

**THE
WAYWARD
GIRLS**

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**THE
WAYWARD
GIRLS**

ZAFFRE

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For Jim Mayer
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1976

‘Stand still.’ Bee tugged at Loo’s petticoat, trying to straighten it.

‘I don’t like it,’ said Loo. The cotton was soft and cool but it smelt funny, as if it had been left out in the rain. It made her skin crawl.

‘Oh, shut up.’ Bee stood back, concentrating. Her own petticoat had a frill around the skirt and the top she wore – the camisole – had lace edging at the neck; she looked different, not pretty exactly, but more grown-up. She stood with her hands on her hips, her head tilted to one side, scowling, her long dark hair flopping into her eyes.

‘It’s too long.’ Loo kicked at the skirt. ‘I can’t walk in it.’

‘Well, we’ll pin it up, then,’ Bee said, as if her sister was either very small or very stupid. ‘God, Loo, it’s not – stay here, and don’t let Cathy see you.’ She opened the door, then turned back, her expression stern. ‘Don’t move a muscle,’ she said, before ducking out of the room and running lightly across the landing, disappearing into their parents’ bedroom.

They had found the box in the pantry, shoved out of sight under the shelves, and had brought it up to their room while their mother, Cathy, was busy in the garden with everyone else. The cardboard was speckled with damp and there was bold blue print running along one side: **GOLDEN WONDER**. It was old, but not as old as the clothes they’d found inside.

Cathy wouldn't be pleased. She might even take it away; it wasn't really theirs, after all. She might want the clothes – for that was all the box held, petticoats and nightgowns and camisoles, a lot of them, too much for one person, surely – she might insist they hand them over to their rightful owner, whoever that might be.

Bee was taking ages. Loo ran her hands across the fabric, trying to smooth out the deep creases that criss-crossed the skirt, some of them a faint brown. The fabric was paper-thin and she wondered if it might tear if she pulled it hard enough. What Bee would say if she did.

It was stuffy in their bedroom. She went to the window and, pushing it as far open as she could, she leant out.

They were still there, all the grown-ups and Flor and the baby, sitting on the grass under the apple tree at the far end of the garden, not doing much, any of them; it was too hot.

Simon was sitting next to Issy, and they were talking to each other. Loo wondered what they might be saying. Issy raised her hand to her face to shade her eyes whenever she spoke and Simon leant in close, as if he was whispering secrets in her ear.

Odd words drifted up to the open window, but nothing that made much sense. Issy laughed once or twice and Loo suddenly wished they would look up, one of them, see her, smile. She leant further out, bracing her hands on the window ledge, on the warm, blistered paint, letting the sun bake her arms.

There was a shift in the air as the door swung open. She felt Bee cross the room and stand behind her, looking at the same view, at Simon. She leant in closer. Her breath was stale, her hip nudged Loo, one arm draping around her shoulders and her weight settling on her, skin on skin, edging Loo off balance. It was too much, too hot; besides, they never hugged. Loo tried

to pull away and felt an answering pressure across her shoulders as her sister refused to budge, her fingers digging into the soft skin at the top of Loo's arm.

'I told you not to move.' Loo jumped back from the window, startled. Bee was standing by the door, well out of reach, her mother's pin cushion in one hand, needle, thread and scissors in the other. Loo felt dizzy, the room seemed to shimmer briefly, then everything came back into focus, sharp, solid. Bee was giving her a funny look.

'You're bloody useless, you are.' Bee dragged her in front of the mirror again. She grabbed the waistband of the skirt and pinched it, pulling it tight, pinning it into place before she knelt and began to work on the hem. 'You can sew it yourself, though,' she said. 'You needn't think I'm going to do it.' She worked quickly, so quickly Loo was sure the hem would turn out lopsided.

'Bee?'

'What?'

'Will Joe come back soon?'

Joe, not Dad. Cathy, not Mum. Loo wasn't sure when they'd started using their parents' proper names, or even whose idea it had been in the first place, but they all did it now, except for Anto, who was too little to say anything.

