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THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY

Coming October 2020

REASONS TO STAY ALIVE

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NOTES ON A NERVOUS PLANET

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HOW TO STOP TIME

Available Now

THE DEAD FATHERS CLUB

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THE MIDNIGHT LIBRARY

MATT HAIG

VIKING

‘Between life and death there is a library,’ she said. ‘And within that library, the shelves go on for ever. Every book provides a chance to try another life you could have lived. To see how things would be if you had made other choices . . . Would you have done anything different, if you had the chance to undo your regrets?’

The Moving Shelves

The shelves on either side of Nora began to move. The shelves didn't change angles, just kept on sliding horizontally. It was possible that the shelves weren't moving at all, but the books were, and it wasn't obvious why or even *how*. There was no visible mechanism making it happen, and no sound or sight of books falling off the end – or rather the *start* – of the shelf. The books slid by at varying degrees of slowness, depending on the shelf they were on, but none moved fast.

'What's happening?'

Mrs Elm's expression stiffened and her posture straightened, her chin retreating a little into her neck. She took a step closer to Nora and clasped her hands together. 'It is time, my dear, to begin.'

'If you don't mind me asking – begin *what*?'

'Every life contains many millions of decisions. Some big, some small. But every time one decision is taken over another, the outcomes differ. An irreversible variation occurs, which in turn leads to further variations. These books are portals to all the lives you could be living.'

'What?'

'You have as many lives as you have possibilities. There are lives where you make different choices. And those choices lead to different outcomes. If you had done just one thing differently, you would have a different life story. And they all exist in the Midnight Library. They are all as real as this life.'

'Parallel lives?'

'Not always parallel. Some are more . . . *perpendicular*. So, do

you want to live a life you could be living? Do you want to do something differently? Is there anything you wish to change? Did you do anything wrong?’

That was an easy one. ‘Yes. Absolutely everything.’

The answer seemed to tickle the librarian’s nose.

Mrs Elm quickly rummaged for the paper tissue that was stuffed up the inside sleeve of her polo neck. She brought it quickly to her face and sneezed into it.

‘Bless you,’ said Nora, watching as the tissue disappeared from the librarian’s hands the moment she’d finished using it, through some strange and hygienic magic.

‘Don’t worry. Tissues are like lives. There are always more.’ Mrs Elm returned to her train of thought. ‘Doing one thing differently is often the same as doing *everything* differently. Actions can’t be reversed within a lifetime, however much we try . . . But you are no longer *within* a lifetime. You have popped outside. This is your opportunity, Nora, to see how things could be.’

This can’t be real, Nora thought to herself.

Mrs Elm seemed to know what she was thinking.

‘Oh, it is real, Nora Seed. But it is not quite reality as you understand it. For want of a better word, it is *in-between*. It is not life. It is not death. It is not the real world in a conventional sense. But nor is it a dream. It isn’t one thing or another. It is, in short, the Midnight Library.’

The slow-moving shelves came to a halt. Nora noticed that on one of the shelves, to her right, at shoulder height, there was a large gap. All the other areas of the shelves around her had the books tightly pressed side-by-side, but here, lying flat on the thin, white shelf, there was only one book.

And this book wasn’t green like the others. It was grey. As grey as the stone of the front of the building when she had seen it through the mist.

Mrs Elm took the book from the shelf and handed it to Nora.

She had a slight look of anticipatory pride, as if she'd handed her a Christmas present.

It had seemed light when Mrs Elm was holding it, but it was far heavier than it looked. Nora went to open it.

Mrs Elm shook her head.

'You always have to wait for my say-so.'

'Why?'

'Every book in here, every book in this entire library – except one – is a version of your life. This library is yours. It is here for you. You see, everyone's lives could have ended up an infinite number of ways. These books on the shelves are your life, all starting from the same point in time. Right now. Midnight. Tuesday the twenty-eighth of April. But these midnight possibilities aren't the same. Some are similar, some are very different.'

