

Excerpts from:

The Infinitude of the Sentient Singularity:

Future Ghost

by JACK GRANT

Warning: Contains adult themes and explicit material.

This extensive literary work contains any and all ‘triggers’ seems the tome is one relating to horror in all its forms. Anyone in fear of triggering a phobia or a traumatic memory definitely should not be reading horror content.

This novel also contains some lighter moments, including humour, good cheer, friendship and laughter; in light of this, the book should be avoided by any and all ‘miserable gits’ everywhere.

N.B.

These excerpts taken from the novel:

Future Ghost;

are part of a larger work:

‘The Infinitude Of The Sentient Singularity - Screamin’ Skull Trilogy’

In the carefully chosen excerpts there are a few select omissions
to avoid ‘spoilers’.

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Preface

A number of stories and themes described in this book are based upon true otherworldly encounters as experienced by the author. However, names and locations have been altered. Remember, that to some degree, we are all psychic, for this ability is inborn and far more common than the mainstream would ever dare to admit.

There is nothing supernatural nor paranormal; in fact, expanded awareness is both quite natural *and* normal. Suspend your disbelief and delete the 'super-' along with the 'para-'. If I had a penny for every time I saw or spoke to a spirit entity (ghost) then I believe I'm very likely to be nudging nearer towards a tenner!

Beyond the fleshy confines of mortality
In unrestricted realities that abound
The war to realise realm reduction rages on

Within time and space which cannot exist
An infinity bristling bright with expression does persist
To perceive the true power and glory of the 'one'

The magnificence which is ...
the Sentient Singularity

Future Ghost [Excerpts]

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Future Ghost:

Excerpt from Chapter Two

Mrs. McTavish stared into the fireplace. Red embers crackled and popped sending occasional sparks astray. She watched the reflected dancing shadows of flame upon the hearth. The elderly lady nursed in her hand a wee dram from which she took a sip. *'Early morning or no,'* she thought, *'prevention is better than a cure.'* She had already taken porridge laced with whisky into her husband who languidly lay in his sickbed nursing a very bad cold. The matronly wife now mused to herself, *'You would think, no one could ever suffer more than him, to hear his complaints!'*

Domestically driven, she had risen before the light of dawn to mix and knead dough. Her kitchen had become fully imbued with the enticing aroma of freshly baked bread. *'Trust him to get ill when we are expecting guests,'* the quietly pondering lady thought to herself. *'Paying guests at that, in of all months, October.'*

The dexterous expertise honed over the years, now evidenced in her very own homely feminine touch, would be applied to making pastry in a wee moment or two but for now she took respite in a well deserved break. Maureen McTavish stared into the fire letting slip her thoughts just for a few seconds.

She could discern a few figures within gently glowing scenes in the embers of the fire, like her parents and grandparents before her. They were adept at fire gazing which gifted them with the ability to see future events. This sort of divination blessed the seer with much more insight than mere fortune telling. Uncannily, she, along with her forebears knew when friends or indeed strangers approached, oftentimes even before they had decided to visit. Thus, in the tranquil warm glow reflected from the hearth, Maureen and her family would while away the hours on those long cold Scottish nights.

In keeping with her modest sensibilities, she never claimed to be gifted by second sight, though on occasion Maureen saw strange things on the moor. She thought it more likely that the lands which lay beyond her door were haunted by things long in the past and eerily, things that were yet meant to be.

That very morning she had been in her back yard overlooking the moor, feeding grain to their hens before collecting eggs into her basket. Slightly taken aback, she glimpsed a reddish hue from the corner of her eye. Caught so unawares, Maureen turned to see a half naked young man in a long red cape hurrying towards her. She could see a wound through the shortness of his hair. In gruesome streaks, congealed blood marred one side of his face. Whether in woe or turmoil, the distressed young man presented himself shirtless, which revealed to the naked eye his badly bruised torso; black, blue and sallow contusions. He had a dark leather kilt fastened around his waist and he clasped a blood stained short sword.

Looking her in the face whilst still running forwards in his urgency, the anxious legionnaire called out, "Mater, mater!" On swift heels the wounded man ran, totally unhindered by material objects, for he passed straight through the panelling

of the gate to the chicken coop. Seemingly this gave the impression that to him the hard bare wood had all the resistance of a vaporous mirage.