Bee stopped what she was doing and looked up. She didn't look angry, exactly, but still Loo wished she hadn't said anything. 'Suppose so,' she said, turning her attention back to the hem. She sounded as if she didn't care at all, but it was hard to tell. Bee was such a bloody liar, that's what Joe used to say whenever he caught her out. He thought it was funny, most of the time, and Loo had often wondered if she did it for that exact reason, to make him laugh.

'Bee—'

‘Shut up, Loo.’

There was no point in asking anything else.

‘There,’ Bee said as she got to her feet. ‘That’s better.’

Bee’s outfit didn’t need altering. Her skirt didn’t sag down onto the floor, and the camisole she wore was a little bit too tight, if anything. As if the girl they once belonged to fitted between the two of them, between Bee and Loo.

She should say something, about the window, about the . . .

‘It looks stupid with this.’ Loo plucked at her T-shirt, which had once been bright blue, and she could see that Bee was torn. ‘I don’t mind,’ she said, ‘you can have it all.’

And she didn’t mind – the clothes in the box, she didn’t like them. She tugged at the skirt again. It felt – wrong.

‘Well, that won’t work, will it?’ said Bee. ‘We have to match.’ She rifled through the clothes on her bed, pulling out a little vest, greyish white and studded with tiny bone buttons. ‘Here. Try this.’

Loo didn’t move.

‘Bloody hell, Loo. You’re not shy, are you?’ Bee chuckled the vest at her. ‘I won’t look,’ she said, turning back to her bed and making a show of sorting through the remaining clothes.

Loo turned her back on her sister and the mirror too, peeling off the T-shirt and letting it fall to the floor, shaking out the camisole and pulling it over her head as quickly as she could, her skin puckering despite the heat as the musty cloth settled into place.

It was too big. She didn’t need to look in the mirror to see that, but she looked anyway. It was almost comical, the way the top sort of slithered off her shoulder, as if she had begun to shrink, leaving the clothes behind. She might have laughed, if it hadn’t felt so . . .

Bee grabbed her and swung her round. ‘We’ll have to fix this

too,' she said, pulling the camisole back into place and digging the pins through the double layers of cotton.

'Ow.' Loo flinched as Bee scraped a pin across her collar bone.

'Oh, give over. I didn't hurt you.' Bee swung her around again and began to gather the fabric at Loo's back. 'Now, stay still.'

Loo did as she was told. It was always easier to do as she'd been told, in the end. Anyway, the sooner Bee finished, the sooner she could have her own clothes back.

'Right.' Bee stood back. 'That should do.'

Loo looked in the mirror, straightening the camisole, trying to get used to herself. Bee stood next to her, admiring the effect, how alike they looked now. She posed with one hand on her hip. 'Say thank you, Lucia,' she said. She'd been in a funny mood ever since they'd found the box: loud, giddy, frantic.

Loo didn't say anything; she went back to the window.

The scene in the garden had changed. Michael was helping Cathy to her feet, and Flor was jiggling around next to her, Simon and Issy were drifting towards the house. No one seemed to be missing them, the girls, at all. They were saying their goodbyes, getting ready to go. One day, soon, Michael and Simon would be gone for good. And then perhaps Joe would come back.

Loo placed her hands on the window ledge again and leant as far forward as she dared. As she watched everyone, it seemed to her that she could feel something underneath the paint, inside the wood, a sort of humming, and the more she concentrated on that, the clearer it became. Just like it had before. There was something scratching, something trying – she thought – to get in. Then she felt it, a sharp pinch, sharp enough to make her catch her breath.

She stretched out her arm, but all she could see was a little

brown smudge. She licked her thumb, and rubbed at it, then watched as more marks appeared, not much more than shadows at first. They darkened, blooming under her skin, resolving gradually into a series of purplish bruises, each one the size of a thumb print.