'This is crackers,' said Nora. 'Except *one*? This one?' Nora tilted the stone-grey book towards Mrs Elm.

Mrs Elm raised an eyebrow. 'Yes. That one. It's something you have written without ever having to type a word.'

'What?'

'This book is the source of all your problems, and the answer to them too.'

'But what is it?'

'It is called, my dear, *The Book of Regrets*.'

The Book of Regrets

Nora stared at it. She could see it now. The small typeface embossed on the cover.

The Book of Regrets

‘Every regret you have ever had, since the day you were born, is recorded in here,’ Mrs Elm said, tapping her finger on the cover. ‘I now give you permission to open it.’

As the book was so heavy Nora sat down cross-legged on the stone floor to do so. She began to skim through it.

The book was divided into chapters, chronologically arranged around the years of her life. 0, 1, 2, 3, all the way up to 35. The chapters got much longer as the book progressed, year by year. But the regrets she accumulated weren’t specifically related to that year in question.

‘Regrets ignore chronology. They float around. The sequence of these lists changes all the time.’

‘Right, yes, that makes sense, I suppose.’

She quickly realised they ranged from the minor and quotidian (‘I regret not doing any exercise today’) to the substantial (‘I regret not telling my father I loved him before he died’).

There were continual, background regrets, which repeated on multiple pages. ‘I regret not staying in The Labyrinths, because I let down my brother.’ ‘I regret not staying in The Labyrinths, because I let down myself.’ ‘I regret not doing more for the environment.’ ‘I regret the time I spent on social media.’ ‘I regret not

going to Australia with Izzy.’ ‘I regret not having more fun when I was younger.’ ‘I regret all those arguments with Dad.’ ‘I regret not working with animals.’ ‘I regret not doing Geology at University instead of Philosophy.’ ‘I regret not learning how to be a happier person.’ ‘I regret feeling so much guilt.’ ‘I regret not sticking at Spanish.’ ‘I regret not choosing science subjects in my A-levels.’ ‘I regret not becoming a glaciologist.’ ‘I regret not getting married.’ ‘I regret not applying to do a Master’s degree in Philosophy at Cambridge.’ ‘I regret not keeping healthy.’ ‘I regret moving to London.’ ‘I regret not going to Paris to teach English.’ ‘I regret not finishing the novel I started at university.’ ‘I regret moving out of London.’ ‘I regret having a job with no prospects.’ ‘I regret not being a better sister.’ ‘I regret not having a gap year after university.’ ‘I regret disappointing my father.’ ‘I regret that I teach piano more than I play it.’ ‘I regret my financial mismanagement.’ ‘I regret not living in the countryside.’

Some regrets were a little fainter than others. One regret shifted from practically invisible to bold and back again, as if it was flashing on and off, right there as she looked at it. The regret was ‘I regret not yet having children.’

‘That is a regret that sometimes is and sometimes isn’t,’ explained Mrs Elm, again somehow reading her mind. ‘There are a few of those.’

From the age of 34 onwards, in the longest chapter at the end of the book, there were a lot of Dan-specific regrets. These were quite strong and bold, and played in her head like an ongoing fortissimo chord in a Haydn concerto.

‘I regret being cruel to Dan.’ ‘I regret breaking up with Dan.’ ‘I regret not living in a country pub with Dan.’

As she stared down at the pages, she thought now of the man she had so nearly married.

REASONS TO STAY ALIVE

MATT HAIG



PENGUIN BOOKS

This book is impossible

THIRTEEN YEARS AGO I knew this couldn't happen.

I was going to die, you see. Or go mad.

There was no way I would still be here. Sometimes I doubted I would even make the next ten minutes. And the idea that I would be well enough and confident enough to write about it in this way would have been just far too much to believe.

One of the key symptoms of depression is to see no hope. No future. Far from the tunnel having light at the end of it, it seems like it is blocked at both ends, and you are inside it. So if I could have only known the future, that there would be one far brighter than anything I'd experienced, then one end of that tunnel would have been blown to pieces, and I could have faced the light. So the fact that this book exists is proof that depression lies. Depression makes you think things that are wrong.

