

THE
DAEMON
PARALLEL

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ROY GILL



Kelpies

For RDP

Thanks to Ann Cook and Isobel Nesbit – who I hope would see the funny side

Mum and Dad – for tea and cake, and labradors on loan

Lindsey – who saw I was stuck, and managed to unstick me



This book is also available
as an eBook .

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1. An Offer Over Coffee

It was over coffee and biscuits that Grandma Ives offered to return Cameron's father from the dead.

"It won't be easy, of course. A resurrection spell is old magic, and quite unwieldy. You would have to be both strong and brave, and I'd have to speak to Mrs Ferguson, which is never pleasant. But I can do it. If you want me to."

Cameron stared at her. The old lady had made her proposal just as casually as she now pushed a plate of biscuits towards him.

"What do you mean, 'a resurrection spell'?"

"Revitalise. Bring back. Make as if he'd never died. I'd have thought the meaning was quite obvious." Her eyes narrowed. "Do you think I'm bluffing?"

You've got to be. Cameron's heart quickened in his chest. He looked away, choosing to examine Grandma Ives' living room rather than reply. The winter sun was poking over Blackford Hill and light flooded in the balcony window, picking out the gold spines on the books, and showing up dust swirls on the bulgy grey screen of the old television. In the corner alcove, a jazz LP spun on the ancient record player and a warm fuzzy voice sang of *love gone bad*, and *a man who done me wrong...*

He'd been living with the old lady for nearly a week now. She'd done nothing in that time to suggest she was mad, or likely to make up wild stories.

But she can't really mean it. She can't really be offering to bring Dad back to life.

"Well, young man?"

Cameron took a biscuit, put it in his mouth, and crunched it.

"It's good." It wasn't really. Nothing was, these days. The biscuit tasted of dry paper and the sort of marzipan he always picked off Christmas cakes.

This can't be happening..

"You do *miss* him, I suppose?" Grandma Ives spoke the word as if a hair had got stuck on her tongue. "Not that I know why I should bring him back; he was trouble enough the first time. Never listened to a word of my good advice—"

"Of course I miss him!" Cameron shouted, unable to help himself. "Can't you tell? Isn't it obvious?" The thing was, deep down, he worried all the time that he should've begun to miss his dad a little bit sooner..

It was now just over two weeks ago, that first night Dad hadn't come home. Cameron had come in from school, and slung his bag in the corner. He'd booted up his dad's PC and logged on. The computer was nearly as old as he was, and it'd crash if you put a game anywhere near it, but it did alright for checking message boards and downloading music. When it got to 7.30, and he'd still not heard the rumble of his dad's van in the driveway, Cameron went to the kitchen and got on with making his dinner. There was a stack of ready meals in the fridge.

“When I win the lottery I’ll cook,” his dad would say. “I’ll be like Number One Super Chef! Even Jamie Oliver won’t touch me.”

Cameron chose tuna and tomato bake. The label promised it was “delicious” and made to the “best ever recipe”, but somehow he doubted it. As he ate the stringy pasta he watched *The Simpsons* and then a bit of a talent show. Some of the contestants could sing, but they couldn’t dance or didn’t have the right look. Others had great hair or clothes, but screeched and wailed like angry cats.

He picked up his bowl, pausing on his way to the kitchen as he caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror over the fire. His best friend Amy said he wasn’t bad looking, if he’d only have a bit of confidence. Cameron didn’t see it. He was tall for his age, sure, but he was thin too, and not exactly broad about the shoulders. He ran his hand through his hair, which fell down in a dark thatch over his eyes. Maybe he should get it cut to look like one of the guys off the telly? Amy would love that. She’d go on about it for a week. Then again, interesting hair got you noticed, and he didn’t want to do anything to make himself stand out more at school...

He channel hopped for a while, then reluctantly went up to his bedroom to get on with his homework. He put his stereo on loud; perhaps the noise would help drive some particularly dull maths problems into his skull. The driveway was still empty when he went to bed at 11.30, falling asleep to the sound of his headphones whispering in his ears.