1

Now

The haunting began quietly once the Corvino family had settled into their new home; the girls heard it first, the knocking inside the walls.

A Haunting at Iron Sike Farm by Simon Leigh

‘There.’ Nina spots it first. ‘That’s it.’

The solitary redbrick house is set back from the grass verge. There’s an overgrown path between two patches of lawn and the front door, a dull dark blue, is secured with a heavy padlock.

‘Are you sure?’ says Lewis. ‘Shouldn’t it be further along?’

‘Of course I’m sure,’ she says. ‘And it’s exactly where it should be.’

Hal parks high up on the grass verge in front of the gate and underneath the rusting metal sign; the name of the house has almost been lost, reduced to a faint tangle of letters, barely discernible, but this is the place all right. Nina is first out of the car. ‘Can you make a start?’ she says, before striding up the path and disappearing round the back of the building.

‘Sure,’ says Lewis.

They get everything stacked on the front step, Hal’s cameras in their scuffed black holdalls, the boxes of AnSoc stuff on loan from the university, sleeping bags and rucksacks, laptops, spare

bulbs, cables, fuses, carrier bags stuffed with food. When they're done there's still no sign of Nina.

'Do you want to go and look for her, or shall I?' says Hal.

'You can if you like,' says Lewis, who is not inclined to go wandering around the overgrown garden. He's heard that there are snakes in this part of the world, adders, and besides, he'd rather keep an eye on their stuff; he doesn't know Hal all that well.

'Fine.'

She's standing in the back garden, underneath a tree, gazing up at the house.

'Nina, have you got the keys?'

'Sorry,' she says, rummaging in her bag, a large leather satchel crammed with notebooks and folders. 'I just wanted to get a sense of it, you know?'

Hal doesn't know. The house, Victorian from the front, but with a large and rickety-looking lean-to kitchen added at the back, looks distinctly unappealing to him: cramped, grubby and sad. 'Yeah,' he says.

'Here.' Nina leads the way to the kitchen door and once she's found the right key – the lock is relatively new, he notices – she lets them in.

'Hang on,' she says and he stands back by the doorway as she steps into the darkened kitchen – most of the windows at the back of the house have been replaced by hardboard – and flicks the light switch. There's a split second where Hal hopes it won't come on. No electricity, no field investigation, he thinks; but it does.

Most of the fixtures and fittings have been ripped out; only a small and greasy electric oven remains. The floor is a patchwork of faded outlines: here a dresser stood, there the fridge, and the

walls bear the ghostly shadows of shelves and cupboards long dismantled. In a corner there's a cheap pine table and a couple of chairs and over the sink one of the taps drips steadily.

'Nice,' Hal says.

'Yeah. Sorry. It was a holiday cottage for a while, then it was on the market for two or three years, and the new owner hasn't got around to renovating yet.'

'Someone's going to move in? Actually live here?'

'I suppose so.'

'And they're not, you know . . .'

Worried.

'We didn't really talk about that,' says Nina.

'What did you talk about?'

'Practical stuff, picking up keys and—'

The knocking makes them both jump. It's heavy and insistent. The sound shudders through the house, echoing through the empty rooms.

'The knocking inside the walls,' says Nina in a mock-serious voice, and she sounds as though she might be quoting from a book, probably the book she and Lewis keep going on about.

'Once for yes . . .' Hal says.

'Don't,' Nina says as the knocking continues. 'I shouldn't have – we shouldn't joke about it, you know? It's not – respectful.'

She opens the kitchen door, revealing an uncarpeted hallway that runs through the centre of the house. At the other end the front door rattles on its hinges.

Once for yes. Twice for—

Lewis's voice is muffled, but they can still hear him.

'Let. Me. In.'

Hal follows Nina down the hall. She squats and pulls the letter box open.

‘Lew? Lewis? I don’t have a key for the padlock. Sorry. You’ll have to bring the stuff round the back.’ She smiles as Lewis swears under his breath. ‘We’ll be right out,’ she says.