But depression itself isn't a lie. It is the most real thing I've ever experienced. Of course, it is invisible.

To other people, it sometimes seems like nothing at all. You are walking around with your head on fire and no one can see the flames. And so—as depression is largely unseen and mysterious—it is easy for stigma to survive. Stigma is particularly cruel for depressives, because stigma affects thoughts and depression is a disease of thoughts.

When you are depressed you feel alone, and that no one is going through quite what you are going through. You are so scared of appearing in any way mad you internalize everything, and you are so scared that people will alienate you further you clam up and don't speak about it, which is a shame, as speaking about it helps. Words—spoken or written—are what connect us to the world, and so speaking about it to people, and writing about this stuff, helps connect us to each other, and to our true selves.

I know, I know, we are humans. We are a clandestine species. Unlike other animals we wear clothes and do our procreating behind closed doors. And we are ashamed when things go wrong with us. But we'll grow out of this, and the way we'll do it is by speaking about it. And maybe even through reading and writing about it.

I believe that. Because it was, in part, through reading and writing that I found a kind of salvation from the dark. Ever since I realized that depression lied about the future I have wanted to write a book about my experience, to tackle depression and anxiety head-on. So this book seeks to do two things. To lessen that stigma, and—the possibly more quixotic ambition—to try and actually convince people that the bottom of the valley never provides the clearest view. I wrote this because the oldest clichés remain the truest. Time heals. The tunnel *does* have light at the end of it, even if we aren't able to see it. And there's a two-for-one offer on clouds and silver linings. Words, just sometimes, can set you free.

A note, before we get fully underway

MINDS ARE UNIQUE. They go wrong in unique ways. My mind went wrong in a slightly different way to how other minds go wrong. Our experience overlaps with other people's, but it is never exactly the same experience. Umbrella labels like “depression” (and “anxiety” and “panic disorder” and “OCD”) are useful, but only if we appreciate that people do not all have the same precise experience of such things.

Depression looks different to everyone. Pain is felt in different ways, to different degrees, and provokes different responses. That said, if books had to replicate our exact experience of the world to be useful, the only books worth reading would be written by ourselves.

There is no right or wrong way to have depression, or to have a panic attack, or to feel suicidal. These things just

are. Misery, like yoga, is not a competitive sport. But I have found over the years that by reading about other people who have suffered, survived, and overcome despair, I have felt comforted. It has given me hope. I hope this book can do the same.

NOTES ON A NERVOUS PLANET

MATT HAIG



PENGUIN BOOKS

A conversation, about a year ago

I WAS STRESSED OUT.

I was walking around in circles, trying to win an argument on the internet. And Andrea was looking at me. Or I *think* Andrea was looking at me. It was hard to tell, as I was looking at my phone.

‘Matt? Matt?’

‘Uh. Yeah?’

‘What’s up?’ she asked, in the kind of despairing voice that develops with marriage. Or marriage to me.

‘Nothing.’

‘You haven’t looked up from your phone in over an hour. You’re just walking around, banging into furniture.’

My heart was racing. There was a tightness in my chest. Fight or flight. I felt cornered and threatened by someone on the internet who lived over 8,000 miles away from me and who I would never meet, but who was still managing to ruin my weekend. ‘I’m just getting back to something.’

‘Matt, get off there.’

‘I just—’

The thing with mental turmoil is that so many things that make you feel better in the short term make you feel worse in the long term. You distract yourself, when what you really need is to *know* yourself.

‘Matt!’

An hour later, in the car, Andrea glanced at me in the passenger seat. I wasn’t on my phone, but I had a tight hold of it, for security, like a nun clutching her rosary.

‘Matt, are you okay?’

‘Yeah. Why?’

‘You look lost. You look like you used to look, when . . .’

