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"I know a voodoo when your lover leaves you." Chris Isaak.

"Minos," Selina stated, the day after they had brought him home from the sale. "You should have called him Minos, not Jester." As usual, Richard was not exactly sure what she was going on about.

"Minos was the ruler of Crete," Selina explained slowly, "he was given a magnificent white bull by Poseidon to sacrifice. But he admired it so much he could not do it and killed another in its place; though, as thanks for being spared, it went on to ravage the island." Selina did not add to Richard's knowledge of Greek mythology by explaining that it had also paid back the kindness by mating with Minos's wife who later gave birth to the Minotaur. Richard's jealousy had become so intense she could imagine him following her every time she took a walk near one of the fields if she had. That or trying to fulfil his other obsession, her becoming pregnant, by getting the local blacksmith to emulate Daedalus and construct a hollow cow for her to climb into and see if that worked on her. "I just thought that a name should be in keeping with such a beautiful creature. Not Jester!"

The huge, young Charolais bull had snorted its steamy breath between them; the ring through its nose caught a mist of condensation and let a single drop fall down onto one of Selina's high, red leather boots. Richard stared down at his own dung-caked Wellingtons, feeling angry and foolish that he'd pleaded with her to come and see what filled him with so much pride.

"He's cream, not white," Richard informed her. "His origins are French, not Greek. And we always call our bulls Jester."

"He's as near to white as anything is ever likely to be in this dreary, gray land," Selina replied, having the last word and leaving Richard standing in the pen holding the bull which he sensed wanted to follow her.

Now he watched the animal shouldering its way through the herd of cows. "Lift a calf everyday, and one day you will be carrying a cow." His father's explanation for the almost imperceptible growth of something you saw regularly. But not Jester. He grew in slabs of unliftable,

unmissable muscle, almost hour by hour it seemed. Human greed or need had altered his shape until, paradoxically, he resembled a cave drawing. Some ancient, idealized dream of plenty tottering tamely on thin matchstick legs. The cows, desperate for a bribe of cow-cake – or just be relieved of burdens of milk – were pooling into the yard ready to force their ways into the portable milking parlour. Richard's hardest task was keeping them out to wait their turns. Jester towered above them. His wives: some pregnant for the first time; others, old whores or virgins.

Richard glanced at the creature's balls, swinging and tumescent; its dick looked as if it had been used for planting cabbages. He hoped a fertile young heifer had received a full servicing, trying to see if the strange fire that glowed and faded according to the bull's mood was alight or quelled. It made him think of how long it was since Selina had dowsed the fire of his desire. That's how her sexuality made him feel; and he couldn't help it.

"I will never have a child," she'd assured him from the start. "The idea of giving birth, of being cut, of turning into some nappy-changing-food-machine is the most repellent thing I can imagine. Always has been."

Richard had believed it was just talk and she would change her mind. Then, three months ago, her contraceptive pills began to give her unbearable migraines and she said she was going to take a break from them. Richard had felt a pale light glow in *his* eyes, and a smoldering in his loins begging to burn, knowing this was their time. Her way, he thought, of admitting that she was wrong and had changed her mind. Selina arrived home the first day after her period was over with a carrier bag full of condoms. He pictured her again, tipping them on the kitchen table as if they were his dinner. Then as she must have been in the chemists, buying up the shop: ribbed ones, fruit flavoured, even an extra-large black skinned one. They lay in the bottom of his wardrobe, unopened. And would stay there and decompose before he'd use any.

Richard walked dreamily around the periphery of the concrete yard, though still with enough consciousness not to place himself between Jester and the wall, where the animal could crush him without knowing it. He turned as a heron broke its camouflage of frozen prayers and stuttered into the sky.

Then Richard was flying with it.

Or diving after it, into a sky which must have become as liquid as the water it had been fishing because he could no longer take in air. Everything started to slow as he gained height, then stopped completely as he paused in his ascent, turned, and for a moment, observed the ground below. The cows had shrunken and the bull definitely did look white and magnificent. Then Richard began to follow another character from Greek mythology and plummet to earth. He landed sideways on top of the enclosing wall and luckily, rolled off it outwards onto the soft, soft grass. Richard knew he must be alive because he managed to breathe again - though it did not sound right and felt worse. He lay still and did not want to risk moving.

