



The Legend of Arthur King

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I should have realised right there and then when she said her name was 'Fay'.

"That's an old-fashioned name," I said. "You don't hear of too many 'Fays' around these days."

She smiled at me a little sadly. "No, there's not many of us left. A dying breed you might say." The smile turned to a grin. "Still, while there's a few of us, we do our best to keep things going."

I hadn't the foggiest idea what she was prattling on about. And I don't think I was really listening anyway. I just wanted to look at her.

I'd spotted her the minute I'd walked into the Royal Crown. Quietly sitting in a corner sipping a tall glass of something sparkling. 'Petite' is the way I think most people describe women like her. Small, probably no more than four feet ten in her stockinged feet and about seven stone wet through. But she could never have been mistaken for a child. Not with a figure like that. And those eyes! A kind of turquoise-green. I'd never seen a colour like it. And so old. Eyes that spoke of hidden depths. Curiously out of place in a face so flawless and symmetrical that was framed by a bob of lustrous auburn hair. No. She was definitely no child.

So how come I was talking to her? Same old chat line I suppose. I'd collected my pint and wandered over to where she was sitting. It was only just gone seven and few of the regulars had made their way through the double doors as yet.

"Waiting for someone?" I'd asked.

She'd shrugged. "Not really."

"Mind if I join you. I hate drinking alone."

"Be my guest," she'd said.

"I don't think I've ever seen you in here before."

"That's because I haven't been here before."

"Ah."

There had been silence for a few moments before I'd asked: "Late is he?"

"Who?"

"The boyfriend."

She'd smiled. "Are you trying to pick me up?"

Well, I'd always thought that honesty was the best policy so I'd shrugged my shoulders and lied. "Not really," I'd said. "Wouldn't want to step on anyone's toes."

"There aren't any toes to step on," she'd replied with that same sad smile.

"No?" I'd said. "But there must be. A beautiful girl like you must have a boyfriend."

The smile had widened then. "You are trying to pick me up."

"Only if you want me to."

She'd held out her hand. "I'm Fay," she'd said.

That's when I came out with the line about her name being old fashioned.

"And yours?" she said.

"What?" I said, coming out of my reverie.

"Your name? What's your name?"

"Oh yeah," I said a little sheepishly. "It's Arthur."

"And that's not old-fashioned?" Her eyes were twinkling with mischief.

"It's a sort of family name," I said with a shrug of my shoulders. "Tradition I suppose. First born son of each generation gets lumbered with it."

"I like traditions," she said. "Keeps us linked to our history."

I frowned. "How do you mean?"

"Makes sure some of the old ways are never forgotten."

"By saddling a kid with name like 'Arthur'? You've got to be kidding."

She shook her head. "No. I'm not kidding. Arthur's a proud name. A king's name. You should be honoured to have it bestowed on you."

I grunted. "Well it was a hell of a burden in the school playground, I can tell you."

She nodded. "Yes," she said quietly. "Arthur always had burdens to carry."

She was doing it again. Making a comment that had me completely flummoxed.

“Still,” she added brightly, “school playgrounds are far behind you now.”

“Far enough,” I conceded.

“So what line of work are you in?” she asked.

“Not much at the moment.”

“Between jobs as they say?”

I nodded.

She grinned. “Well that makes a change.”

“What does?” I said.

“Honesty,” she replied with that twinkle in her eye again. “I usually only get picked up by brain surgeons or airline pilots.”

I grinned back and shrugged. “Yeah well.”

“So what do you want to do? Really.”

I looked at her. She looked as if she was actually interested which was a lot more than could be said for most of the regular female clientele of the Royal Crown.

“Really?” I said.

“Yes really.”

“I want to be a writer.”

“So why aren’t you?”

“I am, I suppose, of sorts.”

“You mean you’ve never had anything published yet?”

“Not yet.”

“But you still keep writing?”

I nodded. And sighed. “That’s why I find it difficult to keep hold of a regular job I suppose. My head always seems to be full of tales waiting to be told.” I smiled wryly. “That’s how I got fired last time. Scribbling down ideas when I should have been working.”

She smiled and put her hand over mine. “Don’t stop,” she said. “Real storytelling is a rare and wonderful thing.”

My head had sunk on to my chest, but now I looked up into those wonderful eyes. I managed a sad smile.

“Thanks,” I said.

“I mean it,” she said. “Keep writing. You’ll get there one day.”

“Thanks,” I said again.

“And who knows, maybe you’re destined to be one of those writers whose words will change the world?”

“Yeah right. Most people think I should give up and concentrate on getting a proper job, especially...” I stopped myself.

“Especially who?” she asked with a little smile playing over those exquisite lips.

I didn’t answer.

“The wife?” she asked.

I shook my head. “Nah. Not married.”

“Who then? Fiancée?”

“No, just a girl I was going out with. We broke up.”

“Over the writing?”

I sighed. The last thing I wanted to talk about was Gwen, but here I was. I nodded. “That. And other things.”

“Ambitious for you, was she?”

I nodded again. “Yeah. Said I ought to make something of myself.”

“The sort of girl who sets her sights high?”

“Wanted things I couldn’t give her, and when I lost my job...” My head dropped on to my chest again.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I didn’t mean to open old wounds.”

“It’s okay,” I said. “I’m over it now.”

“Do you want to tell me about it?”

“Not much to tell. She simply went off with my best friend.”

“Ah.” Her hand was still resting on mine. She gripped it. “It’s probably for the best.”

I managed a smile. “Yeah. You’re probably right.”

She looked sidelong at me. “Betrayal always hurts. But,” she added, “things have a way of working themselves out you know.”

I looked at her. “Like meeting you?”

She smiled. “Maybe.” She took her hand away, picked up her glass and drained it. “Let me buy you a drink.”

“No,” I said scraping my chair back. “Let me.”

She shook her head firmly. “My treat,” she said. “You’re out of work, remember.” She saw that reminding me probably wasn’t the most tactful of things to say. “I’m sorry,” she said. “I shouldn’t have said that.”

I shrugged. “It’s true though.”

She patted my hand again and went to the bar. I watched her go. I had to. It was the first time I had seen her legs. Beautiful, shapely legs encased in sheer shiny dark brown nylon (or maybe it was silk) emerging from beneath a short green dress that covered a sweetly rounded backside. Her movements mesmerised me. I was still staring when she returned with the drinks and sat down again.

“A toast,” she said picking up her glass.

I blinked.

“Come on,” she said, urging me to pick up my own glass.

I did so and she clinked hers to mine. “A toast to what?” I said.