She stopped herself saying ‘when you had depression’ but I knew what she meant. And besides, I could feel anxiety and depression around me. Not actually *there* but close. The memory of it something I could almost touch in the stifling air of the car.

‘I’m fine,’ I lied. ‘I’m fine, I’m fine . . .’

Within a week I was lying on my sofa, falling into my eleventh bout of anxiety.

A life edit

I WAS SCARED. I couldn't not be. Being scared is what anxiety is all about.

The bouts were becoming closer and closer. I was worried where I was heading. It seemed there was no upper limit to despair.

I tried to distract myself out of it. However, I knew from past experience alcohol was off limits. So I did the things that had helped before to climb out of a hole. The things I forget to do in day-to-day life. I was careful about what I ate. I did yoga. I tried to meditate. I lay on the floor and placed my hand on my stomach and inhaled deeply – in, out, in, out – and noticed the stuttery rhythm of my breath.

But everything was difficult. Even choosing what to wear in the morning could make me cry. It didn't matter that I had felt like this before. A sore throat doesn't become less sore simply because you've felt it before.

I tried to read, but found it hard to concentrate.

I listened to podcasts.

I watched new Netflix shows.

I went on social media.

I tried to get on top of my work by replying to all my emails.

I woke up and clasped my phone, and prayed that whatever I could find there could take me out of myself.

But – spoiler alert – it didn't work.

I began to feel worse. And many of the 'distractions' were doing nothing but driving me further to distraction. In T.S. Eliot's phrase from his *Four Quartets*, I was 'distracted from distraction by distraction'.

I would stare at an unanswered email, with a feeling of dread, and not be able to answer it. Then, on Twitter, my go-to digital distraction of choice, I noticed my anxiety intensify. Even just passively scrolling my timeline felt like an exposure of a wound.

I read news websites – another distraction – and my mind couldn't take it. The knowledge of so much suffering in the world didn't help put my pain in perspective. It just made me feel powerless. And pathetic that my invisible woes were so paralysing when there were so many *visible* woes in the world. My despair intensified.

So I decided to do something.

I disconnected.

I chose not to look at social media for a few days. I put an auto-response on my emails, too. I stopped watching or reading the news. I didn't watch TV. I didn't watch any music videos. Even magazines I avoided. (During my initial breakdown, years before, the bright imagery of magazines always used to linger and clog my mind with feverish racing images as I tried to sleep.)

I left my phone downstairs when I went to bed. I tried to get outside more. My bedside table was cluttered with a chaos of wires and technology and books I wasn't really reading. So I tidied up and took them away, too.

In the house, I tried to lie in darkness as much as possible, the way you might deal with a migraine. I had always, since I was first suicidally ill in my twenties, understood that getting better involved a kind of life edit.

A taking away.

As the minimalism advocate Fumio Sasaki puts it: 'there's a happiness in having less'. In the early days of my first experience of panic the only things I had taken away were booze and cigarettes and strong coffees. Now, though, years later, I realised that a more general overload was the problem.

A life overload.

And certainly a technology overload. The only real

technology I interacted with during this present recovery – aside from the car and the cooker – were yoga videos on YouTube, which I watched with the brightness turned low.

The anxiety didn't miraculously disappear. Of course not.

Unlike my smartphone, there is no 'slide to power off' function for anxiety.

But I stopped *feeling worse*. I plateaued. And after a few days, things began to calm.

The familiar path of recovery arrived sooner rather than later. And abstaining from stimulants – not just alcohol and caffeine, but these other things – was part of the process.

I began, in short, to feel free again.

How TO STOP TIME

MATT HAIG



PENGUIN BOOKS

I am old.

That is the first thing to tell you. The thing you are least likely to believe. If you saw me you would probably think I was about forty, but you would be very wrong.

I am *old* – old in the way that a tree, or a quahog clam, or a Renaissance painting is old.

To give you an idea: I was born well over four hundred years ago on the third of March 1581, in my parents' room, on the third floor of a small French château that used to be my home. It was a warm day, apparently, for the time of year, and my mother had asked her nurse to open all the windows.

