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The uninvited

1979

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(what seemed to be an extra-terrestrial teleportation experiment - tested on farm animals)

PROLOGUE

The story you are about to read is true, though you will doubt it. With good reason. This is the story of an ordinary family caught up in the extraordinary, for whom the impossible became possible, the unbelievable became believable, science fiction became science fact.

You will find no explanations for the events reconstructed here, for there are none. What took place was as beyond explanation as it may seem beyond belief. And still is.

It would doubtless be reassuring - even comforting - to be able to dismiss the phenomena involved as being the product of an elaborate hoax, or of over-imagination, or hallucination or mistaken identity, yet the number of reliable witnesses and the amount of physical evidence involved would seem to confound such cosy explanations.

Nobody can say for sure exactly what happened to the Coombs family, least of all the family themselves. All that they, their relations, their friends and their neighbours *can* say for certain, is that it *did* happen. Until now, the people involved have been reluctant to tell the whole story, fearing ridicule and having nothing to gain from such revelations but notoriety. That situation remains the same, but they now feel that their experiences are potentially too significant and too far-reaching in their implications to be overlooked. They no longer worry whether their story is believed or not, for they know it is the truth and have condoned the writing of, this reconstruction in the sincere hope that others - the authorities in particular - may profit from its telling. They feel - as maybe we all should that we ignore such phenomena at our peril.

One

January 14th 1977

It began with a bright light, high in the night sky.

To begin with, Pauline thought it was a flare, so bright and fiery it seemed compared to the stars that surrounded it, studying it closer, she wasn't so sure. Within a 20-mile radius of the farmhouse - set in splendid isolation the cliff top overlooking St Bride's Bay - was the Brawdy Royal Air Force Base, a Royal Aircraft Establishment Missile Range, numerous supersonic low-flying corridors, the Army's Pendine Tank Range and an can Navy submarine tracking station. In the eight years that she and Billy and the children had lived at Ripperstone Farm, she'd seen every conceivable sort of light sky - everything from flares to jet fighters and missiles -but never anything like this.

The washing up could wait, she thought to herself, putting dish cloth to one side, leaning over the sink and cupping her hands around her eyes against the inner glare kitchen light, to get a better view. A quarter of a mile away it must be, she reasoned, just hovering there over the field nearest the cliff edge, a giant ball of fluorescent light with a tail of flame stretching out behind it. Definitely not a plane or a missile or even a flare, for there was no movement. A comet, or ball lightning, perhaps, she'd seen them before. This was nothing like it. Queerest thing she'd ever seen and funny how it just seemed to have appeared from nowhere. And now... that swaying motion. Gently. Like a pendulum. Back and forth. To and fro. Like it was watching her, waving to her.

She should call Billy. He might know what it was. But wait.. . it was moving now slowly, now faster, down out of the sky towards the cliff edge.

And gone.

Damndest thing she'd ever seen. She cursed herself for not calling Billy earlier. It must have been there for nearly twenty minutes. She'd better call him now, though. It must have been a flare of some sort, there was no other explanation. A ship from Milford Haven might be in distress near the cliffs. If it was, Billy would have to call the coast-guard.

She smiled to herself. He'd know what to do about it, but he wouldn't want to do it. Not now. She knew, all too well, what she'd find in the front room and padding quietly across the hall and looking around the door, she

was right. There he was, as ever, in the same old armchair by the window, in front of the television, stockinged feet crossed neatly in front of him, Wellington boots discarded nearby, head back, mouth open and snoring loud enough to wake the dead.

'Bless him,' she thought. It was the same thing every night, but it was hardly surprising. He worked hard, did her Bill, and never more so than during this month of the year. She was as glad as he was that the calving season was nearly over. From October to March he hardly slept at all. His day would start at five in the morning and not finish until two o'clock the following morning. As well as the normal daily routine of milking the herd and cleaning the machines, ploughing, fertilising and fencing, he also had to stay in with the 100-strong herd until the early hours of every morning to watch over the mating and to pamper the pregnant members of the herd, taking their food to them, constantly re-bedding them and eventually delivering their calves. Small wonder he needed to catch up on lost sleep now.

She shook him gently. Nobody was normally more jovial or easy-going than Billy, but not after rude awakenings.

'Sorry to wake you, love,' she whispered, 'but something's happened that you ought to know about.'

'What's that, girl,' he grunted uninterestedly.

'Queerest thing I ever did see,' she told him, 'dirty great big light in the sky, all afire it was, came down on the coast path, just a minute ago...'

'Fire? What fire?' Billy rubbed the sleep vigorously out of his eyes. 'What are you on about, love?'

Pauline described what she'd seen in greater detail.

'Pass my boots, I'd better go take a look. And put the kettle on. I'll be needing a cuppa when I get back. It'll be damn freezing down there...'

She watched him leave and then went back to the kitchen. She'd put the kettle on for tea. He certainly would need warming when he got back, the wind whipping across the cliff tops like it did. But first she'd finish the washing up. It was a good two-mile walk down the coast path and she had plenty of time.

She looked out of the window again, up into the sky, half expecting to see the light again. But there was nothing. Inky blackness, with just the lights of Broad Haven twinkling across the bay. What, she wondered, would Billy find down there?

She felt a chill run inexplicably down her spine, then dismissed the feeling. She'd be glad when he got back, though.

She'd better get the tea on. She timed it well. No sooner was it ready than she'd heard the front door open. Billy - wollen hat as always perched on the back of his head, his swarthy frame shivering with the cold, his boots spattered with mud - was standing there, stamping the warmth back into his feet and scowling fiercely.

'Well, I don't know what you saw, or thought you saw,' he grumbled, but with a wry grin, 'there's absolutely nothing down there now, as far as I could see with a torch, anyway...'

She helped him off with his coat.

'Nothing at all?' Pauline couldn't believe her ears. 'I'll be blowed. You'll be thinking I'm daft. Well, I'm sorry, love, but I know what I saw...'

Billy gave her a squeeze. 'Never mind all that now, girl. Quick, there's that tea? Lead me to it, before my blood freezes...!'

He started to chuckle, but stopped when he noticed the serious expression on Pauline's face.

'Listen, Bill, seriously, you better go down and have another look in the morning, first thing. Will you, please?'

He nodded. It would have been pointless to argue, in any case. Sixteen years of marriage had taught him that when Pauline had a bee in her bonnet about something she wanted done, it had to be done.

He took her by the hand and led her into the kitchen. Strange, he thought, how troubled she seemed to be. Unlike her. Normally nothing worried her unduly, not even the kids at their naughtiest. She shrugged off such things. And what was there to worry about anyway? He had his tea in silence, contemplating the thought, while Pauline laid the table ready for breakfast the following day. Breakfast time was always pandemonium in the Coombs' house-hold, what with Billy having to be up at 5.30 for milking; her eldest boy, Clinton, getting up shortly after to get to work at the farm next door; her other son, Keiron, and his twin sisters, Joann and Layann, getting up at 8 o'clock for school. She looked at her watch. It was gone midnight. Time for bed. She'd go on up ahead of Billy and leave him to put *Blackie*, their labrador, out for the night and then lock up. She'd sleep well tonight. It had been a long day.



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Pauline rolled over restlessly and looked at the clock again. Three thirty-five. Billy's snoring was irritating her in a way it never normally did. But it wasn't *that* that was keeping her awake. It was that damn light. She couldn't rid herself of the memory of it, hanging there in the sky, swaying back and forth, to and fro, like it was waving to her, watching her. She didn't understand what it all meant but somehow she had the feeling she hadn't seen the last of it. This was just the beginning of something.

But what?

The thought troubled her, until sleep at last overtook her.

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MORE WELSH UFOs

A predicted increase in UFO sightings over South Wales has proved correct and there have been more sightings during the first fortnight of the New Year.

Pauline put the *Western Mail* down on the breakfast table and sat slowly back in her chair, chewing her lip thoughtfully. Was it possible? Could *that* have been what she'd seen? She didn't believe all that Flying Saucer rubbish but then again...

She read on.

Reports from as far apart as Haverfordwest and Pontypool refer to bright lights and mysterious objects being seen in the sky. All the sightings will be fully reported to the British Unidentified Flying Object Research Association. The regional coordinator for BUFORA in South Wales has received five reports of sightings within the last seven to ten days, including a bright light apparently landing in a field near Haverfordwest, cigar shaped objects near Burry Port and of a machine seen in the air over Milford Haven.

Pauline poured herself another cup of tea and stirred it contemplatively, her gaze wandering out of the window to the rolling fields beyond, and she savoured the stillness in the house, now that Billy and Clinton were at work and the kids were at school. A bright light apparently landing in a field? Could it possibly be the same thing, or the same sort of thing that she'd seen? Maybe she ought to tell these 4 BUFORA people about what she'd seen. But would they believe her? It *had* been a couple of days since she saw the light, she'd seen nothing else since then and Billy had found nothing unusual when he'd looked down there. Perhaps she'd do better to keep quiet about it? Anyway, Billy would be back in a minute with Clinton for their mid-morning cup of tea - she'd ask them what they thought, though she knew already what Billy's reaction would be. Clinton? He was so shy and introverted he'd probably just shrug and say 'Wouldn't know really' in his customary fashion.

'Flying Saucers? Think you saw a Flying Saucer, do you? Bloody nonsense, girl,' shrieked Billy when she showed him the paper, just like she knew he would, 'don't talk so wet - you've been reading too many comics!'

Pauline shrugged and found herself laughing with him, against herself.

'Mind you,' he said suddenly, interrupting the laughter, 'something damn strange *has* started going on along the coast path. I was just down there, near the spot where your light thing came down - a little bit further along from where I was looking to see if there was anything unusual and found nothing - and the place is absolutely alive with unmarked army trucks, soldiers in camouflage uniforms and about fifty frogmen. When I asked one of the frogmen what they were up to, he tells me there's been a landslide there and they were there to build the coast path back, but that's all he could tell me and I couldn't go any closer. Strangest carry-on, it is - the army rebuilding a coast path *and* the navy rebuilding the same path at the same time, but underwater! They reckon they'll be there for a week, too! Beats me what they're really up to. Probably something to do with that American submarine tracking place. They're probably laying cables or something.

Pauline nodded in agreement but remained unconvinced. By the quizzical look on Billy's face as he sipped his tea and then left to get back to the milking sheds, she could see even he wasn't convinced by his own explanation.

She followed him out of the back door and watched him walk around the Corner into the drive. Strange that Clinton hadn't turned up. He was normally so punctual. She went back into the kitchen to freshen the pot.

As she looked out of the window, back at the view over the cliffs that she knew so well, her mind started wandering, assimilating the facts. Logic told her to dismiss any thoughts of UFOs or suchlike. If the authorities *were* so interested in it - and surely it couldn't be a coincidence that they were so interested in the precise spot it came down - then it *must* have been something to do with the Army, Navy or Air Force.

She jumped when Clinton came up suddenly behind her. 'What's the matter, Mum? Seeing little green men in the garden this time?'

'Tea up, is it?'

She gave him a playful cuff around the ear.

'I've told you before, Clint, don't DO that. You frightened the life out of me...'

She poured the tea. 'And listen, young man, none of that silly talk around Keiron or the twins. You don't want to be giving the youngsters ideas, or frightening them, do you?'

She could tell by his expression that he wouldn't have minded in the least, but he understood and agreed. He was a good lad. Sixteen he was and growing fast; responsible for his age and remarkably mature with his brothers and sisters, even when impossibly teased.

'Seriously though, Mum - you don't actually believe any of that stuff about flying saucers do you? Honestly?'

'Course not, Clint; don't talk so wet...'

He gave her a curious sidewise look and she managed a sarcastic smile in return. Just.

Two

DALE 13 miles.

Pauline sighed and smiled when she saw the sign. Nearly home. She was tired and looking forward to getting back, but she never minded having Duggie Richards - Keiron's best friend from school - over to the farm to play with him and the twins. It kept them all out of her hair on a Saturday, and as that was the only day that Billy took off during the week - and the only time they seemed to get a chance to spend any real time together - it suited her admirably to have them out in the fields messing around and not careering around the house bothering everybody.

She looked at her watch. Just gone eight. They were making good time. She had promised the kids they could come along for the ride when she took Duggie home, and then watch *The Six Million Dollar Man* on TV at 8.35, when they got back. If they missed the beginning of it, they'd never forgive her.

'We going to be in time, Mum?'

She looked at Keiron, next to her in the passenger seat, and smiled. He must have been reading her mind.

'Just right,' she assured him, glancing over her shoulder at the twins who were being uncommonly quiet in the back seat of the old Zodiac.(insert picture) 'But straight to bed afterwards, mind? All right?'

'Nearly straight afterwards,' insisted Layann - always the more mischievous of the twins - as she nudged Joann into a sheepish grin.

'You're a baby and babies shouldn't even be up at this hour,' teased Keiron.

'Keiron, enough...'

Pauline gave him a nudge and winked. He was a rascal sometimes, was Keiron, the way he teased the girls, but he often got as good as he gave.

Not far now, she thought, sweeping the car around the last wide corner that would take them along the final seven mile stretch of gloomy country road to Ripperstone Farm.

Billy would have the fire roaring in the (fire-)grate by now and if he hadn't fallen asleep in front of it, he would also have put the kettle on. He and Clinton would already have fixed themselves something to eat, with a bit of luck, so there would be nothing to do when she got back but put the kids to bed after *The Six Million Dollar Man* and settle down to watch a bit of television herself - providing it was still working, of course. **How on earth two television sets could have overloaded and burned out all their wiring in a matter of two weeks was a complete mystery to her - as it was to the five repair men who had, between them, tried to fix/ mend them.** The second set was electronically tuned, too. They'd put over a hundred new parts into that set, but it still wouldn't work. Must be something to do with the wiring in the house, she mused. She must remember to get an electrician in to look the house over.

She glanced at the rear view mirror. Layann had fallen asleep on Joann's shoulder. That was a blessing. She could put her straight to bed when they got in and that would be one less child to have to persuade to go to sleep. Never mind her joking about it; Layann, in particular, needed coaxing to bed at the moment, after the bad dreams she'd been having. Poor love, she thought, waking up like that, screaming and crying. Strange how it had happened twice and both times a television had overloaded and its wiring burned out the same night. She'd had the same dream on both occasions, too - a giant shadowy figure waking her and then drifting noiselessly out of the room, across the landing and into her and Billy's room opposite. Pauline had never seen any of the kids as frightened as Layann had 'been on those two nights - and so insistent she was **that she hadn't dreamed what she'd seen, but that it really had happened.** Billy had eventually got quite angry with her for frightening the rest of the kids. As he tried to explain to her at the time, she *must* have been dreaming because if there *had* been anyone in the house - in either her and Joann's room, or the boys' room next door, or in her and Billy's room opposite - somebody would certainly have seen them when she started screaming and everybody rushed in to see what was the matter. Layann wouldn't listen, though. **She was, she said, absolutely certain she was wide awake on both occasions.** Since then she'd insisted on sleeping with her and Billy.

Let's hope nothing odd happens tonight, Pauline thought to herself. In the two weeks since she'd seen that damn light, all manner of weird things had been happening. As well as the television sets overloading, dozens of lightbulbs had exploded - sometimes immediately after they were put in - and Billy had lost count of the fuses that had blown in his milk machines. And Layann wasn't the only child claiming to have had frightening experiences. Clinton, of all people, had his own story to tell. Only a few mornings back, he'd come down to breakfast looking quite shaken and claimed to have heard this low-pitched humming outside the window while he was lying in the bath.

'Noise like a generator,' he'd said, 'but just outside the bathroom window, and then it sort of came through the closed window and filled the room around me. Got me out of the bath in double quick time, I can tell you!'

He'd laughed at the time, but nervously. He, of all the kids, was the least likely to imagine such a thing. If he said he'd heard such a noise and it behaved in such a way, then that must have been exactly what happened. What could it have meant? She shrugged. Heaven knows what any of it meant.

She turned to Keiron, curious to see why he was so uncommonly quiet.

'All right, love?' For a moment she thought he was asleep, for he didn't answer. 'Keiron?'

'Hmm... sorry, Mum... but look at that, up there...'

I've been watching for ages . . . can't make it out... what do you make of it....?'

He was leaning forward now, head craned, frowning.

'Look there...'

She followed the direction of his gaze, high up into the night sky.

It was back. The light. Hovering in the sky.

She bit her lip. Billy and she had decided not to say any-thing to the younger children about the first time she'd seen the light, for fear of worrying them. There was quite enough UFO nonsense being talked about at the time, any-way. It had been going on for three months already, being widely written up in the local press and although they didn't believe in such things, many people in the area, particularly children, *had* been unnerved by some of the stories. Hadn't even she started wild imaginings about the light, only two weeks earlier?

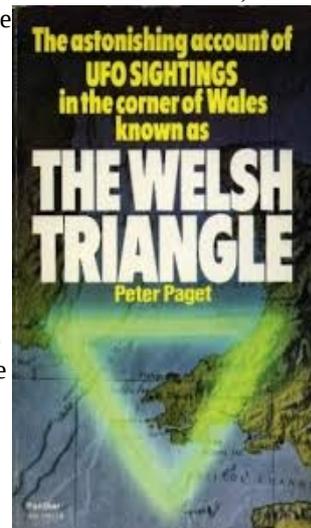
'Probably just a star, an aeroplane light or a flare,' she said dismissively, glancing up at it again.

'Can't be,' muttered Keiron, 'stars don't sway around like that and they aren't that orange colour, nor do aeroplane's lights look like that or behave like that...'

Pauline knew he was right. It was just like before, she thought, then tutted to herself. She'd be believing those newspaper stories next.

And *what* stories! She cast her mind back. Six people had claimed to have seen UFOs in December, and since then - in the three months past - more than fifty people had reported to the police that they'd seen mysterious flying objects in the area. She'd read all the reports in the local papers and there had been so many that one newspaper had even dubbed the area between Broad Haven, Swansea and Mid-Wales, '*The Welsh Triangle*'.

Two schoolboys on their way to a youth club in Haverfordwest and a housewife on her way home from the shops had claimed to have seen a saucer-shaped object, pulsating with green and yellow lights, hovering over an office block in the town centre; the same two children had later claimed to have seen a pulsating blue light in a field near their school that rose quickly into the air as they approached. It had so frightened them that they ran all the way to the local police station and reported it immediately. One of their friends at the same school, on a different morning, told police he'd heard a buzzing or droning noise and had seen a bright silver metallic object hovering over nearby Pembroke. He'd told police: 'It had a dome in the middle that was dark grey most of the time, but flashed to a dazzling white every five seconds. It looked like a plate with a burned fried egg on it and around the rim of the plate it had greenish-yellow lights and what seemed to me to be retro-rockets. The plate seemed to be revolving as well. It was quite clear and I had a good view of it.'



Pauline shrugged. Why on earth anybody should believe such childish stories? As Billy had said, they'd probably been reading too many comics. But then again, what happened recently at Broad Haven School was a bit strange. *Fourteen children had all claimed to have seen a large, silver saucer-shaped craft in a field three hundred yards from their school and when their headmaster had interviewed them all separately and asked them to draw what they'd seen, he'd been amazed at the similarities of all the descriptions and drawings.* One boy wrote: 'It was flattish, with ten or eleven windows and a door with a runway leading from it. It was partly hidden in a clump of trees. Shaun and David saw it first and came running in saying that they'd seen something strange, so we all went up to the field to have a look. We all saw something silver and disc-shaped. David and Tudor said they saw a silver figure, but we didn't...'

'Their stories were the same and have remained the same,' their headmaster had since said. 'Even at my age and normally sceptical, I have to admit I think they saw something. I don't believe that children of junior school age are capable of playing such a sophisticated prank...'

Pauline sighed to herself. Billy and she had laughed long and loud at many of the earlier UFO reports from children, but *that* report was definitely a bit strange.

They'd both dismissed it, to begin with, as being a case of mistaken identity, but it had made them wonder. Only a few days after the children's sighting, their stories had been given a curiously back-handed piece of confirmation when two of the school's canteen staff saw what they thought was a silver sewage lorry in the same field, but when Mr Llewellyn - the headmaster - had gone to investigate he found that the field was so muddy it would have been totally inaccessible to any vehicle. The two women had said they'd seen a figure climb into the 'object' and watched it move across the field. Not only that, but other adults were also backing up the children's stories with stories of their own. Another woman in the area had reported to the police that she was out walking in Broad Haven when something silvery in the sky caught her eye and she 'stopped, looked and could clearly see a large flying object, oval in shape with a slight dome on the top of it, hovering over the town'. **Then again, two company directors driving along the Newcastle-Carmarthen road had reported to the police that they'd seen 'a huge, cigar-shaped machine, at least twenty foot long, cross our path a hundred yards ahead. It was so low it would have taken the top off a double decker bus. It made no sound and we thought it was going to crash. We braced ourselves for an explosion, but there was none. It seemed to come down in a field, but when we stopped and looked there was nothing there. We'd never seen anything like it in our lives before. It had no**

wings, tail fins, or protrusions, how it flew at all is beyond us...'