Unless her eyes were very much deceived, he did seem to have some form of solidity. She felt the need to touch his muscular wiry frame, for she needed to be certain of his physicality. She reached out her arms to offer this lad some comfort but then he blinked out of existence thus confirming his phantom form. He did not drift away nor did he fade, for he simply vanished from sight. Maureen thought she had witnessed something else. Perhaps a trick of the light; a certain something that she couldn't quite be sure of.

Maureen had often heard whispered rumours from the surrounding moors people; legends and myths about a ghostly legion, Romans wandering upon the wilds, witnessed only by a privileged few. She never determined whether any member of this ghostly legion had ever spoken before or even made eye contact. Privately, the lady lodge keeper thought to herself, '*seeing is believing*' but combine that with hearing the voice, then this should have indeed made the incident fact. However, solid facts require solid evidence and she could provide no such proof. If needs be she would swear testimony to the truth of it on a stack of bibles. Alas, with only her cynical husband to confide in, Maureen couldn't envisage this ever transpiring. A thousands oaths to truth wouldn't convince him. The ghostly happening didn't faze her. She had gone about her chores quite unconcerned.

Emerging from her personal musings, she returned her attention to the task at hand. After sweeping the flat of her palm over her greyish, pepper-and-salt, flour sprinkled locks, she took another nip of whisky. "Now for the pastry," Maureen said while lifting herself from the chair in order to carry on with her baking.



Excerpt from Chapter Two

The open Scottish countryside, still blanketed in green, came as such a stark contrast to the bleak smoky streets of Dundee; with grey slated roofs wet with the drizzle that the Scots call *dreich*, which soaks through the clothes much more assuredly than the ravages of a heavy downpour.

The two companions had been discussing everything and everyone. Topics of no real importance. The coach turned into the courtyard of an inn, commonly called a halfway house. Here they would feed and provide water for the thirsty horses. Feeling absolutely ravenous, Louisa inwardly prayed that there would be more on offer than cheese, bread and ale. In such a hungry condition she would have gladly placed the horses on the menu. The day had drawn on to mid-afternoon and Mr. Sinclair expected to arrive at the McTavishes' by early evening if not sooner.

The unexceptional, small inn boasted a beamed ceiling and little else, with the room being very light in decor save for a few brass ornaments. The tables were bare, in that they went without the basic essentials of cloths to cover the rough, untreated planks which constituted the surface area. The time-withered old benches that flanked the tables were equally unimpressive. The solid stone floor lay beneath wood shavings and spontaneously strewn straw fit to soak up spit and spilt ale, a practicality but nothing more. At least the room staved off the cold by providing some much needed warmth. The red ember heap in the big fireplace gave the room a welcome glow, with this being the establishment's only saving grace.

"Can't believe people stay here," Louisa cautiously said to Mary.

Unfortunately, the person behind the bar overheard her irreverent remark; a big man with a ruddy complexion and long ginger hair tied at the back with cord. "For the most part they don't!" he informed a blushing Louisa, "Now what can I get ye?"

Taking the man to be rude and rather uncouth, Mary abruptly informed him, "Food! Preferably hot."

"Oh!" said the bartender with a broad grin, "Ye come on the right day. It's mutton stew wi' root veg." He continued to wipe the innards of a tankard with a slightly dirty looking rag.

"Needs must when the devil drives," said Louisa.

"So is that for the two o' yee?" the bartender asked while hooking the tankard above the counter.

"No," said a voice to the back of them, "Make that four an' we'll take bread wi' the meals." The firm words were spoken by Stuart who had just finished the task of giving the horses water. "Mi pa will be in shortly," the young reinsman told the two ladies while gesturing towards the yard, "he's just feedin' the horses ... So fair maidens, your table."

Stuart showed them to the table he thought to be the best, flanked on either side by benches. A short time later Mr. Sinclair joined them.

A few moments passed in silence until a flustered looking woman entered the bar area, presumably from the kitchen seems upon a tray she carried two large steaming bowls of broth. By the look of her, she seemed to be mid mature in years

and her round, jowled face glowed feverishly red. For all the world to see she appeared to be in a sweltering state of discomfort, probably from slaving over a hot stove, or perhaps, Louisa thought, from being in the last flushes of the change.

“Over there, Ma.” The barman pointed to their table.