Jester had flicked him like some annoying insect into the air. Richard knew a lady in their village who, when she was a 'pretty young maid', had been tossed by a bull. One side of her face and body was frozen but subject to sudden spasms of distortions and tics that had amused generations of children. A distant cousin of Richard's family had recently been gored to death and everyone said that it was his own fault for being a stupid bugger. Richard knew that if Jester hadn't been dehorned, he'd have been another stupid, dead bugger.

He moved and felt his legs respond, filling him with relief that his back or neck were not broken. He got shakily and painfully to his feet. A month ago one of their neighbours tipped a tractor - lacking a protective roll-bar - over its cab. He'd lain there for twenty hours until his wife found him. Now the only thing he was going to be driving was a wheelchair.

This milking parlour was far from the farm and the mere thought of trying to climb on his bike

and pedal the winding lanes made him go dizzy. Richard began to move tentatively over the fields. If he could haul his injured body over three of them, somehow managing to open their old wooden, leaning gates, he'd be close to one of the new borders to their land. Cross one more field awaiting development and push through its hedge - already growing too high and thin at its base to keep any stock secure - and Richard could enter his own little, neatly-manicured back garden. How sweet that would feel for once. Normally, he loathed the twee surroundings even more than their modern house. But the cut grass and easy access was a goal he could focus on. He pictured himself opening the door, phoning his father, then collapsing onto the bed.

The ground was suddenly softer: a peat-damp sponge with an explosion of wild flowers. Their scent was soporific and dreamy as if they rejoiced in this heady moment of freedom before the bulldozers arrived. 'Sleep', the field of poppies seemed to whisper in the breeze, and Richard paused. Then he envisaged the dryness of the milking tank, heard the bellowing of the distant herd, waiting. He crushed an exotic-looking orchid underfoot and moved with fresh force towards the final hedge.

Thorns pierced his flesh. First, the blackthorn with its bitter, astringent fruit which, as his aunt had taught him, could, just after the first frost shrunk and wrinkled its skin, be steeped with gin to make a warming liqueur for Christmas - so sexily pink with a poisonous hint of almond. Then hawthorn, for making jelly and wine that was good for the heart. His maiden aunts had taught him well in the old country ways and forgotten lore.

Richard swathed through the final clutching fingers of thorn into the garden and saw a movement the other side of their patio door. Even in pain, the adrenaline kicked in and let him rush and hide behind the garden shed. The panic that he was disturbing a burglary slowly ebbed as he let his face rest against the recently-creosoted wood, ignoring the burning which began to feel cool compared to what was igniting inside him.

Selina was bending over their coffee table. The one *he'd* made for them out of a piece of elm after the disease took the last of those trees from their land. Her elegant, long-nailed fingers were clutching either side of its knurled and burred edge. Her head was rocking up and down, reflected, Richard knew, in its deeply polished surface, her hair brushing the pools of growth rings that he had sanded until their swirling histories made him feel dizzy. Lew, a newcomer to the village, was standing naked behind her and slamming his dick into her like - the earlier image came back to him - his bull planting cabbages with it. Richard was held like a rabbit hypnotized by a weasel, knowing he must move to survive, but unable to resist the glamour of the spell.

Selina once told him, during an early row about her never wanting to have a child, that Lew's wife, Katie, who'd felt the same, had talked her husband into having the snip. "You'll never get me to do that," Richard assured her. "No," Selina had agreed: "you wouldn't be man enough to be that considerate of your partner's needs."

He'd made himself choke with laughter at the notion of beanpole pen-pusher Lew being a man. "A wether more like," he'd chided: "one quick snip and you're two stones lighter, ha ha."

Now he watched as those two, heavy-looking stones were slapping against his wife's firm arse with more rigour than he'd ever managed. Selina was still dressed in her smart, charcoal and black suit. The short skirt rolled up to look like the belt his mother had once called it in contempt. She was wearing white stockings and her breasts looked the same colour as they spilled out from her blouse, shaking and registering every impact. Richard saw her turn her face towards him but knew she could not see him. Then he heard the noise.