She smiled. “To you.”

“Me?”

“Yes you. To your storytelling.”

“You haven’t read any of them.”

She took a drink. “Not yet,” she said.

“You mean you’d like to?”

“Very much.”

“When?”

She shrugged. “No time like the present.”

My heart skipped a beat. No, make that two beats. “You mean it?”

“Of course. Now drink up.”

I stared at the glass in my hand. It wasn’t my customary pint of mild - the cheapest beer on offer. It was a small glass that contained an amount of dark amber liquid that swirled and stuck to the sides. I looked at her, then back at the glass. “What is it?” I asked.

She leaned across to me. “Heather Nectar,” she whispered.

“What?”

“It’s a liqueur.”

“I gathered that.”

“Whisky and honey. Drink up. You’ll like it.”

I held the glass to my lips and the sweetness tickled my nostrils. I took a sip and felt the smooth warmth wash round my mouth. The rest followed the sip and I felt the same warmth suffuse my chest.

“Whoooo!” I said.

She grinned. “Good?”

I nodded. “Good.”

“Right then. Let’s go.” She stood up and picked up her coat from beside her on the seat. It was the same green as her dress, and her eyes. She slipped it on but didn’t button it then collected her handbag and eased round the table and stood beside me. “Well come on then,” she urged.

I pushed the chair back, stood up and looked down at her. She barely came up to my shoulder. She took my hand. Hers was small, soft, smooth and warm. It was buried in my slightly calloused cold one.

“Cold hands - warm heart,” she said trotting out the old cliché with a smile and a squeeze of her fingers.

My grunt was noncommittal but I smiled back and allowed her to lead me across the room. Ted the landlord gave me a knowing nod as we passed and I managed a weak smile in return. Outside a brisk wind was blowing and she let go of my hand to button up her coat. I hunched my shoulders and put my hands in my pockets to hold the two halves of my battered old leather jacket together. I couldn't fasten it because the zip had broken. She slipped her arm through mine and clung close.

“Is it far?” she asked.

“Just round the corner.”

We started to walk but she must have sensed the reluctance in my step.

“What's the matter?” she asked.

I was thinking of the state I had left the tiny flat above the Chinese Takeaway in. I'm not the tidiest of people and living alone for several months, well... Let's just say it was hardly the most salubrious of places to take a girl. It was as though she sensed my thoughts for she said:

“It doesn't matter if it's a mess, you know.”

“You haven't seen it!”

“No. But I'm going to, aren't I?”

I sighed. “Don't say I didn't warn you.”

The smell of chow mien and curry, borne on the wind, stormed our nostrils as we turned the corner and made our way to my front door at the side of the takeaway. It had once been blue but the paint was now cracked and peeling showing patches of green and brown underneath. I fumbled with my key and the door finally opened on to a short dark hall where the first treads of a flight of stairs, covered in a worn and threadbare carpet, appeared in the glow that wormed its way in from the front window of the Chinese. I managed to find the light switch and the dim light of an unshaded forty-watt bulb at the top did little to dispel the perpetual gloom of the dingy entrance.

Fay shivered. “Well come on. It's cold out here.”

I closed the door behind us and led the way up to my flat, what there was of it. A reasonable-sized bed-sitting room off which were a small bathroom and an even tinier kitchen. I hurried ahead of her determined to clear some of the debris at least before she stepped inside. She stood in the doorway as I picked up the discarded clothes and magazines and looked shamefacedly round for somewhere to put them.

She was giggling as she walked in. “Here,” she said, holding out her arms. “Give them to me. Why don't you go and make us both a cup of coffee while I tidy up. Come on,” she added with a smile. “I'm a bit of a dab hand when it comes to sorting out other people's messes.”

I grinned a little stupidly but did as she asked, plonking the shirts and sweater in her arms and piling the magazines on top.

“Go,” she said.

I nodded and went into the kitchen. I filled the kettle, plugged it in, found a couple of not-too-dirty mugs and rinsed them under the tap. The milk in the fridge was at least a couple of days old but didn't smell as though it was on the turn. And coffee and sugar were two things I did have in the cupboard. I practically lived on the damn stuff. That, and roll-ups when my dole cheque arrived.

“Sugar?” I called from the kitchen.

“Two please,” came the reply from the living room. Same as me, I thought as I busied myself with the mugs, wondering in an afterthought how the hell she managed to maintain such a trim figure with so much sugar. Probably one of those aerobics nuts. For me though, it was just a way of keeping hunger tucked away out of sight as much as possible. A couple of minutes later I switched off the kitchen light, picked up the steaming mugs and walked through to my living

room. And nearly dropped the aforesaid mugs at the sight of it. I'd never seen it neater or tidier. I just stared. The room was lit, not by the single bulb in the middle of the ceiling, but two small table lamps - one on top of the old temperamental television that I had picked up at a car boot sale for ten pounds, and the other on the rather-too-large-for-the-room round drop leaf dining table that my mother had insisted on giving me when I moved out. The lamps themselves had also been given to me by someone - I can't remember who - and I'd never even got round to even checking if they worked or not. They obviously did, for beneath their orange shades, and with the pleasant warmth provided by the little gas fire, the room had taken on a cosy glow. The bed was made and even looked as though it had clean sheets on. Everything seemed to have been cleared away and dusted and polished and vacuumed and... and... standing in the middle of it all was Fay.

She'd removed her coat and hung it on the peg behind the door which I rarely used. Her green dress shimmered as she stood there with the dirty dishes that I had left on the table when I had finished what had passed for my tea, in her hand.

I just stared at her as well. "How...?"

She grinned. "I told you I was dab hand at clearing up after folk."

"But how...?"

She shrugged. "Lots of practice. Now if you'll show me where the sink is..."

I stepped aside from the kitchen door. "In here."

She moved past me. "Put the mugs down on the table - I found a couple of beer mats - then you dig out those stories while I wash up."

I just nodded and did as I was bid. I could hear a clatter from the kitchen as I rummaged in the cupboard of the old sideboard that I'd rescued from a skip down the road and emerged with a pile of papers. By the time I'd put them on the table she was standing in the kitchen doorway smoothing down her dress. She clicked off the light, came across and sat down.

"These them?" she asked.

I nodded as I sat down opposite her.

"What do you write about?"

"All sorts," I said.

"Like what?" I shrugged. "Thrillers, romances, fantasy. You name it I've written about it."

"Sex?" she said with a grin.

I felt uncomfortable. "Some," I said.

"What's your favourite?"

I shrugged again. "Don't know really."

She leant across and placed her hand over mine. "Relax," she said.

