

## Sorceress

By James Kennedy

Steve English steadied himself. Rough night. Grabbing on to his Lamot Pils and Whiskey and Coke for dear life he pressed his chin into his bristly neck and held his breath in deep. Chucking out time was past, and now he was in the waiting room time, when the regulars mingle and the jukebox is off. Kinking of glasses and general ambience. He was in classic conversational mode with his keen chin and spectacles. Weaving and winding and moving and shaking. He wouldn't be home for at least four hours at this rate.

The Fox's Glove was a pub in Hockley, down a side road of the main street. Formica wall look and red carpet. Cosy times. Red leather sofas and red carpets, pictures of 1920s regulars on the wall. A time capsule of real ale and brassy old barmaid's hot sex. Stone cladded toilet hallway, old wooden doors. It had been built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and you could sense the ghosts of the Glove settled in for their regular lock ins, everyone welcome. The dominos section played on a Thursday, darts, cribbage, live music. Bands on, barbecues, comedians. Anyone with a guitar or bongos could join in. A friendly vibe.

Steve English loved this vibe. He'd been a follower of the scene for years, couldn't play anything but preferred to offer his opinion. Needed or not. Manager material. Clever bloke, just the old beer and fags got to him. And the ketamine and coke phases, naturally. Experimentation was the name of the game in his area, in all walks of life, touching it, feeling it through his veins. He'd knocked up with his mate DMT Dave that night, another straggler on the scene. Old punks never die. They wore their battle scars like a badge of honour and shared the same rolled up £20 in the bright toilets.

“SNNNNAAARRRGGGG”

“Wuf...fuck me mate...phwoargh...”

Ambling out from the porcelain party they settled themselves on a quick puff of white widow moments later, the piss warm Lamot Pils swilling inside their empty stomachs as the best lubricant. Steve's off yellow teeth smecked of the rich smoky taste of Jameson and a quick Embassy. DMT Dave growled in his salacious fuck moderation warm haze of pleasure. Mmmm. Pint of foamy lager then the off.

The regulars were filing out now. The couples had booked their taxis, walked home hand in hand and loved each other ready for sexy groping in their flats. The old gents shifted in their seats ready for the off, all slowly filtering out. DMT Dave knew it was time to go, he'd give Steve another chance at interesting the barmaid with some tall story and concentrated more on his high. One polite brush off later and his friend was ready. They propped each other up on the way out.

It's a steep walk back to Steve's. Across moody streetlights and vast subways, twisting and curling up, high rises all the same. Chip papers, cans of guava drinks rolling over, you know the drill. Steve had no idea which one his flat was, and what

wasn't a help was that DMT Dave had gone off in the other direction. Scott of the Antarctic had buggered off, needing to sleep somewhere...

Quiet...

Steve staggered blindly down the industrial estates of Hockley, illuminated by traffic lights and puddles of water and oil. Fumbling in his top pocket for his Embassy. Scratching his bum, pulling his trousers up. He squinted through his thick set glasses and licked his teeth in thought. Where in the great name of Fuck was he...eh? In the well of the industrial estate he pondered his next move. Not enough money for a taxi he thought, as the third Atlas Cars' Vauxhall raced passed. Licking his teeth again he spat on the floor. Lit his cigarette, sixth time lucky. Squaring up to the world. On the left he saw nothing, on the right, more disused warehouses, straight ahead

The cemetery loomed on him as a field of mystery, but he reckoned it was a short cut. Ten minutes at least...the wind was still, all he could hear was his footsteps cracking on the leaves, denser and denser the dark got as he winded his way down to the grave cluster. Graves of people he'd never heard of from a long time ago; stop to rest, the coke had worn off as well as the coca-cola and Steve contemplated his position...who hangs around graveyards at night anyway...maybe people having sex...people fuck in graveyards don'

\*white light  
white\* kite?

Steve peered in the distance. A fox, a badger>surely? Blindly twisting his way around a wet branch scraped across his face and he turned around again in bemusement, tripping

balls

over a headstone and bashing his left knee, a gasp of pain the only noise in the effect of the wood. Sinking to his knees his brain distorted seeing stars and the humid and sticky chill in the air made him queasy, not easy getting up he blinked and saw white orbs of light as he fell backwards into the bracken, mud on his flannel trousers and off white shirt...shit...hit his thin head on a gravestone over in the corner...centipedes and millipedes, woodlice ran through his fingers and up his trouser leg, was that headlice on his bald spot or something else, was that tingle down his left arm a heart attack or something...As he lost balance he lay like an angel on the dewy ground...