The heavily perspiring lady unceremoniously plonked the bowls of mutton broth on the table. She slid the first bowlful towards Mary and the second to Stuart, who had seated himself opposite, facing the young lady. A little while later the ageing waitress brought two more steaming bowls of broth for Louisa and Mr. Sinclair.

“Do we not get a spoon?” Mr. Sinclair asked.

“I’m bringing ’em with the bread in a minute!” the server snapped. Briefly fixing the four diners with a stern, scornful look, she then flounced back to the kitchen.

“What tae drink noo?” the bartender called over to them.

“Oh two ales,” said Mr. Sinclair.

“And fo’ tha two o’ you?” the barkeep asked, looking directly at the pair of young ladies.

“Barley water will do just fine,” Louisa said.

The bartender’s mother in her accustomed role of belligerent waitress returned from the kitchen. The frumpy landlady came clomping across the straw strewn floor towards the four hungry guests. She dropped a basket containing coarsely cut bread crusts in the middle of the table and discourteously slammed down four rather tarnished spoons.

The broth, in both taste and consistency, could best be described as adequate, ordinary fayre. The four spoke little during the meal, though Mary did ascertain Stuart’s age and her well reasoned guess proved correct in that he confirmed his youthful age to be just three months shy of seventeen.

Stuart told them, “When I was only fourteen I wanted to join the army for the adventure and also to face up to the enemy Napoleon.”

Immediately his father interjected, “I didn’t father children so I could see my own flesh and blood shuffle off the mortal coil in some foreign field. To be killed in Europe is bad enough, but I was always afraid that once Stuart joined he would be sent to the Americas to be finished off by a war party of ugly savages, and what’s more they got Frenchies o’er there too.”

Mary thought Mr. Sinclair referred to Canada rather than the United States since the settlers in that part of North America had declared their independence. A fact that didn’t stop the constant skirmishes and warring between the two nations. She decided to stay quiet on the subject for she did not want to correct her elders or cause embarrassment.

The rattle of the spoon in the bowl indicated that Bob Sinclair had finished his meal, leaving him free to converse further.

“You see, I did have two uncles who had the misfortune and ill fate to fall into the hands of the native Huron savages. They were tortured to death by all accounts and I dunnae want the same to befall Stuart.”

His son frowned and turned his attention to the young woman sitting across from him. “Do you ever feel the need to see America, Miss Mary?” Stuart enquired, before pausing briefly to soak up the last of his broth using a hunk of bread. With

his comestibles completely consumed, he continued, "To perhaps walk the streets of New York?"

She gave a slight shake of her head before succinctly telling him, "No," but considering her answer to be far too curt, she added, "However, I do wish to visit Europe if ever the fighting stops. I would like to study the many languages and stroll around the city streets steeped in history. Then there are the great forests and lakes with all the wondrous mountain ranges; all this and yet so near. No I have no longing for the Americas."

Gesturing towards Stuart with her spoon, Louisa asked, "And you?"

Happy to inform her, Stuart replied, "Maybe, one day. If I can afford to, or earn my fare aboard a ship. But for now, Pa needs me."

Bob Sinclair interrupted, "Ya pa puts up wi' ya!" With the sharp comment solely aimed at Stuart, his father didn't mind sharing another pawky remark with the two young ladies. "An' in mah time I've put up wi' a lot seems Stuart's labours are bolstered by brass neck cheek."

Louisa being of an inquisitive nature asked the young man, "And what does your mother make of your plans?"

Bob's ears pricked a little and he sighed, but said nothing while Stuart answered Louisa's question.

"I lost my mother when nothing more than a wee bairn, so I never knew her."

Louisa didn't look at all perturbed. She simply smiled and said, "How unfortunate. I'm very sorry to hear that."

Mary found an instant connection with him, having lost her own mother to a similar complication. It seemed commonplace for people to die young from disease, hard toil, accidents and women all the more so from giving birth. This made Mary despondent so she escaped into literature. She avidly read the Greek plays; for the most part mythology. The dreams of immortality appealed to her: The realms to which the gods would have us aspire, free from ailment and all the worries of the world. She kept such thoughts to herself for she presumed that Stuart, his father and even Louisa would think her a wishful fantasist, besides which, all people wear masks; the true depths of a person always lies hidden beneath the surface. It wasn't just the nature of the moor that appealed to her senses but the contentment she felt from being alone with her thoughts in such a great expanse of land.