All right, Pauline mused to herself, so it was very strange that so many people - prominent people many of them - had all reported seeing similar inexplicable flying objects at the same time in the same area, but there must, surely, be a logical explanation for it all, just as there must be a logical explanation about the light she had seen - and now this one, still hanging in the night sky, glowing above them.

She pulled the car into the right hand turning at the last road junction to home, and accelerated down the final three-mile stretch of gloomy country lane that would take them to *Ripperstone Farm*. She glanced up at the light. Strange. Logically, if it was hovering in the sky, as it had seemed to be, it should now be behind them. But it wasn't. It was now dead ahead. It must have started moving in their direction.

Keiron was now excitedly pointing at it. 'Look, look, he was saying, 'it's getting really bright'.

'I can't look, love, I'm trying to drive, aren't I?'

She was getting irritated now. Tiredness, she reasoned. 'I told you, it's probably just a star, that's all...'

'Can't be, ma, it's moving now - quite fast...'

'Aeroplane, then?'

'No, couldn't be. It's much too fast, too bright...'

'Well I don't know, Kei. Never mind what it is. We're nearly home and you'd better get the twins' things together,' she said, anxious just to get home, get unloaded and get settled in for the night.

But Keiron was insistent. Suddenly he grabbed her arm. The old car swerved momentarily, the headlights weaving erratically across the road, illuminating first one hedge, then the other.

'KEIRON,' she snapped, 'that's ENOUGH. PLEASE. Don't be so daft...'

Keiron was paying her no attention, though. He was pointing again at the light with one hand, the other one gripping the dashboard.

'But ma, look. . . it is moving and even faster now... it's coming down out of the sky really fast... towards us, isn't it?'

Pauline looked up to where the light had been. Keiron was right. The light *had* moved from high up in the sky in front of them, to quite low on the horizon - and it *was* getting brighter. That would mean it was coming closer. They were driving directly towards it.

Despite the glare, she could make it out quite clearly as it sped out of the darkness at them; an orange, phosphorescent globe of light, no more than twelve feet off the road, illuminating the top of the hedges on each side of it as it raced along the road towards them. It looked to be only a few hundred yards away.

'Ma, ma, what *is* it? What do you reckon it *is*? ' Keiron tugged desperately at her sleeve and the car swerved again.

'Keiron, will you STOP that,' she snapped at him. It was useless. Now he'd turned and woken up the twins in the back of the car, telling them to look at what was happening.

'If it doesn't change course, it's going to crash into us,' he was saying.

'Ma, do something...'

'KEIRON, shut up. Now look what you've done,' said Pauline, glancing in the rear view mirror, to see both Layann and Joann, in the dimness of the back seat, looking wide-eyed ahead of them.

Her eyes went back to the road, where - just beyond the probing beams of the headlights, out in the blackness of the night - the orange glow was getting bigger. Keiron was right. Much further and much faster and it - whatever it was - *would* collide with them. She accelerated, hoping and praying it would fly over them and past them. Keiron, silent now, was clenching the dashboard with both hands, and glancing nervously at her. Both twins were asking her what was happening. She wished she knew. And still the light came at them. *She clenched the steering wheel tightly in anticipation of the impact, but the ball of light - flashing along at tree height - sped over them, momentarily dazzling her and lighting the car up as it did so.*

'Dear God, what *was* that? What's happening?' she heard herself say. 'Keiron, what happened to it? Did it crash?'

Keiron turned quickly in his seat and looked out of the rear view window.

'It didn't, ma,' he was saying, 'it's still there going at a fantastic speed away from us, it's already a couple of hundred yards away... no... no... wait... it's turning, it's turning. . . Ma, it's coming back, very low, along the road... it's following us...'

Pauline bit her lip. Thank God we're nearly home, she thought to herself. Got to get home. How far was it? Not far, surely? She accelerated. The old car bumped and splashed down the thin, winding hill. Only a few miles to the little lane that led off the road the last half-mile to the farm.

'Keiron, where is it now?'

No answer. Keiron evidently hadn't heard her, the twins were now crying and fretting so loudly in the back.

'KEIRON,' she shouted, 'the light, where is it?'

Keiron at last replied, his voice subdued with fear: 'Right behind us, Ma. It's right behind us... coming up on your side...'

She didn't need telling. Suddenly the rear view mirror picked up the image of the fiery orange globe, momentarily dazzling her. Then it was gone for a split second, then back again, this time pulsating right ne~ to the window beside her, lighting up the side of the car. She clenched the steering wheel still tighter, fighting to keep the cumbersome car on a true course down the hill, the headlights now flashing everywhere, first to one

hedge, then the other. And still the light was to her right, just out of vision. She glanced sideways. Like a gleaming, orange football, dazzling bright, a white, torch-like beam of light shining down from underneath it. But what was it? What was it trying to do? The twins, now screaming in fright, were leaning over her seat, clutching her around the shoulders: 'Ma, Ma, what *is* it? Please do something, please make it stop,' they shouted over and over.

'Keiron, get the twins off me. Get them to sit down,' she instructed him. He didn't move, nor did he seem to hear, sitting motionless in the seat next to her, fists clenched, head bowed. The twins began grabbing at her more hysterically and the car began swerving dangerously across the road. She began sobbing herself. Please God let them get home. Then there was the turning. Only half a mile. But wait. The headlights were going dim. Can't see properly. They're failing. Just turned the corner safely. Please God let the lights last for long enough to get them down the lane to home.

She glanced to her right. The globe of light was still there right next to her, racing along parallel to the car, pacing them. She gritted her teeth against her sobbing.

They had to make it. But the lights had failed now, they'd gone completely. Blackness ahead. Completely black. And inside the car, darkness except for the orange glow from the light. And now . . . what was that? No power. No accelerator. **The car was dead.** The light was stopping them. Dear God, it mustn't. Not now. Not so close. They could free-wheel from here, it was only a hundred yards. Hold the car straight... there are the lights from the farm. Nearly there.

She started crying openly, the tears blurring her vision. Billy, please be there.

The car was slowing, stopping, had stopped, but where was the light? It was suddenly so dark, so still. Had it gone? It wasn't next to her window. But wait. That glow that faint orange glow... where was it coming from? It wasn't anywhere around the car . . . it must be overhead... but why? What was it waiting for?

No matter. They were home. Must get the kids out of the car and inside. They weren't safe here.

'Kieron, get over the passenger seat and into the back and get the twins out as fast as you can,' she called over the children's screams, 'I'll follow...

Keiron was motionless, still trembling, head bowed. She shook him into action, pushing him over the seat, then helping him to prise the twins off from around her neck, where they still clung. Still crying, the three children fell out of the rear door of the car in panic, Pauline following them into the darkness, stumbling after them, urging them on, never looking back. On and on, down the last remaining yards of the dark lane, up the garden path, into the warm light of the farmhouse porch.

'BILLY. Open the door. Open it. Please. Please hurry...

'Bloody hell, love, what on earth's the matter? What's happened to you?'

Billy looked at his family in bewilderment when he opened the door, Clinton behind him. He took Pauline in his arms. Keiron grabbed him and started sobbing. The twins, weeping uncontrollably, clung to their eldest brother for comfort.

'Clint, take Keiron and the twins into the front room,' ordered Billy, then turned and looked into Pauline's tear-stained eyes. 'Now tell me slowly, love. What the hell's going on here? What's happened?'

'Oh God, Billy... I don't know, some light, some bright ball of light came down at us out of the sky, nearly hit us, then followed us all the way home... it stopped the car, hung over us... it's still there... you've got to do something...

The words came out in a torrent and she began shaking. Billy nestled her to him and took her gently into the front room and sat her down next to the fire with the children.

'Help the kids, love. They're worse off than you. I shan't be a minute. I'll just go outside with Clinton and see what's happening.'

The two men walked quickly out into the night, Billy frowning and shaking his head incredulously, Clinton hurrying along behind. 'Damn me, what's going on *now*? Lights following people home? I've never heard anything so daft...'

Clinton was unconvinced. Like his father, he knew Pauline was no person to panic in the way she had done. Nor was she one to frighten easily. Many a time she'd walked the land around the farm on errands for Billy at the dead of night, in total darkness, armed only with a small torch. She didn't spook easily. To be as frightened as she was, something must have happened...

They turned the corner at the end of the garden path and started up the lane. A couple of yards. Then stopped. The silhouetted shape of the car was already visible in the darkness, bathed as it was in a ray of white light emanating from the orange globe of light that hung motionless over it.

'My God, look...' Billy's words hung in the air.

Clinton grabbed his father's arm. 'Dad... what is it?'

Billy shook his head and fell back a few paces in surprise, further shielding Clinton. 'Damndest thing I ever saw. I've no idea...

'What'll we do?'

Before Billy could answer, the light moved suddenly. The beam of light vanished, the globe itself streaked off at an angle, high up over the house, across the fields behind him and down in the direction of the cliff edge in the distance.

And gone.

The two men looked at each other, their expressions reflecting their disbelief in what they'd seen. It was now pitch black again. Billy fumbled in his pocket for his torch, switched it on and they followed its beam to the stranded car. Neither spoke. The only noise was the crunching of gravel beneath their feet. Billy tried the engine and the lights. Dead. Together they rolled the car down to the front of the house, where they left it, before going inside to check on the rest of the family.

Pauline and the children were sitting in silence, tears tamed and bewildered, but calmer now. Billy told them that they, too, had seen the globe, but that it had left. Clinton went into the kitchen to make a plate of sandwiches and some cocoa for them all. After a while, relative composure had settled over them as they tried to comfort one another by explaining away what they'd all seen. A trick of light, surely? Impossible. Something else? What else? No explanation seemed to fit. But no matter. It was over. The light had gone. They were together, at home, safe. That was all that mattered.

Pauline, feeling better in herself, began to worry about the after-effects on the children. She didn't want them to have nightmares - least of all Layann, after all her dreaming about phantom figures prowling the house at night. She suggested quietly to Billy that they should still be allowed to watch the rest of *The Six Million Dollar Man* and perhaps the programme that followed it. It would help take their minds off what had happened.

Billy leaned over to her, shaking his head slowly, and whispered in her ear: 'Not possible, love. Just before you and the kids arrived with that light thing over the car, *this* television suddenly overloaded and burned out all its wiring, just like the others...

Three

Spring. A typical April morning.

Pauline looked out from the kitchen window across the rolling green fields bathed in mid-morning sunshine, out over the cliff edge to the twinkling sea beyond. Beautiful. Her favourite view of her favourite season. Winter - with all the rigours it brought with it - was truly over and one of the nicest farming seasons was with them. Her gaze wandered skywards as it now always tended to, ever since she had first seen the light. It had been three weeks since she and the kids had been chased by the ball of light, but time hadn't dimmed the memory. It was not through lack of trying, either. Nobody had, in fact, mentioned the incident since then, not since Billy had been unhappy with the local newspaper story that had come out about it. He still couldn't bring himself to believe in such 'comic-book things' as UFOs - as she herself could barely bring herself to - and they had both feared not only ridicule within the Community, but that the children would get even more frightened by further reminders of what had happened. He just didn't want to talk about the incident any more and the family respected his wishes.

But it hadn't helped. The family *did* remember, all too well, and it rested uneasily on their minds. With good reason. Even if they *had* been able to forget, there had been an increasing number of other inexplicable happenings during the intervening weeks, bringing the memory sharply back into focus and quietly unnerving everybody. Something was definitely wrong with the house and the family. Billy, normally so rumbustious and cheerful, was often irritated and impatient; Clinton, normally so withdrawn/ introverted and so much of a loner, was even more so; Joann and Layan, normally as playful and mischievous as any two schoolgirls of their age, were more subdued. And herself? She pondered the thought. Though single-minded, she had to go along with Billy in his scepticism about such things as UFOs, flying saucers, space craft, or call them what you will. They were ordinary farming folk with the down to-earth basic values of farming folk. What did they know of such things - or even care about them?

But on the other hand, what the hell *had* started happening to them and their lives? Normally everything was as predictable as the seasons - the way they liked it - but now it had become so complicated. The light in the sky, the light chasing the car; Layann's phantom figure in the house; Clinton's strange humming noise outside the bathroom window; all those fuses that had blown and the light bulbs that had exploded; the three cars and three television sets that had suddenly burned out all their wiring. It had all happened within three months - ever since she first saw the light in the sky that night - and they could find no explanation for any of it. Why *shouldn't* she

- or the rest of the family - feel a bit frightened? They had problems, but could solve none of them and could seemingly find nobody who could.

No local car mechanic could explain what had been happening to their cars - how all the wiring except the parts made out of copper could suddenly burn itself to a cinder (=ashes)- and, similarly, no local TV engineer had been able to explain why the same thing was happening to their televisions. Though it wouldn't explain what happened to the cars, but just in case it was something to do with faulty wiring in the house she'd even taken the trouble to get an electrician in to check the whole place over.

When he'd come, she'd told him about everything that had been happening and how the whole family were now also suffering electric shocks when they touched the taps and how worried Billy was about the soaring electricity bills. The engineer had agreed to check every appliance in the house and all the wiring. Everything, he said at the time, was in perfect working order. The wiring? It looked fine. Then he'd checked the meters to see where the high consumption was coming from.

'Totally impossible. Absolutely impossible. It's the most incredible thing I've ever seen. Inexplicable.' He'd turned off the electricity at the mains supply, yet the meters were still going round. **'An awful lot of voltage is being drained from this house,' he had said, looking totally bewildered, 'but where it's going to, and how it's going, I couldn't tell you...'**

Billy hadn't believed it at the time. He'd insisted on having the whole place rewired, especially because the electrician had speculated that they were living in a force field and had said that the whole house was so alive with electricity he was amazed someone hadn't been electrocuted. It hadn't done any good, though. All the problems had remained.

She sighed to herself. What was going to happen next? She shook herself out of her day-dream. Time to get back to matters of daily routine. There was everybody's lunch to get ready. Billy would be in shortly from fencing in the lower field, Clinton would be coming over from next door's farm and Keiron and the twins would be in from school.

She busied herself with the cooking and had the food on the table just as everyone arrived. Billy, normally so hungry he sat down immediately and tucked straight in, came straight over to her, took her arm and led her gently to one side.

'Come into the front room, love,' he whispered, 'I've got something really odd to tell you'

Leaving his food on the table and the rest of the kids to eat their lunches, he guided her to the next room and sat her down.

'Just been talking to your brother, Terry, haven't I? Told me the queerest story. Seems he had to tell someone, it was driving him potty (=crazy) keeping it to himself and I'm not surprised. Seems your 12-year-old nephew, young Mark, frightened the wits out of the family about ten days ago with some tale of having met a spaceman in a field near here. Came home one night sobbing and trembling and nearly hysterical he did; reckons he was in that field behind their house - about a hundred yards from the house - when this huge great figure in a silver suit appeared from a glowing, red, saucer-shaped object and started walking towards him. Young Mark apparently walked back to the edge of the field - near the road - and the figure kept coming towards him. Under the street light he saw quite clearly what he looked like. He reckons he was very tall, had a square, helmeted head with a black visor, an aerial sticking up from one shoulder and was wearing a silver suit and black heelless boots. Well, you can imagine how I laughed when Terry told me, but Terry's not so sure. As he says himself, young Mark's a very responsible lad, not given to telling tales and he was apparently scared half out of his mind when he got home. Not only that, but Terry reckons he went back to where Mark said he was followed by this figure and found a giant footprint in some slurry. Isn't that the damndest thing you ever heard? Anyway, listen love, don't tell the kids, all right? They'll probably get to hear about it anyway, but we don't want to frighten them, even if it is a load of bloody nonsense, which I'm sure it is...

Billy stood up, chuckling and shaking his head incredulously, and started back to the kitchen.

She knew Mark, her nephew, very well. Never was a child more honest or less likely to make up such a preposterous story. And even if he *had* done, why was he frightened to the point of hysteria? And where did that giant footprint come from? She sighed deeply, shook her head, got up and went back into the kitchen to join Billy and the family. Neither mentioned what they had heard. She, in a way, would have liked to; particularly she would have liked to talk to Mark. But she wouldn't, not with Billy already thinking the whole affair was a load of non-sense. She shrugged. He was probably right.

After lunch she said goodbye to Billy and the kids as they went about their separate ways, and set about tidying and getting ready for dinner that evening. She looked forward to Friday nights as that was when she and Billy stayed up to watch the midnight movie on television, a luxury they could afford on that particular night, as Billy's half-day was on the Saturday.

He'd be late home that night, as it happened. Another - the fourth in three months - had inexplicably burned all its wiring to a cinder and he planned to go down the road to a neighbouring farm to try and borrow a car until they could buy a new one. She shuddered at the memory of what had happened to that last car. This time the wiring had burned out when Billy started it and the car had burst into flames in the forecourt of a nearby garage. They had put it out just in time. Somebody could have been killed. She dismissed the thought from her mind. Billy would be hungry when he got in. She'd cook him something special. The film was *Chukka*, starring Chuck Connors. It should be a good evening.

*

Pauline looked at her watch as she heard the front door opening. Ten o'clock. Just as he'd promised. She'd never known anyone in her life as punctual as Billy. Dinner was already on the table, she'd got the fire roaring in the grate and the television was tuned in to the right channel for the start of the film at ten thirty-five. After dinner she'd leave the washing up in the sink and settle straight down with Billy in front of the fire.

'Aah, that's the life,' said Billy, groaning with pleasure as he discarded his Wellingtons, stretching out in his

favourite armchair by the window and warming his feet by the fire. 'A Western, is it? That's grand. Just the job...'

Pauline smiled to herself as she stretched out on the sofa opposite him and wondered if he'd last out to the end of the film, or sink into a deep sleep as he so often did. One hour later he was snoring loud enough to raise the roof. Pity, it was a grand film' just the sort he loved; plenty of action. Maybe she should wake him? Get them both some tea? No, let him sleep on. She smiled to herself again as she watched him sleep, slumped to one side, mouth open, woollen hat still perched on the back of his head as it always was. A picture of contentment.

If only Blackie was as contented. She'd never known him to be so restless. Normally he'd lie in typical labrador-fashion at his master's feet in front of the fire. But not tonight. For the last hour he'd been padding around the room furiously, weaving in and out of the furniture, sniffing the ground, ears pricked up, tail between his legs. She'd put him out if he didn't settle down soon.

And now... it looked like visitors. Car headlamps coming down the drive to judge from the light reflection on the window. Who on earth would be visiting at this time of night? They hadn't invited anyone. A pity, it was so peaceful, too - apart from Blackie's confounded behaviour. Company was the last thing they wanted. But wait - there was no noise on the gravel and the flickering light against the window pane hadn't passed by, but was still there. Strangest thing. Oh well, no matter...

She snuggled back into the sofa and tried to blot out the sound of Billy's snoring so that she could concentrate on the film. That constant flickering at the window didn't help. Like a glistening chandelier it was, and quite pretty really, but it really distracted from the film. An hour it had been there already. She'd better look and see what it was. But no, that would mean disturbing Billy - it was nearly one o'clock in the morning in any case and the film was nearly over. It could wait.

'What's the matter, love?'

She'd been so busy looking at the flickering light at the window, she hadn't noticed Billy wake up.

'Nothing, love,' she assured him.

'Somebody's car isn't?' he said, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes, 'damn headlights at the window must have woke me up...

She was about to tell him that it couldn't be, when he turned and looked over his shoulder to check for himself.

Next thing he was on his feet, arms crossed over his face as if to ward off an assailant, backing away, shouting as he stumbled towards her: 'JESUS CHRIST, what's that? What IS that...?'

The words rang in her ears, shouted so loud, so choked with fright. Her senses reeled in surprise as he pulled her to her feet and clung protectively to her. What was happening? She strained to look over his shoulder and see.

Then she saw it clearly, and as the fear clutched at her stomach and made her weak, she began to scream. There, framed clearly in the window, the towering figure of a man - or figure that looked like a man. But, dear God, so much bigger. Silver and glowing. But where was the head? She could only see the bottom of it. Impossible. The window was seven feet high, it must be. But she could only see his torso, his arms, part of the head with... what was it? A helmet, with a blacked out face? She felt faint. 'Hold me, Billy. Do something.

The words wouldn't come. Only involuntary screams. She looked at him for encouragement.

'I don't know what's happening, love. I don't know. I don't know what it is...'

She clung to him.

'Got to do something, get help, see to the kids...' he was telling her, 'go upstairs and see to the kids

He watched her go, stumbling, sobbing up the stairs. Then turned to look again. It was still there, framed in the window. Motionless, looming at the window, just... what? Looking? Watching? Waiting? For what?