‘It was a proper farm, then?’ says Hal, once they’ve got everything in and he’s standing on the kitchen step looking at the scrubby and neglected garden. Beyond the dry stone wall, fields stretch up to meet the moors, muddy grey and brown, and a little way off there’s a solid-looking barn.

‘Once upon a time, yes,’ says Lewis.

‘The original house was pulled down in the late 1800s. This one was built slightly nearer the road,’ Nina says.

‘We’re not sure why, possibly it was an attempt to gentrify the place a bit, put some distance between the house and the barn,’ adds Lewis.

It must have cost money, to tear down one perfectly good house and replace it with this. Hal is still staring at the garden, trying to picture what the vanished building might have looked like, when Nina taps his hand lightly.

‘Come on,’ she says, ‘I’ll give you the tour.’ He follows her inside. ‘The kitchen was added in the sixties. There’s a room here that’s a sort of scullery.’ She pulls at a white painted door, set in the corner of the kitchen; it leads into a small dark room with a sink in a far corner. Cheap wooden shelves set on metal brackets run down both walls. ‘This might have been the original kitchen,’ she says.

‘Right,’ says Hal.

‘But we won’t be running any obs there.’ She closes the door and squeezes past him. She smells of lemon and something sweet, honeysuckle, perhaps, and he’s reminded of the first time they met, her fingers brushing over the back of his hand as she explained why she thought he might be able to help her out

with a problem she had. It had been noisy in the bar and she'd had to lean in close, her breath warm on his skin.

She leads the way down the hall, past the staircase, and stops between two doors, one the mirror image of the other and both firmly closed. 'The dining room and the living room,' she says.

'Right. I give in. Which is which?' says Hal.

Nina smiles. 'Here,' she says, opening the door to her left, 'the living room.'

There's actually a sofa. And a chair. There's carpet too, faded green, spotted, thinning and stained in parts. But there are no curtains, and the exposed window looks out over the front garden, the valley, and the inky October sky. The fireplace, not original, but another 1960s improvement, is tiled and coated with dust. The grate is blackened and empty. It's cold.

'But we're going to set up in here,' says Lewis, opening the other door. The dining room is smaller, presumably to accommodate the scullery behind it. There's an empty bookcase pushed up against the wall and a dining table, the kind with leaves that fold down, underneath the window. Several wooden chairs, mismatched and one lacking a seat, are stacked in the corner. The floorboards are bare and the fireplace in this room has been boarded up.

'It's perfect,' says Nina.

Once they've got everything into the dining room – the various monitors for logging temperature changes and carbon monoxide readings, the voice recorders, and the stacks of spare batteries and chargers, and the cables, the metres of cables all this gear seems to need – then they need to think about sleeping arrangements. It's Lewis who's considerate enough to offer Nina the option of a little privacy.

‘You could always sleep upstairs, you know,’ he says. ‘Or we could.’

‘There’s no need,’ says Nina. ‘Not if we’re going to sleep in shifts anyway.’

‘You want to work all night?’ No one had mentioned this to Hal, not Lewis with his endless forms and questionnaires, not Nina when she’d first approached him in the pub with her open smile, her problem, and her proposition.

‘No. Well, we won’t be running obs in the rooms,’ says Lewis.

‘But since we’ve got the gear, we thought we could leave it all recording overnight,’ says Nina. She looks up at Hal, pushing a lock of hair behind her ear. ‘That won’t be a problem, will it?’

‘No,’ says Hal, ‘not really. But we’ll still need to retrieve the SD cards, at some point, import the rushes.’

‘How often?’

‘Well, it depends on the camera: with two slots, say every five hours or so. But a DSLR will only film up to thirty minutes at a time and then you’re looking at changing the cards every ninety minutes, importing the files to the laptop. It’s a lot of hassle.’

‘But it’s possible?’

‘Sure.’

‘Right, well, sleeping bags in this room then. Yes?’ She doesn’t really seem to be expecting an answer from either of them. ‘You said we could monitor one of the cameras?’