Selina was moaning, a painful-sounding noise, he thought. Then she began to squeal. Once, just recently married, they'd stayed with some friends of Selina's. Laying in the guest room that night he'd listened to the husband and wife making love in the next room. When Richard

realized Selina was still awake, he whispered, embarrassed by the noise and length of what was happening, "I guess it comes with practice." "Yeah," Selina had replied loudly, "just like playing the violin."

He saw Lew go rigid. A look of agony waved across his face as he emptied his barren seed into Selina. Richard saw her sag slightly as if disappointed; then her whole body stiffen and shudder. She stood up as Lew drew back and they both began rubbing with their feet at what must have spilled onto the new carpet. Selina grabbed Lew's hand and almost ran up the stairs dragging him with her. Richard noticed that the front room curtains were wide open and, though the house was detached, it could be overlooked by others and any passing residents. He stared at Lew's body as he trailed Selina up the stairs; it looked as if he'd been mauled or whipped and Richard imagined they'd been at each other most of the afternoon.

He soon heard the bed going and knew they were in no position to witness his departure. Richard forced himself to walk straight and firm through the thorn hedge. He was going to return and milk the cows regardless of the pain. If his father turned up, he would not even mention the bull and would take any insults about how slow he was without reply. What really mattered was the plan growing in his head.

Richard knew how to quieten a filly down. And, how the more wild they were to start with, the better they ended-up for the breaking. It was all a matter of timing. The exact moment vital. He'd need his charts and a little magic to make sure.

Selina lay on a Cretan beach and watched as two English women - probably with the encouragement from their men - removed their bikini tops. They were stretch marked, she noticed, with sagging breasts; drained now, but once, no doubt, full. But such dutiful mothers to the toddlers glistening in sunscreen and screaming out their endless demands. Breeding machines and good milkers, Selina thought bitterly as that image forced her back.

Back to Porlock Weir in Somerset, England. Another little fishing village that, like the one she was now in, had used its nets to catch tourists.

"They say the harbour is filled with treacle and once you sail in you are stuck for life," Selina recalled the landlord of the hotel telling them as he opened a bottle of champagne. And still that grip of golden viscosity, could hold her struggling like some insect in amber as she tried to fly from its trap and aftermath.

Richard had not made love to her for months, and Selina needed sex. She always had, since her first period at eleven years old. It filled a void, temporarily. So she'd taken Lew. Then, as usual with the men in her life, he'd become a nuisance: needing to tell his wife, pleading for Selina to leave Richard, phoning all the time and growing more pathetic by degrees. Even stating that he wanted to have the snip reversed when they were 'fully' together. Selina had not bothered to remind him the main reason she was with him was owing to her husband's fixation in that direction. Were all men, she'd questioned at the time, obsessed with impregnating women? Or was it just that they took her desire not to conceive a child with them as a slur against their manhood?

Then, as she'd been wondering how to get shot of Lew and who, if anyone, might take his place, Richard announced that he'd booked a room in a hotel for three days and was going to take a break from the farm. He said he understood it was short notice and no doubt she'd already made other plans. Selina stared at him. His thickening features and coarse hair appeared to tremble as he waited for her decision. 'Did he know about her affair?' her mind yelled a warning. 'Was this some crude farmer's trap to leave her and her lover alone?'

Selina had heard the family's famous story about Richard's father, Herbie, and his first wife who turned out to be a 'gold-digger', cheating on him. So one night, with his brother's aid, Herbie came home smeared in fake blood, claiming to have been in a crash on his motorbike. They were both going to the hospital he told her for a check up. Later, his brother called to say that Herbie was being kept in overnight for observation, but she mustn't worry. Selina heard again the tone of delight in her father-in-law's voice as he described the two of them bursting in with some private detective in tow and catching his ex-wife 'in flagrante delicto'. The photographs of the event were still in his lawyer's safe, Herbie had assured Selina once, with *certain* other records, just in case. She pictured herself and Lew lying together in the same cold steel safe, bound with a ribbon, in the act itself, or just pulling apart in shock, that moment frozen forever.

Selina said she would love to go.

"The honeymoon suite wasn't it?" the male receptionist asked, smirking at Selina.

"Actually," Richard said, "it was a single room, but my wife decided to come after all. And we would prefer one with two beds."