'God smiled on you,' my mother said. Though I think she might have added that – should He exist – the smile had been a frown ever since.

My mother died a very long time ago. I, on the other hand, did not.

You see, I have a condition.

I thought of it as an illness for quite a while, but illness isn't really the right word. Illness suggests sickness, and wasting away. Better to say I have a condition. A rare one, but not unique. One that no one knows about until they have it.

It is not in any official medical journals. Nor does it go by an official name. The first respected doctor to give it one, back in the 1890s, called it 'anageria' with a soft 'g', but, for reasons that will become clear, that never became public knowledge.

*

The condition develops around puberty. What happens after that is, well, not much. Initially the ‘sufferer’ of the condition won’t notice they have it. After all, every day people wake up and see the same face they saw in the mirror yesterday. Day by day, week by week, even month by month, people don’t change in very perceptible ways.

But as time goes by, at birthdays or other annual markers, people begin to notice you aren’t getting any older.

The truth is, though, that the individual hasn’t stopped ageing. They age exactly the same way. Just much slower. The speed of ageing among those with anageria fluctuates a little, but generally it is a 1:15 ratio. Sometimes it is a year every thirteen or fourteen years but with me it is closer to fifteen.

So, we are not immortal. Our minds and bodies aren’t in stasis. It’s just that, according to the latest, ever-changing science, various aspects of our ageing process – the molecular degeneration, the cross-linking between cells in a tissue, the cellular and molecular mutations (including, most significantly, to the nuclear DNA) – happen on another timeframe.

My hair will go grey. I may go bald. Osteoarthritis and hearing loss are probable. My eyes are just as likely to suffer with age-related presbyopia. I will eventually lose muscle mass and mobility.

A quirk of anageria is that it does tend to give you a heightened immune system, protecting you from many (not all) viral and bacterial infections, but ultimately even this begins to fade. Not to bore you with the science, but it seems our bone marrow produces more hematopoietic stem cells – the ones that lead to white blood cells – during our peak years, though it is important to note that this doesn’t protect us from injury or malnutrition, and it doesn’t last.

So, don’t think of me as a sexy vampire, stuck for ever at peak virility. Though I have to say it can feel like you are stuck for ever when, according to your appearance, only a decade passes between the death of Napoleon and the first man on the moon.

One of the reasons people don't know about us is that most people aren't prepared to believe it.

Human beings, as a rule, simply don't accept things that don't fit their worldview. So you could say 'I am four hundred and thirty-nine years old' easily enough, but the response would generally be 'are you mad?'. 'Or, alternatively, death.'

Another reason people don't know about us is that we're protected. By a kind of organisation. Anyone who does discover our secret, and believes it, tends to find their short lives are cut even shorter. So the danger isn't just from ordinary humans.

It's also from within.

Sri Lanka, three weeks ago

Chandrika Seneviratne was lying under a tree, in the shade, a hundred metres or so behind the temple. Ants crawled over her wrinkled face. Her eyes were closed. I heard a rustling in the leaves above and looked up to see a monkey staring down at me with judging eyes.

I had asked the tuk-tuk driver to take me monkey spotting at the temple. He'd told me this red-brown type with the near bald face was a rilewa monkey.

'Very endangered,' the driver had said. 'There aren't many left. This is their place.'

The monkey darted away. Disappeared among leaves.

I felt the woman's hand. It was cold. I imagined she had been lying here, unfound, for about a day. I kept hold of her hand and found myself weeping. The emotions were hard to pin down. A rising wave of regret, relief, sorrow and fear. I was sad that Chandrika wasn't here to answer my questions. But I was also relieved I didn't have to kill her. I knew she'd have had to die.

This relief became something else. It might have been the stress or the sun or it might have been the egg hoppas I'd had for breakfast, but I was now vomiting. It was in that moment that it became clear to me. *I can't do this any more.*

There was no phone reception at the temple, so I waited till I was back in my hotel room in the old fort town of Galle tucked inside my mosquito net sticky with heat, staring up at the pointlessly slow ceiling fan, before I phoned Hendrich.