Never mind. Don't look too long. Get help - and quickly. Find Blackie. He was a good guard dog. Put him outside.

Thoughts clamoured in Billy's head. He knew he had never been this frightened in his life before, but that he had to control his shaking, steady himself, act positively. Blackie was howling somewhere. The hall, probably. He went to look. There he was, crouching in the corner, just howling. My God, he was as frightened as they were.

'Come, Blackie. Comon boy - outside, see him off...' Billy backed off. Blackie looked like he had the devil in him. His teeth were bared, hackles raised, ready to attack if provoked. No time to worry, thought Billy, grabbing the snarling dog by the scruff of its neck and thrusting it out of the front door into the blackness. Useless. He might have known. No sooner on the porch, than the frightened animal, howling and with its tail between its legs, streaked down the drive away from the house.

Billy slammed the door, spun around and backed himself up against it. The trembling started again. He was breathing heavily, sweating profusely. Jesus, he was frightened. He'd never felt so alone. He must get help, outside help. And fast. He didn't want to leave the cramped security of the darkened hall and go next door into the brightness of the lounge with the creature at the window, but he must. The telephone was there. He had to ring for help.

Would it still be there? He hardly dared look as he opened the door.

It was. Just as before. Just standing at the window looking in. But wait. A movement. Billy froze, the fear choking in his throat. One of the creature's hands . . . was it a hand? . . . yes, a gloved hand... was moving, palm

outstretched and pressed against the window pane . and now the pane of glass was rattling, vibrating to his touch at an incredible speed... the lights were flickering, on and off... the television, too... what was that interference on the screen?

He felt faint, his vision blurring. But it mustn't, he thought. Help. He must get help, before anything else happened. But who? Robert Morrison, first. He was their nearest neighbour, his farm was only two miles away. He could be here in a couple of minutes. And the police. He must call the police. They could be here quickly, surely.

'Robert, hello Robert? Thank God you're there. It's Billy, Billy Coombs. come up here quickly, for God's sake come up here and help...'

'Billy? D'you know what time it is? Heave us above, it's gone one o'clock, I can't co...'

Billy cut him short.

'ROBERT, for God's sake, PLEASE...'

'You sound as if you're frightened witless, what's going on up there?... never mind... I'll be right with you... The phone went dead. Billy gasped in relief. And now the police.

999

Which service do you require, Fire, Police or...

'police, police. Broad Haven police...'

Billy glanced nervously up at the window. The figure was still there. Studying him, watching his every move.

'Hello, Broad Haven Police... 'Billy steadied himself. They must come, they had to. But would they believe him?

'Billy Coombs here, Ripperstone Farm, near Dale,' he began, trying to subdue the trembling in his voice.

'Yes, Mr Coombs, what seems to be the trouble?'

'We need help here, quickly. Please. Please could you send someone as soon as you can?'

'Need help, do you? What sort of help?'

'There's someone at the window. .

'Intruder, is it?' cut in an efficient voice.

'No, no, you don't understand. We don't know who it is... or what it is...'

'What it is?'

'It's huge. Looks like a... well... a spaceman of some sort

Billy cursed himself for having to use the word. He was sure he could hear chuckling from behind a muffled receiver.

All right sir, we'll send a car straight round to investigate your... ehr.. intruder...'

The line went dead.

He put the receiver back on the cradle with clumsy, quivering hands. *Why should* they have believed him? He didn't believe it himself.

He glanced nervously at the window. It was still there.

Crazy. This was absolutely crazy. He never had believed in such things. Not even in Mark Marston's story that very morning. Yet hadn't Mark described the same thing? He breathed in deeply, trying to rid his system of the feelings of nausea that kept sweeping over him and all the time diverting his gaze from the window - except when the compulsion grew too strong. Each time he glanced he hoped it would have gone. Yet it never had.

Pauline. . . where was she? Upstairs with the kids. He must go and see if they were all right. He started up the stairs but only got as far as the first landing before he heard the sound of distant police sirens and turned back. By the time he reached the front room, the sirens were quite clear.

The figure at the window remained.

Then it vanished, as he looked at it. Just vanished.

It was Robert Morrison who reached the house first, swiftly followed by two young constables from Broad Haven police station.

Pauline had heard them arriving and hurried the children down from upstairs, still in their night clothes, still rubbing the sleep out of their eyes, completely unaware of what had happened as she had said nothing for fear of terrifying them.

She sat them together on the sofa, then joined Robert and the two policemen who were huddled in a corner where Billy was relating what had happened.

After what he had thought to be a light-hearted response to their cry for help, Billy had been surprised by the two young policemen's readiness to listen to his story.

'So you believe what happened?' he asked one of them, still scarcely believing it himself.

'Oh sure,' came the reply, 'we've been hearing too many strange reports for too long to dismiss anything now. There's definitely something very strange going on in the area. Some of our colleagues have even seen some very odd things - UFOs and what have you. Besides, neither of us has ever seen two people as frightened as you two obviously are. Something obviously happened here...'

Pauline and Billy, still hugging each other for mutual comfort, went over their story again.

'But you're not going to go outside and investigate?' asked Pauline, when it became clear that they had no intention of doing so.

Sorry love, no way,' came the reply, 'there would be no point. We don't know what we're looking for. We'll open the front door and have a look around the garden through...'

Pauline and Billy looked knowingly at each other.

'You're frightened, too, aren't you?'

The policemen looked a little sheepish. 'Well,' said one of them in hushed tones, 'let's just say that you could do us a favour and leave the front door open while we're out there, so we can dash back inside quickly if anything happens. You see, if we do see this thing, we don't really know what to do - we'd probably end up sitting next to you, shaking, to be honest. I mean, how can you know what to do when you don't know what you're up against? You can defend yourself against another human being, but this?'

Pauline glanced up at Billy and then across at the kids, still sitting sleepily on the sofa opposite, and felt the tears coming up inside her again.

'Bill, listen to me,' she whispered to him, 'I'm not staying here with the kids a minute longer. Honest I'm not. It's not safe what with everything that's been happening - and now this. It's all leading up to something. Something terrible is going to happen here. You can take us all to my mother's house in Milford Haven, tonight...'

She started sobbing again. Billy squeezed her reassuringly and nodded to the policeman to go over and distract the kids' attention.

Now, listen, love,' he said, trying to be as firm as he could without being unkind, 'don't start. If you do, you're going to frighten the kids. We've got to behave as normally as we possibly can. We'll explain why the police came tonight put the kids to bed and talk about the rest of it tomorrow. All right? The police have said they'll stay here for an hour anyway, just in case...'

He squeezed her again. 'Now listen, nothing else is going to happen tonight, so why don't you wipe your eyes, steady up, and get the kids quietly off to bed. Meanwhile I'll get Robert and the two policemen some coffee, OK?'

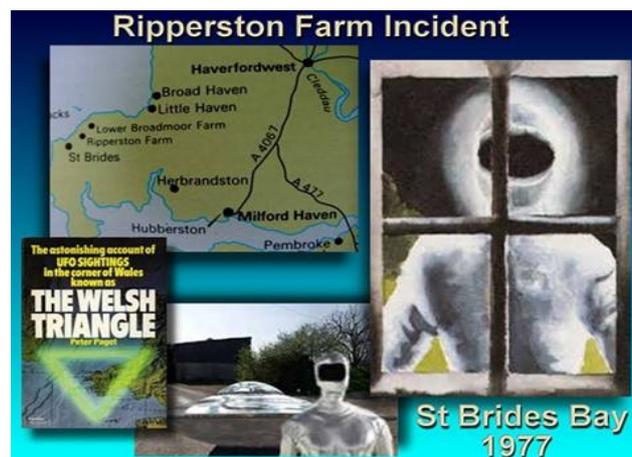
He watched her leave and usher the kids upstairs and then set about making coffee. They all needed it

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Billy and Pauline huddled close to one another in bed that night, Pauline soon succumbing to the nervous exhaustion and sobbing herself to sleep, but Billy lying awake and chain-smoking for most of the night, his mind in a turmoil of confused and worried thought. Whatever his feelings might have been before, they were certainly different now. The realisation that all the mysterious things that had been happening to his family might have a direct connection with the creature that had watched him so intently through the window frightened him desperately.

Worse still, he felt there was more to come, and wondered if there would be anybody who could help them when it did happen.

Whatever it was.



Four

'Damn the papers,' thought Billy as Pauline left the kitchen. She'd just about got over the worst of the shock at what had happened two nights previously - and now this.

He looked down at the newspaper. No wonder it had upset and worried her all over again. It worried the hell out of him. He hadn't been able to explain away the figure at the window as mere hallucination, as he would have liked to - **for they had found giant footprints in the flower bed the following morning** and the rose bush outside the window was scorched to a cinder - but he *had* hoped that both of them would at least be able to forget the incident. Some chance. It might have been a terrifying experience for them, but to the Press it was obviously - and understandably - just a good story. Reading about it, reliving it all over again was the last thing they wanted, though. To make matters worse, the article wasn't only about their experience, either - it was about another UFO sighting, this time by Robert Morrison's wife, Julia, at the farm just down the road.

He studied the article. Julia, the report said, claimed to have seen a large silver craft, over fifteen feet high and fifty foot across, and shaped like a jelly mould, standing in the garden close to their farm house. It was, she said, a bright sunny morning, just recently, and she saw it quite clearly. After ten minutes it rose noiselessly into the air and flew off leaving no traces behind it.

Billy put the paper down. Curious, he thought to himself how he still viewed such stories with scepticism, even after what he'd seen for himself only two nights earlier. Julia Morrison was certainly a serious-minded, highly intelligent and perceptive woman - a Reading University honours graduate with BSc in agriculture and an honours degree in agricultural botany - and was hardly any sort of person to fabricate such a fantastic story. Paul-ne knew that as well as he did. That's what worried them. They both knew that the other was trying privately - however hopelessly - to explain away what they'd seen, but when someone like Julia claimed to have had a similar experience, it made the task virtually impossible.

He finished his breakfast quickly and called out to Pauline to tell her he was off down the milking sheds. The ringing of the telephone drowned out what he was saying and he heard Pauline answering it as he left by the back door.

Pauline knew the voice instantly. 'Pauline? It's Rosa, Rosa Grenville from the Haven Fort Hotel, across the bay...'

She'd known Rosa ever since she and her husband, Frank, had come to live in Broad Haven six years ago and had taken over the splendid, castlelike hotel that overlooked St Bride's Bay, directly opposite them.

(inserted picture of this bay) They were a nice couple - she an effervescent, buxom lady of Spanish descent, he, in strict contrast, the shy, retiring Welshman. 'Hello, love, how are you? It's been a long time since we spoke. How's Frank...?'

'Never mind that, now. Just listen, Pauline,' said Rosa, her voice trembling and agitated, the words coming in a torrent, 'don't say anything, just listen to this, listen to what happened last night...'

Pauline caught her breath.

'Now, Pauline, you're probably going to think I'm going crazy - I'm beginning to think I am, myself - but last night, very late it was, I was looking out of the bedroom window and - right there, at the back of the hotel in the field, I saw this . . . this spaceship and these . . . er...creatures...'

There was a momentary silence. Pauline said nothing in reply.

'Anyway, what happened was I went to the window- I noticed a bright light out there and for a minute it might be poachers - you know how I've been loosing my chickens - but then I saw this giant saucer-thing with a dome on the top of it and then these two figures came out of it. It was radiating a light, such a I've never seen before. Honest to God, Pauline, a heavenly light that once seen you'd never forget. It was like daylight out there, it was that bright. I could see everything clearly. Anyway, these two creatures - I've got to call them creatures because I know they weren't beings - started bending down, looking at the ground, like they were measuring the ground or something. I could see them clear as anything, they were there for just twenty minutes and I was watching all the time. They didn't have faces, just sort of black spaces where faces should have been and they were tall, thin, fleshy looking. I was that frightened while I was watching them moving around out there, I can't tell you, but I couldn't stop looking. Then they got back into the dome of this thing, the light faded and the craft thing lifted into the air and shot off at a tremendous speed across the bay in your direction. I tell you, I still can't believe it, but I tell you one thing, I'm damn well going to find out what it was. I'm going to get on to the authorities - Brawdy Air Force Base, next door to us here - and find out if they know anything about it. They've got a duty to protect us from this sort of thing if we're in danger and I tell you, Pauline, it's frightened me out of my wits...'



Silence.

'Pauline?'

Pauline took a deep breath and steadied herself. She felt sure her voice would tremble, and she didn't want to alarm Rosa further.

'Yes, Rosa, I'm still here...'

'Well, what do you think of that? You do believe me, don't you?'

'Of course, Rosa, of course I do..'

'Frank says I shouldn't report it, but should leave it well alone in case people think we're mad. Maybe he's right, I just don't know, but I had to tell someone. Well, you do, don't you?'

Pauline was close to tears, but she fought them back.

'Yes, Rosa, you do. I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to go now, really. Look, I'll call you back a little later, all right?'

She put the phone down and began to sob. It was no use, she was going to tell Billy that they had to leave this place as soon they could.

Too much was happening and whatever it was it was getting too close for comfort. As well as their own frightening experiences, hadn't other people - over one hundred of them - reported seeing strange craft and creature~ in their immediate neighbourhood over the last five months? And now, their nearest neighbour had seen a landed spacecraft outside her home.

Where was it all leading? She knew, now, that she was too frightened to stay and find out.

*

Billy stopped and leaned on the fence, surveying the panorama of his land. In front of him, the sea. Behind him, the white-washed facade of the farmhouse bathed in the orange of the rising sun. All around him, rolling green fields, his 'cattle grazing, hedgerows alive with spring flowers.

Tranquillity. On the outside. But not within, beneath the surface. Where once everything was as predictable as the seasons, why was it now so bizarre, so confusing, so frightening? What *was* happening in the area - and why to his family in particular? It was making their lives a misery. The day after the story of the figure at the window had appeared in the local paper, the phone and door bell hadn't stopped ringing from dawn until dusk; it was as if the whole world wanted to hear, first hand, what had happened. They'd all come calling - local papers like *The Western Mail* and *The Western Telegraph*, national newspapers like *The Sun*, the *Mail*, the *Express*, the *Telegraph*, *The Observer*, even *The Times*. Local television and the BBC had been after them, as well, waving contracts. Then there were the people from the British Unidentified Object Research Association and dozens of UFO enthusiasts demanding replies to letters or asking to come and sky-watch on the farm. Originally, both he and Pauline had felt obliged to report what they had seen and what had happened to them. But not any more. Their lives were not their own any more and there had been too many tongue-in-cheek comments, too many inferences that they were lying, too many blatantly insulting attempts to trip them up with clever questions. In desperation they'd even offered to take truth drugs or lie detector tests but their offers were never taken up.

And that wasn't the worst of it. Even the locals were overreacting. Pauline had been jibed at in the local shop with people saying things like: 'We'll be seeing you in a Smash commercial next, won't we love?' and laughing openly in her face. For his own part, Billy had suffered the opposite reaction. Down at a nearby garage, a local resident had confronted him hostilely, accusing him of frightening his family to such an extent that his mother refused to live in the area any more, and of bringing down the value of his land. 'You've damn well got to stop making up these stories,' he had said, 'you're frightening everyone so much...'

'Frightening everyone?' Billy had countered, 'how the hell do you think I and my family feel?'

The man had been unsympathetic and had promptly thrown a punch at him.

No wonder Pauline was anxious to leave the farm. It was only by reminding her that nobody in the area had been injured by the craft or the creatures, that he'd been able to convince her that there was no danger in staying. Not that she'd really been convince.

Nor, secretly, was he.

But there was work to do and he was behind schedule already. There were extra chores to do because Clinton was being so bloody silly at the moment. Normally when Clint helped him on the farm it was his job to get the cows out of the sheds early in the morning after milking and put them out to graze. Normally. What he'd been up to yesterday was anybody's business. He'd come back to the milking sheds talking some nonsense about how he couldn't get the cows to go into Clover Park, the lowest field. He'd tried everything, but they simply refused to go. Eventually, he'd had to lose valuable time himself, leaving the cleaning of the milking machines, to go and do it himself. Mind you, Clint had been right about the herd being difficult. To begin with, they'd stampeded at him and damn nearly trampled him rather than go into the field and when he did eventually get them to go in, they'd stampeded all over the place in a mad panic. He was down near the field now, for fencing. He'd have another look to see what the matter was.

Funny how non-farming folk take grass so much for granted, he mused, as he paced across Clover Park. To a farmer, grass was like gold dust and to lose it to flood or drought was a disaster. Especially this grass. He bent down and picked a handful. Tall, thick, moist, it was. Perfect for grazing. And the cows would have known that

better than anyone, so why on earth didn't they want to come in and...

He froze momentarily in his tracks. That was strange; there was an enormous dark patch of something, about fifty feet across, in the grass in front of him. He walked a little closer. A patch of swamp perhaps? No, it couldn't be - there hadn't been any rain. Oil spillage from one of the tractors? Not possible, there hadn't been any tractors in this field recently.

What the devil could it be, then?

He walked on to the patch of ground and stood in the middle of it, then crouched down and stroked the palm of his hand along it. Incredible. Just incredible. A perfectly circular area of ground where all the grass had been scorched and flattened.

What the hell could have happened there? He'd never seen anything like it in his life before. But the cows - of course, this was the field they suddenly wouldn't go into.

The ground looked as though it *had* to have been scorched and flattened by something mechanical. Could it be possible? Some craft or other - like the ones that Julia and others had reported seeing? It seemed, as ever, impossible for him to believe in such things - a flying saucer landing and taking off from this exact spot on which he was standing - but what other sensible explanation fitted, bearing in mind all that had been happening recently?

But what should he tell Pauline? Should he tell her at all?

He began walking back across the fields to the farm.

He must tell her. He had to. She'd find out anyway and would never forgive him. They never kept things from each other and this was no time to start.

She was in the kitchen preparing the dinner when he got back to the farmhouse.

Just seen the queerest thing in Clover Park, love,' he told her, trying to sound as matter-of-fact as humanly possible, dirty great patch of burned and flattened grass, circular shaped . . . ' he glanced at her, hoping that she wouldn't overreact. 'Damned if I can make out what it is

Pauline said nothing, just carried on preparing the food. 'Nothing would surprise me now, love,' she said, looking

over her shoulder and flashing him a quick smile.

Billy's expression must have given him away.

'Surprised I'm not shocked, are you?' she grinned.

'Well, I'll tell you - you're quite right, they haven't actually done us any physical harm, have they, so why be so frightened of them?'

Billy nodded and gave her a knowing smile. That was more like the Pauline he knew.

*

A shame, thought Pauline, that Billy had to spend any time at all down at the cowsheds that evening. Dinner was a more relaxed affair than it had been for a long time and she would have liked an equally relaxing evening with him.

Even the kids seemed to have been happier this evening, probably because the atmosphere *was* that little bit less tense.

Dinner over, she watched Billy get ready to walk down the drive to the sheds, but she didn't go with him as she often used to. She was frightened of the dark these days -or at least the dark around the farm - as the whole family seemed to be.

He'd chided her for her silliness, but had understood. He'd never let the rest of the family know, but he was none too happy alone at night himself. He couldn't even take Blackie with him. Ever since he'd seen that creature at the window, that damn dog hadn't been the same. He'd got a wicked temper, snarling at the slightest thing and preferring to stay hidden away indoors rather than go out. At night when he was put out, he'd sit and howl and snarl in the direction of the window where the figure was seen. Maybe, thought Billy as he crunched his way down the gravel drive towards the cowshed, the dog and the cows, too, do have a sixth sense. Maybe they know exactly what's going on - and even why it's going on.

Pauline watched him from the porch of the house as he disappeared around the corner. Rather him than me, going down there at this time of night, she thought to herself, closing the door quickly and stepping in out of the darkness.

The children were so engrossed in something on the television, they scarcely noticed her walk into the room. They looked so sweet all lined up on the sofa, in order of age: Clinton, Keiron, Layann, Joann.

Tomorrow was Sunday, her favourite day, with the whole family at home. Suddenly, for the first time in weeks, she felt happier and more secure.

*

'Blast those kids, what can have happened to them?'

Pauline cursed the children for the third time in five minutes. The boys were out shooting with their air rifles and she knew the twins were out playing in the fields, but knew darned well what time Sunday lunch was.

She didn't roast a joint for fun and they knew quite well grandmother and eldest sister, Tina, who lived with

her, had come all the way over from Milford Haven for lunch. It was unforgivable. Billy stopped his carving a minute: 'I'll tan all their bottoms for them when do get here,' he promised and Pauline's mother chuckled to herself for she knew her son-in-law better than that.