The first night Richard was charming and easy company. Much as he had been when they first started dating, giving her a sense of security with freedom which at that time had felt so inviting. Like then, they drank too much without any of his recent tutting disapproval. Though - unusual for him - this time, Richard appeared to handle it much better than her. In fact, Selina spent the first half-an-hour after he helped her up the stairs, with her head swirling like one of the eddies in the wake of the boat they had stood watching leave the 'treacle' embrace of the harbour after their meal. "Time you were in bed my girl," Richard had stated, catching her arm as she staggered, and leading her back to the hotel.

"Why don't you stay with me?" Selina asked as he helped her into her bed.

"I didn't bring any of your *condoms*," Richard replied.

She thought he sounded more regretful than sarcastic, "I bet they sell them in the toilet," she offered, "get a fruit flavoured one and I'll give you a banana split for your breakfast." Selina heard his grunt of disgust and did not know why she had said it. The one time she tried to push him down on her he'd struggled like a man drowning. "I can't see the point in any of that," he'd said. "It's what the bull does to the cow to see if she's ready." When she tried to do it to him he went limp in her mouth and she got the message. She was still trying to work out where the suggestion came from when the bed began to spin and his snoring joined the sea whispers all around them.

Selina's sleep was full of strange dreams that night: vivid and too weirdly-coloured as if the poet who once walked this shoreline was leading her into his measureless caverns. She woke in the morning with the most awful hangover. Richard was sitting up in bed with a clipboard on his lap and nearly jumped out of his skin when she spoke. Selina imagined he was doing the farm accounts or something and was ashamed at being caught. Afterwards, he was so kind and understanding for the rest of the day Selina tried to join in with his high spirits, ignoring her pounding head and nagging doubts about what he really wanted. Only one thing threatened to spoil what had been such a light and blissful day: Selina tried to refuse the champagne that night. "But I've already ordered it," Richard said angrily. "To go with our oysters."

"I think it gave me a terrible headache and the strangest dreams," Selina told him. "I saw Coleridge and all of his 'slimy things crawling upon a slimy sea'."

"So, you are going to spoil my holiday already," Richard snapped, downing his drink as Selina had never seen him do before. "And you are supposed to be the big drinker. I think you must be

getting too old - or overdoing it behind my back.”

Selina chinked her glass against his and swallowed quickly.

That night Richard climbed into her bed. Selina was asleep but she felt his weight as she drifted in and out of another dream. This time the garish colours were replaced by a monochromatic seascape. She was walking along the edge of a leaded sea, each wave heavy and ponderous, balanced between breaking or falling back on itself. There was a man walking close to her - or even accompanying her - though not Richard. A thin, more aesthetic figure, in a gray cape who would not let her see his face. Then a bell rang. A melancholy tolling as if it was finding its way to them from a deep drowned church.

“Run,” the man yelled turning and moving away from her too quickly for Selina to react, his cape flowing behind him like smoke. “Run for your life you little fool. It is the riptide.”

Selina’s legs began moving. Pumping faster than her heart as she felt the ground liquefy, hold her wriggling as the sea began to swirl around her ankles. “Sound a bell,” she recalled a local telling them, “when the riptide turns, and a rider on a fast horse cannot outrun it.”

The water reached her crotch and a thick, icy-cold finger of it entered her, waking her fully. Richard was on top of her thrusting mechanically back and forth. “Richard,” she felt him jump and his rhythm falter, “you got some did you?” she slurred, her tongue heavy inside her mouth. He began again without answering as if the beat of some silent metronome were driving him on. Selina began to feel herself drifting away and fought to gain control. She felt him pull roughly out of her.

“Feel,” he said and brushed one of her long-nailed fingers over a ridge of something circling his penis. Selina felt its rubber tightness and sagged onto the bed as he thrust roughly and quickly into her. Almost immediately, she found herself back in the surreal seascape. This time she was swimming in the water. Men were staring down from the harbour wall. Some were laughing at her attempts to keep going, others encouraging her. “Swim baby, swim” someone yelled down. Then another, “Kick those legs open, good and wide. Or try the doggie paddle.”

Selina went under and was filled by the sticky liquid that surrounded her. She felt herself swell with the force of its pressure, before something caught her ankles and she was dragged upwards. Whatever had lassoed her ankles was wound around and pulled tight, so her legs were bound together. She was then left hanging upside down like some trophy fish on display. “Breathe slowly,” her captor coaxed. “Relax and drink in the ozone, please.”