I managed a self-conscious half smile. "It's just that..."

"What?"

"No-one else has ever actually read any of them."

"You've never sent them to a publisher?"

This time the smile was accompanied by a self-conscious half shrug as well. "No typewriter."

"Oh dear. Well no matter. Pick one for me." I reached towards the top of the pile and picked up a bunch of loose sheets held together by a loop of string in one corner. "Well... this is my latest..."

"That'll do fine." She took it from my hand, neatened it up in front of her, took a sip of her coffee and began to read.

Suddenly my stomach filled with butterflies and I couldn't sit there and watch her.

"I've got to go to the bathroom," I mumbled.

She nodded abstractedly, her eyes never straying from the page.

Now my bathroom is probably the one they based that old Yellow Pages TV advert on. You remember it don't you? Where the girl from down the hall meets the young chap at the door to his flat and says it looks as though he's been burgled; and while he's ringing for a cleaner she says that he doesn't want to see what the 'burglars' have done in his bathroom? Yeah. That one. Well maybe not quite as bad. But pretty near. So it wasn't just to relieve myself of the pint of

beer I had consumed; I thought I'd better do something about the mess in there double quick in case Fay wanted to use the somewhat Spartan facilities later on.

But when I opened the door and switched on the light I stopped dead. It was abso-bloody-lutely immaculate. Every surface gleamed. The taps sparkled; the washbowl shone; soap, shaving tackle and toothbrush all neatly arranged. And the towels - well they looked as though they had been boil-washed and then hung out to dry in a warm summer wind they were so fluffy. I just gawped in amazement.

I turned to look at Fay and my hands sort of wavered in the direction of the bathroom but my jaw wouldn't form any words, it just sort of flapped up and down making strangled mouthings like a trout on a riverbank. I think I must have managed the word "How?" for Fay looked up from her reading for a moment and smiled at me and shrugged before resuming her task. I blinked, shook my head and decided I had better do what I had set out to do before the shock reached my bladder.

By the time I had washed my hands and walked back into the living room, Fay was sat back in her chair looking thoughtful. My stories were stacked in a neat pile beside her.

"You've read it?" I asked.

She nodded. "They're good. Very good."

They? She'd read them all?

"I especially like the one about..."

But I wasn't really listening. Well I was, but only with half an ear as she picked up a point or two or three from each and every one of the stories I'd written. I blew out a breath and ran my fingers through my hair as I stared at her.

"You've really read them all?"

She nodded again. "I'm a quick reader."

"But you can't have!"

She looked slightly indignant. "Why not?"

"Because there must be... what? A hundred thousand words there..."

"One hundred and seven thousand six hundred and seventy two, not counting crossings out," she said.

"Oh," I said and sat down heavily on the chair opposite her.

"They really are very good, you know," she said as she put her hand over mine as if it were all perfectly commonplace. "You should try to get them published. You really should."

I closed my eyes and shook my head. I'm bloody dreaming this, I thought. I've got to be. But when I opened my eyes and looked across the table she was still there and so were the stories, all neatly stacked.

"You need to get them typed though; your handwriting is appalling in places."

I stared at her. "What are you?" I asked.

"What do you mean? 'What am I?'" she said withdrawing her hand and looking a little hurt. "I'm Fay, that's all."

"But..." I swept my hand the room. "All this, the tidying; the bathroom; your reading... it's, it's not natural."

"Don't forget the kitchen," she said with a grin. "Did that as well."

I ran my hands over my face, hearing day-old stubble scrape against my palms. I shook my head. "I don't understand," I said.

She looked puzzled. "What's to understand?"

"How you managed to do all this in no time at all?"

"What's time?" she said with a shrug.

"What do mean? What's time? Time's what governs everything. It passes at a fixed rate. Sixty seconds to the minute, sixty minutes to the hour, twenty-four hours in a day..." I stopped feeling a little foolish because she was grinning at me again.

"And what about Einstein?" she said.

"Einstein?"

"Of course. Didn't he prove that time was relative?"

I think the Heather Nectar must have befuddled my brain because she was losing me. Easily. I frowned trying to remember. "You mean that $E=mc^2$ stuff?"

She giggled. "More or less. It sort of works out that the faster you do things the more time you have for other things, and if you have more time you can get more done in a shorter time. See?"

I frowned again. It sort of sounded right.

"Oh stop worrying about it," she said as she got up and came round the table to stand next to me. She took hold of my hands and looked into my eyes. "The only thing you should be worrying about is how to get those stories typed up and packed off to a publisher."

I looked back at her. "You really mean it?" I said. "You really think they're that good?"

She nodded. "Most definitely."

"But I haven't got a typewriter. And even if I had, I can't type."

She wrinkled her nose. "Don't keep putting obstacles in your own path," she said. "I'm sure we can get hold of an old typewriter from somewhere. They're ten a penny these days now that everyone is going over to computers. In fact I think I saw one for a few pounds in that charity shop in the high street."

I sighed. "But I haven't got any money until my dole cheque comes on Thursday."

"There you go again. Isn't there something you could swap?"

"I don't think they do swaps."

"Of course they'll do a swap. You give them something they can sell easier than an old typewriter and they'll jump at it."

"Like what?" I said doubtfully.

She shrugged. "Oh I don't know we'll think of something in the morning."

"You're coming back tomorrow?"

She shook her head and there was a smile playing over her lips as she said softly: "No."

I must have looked disappointed because the smile became a grin as she bent closer to me and whispered in my ear: "I'm not coming back tomorrow because I'm not going home tonight."

"Oh!" was all I could manage to reply. I squeezed my eyes tight shut for a second or two and when I opened them her face was inches from mine because she had hopped on to my lap and her arms were round my neck.

"You do want me to stay, don't you?"

I was drowning in the depths of those wonderful eyes. I took a deep breath and nodded. "More than anything in the wor..."

Her kiss stopped me finishing the sentence. It was soft and had the sweetness of honey. I slid my arms around her tiny waist and she rested her head on my shoulder.

"Good," she said.

When I awoke next morning the sun was already working its way through the worn curtains. I yawned and stretched and felt more alive and awake than I had done in weeks. In fact I felt bloody marvellous. All the more so because nestled next to me, still sleeping softly, was Fay. I took a few minutes to study her soft, sweet, lovely face before carefully slipping out from under the duvet and padding across the room to peek out of the window. I stuck my head through the curtains and rested my elbows on the sill. It had rained during the night and the rooftops with the sun on them had that clean rain-washed look. I smiled to myself and sighed, then jumped as a voice behind me chuckled:

"And I thought it was daytime."