She needed no paper or quill, just her imaginings that could be written down later, at a time she found convenient. First the inspiration, then the thoughts that she could channel from mind to hand. Once equipped with quill, she could commit her musings to paper, having the intention of enthralling, or dare she hope, sparking the imagination in others solely from her very own work. The whole process fascinated her. Were people mere automatons instilled with a consciousness, the breath of God, like clockwork creations designed by artisans hailing from some other unknown world?

She drank the barley water before returning to the unenviable task of finishing her greasy meal.

"Suppose we'll mek for the McTavishes' noo," Stuart said while placing his blue cap upon his wavy blond locks and firmly adjusting the side seams for a tighter fit.

Excerpts from Chapter Three

Mary inhaled the cool night air which she found invigorating. However, the misty vapour from her breath exposed in the light of the lodge window gifted her a warning. It would be quite unwise to prolong her evening respite, exposed to the elements which could possess the makings of a frost. Mary's musings settled upon the fact that she had probably imbibed far too much elderberry wine; a rather rich tippie, claret in colour, though to her palate she found the wine tasted very much like a fortified sherry or a full bodied port.

Mary became aware that, while lost in thought, she had been absent-mindedly staring into the side of the coach. What broke Mary from her proclivity to ponder proved to be the disturbance of an indiscernible 'something' moving about in the shadows.

She stealthily approached the coach with extreme caution. However, her natural curiosity and inquisitiveness had to be satisfied. Her eyes became more accustomed to the gloom.

A dull shape of an indeterminate size sprang from its temporary resting place upon the flat sill base of the carriage window onto the seat within. This gave Mary scant relief, but relief all the same for the obscured shape certainly did not possess the size of a human being; too small even to be a child.

An unnerving sound of movement came from inside the carriage.

With a reckless abandon to anything even remotely approaching a sober judgement, Mary succumbed to the inebriating effect instilled by the wine. Her actions, executed in a rash manner, were bold and foolhardy to say the least. Grabbing the handle she violently yanked open the coach door.

The handle slipped from her grasp. The door forcibly slammed against the side of the coach with a sudden thud. Her senses were instantly assaulted by the sound of a sharp threatening growl and a spitting hiss. Something scrambled over the interior seats while emitting a low rumbling sound that exploded into a predatory screech. The dark creature shot towards her. Mary impulsively jolted backwards to dodge the aggressive attack.

The indistinct shape leapt past her right shoulder and hit the ground running, swiftly darting across the yard. Mary witnessed the shadowy mass speedily scurry up the stone stacked wall to one side of the courtyard entrance. The obscure shape finally came to rest upon a wooden post nearest the double gate. There the dark form remained in unnerving stillness. From the creature's outline, Mary deduced this beast to be nothing more than a dark furred cat albeit a very formidable one. She felt sure that in temperament this particular feline did not relate to the ordinary domesticated variety. This savage species had the rumoured reputation of having an untamed ferocity. Frequently told tales about the legendary Scottish wildcat came with the insistent warning of the grave danger these feral carnivores posed.

The perilous situation gifted Mary with a little more sobriety though fell well short of a sober sensibility in that she did not flee. The very thought of Maureen's hens in the coop falling victim to a vicious end by tooth and claw struck her as

unthinkable. Mary swept the ground with her foot until she made contact with a loose heavy object. Bending at the knees, she lowered herself to pick up the rock which she believed to be at her feet in the darkness. Indeed, the solid object did turn out to be a large stone of a good size and weight. After grasping the rock, she straightened herself up, with her gaze never shifting from the dark shape resting atop the wooden post. She drew back her arm to take aim, the best a scholarly young lady could. Using all her strength, she let fly with the rock.

In that very moment a severe blinding light froze her to the spot. A rhythmic beat invaded the atmosphere that increasingly became overpowered by the discordant sound of clanging. This invited the idea that the devil himself orchestrated the blaring racket with a foundry full of iron bars and metal sheets. The chords had a frantic frenzied speed and a powerful urgency. Over this raucous cacophony a voice erupted to chant not unlike Mr. Sinclair's folk songs but this had a primitive insistence in being far more abrasively coarse.