For the rest of the night it seemed that she was left strung up on the quayside for various men from her past to arrive and take a good slow look at her naked form. “Quite a catch,” she heard one of them say.

“She’s caught all right,” a voice from whoever was slowly massaging her body replied each time a similar sentiment was offered.

In the morning her head felt worse than the previous one and her ankles were covered in red marks and felt bruised. It was late and Richard was not in the room. She found him sat out on the harbour watching a boat preparing to go fishing. Selina felt a wave of nausea turn her stomach at the thought of it returning and spreading out its catch.

“What the hell was going on last night?” she demanded as Richard looked up and smiled.

“I should be asking you that!” he replied. “You were dreaming and babbling like a mad woman all night. At one point you got your legs tangled up in the sheets and hung out of bed. It took me

ages to unravel you. I cannot imagine what the people in the hotel thought was going on. Kicking and flaying around. You didn't know what you were doing. I hardly got a wink of sleep."

"You fucked me. I remember that much anyway."

"You insisted I did. You were begging for it at the top of your voice. I think it must be all this fresh air and seafood. My one aunt always said..."

"I want to go home," Selina interrupted. "I've never felt so ill in my life. I feel like I've been poisoned."

Richard looked shocked, "Home? Just one more night," he implored, struggling to keep her with him. "How many breaks do I ever get? We'll leave the champagne and seafood alone. I hear they do a very nice rare steak and stout at the pub. We'll go there tonight, please, you could stay with me. Or do you want to go back on your own for other reasons?" Richard threw something into the water and Selina watched a flesh-coloured ring flutter and dart into the depths.

These onerous memories that Selina now recalled with such clarity as a different sea inched its way towards her brown, unshackled ankles had quickly faded, and might have been lost forever if not for a bird. A thing left alive for another part of the lie probably. But still, she hoped, flying free and untainted.

By the time Selina began to suffer regularly from morning sickness and indigestion, Lew had, on the only occasion he managed to get anywhere near to her, been beaten half senseless and had his arm broken. Richard arrived just as Lew pushed past her on the doorstep, where she was struggling to get rid of him for good. He was actually trying to drag her up the stairs at the moment the tractor roared up their drive. Afterwards, Richard did not give her a chance to try and explain anything.

"I saw this coming," Richard said. "he's tried it on with loads of girls before. Herbie caught him on the village green once, running away from another woman's house in the nude. Of course it was no good trying to warn you. I just bloody well hope he goes and calls the police."

Of course he did not. And Richard became more kind and attentive than she could stand or find a way of escaping from.

Then the jackdaw came down from the chimney and rescued her.

Selina was home from work, feeling terrible with a red burning glow to her face and a pounding deep threat of an advancing migraine. Her whole body felt as if it were in revolt over the terrible invader that had somehow found a way to grow inside. She wanted to refute all of the feelings, to deny the purple line that had appeared on the testing kit as stark and bold and cruel as an open vein, and had not mentioned anything to Richard who seemed oblivious to her symptoms.

The jackdaws had nested in their chimney and Richard said Herbie was going to either shoot them or lend him the gun to do so. Selina insisted they stayed. "Next year," she told them both, "you can block off the chimney and stop them doing it again. They will not hurt anything, and may already have babies. You must leave them alone." Strangely, Richard agreed and gave her a glowing look as if she'd said the most wonderful thing in her life.

Selina was sitting on the sofa trying to concentrate on the comings and goings of the birds, their shadows passing like small clouds outside the window, and ignore the taste of acid bubbling its

way back into her mouth, when an acrid scent and haze of soot stirred by wings came into the room. A young jackdaw shot out of the hearth in a puff of dust as if some magic trick had been performed for her distraction. It began flapping around the room, streaking the walls and windows black.

After two or three attempts, Selina caught it and held it gently. The bird immediately went calm and turned its head to observe her. Selina was startled by the pure clarity of its eyes that appeared to look much farther than anything she could see; into the depths of a sky and dimension beyond her understanding. Then she saw a fleck of red touch the sparkling silver-blue lens and for a moment feared it might be blood and the bird was injured. She turned and followed its gaze as a red package finished its fall and settled in the cold, unused cradle of the fire grate.