Suddenly the back door flew open and Layann came bursting in, flushed and bedraggled, closely followed by Joann. Before she could ask them why they were late, the explanation came out in one, long, garbled and panicky outburst: 'Ma, ma, you've got to come and see what we've seen. A man, we saw the man first. Like the one you and Dad saw, he was. He was silver, very tall with a helmet with a blacked-out face. Me and Joann saw him first at the bottom of the field and then he walked - well, sort of floated across in front of us. He was really, really tall and of glowing and when he moved his arms didn't move.

Then he sort of. . . well . . . floated through the hedge. We were really frightened, but I said let's follow but Joann didn't want to - but we did. And we went into the next field through the gate but he wasn't there. At first we didn't see anything, but then we did. At the bottom end of that in the corner, we saw this enormous, silver, saucer-thing, with lights and windows all around it and a kind of ladder coming down from a door. Then, as we watched, the ladder went back into the thing, a red box dropped from it and then the thing rose up into the air. Then another, bigger saucer appeared above it and both flew off terribly fast but without any noise across field to the cliff edge and we didn't see them again...'

Layann stopped for breath, gasping with excitement, while Joann stood at her shoulder nodding furiously. Pauline looked nervously across at Billy.

'Now listen, you two, if you're lying I'll give you such a hiding you'll never forget it,' said Billy, advancing on the twins.

'We're not, we're not,' pleaded Joann, stepping in front of her sister, 'we just went down to where the box was dropped and we scabbled around and we couldn't find anything, but all around us we could hear this buzzing, droning noise in the air. And the grass down there, you can see for yourself, is all burned and flattened. And there are these giant footprints where he walked in the field and a landslide on the other side of the hedge where he floated through it. Honest, ma, come see for yourself...

picture below- similar case



Billy put a hand on each of the twins' heads and looked at them sternly. 'Now, I told you, if you're fibbing to me you're in for big trouble, do you understand?'

The twins nodded.

'Well, I'm going down there to look, anyway...

Billy spun around in surprise. Pauline was putting on his heavy donkey jacket and beckoning the twins out of the door.

'What about dinner, love?' he asked her, bewildered, reaching out for her arm.

'Pauline, don't,' pleaded her mother, 'you don't know *what* you might find down there...

Pauline rounded on them all. 'I'm tired of being frightened all the time,' she snapped, 'I'm damned well going down there to try and find out for myself what's going on. Better to know your enemy...

'Pauline, *please*...

Billy gestured to her mother to keep quiet. If Pauline was determined to go, nothing on earth would prevent her - and he was privately pleased to see her showing her familiar mettle.

Pauline left quickly with the twins, Tina and Blackie in hot pursuit.

The children could barely keep up with Pauline as she paced swiftly ahead of them down the front garden path, right along the drive and down past the cowsheds and finally out into the fields beyond.

"There, ma, he was there.

Pauline looked where Layann indicated, when they got *the* bottom of the field they had taken her to. Everything looked normal enough, until she noticed Blackie. Only then did it occur to her how strange it was that he there at all. Not that his behaviour was strange. Quite contrary. It was sadly the same, with him running around in circles on the same spot, hackles raised, snarling dementedly at nothing.

He was there, he was there,' Layann was still insisting. she brushed through the long grass to where Blackie acting up and shooed him away. Then gasped.

The twins had been telling the truth.

There - where the grass was flattened, quite unmistakeable -was the imprint of a giant foot. No footprints preceded it, but stretching out in front of the first one, was a trail of them, leading across the bottom of the field to hedge beyond, about a hundred yards away. She shook her head incredulously. No human being had made those.

Each one must have been two foot long and it took two paces to get from one print to another. She followed them, scarcely believing what she was seeing - until she reached the hedge. It was clear where the figure had gone through it. The grassy bank on the other side had subsided for some enormous pressure and the hedge itself was tangled and flattened as if torn down by a hurricane force wind.

Layann was holding tightly, nervously on to her arm. where were the other girls? They'd gone? But where? panic seized her momentarily and she looked around wildly.

Then she heard Joann's screams from the other side of field: 'MUM, MUM, QUICK, COME QUICK, IT'S OVER HERE.

She started to run, Layann behind her, stumbling idly through the long grass towards her children's screams, Billy's coat billowing off her shoulders, gasping breath as she went.

Joann and Tina were hanging over the gate that led to next field.

'MUM... LOOK, LOOK, OVER THERE..

Joann was screaming at her as she approached, 'HURRY, IT'S GOING...'

Pauline rushed up to her, squeezed her and then Tina and I looked searchingly out across the next field.

'What, what is it? Show me, love . . . ' She grabbed joann by the shoulders, then turning to her sister, 'Tina, you tell me, what happened?'

Tina shook her head, a blank and bewildered look on her face. 'I'd heard all the stories, but I never really believed that.. .I mean.. . but I saw it. .. I saw it, too... this big silver disc . . it just flew from this corner of the field over the cliff edge and into the water over there, next to Stack Rocks...'

insert picture



The words trailed away. There was no doubt she was telling the truth, thought Pauline. She was too stunned to be lying. Understandably. Unlike the rest of the family, she had seen nothing up to now, living as she did with her grandmother in Milford Haven, and was totally unprepared for the shock of what she'd seen.

'MUM!' Joann had left them and gone into the field. She was screaming to her from the bottom corner of it. 'COME

HERE. COME AND LOOK. .. YOU CAN SEE WHERE IT WAS...

Pauline ran towards the voice, curiosity negating any fear or apprehension she might have felt. She had known exactly what to expect, yet it still took her breath away with surprise. Joann was right. There was no doubt. There on the ground was another circular scorch-mark of flattened grass, at least fifty feet in diameter.



(picture here is not from this particular case)

'This was where we saw the first one take off from and where the box was dropped,' Joann was gasping.

'Be quiet, listen, can you hear it,' Layann was insisting, tugging her sleeve. She could hear it, in the air all around them, close to them - a low drohing, buzzing noise that seemed to come from the ground itself.

My God, she thought to herself, the creature *was* definitely in the other field and that spaceship or whatever it was, *did* take off from here, where she was standing. She'd seen the footprints, was standing on the scorched earth the craft had stood. She felt that old familiar feeling of fear grab at her stomach again, that dryness in the month, that trembling. They mustn't hang around out here, in the open, a moment longer. They - whoever or whatever they were - it come back.

Gathering the children around her, she hurried home.

*

eleven o'clock. Billy squeezed her arm reassuringly. Bless him - and the kids. They hadn't minded the spoiled lunch had even around to help tidy up and re-heat something for dinner. Clinton, Keiron and the twins had turned in for the night and Billy was about to take her mother and Tina home to Milford Haven.

when they left, Pauline sat there savouring the silence, as nervous as ever about being left alone. She'd better keep busy. Tidy up a little before another hectic weekend tomorrow. She looked around the room. What needed doing? It was already late, but she could draw the curtains for a start. She didn't often forget to do that, these days, although it was a new habit. Throughout her life and right up until the time she'd seen that figure at the window, she'd never even had curtains. Not now, though. After that terrifying night, she'd immediately bought material, and made curtains and hung them on every window in the house.

She got up and went to the window. Nervously. How could she possibly feel otherwise. The very sight of that window - by day or by night - made her feel nauseous with fear. She reached for the curtains, glancing out of the window as she did so.

And froze, her eyes widening with shock, her hands tightening their grip on the curtains.

It was back. There, just beyond the pool of light on illuminated patch of lawn in front of the house, there the inky blackness of the drive beyond - a figure was moving around; a tall, silver, luminous, unmistakable figure. in profile this time. Glowing eerily in the dark, floating slowly up the drive and past the house. Just gliding ghost-like through the night, arms fixed rigidly at its sides, its helmeted head pointing straight ahead.

Dear God, it was the same creature, returned. But this time she was alone. Had it seen her? Why had it come back? What did it want?

She wanted to move, but couldn't. She just stood, clutching the curtains, framed in the window, mesmerised by the sight.

The figure moved slowly onwards up the drive until darkness began to envelop it. Then, as she watched, it vanished. Just as before. Just like a light being switched off.

She bowed her head, dropped her trembling hands to her sides, took a step backwards and slumped into Billy's armchair. Heaven knows, she'd tried to rationalise all this over the past couple of days; tried to confront the phenomena, tried to control her fear of the unknown, but how could she? How could anyone? They *were* real, these creatures, and they were interested in her and her family for some unearthly reason.

She sat in silence for what seemed like an eternity, not daring to move.

Midnight. The chimes on the mantelpiece coincided with the sound of Billy's car crunching to a halt outside. Thank God. She rushed over and flung herself into his arms the moment he got in the door. He held her tight and led her back into the front room and settled her into the sofa.

'The figure, that creature, it was back, floating past the window,' she sobbed.

'I guessed as much,' sighed Billy, squeezing her tighter, 'you must have been terrified all alone. But no matter. I'm here and it's gone now. I'll fix you some cocoa and then we'll get you straight to bed, all right?'

She nodded, taking a deep breath and managing a smile.

'I've got to stay with that heifer tonight,' he went on, squeezing her hand, 'you remember, the one that's ailing?'

I don't like to leave you alone, but what can I do? Do you you'll be all right now?'

She agreed reluctantly.

I'll be all right, love. Layann will be in with me tonight any case...'

Billy held her tight again for a moment and then went into the kitchen to make the nightcap. She *would* be all right, he thought to himself. He'd never seen her look so exhausted. Sleep would claim her immediately she went to bed.

*

nine -thirty. Pauline looked at the alarm clock and rubbed her eyes in disbelief. It couldn't be. Heavens, she was late. She'd never been this late, she was always up before Billy and Clinton to get them breakfast and then see them off to work. And then there were the kids. They should already have had their breakfast before going to school. What were they all playing at, letting her sleep this late?

She smiled to herself. Billy will have had something to do with this. He'll most likely have told them all to look after themselves and leave her to sleep.

She started to get up - then fell back. Good God, what was wrong with her arm? She could barely move it - and what could have caused all that swelling and irritation? It was damn near paralysed. Had she been sleeping on it? No - that wouldn't account for all the inflammation. Heavens, it hurt.

She struggled out of bed and manoeuvred a dressing around her shoulders. It would probably loosen up a little in a minute, she reasoned, as she gave it a gentle but painful squeeze. She'd have a spot of breakfast with the kids just before they left for school. That would make her feel better. Funny thing - she should feel grand after such an uncharacteristically long sleep, but not only did her arm feel terrible, but her eyes were stinging terribly as well, as if she hadn't slept for a week. And they looked like it, too, she thought as she studied them in the bathroom mirror. My word, they were so swollen and puffy she could hardly see out of them. Looked as if she'd spent too long under a sun ray lamp and got ultra-violet sickness or somethi....

Oh no. The creature last night. She'd watched it closely for more than five minutes. And the brightness of the glow it gave off. Please, no. Don't let it be that.

She clenched the edge of the basin tightly, to steady herself. What was it Billy had said about how there was no reason to be frightened because they hadn't actually hurt anyone yet? She breathed in deeply. She mustn't panic, or cry. She had to make sure the kids had got their breakfast all right and were ready to go to school, and she mustn't frighten them. There was no good reason that they should be told that another creature had been seen near the house the night before.

She made her way downstairs.

Keiror Layann and Joann were already tucking into their cornflakes. Somebody had put the kettle on for a fresh pot. She flinched as the morning sunshine dazzled her aching eyes.

'Morning, lazy-bones,' cracked Keiron.

The twins were uncommonly quiet.

'What' the matter, soap got into your eyes?' quizzed Keiron, always the joker.

Pauline smiled winsomely. 'That's right, Kei.'

She glanced at the twins. They drove her mad when they were too rowdy - which was most of the time - but it worried her when they were this quiet. That generally meant something was wrong. She noticed Joann vigorously scratching her foot.

'What the matter, love?'

Joan rolled down a white sock and partly pulled it off, to reveal the side of her foot.



Pauline Coombs og hendes familie.

'Got rash, Mum, just like Layann's got on her leg. Started when we were kicking around in the grass, looking for that red box yesterday...'

Pauline felt tears stinging the inflammation around her eyes. Not the children, too.

'Probably just a grass rash, love.'

Don't think so, Mum. We've had that before, but it is nothing like this. This burns something terrible...'

-- 'it will, love. It will...'

Pauline hoped the choked tone of her voice didn't give away her true feelings.

Get on and eat your breakfast or you'll be late school...

She turned her back to them, gripping the sideboard, steadying herself again. It was happening to them all now, not just happening around them. And what next?

Must keep calm. Must think.

'Mum...

'Yes, Layann?'

'Do you think it would be all right if I went to stay with Tina and Grandma for a bit?'

Of course, love, but why?'
'No reason,' she shrugged, 'I'd just like to, that's all you did promise me I could, ages ago...

'Yes, so I did. Of course you can, love. When?'
'Tonight?'

The voice had an expectant, pleading tone to it. She in no mood to argue. The way her mind was working the moment, she felt it would probably be no bad thing if the child wasn't around - it was one less to be harmed.

'All right love, I'll have your dad run you over there this evening after school.'

'Thanks, Mum.'

She watched them go - and gratefully. She had to take easy today, she felt terrible. And she had to have time to think.

By the evening, she felt no better. Her eyes were still red, puffy and horribly swollen and her arm looked the same and was still virtually immobile. Even the kids looked worried when they got home from school at four-thirty for their tea and when Billy and Clinton arrived shortly afterwards, they insisted she put her feet up for the rest of the day and that they would look after dinner and the putting of the children to bed. She had to admit she was glad of the offer.

'Do you want a doctor, love? I think you should, you look absolutely dreadful.'

Billy knelt down beside the sofa, next to her.

'What do you reckon the matter is?'

'Probably just got some soap, or hair lacquer or some-thing in my eyes,' she lied to him, dismissing the subject and patting him on the head, 'don't you worry yourself, love. I've taken some eye drops. It'll pass...

Billy looked deep into her inflamed eyes - normally so big, bright and beautiful - and nodded. She obviously hadn't considered that the trouble might have been caused by looking at that figure the previous night. That was a blessing, he thought to himself. She'd be frightened witless otherwise.

'And what about the arm?'

Pauline shrugged. As far as that was concerned, she really had no idea what was the matter with it.

'Haven't a clue, love. Must have turned badly in the night and pulled a muscle or something. Search me. Don't you worry yourself, though. I told you before, Mum's expecting Layann down at Milford Haven soon, so you'd better get moving...

Billy stood up and shrugged. Drat that child. Pauline should never have agreed to letting her go off like that, at the drop of a hat, on a mere whim, for no good reason. All right, so she always did have a marvellous time with her Granny and with Tina, but leaving like this, so suddenly, was going to upset the whole family routine.

Still, Pauline had agreed, so there was no more to be said.

Pauline waved to them both as they left up the drive -and then to Clinton and Keiron as they left the house and walked down the drive in the opposite direction, to go shooting in the fields. She'd persuaded them to take Joann along with them, so that she could get a couple of hours' sleep on the sofa before getting the dinner at seven o'clock. She was amazed that they'd agreed - or that Joann should have wanted to go. Neither of the twins wanted to venture far from the house since they'd been frightened by the figure and the strange craft in the field. She was relieved when they left, and she settled back on to the sofa for much-needed rest. Maybe she'd feel better when she woke.

*

What's that?' Pauline started out of her sleep, as a hand touched her gently on the arm.

It was Keiron.

'Telephone, Mum,' he explained, 'sorry to have to wake you...

'That's all right, love.' She looked at her watch.

'Havens above, it's nine o'clock. Why didn't somebody wake me? I've got the dinner to make. Oh, no...'

She got to her feet. Keiron was beaming proudly. 'Dad said to leave you be. We got the dinner between and we're all going to have an early night. Dad said he'd even help us all do the washing up!'

She smiled. She had a good family.

'Pauline?'

Billy looked around the door, from the hall. He was scowling and holding the telephone in an outstretched hand.

'Come on love - it's your mum, she's holding on...'

She took the phone.

'Hello, Mum. How are you? All right? And Dad? Layann behaving herself, is she?'

There was a long pause.

'Mum?'

'Sorry. Yes, Pauline, I'm here. Look, love, that's why phoning. Yes, Layann's here, but she's not all right.' She didn't just come visiting because she wanted to, but she was frightened of staying up at the farm...

'Qh no, why?' Pauline shook her head. 'It can't be what's been happening here. I just can't believe that. She

always been less frightened than the rest of the kids and in any case, she's said nothing to me . . . 'She held the telephone tighter. For so long, she and Billy had tried to shield the children from the worst of what was happening for fear of just something like this.

'No, Pauline, it's not just that,' insisted her mother, 'there's more...

A pause.

'Listen, love, I didn't know whether to tell you this, or not. Normally I'd have put it all down to a child's prank, or overimagination, or a bad dream, but Layann was so frightened when it came to going to bed tonight, that when I asked her what the matter was, she blurted out what I'm about to tell you. As I said, normally I'd have ignored it, but bearing in mind what's been happening up there for the last few months and especially the state your arm's in, I just had to tell you. According to her, she woke up last night in your bed - not long after you'd both turned in for the night - and she'd heard a noise in the room like rustling paper. When she turned over, she saw what she described as a silver hand - just a hand - drifting through the door opposite and over to your side of the room, where it touched you on the arm. Then it drifted slowly out of the room again. She said she was so frightened that she didn't dare move at the time, but when it had gone, she tried to rouse you but you were obviously so exhausted, she couldn't get you to wake up. Or that's what she thought at the time...

Pauline's mother waited for a reaction. There was none.

'Pauline, are you still there?'

She heard only sobbing. Then the phone went dead.

Billy came back into the room.

'All right, love? Feeling better?'

Then he noticed the state she was in.

'My God, love. What did she say to you? What's the matter?' He took her by the hand. She was trembling furiously.

She looked up at him, her eyes red from the combination of the crying and the ultra-violet irritation. 'We've got to leave here before it's too late, Billy. We've got to leave this place...

Then she fell into his arms.

Five

June 7th, 1977.

Great. They all looked absolutely great.

Billy smiled contentedly at the sight of his children resplendent in their red, white and blue fancy dress, ready the Jubilee Day party at the next farm. Almost every child in the neighbourhood would be there, he thought to himself, but they'd have to be a bit special to match his brood.

He looked over to Pauline, busy putting the finishing touches to Joann's ribbons. When she had finished, she kissed her youngest on the forehead, then patted her bottom to indicate that it was time for her, Layann and Keiron to be on their way.

Never had a day of celebration been more welcome, he mused. Such distractions couldn't be more timely. The last few weeks had been murder. Nothing strange or frightening had happened directly to them, thank the Lord, but the after-effects of what had already happened were bad enough. It had been a week before the twins' rashes had subsided and Pauline's eyes had recovered, and for another 2 weeks before her arm was back to normal.

Then, of course, there was the effect on the family of what had happened to Blackie. They had all been terribly saddened when he had had to have the dog put to sleep, although they understood perfectly why he had to do it. There was just no way Blackie could have stayed with the family or gone to another home. The effect of seeing the figure at the window that night had quite simply driven him insane. His behaviour had grown progressively more erratic and unpredictable as the weeks went by. More and more he'd spend time running dementedly around in circles, snarling and with his hackles raised; he refused to leave the house and when forcibly put out at night, he howled continuously at the same empty spot outside the window where the figure had stood. They all loved him, but he was getting worse and was now at peace.

For the rest of the family, life was now a little more settled - not that it seemed to be for the rest of the neighbourhood. Strange reports were still coming out in the local papers of inexplicable sightings of strange figures and mysterious flying objects, but though he and Pauline had taken careful note of what was going on, they had tried to keep it from the children, not wanting to frighten them further.

Rosa, of course, had telephoned again, to say that since she'd seen the strange craft and figures outside the hotel, she'd twice seen an orange globe of light pulsating outside her bedroom window, swinging like a pendulum, for long periods of time. What she'd described - and the mesmeric effect it had on her - had

corresponded exactly with the light that Pauline had first seen and the one that had followed the car that night. Rosa was now so frightened that she said she was going to write to her Member of Parliament for help, demanding that he find out if all the mysterious things they had seen were something to do with the [Brawdy RAF Base](#) adjoining the hotel. If it was, she didn't want to know anything else. If it wasn't - and they didn't know what it was either - she was going to demand they find out and give her assurances that they were safe. If they couldn't make that assurance, she said, they were going to leave the hotel.

Billy smiled to himself. Good old Rosa. That was the Spanish blood in her, the, fiery Latin temperament showing. Maybe he and Pauline should have shown similar mettle in demanding that the authorities do something to help *them*.

Strange, he thought to himself, how his reaction to the latest UFO reports in the area had altered from his original tongue-in-cheek scepticism to complete acceptance. Well, perhaps it wasn't so strange. After all, how could he disbelieve anything, after what he and his family had been going through? How could any of the people who had had similar - albeit individual - experiences retain their cynicism? It would be impossible. What they were seeing was so stark, so vivid, so obviously real.

