

WHAT'S PAST IS PRESENCE



LORI C. HAWKINS

“PETER, Peter! Wake up, sweetheart!” Alec cried as he fended off a forearm thumping on his chest.

“No, no! I won’t let you take him! No!” he heard Peter yell in his sleep.

Alec reached over and shook his partner awake. Peter bolted upright, alarm broadly written across his face. “What, what is it?” he exclaimed in confusion.

“You were having a nightmare. I could have gotten a black eye from the way you were flailing around,” Alec replied.

“Oh, I’m sorry, love. I didn’t hurt you, did I?” Peter asked anxiously as he came to himself.

“No, nothing that a bit of bruise lotion won’t cure,” joked Alec. “Bloody hell, what were you dreaming about? You seemed terrified,” he continued as he massaged the spot where he had gotten a thumping.

Peter lay down again and pulled the covers tight around himself. “I dunno. I can’t remember, really. It seemed someone wanted to take me somewhere. But when I refused go with him, he said he’d take you in my place.”

Alec rolled over, pulled Peter into a cuddle, and said, “Well, never mind. It was only a bad dream. I warned you

about eating that curry for dinner, didn't I?" he gently scolded before going back to sleep.

THE next day was a warm, sunny June day, and the bright light that flooded their bedroom woke them.

Alec rolled over lazily and saw that Peter was awake, "Good morning, gorgeous, did you go back to sleep all right?"

Peter yawned. "Not really. And now, I can't shake the feeling that something terrible is about to happen. You will be careful today, won't you?"

Alec was touched by his partner's concern, but a bit worried that Peter, the "steady" one in the relationship, would give a second thought to a nightmare. "Of course I will, but it was only a nightmare," Alec reassured Peter. "And I can think of something that'll make you forget all about your bad dreams," Alec purred, and then slipped a hand between Peter's thighs.

"Oh, honestly, you do have such a one-track mind," Peter said, rolling his eyes. "Well, it's more than that. My nightmare wasn't entirely due to the curry I ate. I didn't want to worry you, but I found out something about this house."

"Oh, now I suppose you'll tell me Jack the Ripper lived here!" Alec scoffed and withdrew his hand.

"No, of course not. Besides, he probably lived in Whitechapel. But listen, I was at the London city archives last week looking through old newspaper photographs so I could get an idea of the original facade for that restoration

we're doing in Holland Park," Peter recounted, referring to the renovation project where he worked as a construction engineer. "Well, I came across this article about a young family with a baby who lived here in the days of Queen Victoria. They disappeared one day without a trace, and several years later some workmen digging in the back garden found the skeleton of woman. They assumed it belonged to the wife who disappeared but they never found out what happened to the husband and baby."

"Our back garden?" Alec asked apprehensively and snuggled closer to Peter. "You're having me on, right?"

"No, no, it is the honest truth. It was right there in the newspaper archives," Peter declared in a very matter-of-fact tone.

Alec wasn't quite sure whether to believe Peter, but even so, he felt the urge to get out into the sunshine. "I'm hungry. It's a beautiful day, and I fancy going out for breakfast," he said suddenly.

That Alec wanted to go out for breakfast was a measure of how unnerved he was by Peter's discovery in the archives. They almost never went out for breakfast because Alec was a musical theater actor in London's West End, where he usually worked late into the evening and was not a morning person as a rule. But after hearing of Peter's discovery, lingering in bed had lost its appeal, and in short order, they were dressed and out the front door with their three dogs scampering excitedly along with them.

Outside, the sky was bright blue with large puffy white clouds that formed fantastical animals, and the air smelled fresh from an overnight rain. As they walked along the

streets of their Kensington neighborhood toward the main road, they noticed that some of their neighbors had readied for summer by setting out colorful pots of flowers. Geraniums and petunias sat cheerfully on the front steps along the route to their favorite café.

The walk in warm sunshine chased away Alec's uneasiness from the morning's conversation about mysterious disappearances, and he was his usual bouncy self when they arrived at their cafe.