Selina opened the window and let the young jackdaw tumble softly onto the lawn. She stood, unwilling to look away, as both parents landed on a telephone wire and began to caw angrily at their wayward offspring. It took off at a rush and they whirled after it, effortlessly tracking its clumsy flight path. Selina watched it cross the field and crash land into a cradle of a hawthorn. The adults joined it and she knew that it was safe.

She moved slowly towards what the bird had dislodged, sensing, no matter what noted thieves members of the Corvidae family were - gold rings, jewels and coins to add to their hidden hoards a speciality - it was a different type of criminal that had placed this treasure out of sight.

Selina unwrapped the red oilskin, its texture shaking off the soot like droplets of black rain falling onto the carpet as she read her own name. It was on one of the farm's breeding charts. The special type Richard used as he attempted - in spite of Herbie's opinions - to improve their herd and produce, in the future, an award-winning beast. She could remember sitting with her husband and feeling - though unable to share - his excitement as he told her of this dream. On the top of the chart, where the number of the cow should have been - no pet names for any of their animals except the bull - Richard had written, in fussy, florid, calligraphy her full name. It looked as if some patient monk had laboured for hours to produce it. Selina dreaded already what may have been in this one's prayers as the ink bled from his quill.

The rest of the page, and pages clipped to it, were a series of dates and a graph. Selina knew exactly what it was. One of the girls at work, struggling to fulfil her desire to have a child, brought in the more human version for them all to look at. "See," she'd explained to them during a coffee break, "this is the moment: our best chance to conceive. I should be going home for a light supper, flowers, a little wine, then a full night of passion. The clinic worked out this chart for us. They even told Rikki to save himself for these special occasions. Mind you, they also suggested he stopped wearing his 'little boy' Y-fronts and give his balls some air and room for production. So of course his mother bought him a dozen pairs of extra small ones." Selina recalled them having a laugh at the man's expense and, as she did, her own private amusement when Richard had recently bought himself three pairs of expensive, Italian boxer shorts and started wearing them to work.

Any humour vanished as she carried on going through the pages, watching the circles and other symbols move like particles being drawn by an irresistible gravity until they contracted on one date. The number was surrounded by a many-pointed star; a supernova that exploded off the page and made her swallow the cold bile rising in her throat. She sat back and tried to concentrate, to keep as calm and calculated as the person who'd done this. There were other dates marked and highlighted in different ways but she guessed he knew his chances were limited and this was his best shot.

The rest of the stuff made her feel sicker than what she now knew had been forced inside her. Selina placed the two leather straps on the sofa next to her. She could hardly bear to touch them. How neat though, she noticed, the stitches holding the layer of black velvet to their inside

were; how considerate of him not to have used glue, knowing her skin was allergic to it and broke out in a rash instantly at contact. Or more like, she realized, that there was no point trying to hide the marks left by them if another set gave him away. Selina looked at the old, brown wrinkled and cracked leather. What other creatures had it restrained or led around some show or slaughterhouse before it bound her flesh? she wondered.

Selina used a pencil to lift, then drop the rubber ring. She had seen and experienced them before. A friend once brought the real thing back from India; a delicate object carved from ivory with precision and wisdom to hold back the male orgasm and stimulate the clitoris at the same stroke. "You wait," Selina's friend had said "until the premature little sods get this beauty on." Selina could recall being jealous of it and making her friend promise to find the same antique bazaar next time she returned to Goa and get her one. This one she knew had been used to fool her, and maximize not pleasure, but Richard's chances of success.

He must have bought two, Selina thought, seeing the other one vanish into the depths of Porlock harbour again. She picked up a container of pills with different colours and sizes, rattling dully inside the small yellow bottle. Next, she opened some cuttings. The first from a glossy, women's magazine on how the female orgasm played its role in conception with a series of photographs showing a contraction dip something hungry and beak-like into a tidal wave of semen if the timing was exact.