One Milford Haven businessman, together with his wife and one of his neighbours, spent five minutes looking through binoculars at what he described to the local paper being: 'a silvery craft the size of an airliner with a dome the top' flying in a zigzag formation over his house, laughed about UFOs for ages, *'but the sight of the blasted thing has changed my views completely,'* he'd gone to say. 'I'm not some nut case or crank, I just believe I see with my own eyes. I've travelled the world and many things in my life, but I'd never seen anything like that before...'

Billy remembered how he'd laughed when he first read that. It was a laugh not of ridicule, but of sympathy, mixed with despair. He knew, so well, how desperate the man felt, trying to get people who hadn't seen such things with their own eyes to accept that *he* actually had. Never was the old adage seeing is believing so appropriate. Other reports sprang to mind. There was that old-age pensioner in Milford Haven - a retired council worker who was well known for his dour, down-to-earth manner - who had been so stunned by what he had seen, he had only told the local paper his story on the understanding that he remained anonymous, for fear of being ridiculed. He knew what he had seen and was quite adamant about it, but also knew others would probably never believe him. Billy sympathised. His story was as fantastic as the one he and Pauline had to tell. He had apparently been woken up at 5 o'clock in the morning recently by a pulsating light was shining into his bed-sitting room in Milford Haven. When he'd looked outside, he'd seen a giant, silver, eggshaped craft swinging like a pendulum across a distance about thirty or forty feet, at roof-top level. Thirty feet from the craft, he claimed, 'a spaceman' was suspended in the air like a free-fall parachutist. He was, he said, absolutely clear about what was happening because he watched them both hanging in the air above him for a full forty minutes before they drifted away out of sight. His reaction had been the same as Billy's, the Milford Haven business-man's and that of countless others in the area: he didn't believe in UFOs before. *'I thought it was all a lot of bloody nonsense. I thought people were making up stories or imagining things. Not now, though. I know exactly what I saw, and that's that...'*

He might have done, thought Billy, but he was right to 'retain his anonymity. People rarely believed in what they hadn't seen for themselves - that was the trouble. That's what worried him when it came to any likelihood of getting help in an emergency - who would believe him? What had to happen before even the cynics would take seriously what was happening in the area? Goodness only knows, when even an RAF officer on leave reported seeing a UFO in starkest detail, and people wouldn't take the phenomena seriously. The local paper had reported how he had described seeing 'a fairly large, circular object, covered in lights and moving as though it was manned, flying very low over the River Cleddau - picture - at a speed of approximately one thousand miles an hour...

He sighed to himself. Somebody had better start doing something to find out what was happening, before something serious occurred. It wasn't so much the mysterious sightings in the sky that troubled him - and many people - it was the regular reports of strange, spaceman-like figures in their midst, and seemingly trying to make some sort of contact.

*

He watched Pauline putting the finishing touches to the children's clothes. Lord knows, he thought to himself, my family might be at risk. He and Pauline and the kids, not to mention their nephew and Rosa, had all described encounters with these alien figures, and who knew what it was leading up to? Only a few days ago, one of Keiron's friends - Stephen Taylor, a young man regarded by everyone who knew him as being a nice, honest, well-behaved - had reported yet another encounter. Billy remembered the newspaper report vividly. Stephen had been back



to his home from his girlfriend's house when seen a dog racing out of the darkness towards him and past him, as though something was chasing him. A little further on, he'd noticed that the lights of a farmhouse that he normally saw on his right-hand side were blotted out by something. Looking closer, he'd been able to make out a giant silver, dome-shaped object that filled up half the field and gave off a dim light from its underside.

'I'd leaned on the gate and was studying it, when I heard a sound like someone treading on dried leaves,' he'd related later, 'and I looked to my right, in the direction of the noise. Standing very close to me was a 'figure that like a very skinny human being about six foot tall and had high cheek-bones like an old man's and large, glassy eyes, a bit like a fish's - round and glazy. Over his mouth he had a box-like contraption and a tube leading from this over his shoulder. He was wearing something very strange, a sort of one-piece suit of something that was transparent, but somehow not transparent, with a sort of ziplike attachment down the middle of it. I didn't notice more, because I took a panicky swing at it and started run. I ran all the way home and never looked around till I got there. When I got home, something very odd happened. I went to pet our *pomeranian dog*, - picture right- but it snarled me and I couldn't get near it.



Its hackles were up and it frightened and terrified of me. We had to put it outside the night until, by the following morning, it was back to being its normal, affectionate self.

Billy shuddered as he recalled the story. He didn't know the lad personally, and the lad knew nothing of the experiences the family had had recently, because he had told nobody, but so many little details were familiar to him. That sound he described as being like 'somebody treading dried leaves'. Hadn't Layann described a sound like 'rustling paper' when that silver hand had come into the room that night and touched Pauline? And the description of what this figure was wearing. All right, there was no helmet this time, but he himself remembered, from first-hand experience, that zippered, one-piece suit that 'looked transparent but somehow not transparent'. And that dog that came racing out of the darkness and the boy's own dog being frightened of him and threatening him? Memories of Blackie came flooding back.

Pauline's voice suddenly startled him out of his day-dream.

'Billy? Wake up, love. Everybody's ready. I'm just going to run them down to the party. You'll be back in the cow sheds by the time I get back, won't you?'

He nodded.

'And Clinton,' she said, turning to her eldest, 'you'll be staying here, right?'

Billy smiled. This was more like the Pauline he knew: brisk, efficient and effervescent. She was still far from her normal self - still obsessional about drawing the curtains even before the light went and still uncharacteristically frightened of the dark - but was far more composed and had seemed to have come to terms with the situation far better than she had done before. He just hoped it would last - and would be allowed to. Please, he thought to himself, let none of them see any more mysterious space craft or alien figures.

He watched them leave, then made his own way back to work in the cowsheds, leaving Clinton to enjoy some of his day off the way he liked it most - quietly on his own...

*

Pauline pulled the car up outside the farm. She'd only stayed a couple of hours at the party and had then acted like any discreet parent, and left the children to their own devices.

It was a good job Clinton was in. She'd forgotten her keys again.

She rang the door bell and waited.

Nothing.

Strange, she thought. Clinton was normally so quick to answer the door. rang again.

Nothing. Then a voice. A whisper.

'Clinton? What are you playing at? Let me in this instant...'

She heard the sound of the newly-fitted safety chain slid back. The door opened and Clinton was standing there, white as a sheet and looking badly shaken.

'Oh, Mum, it is you...'

'Course it's only me. Who else were you expecting?'

'I thought perhaps it was those two men, come back again...'

'What two men?'

'You know darned well *which* two men.'

'Clint, what are you getting on about?' She was getting cross now.

He looked at her, a bewildered, troubled expression on face. 'You know, the ones in the car that passed you, as



you drove in... 'he insisted.

It was Pauline's turn to look bewildered.

'Listen, Clint,' she told him, 'I saw nobody, passed nobody in the drive as I arrived...'

She couldn't mistake a look of near panic on his normally passive face.

'But Mum, you *must* have passed them. Just a couple seconds - quite literally - before you pulled up outside, had left, up the drive. There's only room for one car get up and down that drive and there's no other way or out of the farm, so you *must* have passed them, mustn't you?'

Now Pauline felt a bit panicky herself.

'Who are "they", Clint?'

'Two men . . . or rather they weren't really men, not human I don't think - who just came to the house. I saw them arrive in this enormous silver car. Well, I say car, it was like no car I ever saw before. Anyway, one of these "men" stayed in the car and then I saw the other coming up to the house. I could see them both quite clearly and both of the "men" were identical; both with dark coloured suits on, both very tall and thin, both with dark, slicked-back hair and abnormally large foreheads. The one who walked up to the house glided rather than walked, hardly moving his arms. I tell you, ma, it was all wrong. It looked right enough on the surface, but when you looked closely at it all - the car and the men -there was something wrong, something unreal about it. It was like an illusion. It really frightened me, that's all I know. I didn't wait to find out, I can tell you - I locked the front door immediately, then the back door, and went and hid upstairs...'

He shook his head, eyes downcast, as if ashamed of his fear. Pauline reached out and squeezed his hand reassuringly. She hoped that he wouldn't notice that she, too, was trembling. If Clint had been frightened, she knew it must have been with good reason. He was the eldest of her children and proud of the fact. He'd witnessed little or none of the phenomena that the rest of the family had and had therefore shown no fear at all - up until now. He was used to opening the door to all sorts of people at the farm - friends, relations, strangers - and had been for years. If these 'people' had frightened him, it *must* have been with good reason.

'He tried the front door, then the back door, but I wasn't about to open them,' he was saying, his gaze still overtaken from hers, 'so then he went next door to speak to Carol...'

Pauline went cold.

'Carol? Carol spoke to him? My God, is she all right?' She panicked for an instant. Carol - a nurse who rented a little cottage adjacent to the farmhouse - was away such a lot that she'd been spared everything that had been happening to them and she and Billy and the family had been sure to keep it all from her, not wanting to frighten her. All she knew about what had happened at the farm was what she had read in the local papers, and after the incident of the light chasing the car and the figure at the window, they hadn't spoken to the papers, so she knew nothing. But now, this.

'Clinton, run next door and see if Carol's all right,' she told him, the panic registering in her voice. My God, she thought, as he left hurriedly out of the back door, if she had talked to the 'man' she'd have been the only person yet who had actually communicated, face to face, with one of them.

It seemed like an eternity before Clinton came back, Carol following him.

Pauline gasped in relief. She was all right. In fact, she had rarely looked better, positively beaming. She and Billy liked Carol from the moment they had first met her. Demure and shy, she had a natural warmth and sweetness when you got to know her and was easy to talk to and get along with.

'Hello, love, how are you then?' she said, the moment saw Pauline, 'sorry I've not dropped in for a bit, but at with work and everything, well, you know what I mean...'

Pauline cut her short.

'Never mind that, love. Listen, what's all this about these men who came calling just now?'

Carol had a bewildered expression on her face and was shaking her head.

'Don't ask me, Pauline. I'm still trying to work it out. It was really strange. I saw this fabulous-looking car in the first of all, and wondered who on earth you knew owned a car like that. I'd never seen anything like before. That's the first thing that I thought looked a bit strange - and also that although I'd been standing right the window, I didn't hear it crunch on the gravel, like I normally would have done. It was just there all of a sudden. Anyhow, I glanced out of the window and saw this strange-looking man walking up the garden path to your front door and after a little time, come back down again and go round the side of the house, presumably to the back-door. I remember wondering why Clint wasn't answering the door, as I felt sure he was in. Anyway, after a little while - in fact, in an impossibly quick time, he was back in front of the house again, looking up at it. At that point I left the cottage for a moment by the back door in my kitchen, to put some garbage out in the bin. That's when I got frightened. No sooner was I outside and putting it in the dustbin, when suddenly, there he was, at my shoulder, standing right next to me. Now, Pauline, as you well know, there is absolutely no way anybody could get round the house and into that back yard in less than about three or four minutes - yet within about twenty seconds of seeing him in front of the house, there he was, suddenly appearing next to me. I can't tell you how startled I was, I didn't know what to think. Anyway, then he said to me - in this very flat, expressionless voice, "Where is Pauline Coombs? When will she be back?" I told him I didn't know, because I didn't trust him. I mean, as far as I knew, you didn't know anyone who looked like him or drove a car like that, so how did he know I wasn't Pauline Coombs? He really frightened me. I'll never forget his face - that strangelooking hair, drawn back off this really high forehead, those glazed, unblinking eyes and his skin that was the strangest thing

of all. . . it was just like wax or plastic, absolutely smooth, shiny looking. Anyway, when I'd told him you weren't at home and I didn't know what time you'd be back, I turned to go into the cottage and when I glanced over my shoulder as I closed the door, he was gone. Just like that. Gone. Next thing I know, he and the other man are back in the car outside the front of the cottage and it's leaving up the drive. Then, within a matter of seconds, your car arrived from the direction in which they had left, so I figured, well, you must have passed them and I wondered why you hadn't stopped to speak to them...

She smiled, momentarily. Then became serious. By the way Pauline and Clinton were looking at one another, she knew instantly that there was something more sinister about her mysterious experience than she might at first have thought.

'Pauline, who were they? Who were those two people?' Pauline remained silent. What could she say? She didn't want to tell Carol what she thought, for fear of being laughed at or even, possibly, frightening Carol as much as she, herself, was frightened.

'Pauline?'

She had no alternative.

Carol, it's difficult to explain, but we don't think those couple" were human. I know, I know it sounds incredible, both Billy and I saw that figure at the window, as you know, and since then, I've seen another figure out of the same window and the twins have seen one in the lower field.

Not only that, but Mark, our nephew, has been approached by one and so has another boy near here. There's definitely something going on, Carol, there honestly is. Lily and I have both been wondering what it all means, what it's leading up to. Perhaps it was an actual confrontation and today was' supposed to...'

She bit her lip, fighting to keep the sobs back.

'...perhaps today they were going to make some sort or, well, I don't know...'

Clinton comforted her as she wept. Carol came over and held her hand.

Look, love,' she said, in that comforting voice that only nurses have, 'don't upset yourself. With all that you've been through and all, that's supposed to have been happening in the area, we're all probably letting our imaginations away with us. What happened today was probably nothing at all...'

Pauline looked up at her angrily. 'No, Carol, no. You know that's not true. There's no normal explanation for what happened today. It's virtually impossible for a car arrive in the drive without being heard - and it's certainly impossible for one to leave at the same time as I arrived, without passing me. And what about those men?'

Why were both you and Clinton so automatically frightened of them? Why did they both look the same, with high foreheads, strange unblinking eyes and complexions like wax? How do you explain how one of them was at the front of the house one minute, and right at your side a few seconds later at the back of the house?'

Carol pulled a face and shrugged.

'All right, I know it *sounds* impossible, but what are you suggesting? What are you suggesting they were? You're not, trying to tell me they were

The words hung in the air. She looked quickly across at Clinton. He avoided her gaze.

'My God . . . ' She released Pauline's hand and went and sat down in the chair opposite.

'It seems impossible . . . I mean, how *could* they have been. . . you mean they looked strange because it was all an illusion, a sort of disguise they adopted to be more readily acceptable? But what did they want here? Why did they come...?'

Pauline shook her head and sighed: 'Carol, we just don't know, love. We don't know what any of it means. You don't know the half of it. They - whoever or whatever they are - just keep coming back, and when they do, all sorts of things keep happening to us. Ever since it first started happening, four months ago, nothing's been the same. We've lost count of the number of television sets that have overloaded and burned out their wiring and four cars have gone the same way; there's an impossible drain on our electricity supply as the whole house seems to be in the grip of some sort of electrical force field; the kids have had inexplicable rashes on their feet and legs and feverish headaches and I've suffered some sort of ultraviolet irritation in my eyes, and my arm swelled up painfully for weeks; we've even had to have Blackie put to sleep because the effect of seeing one of these figures drove him insane...

Carol sat forward in her chair and looked intently at her: 'Look, Pauline, you've got to do something about all this. You can't just let things' drag on. Have you got anyone helping you? Who have you told about this?'

'We're trying to keep it as much to ourselves as possible. Who would believe us?' asked Pauline.

'But you *can't* keep it to yourself,' came Carol's angry retort, 'it sounds to me as if all this is leading up to something. You could be in very real danger - all of you...'

Pauline said nothing. She knew her friend was right.

Six



picture here is from this area, but not particular the kitchen window view

It was a beautiful view, thought Pauline to herself as she stood in her customary position at the kitchen window, surveying the country scene behind the farmhouse. On June evenings like this, it was difficult to believe that such tranquillity was being undermined by all that was happening to them.

Carol was right, of course. They had to do something before something happened to them. But what? She loved the farm and would hate to leave it, as picnic had made her feel inclined to on those two occasions, but it certainly did feel as though these creatures, aliens, or whatever they were, seemed intent on driving them out.

She sighed to herself and got on with preparing the potatoes for that night's supper. The children were already back from school and Clinton had just got in from work at the farm next door. It was seven o'clock. Billy would be up from the sheds in a minute, ravenous as usual.

Damn. The telephone. Trust somebody to phone right in the middle of her preparing supper.

'Clinton,' she shouted out of the kitchen and across the hall to the front room where he'd be watching television, 'get that will you, and tell whoever it is that I'll call back...

She heard him answer the phone. Then silence for a minute.

'Mum... it's Rosa, she says it's important...'

Clinton was looking around the door, a frown on his face.

'She sounds in a real state, Mum...'

Pauline felt herself tense up. What now?

She picked up the phone apprehensively.

'Rosa? How are you, love?' She felt nervous about asking such a leading question these days.

'Oh, Pauline. Thank God you're there. I've got to talk to you...

Clinton was right. She did sound in a bit of a state: excitable and nervous.

'Look, Pauline, I don't want to frighten you any more than you and the family already have been, but I had to talk to someone about what's just happened to us and I thought you would be the best person. I can't understand it, I really can't...

She was gabbling now. Pauline tried to calm her. 'Slowly, Rosa... Take it slowly. What happened?'

'It's like this,' she began, slower and clearer now, 'while I was out for a minute this afternoon, down in the town to do some shopping with Frank, I left my daughter, Anna, here - you know, the one who is at university in Madrid and is over here on holiday at the moment? Anyway, when we got back, Anna was in a terrible state. Trembling she was. Apparently she'd looked out of the window at the front of the hotel and seen this enormous silver car standing there. It was like no car she'd ever seen before and what she couldn't understand was why she didn't hear it arrive. Our gravel drive is dreadfully noisy as you know and she had been standing so close to the window, she should have heard it quite clearly...

Pauline felt a tightening in her stomach and began to tremble slightly. She knew what Rosa was going to say next.

.... anyway, it wasn't that that frightened her, it was what the men in the car looked like. I say "men", but she swore to me that they just didn't look normal, didn't look human. One of them apparently stayed in the car, the other one came to the door. She said the one at the door wore some sort of dark-coloured suit and walked in this strange, static way. It was his face that she says frightened her the most. She says the forehead was much larger than it should have been, the eyes were really piercing and the skin looked like it was made of wax. Another funny thing was that he asked for me by name and asked where I was, although I know I've never met him. How did he know that Anna wasn't me? How did he know what I looked like, when he'd never met me? That's what

anybody would do, normally, isn't it - ask the person who answers the door if they are the person they are looking for. Anna was dreadfully frightened - and so am I. Pauline, I got back to the hotel in the car with Frank only a minute or two after these "men" left, but although Anna insisted that we *must* have passed them on the way up our long drive, we passed nobody. That damn car just vanished into thin air. I tell you, Pauline, it's really shaken us up. Anna in particular. She doesn't know anything about what's been going on around here, or what's happened to Frank or me, so you can imagine the shock it gave her...

Rosa waited for a response. There was none.

'Pauline?'

There was a long pause, while Pauline steadied herself on the other end of the phone, breathing deeply to calm her voice.

'None of what you've told me surprises me,' she said softly, 'exactly the same thing happened here, to Clinton, only two days ago...

'Pauline, no... what's going on?'

'I don't know, Rosa, I really don't know. Carol - you know Carol, our neighbour - saw them, too. She reckons we must all get somebody to help us. The authorities, or somebody...

Rosa interrupted her. 'That's the other reason I phoned you, Pauline . . .' she began, slowly and earnestly. 'Remember I told you that I was going to do just that, after I saw those creatures in the field behind the hotel? Remember I said I was going to get in touch with Nicholas Edwards, our MP, and get him to find out if the RAF or Ministry of Defence knew what was going on? Well, I did just that.'

There was a long pause.

'Pauline, I can't believe what's happened since I wrote that letter. First this important RAF type - an officer he was, from Broad Haven - comes down to the hotel and gives me a whole book of questions to answer about what I've seen and asks me not to talk about what happened, then I got these strange letters, one from Nicholas Edwards and one from the Ministry of Defence. They both came in the same envelope. The one from Nicholas Edwards - on House of Commons notepaper, dated June 17th - reads like this:

*Dear Mrs Grenville,
I enclose a copy of a letter I have received from the Ministry of Defence following the representations I made on your behalf but I am afraid this seems to throw no light on your encounter.
Yours sincerely, Nicholas Edwards, MP.*

'The letter he enclosed - from the Ministry of Defence, dated June 15th, (*suppose 1977- rø-rem.*) on Ministry of Defence notepaper - reads like this:

Dear Nicholas,
My department have investigated the report about an Unidentified Flying Object which you referred to me on behalf of Mrs Rose Grenville of the Haven Fort Hotel. I regret to say, however, that although an RAF officer has visited Mrs Grenville, we are unable to offer any further information. It is true that the Royal Observer Corps have a post in the adjoining field, but there is no evidence that their activities could have seemed unusual in any way and we have no record of any other unusual activity in the area.

I am sorry I cannot be more helpful.

'It's signed by James Welibeloved, Parliamentary Under Secretary Of State For Defence. What do you make of that, Pauline?'

