock sprung to mind again.

So with the evidence review over, Ian explained the plan for the rest of the day, we could review all the evidence for ourselves and chat to Rob about anything that had happened, otherwise it was a meet back here at 7pm after evening meal to do the séance with Rob as a group and as couples, or one to one if Rob had any messages to convey! After that it was another night of vigils with a view to finish at 4am. I was pissing myself with excitement as Sue and I looked at each other!

"Don't start," was her stern reply to my excited expression, oh she knew me so well.

I said to Sue, "Let's get some fresh air, let's go for a walk, I need to talk to you."

We left via the French doors into the beautiful landscaped gardens, I explained or tried to explain all that had happened since we had been here, concentrating mainly on the conversations with Henry!

She looked me in the eyes and much to my relief she said, "I believe you."

I explained about the planned séance later and what Henry had said to do, I told Sue to come up with a name and just focus on it as hard as possible. We agreed a plan of attack for later and started to make our way back towards the house, I asked Sue what she thought of Beth and Evan?

"I'm not sure," she said, "at first I thought they were your typical young students, here for a bit of a laugh, but I've been watching them and they do act quite strange at times."

"What do you mean?" I said.

"Well sometimes it seems as if they are having a conversation with a third person. Also they don't appear to have mobiles! I mean teenagers without mobiles! Never happens, also when I did the vigil with Evan he wouldn't use any of the equipment, he just plain refused, which I thought was strange at the time, but now after what you've told me, it seems even stranger. I'm going to keep a very close eye on them pair at this séance. Don't make it obvious, they'll suss you out otherwise."

We arrived back at the hall and entered the way we came out, only Phil was still there, he seemed totally engrossed in the video footage that was playing.

"You ok, Phil?" I asked, which was met with a wave, his eyes never left the monitor, "Let's leave him

to it," I said.

As we left the dining hall we saw Evan and Beth deep in conversation by the door to the cellar.

"Everything alright, guys?" Sue asked. Either they didn't hear her or they chose not to. Anyway I was more interested in the couple at the top of the stairs gesturing me to follow them, I grabbed Sue's hand and pulled her to follow me. We got to the main landing and the couple had disappeared, nothing unusual with that the way this weekend was going.

I said to Sue, "Go to the room and I'll have a look around." It came as no surprise that as soon as Sue had left that the couple "reappeared." They gestured me to follow them, I followed them to the attic and found them sat on an old sofa. They appeared to be in their late 60s.

I asked, "Are you ghosts?" I know, stupid question.

"Yes," they said, "our names are Gwen and Albert. We met Henry when we were alive, we died within a couple of weeks of each other and found ourselves here!"

"Ok, so why have you brought me up here?" I said.

"We need to explain some things to you to help you understand what's happening. You're on a very important journey and we are here to kind of give you directions."

"So you're my spiritual sat nav then?" I asked with a smirk, I thought it was quite funny under the circumstances, suffice to say 'George and Mildred' didn't see the funny side, wasted!

"Ghosts or spirits need energy to communicate or show themselves, hence the reason why batteries run out quickly and the more energy around the more we can do. Henry built this house here for a reason, a high source of natural energy lies beneath the hall, that's the reason why we can pretty much do what we need to do. Not all ghosts are spirits, some are 'recordings' of people, light is energy, light allows us to see. That energy has to go somewhere, it's kind of stored in its surroundings and can 'playback' at any time, so not all paranormal encounters, as you like to call them, are caused by spirits like us. Yes sometimes we are seen, but usually for a reason and to the right people, but in death some spirits retain the evilness they had in life and can cause chaos, but it is unusual. Ok, time for you to go before you're missed. Remember, Gary, not everybody you see is real, especially here, bear that in mind and good luck with your journey." And they were gone, so I made my way back to our room, Sue was lying on our bed reading, she glanced up as I entered.

"Find anything interesting?" she asked, so I relayed what had happened in the attic. "You're becoming a right little ghost magnet, aren't you?" The hint of sarcasm didn't go unnoticed.

"Everything ok?" I asked.

"I'm sorry; this weekend was just meant to have been a bit of fun and has been hijacked by the spirit world it seems!" At least this statement was accompanied by a smirk.

"I know, it's not like I planned it, well apart from Jeff fainting!" I returned the smirk. "Mind you, who would believe us? I mean, what spirit in their right mind would pick a sarcastic, anti-social prick like me to spread the word?" Now that was met with a full on laugh, which cheered me up also.

We had a quick shower, changed and left for tea; downstairs we met Claire, who looked quite

worried.

"Is everything ok, Claire?" asked Sue.

"I can't find Phil," she said.

"Is that such a bad thing?" I asked. Sue scowled at me and Claire didn't seem to hear.

"Where did you see him last?" Sue asked. "I left him in the dining room; he wanted to have another look at his and Mary's video footage."

"Why?" I asked.