‘On my iPad, yes, that’s not a problem.’

‘OK. Well, if we use that for the girls’ room – Lew, is that OK with you?’

‘Fine.’ Lewis opens one of the AnSoc boxes and starts to make notes on some sort of checklist.

‘I’ll show you what we need, then,’ says Nina.

*

They start in the kitchen. Hal works quickly, setting up a small boxy camera facing the blocked-in window and the back door. He considers the dimensions of the room for a moment before selecting a lens and fitting it to the camera body. Nina watches in silence.

‘You happy with that?’ Hal adjusts the tripod and stands back so she can look at the image in the viewfinder. Nina bends down to look, suddenly self-conscious.

‘That’s great, thanks.’

‘OK. Two cameras upstairs?’

‘Yeah, I’ll show you.’

Nina leads the way. It’s not so bad, Hal thinks, the house. It’s smaller, more mundane than he’d been expecting. It’s on the chilly side though. Maybe it’s just as well they want to work through the night; he can’t imagine sleeping here. He can’t imagine that at all.

A couple of steps ahead of him Nina stops, her fingers resting lightly on the banister. ‘That’s it,’ she says, ‘the girls’ room.’ The door is closed, the white gloss paint dingy, the brass doorknob tarnished and dull. Hal pauses, not sure if he should give her time to tune in, sense the atmosphere, or whatever it is she needs to do.

She waits a minute or so before stepping up onto the landing, then turns to smile at him. ‘Thanks for doing this,’ she says.

‘It’s no problem.’

‘Really,’ she says, ‘it’s great.’

Someone has torn up the carpet here; dusty floorboards give under their weight. Hal finds himself wondering about Health and Safety, about dry rot and collapsing beams. The air is stale, still. ‘It’s just us then?’ he says.

‘Sorry?’

‘From the – from the AnSoc?’

‘Oh. Yes. We’re just going to focus on the most active area and next time, well, we’ll see what we come up with this weekend before we worry about that.’

‘Active?’

‘Yes. You know, the room where – where stuff happens.’

Anomalous activity, that was one of the phrases she’d used in the bar, downplaying the whole thing really, trying to sound serious, responsible. He’d noticed her around, once or twice, but they’d never spoken before. He was in the final year of his Film and Media Production course, and she and Lewis were in their second year of Psychology. Someone must have recommended him, he supposed. It had seemed like a laugh at the time, and he knew he’d be able to scrounge up some extra gear as well as bringing along his own cameras. ‘Right,’ he says, ‘so, you want something here?’

‘Please. And if we could get the bedroom door in frame, that would be brilliant. And then the last camera in the bedroom itself. If that’s OK,’ she says.

‘Sure. Whatever you want.’

Nina moves out of the way as Hal squats and sets to work, pulling a different type of camera from the padded bag and assembling another tripod.

They have all filled in the usual forms prior to this trip, following established AnSoc procedure, questionnaires dealing with personal beliefs and experiences, opinions on the supernatural and anomalous phenomena, the purpose of which is to fix each team member in place on the percipient scale.

Have you experienced paranormal activity?

Have you ever consulted a medium?

Do you believe in the survival of the human soul after death?

Both Nina and Lewis have read through the results. Hal's responses were depressingly absolute.

No.

No.

No.

She and Lewis are both inclined to believe, and they are both aware that investigation protocols are there to prevent misinterpretation or, worse, fraud. This visit, their first, is purely to collect baseline information and readings, and she knows she shouldn't be jumping to conclusions, yet something about this part of the house bothers her, and she wonders if Hal feels it too. She could ask, but that would be against the rules.

He assembles the tripod and attaches a small microphone to the top of the Sony, flipping out the viewfinder and making various adjustments to the lens until Nina has the coverage she wants.

'OK,' says Hal, picking up a holdall and heading towards the girls' room. 'In here?'