She came

O faded white light of the night  
What do you do that's so wrong and not right  
Why do you come for me at this hour  
Is it my mind or something more sour

Mind plays tricks on you. Situation critical from what you've heard or fairy stories or mere fables. Existation of these phenomena in mind or in the flesh. She was negative entity. Born of the last month. Come to visit...she hovered over him, face shrouded in

white, limbless floating, just a force of nature. Steve backed up, fingers digging deeper into the grave he was shivering on as the sorceress drew near. He smelt her fetid breath as ascending on him the sorceress opened up to him and he saw death in all its glory yes as her shroud covered his face he sees the good grace of the sorceress I can't tell you what he saw as I didn't see what the sorceress did to him but all we know is that when the sorceress drew back from him he was minus a right eye and half a tongue.

Babbling incomprehensibly he winced in pain, backing deeper and deeper into the grave's cold stone, blood gushing down his mouth. Stretching his eyebrows into a contorted pain mask wider and wider he felt the cold wind rustle in his empty right socket and vomited over his shirt. The noxious bile and furious pain made his head swim and every time he blacked out he woke again to see the sorceress hover above him, chastising him for his impotent fury, static electricity crackling in the air as she raised her arms to reveal the children of the Sorceress. No more than three feet tall, simple white shadows with polka dot eyes boring into Steve's soul. A low hum rising in intensity, as their nemesis bucked and winced on the ground, gagging, gagging. A shrill shriek pierced Steve's mind, the world span round ever faster, closing his eye to steady himself all he could feel was the wind rustling in his empty socket. No use. He'd have to fight his way out.

Legs like lead, he fought against the children of the Sorceress, barricading his way to possible sanctuary. Crawling up him as their mother watched on, still wailing and shrieking. They dragged him down, crawling all over him like snakes, and he tried in vain to stop the insects from getting too close to his face. Spastic howls of tongueless agony as he crawled through the muddy fields of the dead, looking up to see records of those passed everywhere. As the crescent moon laughed at him, Steve despaired of future days. Just a few...more...handsteps...The children and the Sorceress vanished into the atmosphere as Steve doggedly approached the road.

No cars. No streetlights. No phones. No nothing. This was Steve's area. The blood rattled and hissed in his mouth as he made a vague attempt at sounding relieved. It was down a quiet hill, just off the main road. Staggering half blind down the lonely road he momentarily forgot where his house was. Limping, itching, swaying. At least another ten minutes. Hot tears from his remaining eye trickled down his face. He couldn't see a thing without his glasses. Mud and blood mingled freely on his face.

It was wet, pissy rain that blenched his skin. Steve's green mac was no protection against the elements, it just smelt of wax. Pneumonia next, the rain flattening his Mr By-Rite hairstyle. Where was his house?

Ten minutes later he was at his house. He recognised the white light/

white\*kite?

he'd left on in the upstairs bedroom. Where were his keys? The obvious answer was the correct one. They had fallen on the grass when the sorceress had arrived. The side door to the garden was open, down a urine and rain sodden ditch into the back patio. Picking up a brick he smashed his way inside, gibbering at this further indignation. Crawling over broken glass he fell onto the kitchen floor in a heap with caked blood

and snot dangling from his broken nose. Gargling and spitting he rose up and fumbled for the light switch. Shit. No electric.

The eerie pre morning glow bathed his kitchen in a mocking light. Scorched Earth. Like the whole world had gone mouldy over night and turned into a sour brown. The stench of the day before's forgotten washing up was too much to bear. Mouldy crockery piled up in the sink. Steve climbed up the stairs to his bedroom, head spinning, gripping onto the banister for dear life. There was no need to relieve himself as he had done so in the graveyard, both ends. No electric anyway, the bathroom would be impenetrable and ugly in its dark dankness. He'd have to sleep in his own filth then assess the situation later. All he needed was to lie down.

As he opened up his bedroom door he saw her shining light in the mirror

She came

O faded white light of the night  
What do you do that's so wrong and not right  
Tell me what you think standing there  
I can't turn back now, no, not anywhere

He slammed the door shut. In doing so it seemed that he opened a hole in Heaven, as thunder and lightning raged from the sky, cracking his soul into a thousand pieces. He ran down the stairs retching at what he had nearly seen again. The rain howled through the broken kitchen window, all other escape routes blocked off. No lounge, no cellar, all locked. If he stayed in the house any longer, she would come after him. The sharp wind buffeted his face as he stuck his head out of the broken glass pane, dragging himself onto the chassis, falling with a thud and breaking his left ankle on the concrete outside. Back out down the alleyway. Must find the main road again. Steve dragged himself up again, a lone man against the forces of nature. Walking was no good, but something inside him told him to keep moving. It needed to be somewhere public, a hospital? A police station? Where would have him now? To most, he'd be a pitiful drunk who'd obviously been at the bleach after picking and losing a fight with someone bigger than him. Screaming and gurgling at the storm, Steve powered on as the rain lashed his tortured, frail body.

Hours later they found him dead at the side of the road. Forensics noted the missing eye and the bloody stump that used to be a tongue. No other marks on him, any murder weapon, wallet intact, no keys.

Verdict: Misadventure.