I glanced over my shoulder and regarded her with puzzled frown. "It is," I said.

She grinned. "So how come I can see a full moon?"

I grinned myself as I turned round and walked back across the room, leant over and kissed her lightly on the mouth. She peeled back the duvet revealing the fact that she was as naked as I was.

"Come back to bed for a while," she said.

The charity shop opened at ten and by the time the volunteers had made their first cup of coffee we were standing on the doorstep with my old wooden mantel clock under my arm. I hadn't wanted to bring it I have to admit, as it was one of the few decent things I actually possessed, but it was probably that fact more than any other that made it favourite for the exchange. Besides, Fay had pointed out with a little smile, time wasn't everything. And I did still have my watch, so I'd shrugged, lifted it carefully from the old sideboard, wound it to make sure it was going, and wrapped it in a Tesco carrier bag. The two old dears who ran the shop were a little doubtful at first, explaining that they weren't really supposed to exchange things, but Fay's disappointed face had softened them and they had finally agreed. So by a quarter past ten I was the proud owner of a thirty-year-old portable typewriter, complete with battered mis-matched dark green case and, from the cut-price stationery shop opposite, a ream of A4 copier paper that had been on special offer but had still cost me the last two pounds in my pocket until my dole cheque arrived.

"Right," said Fay with a brisk smile now that the bargaining and buying was done with. "Home, and let's get to work." She set off leaving me to carry the typewriter while she tucked the ream of paper under her arm.

She was just as brisk back at the flat. "You get started and I'll make us some coffee."

I just nodded, plonked the typewriter on the table and opened its case. It as old 'Brother', the grey plastic a bit scratched in places and some previous owner had stuck a piece of black label tape across the front which bore the legend 'Merlin the Magician rules OK'. I chuckled as I unpacked it, put the case on the floor and sat the machine in front of me on the table. It stared at me and I stared back. I ran my fingers over the keys watching the letter arms jump little under my touch. I tried the carriage return arm and watched the roller turn. Tentatively I tried the space bar and grinned as it moved jerkily along, then jumped as a little bell rang to indicate the end of a line. I hit the return key and jumped again as the carriage shot back along its length and banged against the stops.

"Are you just going to sit and play or are you going to get some work done?" asked Fay as she came in with the coffee.

I looked up sheepishly and gave what I hoped was a nonchalant shrug. "Just, getting to know it," I said.

She put the coffee down on the table. "Well try it with some paper in," she said. "It makes the words easier to read."

"Oooh, sarky," I said as I thumbed open the packet of paper. I extracted a virgin white sheet and tucked it behind the roller; turned the knob and watched it roll round; slipped the clip into place and sat back with a daft grin on my face. I was ready to type. Fay nodded her encouragement as she sat down opposite me and took a sip of her coffee. Then I looked at the pile of handwritten sheets and suddenly felt scared to death. One hundred and seven thousand six hundred and seventy two words, not counting crossings out.

I shook my head. "It's going to take forever this," I said. "I'll never do it."

"It will if you don't get started," said Fay. "Come on," she added encouragingly.

I picked up the first story and laid it beside the typewriter, glanced at it then searched the keyboard for the first letter. QWERTYUIOP? Why the hell wasn't everything in alphabetical order? I looked at Fay. "Is this thing designed to be deliberately confusing?" I asked.

To my surprise, she nodded. "It was done that way to slow secretaries down," she said. "The first typewriters were alphabetical but they typed so fast that the keys kept jamming."

"Is that right?"

She nodded again. "You'll soon get used to it though."

I managed a weak smile and resumed my search for the letter F. There it was on the second row. I prodded at it and the arm shot up to print on to the paper. I grinned stupidly and looked for the A. Then the Y. Then sat back. 'fay' was neatly typed in the top left hand corner of the sheet.

Fay looked at me, shook her head and chuckled. "I think you'd better just practice to start with," she said. "Try typing: 'The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog'."

"Whatever for?"

"It uses all the keys."

"Oh," I said and bent my head diligently to the task. My brow furrowed; my tongue stuck out of the corner of my mouth and the forefingers of my right and left hand prodded away. It took a good three or four minutes before I was able to look up and see that I had typed: 'Yhr qwivk brown foz jumprd ivwr the lazudig.' Well at least I'd got two words right!

"Again," said Fay.

I set my jaw and nodded and an hour later the quick brown fox had jumped over the lazy dog another twenty times. And he'd managed the last three without tripping over anything en route! I tore the sheet out of the typewriter and handed it to Fay with a flourish.

She glanced at it and nodded. "Now," she said, "is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party."

"What?" I said screwing up my face in complete incomprehension.

She giggled at my expression. "The next exercise," she said. "It makes you move all over the keyboard."

"Oh right!" I said and in another hour thirty good men had come to the aid of thirty parties. Although quite a few of the early ones had done things like 'cime tp the sid of the paftu'. Still, I was getting there, albeit slowly. I looked at my watch. Half twelve and my stomach was rumbling.

"Time to break for lunch," said Fay. "Then we'll get down to some real work."

"Ah," I said, suddenly remembering that the two pounds I had spent on paper had meant to be spent on a loaf, some cheap margarine and a couple of pot noodles to keep me going until dole day.

But Fay had already disappeared into the kitchen. "Cheese on toast do?" she called emerging with half a slightly mouldy loaf in one hand and a lump of rock-hard Lancashire in the other.

"I thought I'd thrown those out," I said.

She held the loaf up and looked at it. "The mouldy bits will cut off and when this cheese has melted on it, you'll never know. Besides," she added with a grin, "I thought a bit of penicillin was good for you?"

"Only when it's in capsules when you've got flu," I said.

Fay just stuck out her tongue and went back into the kitchen. Ten minutes later she emerged with two plates on which were three squares of crust-less toasted bread covered with melted cheese. She plonked one down beside the typewriter.

I looked at it, then at her. "You sure this is all right to eat?" I asked.

"Positive," she said picking up a slice from her own plate and taking a large bite.

Well it was either this or starve, so... And do you know, it was bloody delicious. I don't know what she'd done with it but the first bite filled my mouth with flavours I'd never noticed before. And the textures! The bread, crisp on the outside, soft inside. The cheese, piquant and stringy so it clung to the bread and stretched like elastic. I'd devoured the lot before I had time to think about it.

Fay smiled. "Told you," she said with a grin. She picked up the plates and took them back into the kitchen while I just sat and watched her. She came back with two small glasses a quarter full of amber liquid. "This'll finish things off nicely," she said as she handed one to me.