"Mmm, I could murder a full English breakfast today," Alec declared as he took a seat at one of the outside tables. The dogs obediently settled themselves at Alec's feet as Peter quietly took a seat.

"You still look worried, Pete. C'mon, it's just a nightmare; nothing is going to happen to either of us. Have yourself a nice breakfast and forget about it," Alec nattered cheerfully.

"Well, perhaps you're right. Even if what I read in that old newspaper article were true, London is an ancient city; the bones they found could have been Roman or Celtic. But still, it gives me the creeps."

"Well, there you are, then. There are probably loads of old Roman and Celtic burials in this city, and they've never done anyone any harm. It's all part of our history!"

While Alec indulged in a traditional breakfast of eggs, bacon, grilled tomatoes and mushrooms, baked beans, and toast, Peter had a lighter breakfast of bacon with brown sauce in a sandwich, but at intervals he helped himself to the beans on Alec's plate.

After breakfast, Peter was in a much brighter mood, and Alec suggested that they spend the day in Hyde Park with the dogs. Despite Peter's premonition, they spent rest of the day lounging pleasantly on the grass and throwing a Frisbee to the dogs. But later that night....

"NO, GO away! Go away!" Alec heard as he woke with a start. He sat up in alarm and turned on the lights to find Peter awake and staring at the tightly shut door to their bedroom.

"What's the matter, sweetheart? Another nightmare?" Alec asked, stroking circles on Peter's back.

"No, not a nightmare!" Peter said as he pointed toward the door. "There was someone in here. A shadowy figure standing right there! It was beckoning to me!"

With an uneasy glance at where Peter was pointing, Alec got out of bed and opened the bedroom door. He stuck his head out and peered up and down the hallway.

"There's no one there," Alec said a little too quickly and got back into bed. "It was just another nightmare. I'll leave the lights on if it'll make you feel better," he said, although at this point it was more for his own benefit than for Peter's. He nervously slipped down low under the blankets, snuggled up tight against Peter and tried to go back to sleep.

The next day was Sunday. Alec had a matinee as well as the usual evening performance, and he was none too happy about losing another night's sleep. Outside, the weather had

turned wet and blustery and did nothing to lift his general torpor.

“Peter,” he said with a yawn as they lingered in the kitchen after eating a late breakfast, “if you keep having those nightmares, you should see a doctor about it. You’ve had them two nights running. We can’t keep going on like this.”

“Alec, I swear to you. It was not a nightmare. There was someone in our bedroom,” Peter insisted.

“It was probably one of those waking dreams from reading about that family that disappeared.” A chill ran up Alec’s spine as he said that.

Alec finished his coffee and tiredly got up. He gave Peter a peck on the cheek and said, “I’m going to get cleaned up, I have to go to the theater soon.”

As Alec headed upstairs to the bathroom, he was keenly aware of the oppressive gloom from the inclement weather outside and turned on every light in his path. When he came back downstairs he suggested to Peter, “Why don’t you come by the theater tonight and bring some food, we can have dinner together in the dressing room before the evening show.

Peter’s face lit up at the suggestion. “I’d love to! I’ll come by around five.”

“I’ll see you later, then. And no curry!” Alec hated curry and never ate it, but he didn’t want Peter eating it, either, for fear of another nightmare.

Later that afternoon, as he was sitting in his dressing room, Simon, his co-star, stuck his head in. “Hey, Alec....”

Alec jumped a mile at the sound of Simon's voice. "Simon, you scared the daylights out of me."

"Sorry, Alec. Your door was open so I didn't think to knock."

"No, no. It's okay. I'm a little jumpy today. What was it that you wanted?"

"I wanted you to come and take a peek out at the audience. Quite a few of them have come in costume."

"Really?" Alec said in an amused voice, "We must have a coach-load of teenage girls out there."