Pauline could tell by the tone of Rosa's voice that she was as baffled as she was.

Pauline, I tell you, there's something damn funny going Rosa continued, her voice now sounding agitated.

'Do they take us for fools? I mean to say, first the Secretary Of State For Defence says that the RAF --unable to offer any further information" about what's going on - in other words they can't explain what the spaceship was or what the aliens were - and then he says 'we have no record of any unusual activity in the area.' Pauline, that's ridiculous. He *does* have records of unusual activity in the area. Apart from what I told him myself, he must have records of the *dozens* of stories that have been appearing in our local papers and the national papers about what's been happening around one of his top secret RAF bases. No records? It's a well-known fact that over a hundred people have reported seeing Unidentified Flying Objects and over a dozen people have seen spacemanlike figures in this area over the past few months. How can he tell the Member of Parliament for this area that he "has no records of unusual activity"? It's simply not true!'

Rosa fell silent again for a minute. Pauline could hear the rustling of newspaper in the background. Then she started to speak again. 'And Pauline, here's another thing. How can the *Under Secretary Of State For Defence* tell our MP that he "has no record of any unusual activity" in the area, when a spokesman for the Ministry Of

Defence told *The Sun* newspaper, only last month: "We *have* heard of unexplained objects in the West Wales area. The people who report these sightings are not nut cases, they are genuinely sincere people, genuinely concerned. We investigate every report on this assumption. We do not discount the possibility of intelligent life in outer space. There have been a flood of reports from West Wales. The ground sightings do not, in time or place, fit in with any of our operations..."

Another silence. She could hear Rosa sighing.

'Pauline, say something. What the hell do you make of all this? First an RAF man asks me lots of questions and asks me to keep quiet about what I've seen, then the Ministry of Defence publicly state that they've had dozens of similar reports they can't explain and that they don't discount the possibility of there being intelligent life in outer space - and now this, the *Under Secretary Of State For Defence*, telling our MP that he *hasn't*, in fact, heard about any unusual things happening in the area and that he *can't* help us. Why are they turning their backs on us, pretending that none of this is happening to us? They *know* what's happening and they must *know* how threatening it's all becoming. Why don't they want to help us?'

Rosa was now sounding very upset. Pauline knew she should try to calm her down, console her, but she would find it difficult. For heaven's sake, she was feeling as panicky as Rosa. Everything she had said was true. It was obvious that the authorities - the police and the Ministry of Defence - knew exactly what was happening to them, but it was equally obvious that they could be of no help at all, if the worst ever came to the worst. They had as good as admitted as much. Basically, then, she and Rosa and their families and the rest of the neighbourhood had been left to fend for themselves...

She tried to sound calm.

'Rosa, I know exactly what you mean. I understand perfectly. It *is* obvious that these Ministry of Defence people know exactly what's going on - just like our local police have already admitted that *they* do - but I suppose they think that it's now better to investigate what's going on in secrecy. The moment that they tell us - or anyone in the area - that there's something extraterrestrial going on that they can't explain and have no control over, everybody's going to panic, aren't they? It's obvious...'

She was pleased at the note of calm she had managed to bring to her voice. She was grateful Rosa couldn't see her shaking hands, though. There was another long pause after she'd spoken, then Rosa said, 'I suppose you're right, love, but what do you think they're doing about it?'

'Rosa, I don't know. I just don't know. Perhaps nobody ever will. All we can do is assume - and hope - they *are* doing something...'

She fell silent. She could console Rosa only up to a point, feeling as shaken as she was herself. She promised she'd speak to her again soon, made her goodbyes and hung up.

Clinton was looking at her intently from the other side the room, with Billy - who'd come in from work while she was talking - standing behind his chair.

'What was all that about, love?' asked Billy, his voice stern, direct and worried. 'Rosa, was it? What's the problem?'

Pauline explained everything and Billy, frowning intensely, walked slowly over to her and sat down next to her.

'Bloody hell,' he muttered to himself, head held in hands, 'this is all getting to be too much. I just don't understand any more. We're living in the middle of a proven electrical force field and can show the inexplicable damage resulting from it; we've had several corroborated sightings strange spacecraft in the sky and on the ground and several encounters with spacemen of some sort, and have the radiation traces, scorch marks on the ground and inexplicable physical disabilities to prove it. It's all happening within a stone's throw of all these important Army, Navy and Air Force bases and what happens? Nothing.'

The police? All we get is "*we're as frightened as you are we've no procedure to cover this sort of thing . . .*" Ministry Of Defence? They admit something beyond knowledge is going on, but deny it in our case. So, we're supposed to suffer alone? I'll tell you, love, we're not going to. That settles it. If anything else happens, we'll start thinking very seriously about getting away from this place, before the worst comes to the worst...'



Seven

That was August gone. Billy tore off the page of the calendar that hung in the kitchen with careful deliberation and threw it into the waste basket.

That made two months since anything unusual had happened to the family. July and August had been as quiet and normal as the family could have wished. No fuses had blown, no light-bulbs had fused, the television and the car were both working all right, they had seen no strange objects in the sky, no alien figures on the ground.

Strange, he thought to himself, but the encounters had stopped happening almost exactly when Pauline began her annual job down in the turkey factory in Milford Haven, where she always worked for six months of the year in the packing department, getting the poultry ready for the Christmas season. He was normally grateful just for the extra money the job brought in, but this year... well, the results were even more fortunate.

Perhaps that UFO enthusiast who'd written to them a while back had been right after all. They had, predictably, been deluged with letters from UFO investigators, cranks and all sorts when their story first became public, all of them with theories about what that first light had been and who the man at the window really was. One of the people who had written had insisted that such phenomena generally happened to people - or around people - who were particularly psychic. Perhaps, he had suggested, Pauline was the psychic power that was attracting the extra-terrestrial visitations? Billy remembered how they'd laughed at the, suggestion to begin with, but since then he'd thought more deeply about it and it had made him wonder.

Certain thoughts kept recurring in his mind. Hadn't it been *Pauline* who had first seen and been obsessed with that light she saw in the sky? Wasn't it *she* who had first seen the man at the window? Didn't that silver hand that Layann saw enter the bedroom that night touch Pauline - and her alone - on the shoulder? *And now that she spent most of the time away from the house, hadn't all the strange happenings stopped as suddenly as they started?*

He shook his head. Nobody had mentioned the events that had happened between January and June, not since things had returned to normal. Nothing had been reported in the area and it was as if everyone in the neighbourhood was trying to forget. They were thankfully in the middle of a glorious summer in one of the most picturesque parts of the country, and relishing it.

Never mind whether it was some psychic power Pauline possessed that had caused the phenomenon they had witnessed, or whether it wasn't. Whatever it had been, it seemed to be over - and hopefully for good.

He busied himself around the kitchen, laying the table for lunch Pauline would be dashing back from Milford Haven to make lunch for him and Clinton and the kids, who were on summer holidays. She never had much time and was always grateful for the little help he could find time to give her. Pity the kids couldn't rally round a little more to help her around the house, he thought to himself, but never mind - they were on holiday and the weather was great, so let them enjoy themselves playing out in the fields.

Midday. Pauline would be back shortly. He'd laid the table, he'd just about got time to have a cup of tea and a cigarette before she and all the kids came in.

Damn it, he thought to himself, where the hell was that carton of cigarettes that Pauline had bought yesterday and put on the kitchen sideboard? She always bought a carton of two hundred cigarettes on a Monday and left them there, but this was the second time they'd suddenly gone missing from where she normally always left them. They'd naturally suspected the kids the first time - although they were very honest children - but had been assured it wasn't them and had believed them. And now it had happened again. He thumped the sideboard angrily. It was too much. A lot of things had suddenly started going missing recently. A couple of other times, small sums of money had vanished from their customary cubbyhole in the front room - only to reappear, in exactly the same denominations - a couple of days later. Two cardigans that he'd been given on separate Christmases - but had never worn - had also gone missing, never to return. None of it was serious, just damn irritating. Pauline and he knew their kids and they certainly weren't dishonest. They just couldn't have been responsible. As a family they were very organised and settled in their ways, as well; things never normally got lost or misplaced so frequently.

Not to worry, probably just one of those things, he reasoned. The front door banged. It was Pauline - swiftly followed by Clinton and the kids, who'd heard her arrive and hurried in for their lunch, all pushing, shoving, laughing and generally carousing around.

Neither he nor Pauline told them to quieten down. It had been too long since they'd heard that much laughter around the house. The more they had heard of it in the past few weeks, the happier they'd felt. It meant that things really were back to normal.

*

Billy stopped the tractor and looked at his watch. Five o'clock. He'd knock off early this afternoon. Ploughing under a hot sun was certainly exhausting. A glass of cold orange juice, a cold shower and a chance to put his feet up for a while was just what he needed before the house filled up with kids again for another rowdy supper time.



He kicked the tractor into gear and chugged off across the final field that led to the drive up to the farm. Funny, he thought, where's Keiron? It was normally a devil of a task to get him off a tractor, once he'd been allowed to do a little ploughing himself, yet he couldn't see him anywhere.

He scanned the horizon. Very odd. He must have gone to the farm as well, for some reason.

Kei, sun too much for you?'

He found Keiron back at the farm, just as expected, near the stationary tractor and leaning against the garden wall outside the house. He looked white as a sheet, his head bowed.

'What's the matter, old son?' he asked, patting him on back. 'I told you before, if you're ploughing with your back at the sun, put a hankie on the back of your neck or you will get sunstroke. Feels bad, does it?'

Keiron looked up at him, a frightened look in his eyes.

'Wasn't the sun, Dad...'

Billy felt his fists clench in anxious anticipation of what was about to hear.

I saw something, Dad. I saw something in there, in the house...'

'What do you mean "something"? What sort of thing? Where?'

Keiron looked awkward, embarrassed for a minute.

'Come on, son, spit it out,' Billy insisted, 'what did you and where?'

Leiron started mumbling his explanation. 'Well... I'd pulled up in the tractor - I wanted to get a drink, I was not - when I looked through the window of the front

'oom, there in front of us, and saw this black shape moving ound in the room

Billy was getting irritated at the ambiguity of what .eiron was saying - and unnerved. 'Black shape? What you mean "Black shape"? Shape of what?'

Keiron sighed and shrugged, looking more awkward than before.

'Dad,' he said pleadingly, 'I don't know, that's the whole point. I just saw this hovering black shape, sort of tall and thin and taking up the sort of space a very large man would take up, just moving around the room - first to the window near the television, then over to the other side of the room...'

'You didn't see any exact shape?' asked Billy, glancing nervously towards the window himself.

'No, just a sort of undulating shape, like sort of liquid the way it moved around,' insisted Keiron, 'and it frightened me. I just stood and watched it for a minute, and then moved away so I couldn't see it any more...'

'You didn't go into the house then?'

Keiron looked surprised at the suggestion.

'No, Dad, I told you, it frightened me. Besides, I knew the house was locked up and I was the only one of the two of us who had the key, so I knew darned well that whatever it was, wasn't normal...'

Billy reached out and patted him on the head. He regretted being short-tempered with him, it was just he was so disappointed, so frustrated, so unnerved that something like this should have happened again after so long. Please God, he thought to himself, don't let it all be starting up again.

He put his arm around Keiron and led him towards the front door. 'I couldn't see anything in the room when I just looked,' he told him, 'you'll be all right now. Come and help me lay the table for supper. Oh, and listen, not a word to anyone about this, all right? You know what I mean?'

Keiron looked up at his father and nodded. Later, Billy left him in the kitchen to get on with laying the table, and checked the front room. He felt as nervous as he had been the night the man appeared at the window. Was this shapeless entity the, same figure, returned? He opened the door gingerly and stepped in.

There was nothing there. Nothing seemed to have been disturbed. He went out and shut the door and stood alone in the hall for a minute, thinking. Perhaps, just perhaps, it had been a trick of the light or Keiron's imagination? True, he was a very perceptive lad and not given to wild imaginings and you could normally trust his word entirely, but maybe this time he was mistaken? There was always hope. Surely it *couldn't* all be happening to them all over again?

The sound of the front door opening behind him interrupted his thinking.

It was Pauline, bustling in with an armful of shopping, beaming all over her face.

Give us a hand with these, love, she was asking him, ng an enormous bag of groceries into his arms.

Billy took them and later - as he helped her unpack them and got all wrapped up in family talk - put all thoughts of what Keiron had said he'd seen firmly to the back of his mind.

No, nothing weird had started happening again. Everything was back to normal.

Pauline pushed her plate away from her. 'Well, that was delicious, if I say so myself,' she grinned, 'so I'm going to reward myself by leaving the washing up till the morning. Billy, you can make me a cup of coffee and bring it to me in front of the television. Kids, you can stay up with me and watch a bit of telly for one hour and then put yourselves to bed!'

Billy chuckled to himself. His Master's Voice and no mistake!

He watched her lead the kids out and into the front room, and then put the kettle on. It had nearly boiled when he heard Pauline calling to 'Billy, come here a minute, love...'

He turned off the gas ring and went through to the front room. Pauline was kneeling in front of the television. 'It's not working, love. I can't make it out. It was fine last night...'
Billy shot a look across at Keiron and raised a finger to lips. His worst fears had come true. It had started again. They were back.

Eight

September 10th, 1977.

The moment he saw Keiron that evening, Billy knew something else had happened. A week had passed since he had seen the shapeless figure in the front room, but they hadn't mentioned it to each other since then and Keiron had been as good as his word and not said anything to the rest of the family.

Billy had still clung to the hope that Keiron had been mistaken in what he'd seen or had imagined it, but knowing the boy as well as he did, he hadn't really been able to convince himself of that.

And now, what was this? Keiron was standing at the entrance to the cowsheds, head buried in his hands, trembling. He looked shaken out of his wits. Behind him, standing in the muddy drive, the tractor's engine was still running. It was a Saturday and he had let Keiron drive it down to the lower fields to check some fencing.

'Kei, what on earth's the matter with you?' he asked the boy.

Keiron ran towards him and grabbed his arm. 'There was someone on the path and I'm sure I hit him, but when I looked around there wasn't anybody there,' he gabbled.

Billy held him at arm's length and looked at him sternly. 'Now, Kei, take it easy. Tell me slowly exactly what happened. You hit someone you say? On the path?'

Keiron nodded, frowning a bewildered frown and still gripping his father's arm. 'But I don't understand it, Dad. I don't understand. I was just driving up the path, up to the farm from the lower fields, when suddenly, out of nowhere, this person appeared right in front of me, right in front of the tractor

'just stepped out in front of you? What person?'

'no, dad, they didn't step out in front of me. just appeared out of thin air, just like that, there in front of me. A lady, dressed all in white, from head to toe, with long hair. She was suddenly there. I couldn't stop, I just went straight into her. I felt the bump as the wheels went over her, but when I jumped on the brakes and looked around, there was nothing there. I looked everywhere, but there was nobody...'

Billy felt his grip tighten on the boy's shoulders. 'Keiron, you sure about this?' He didn't need the boy to answer. His shocked and frightened expression said it all for him.

It was broad daylight, Keiron's description was precise, and the effect it had had on him was real enough. This time there was no mistake. But a lady in white? What did that mean?

Whatever it meant, thought Billy, the same rule must apply; Pauline and the rest of the family were not to hear about it. Maybe this, after all, would be just an isolated incident. Perhaps the last of all. It would be such a shame to stir up old fears needlessly by repeating what happened.

He swore Keiron to secrecy again and sent him back the farmhouse for his tea. He would follow later. He to have time to think.

Any slender hope that he might have previously harboured that Keiron had imagined seeing that shapeless figure in the front room, looked as though it could be ruled out in the light of this new sighting. But did that mean they were in for months more of the same phenomena that had so threatened them before? It couldn't be coincidence that, after a lull in sightings over the past couple of months, the BUFORA people were now getting fresh reports from the area of UFO sightings and strange encounters with spacemanlike figures.

He cast his mind back to four recent local newspaper reports.

In the first one, an ex-RAF pilot had reported watching six UFOs flying at fantastic speeds, in formation, over Broad Haven. (illustration right of this place- made by RuneØ)

In the second one, a 5-year-old girl in Llandeloy had woken up her 11-year-old sister in the middle of the night, screaming that there was 'a big helicopter with a rainbow-coloured man inside it' hovering outside their bedroom window. When her sister had looked, she'd seen what she described as 'a black cloud hovering in the sky and radiating a dim glow, from which a golden pyramid-shaped object had appeared'.

In the third report, a long-distance lorry driver on the road to Carmarthen had described seeing two figures in the road as he drove past 'about seven foot tall, dressed in red translucent material, with large featureless heads and humanoid arms'.



Both he and his passenger described 'a sudden chill' as the lorry sped past the figures.

In the fourth report, a mother and her 13-year-old daughter reported having watched a fantastic 'UFO air display' over Milford Haven. They said it began with five lights hovering in the sky over the town. As they watched, one light detached itself from the group and moved out to sea, where it disgorged three more lights. Then a second light did the same. The new lights flew around in a circular pattern before returning to their parent craft, which in turn rejoined the main group of lights that was still hovering over the town. Three of the original five then detached themselves, flew out to sea and disgorged more craft, which then came back inland as a formation of nine red, green and silver lights. They watched the 'display' for over forty minutes.

Billy sighed to himself and looked up into the fast-dimming night sky above. They were obviously not alone in having more visitations, but where would it all end this time? He had promised Pauline that if ever things like this started happening to the family again, they would start making plans to leave. What should he do now? He'd leave it for now, chance it and hope nothing else happened.

He looked at his watch: six o'clock. He'd miss his early supper if he didn't get a move on - and tonight was going to be the first of many long nights, now that the calving season was here again. For the next six months he'd be spending every night, from midnight to two o'clock, in with the herd to watch over the mating - and often the whole night, in case any of them dropped a calf.

He made his way slowly up the darkening drive, past the paddock, past the milking sheds, up around the corner to the welcoming lights of the farmhouse beyond, the mud lapping around his boots and the chill evening breeze pinkening his cheeks.

Pauline, jovial as ever, was joking with the kids as they all ate supper around the kitchen table. Only Keiron remained uncommonly quiet in the corner and to judge from the cheerfulness of the others, he'd kept his mouth shut about what he'd seen.

'Don't mind Kei,' Pauline told him as he walked in, 'he's just got a bit of a headache...'

Billy smiled to himself. Good lad, Kei.

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Billy pulled the collar of his donkey jacket up around his neck and hunched his shoulders against the cold wind as he made his way back down to the cowsheds at midnight. Lord, how he hated the first night of the calving season, having to leave home and hearth at the dead of night to linger around the cowsheds in the cold and tend the herd. Still, he thought to himself, that's the price you pay for being not only a dairyman who tends a herd, but one who does the calving as well. Many dairymen let the local vet handle all that sort of thing, but some, like him, preferred to know in advance which heifer had mated with which bull, so a special eye could be kept on them and the birth could be anticipated and as trouble-free as possible. Too many calves, in his experience, had never had a fair chance of a safe birth simply because they'd come into this world alone and unexpected; one single complication and they were stillborn.

He trudged on, down the drive, towards the cowsheds.

Funny, he thought to himself, how nervous the place made him these days, after all the years he'd spent here. Especially at night. He looked up at the dark silhouettes of the trees against the pale, moonlit sky and was aware how every shadow made him feel jumpy. He, of all people. He, who had spent a major part of his life wandering around the countryside at night. It was ridiculous. Or was it?

He turned the light on outside the cowsheds, bathing the enormous concrete forecourt in a fierce glare. It made him feel better, but evidently did nothing to console the cows, who were agitated, as they had increasingly seemed to be for the last few weeks. Several times they'd stampeded while out grazing in the same field and had gone totally crazy for no reason, charging, en masse, through electrified or barbed wire fences, risking being badly cut up just to escape into the next field.

He slid back the heavy iron locks on the shed gates and walked inside, stopping at each and every stall to check on each cow, looking for signs that they were coming into season and would be ready for insemination. Each one would be in season for only twelve hours at a time, so it was important to be sure. Similarly, if any of them was ready to drop a calf she would have to be taken out and put on her own.

It was an hour before he had checked all one hundred cows to his satisfaction and had returned to the glare of the forecourt and securely locked and bolted the heavy iron gates. He was about to go across to the far side of the forecourt and turn off the lights for the night, when he heard the phone ringing, back at the farmhouse.

He looked at his watch. One o'clock. Good God, who on earth would be phoning at that time of the morning? He felt a slight sinking feeling in his stomach, the sort that telegrams, and phone calls at that hour of the night, normally give you.

It was only about a hundred feet from the sheds to the house and he'd answered the phone within a minute.

'Hello, who's that?' he asked, aware of the anxiety in his voice.

'Billy? Billy Coombs?'

He recognised the voice. It was Martin Chambers, from one of the neighbouring farms.