The second was a newspaper article on a famous rock guitarist who had recently come to live in a neighbouring village. He was already associated, the paper said, with black magic rituals. Now he had driven his young 'child bride' half-crazy. She needed, she claimed, to sell her story as part of the 'catharsis'. 'He had become obsessed with his orgasm', she told the readers. 'He would not allow himself to ejaculate. Day after day, week after week, he would keep bringing himself to the point with his hand or in different parts of me. Always stopping. During these times he would sleep on the cellar floor wrapped in sackcloth so as to prevent wet dreams. In the end his testicles would be so big and swollen he could hardly bear to stand or walk. Then he liked to climb on top of me and let the dam burst. I could almost feel myself explode there was so much. Then I had to lie with my legs up above my head while he watched. I would get whipped if any spilled out. He once even tied my legs together, after he read that the old aristocrats used to do it to their wives when they were desperate to produce an heir. Not that he wanted a child. Not unless it was to sacrifice to Satan of course'.

The third article was on a rape drug being slipped in girls' drinks at clubs and pubs. She could hardly read the descriptions of their suffering and the way *their* memories returned.

Selina put everything carefully back in place. She pictured how many times before the trip to Porlock she'd found Richard locked in the toilet claiming to have an upset stomach. She saw him again shuffling around claiming he'd hurt his back and needed to sleep on the floor for a time. She felt herself swell again that night as he had let 'his dam' burst.

The final thing Selina placed back in the oilskin was a little notebook. It was the only thing that made her smile slightly with its list of expenses, including receipts from an Ann Summers' shop for love rings, his boxer shorts from a London mail order company, the hotel and petrol. Also, a largish cash amount recorded as going to someone named 'Spiker' - Selina guessed for the drugs he must have given her. She even saw the cost of the bloody magazine and newspaper.

The smile faded as she read the last entry: the date when her period should have started and exactly how many tampax there were in the bathroom. It was followed by, 'First day due, same amount. End of first week, same amount. A month overdue, ditto.'

To end the record, he had written in large capitals: THE DEED IS DONE.

Selina decided to exorcise 'the spell' with similar magic. She did not go to any clinic, but to an

old lady who lived in a subsiding stone cottage at the heart of the Somerset Levels. She claimed to be the reincarnated 'Witch of Wookey Hole', brewed potions in a cauldron over a peat fire, and danced naked around the first blossom of hawthorn and apple - mostly for tourists and local news stations. She also performed another - now rarer - service that most of the village grandmothers, some mothers and even the daughters of stricter families knew about.

After the beldam had driven, or torn out, with her crude brutal magic, what was growing inside her womb, Selina left for Crete. Before she went, instead of any note, she placed on top of the red oilskin package, the mud-baked effigy the old witch always made: a thorn of blackthorn entering through its naval, casting a finger of shadow down towards what had been exorcised.

The memories darkened the sun as Selina got to her feet and sprinted into the sea. She swam until the light returned, then floated on her back to let the sun burn off anything that remained. In the distance she could see the peaks of the Lefka Ori. A feeling of hope came to her that by the time the White Mountains became snow-capped again, then burst into their spring spectacle of wild flowers, the white would feel even purer, the wild lupins and narcissi explode more vivid than ever. As her spirit increased, something light brushed against the back of her thigh in its passing. Selina imagined it could be the smallest tip of some giant creature, or the largest part of a minute life form.

She would never know. And it did not matter. The spell was broken and she swam towards the shore.

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Neil Grimmatt has had over sixty short stories published in the UK by among others: *London Magazine, Stand, Panurge, Iron, Ambit, Penpusher, etc.* Australia, *Quadrant*, South Africa, *New Contrast*. Plus stories in the leading journals of Singapore, India, France, Canada, and the USA, where he has appeared in *Fiction, The Yale Review, DoubleTake, The Southern Humanities Review, Green Mountains Review, Descant, The Southern Review and Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine*. He has appeared online in *Blackbird, Tatlin's Tower, Web Del Sol, In Posse Review, m.a.g., Word Riot, Blue Moon Review, 3AM, Gangway, Eclectica, The Cortland Review, Segue, The Dublin Quarterly* and over twenty others. He has made the *storySouth* Million Writers Notable Short Story list for the last three years. In addition, he has won the Write On poetry award, the Oppenheim John Downes Award four times, two major British Arts Council bursaries and a Royal Society of Authors award. He is a member of the US branch of PEN.