For some unknown reason, Alec's and Simon's characters in the show had become a touchstone for teenage girls, and they often received fan mail with pictures from young female fans dressed as characters from the show.

"Well, come to think of it, they do all seem to be young girls," Simon observed with a shrug, then leaned against the doorjamb as he watched Alec put the final touches on his stage makeup.

"I say, Alec. You're looking a bit peaked and you *are* quite jumpy. Is everything all right?" Simon asked.

"Well, I'm a little tired because Peter has been waking up in the middle of the night with nightmares. Last night he insisted that someone was in our bedroom." Alec felt goose bumps rising on his arms as he related the story.

"Are you telling me your house is haunted?" Simon said skeptically.

"No. Well, I least I don't think that's what I'm saying. We've lived in that house for over ten years and nothing out

of the ordinary has ever happened. But Peter's never been one to take flights of fancy," Alec said, now unsure of what to believe.

Although the weather outside was gloomy, the atmosphere inside the theater for the matinee performance couldn't be more cheerful. The school group in attendance was enthusiastic without being rude and cheered wildly when the show was over. The energy of the audience made Alec's worries about Peter's nightmares a distant memory and he was his cheeky self with the rest of the cast as he waited to have dinner with his partner.

As promised, at five o'clock Peter came around with Italian take away—chicken piccata and spinach for Alec, and lemon dill salmon with carrots for himself. He was unpacking the food in the dressing room when Alec arrived.

"Mmm, smells great! What did you get me?" Alec asked eagerly.

"Chicken piccata," Peter said as he took the lid off the plastic take away container.

"So what did you do today?" Alec asked as Peter handed him his dinner.

Sitting down with his own plate, Peter answered, "Well, I got the food shopping done, and I did some more research on that Holland Park project."

"You haven't found any more lurid stories, have you?" Alec asked, and took a forkful of chicken.

"Well, no, not exactly. I'd say more disturbing than lurid."

“Peter, I want you to drop this. It’s unhealthy. Not to mention that these nightmares are wearing me out too,” Alec said a tad sharply.

After Peter had swallowed the bit of salmon he was chewing, he said intriguingly, “So, you don’t want to know what I found, then?”

Alec sighed; his curiosity got the better of his judgment and he said, “Okay, just this once, what did you find out?”

“Well,” Peter said as he pulled his chair closer to Alec, “I found out that every few years disturbances have been reported at our address. One article from the 1950s tells of a family fleeing in the middle of the night because some unseen thing was in the house.”

A forkful of spinach paused on its way to Alec’s mouth, and anxiety crossed his expression for a second. “Aw, the next thing you’ll tell me is that they think there is a rift in time and space running down Brompton Road,” Alec said to buck himself up.

Peter shrugged and replied, “I’m just repeating what they wrote in the papers.” He then let the matter drop and brought up the subject of where to go for their summer holiday. Alec was more than glad to move on to something else, and the two of them finished their dinners while talking about tropical beaches and exotic rum drinks.

“Well, I guess I better clear out and let you get ready,” Peter said after he had bagged up the empty food containers.

“It’s getting close. I’ll see you at home. Thanks for bringing dinner.”

II

“Anytime, babe. Have a good show and I’ll see you later,” Peter said as he gave Alec a quick little kiss and left for home.

The show that night went on without a hitch, and the audience gave the cast a standing ovation. But the warmth of the audience was of no comfort to Alec when he headed out into foul weather to catch a cab to take him home. What started out as a wet, blustery day had turned into a stormy night, and as Alec stood on the deserted street waiting for a cab, all he could think of was having a hot cup of tea and cuddling up with his partner for a good night’s sleep.

When the cab driver let him out, Alec dashed to his front door with his keys at the ready and managed to get inside without getting much wetter. The dogs greeted him in a swirl of wagging tails and glad little yips, but he noticed that Peter had not waited up for him as usual and the house was strangely dark and silent. Thinking that Peter had gone to bed, Alec decided to head straight upstairs. But when he flipped the switch to light his way, the stairway remained in darkness.