Stuart, holding his lantern high, walked a short distance across the small dark yard to the now horseless coach, with the four mares having been placed in the McTavishes' barn to feed and rest. He clambered up the front of the carriage to stand on the reins man's seat and rummaged around in an old case which lay atop the coach. Stuart struck discordant strings upon finding the item that he had been searching for. Still holding the lantern aloft, Young Master Sinclair hopped from the coach whilst rather awkwardly clutching a fiddle and bow to his chest.

'Now, 'he thought to himself, 'the party will get started good and proper.'

Initially about to briskly march back to the cosy gathering, Stuart stopped in his tracks upon hearing the sound of unsettled neighing from the horses. At first, he thought that he himself had unnerved them from his noisy clamber atop the coach. *'Better safe than sorry,'* came his wise notion, so he went to check on the nags. He cautiously reasoned that maybe they had been spooked by an opportunistic fox; alternatively, the pest could be a grain-trough raiding rat, or even worse, a flesh hungry wolf. The general consensus presupposed that wolves had been eradicated in Scotland, though from many a tale told, Stuart and his father knew better.

He drew open the small side door and entered the dark barn. He could see the moving shapes of the horses when he entered. Sure enough they looked to be nervy and unsettled. He lifted the lantern to inspect the horses and to reassure them. They instinctively knew the tone of his voice and they also recognised him from his scent.

“OK there bonnie lassies it's only me, now calm doon and stop fussin'.”

The horses had made short work of the oats that had been placed in the feeder before them, so Stuart decided to give them a few more scoops. Evidently, there remained more than enough water in the trough. While he dished out the horse feed from the sack using a short handled shovel, he thought or he imagined that he

heard a faint whispering from one shadowy corner. He lifted the lantern. Stuart checked every corner of the small barn. With the inner area seemingly free of intruders, Stuart dropped the shovel into the sack before retrieving his fiddle and bow which he had rested against the wall.

Intending to leave, safe in the knowledge that the horses were unharmed and undisturbed by any stray wild beast, a clearly whispered utterance had him fixed to the spot.

'You are one of two, and one of you shall perish when the fiddler calls the tune.'

However, he could not ascertain nor distinguish from where the voice emanated. Stuart stared into the blackness which pervaded the back of the barn while a shiver ran down his spine. He called out nervously,

“Who’s there? ... Show yourself.”

The tense silence denied him an answer.

He rechecked every square inch of the interior. The whispered phrase undoubtedly originated from within the confines of the barn but despite his best efforts he could find nothing and no one.

“Show yourself!” Stuart sternly repeated.

He received no response, so he decided upon the use of a threat.

“If anyone is in here ya better flee ’cos I’m away to fetch mah musket to finish yer off.”

With not a soul to hear his words, the only sound came from the mares who continued to busily chew their feed.

“Och, listen to me talking tay mysel’ and hearing imaginary whispers brought on by a strong grain whisky.” This he had spoken aloud to comfort himself while he slowly backed away towards the door, expecting some hideous phantom to dart towards him from the darkness.

This fleetingly imagined horror did not occur but while he walked from the barn back to the lodge, this strange incident weighed heavily upon his mind. He considered himself far too young and carefree to pay superstition much heed or the wittering words of an auld landlady like Maureen McTavish. However, even if the eerie moor repelled every last ghost and in a heartbeat erased all supernatural phenomena to be forgotten forever, Stuart thought to himself that those whispered words he heard in the dark of the barn would still, one day, come back to ‘haunt’ him.

The other niggling thought that unnerved him derived from the very nature of the words. Did it mean that anyone who called for a tune would perish this very night? ‘*One of two*’ had a much deeper meaning for Stuart. The apprehensive feeling convinced him that the warm glow from the whisky in his belly needed an urgent top up. With the lantern dangling from his wrist, he placed his palm flat against the surface of the lodge door. Just before he entered, he spoke aloud to nought but the cold night air.

“Och, one of two and fiddle-di-dee. Stuff and nonsense.”



Excerpt from Chapter Four

The choice of character the three friends expressed themselves with had never before been brought together, yet each of them knew they had never truly been apart. They were the imagination of themselves. The sentient trio idled through the meadow until they came to the banks of a clear blue, very inviting river which appeared pleasing to the eye.

“Skinny dip?” Chica suggested.

“Skinny dip!” Vance and Danny spoke in unison, while nodding in agreement.