"I'm not sure, he thinks he's being haunted! I know what you're thinking, what's so strange about being haunted in a haunted house?" To be honest, Phil had been singled out for some rather 'personal' attention.

The others arrived and Claire asked them about Phil, most of them had the same response as me and Sue, apart from Beth, she replied with what can only be described as the most malicious grin,

"Who cares?" Now that did get everybody's attention.

"That's not very nice, Beth," said Mary.

"Who cares what you think? You old bag!" It appeared it was time for Beth to show her true colours. "What a sad bunch of people you are." This outburst really did take people by surprise, well apart from me, I had a feeling there was more to Beth than we had seen and, boy, how right I was.

"Why are you being like this?" asked Sue.

"What the fuck has it got to do with you?" was Beth's reply. Enough was enough. I stepped forward and grabbed Beth by the elbow with the intention of moving her away from the group and having a stern word. As my fingers made contact with her, it was like being electrocuted, I was frozen to the spot. Beth's facial features seemed to change to what I can only describe as demon like! She turned and faced me.

"Don't fucking touch me!"

Now I don't claim to be the bravest of men but the change in this woman frightened the crap out of me, apart from the facial change, her voice seemed to deepen and the smell from her mouth made me gag, all this made me stagger back holding my hand. Beth and Evan stormed out the main doors leaving us all stood there open mouthed.

"What the fuck just happened then?" was Jeff's response, we were all stunned and for once we all seemed to have experienced Beth's outburst.

My whole arm was tingling, confused was an understatement, Sue asked me if I was ok. I just nodded, I was quite shocked by the whole incident. As I was stood there I felt this hand on my shoulder, as I turned to see who it was, a wave of calm seemed to wash over me and the tingling stopped in my arm. As I looked, Gwen who I had met earlier breezed past me, this was fast becoming the twilight zone on acid.

The silence was broken by Ian's arrival. "Did I miss something?" was his opening statement. Fuck me. If only he knew! It did seem to bring everybody back to reality, Sue took charge of the situation.

"Phil's missing and Beth's just flipped and insulted everybody before storming off with Evan."

"Oh right, I really did miss something then. Phil's fine, he's sleeping in my office, he came to see me and Rob about the problems he'd been having - of a spiritual kind before you ask!"

Claire left with Ian to see Phil. I guided Sue out earshot of the others so we could talk.

Sue asked, "Are you ok?"

"I think so, what the hell was that all about?" Sue gave me that look of *spill!* So I told her everything including Gwen's appearance. What concerned me more was Beth's outburst, now I know we had our suspicions about Beth but the image she had left me with was one of pure evil and a feeling of "don't fuck with me or you'll pay." Just thinking about it gave me the shivers, I didn't mind telling Sue that the whole encounter had really freaked me out. I was, for the first time, struggling to get my head around it.

"Do you think they'll be back?" asked Sue.

"I don't know, but I hope not," I said with a nervous smile.

Tea was unusually quiet, not that there were many there, I had a stomach that really needed feeding and I mean feeding. Sue just looked at me shaking her head which made me feel like a naughty child. Mind you, I was eating like one so it came as no surprise really.

With my stomach full, my mind was back on an even keel, well sort of, I wanted to discuss with Sue our plan of attack with Rob later. For someone who didn't even want to come on this weekend I was like a dog with a bone, my mind seemed to have processed all the crazy shit that had been happening and accepted it. I was a man on a mission and if I was honest with myself I was really up for it, hook, line and sinker.

After a quick shower and a change of clothes we made our way to the dining room for the highlight of the weekend! (Ian's words not mine.) Ian was there like a puppy needing a pee, Bill, Mary, Jeff and Sally were already there. Ian explained that Phil and Claire wouldn't be joining us, he made no mention of the Devil's spawn, Beth and Evan, which suited me fine. Ian told us that Rob would be waiting for each of us in turn in the library, Bill and Mary wanted to go first, real eager beavers, so Ian escorted them to the library and returned a couple of minutes later. Much to my annoyance he decided to make a beeline for us, having sat down he looked me in the eye and asked,

"Do you think Phil is possessed?" We just looked at him, I thought he was joking but the look on his face told me he was deadly serious.

I asked, "What makes you think that?" Ian explained that Phil had come to see himself and Rob this morning; he'd explained that he'd be woken during the night by a woman's voice telling him to go to the attic, he remembered going up to the attic and that was the last thing he could remember until he found himself wandering around the grounds but couldn't remember how he'd got there from the attic. So he'd gone back to the hall to explain to Claire what had happened, as soon as she saw him he could see the look of horror on her face. When he asked her what was wrong, she just took him into the bathroom. There he could see his bloodshot eyes and what could only be

described as hand marks around his neck! Claire was naturally shocked, even more so when Phil explained that he could remember nothing. It had been Claire's suggestion to Phil to go and speak with Ian and Rob. The cynic in me was thinking, that wasn't a good move. I turned the question back on Ian.

"What did Rob think?"