'Martin. Is that you? What the devil do you want at this time of the morning?' he asked, but good-humouredly.

'Now listen to me, Billy,' said the gruff voice, 'what the hell do you think you're playing at? Your whole damn herd - must be a hundred of them - have been rampaging all over my land for more than an hour now,

making a hell of a mess. They woke me up just before midnight with all the noise they were making. They've damn near ruined all the feed for my herd, trampling it into the ground as they've been stampeding around my sheds...'

Billy chuckled to himself.

'No, you're wrong there, Martin,' he corrected him, 'they're not mine. Couldn't be mine. I've only just come from my own sheds, where I've been with my herd for the past hour. I only left them to answer the phone...'

'Well, it's about time you did answer it,' came the angry retort, 'I've been ringing you over and over for the past hour without a reply. You can't have been with your cows - you were probably in bed, am I right?'

'No you're bloody not. I told you, Martin, I was in with my cows. If you had rung, I'd have heard the ringing. Anyway, what's it matter, they're not my damn cows anyway, as I said...'

He was about to hang up, when the voice, calmer now, said: 'Billy, I know they're your cows because they've all got yellow and green tags in their ears - that's your marking isn't it?'

Billy caught his breath. Martin was right of course. That was his marking - and only his. What the bloody hell was going on here?

'Look, Martin, just hold on a minute,' he told him, banging the telephone down on the hall table and hurrying out into the darkness. *This was ridiculous. He'd been standing by the open front door, looking at the cowsheds during the entire conversation and there was nothing unusual to see - just the illuminated sheds, locked and bolted, with the cows bedded down for the night, just as he'd left them.* He shook his head, tutting and chuckling to himself as he jogged down the drive and into the brightly-lit forecourt once again. One look over the gate and into the first set of stalls would confirm that they were there. What on earth that damn fool was going on about, was anybody's guess. Green and yellow tags indeed. He must be colour blind.

He gave a cursory glance over the gate to confirm the obvious.

And stepped back, gasping.

There was nothing there. *The stalls - every one of them - were empty.* Just the straw he had left the cows remained.

The cows - fifty of them - had gone. Vanished. (only ill.right>)



What about the others? He moved around to the adjacent gate and looked into the gloom of the second shed. He could hear no rustling movements of straw, nothing at all. Complete stillness. There was nothing there. They were empty, too. Fifty cows, just vanished.

His hands dropped to his sides, his knuckles scraping against the big iron padlock and chain that held the gates firmly shut. He looked down. Still locked. Firmly bolted. Then he looked up again and into first one shed and then the other.

Nothing. Completely empty. *But it was ridiculous, impossible. He'd been with them, just five minutes earlier. Or less. He'd only taken his eyes off the sheds for thirty seconds, the time it had taken him to answer the phone.* Even if they had got out - which was absolutely impossible - they could never have got up the drive and past the farmhouse in less than fifteen minutes and he'd been there, in the drive, or looking at the drive all the time. Impossible. It couldn't have happened. He looked into the sheds for a third time. Empty. **One hundred cows, just disappeared, vanished into thin air.** Or rather, vanished and appeared at Martin's farm. But how - and how could they have been there for over an hour, when he had been with them here for an hour?

He turned slowly around and made his way up the drive to the farmhouse. What could have happened? What was happening? Was he going mad? Hallucinating? None of it any sense.

'Martin...' his voice sounded as dazed as he felt, 'you to be right. I don't understand any of this, but you to be right. They are my cows. They just...' paused and reconsidered his explanation. If he didn't believe it himself, how could he expect Martin to believe it?

'...they just seem to have got out without my noticing - i'll be right down in the car to pick them up. I'll leave the car with you and herd them in myself...'

He put the phone down, went into the lounge and flopped down into his arm-chair. He'd have a quick cigarette and collect his thoughts before he left.

'Bill? Ah, there you are, love. All finished for the night? Ready for a cup of tea before bed?'

It was Pauline. Bless her heart, she'd waited up for him, keep him company. He could only shrug in greeting. She noticed the bewildered look on his face. 'What's up, love? Take your coat off, put your feet up and tell me all about it...'

She reached out to help him off with the donkey jacket, he shied away.

'Can't take it off, love. I've got to go out - down to Dale Farm down the road...'

'At this time of night, whatever for?' She looked amazed.

Billy looked up at her and studied her expression. There was no fear there - there hadn't been for such a long

time now - but how could he keep this to himself? He had to tell someone and she'd hear him herding the cows past the house in a minute in any case.

He'd risk telling her. He had to.

'Sit down, love,' he instructed her, 'and listen to this...'

When he'd finished, he looked at her long and hard to solicit a reaction. For a second or two he wondered if even she would believe him. It was all so ridiculous, so impossible, so pointless.

She nodded quietly to herself, when he'd finished telling her. Her head bowed, her hands clasped tightly together. Then she looked up, frowning, but not registering the fear or panic he had seen on her face so frequently over previous months.

'You believe me, love?'

'Don't be so daft, love. Of course I do,' she murmured, looking up at him. 'It's happening all over again, isn't it? They're back, or it's back again, isn't it? Dear God, Billy, what are we going to do? What does it all mean - a whole herd of cows vanishing and appearing somewhere else at a different time? Why? For what possible reason? What are we going to do about it?'

For a moment he thought she was going to crack again. Then he noticed her expression grow resolute and the momentary panic dissipated. She stood up and offered her hand for him to take. He took it and she pulled him to his feet. 'Well, for a start you'd better go down to Chambers's and collect the herd. Get them locked away, I'll make a cup of tea and we'll go straight to bed when you get back. We'll try and work it out in the morning, but we'd better do as we normally do and keep it from the kids...'

She pushed him out of the door.

How strange, he thought to himself, that it was she who was now stronger than he. Ironical, too, for hadn't it been he and Keiron who alone had shared the most recent sightings and kept them from her? Just as well, he reasoned, for if she thought that what had happened tonight *wasn't* an isolated incident, she'd not have been able to cope with it so well.

He went to start the car. Nothing. ***It was dead.*** Nothing worked, not the lights, nor the engine. Just as before. He slumped forward on to the steering wheel for a moment, his forehead resting on the backs of his hands. Oh God, no. Not another one.

It was only half a mile. He'd have to walk.

He got out of the car and looked ahead of him into the inky blackness of the drive that wound up ahead of him. Only the faintest silver glow from a crescent moon lit the way ahead. He'd made the walk many times before up the dark, tree-lined drive and it had never unnerved him. But it did now. Terribly.

He was even glad to meet Martin when he eventually got to Dale Farm, though the farmer was obviously less than happy to see him, and it was easy to see why. The mess his herd had made was dreadful, with sacks of carefully stored grain upturned, scattered and trampled everywhere. It took him twenty minutes to round the panicky herd together and another half an hour to herd them down the lane, past the farmhouse and into the cowsheds again. He spared Martin any explanation, but had just apologised, said he didn't know how it could have happened and then left.

Pauline was waiting for him on the porch with tea and sympathy after he'd got the job done.

He was about to start talking about it again, when she pressed a finger to his lips.

Never mind, love,' she whispered, 'tomorrow we'll talk about it...'

Billy nodded, his eyes downcast. Up until now, he'd managed to cope, but this was . . . well. . . this was just beyond him. If this could happen, anything could happen. The thought haunted him as he went to sleep.

*

This time, thought Pauline as she sneaked out of their bed, it's my turn to let Billy sleep off the trauma of the night before. She tucked him up more firmly under the duvet. Let him sleep on for a bit. She'd get breakfast for Clinton and get him off to work and then get the kids' breakfast and get them off to school and, for once, Billy could be last down. They could talk before he started work.

She didn't call him until nearly ten o'clock and he was none too pleased to begin with, but eventually grateful for chance to relive the experiences of the night before and try to get them into perspective.

Not that it ultimately did any good. In fact it was use-less. What had happened quite simply defied explanation.

'That's the worst of it, love,' he had said to her, 'this is so bizarre, so unlike any of the other things that have happened to other people in the area, I'm not even sure if those BUFORA people would believe us, and they've heard just about everything. I don't know, I just don't know. The best thing is just to keep absolutely quiet about it, OK?'

She agreed with him, secretly hoping nothing else of a similar nature would happen. Or worse.

She could tell by his expression as he left, that he felt the same.

*

So unlike him, thought Pauline as she tipped the leftovers of that morning's breakfast into the rubbish bin.

For Billy to leave a single scrap of food, something definitely had to be wrong. Mind you, all things considered it was hardly surprising. The experience of the previous week was obviously still preying on his mind. He'd once said to her that he thought he was going mad or having a nervous breakdown. He'd later said he was joking, but she doubted his sincerity.

The herd had been troubling him, too. Cows were more than a livelihood to him, he really loved his herd, and the effect on them of what had happened that night had been devastating. The herd never stopped stampeding - panicking for no apparent reason, charging into electrified and barbed wire fencing over and over again. One cow had literally torn herself to pieces in her frenzy to escape from something unseen that had terrified her, and she later had to be destroyed. The rest of the herd had escaped into the farm next door - where Clinton worked - so often that Clinton's boss was beginning to lose patience with them. On top of all these problems the entire herd's milk yield was understandably way down.

And how would Billy be able to explain it all? Easily - but who would believe him?

She watched from the porch as he and Clinton walked down to the paddock next to the milking sheds to feed the heifers.

'Something the matter, Dad?'

Clinton knew his father well and he knew something was wrong. Billy normally relished the chance of having his eldest son to help him on the farm on his days off and talked non-stop before and after they started work.

But not on this morning. Billy just plodded along next to him, silent and with a frown on his face.

He shrugged. 'No, nothing's wrong, Clint. Just got a quiet on, that's all . . . 'He'd have liked to tell Clint what the matter was, but he knew it was better not to. He hadn't told Pauline what had happened since the cows had vanished that night. A couple of days later, he'd gone on to the cowsheds in the morning to get the cows out to graze and had found two of the cows locked together in the same stall. He'd been amazed, for what had happened was impossible. He'd fastidiously checked the herd one o'clock that morning, before going to bed, and was absolutely certain that each calving cow was comfortably properly in its stall. There was never any likelihood of a cow being put in the same stall in any case. Such a mistake just couldn't be made - apart from anything else, the cows in question would kick up too much of a fuss to let it happen.

Yet it *had* happened. He knew *he* hadn't put them there and he knew nobody else had been down there, so *how had it* happened? The unanswerable question kept nagging his brain and the answer was always the same. Who, or whatever, had transported the entire herd from one farm to another on that first occasion, must have somehow - and for some reason - transported one cow from one stall to another. Maybe, he had pondered, they had moved the cow somewhere else and brought it back to the wrong place?

- His thoughts on the subject had ended there, so bizarre were they becoming.

He and Clint rounded the corner at the end of the drive entered the sheds. Billy instructed Clinton to herd the heifers into the enclosed paddock opposite, while he went to check that there was enough hay for their feed. By the time he had returned with a few extra bales of hay, Clint had herded all the heifers out and securely chained and pad-locked the high gates. They both heaved the bales of hay over the top and the moment the feed hit the ground, the hungry animals were on to it.

'Right, next the milking,' Billy muttered, beckoning Clinton towards the little room adjoining the cowsheds opposite, where the milking machines were housed. They walked the six paces to the room and Billy flicked the switch to start the machines.

As he did so, he felt Clinton - who was standing behind him in the doorway - grab his arm violently.

'Dad, Dad... my God, look... what happened?'

He felt himself tense up, and dared hardly turn and look.

Clinton was pointing to the paddock in front of them, into which they had just herded the cattle.

It was empty, the bales of hay still on the ground, half eaten.

Billy glanced across at Clinton. The boy's mouth was hanging open, his hand still pointing in the direction of the paddock.

'But we just put them in there, sixteen of them. . . we did, didn't we? ... just now?... I don't understand, what happened to them? . . . Dad?' There was a note of panic in his voice now.

He turned and looked at his father.

'Dad? You... you don't look surprised, not really...' Billy sighed and clenched his fists, trying to compose himself, to stop himself trembling.

'Clint, I'm *not* really surprised. I've been half expecting something like this to happen again...'

'Again? It's happened before?'

Billy explained everything. Clinton started to shake his head in disbelief, but then obviously remembered what he'd just experienced for himself and nodded in recognition of what he was being told.

'I believe it, Dad. I don't understand it, but I believe it, after what just happened. Where have they gone though?' How do we get them back?'

Billy prodded him out of the room.

'Search me, Clint,' he sighed, 'we'd better just start looking...'

The words were no sooner out of his mouth, and the pair were out of the machine room, when Clinton grabbed

his arm again and pointed to the enclosed paddock across yard, opposite the open paddock they had just put the heifers into.

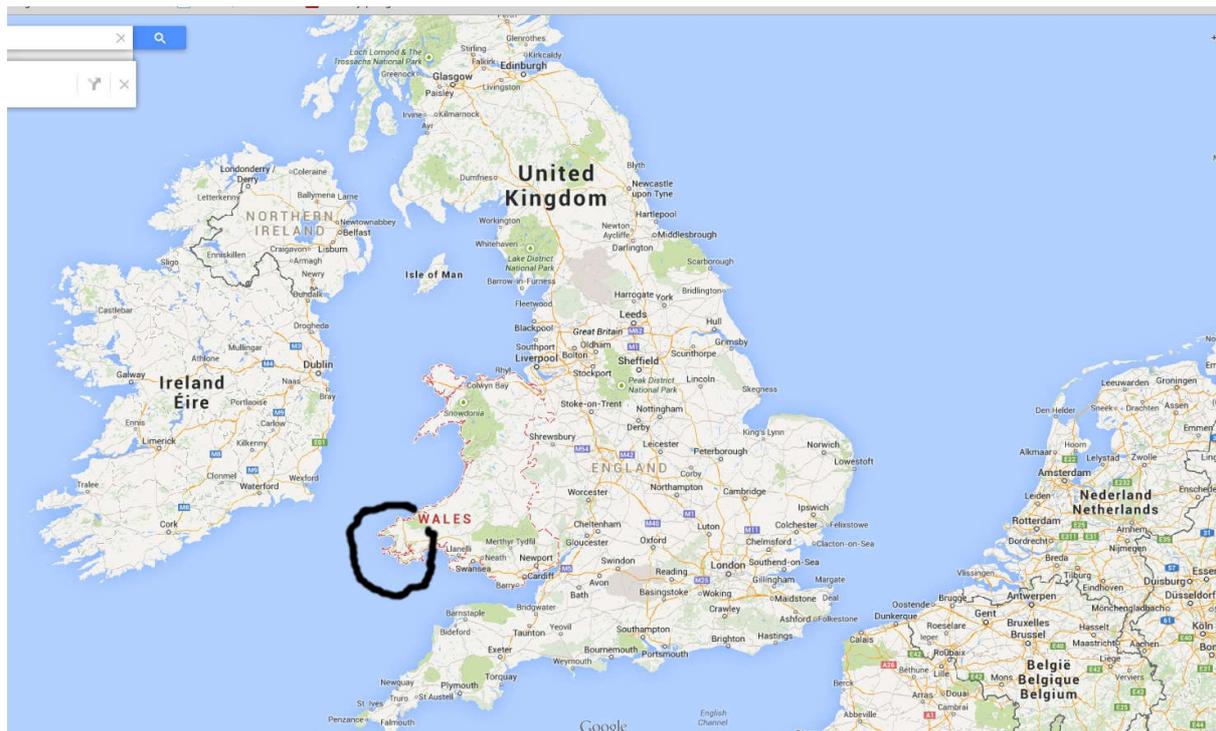
All sixteen heifers were there, milling around, looking agitated. The gates to that paddock were still chained and padlocked as they had always been - as were the gates of paddock they had just left.

Billy and Clinton just stood there, for what seemed like eternity, in complete silence, studying the scene that confronted them and trying to comprehend the impossible. Clinton eventually spoke, slowly and in a half whisper. But why, Dad? Why is this happening? What does it mean?

Billy shook his head.

'Don't ask me, Clint, I'm as baffled as you are,' he told him. 'It doesn't make any sense to me, either. How could it? And don't ask me what I'm going to do about it, because I don't know. What can any of us do? We're obviously at the mercy of whoever, or whatever is doing to us...'

Clinton looked at his father and then shuddered. He knew he was right.



Not from book/ rø-comment: The circular marking here are the area this unbelievable happenings came to pass, and remark this happened in a time-frame where many such contacts to HUMANLIKE – so-called pleiadian-family- planets happened. We know these contacts to the Erra-pleiadians which [Eduard Meier](#) had in this time-period, and before that – those of the [UMMO](#) contacts in Spain/France. Acc.to info from the spiritual science of the danish wiseman [Martinus](#), there came very strong spiritual impulses to our Earth in the beginning of this century, and again in the beginning of the seventies. Those last opened more directly to contacts/ information to other civilisations that guide our development. And some [forerunner contacts](#) happened from 1952> ex.those of Albert Coe, Orfeo Angelucci and Robert P. Renaud + +

Nine

November 12th, 1977

Pauline turned the old car slowly off the minor road and on to the dusty track that led up to the farm, and sighed to herself. It had already been a busy morning but she had an even busier day ahead. Earlier that morning she'd had to drive the 8 miles into Milford Haven to collect Tina and her parents. After that there had been a mammoth load of shopping to do, and now there was lunch for nine people to be cooked. She always looked forward to having the whole family over for the day, but cooking for them all at one sitting was a bit of an ordeal.

'What's for lunch, Mum?'

Tina - sitting next to her in the passenger seat - must have been reading her thoughts and was grinning, ear to ear. Trust her to be thinking of her stomach again. She reached over and gave her eldest daughter a playful poke in the ribs: 'Whatever you get, my girl, whatever you get!'

She could hear her parents chuckling in the back of the car. They knew, all too well, about Tina's appetite, having had to cater to it for the 3 years that Tina had lived with them. Still, she thought, it was nice to have them all together again as a family - it seemed to happen all too rarely these days, particularly since all the strange things had been happening at the farm. It was only now - after a few weeks of comparative calm both at the farm and in the whole area - that Tina, and her parents, had felt relaxed enough to come visiting again. The atmosphere around the farm had, in fact, lost much of its tenseness recently, thank God, due mainly to the fact that nobody had been much to what had gone before; even Billy was noticeably less moody than he had been, though she could tell he was still deeply disturbed over the inexplicable disappearances of the herd and their strange behaviour. She glanced at her mum in the rear view mirror and studied her nervous expression for a moment. Poor mum. She was normally such an extrovert, bumptious character, who always got the upper hand - until now. It had taken father all his powers of persuasion to get her to venture to the farm again and he must have found it difficult, particularly as he was a far more nervous, introverted character than she, and wasn't even sure *he* wanted to come in the first place.

'All right, Mum?' she asked.

No answer. Pauline glanced at the rear view mirror for second time, but her mother wasn't in view. 'Mum?' She glanced over her shoulder. Her mum - sitting in the back of the car on the passenger side to her left, clearly hadn't heard her. Her face pressed up close against the window, she was straining her neck to look something.

'Mum, you all right?'

'Yes, love, I'm fine,' she eventually heard her mother reply, her voice soft, hesitant and lacking in conviction. just that, well. . . I'm looking at that, up there... I can't make out what it is... look Pauline felt herself clench the steering wheel tighter, thoughts racing. She had purposely taken this backroute to avoid using the main road along which that globe light had chased her that night, in order not to unnerve her parents before they even got to the farm - and now this. Surely nothing strange was happening again.

Please not. But wait... how could she have been so stupid. Wasn't it in the sky above these very fields, on either side of them, that she had seen the light that first night? She braked fiercely, the car sliding dustily to an erratic stop. From where she was sitting, she'd seen nothing out of ordinary as they had rumbled along the track towards the farm, only the straight route home, with the flat green fields that rolled away on either side; to her left away to the horizon and to her right, down to the cliff-edge and the sea beyond. A perfect, still, sun-drenched country scene.

Yet now Tina was leaning out of the window opposite, head tilted up, eyes squinting into the sun, tugging excitedly at her arm and squealing: 'Mum, Mum... look at it's fantastic... Mum, let's get out and look...'

She turned quickly and looked at her parents, now huddled together at the back window, her father straining to see what it was that was so frightening her mother, her mother with her head buried in his shoulder, apparently too shaken to move.

The moment the car had slid to a halt, Tina had flung open her door and scrambled out of the car and was now struggling to open the door on the driver's side.

'Mum, Mum, get out - quick...!' she was screaming as she struggled with the handle of the door and then stumbled backwards as Pauline pushed it open.

Once outside, Pauline squinted up into the sun herself, her eyes fighting to focus into the clear blue sky and following the direction Tina was pointing in, over the roof of the car and into the sky above the field opposite.