"Where did you get this?" I asked as I sniffed the same honey-whisky aroma I'd been introduced to the night before.

"The pub," she said. "The landlord said it had been sat on the shelf for months and no-one round here wanted it. Too sophisticated for his regulars' tastes, he said, so he gave it to me."

"He gave it to you? Ted gave it to you?" Ted had never been known to give anything to anybody.

"Yes."

"Ted GAVE it to you?"

“He said if I liked it I might as well have because he was never going to sell it. Couldn’t even remember buying it, in fact.”

“He actually GAVE it to you? For free?”

She looked sidelong at me. “Well not exactly for free.”

I frowned.

“I offered to do a couple of hours cleaning for him, that’s all.”

“Why?”

“Why what?”

“Why are you doing all this?”

“Because I want to.”

I shook my head. “But why? We only met last night. You hardly know me.”

“I believe in you.”

“You do?”

She nodded. “You have a lot of potential.”

I snorted. “Gwen used to say things like that.”

“She didn’t understand. Never could understand.”

“How can you say that? You didn’t know her.”

“There are lots of Gwens in this world. People who always take the narrow view. Try to change a man into what they think he should be instead of letting his real talents blossom.”

“And that’s what you want to do? Help my talents to blossom?”

She sat on my knee. “You can be great if you put your mind to it.”

“You really think so?”

“Like I said, I believe in you.”

I looked at her face, so sincere and so close to mine and shook my head slowly.

“What’s the matter?” she asked.

I sighed. “I suppose I’m wondering if this is all a dream,” I said.

“Why?”

“Why?” I repeated. “Because I met you just last night and... and...” Everything that had happened in those few short hours sped before my eyes. “I’m just finding it hard to believe, that’s all.”

She looked troubled. “Believe,” she said. “You must.”

“I still haven’t quite got my head round how you managed to zip through this flat in the time it took me to make a brew for one thing.”

She shrugged. “You were longer than you thought.”

“Not that long! It usually takes me hours.”

“I told you, I’m a dab hand at tidying things up and the faster you do things...”

“I know,” I interrupted, “the more time you have to do other things.”

She grinned at me and although I had intended to mention the fact that she had also read all my stories in the time it had taken me to pee, I was finding it hard to concentrate on anything but her face. So I just smiled back instead.

“So you’re sure now?” she asked.

Still sure I wasn’t dreaming? My eyes roved briefly round a room that was cleaner and tidier than I could ever have got it in a month of Sundays. It had happened. I know it had. I just didn’t know how. But then I didn’t really know how a beautiful girl called Fay, that I’d met just hours before, had ended up wanting to spend the night with me either. But she had, and she’d made love to me. There in that ever-so-single bed that I’d occupied so very alone the last few weeks. And again this morning. If it was a dream, it was one I sure as hell didn’t want to wake up from. My eyes, like my thoughts, stopped wandering and settled on the face of the girl on my lap. Light though she was, I could feel her weight. Feel her back beneath my hand. Her breath on my cheek. No. I wasn’t dreaming. She was real. It was all real.

“Well?” she asked with that quirky little smile of hers.

I nodded.

“Good,” she said and planted a soft kiss on my lips. “It’s all very well being someone’s dream lover, but I much prefer the real thing.”

Half an hour later, as she lay with her head propped upon her elbows and her elbows resting among the fuzz which passed for hair on my chest, she bent forward to kiss me again then said:

“I’ve got to go out for a little while?”

“What for?” I asked as my hands stroked her back.

“Work.”

I frowned. “Work?”

“You remember? The couple of hours cleaning up. At the pub.”

“Now? Must you?”

“Yes. They’re having a bit of a do tonight, so Ted asked me if it could be this afternoon. Besides,” she added with a grin and a tap on the tip of my nose with her forefinger, “it’ll give you chance to get some work done without any distractions.”

Before I could protest further she had pulled back the bedcovers and had rolled off my chest and was sitting on the edge of the bed. She stood and stretched, picked up her clothes and I watched her disappear into the bathroom. I was still lying with my hands behind my head when she re-emerged.

“Come on!” she said.

“I expect to see every single one of those stories typed up by the time I get back.”

“Yeah right,” I said as I reached out for her as she passed me on her way towards the door where her coat hung. “I’ll be lucky if I manage the first page without mistakes.”

She resisted coming into my arms - even for a goodbye kiss. Instead she held on to my hands for a few seconds and looked intently into my eyes before tugging me into sitting position.

“You won’t get anywhere until you start,” she said. Now come on! Work!” And before I knew it, she was out of the door.

I swung my legs round and sat on the edge of the bed for a few seconds. I ran my hands over my face, shook my head and went into the bathroom for a wash to wake myself up. As I emerged from the door again I stopped and looked at the neat piles of paper surrounding the typewriter on the table. One hundred and seven thousand odd words, I thought as I wandered across the room. At the rate I had ‘progressed’ in my lessons it was going to take me about a month. At least. I sighed. Oh well, better get started. I picked up the glass of Heather Nectar and drained it in one. The cold seat of the chair I sat down reminded me that I still had no clothes on. I looked out of the window. What the hell! It was warm and who can see in here? So I just slipped on my boxers and a T-shirt and reached for the bottle of amber liquid to pour myself another shot. Funny. I didn’t remember it being on the table. Must have been hidden behind the papers. I drank, picked up the first story off the pile and set it beside me. I turned to get a sheet of paper from the packet only to find that one was already slotted into place on the roller. I frowned because I didn’t recall putting it there. I must have done it automatically while I was considering getting dressed. I looked at the story and managed to type the title on the top left hand corner and my name on the right without making any mistakes. Pleased with myself I shifted the carriage return a few times and once again there were no mistakes as the title was repeated neatly in the centre of the line. Another couple of carriage returns and I was ready to start for real. I linked my fingers and stretched my arms to make them crack, flexed them, then sat for a few seconds with my hands poised above the keyboard like a pianist about to perform a symphony. I glanced over to the page beside me to fix the first sentence or two in my mind and let my fingers descend towards the keys. As the first one struck I felt it tingle, then the key was bouncing on to the page followed by another and another and another. Not just one finger from each hand, but all of them. Working together with the precision of the fastest copy typist ever to find a job among the ‘Crème de la crème’ adverts in The Times.