The answer was kind of predictable; Rob had said it wasn't his area of expertise! I was like, what a cop out.

I said to Ian, "Then why ask me what I think? I'm no expert either." His answer completely threw me.

He said, "Rob thinks you have the gift." I just looked at him with a stunned look on my face. Thankfully Ian's reply kind of dug me out of my own hole. "I told him he was talking rubbish," he stated with a kind of nervous, *I believe him but don't want you to know* look on his face. Thankfully the awkwardness of the conversation was broken with the return of Bill and Mary, both of them had tissues in their hands and had obviously been crying. Jeff and Sally were then ushered out by Ian as the next to see Rob, Ian didn't come straight back which gave us a chance to ask Bill and Mary how it had gone, I left the questioning to Sue, being slightly more tactful than me!

They explained how their son Steve had spoken to them through Rob! They told us how Steve had been killed in a motorbike accident 3 years ago on his way home from work and that he'd told them he was at peace and that he hadn't suffered at the time of the accident, all good, consoling stuff and the kind of things you would want to hear in their situation, I was thinking to myself.

Before we knew it, Jeff and Sally were back wittering excitedly to each other like a couple of school kids, followed closely by Ian. It was our turn next. We followed Ian into a small study like room where Rob was sat behind this massive desk, to me he just looked like a dick! But maybe he thought it added to his drama. Anyway, Ian sat us down and scuttled off. Rob asked if we were happy to have a reading as a couple, to which we replied "yes". He explained to us that he was just a messenger for the spirits and sometimes the messages might not make sense straight away! I was doing my best to keep a straight face. He asked us to think of the name of the person in the spirit world we wanted to speak to, this was where our plan came into effect.

Very soon I could see him frowning, which distracted me a little. Straightaway he blurted out the name Michael, who was the son of one of Sue's friends, who was, I might add, still alive. I had been thinking about our neighbour's dog, Sabre, which I think had thrown him a little. Me getting distracted had allowed him to pick up on Sue's thoughts which was her friend's son Michael. Again, he proceeded to come out with this story about how our 'son' had died in a swimming accident and gave us the usual he was at peace and with other family members in the spirit world waiting for us! All this was confirmed by Sue when I questioned her later, She told me that her friend, Deb, had a son called Michael who had nearly died in a swimming accident on holiday a couple of years ago. Rob was nothing more than a very clever thought reader, as explained to me by Henry and confirmed by Rob's performance, and with the reading concluded we joined the rest of the group. Due to the events of the past 36 hours Ian had decided to cancel the last set of vigils, which was fine by me, he explained that there would be a small refund due to this and asked us to "Like" their Facebook page! I thought, you cheeky sod. Ian gave us his end of event speech, we all said our goodbyes and thankfully left. As we left I glanced in the rear view mirror to see not Ian and Rob but Henry, Gwen, Albert and a whole host of others waving goodbye, now that really did give me a 'piss shiver'.

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he trip home was quiet to say the least; Sue seemed to spend the whole trip deep in thought, not that it surprised me, we had our money's worth that's for sure and there was a lot to take in for her also. I mean, having your husband "outed" as a physic or whatever I was supposed to be, surely wasn't in her plans for that weekend.

I decided it was time to stop and have a talk before we got home to 1001 questions off the kids. I pulled off into the first services we came to, Sue didn't even realise we had stopped until I said,

"Coffee, toilet or both?"

A couple of blinks and she seemed back with us.

"Welcome back," I announced. "Where are we? Why have we stopped?" she asked.

"I thought it would be a good idea to have a brew and a debrief."

She rolled her eyes at me, she loved my military speak, honest!

I went and got 2 cups of what could be loosely described as coffee and made my way to the table she was sat at, again staring into space. I asked her what was up.

"What do you think?" was the sharp reply. Ask a stupid question, you get a stupid answer!

"Ok, talk to me."

Gary Channing's transition into middle age has been rather uneventful so far. After twelve good years of marriage to his loving wife Sue and raising two kids, Gary's life has become something of a blur of rinse-and-repeat evenings watching the TV. However, Sue has organised for the two to spend a weekend in Hope Hall, a so-called haunted stately home where even the walls feel like they're watching you. Being fans of the paranormal themselves, Gary and Sue think they've seen everything, but that comfort quickly vanishes as soon as the couple arrives on the grounds.

Plagued by visions and waking nightmares, Gary immediately feels at odds with the eerie hallways of Hope Hall, something which is only exacerbated when he finds himself talking to the wealthy architect of the building, Henry. Talking to the owner shouldn't be a problem, but Henry built Hope Hall back in 1840, and died thirty years after that.

Offering Gary a haunting warning about his fate and purpose at the Hall, the ghost informs him that he'll be visited by even more apparitions over the coming months, all who will give him the insight he needs - in one form or another - for an impending battle between good and evil. Getting the rest of his family caught up in the mix, Gary's beliefs are brought into question as he falls head first into this fight for the souls of the dead.

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