The truth was, his dad was so often home late, Cameron had stopped finding it unusual. He ran Duffy's Quick Clearances, and spent his days emptying houses after their owners died, or moved away, or went bankrupt. He would sort out the things worth selling, and take the lumpy old furniture nobody wanted to the dump. When Cameron was small, his dad sometimes took him along. He would run wild round strange, slowly-emptying spaces. Sad-eyed relatives of the departed would look at him fondly, and slip him fifty pence. Other times he'd get shouted at for being a nuisance and making too much noise.

Now his dad hardly ever wanted to take him, even if the jobs were at a weekend.

"You've got to study. Find out what you want and how to get there," he'd say. "Don't just fall into something like I did."

Cameron would ask what he meant, but his dad would always push the question away.

Sometimes emptying a house meant working late into the night. People would leave it to the last minute to call the clearers. Malcolm Duffy and his lads would have to put in long hours to get the job done. If a client's house was far away, Cameron's dad would sometimes even bunk down in his van. When he came home the next day, he'd shake his head sadly and say, "You wouldn't believe how much stuff people collect."

Cameron would nod, thinking how his dad kept loads of odds and ends, all packed into the spare room; stuff he hadn't been able to shift but insisted might be useful. The garage was crammed too, and the van usually had to

sit outside. On cold mornings, the engine would cough over and over before it shuddered back to life...

On the second day his dad did not come home, Cameron had gone round to Amy's. Annoyingly, all Amy wanted to do was talk about some boy in the sixth year she'd got a crush on. Cameron hadn't been sure what to say. He concentrated on checking out which new tunes Amy had added to her laptop, and waited for her to change the subject.

"Stay for dinner, Cam," said Amy when her mum got in from her shift at the hospital. Her mum's eyes were red around the corners, and Cameron didn't think he should push his luck. He caught the bus home instead.

Fireworks popped and crackled above his head as he walked along Scott Street. People were getting ready for bonfire night early this year. As he turned the corner, he saw that the van was still not back in the drive. In the kitchen, his dirty plates lay untouched in the sink. If Dad had been in during the day, he'd have expected to find a clutter of mugs there too.

Cameron wasn't sure what to do. The odd evening on his own was kind of fun; after a day in school, with its overheated cabbagey corridors, he enjoyed the space.

If Dad wasn't going to make it home tonight either, Cameron told himself he wasn't bothered. He would make the most of it. He'd raid the fridge, have a fry-up, and pig out in front of the telly. He'd put on that music channel that played nothing but rock and indie, the one that always made his dad glare and plug his ears...

He grinned. It was an excellent plan! But when he sat down on the sofa, with his skilfully cooked plate of

food – bacon brown and crispy, eggs running into the beans – it didn't seem to taste right.

He tried his dad's mobile. He hadn't bothered before, when it had just been another late night. Two days without a message or text was definitely odd, though. When an answering *Brrrupp!* came from the old donkey jacket hanging up on a peg by the door, Cameron thumped his hand off his head in frustration. His dad was always leaving his phone in the wrong coat.

He looked up the tatty address book by the hall phone. There was no one permanently on the payroll of Duffy's Quick Clearances, but there were a couple of guys his dad used regularly. Big Joe had the biggest beer belly you've ever seen. Scribbled in the phone book was "Try Black Bull" next to Joe's name, so Cameron called the pub.

Big Joe hadn't heard a thing. "Dinna concern yersel', lad. It'll all come oot fine in the wash." He was keen to get back to his drinking.

Cameron called Eric next. Eric was trying to make it as a singer, when he wasn't shifting furniture. Dad said Eric was sensitive, which Cameron took to mean his songs tended to go on a bit.

Eric was on the way home from band practice. "I haven't been out on a job in weeks, Cam, and I'm noticing it. Listen, are you alright there, mate? Do you want me to head over?"

"Nah. It's cool. I'm ok."

Cameron went back to the living room to worry. Not long later, the doorbell rang.

"I'm fine, Eric, really—"

It wasn't Eric on the doorstep. The two policemen invited themselves in, asked a load of questions, and made several cups of tea Cameron didn't want. They spoke on their radios, looked at each other gravely, and offered to make more tea.