I didn’t even have to look at the keys. My fingers knew precisely where every letter was and found it unerringly. I glanced back at the handwritten page and they were off again dancing over the keys. Glance, typetypetype. Glance, tytypetypetytype. The words flew from my fingers and almost before I had time to think about it the first page was done and the second

sheet ready in the typewriter. Then I was off again. Glance, typetytypetype. Glance, typetytypetytypetype. The pages began to pile up. In what seemed like no time at all, the first story was done and I was on to the second. Then the third. Now I had to take a break. Apart from anything I had spent the last few pages wriggling in my seat dying for a pee! I got up and did the necessary but all the time my fingers seemed to be twitching, itching to get back to work. It was all I could do to aim straight into the bowl! Another glass of nectar and I was off again hammering away at the keys as the pile of handwritten paper steadily transferred itself from one side of the table to the other; the packet of typing paper steadily emptied and the pile of typed stories steadily grew. It was getting dark now but I didn't want to stop even to switch on the light. I had to go on. Had to get them finished. Then my eyes must have adjusted because it seemed to get a little lighter and I ploughed on. And on. It was only when I glanced to my right for the umpty-thousandth time and found there was nothing to read, and my right hand automatically went to the packet and found it contained no paper that I realised that I had not only finished but been working for goodness-knows how long by the light of the street lamp outside the window. I stared at the typewriter; and at my hands which had suddenly started to shake with fatigue. I could just make out the time on my watch: eleven fifty-nine. Eleven fifty-nine! Nearly midnight! I had been typing for about ten hours with barely a break! I let my arms hang. God how they ached! And my back! I sat up straight to stretch it then sagged as I heard a distant church clock strike twelve, closed my eyes and thought only of sleep.

Suddenly I sat bolt upright again. Where was Fay? A couple of hours she'd said. That's all. Had something happened to her? Panic twisted a knife in my stomach. An accident? Had she been mugged? I stood up, knocking the chair over, then my eyes closed, my face creased with pain and I promptly collapsed in a heap as cramps shot through my calves. But before I could reach down to knead the knotted muscles small hands were already there. I opened my eyes and stared. There she was, head bent, her small fingers already massaging the pain away.

She looked at me and her white smile glowed orange in the streetlight.

"When...?"

"A while ago."

"How...?"

"Very quietly."

"But I didn't..."

"You were working. I didn't want to disturb you."

"You've been here...?"

"I told you I was only going to be a couple of hours."

"But..."

"Oh, I was a little bit longer. I slipped back to my place to get some things."

I noticed the holdall then, beside the bed.

"Oh," I said.

"A girl can't go on wearing the same outfit all the time, can she? Besides," she giggled, "I'd run out of clean undies."

"You're staying then?"

She gave my calves a last slap and nodded. "I'm staying." She knelt back on her heels and held out her hand. "Come on," she said. "I'll run you a hot bath. Good soak, then bed." I was too exhausted to argue, just let her pull me unsteadily to my feet and lead me to chair. "Sit there," she ordered. "I won't be long." She wasn't.

But amid the sound of running water coming from the bathroom, my mind started to ask itself questions. Questions that didn't seem to have any logical answers. I shook my head. But it was befuddled, both by tiredness and the amount of Heather Nectar I had consumed, and I couldn't think straight.

Fay beckoned from the clouds of steam that were issuing from the bathroom. Backlit like that she looked almost ethereal. I smiled at her but, as I made my way over to where she stood, my aching body told me to forget about questions for now, it was time to relax.

At the door Fay took my hand. "I've added a few herbs," she said. "They'll take the ache out of you, you'll see." She held my hand to steady me as I stepped into a bath with more hot water in it than I'd ever managed to coax from the ancient cistern before. Water that was hot enough to tingle, but settled into a soothing heat as soon as I lay down. Water that enfolded me in its embrace and brought a contented sigh from my lips. I just lay there for a few moments with my eyes closed and when I opened them Fay was seated on the closed lid of the loo, watching me.

"You worked hard today," she said.

"Don't I know it!"

She smiled. "I'm proud of you."

I grinned foolishly. "I don't know how I did it though."

Fay shrugged. "Hidden potential."

I snorted. "Yeah right. Before lunch I could barely type a sentence without making a mistake."

"A bit of practice makes all the difference."

I sat up. "A bit of practice! Fay! I typed the whole one hundred and seven thousand odd words in about ten hours!"

She shook her head. "You're not that fast."

I frowned at her. "What do you mean?"

"In the morning," she said and got up to head into the living room.

I caught her wrist. "Tell me."

She looked down at me. "Today's Friday."

I blinked. "Friday?"

She nodded. "It's gone midnight. So today's Friday."

"It can't be!"

"It is," she said.

"But I started typing at lunchtime."

"On Wednesday."

"On Wednesday?"

She nodded again. "Your dole cheque came yesterday morning."

"On Wednesday?" I repeated. "You mean I've been typing..."

"For thirty-four hours without a break."

Shit! No wonder I was knackered!

She grinned at me. "I said I was proud of you."

But I couldn't believe it. "You're having me on, aren't you? Apart from anything, if I've been working for thirty-odd hours how come I'm not abso-bloody-lutely ravenous, eh?"

"Ah, now that's the Heather Nectar. It's a bit special as liqueurs go. As to the other, work it out for yourself. How fast would you have had to type to complete one hundred and seven thousand words in ten hours?"

I frowned. Ten hours, that's six hundred minutes. Divide that into one hundred and seven thousand. Knockoff the two noughts. That's six into one thousand and seventy. Six into ten is one, carry four. Six into forty-seven, almost eight. About one hundred and eighty words a minute. She was right. It was impossible. Just about as impossible as me typing for thirty-four hours non-stop because even that would have needed thirty-four times sixty then divide that into... My brain gave up.

"About fifty-three, give or take," she said.

I looked at her. "But that's still ten times faster than I was managing..."

"Like I said," she said with a shrug. "Hidden potential. It just needed bringing out." She wriggled her wrist free from my hand and with a small smile walked into the living room.

I let my hand flop back into the water. Hidden potential! Bollocks! No one suddenly learns to type that fast. There had to be another explanation. But what? Then I had it and smiled grimly.

"Fay!" I called.

She came to the door wearing just a green satin bra and matching knickers. "Yes?"

"You hypnotised me, didn't you?"

She just smiled, but didn't say anything.

“You did, didn’t you? Made me believe I was the world’s greatest typist or something?”

Still she didn’t reply.

“That’s got to be it. How else would I manage to do it? And not realise I had been working non-stop for so long?”

The smile stayed on her lips and she inclined her head a little. “If you like.”

“What other explanation is there?”

She shrugged. “Not now.”

“Why not now?”