“The storm must have knocked out the lights,” Alec muttered to himself as he carefully mounted the dark staircase. When he reached the second floor, he saw a crack of light coming from under their bedroom door.

Puzzled, Alec called out, “Peter, I’m home! Why aren’t the lights working out here?”

When he got no answer, he peevishly made his way to the bedroom by the dim light of the street lamps coming through the second-story window.

“Pete, are you asleep?” he asked in a quiet voice as he opened the bedroom door.

He jumped in surprise when he looked to his left and came face to face with Peter. “Bloody hell, you nearly gave me a heart attack! Why didn’t you answer me?”

Alec’s throat went dry when he noticed that Peter was standing as stiff as a corpse. He thought Peter was having another nightmare and shook him by the shoulders. “Peter, wake up! You’re sleepwalking! Sweetheart, what’s the matter? Can’t you hear me?” Alec asked loudly.

Peter did not move a muscle but continued to stare sightlessly ahead. “All right, joke’s over, the thing with the lights was dead clever, but now you are really scaring me,” Alec said, his voice starting to crack.

“The one you ssseek is yours no more,” Peter suddenly uttered in an unearthly voice. “I come to claim my bridegroom tonight. Forever mine. Forever mine,” Peter said softly.

“What are you talking about? No one is coming for you! Peter, you’re dreaming! Wake up!” Alec yelled. He was beside himself as he swung between believing that Peter was possessed and believing that Peter was having a mental breakdown.

“No, no. Let him go!” Alec finally pleaded as his rational brain finally tipped to the side of supernatural.

“A ransom. A ransom is demanded for his return. You must... you must....” Peter continued in an unearthly voice.

“What! What do I have to do?” Alec demanded.

Peter hissed out an answer in a barely audible whisper, and Alec leaned in closer to hear.

"Tell me again! What am I suppose to do?" pleaded Alec, shaking Peter again.

"You must... let me shag you senseless!" Peter said with a grin and a wink.

Alec went catatonic for a full five seconds before he found his voice again.

"Oh, you... of all the... you... you!" Alec sputtered, too angry to make any sense. "I've been through hell the past two days worrying about you!" he yelled, as he collapsed onto the edge of the bed. His chest was heaving as he fought back tears "You've been setting me up all this time! The nightmares, the stories!"

Peter realized it had all gone pear shaped and timidly nodded his head.

Suddenly, Alec covered his face with his hands and started weeping uncontrollably, "I was so frightened! I thought you were having a mental breakdown," he choked out between sobs.

Peter gulped. He felt terrible that the joke had gone so far and rushed over to clutch Alec in a hug.

Peter tried to make amends by placing kisses on the top of Alec's head and on his temple. "I'm so sorry. You weren't meant to worry about me. I only meant to scare you with the stories I made up. I really screwed up. I shouldn't have let it go this far. I'm so sorry."

When Peter had finished his apology, Alec's sobs subsided and a few muffled words came from behind Alec's hands.

Peter leaned close and asked, "What, sweetheart? Did you have something you wanted to say?"

Alec peaked out from behind his hands with an impish grin, and repeated, "I said, I'll forgive you if you let me shag you senseless."

"Oh, you... you... you *actor*, you!" Peter sputtered, and swung at Alec with a pillow.

"Yeah, a darn good actor too!" Alec shot back and bopped Peter with the other pillow.

"I guess we're even, then," Peter said sheepishly.

"No, not quite," Alec said, and hit Peter with the pillow again. "Now we're even. I really was worried about you."

"I'm sorry. I didn't think you'd—"

"What, you didn't think I'd worry about you?" Alec interjected. "Of course I would, you idiot, you're everything to me," he said in a quieter voice, and this time a genuine tear rolled down Alec's cheek as he spoke.

"Sssh," Peter said gently as he took Alec into his arms, "I'm not going anywhere and nothing is going to happen to me. Please forgive me for making you worry."