The room is at the back of the house and there's a single window, boarded up, a remnant of net curtain hanging underneath the window sill. Someone has tried to strip the wallpaper in this room, but only one wall is fully exposed. The others are a palimpsest of half-revealed patterns, a plain blue over a Regency stripe, over a psychedelic swirl, over a pale floral print. There's a wardrobe, with one door missing, and a mattress, with an armful of blankets piled up at one end. It smells, that damp paper and wallpaper paste smell, and it's dark.

Nina flicks on the light switch. 'Shit.'

No bulb.

'Bring one up from downstairs?' Hal says.

'Best not. I don't want to – you know – start messing around

with the rooms we're observing. We should work with what we have. You can cope with this? The low light?'

'Sure, I can fix a light on the camera, but if you want to work all night it's something else to keep an eye on.'

'OK. Well, we'll do that. Facing the window again, I think.'

Hal kneels down and starts unpacking his bag. The floorboards are dusty and spotted with candle wax and Nina treads carefully, as if she might disturb someone, something. She stands with her back to the boarded-up window, trying to imagine the room as it once was, the bunk beds against the wall, the dressing table to her left. The sensation she'd had before, as they were walking up the stairs, that faint fluttering anxiety, has turned to something else – anticipation, perhaps.

'So, do you want to tell me what went on here?' Hal says.

'You know I'm not supposed to.'

'Not even a bit of a clue?'

'Not a word, not from me.'

They'd agreed, the three of them, that they'd let Hal experience the house with no preconceptions, that his experience that weekend wouldn't be coloured by any expectations.

'You know,' he'd pointed out, 'both of you know what's supposed to be going on here.'

'But that's the point,' Lewis had said. 'It's brilliant for us, really. We can measure our experiences against yours – you'd be a sort of test case, a control group of one.'

'You'll keep us honest,' said Nina. 'We'll be able to look for similarities in our responses, all three of us, and blind spots too – with you, if you don't know what to expect, there'll be no danger of you, you know, playing along? We'll just have your first reactions to the farm, and to any – incidents.'

It hadn't made much sense to him, not really. But neither had it seemed like a big deal. Only now they're actually here,

inside the house, he finds that he'd like to know more after all. 'Go on,' he says. 'Just a hint. Just so I know what to keep an eye on.'

She leans back against the wall, smiling, pretending to consider his argument. 'There was this family,' she says, 'and they were – troubled, I suppose; dysfunctional. There was a whole bunch of kids, and the two oldest girls, Bee and Loo, shared this room.'

Lewis takes his time unpacking. Sound recorders in each room, despite the fact they're using cameras, because he's happier relying on equipment he's familiar with and, besides, it never hurts to double up. He sets up the temperature monitors and carbon monoxide loggers too, and checks over the electromagnetic field meters: all of this gear from the uni's AnSoc, all of it temporarily his responsibility.

Back in the dining room he pauses to take stock, going over his notes. They'd borrowed every bit of gear they could lay their hands on, but what had seemed far too much stuff when crammed into Hal's car now seems barely adequate, and he tries to ignore the creeping sensation that maybe they're not quite so well prepared after all. He's still standing there, lost in thought, when they come down the stairs, the two of them, and he can hear Nina's voice drifting along the hall.

'Not a re-creation,' she's saying, 'there'd be no point in that at all. But because they never came back, they weren't able to reproduce their results. The lead investigator, Michael Warren, he died.'

'Here?'

'God, no,' Nina says. 'No. Back in London, it was a road accident – nothing to do with . . . But what that meant was that everything just stopped.'

Lewis reaches the doorway in a couple of strides. 'Hey,' he says, 'we agreed. No spoilers.'

'Sorry.' Nina leans over the banister, smiling. 'See?' she says to Hal. 'He's on to us.'