Their clothes instantly disappeared leaving all three naked and free. The liberated trinity of souls plunged into the water and with ease of effort, they breaststroked up-river. Effectively, the waters massaged every muscle and the experience became the epitome of relaxation.

A tickling sensation revolved around Vance’s legs, the soles of his feet and his toes. Dipping his head beneath the surface, Vance gazed down, to see below them a most beautiful escort; a shimmering shoal of multicoloured fish; metallic gold, emerald, aquamarine, rich ruby red. The shades of their scales changed from one exotic colour to another.

He and his companions dived down a little deeper, swimming through soft aqua fern grasses which were gently swaying in the current. Strewn with opal, onyx and silver, the river bed glistened. Occasionally they saw themselves submerged in their nakedness. The bodily images ‘*au naturel*’ were reflected from stretches of pure crystal and seams of mirrored quartz amidst an amethyst sheen. Cast from the entire length and breadth that spanned the gemstone foundation, this enchanting perspective served as the very bedrock of the river.

Emerging from the gleaming strata, a marble white circle of standing stones came into view. The three friends dived deeper and with every measure of submergence that they undertook, each naked body shrank to become diminutive representations in comparison to their former selves. Once inside the polished limestone henge, in three very definite twinkles, they vanished, only to reappear a millisecond later. Leaving the marble structure behind, Vance, Chica and Danny returned to their normal size.

The trio swam in timeless peacefulness before they lifted themselves from the aquatic paradise below. Instantly clothed, with the comfort of being dry, they walked on the water, shaded by the leafy trees that lined either side of the river bank. The abundant bushes in bountiful efflorescence displayed many a vibrant colour. The heavily hanging blossoms scented the air with a fragrance so pleasing to the senses.

The three friends had no real need for garments. The modesty insisted upon by narrow minded morality did not apply, for each individual, without exception, embodied and mirrored back a spiritual reflection of everyone else, thus clothing covered a chimerical deceit, this being their illusory physicality. However, of their own free will, they chose to sport stylish attire. They had no need to be separate entities. This also came down to a choice they made. Even the glorious delights of this entire heaven could not measure in comparison to their true home: an awe-inspiring place *so* much more wonderful.



Excerpt from Chapter Seven

Within the smog, partially formed images of hideous creatures with constantly gnashing teeth sporadically shot forth. Before the horrific visages could be fully realised, they dissipated like evaporating masks of doom. The unseen threat became far more terrifying when lost within the unknown. Each wisp from the dense bank of fog became a potential predator. Mary's companion endeavoured to stay sane and strong in spirit but the heavy impenetrable atmosphere played tricks on his mind. In the young man's thoughts he visualised a mass of snaking arms equipped with clawlike hands infesting the vaporosity which surrounded his immediate vicinity; claws penetrating the mist to tear at the flesh of his quaking body. These imaginings close to the brink of being made manifest began to erode the last remaining vestiges of his resolve.

With body all a-tremble and a straining heart thudding at full pelt, Stuart literally witnessed a host of foglike claws undulating all around him.

Compounding Stuart's petrified state, the claw-tipped digits, becoming more solid with every passing moment, touched the clammy coldness of his skin. Scraping against the sides of his head and upper torso, sinisterly probing and a-groping, the claws examined Stuart's frame. Quaking in fear, the young reins man suffered a chilling cold sweat while the talon sharp fingers scratched at the heavily perspiring surface of his face and brow. Each vicious claw searched for a vulnerability, perhaps to reach in and rip out the raging tribulation of his fiercely racing heart.

Unexpectedly, hope surged in Stuart's awareness. He fixed upon a faint, twinkling light in the distance. Defying the fear that he felt, Stuart snapped out of his stupor. Grasping her hand, the determined young man led Mary onwards and even though surrounded by this nightmare of the macabre the cheer in his own voice won through. "Mary, 'tis Mrs. McTavish. She has lit a lantern in the back window to show us the way. We head towards the light."

No argument came from Mary. The gladdening words were like sweet music to her ears. The dense smog could not blot out the small point of light that beckoned the pair to safety.

They did not speak to one another for what seemed to be an age, though truly this could only have been a matter of minutes. With their senses on high alert to detect the merest hint of a savage assault they journeyed on. The situation did not demand any kind of small talk from either Stuart or Mary; with a persistent purpose they pursued their only salvation. They knew they were getting closer, for the illumination seemed to be much nearer. The outlying glow drew them on.