About an hour later, another police officer arrived. She was young and pretty, with dark hair pulled back into a ponytail. When she opened her mouth to speak, Cameron noticed an odd little gap between her bottom teeth. As she told him about the way they'd found the van by the caves on the beach at Weymss, the body on the sand, he found himself focussing on that gap, as if concentrating hard enough could keep him from crying.

The next week and a half passed in a painful sort of blur. Amy's mum put him up at first. Amy hadn't known what to say. She kept apologising, saying she was there for him, and asking if he wanted to talk. Cameron just wished she'd shut up and leave him alone.

Moving in with Grandma Ives hadn't been Cameron's idea. He barely knew the old lady. He had only vague memories of a woman with steel-grey hair, who'd turned up once on his seventh birthday. She'd given him a wooden music box, then sat in the corner, watching him intently. Cameron's dad had been angry for some reason, and had taken the box away.

"He's not going to be like you. You and your daft old ways! You keep your hands off!" he'd said, before showing her the door.

Cameron's dad never made any secret of the fact he didn't get on with his mother. There were cards that came

through the post at Christmas, but no more visits. So Cameron had been amazed when his dad's will said Mrs Isobel Euphemia Ives-Duffy of 24 Observatory Road, Edinburgh was to be his guardian.

Cameron had tried to explain to Carole the social worker that he didn't know the old woman at all. She hadn't listened.

"Crises like these, they have a wonderful way of bringing family together. You're only thirteen. There's no way you can live on your own."

Cameron's house turned out to be owned by his mum and dad together, but no one knew where Elaine Duffy was these days, Cameron included. There were only a few precious things he remembered about her, she left so long ago.

"There are all sorts of complicated legal things to be sorted before the will can be settled," Carole said. "You're best off with your gran. And your school has agreed to send work home for now."

She helped the boy pack some of his possessions, and drove him in her battered Volvo to Grandma Ives' house in the south of Edinburgh. Even though it was only fifty minutes away from his home in Cauldlockheart, Cameron had never been to her house before. As they sat in Grandma Ives' living room, Carole promised she'd drop in soon. Grandma Ives insisted that would not be necessary. Her tone suggested she was used to getting what she wanted.

"I can see you'll both get on famously!" Carole said, as she packed up her notes in her leatherette briefcase.

Cameron had exchanged a wary glance with his newly acquired Gran. “Grandma Ives” – that’s what he was supposed to call her. She looked smart in an old-fashioned sort of way, and thin, and more than a bit stern.

Not like a proper granny at all...

A proper granny would never offer to bring her only son – his dad – back from the dead.

“I can tell by your face you don’t care for the biscotti. That’s alright. You don’t have to eat them.”

He looked down at the plate she’d pushed towards him. Dad wouldn’t have put out biscuits like that, with their posh paper wrappers and icky-acid almond taste. You’d get a torn-open packet of Hobnobs, or maybe some Jaffa Cakes. The coffee wouldn’t come in a glass pot with a plunger either...

Cameron’s hands went to his stomach. Everything normal, everything he had grown up with, had been taken away. The pain of losing Dad felt like someone had cut a vital muscle from his guts, and it wasn’t getting any better. He still went about, day by day, walking and talking and eating as if he were normal and healthy, but all the time he was trying to hold himself together, to stop the gap from spreading. He blamed himself for all sorts of things: for not noticing something was up with his dad; for not calling the police sooner; for not starting to worry when something still could’ve been done. And now the old woman was offering to put that missing part back, to give him the chance to find out what really happened, to magically make it all better...

“Did you mean what you said, about bringing him back?” Cameron hardly dared to believe it.

“I always mean what I say.” Behind Grandma Ives’ wire-framed glasses, her eyes were calm and steady, without a hint of doubt or playfulness.

“Yes,” he said quietly. “Please. Bring him back.”

“What was that?” The old lady leaned closer.

“Bring him back. Just tell me what I have to do.”

Grandma Ives smiled. “Good boy,” she said.