Alec returned Peter's hug with a little squeeze. He placed a soft kiss on Peter's lips and whispered with a sly smile, "Only if you make good on that promise to let me shag you senseless."

“That’s a punishment I could live with. And I’ve been such a naughty boy,” Peter said with a waggle of his eyebrow.

Alec grinned and kicked off his shoes as Peter fell back onto the bed with arms held wide to receive his partner. With an evil laugh, Alec pounced on Peter, and soon the world around them receded as shirt tails were pulled free from trousers, and practiced hands undid shirt buttons until bare chest met bare chest and arousal met arousal.

Alec sighed and held Peter in a kiss as he let his hands drop down to their groins. He clasped their erections together into a pulsing handful and languidly stroked them. When their pre-cum made the swollen members too slick to hold, Alec kissed his way down the length of Peter’s body, teased a silky thread of salty slipperiness from Peter’s slit with his tongue, and lavished it on the throbbing glans.

Peter writhed in pleasure and moaned out, “Alec, please. I need you inside of me now.”

“Not yet. You were a very, very naughty boy and you must take your punishment. I think you’ll take a spanking from me before you’ll get anything else,” Alec said sternly.

Alec sat up and hefted Peter onto his lap face down to present his buttocks for his punishment. Alec gave each cheek a squeeze before he raised his hand and brought it down onto Peter’s creamy flesh in a resounding smack. Peter yelped and fisted the sheets.

“That one was for making me lose sleep,” Alec said. Then he raised his hand again and smacked the other cheek. “This one is for making me worry,” Alec continued. “And this

one is so you will remember not to scare me like this again,” Alec said with a last smack.

Peter, who had held fast to the sheets as the blows stung his behind, had gone breathless. When he rolled off Alec, his belly was soaked with his own pre-cum and his eyes were wild with excitement.

“Alec, please. I need it. I need you,” he gasped.

Alec’s heart was racing at the sight of his partner being so completely undone. “Roll over and get on your knees,” he commanded hoarsely, and reached for the lube in the bedside table.

Peter obediently presented his backside for Alec to do with as he would. He whimpered in anticipation as Alec squirted the lube between his cheeks. Then Alec slicked himself up and mounted his partner with gentle pushes. Peter threw back his head in a cry of pleasure when he felt Alec push past his tight entrance.

“Oh God, Peter, you’re so tight,” Alec gasped. He took a firm grip on Peter’s hips and started to pump. The sting of Alec’s fingernails digging into the flesh of his already tender buttocks as each inward thrust hit its mark on his prostate was too much for Peter and he came in an unexpected explosion of cum onto the bed.

Alec felt Peter clamping down on his penis and he drained himself into Peter in a dizzying climax. For a few seconds reality came to a standstill while they rode the wave of the orgasm to its conclusion and collapsed together onto the bed.

“God, Peter. I didn’t know you were into spanking. If I had known it would be this hot, I would have tried it long ago,” Alec panted after he had rolled onto his back. When he got no reply, Alec looked over at Peter to find him sound asleep and still face down in the spot where he had collapsed.