‘You did what you were supposed to do?’ he said.

‘Yes,’ I said, which was halfway to being true. After all, the outcome had been the one he’d asked for. ‘She is dead.’ Then I asked what I always asked. ‘Have you found her?’

‘No,’ he said, as always. ‘We haven’t. Not yet.’

Yet. That word could trap you for decades. But this time, I had a new confidence.

‘Now, Hendrich, please. I want an ordinary life. I don’t want to do this.’

He sighed wearily. ‘I need to see you. It’s been too long.’

The Dead Fathers Club

MATT HAIG



PENGUIN BOOKS

The First Time I Saw Dad After He Died

I walked down the hall and pushed the door and went into the smoke and all the voices went quiet like I was the ghost.

Carla the Barmaid was wearing her hoop earrings and her tired eyes. She was pouring a pint and she smiled at me and she was going to say something but the beer spilt over the top.

Uncle Alan who is Dads brother was there wearing his suit that was tight with his neck pouring over like the beer over the glass. His big hands still had the black on them from mending cars at the Garage. They were over Mums hands and Mums head was low like it was sad and Uncle Alans head kept going down and he lifted Mums head up with his eyes. He kept talking to Mum and he looked at me for a second and he saw me but he didnt say anything. He just looked back at Mum and kept pouring his words that made her forget about Dad.

Nan was sitting on her own with her silver sticks on the seat and she was drinking red juice like blood in her glass.

Her eyes went in a squint and made her face more wrinkly

and she saw me. Her skeleton hand said Come here come here so I went and sat with her and she just stared at me and didnt say anything at first. She just looked round at everyone and went Sssss because of her pains like she had a puncture.

After a bit she said Ee now come on pet dinny you fret. It will be all right son.

Nan lives in Sunderland and she speaks Sunderlanguage. Mum used to live in Sunderland but she hates it and says it is a Ghost Town and she doesnt talk Sunderlanguage only a bit when she talks to Nan but most of the time she talks normal.

Nan said Youre not a little bairn now son. Youre the man of the place.

I am 11 so I am not a little bairn and I am not a man but I didnt say anything I just nodded my head a bit and Carla came and gave me a glass of Pepsi.

Carla said in her croaky frog voice Theres a glass of Pepsi duck.

She put it on the table and smiled at me with her thin lips and she itched the dryness on her arm and then smiled at Nan and she went back to the bar.

Nan kept on saying things and I just drank my Pepsi and looked round at the people. I think most of them were happy that the Pub was open and they were talking louder than at the funeral because funerals make voices quiet and beer makes voices loud so now they were speaking about normal.

The Regulars were there like Big Vic and Les who were at the bar and smoking Hamlet cigars and speaking to Carla.

Carla always talked to men since her Divorce and since she stopped falling over and getting the bruises. Mum used to tell Dad she thought Carla was an Old Tart but she liked her really. I dont know if Carla is older than Mum because she has twins in my Year at school but she looks older than Mum.

Les didnt look happy but Les never looks happy and that is why Dad always called him Les Miserable. And when I was looking at them Big Vic looked at me and normally when he looked at me he smiled or said something funny like Oi Philip its your round. But that day he looked away as soon as his eyes touched my eyes as if looking at my eyes could be dangerous or make him ill or as if my eyes had lasers in them that cut him in half.

I moved my eyes and watched Mum and Uncle Alan and I wanted Uncle Alans hands to stop holding Mums hands and they did stop when Renuka went and talked to Mum. Renuka is Mums best friend who goes to Step class with her on Mondays and Thursdays where they step on boxes for an hour to make their bums smaller. Renuka had been with Mum lots this week and she had made 700 cups of tea and Uncle Alan looked cross now because when Renuka talks no one can fit words in because she doesnt have any spaces.

I kept looking round the bar and Nan kept talking to me and that is when I saw him. That is when I saw Dads Ghost.