“Because,” she said with an engagingly wicked smile as she slipped her hands behind her back and fiddled around for a few seconds, “what you really need right now is some TLC.” Her bra slid down her arms and she held it dangling from one hand. “So why don’t you hurry up with your bath and come to bed?” She let the bra drop to the floor, turned and walked back into the bed-sitting room.

I leaned out of the bath and managed to crane round the corner of the door just in time to watch her bend down to slide her knickers down her legs and step out of them. She must have known I was watching her because I could see the grin on her face as she glanced over her shoulder before slipping under the duvet. Suddenly all my aches and pains seemed to disappear and I hooked the plug chain with my big toe and was out of that bath and towelling myself down in nought seconds flat. I was still rubbing my hair dry when I followed her into the room. She said nothing, just turned back the cover. I dropped the towel and slid into bed beside her.

It was still dark when I awoke and my watch, when I had dug it out from under the pillow and managed to find the button for the backlight, said four thirty-seven, Saturday the 28th. I lay back on the pillow and glanced to my left to where I could just make out Fay’s face turned towards me. I smiled to myself, then frowned and looked at my watch again.

Saturday? Saturday? Surely that was wrong? I fumbled for the backlight again. No. I hadn’t misread it, it definitely said Saturday.

Fay stirred and yawned. “What time is it?”

“Twenty to five.”

“Is that all? Go back to sleep love.”

“My watch says it’s Saturday.”

“So?”

“Is it?”

She yawned again. “Probably.”

“How can it be Saturday?”

She was a little more awake now. “Because you didn’t wake up yesterday. Now go back to sleep for a bit longer.”

But I couldn’t, could I? I mean if she was right I’d been asleep for more than twenty-four hours as it was. “I slept all through yesterday?”

She nodded on the pillow. “You’d been working hard, remember? You needed to catch up.”

I did remember. Sort of. I looked towards the table and saw the shadow of the typewriter sitting stark in the orange streetlit glow from the unclosed curtains. The typewriter. The one I had exchanged my mantel clock for. The one I had been going to type up my stories on. But I could see nothing else. Hadn’t I been typing them up? Working day and night? But there were no piles of handwritten stories. No stacks of typed copies. I got up and walked over to the table. My eyes hadn’t deceived me. They simply weren’t there.

“I posted them for you,” said Fay from the bed. “Yesterday.”

I turned. She was propped up on one elbow.

“You did?”

She nodded. “While you slept.”

I scratched my head. “Who did you send them to?”

“Oh all sorts of people.”

“But how did you know where to send them?”

“Simple. I went to the library and borrowed the Writers’ and Artists’ Yearbook. There’s lots of addresses in there.”

“I see,” I said. “Just like that.”

She grinned at me. “Just like that.”

“But where did you get the money? It must have cost pounds?”

“I’m not destitute you know.” She sounded offended.

“I’m sorry. But you shouldn’t have. They could have waited until I’d cashed my giro.”

“I know. But after you’d worked so hard to finish them I wanted to get them sent off as soon as possible.”

I snorted. “In case I chickened out after all?”

“No!” It came out half scornful and half giggly. “The sooner they were sent, the sooner you’ll sell them.”

“Yeah right!”

“There you go again! Believe in yourself and you’ll sell them.”

She seemed so intense about it I couldn’t help but smile. “You really think so?”

“I know so!”

I walked over to the bed and knelt on the edge. “Thankyou.”

“For what?”

“For your confidence.”

“That’s not hard. You’ve got real talent.”

I looked down at her smiling up at me. “Have I?” I said. “In what way?”

Her smile became a grin and she squirmed herself flat. “For writing of course.”

“No other ways?”

“Well there is potential. But you do need to practice.”

“Often?”

“Often.”

“Fay?” I asked eventually as the dawn began to lighten the sky over the rooftops opposite and she snuggled against my chest.

“Yes love?”

I loved it when she said that. It made me tingle all over. “Will you marry me?”

She stiffened in my arms and my heart sank. Then she pushed herself away from me and sat up, her head turned away from me. “You don’t know anything about me.”

“I know enough,” I said.

She shook her head. “No you don’t.”

“I know enough to love you.”

“Do you?” she asked without turning.

“Yes.”

“That’s easy to say when we’ve just made love.”

That hurt. “It’s more than that,” I protested. “Much more.”

“Is it?”

“I don’t want to lose you.”

“It might not be enough.”

I was puzzled. “What?”

“You say you love me now, but what about in three, five, ten or even twenty years from now? What then?”

“A hundred years. A thousand,” I answered extravagantly. “It wouldn’t matter. I’d still love you.”

“And what if she came back?”

“She? Who?”

“Your Gwen.”

“Gwen?” I think we’d mentioned her once since that first conversation in the pub. I sat up.
“What about Gwen?”

Fay turned to face me now. “She called round yesterday.”

“She did?”

Fay nodded. “She wanted to see you.”

“And you didn’t wake me?”

She shook her head. “I told her you were out.”

Which I was. Out cold. “You still should have woken me.”

She shrugged. “You needed your sleep.”

That was true. “Did she say what she wanted?”

Fay shook her head. “She seemed a little agitated. Annoyed even. And she seemed rather surprised to see me.”

“She would be.”

Fay looked at me sharply.

“Gwen,” I said. “Is the sort of woman who can’t believe that a man would want to go out with anyone else once they’d been out with her.”

“Is she right?”

I snorted. “She has been in the past.”

Fay raised her eyebrows.

“She likes a good time, does Gwen. Her good time. But when she’s tired of a man, or she finds she can’t mould him to exactly what she wants, she dumps him and moves on. I know half a dozen blokes who are still moping after her months and months afterwards.”

“But not you?”

I shook my head. “The writing was on the wall even before I lost my job and ended up moving in here. I’d resisted her you see. Refused to stop writing my ‘fairy stories’ as she called them. Then refused to take the first job that came up so I could keep her in the way she wanted. I knew then it would only be a matter of time.” I paused and shrugged. “And when Lance came back from France and popped in to see me one night when she had deigned to come and visit... well, I could tell from the look in her eye that she’d found her next victim.”

“And you just let her go?”

“There was no point in doing anything else. At least that way Lance and I would still be friends.”

“Then why has she come back?”

I didn’t say anything. Just grinned.

“Your old flame turning up on the doorstep doesn’t seem very funny to me,” said Fay.

“Oh it is love,” I said. “It’s beautiful.”

She scowled.

“It means,” I said, “that she’s found out Lance’s little secret.”

“And what’s that?”

I didn’t answer her. Just said: “It’s no wonder she looked annoyed when she called round yesterday.”

Fay looked shrewdly at me.

“What have you been up to?”