They have timetabled their evening. They spend the first hour in the dining room, gathered around the table, leaves extended, working on their laptops, or patrolling the rooms monitoring their readings and making notes. Then they run the first series of percipient observations for an hour with Nina and Lewis in separate rooms, making notes. Nothing happens, at least nothing out of the ordinary. The house settles into itself for the night and the three of them, Nina, Lewis, and Hal, work quietly.

At about nine o'clock they decide to run a second set of observations. Nina is in the bedroom and she chooses to sit opposite the camera underneath the boarded-up window. Lewis is in the kitchen, lit by a single light bulb, and he sits on a wooden chair in the far left-hand corner of the room, where he can see the door and the window. He spends the first thirty minutes doing a crossword in today's paper, occasionally looking up, deep in thought, or possibly listening. Nina reads, going through one of the files she's brought along, her bag propped against the wall beside her.

Hal is left alone in the dining room, and he spends some time looking at the rushes from the kitchen, scanning idly through the static image of the door and window, and the speeded-up motion of himself approaching the camera, of Lewis and Nina as they enter the room to check their monitors. He doesn't think about the house.

He checks his watch. Half an hour exactly.

He knows that for Nina and Lewis their thirty minutes engaged in unrelated activity, simply being present in the room,

are over; for the next thirty minutes they must be active, open, concentrating on the space, making notes and observations, recording the subjective impressions which can later be read against the data their monitors and meters have gathered. They explained that to him at the start of the evening.

One participant in the control room, the room with no history of phenomena, and one in the live room, the place that's experienced problems. Those are the rules. The protocols state the observers go in blind, unaware which room they've been given, but obviously, given they both know the history of the farm, that's not been possible here, although Hal has no idea which room is which.

Nina had insisted she go upstairs the second time round.

Hal has come to the conclusion that he definitely doesn't like the house; it may only have been empty for a couple of years but he can't shake the feeling that it has been abandoned for much longer than that. He wonders if that observation is the sort of thing Nina and Lewis are after, if this vague sensation – not unease exactly, but certainly of discomfort – is part of his role as the control observer.

He yawns, he's getting cold, colder, and he resists the temptation to check the time. They'll be done soon and then maybe he can persuade Nina to take a walk down to the pub, somewhere warm and bright and noisy. It's just an old house, he reminds himself, empty and unloved.

He picks up his iPad and taps the icon that allows him to monitor the camera in the upstairs bedroom, the girls' room. Nina is sitting in the far left corner, next to the boarded-up window, very quiet, very still. He can't quite make out what's going on in the opposite corner though; the shadows are darker there, thicker.

It's possible for him to control the camera via this device,

he'd explained that to both Nina and Lewis, and they'd decided that this time round they were going to work with static shots. But still, there is definitely something about the shadows in that part of the bedroom that's bothering him.

He taps on the pad, adjusting the image on-screen, zooming in, just a little, not wanting to lose sight of Nina altogether, not wanting to leave her alone.

At first, he thinks he can see a person, someone lying on their side, facing the wall, hunched up, cold perhaps, or sulking. He zooms in closer.

Blankets, that's all. Idiot.

Nina is still in position, unaware that he's been operating the camera, and he indulges himself for a moment, letting her face fill the screen, silent, serene, before trying to move the camera back to its original position. He taps the pad again but nothing happens. His hand cramps and he finds himself struggling, his fingers moving clumsily, cold and unwilling.

He's still looking at Nina's face, puzzled by this sudden loss of control, when it begins.

The sudden pressure in his ears is almost unbearable as the room, the air around him, fills with a buzzing, hissing white noise, enraged and alive, and the light above, a single glass bulb, seems to burn brighter, dazzling him. He's vaguely aware that he's dropped the pad, that he's trying to stand.

It's all too bright. Too close. Too much.

It lasts for hours, minutes, seconds, he can't tell.

The air crackles, and the light fades, gradually, until it's no more than a faint blue spark.

He can't look away.

The spark vanishes and he's alone in the dark.

The silence that follows is broken by a slow, deliberate knocking.

One.

Two.

Three.

It's coming from upstairs.