King of the CASTLE

You are meant to be frightened when you see a ghost but I was not frightened because it felt completely normal which is weird because I had never seen a ghost before. He was just standing there behind the smoke of Big Vics cigar and he was looking at me and not scared of my eyes like everyone else was.

Carla was next to him serving drinks but she didnt notice him and I looked round and no one noticed him apart from me. After she had served the drinks Carla walked through Dads Ghost to go and see herself in the mirror which says Castle and Falcon because that is the name of our Pub.

Dads Ghost was wearing the same clothes Dad was wearing the last time I saw him which was at breakfast on the day he died when I made him cross because I wanted the PlayStation. He was wearing his T shirt which said King of the Castle with the word CASTLE written in red capital letters like on the sign outside the Pub. But now all the colours were more faded because Dad was pale and see through like the ghosts at the

Haunted Mansion in Disney World and he had blood running down from his hair.

Nan asked me Whats the matter pet?

She turned to see where I was looking but she couldnt see anything and Dads Ghost was now telling me to follow him with his hand.

I said to Nan I need the toilet.

I went past the bar and down the hall and into the back office where Dads Ghost walked through the door.

I checked to see if anyone was looking and they werent so I opened the door because I couldnt walk through it and Dads Ghost was standing in the corner by the desk and the computer was on which was weird.

He nodded to the door and so I shut it and then he said Dont be scared.

I said Im not.

His voice sounded the same but different like he was standing far away but I could hear him more clearly than ever. That doesnt make sense but that is how he sounded.

And the second thing he said was Im sorry.

I said For what?

He said For everything.

And when he said it I thought he was talking about the past when he was alive but now I am not sure.

I went across the room and I went to touch him and my hand went right through and I couldnt feel anything except a bit warmer but I might have just been thinking that.

I dont think Dads Ghost liked me doing it but he didnt say anything but I didnt do it again.

I said Are you a ghost?

It was a stupid question but I didnt know what to say.

He said Yes.

I said Where have you been?

He said I am not here all the time. I go on and off.

And I said Like a light bulb?

And he smiled but in a sad way and he said Yes like a light bulb. It is hard to control where I go but I am getting better.

And I said Have you been to the Pub before?

He nodded his head and said You were asleep.

Then I asked him if he sees other ghosts and he said There are lots of ghosts in Newark and they take some getting used to because they are all from different ages.

And I said It must be weird seeing all the ghosts.

He said It is.

Then he was quiet for a second and then he said Philip.

So I said What?

But really I didnt want to know because I could tell from his voice that he was going to say something bad like when Grandad died.

He said I have to tell you something.

And then he stopped for a minute and looked at the door and I wondered why he was looking at the door but then Uncle Alan walked in and he never walks into the office and Uncle Alan looked at the computer and he said Your mum sent me to look for you.

And he was smiling and his big hands were holding his glass of whisky on his big stomach. And he went over and touched my shoulder and he said Are you all right Philip?

And I said Yes.

And he said Its been a tough day for all of us.

I said Yes.

I just wanted him to stop touching my shoulder.

I could see Dads Ghost looking at him and he was looking at him in a way I had never seen him look at anyone before es-

pecially not his brother and I knew he didnt like him being in the office. So I said Ill go out in a minute Im just looking for something.

And Uncle Alan sighed and made the air smell of whisky and he was going to say something but he wasnt my Dad and so he went out again and shut the door.

Then I looked at Dads Ghost who was flickering and screaming but with the volume down and then he came back and he said I might not have long.

Then he faded out for about five seconds and came back.

He tried to speak and all I could hear was It wasnt

And then he tried again and again.

It wasnt

It

It was

It wasnt

It wasnt an axe

He disappeared and I said Dad Dad Dad! Come back! Come back!

But he didnt.

Then I heard a voice say Oh Philip and it was my mums voice and I dont know how long she had been there and Uncle Alan was now behind her and touching her shoulder but she didnt feel the coldness down her back like I did.