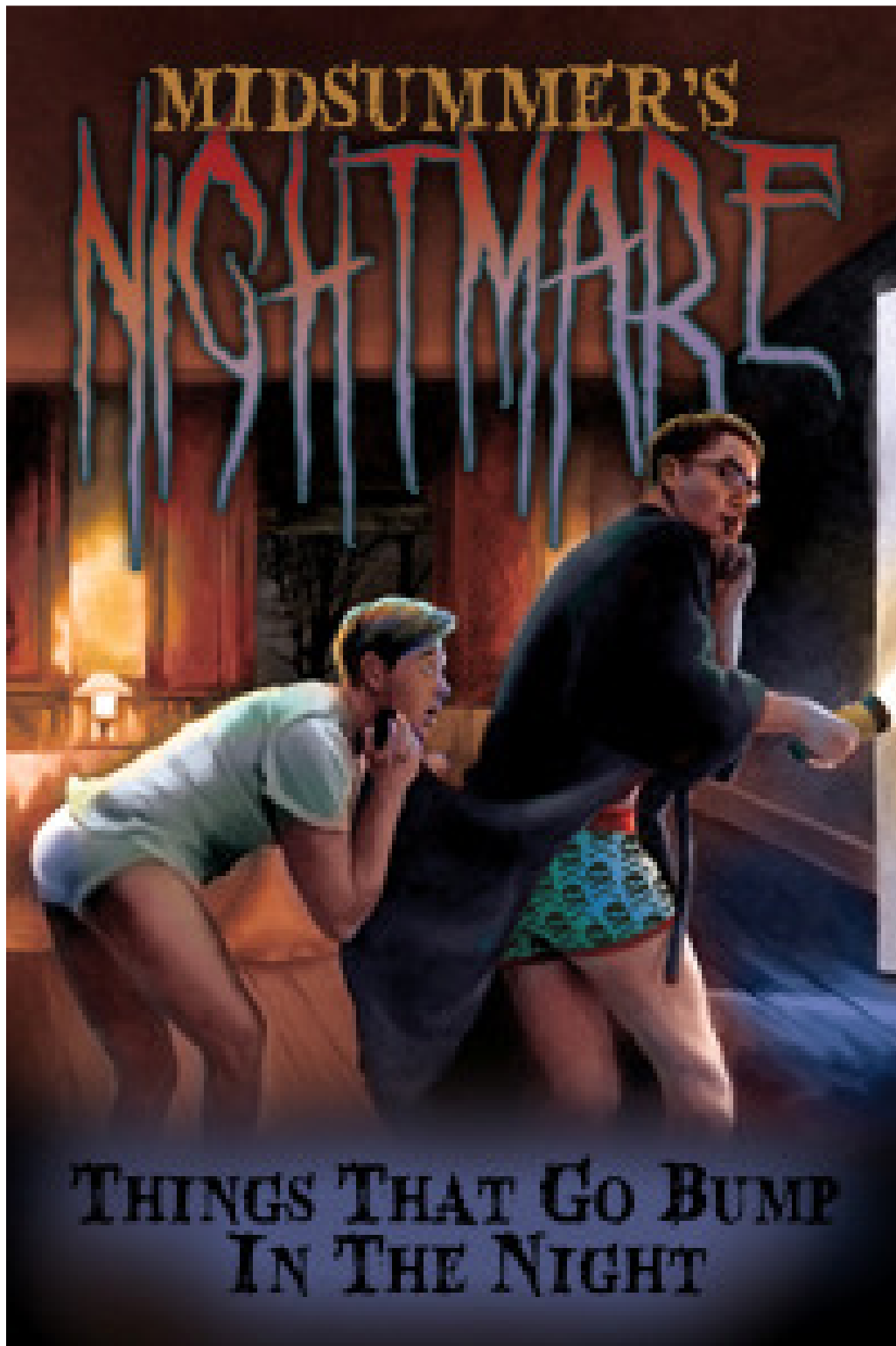
Alec chuckled and poked at his sleeping partner. “Peter, come on. Let’s shower off before we go to sleep.”

“Right,” Peter mumbled as he unglued himself from the sheets and headed for the bathroom.

“I’ll change the sheets while you start the shower. I’ll come join you in a minute,” Alec called after his partner.

Alec chuckled to himself, knowing that it was going to be another night of lost sleep, but for a good reason.

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LORI C. HAWKINS is a New York City transplant living in California, where she divides her time between the San Francisco Bay Area and suburban Los Angeles. She travels extensively, loves opera, and plays golf in just about any kind of weather.

Lori discovered her passion for writing after leaving a finance career at a major bank in San Francisco and is now writing full time. She believes in living an audacious life and in happy endings.

Visit her at <http://rainbowromances.livejournal.com/>. You may contact her at rainbowromances@livejournal.com.



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