Their hastening pace could have been from Stuart's anxious eagerness to lead them to safety in that he still held her hand tightly and at arm's length while Mary trailed behind him. So much did the thick foggy barrier obscure him that Mary lost all sight of her gallant guide.

At first she found his clasp to be pleasant and reassuring but now he held her hand in a vicelike grip. So sorely compressed by the continuance of the constant pressure, Mary believed the bones in her hand would be crushed by his might.

He pulled her onwards like a parent drags a dilly-dallying child. The pain Mary felt in her hand became so intense that she could feel the rest of her arm growing in agonised distress from the severest unrelenting ache.

“Stuart, my hand! You’re breaking my hand! Slow a little and release me from your grip.”

Although she could not see him clearly she sensed and felt Stuart draw to a halt. Even so he did not loosen her hand from his compressive hold.

She drew herself closer to his outline in the mist.

“Stuart, let me go, I can’t feel my hand, it’s so ...”

Mary’s words trailed off at the sight when confronted with the fact that she had been led by the hand into the mist and towards the light by something her brain fought hard to fathom. Partially obscured by the mist, her guide turned towards her. Now that she could see the figure somewhat clearer, Mary instantly prayed for the return of a smoggy blindness.

Stuart stumbled, very nearly losing his footing from the jolt he received. The obscured visibility of the misty moor proved bad enough though his companion now attempted to pull away from him. He thought he could make out Mary’s form laying low to the ground. From impeded eyesight, the young lady must have fallen but she made no move to lift herself back up like one would expect.

Stuart thought to himself, *‘If need be, I will gladly shoulder the burden of carrying the young lady the best I can.’* However, he could not drag her across the wilderness while she resisted or recoiled from his assistance.

“Mary?” he said, pulling on her hand to drag the young lady closer, “Mary, what’s wrong? Did you fall?” He wafted at the thick smog with his hand to get a clearer look at her, and when at last he did, the shock froze him to the spot.



Excerpt from Chapter Eight

Something disturbed the silence above. Mary held her breath. A little shale fell upon her head. 'Good God', she thought, *'the beast has found me!'* Mary feared that she would suffer much pain if dragged into the clutches of the beast and she desperately wished to avoid such a terrible fate. She felt like the virgin offered in sacrifice to a voracious dragon. The young lady found herself caught in a dilemma between two equally terrifying perils. To fall to her death or be ripped to shreds above. This distressing prospect swept through the totality of her frantically ongoing thoughts. A feverish moment later, she thought about the torment of her situation; unable to move a muscle, nor a single sinew. Even one unrestrained breath could dislodge her fragile position.

She felt the last few threads of her sleeve ripping, slowly tearing with each flimsy strand becoming looser. She thought of her father who would be beside himself with grief. Tears welled up in her eyes when she became very mindful of poor Stuart Sinclair, out there somewhere, unconscious and alone.

All her life, she had been unaccustomed to prayer, not being religious at all, preferring the arts and the sciences of the modern age. She prayed now. Mary prayed in her thoughts to any holy unearthly power that be, *'Save me! Somehow, rescue me! Please ye gods I pray!'*

Fearfully the final fate did strike her. The very last split ripped through the light material of the sleeve. On impulse she cried out in alarm. When she felt herself drop she instinctively grabbed for the side of the ravine. Suddenly, if not miraculously, her grip found a hold.

A small rocky clump jutting out from the sheer face of the ravine saved her fall, albeit only momentarily. The rock she grasped came loose in the palm of her hand which she folded into a fist so that at all costs she would not lose her grip on the craggy support. Caught between life and death, insanity prevails in the fleeting moments of traumatic shock. A strange notion instantly struck Mary with the bizarre belief that the clump of rock in her hand contained a charm akin to a divine magical talisman which could, even now, still save the day.

At the exact time that gravity turned to turmoil and she felt the weight of her entire body fall, something grabbed her by the wrist. In that very instant she thought, *'Oh my good God! The beast has found me!'* Of her two predicaments, she would have preferred the fall to her now violent ending.

She kicked out, screaming hysterically, trying her damndest to wriggle free. In that anguished agonising moment of trepidation she desperately wanted to fall.