“Just giving her a taste of her own medicine, that’s all.”

“I don’t follow.”

“Lance, my love, has been my best friend since school. He’s good looking, charming and his dad’s absolutely loaded. Just the sort of chap Gwen would love to get into bed with on a permanent basis. But there’s just one snag.”

“He’s already married?”

I shook my head. “No, he’s not married - not that a little thing like that has ever bothered Gwen in the past.”

“Then what?”

“He does have a long-term partner though.”

Realisation slowly dawned on Fay. "You mean..?"

I nodded. "Gay as a floral dance and proud of it. Been living with Gawain in Paris for something like five years now."

A little smile had begun to creep back on to Fay's face. "You didn't tell her?"

I shook my head.

"But Lance knew about her?"

"Oh yes. Knew some of the other lads she'd dumped as well."

"You cooked it up between you?"

"Sort of. It was mostly Lance's idea. Bet me he could string her along for at least a month before he'd have to tell her."

"So that tale you told me in the pub was a lie?"

I sighed. "Not entirely," I said. "I think I might have loved her in the beginning. And I think I was still a little fond of her even at the end. And she did run off with my best friend."

"With your connivance!" retorted Fay.

"Yeah well," I said. "Someone had to show her that she can't go around manipulating people like that."

She looked at me through narrowed eyes for a moment, then shook her head and smiled.

"Besides," I added. "I'd already fallen in love with someone else."

Fay's head snapped round.

"I have a little confession to make," I said.

She didn't say anything, just regarded me steadily.

"I'd er... seen you a couple of times before a couple of weeks back. In the high street, then in the park. I kept... wondering who you were. Whether I'd ever be in a position to actually speak to you. Then I saw you in the pub..." I stopped because she was grinning.

"I saw you too," she said. "Tried to catch your eye both times, but each time you'd looked away."

"You're joking?" I said.

She shook her head.

We stared at each other then burst out laughing.

"Well?" I said.

"Well what?"

"I asked you a question."

"So you did."

"Well?" I said again, but before she could answer there was a knock on the door. I looked at Fay. "Did Gwen say she'd come back?"

"She did, but it can't be her. It's only half six."

"Don't you believe it," I said as the knock was repeated.

I hauled myself out of bed, found my boxer shorts and slipped them on, then, as the knock was repeated for the third time, made my way to the door and turned the key. It wasn't Gwen, it was the postman.

"Sorry to wake you sir," he said.

"But this is special delivery and I have to have a signature."

"Oh right."

I took the envelope and signed for it and he gave me a nod and went back down the stairs. I turned it over in my hands as I walked back to bed.

"What is it?" asked Fay.

"It's from a publisher," I said looking at the address on the back. "But how... You said you only posted them yesterday."

"Never mind that now. Open it!" She was kneeling on the bed, excited.

I tore the envelope open and extracted a single sheet of headed paper. I read it. Then read it again.

"Well?" said Fay.

I looked from the letter to her, then back to the letter. "They like it."

“Told you,” she said a little smugly.

“In fact they like it so much they want me to send them everything I’ve written.”

“Brilliant!” she said.

I rubbed my hand over my face. “But if you only posted them yesterday, they could hardly have time to...”

She gave me that disarming smile.

“I know,” I said. “What’s time?”

The smile turned into a grin. “You’re learning,” she said.

I was. Learning that life with Fay would always be anything but ordinary.

I looked at her again. “So?” I said, “What’s your answer?”

She knew what I was talking about. “You sure about this?”

I nodded.

She studied my face. “You know I’m Fay?”

I wasn’t entirely stupid. “What else could you be?”

“How long have you known?”

“Not the first couple of times I saw you. But, when we met in the pub...”

“Third time was the charm?” She interrupted.

I nodded. “And you told me your name. I was almost sure then.”

“A bit tenuous that.”

“Perhaps. But not after those little time dilation stunts you kept pulling...”

She grinned. “Don’t forget the typing lesson.”

I smiled wryly and flexed fingers that were still somewhat stiff. “Besides,” I added, “I knew we’d get together again one day. When the time was right.”

“And this is the right time?”

“It has to be.”

“Why?”

“Because of Gwen.”

Fay looked at me.

“I knew,” I said, “that if I was ever going to find you again I had to let her have Lance freely.”

“But he’s gay!”

“So?”

“That’s not really fair is it?”

“And she was fair to me?”

“So is this your way of taking revenge?”

I shook my head. “No,” I said. “It’s just the way things have turned out.”

Fay nodded wisely. “The spiral of history never quite manages to repeat itself, does it?”

“Things always change a little, thank goodness.”

“Like the fact that this time around I’m not your half-sister?”

I smiled. “That does help.”

“She’ll try to wreck things again you know.”

I shook my head again. “She won’t be able to. Not this time.”

“Sure?”

“Absolutely.”

We looked at each other for a few moments.

“Well Miss Fay Morgan?” I asked eventually. “Have you decided if you’d like to become Mrs King?”

Fay giggled. “Isn’t a Mrs King, a queen?”

I grinned. “Undoubtedly.”

She stood on the bed and put her arms round my neck. “I’d love to, my Arthur,” she said.

The letter dropped to the floor as I held her tight. This time I definitely wasn’t going to give her up. Whatever happened.

So maybe a little bed-sit above the Star of Destiny Chinese Takeaway on Camelot Road isn't the best place to think about starting to change the world. But then it's not the worst place either. And they do say that the pen is mightier than the sword, don't they?

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Ramblings of an elf

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Very well plotted story and well researched. This book tells a great story. It is well paced and exciting with a fascinating insight into the original Pendle Witches. The combination of police work with supernatural aid from modern witches is brilliant. Love this book and have read it twice. Hope the author gives us another book.

Peter Herring

(More reviews are available on Amazon)

Familiar Territory (due for publication October 2013)

A chance encounter with a charismatic fortune teller called Marcus at a psychic fair in Manchester leads Emma Craine into a situation that imperils her soul. For he has a familiar - an incubus which is the reincar-

nation of Sinistrari, the infamous 17th century Vicar General of Avignon. To maintain his youth, and power over women, Marcus has struck a deal with Sinistrari: every seven years he must mark someone out for him - to do with as he will - and Emma is his latest victim.

But Emma finds allies in her sister and her husband and they desperately fight back when the incubus tries to collect on the pledge.

Subtle help is also supplied by the enigmatic withes of Pendle who recognize Emma as one of their own, but will it be enough to save her when the demon comes to call for the final time?

This story is set a year before events in 'The Demdike Legacy' and introduces many of the characters for the first time.