

# The Weeping Woman

Mile Roden

The house had been built sometime in the 1880s or early nineties, an elegant double-fronted villa designed as a home for a well-do-do Battersea businessman and his family. Now of course it was sub-divided into flats, two on the ground floor, two above and just one large flat on the top floor. As an estate agent would say, ideal for a couple of busy young professionals. More bars and restaurants than you could shake a stick at.

My friend Leo and I walked up the steps and he rang the doorbell. 'I just want you to listen to Greg again.'

'Is this all about things that go bump in the night in their flat?' I asked.

'You've been talking about finding something to write about,' returned Leo 'I'm just trying to help.' The door opened then and his son Greg stood there. He towered above me as he shook hands, and looked quizzically at his father. 'I thought you were going to the house with mum and Julie?'

## Haunting

'We are, later,' said Leo. 'Though I thought we'd go for a drink first. I just want you to tell our friend the latest about your — haunting experience.'

Greg shook his head and gave me a sympathetic look. 'OK. Come on in.'

We followed him up the ornate central staircase to the first floor flat where he and his wife had lived for the last eighteen months. I'd been here once before, after they'd been living here for a couple of months. I'd been dragged along rather reluctantly by Leo who insisted that Julie and Greg might benefit from getting my 'expert' views on some strange occurrences. Leo's wife Harriet and my own better half had come along to offer support.

Greg led us inside now. 'I've just been having a last scout round, see if we've left anything.'

'Have they found new tenants yet?'

'Not absolutely sure, dad,' he said, 'Not our problem, anyway. We're in the land of mortgage hell now rather than rental misery.'

'You'll be glad to leave, I suppose.'

He looked at me easily enough. 'To be honest, we'd got used to the occasional unexplained noise, or voice. It wasn't really frightening.' He shrugged. 'Could all have been our imagination anyway.'

That first time I'd heard about it, I'd listened to tales of being woken up by loud voices suddenly sounding from their living room with nobody there. Footsteps along the hall outside their bedroom, or the noise of doors slamming when every door in the place was firmly closed.

## Music

Once Julie woke up to hear piano music playing. Thinking she might have left the tv on she came into the sitting room and turned on the light, 'The music stopped.' She told me 'And just for a moment I could smell cigarette smoke.' She paused, 'And neither of us smoke!'

Then one day Greg thought he saw a stranger in the kitchen. 'Only for a moment, very briefly. A dark haired woman who turned to stare at me. She was very pale...' He'd laughed. 'Then she wasn't there. As presumably she never was!'

It became clear to me that these two sensible young people were already taking these odd noises, or occurrences in their stride. They never felt threatened in any way, and there could be perfectly rational explanations for everything that had happened, even the pale visitor Greg thought he'd seen.

Now Greg looked at me, 'For the last week or so,' he said, 'It's been getting worse. We've heard a lot more noise. Never for very long, but different. We've heard shouting – a loud argument. Then there was what sounded like angry hammering on a door. And a few times Julie thought she heard a woman crying – weeping bitterly. I thought I heard someone scream. It was starting to get rather unsettling.' He shrugged. 'And well, I thought I saw the woman again.'

'In the kitchen?' I asked

He shook his head, 'No I was coming in from outside, when I heard a door slam. I started to come upstairs and then she was at the top by our front door. She just stared down at me then. Huge eyes in a pale, terrified face.' He laughed unconvincingly. 'Only for a second

or two. And then there was no-one there.'

Leo turned on me. 'Well what about that?'

'I presume it was getting dark Greg,' I said, 'You were tired after a day at work...'

'Precisely,' said Greg firmly. 'All easily explainable, as these things always are. We've been on edge, waiting to move, not sleeping well, having bad dreams. It's hardly supernatural.'

Greg's mobile rang and he moved away to take the call.

## Tragedy

Leo glared at me in frustration. 'For someone who writes stories about weird events, you seem remarkably unimpressed by all this,' he said, 'Greg and Julie have been seeing and hearing traces of a real drama - a tragedy even - that happened in the past. And you just don't seem interested.'

Greg was still talking to the caller. 'Ten minutes? Ok, I'll stay here.'

Ending the call he turned back to us. 'The estate agent is bringing some potential tenants round. He wants to have a quick word with me, so I'll stay here.'

'Well we'll go off to the Northcote and wait for you,' said Leo.

'OK, see you in a few minutes.'

We went off down the stairs. 'I'm sorry to be such a disappointment Leo,' I said, 'But a story needs an end. And this one just doesn't have one. Maybe something bad did happen in this house, but we don't know what it was. Probably never will. Greg and Julie will go and make a new life in their new house, and everyone will forget about this.'

He glanced back up the stairs as if hoping to see the pale woman, then grunted unwillingly, 'S'pose you're right.'

He'd cheered up by the time we were settled with a drink. 'Anyway, we're really pleased that they've got their own place now. Like a story really, Julie inherited some money from an old aunt she hadn't seen when she was a child. Meant they had enough for a deposit.'

'Maybe I should write that story,' I said, 'There is a weird event – two young people managing to afford a deposit on their own place.' ▶ p14

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◀ p13 'No need to mock me,' he said, 'I have your best interests at heart. Oh here he is.' His son had come in through the door looking round for us. He came over and it was suddenly clear to both of us that something was wrong.

'What's up?' said Leo, 'You're as white as a sheet. Problems with the estate agent?'

For a moment he stared at us wordlessly. 'It was her,' he said shakily, 'The woman. The woman I

saw in the kitchen and on the stairs.

I realised what he meant. 'The new tenant?' I asked. He nodded. 'Her and her boyfriend.' He shivered. 'I didn't really take to him.' He was calming down now, and Leo fetched him a drink. 'She was so happy,' he said, 'Really excited about moving in. Not pale and drawn like when I saw her... thought I saw her.'

'You're sure it was the same woman?' I asked

'Well I'm pretty sure.' said Greg.

A thought suddenly occurred to him. 'Have Julie and I really been seeing the future? Is something going to happen in the flat... can we do something to prevent it happening?'

I had no answer to any of those questions. I still don't. I do hope it's all been in Greg's imagination but that hasn't stopped me reading the *Wandsworth Guardian* very carefully lately.

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