And then, quite suddenly, she saw it. There, to the right of the sun - becoming clearer as her eyes adjusted to the glare - an enormous silver disc, just hanging in the sky, quite motionless, the sun reflecting slightly from its burnished surface, making it shine. She cupped a hand over her eyes against the glare and edged slowly forward around the back of the car and across the track to the edge of the hedgerow opposite.

It was fantastic - a quite perfect, slightly-domed disc, suspended there above her, magnificent, almost majestic. She moved a little further forward, daunted and awe-struck by what she was seeing, but feeling compelled to move closer. She felt mesmerised by the sight of it. Dear God, it was like before. That first night, that first sighting, that first feeling? And now, it was moving, swaying slowly, first to one side, then to the other,

in a slow and gentle arc, like a coin drifting down in water, or a leaf falling in a breeze. And the sensation was the same; as if its movement was a response, an act of recognition, a gesture.

She inched forward a little further.

'MUM....!'



(picture online as illustration)

Tina's voice shook her back to reality. She spun around. 'Grandmum and Grandad . . .' Tina's words trailed away, but her frantic gestures indicated the importance of what she was trying to say, as she pointed anxiously in the direction of the car. With a final sideways glance at the disc, still hovering in the sky above her, Pauline hurried back to the car.

'We'd better go now, Mum, hadn't we?' Tina was whispering urgently, 'Grandmum and Grandad are really frightened, and – so am I...'

Pauline put an arm around her and squeezed her, her gaze simultaneously drawn back again to the giant silver craft. 'You're right, love, we'll get straight home...'

Tina, trembling now, was holding tightly on to her arm. She gently released her grip and hustled her around to the passenger door. 'Do your best to calm your grandparents,' she told her, trying to keep a note of calm in her voice, 'we'll be home in just a minute...'

She felt her eyes drawn back into the sky again and was aware of feeling frightened for the first time since she had seen the object. Remember what had happened to all the other cars whenever one of these things had been around? Remember how they had always broken down, their wiring somehow burned to a cinder? The sense of panic that she suddenly felt at the thought of being stranded in such an open space with that craft hanging over them, made her tighten up. The sense of wonderment that had so captivated her before, was now replaced by a sense of vulnerability and isolation. Home, though so close, felt too far away for comfort. She tried to push such thoughts to back of her mind as she bundled Tina into the car - then it happened.

Tina saw it move first, pointing frantically upwards in the direction of the object and screaming at everyone to look at what was happening.

Pauline looked quickly over her shoulder, a sense of panic seizing her again. The object had started to move, climbing slowly now, drifting higher in the sky as they watched - not revolving as its shape seemed to require it to, but holding its position and just rising gently, in a perfectly vertical ascent. Tina was motionless, seemingly struck dumb by the sight of it, her head back and her mouth gaping in amazement.

And still the object rose higher in the sky above them. It rose maybe another fifty feet, until it was about two hundred feet up, stopped momentarily and then, with frightening suddenness, shot off across the sky, slicing its way with unswerving directness across the field behind them, off towards the cliff-edge, then it plunged down towards the outcrop of rocks just beyond the cliffs - and was gone.

Pauline felt herself wince, Tina turned her head away and buried it in her shoulder and she could see her parents duck down in the rear seat of the car in anticipation of the explosion they all felt would surely follow.

But there was nothing. Everything was still. Somewhere nearby a bird trilled in the hedgerow. It was as though nothing had happened. For what seemed like an eternity, they all just stared blankly in the direction of the cliff-edge, towards Stack Rocks and the horizon of sea beyond, neither speaking nor registering any emotion.

Tina was first to break the silence.

'What happened? Where did it go?' she whispered.

Pauline looked at the bewildered, upturned face and sighed. 'I don't know, love,' she shrugged helplessly. 'It's like we've all been telling you during these past months -we've all seen things like this, but it doesn't help us understand what's happening. ' She gave her a squeeze. 'You're trembling, love - are you OK?'

Tina snuggled closer beneath her mother's arm, nodded and smiled half-heartedly. Pauline surveyed the scene again. Nothing. Everything just as before, just the dusty track dividing the expanse of daisy-spotted fields around and an everlasting ceiling of cloudless blue sky overhead. Perfect tranquillity.

'Pauline, PLEASE love...'

Her mother's voice shook her back to reality.

'Sorry, Mum,' she sighed, reaching past Tina and squeezing her mother's arm through the open window of car, 'we'll get straight home now'. Tina, get in as quick you can...'

Please God, let it start, she thought to herself as she settled into the driver's seat. By the look of her parents any further strain would be the breaking of them. Nervously, she turned the ignition and then gave a little silent prayer of thanks when the car stirred immediately into life.

It was only a matter of minutes before the car rumbled the gravel drive in front of the farmhouse, and the rest of the family (with the exception of Billy who was not back from a business trip to the next farm) were for them at the front door. To judge from their one or all of them had already seen what had been happening over the field behind the farm.

We saw it, too, Mum - why the hell did you stop out there?' Clinton was demanding, the moment Pauline emerged from the car. 'You could have been in danger, with that thing so close to you...'

Pauline gestured to Clinton to hold his tongue and ushered him to one side, indicating to Tina to take her

grandparents into the house.

'Clinton, don't be so bloody stupid, talking like that in front of Grandmum and Grandad,' she scolded him, 'they're frightened enough as it is, without you saying things like that...'

Clinton looked sheepish for a moment, then worried.

'OK Mum, I'm sorry, but . . . well, did you see it properly? What was it like? It looked incredible from where we first saw it, from the kitchen window. Did it make any noise? Why did you stop the car, did it break down on you?'

Pauline raised a finger to her lips. 'Clinton - enough. Look, we'll go and see if your grandparents are all right, then you can come down the coast-path with me and we'll have a look and see what happened to it; I'll tell you everything then...'

She prodded him in the direction of the house.

The moment they got inside, her worst fears were realised. Tina - with Keiron, Layann and Joann huddled around her - was now busy reliving every minute of what had just happened to them, while her parents sat silently at the kitchen table, her mother still obviously badly shaken, her father doing his best to console her and make tea at the same time.

'Clinton, get the kids out of here,' she instructed irritably, her nerves now getting the better of her. 'Take them into the front room and I'll be in to talk to you all in a minute...'

She watched him lead the children out of the room and then went and sat with her mother.

'OK, Mum?'

Her mother managed a weak smile.

'She'll be all right in a bit,' her father assured her, 'but what are you going to do now? Going to see what happened to that disc thing, are you?'

'I should really, Dad,' she told him, 'it did come down on our land, after all... it's our responsibility...'

She bit her tongue as soon as she had spoken and, as her mother grabbed her arm, immediately regretted having opened her mouth.

'Pauline, love, you can't go down there, you just can't,' she was urging, 'you never know what you might find down there, it could be dangerous. . . PLEASE, Pauline, no...'

'Mum, Mum, it's all right, honestly - I'll take Clinton with me and we'll be very careful,' she told her, trying to sound as comforting as possible. She was sure her mother was far from reassured, but was equally sure that she had to go and see for herself what had happened down by the cliffs.

'You go on, Pauline, we'll be fine,' her father interceded, 'take care, won't you?'

Pauline nodded confidently, blew her parents a kiss and the room to fetch Clinton. Clinton already had his coat when she got back into the hall - as had Keiron, Tina, Joann and Layann.

Clinton came over to her, shaking his head: 'It's no use, he sighed, 'they're all frightened out of their wits, too excited to stay behind...'

Pauline looked over his shoulder to the silent group embled behind him near the front door. She could see what he meant. None of them was saying a word and they looked anxious but it was clear they weren't going to be left out of anything. There was no alternative, she'd have to take them all. To tell them to stay behind would be certain to cause a fuss and her parents' nerves were in bad enough state already.

She told them all to wait where they were, and went into the kitchen.

'Mum, Dad, we're off now - just going down the coast a little way to see if we can see anything. Won't be long..'

'You and Keiron?'

'And the rest of the kids...'

'All of you? Pauline, no, you can't...'

'Mum, I'm not arguing with you. Look, we'll be fine, honestly. We're not going all the way along the coast path, just a little way. We won't be more than a minute or 2...'

She left the room immediately, closing the door behind quickly. She stopped momentarily, falling back against it and taking a deep breath. How she wished Billy were home, this was all too much for her to cope with on her own...

'Ready, Mum?' Clinton already had the front door en and the rest of the kids were milling around in the porch. She nodded wearily and followed them outside.

Keiron and the twins were noticeably subdued as they set off down the drive towards the cowsheds. In the normal way they would have been off and running by this time, she thought to herself, but not today. For once they walked behind her, staying close - as did Tina. Only Clinton walked ahead of her, doubtless because he felt that as the only man amongst them it was his duty. He didn't look particularly happy with his chosen role, though. He kept looking nervously over his shoulder at her, as the group made their way around the corner, past the cowsheds, and into the first of the two fields that separated the farm from the cliff edge. They would walk down the edge of the first field, cross the second and then join up with the coastal path that ran the full length of the cliffs along the coast to the resort town of Broad Haven, 2 miles away. It was only about, a mile or so along the path to the spot where they had seen the object come down, somewhere near the outcrop called Stack Rocks that lay about a quarter of a mile or so offshore. It wouldn't take them long to get there.

They walked quickly and quietly all the way. Pauline had seldom seen the children so quiet or pensive. She knew how they felt. Suddenly the familiar countryside around them felt alien, almost hostile. The surrounding expanses of open pasture made her feel terribly exposed and vulnerable and the urge to keep looking nervously up in the sky and over her shoulder never left her. The others seemed to feel the same. As they left the rough track at the perimeter of the first field and began threading their way through the grass of the second, she wondered if the children shared her increasing reservations about going on. The further they got away from the farm and into the deserted countryside, the more uneasy she felt. And wasn't this the same field where the twins had first seen that disc, that had then taken off at such speed and vanished over the cliff edge? She glanced over her shoulder at them. Their expressions confirmed the fact; if the idea of walking back to the farm by themselves wasn't so frightening, they would surely have preferred to turn back..

She slowed her pace to let them catch up, stepped between them and put her arms around their shoulders: 'All right, twins?' she asked them, squeezing their shoulders trying to sound as matter-of-fact as possible. 'Well, wanted to come, didn't you? Exciting, isn't it?'

It was too late to turn back now, in any case, they were already at the coast path. So far, so good, she thought to herself. They'd head straight back home as soon as Stack rocks came into view. She must be mad to have come down here - particularly with the children. Her mother was right.

She prodded the twins ahead of her, telling them to walk in single file, behind Tina, Keiron, and Clinton, who was leading the way. The coastal path was only a couple of feet wide, and the cliff edge was perilously close to it.

'Take it slowly, Clint,' she called and stop when you get around the next bend and can see the rocks...'

Clinton waved acknowledgement and duly stopped at the corner, where the path was wide enough for a small group of people to gather in safety.

'There they are, Mum - Stack Rocks,' he announced, pointing out to sea. (>)



The little group turned, as one, and looked out from the cliff-top to the outcrop of rocks, clearly visible in the bright mid-afternoon sun, the surf gently breaking around its perimeter. On such days, thought Pauline to herself, it looked particularly barren and beautiful - a great, undulating island of grey rock jutting defiantly out the ocean like a mighty twin-humped sea monster. No wonder everyone who saw it was captivated by its mystery.

There was something strange about it, an aura of...

Nobody - not even local Pembrokeshire folk who were normally so steeped in myth and legend - knew the history of the rock or whether it was of any significance. Yet it seemed special - at least to those who knew it well. Plant life could proliferate on it - yet there was none; birds could have populated it - yet there were few; in stormy weather, the sea surrounding it would sometimes as inexplicably calm as a mill-pond; snow would settle on other coastal outcrops of rocks, but never on Stack Rocks - not even on its highest peak.

Pauline stared long and hard at it, scanning her eyes along the length and breadth of it. She had already noticed the rest of them studying the cliff face below and the bays and grottos that lay along its base, but she somehow knew where her attention belonged. How *could* it have been a coincidence that when any of them had seen a strange object either in the sky or on the ground, by day or by night, it had always ended up heading for this particular spot, then vanishing over the cliff-edge? There must have been a reason and the only significant difference about this part of coastline was Stack Rocks. But in what way was it significant?

She concentrated her gaze harder on the rocks. But there seemed to be nothing, no clue as to what had happened to the disc that had seemed, so clearly, to plummet straight into them only half an hour earlier. All that moved on them was the occasional gull. In fact as she watched, she could only see one solitary white bird, midway up the highest protrusion of rock. There, she could just see it again, first it was moving into view, then it was gone. And now back again.

But wait. Dear God, what was that? A white shape, moving about on the rocks, but that was no gull, it was a figure. A man? No, wait. . . she could see it clearly now

what she'd seen before was only a fleeting glimpse of a limb, an arm or a leg. . . now she could make out the whole figure as it came into view, descending from a higher level on the rock and down to a flatter area at the water's edge... and it wasn't white, it was silver... a tall, silver-suluted figure...

'MUM, LOOK - LOOK AT THE ROCKS...'

Clinton had now seen it, too, and was shouting to her from a few yards further down the coastal path.

'CAN YOU SEE IT? SEE THE MAN?' he was shouting.

'I SEE IT,' she called, looking quickly back to the rock as Tina, Keiron and the twins gathered around her.

'Who is it? What do you think it's doing?' Keiron was gabbling next to her, pushing his way past the twins to get a better view.

'Kei, be still - just keep quiet and look,' Pauline instructed him, as she tried to concentrate on what she was seeing. The figure was now quite clearly in view, even at that distance; it must, she reasoned, be enormous. Visions of the figure at the window flooded back. Yes, he must be same size - something like ten, maybe twelve feet tall. And that silver clothing - the same. But what was he - it - doing? She couldn't make it out... crouching, it was crouching, as if looking at something, or for something?

She turned to Clinton, who was now standing next to them, gaping at the sight in front of him, as they all were: Clint, what's he doing,' she asked him, 'can you make it out?'

Clinton shook his head, then suddenly grabbed her arm excitedly:

'Mum, look - up higher, higher up the rock above him. I don't believe it, it's a . . . no, wait, it can't be . . . Pauline lifted her gaze upwards over the figure, up the slight incline of rock behind it, to a ledge a little higher up. And then she saw what had caught Clinton's attention. There, standing half shrouded in shadow, was another figure, the same as the first one.

'Yes, love, I see it - another figure,' she acknowledged. 'No, not that, not just the figure,' he was insisting, 'but behind the figure. That's not a shadow he's standing in, a doorway -honestly, look...'

'-A what?'

She gave him a quizzical, sideways look, then returned gaze to the rock. As she did so, the second figure moved forwards, out of the shadow. But wait. My God, Clint was right. Now the shadow was somehow moving, thinning-out, gone. And in its place - a perfectly flat, metall-looking surface, glinting slightly in the sun. The figure was moving back again - and what had looked to her to be a shadow, was now spreading out behind him. It *was* a door. It had to be. A sliding door, first open, then closed, now open again to reveal the blackness within. But how could this be? She looked around her at the children.

'Did you all see that?' she found herself asking, helplessly. 'Did you see it, did you see what just happened?'

They didn't seem to hear her, talking amongst themselves as they now were. The distance that separated them from the extraordinary scenario that was unfolding before them, seemed to have given them courage. She looked back to the rock. The second figure had now emerged again from 'the door' for a second time and was making his way down to his companion at the water's edge. Once there, he stood motionless, apparently looking on. The first figure then moved along the water's edge: when he reached an inlet which blocked his path, he paused momentarily and, to her amazement, seemed to walk across the water for a few paces to the opposite side. Again she turned to Clinton to solicit confirmation of what she'd seen. She didn't have to ask.

'Incredible...!' Clinton was muttering to himself, 'this is bloody incredible...'

She looked down at the twins - still one under each arm - and then behind her to where Keiron and Tina were standing. All were silent now, struck dumb again by what they'd seen. Thank God they *had* seen it, though. To have witnessed this on her own, and then had to live with it for the rest of her life with nobody else believing her, would have been too much to bear. Now, at least, there would always be five other people who could swear to have seen the same thing.

The two figures were now making their way up the lower face of the rock towards the ledge and the door above. Strange, she thought, how effortless their ascent was - like they were almost floating over the surface of the rock face. And now they were by the door again, just standing there, so tall, so motionless, just looking out to sea, across to the cliffs... across to them?

Panic suddenly took hold of her. 'Come on, kids, right now- let's go, quickly, as fast as you can,' she found herself shouting at them, bundling the twins off down the coastal path and waving to Clinton, Keiron and Tina to follow her.

Clinton ran up next to her: 'What's the matter, Mum? Why the panic?' he was asking her, breathlessly.

'Don't be so bloody stupid, Clint,' she snapped at him, 'we could see those, those. . . whatever they were clearly, they must have been able to see us, right? We Don't know *who* they are, *what* they are, *where* they come from, or *what* they want. If they're not friendly, what then - and us stuck out here on our own?'

Clinton nodded.

'Just make sure Keiron and Tina stay with you and don't about,' she urged him, 'we've got to get home as quick as possible...'

She patted him on the back and smiled encouragingly -not convincingly. If she had originally felt vulnerable in these wide open spaces on the cliffs, she now felt even more unsafe, the expanse of pasture ahead of them seeming to stretch away into infinity, and home never having so far away.

On, across the field they stumbled, up the perimeter path of the next field, into the farm yard, up the drive and, finally, into the security of the farmhouse.

'Pauline? Is that you? Thank God you're all right, we worried sick, you were so long...'

Her mother had come hurrying out of the kitchen when she heard the front door open.

'it's all right, Mum, we're all fine,' Pauline assured her, her a quick peck on the cheek. 'Help me get some tea for us all, will you?'

She caught sight of her father: 'Dad, I'll be right in to give you both a hand in just a minute, OK?' seeing his daughter's knowing wink, her father dutifully red her mother back into the kitchen and shut the door. Pauline turned to the children, now collected in the front room, still breathless and muttering nervously about what they'd just seen.

Now listen to me,' she instructed them, 'I don't want of you to say **ANYTHING** about this to **ANYONE**. Do I make myself clear? Nobody outside this house is to be about it, all right? I'm going to tell your grandmother

and grandfather about it now, in my own way - and then you can leave it to me to tell your father. And afterwards, as I said, I don't want you to breathe a word to anyone - clear?

She looked sternly at them, then hustled them all out of the room and into the kitchen.

The moment Pauline's mother saw their faces she knew something was wrong. When the children had taken their mugs of tea and left the kitchen, she grabbed Pauline's arm and shook it fiercely: 'Something happened down there, didn't it?' she demanded.

Pauline told her everything, trying to play down as much of what they had seen as possible. The effect on both her parents was just as she had expected. They were shattered. The sound of Billy's arrival home came as a blessed relief. It was not a moment too soon. Her mother was so unnerved to hear what had happened, that she was already insisting to her father that they left immediately.

Billy came hurrying into the kitchen with a worried look on his face.

'All right?' he nodded in greeting to Pauline's parents. 'Pauline? What's going on? What happened to lunch? The table's not even laid. And what's up with the kids, they're sitting in the front room looking very sheepish. . . ?'

Pauline took him to one side. Billy, looking even more puzzled than before, followed her out of the kitchen and into the hall. Shutting the door, she told him everything. By the time she had finished, he was shaking his head and cursing to himself.

'Oh hell, damn it, why the *hell* did it all have to start up again?' he was saying, over and over. 'I'd really convinced myself in the past few weeks that, well... you know...'

The words trailed away. He sighed and shrugged resignedly, burying his hands deep in his trouser pockets and slumping down on a nearby chair. 'Your parents a bit shaken up, then? And the kids, too?'

Pauline nodded.

'What do you think we should do about it, tell the police - or what?' he went on. 'It beats me...'

He shrugged again, his eyes downcast. The telephone rang. Billy answered it, then held the receiver out to her. 'It's Rosa at the Haven Fort Hotel.'

Pauline mouthed silent protests to him and waved the receiver away. She really didn't want to talk to anyone at that moment. But it was useless. She was already committed to speaking to Rosa.

Rosa, hello love, how are you?' she asked, hoping the question wouldn't be reciprocated.

Yes, I'm fine. Look, I had to call you to let you know that I've just seen. It's unbelievable, really - I couldn't believe my eyes. I was just looking out across St Bay through my binoculars - like I sometimes do, you know - when I saw this silver, disc-like object come skimming over the fields just below your farm and then... well, it dipped down and went into Stack Rocks. It just went into them, Pauline, like... well, I don't know, ***like a door had opened in the rocks and it had gone inside***. You will probably think I'm crazy, love, but that's exactly what it looked like. And that wasn't all. . . the more I kept looking at the rocks, the stranger it got. Shortly afterwards I saw these silvery figures walking about over coming down from a sort of door that kept opening shutting and shutting and then walking to the water's edge and again. It's incredible, I know, but that's what I saw, Pauline -honestly...'

There was a long pause. Pauline eventually answered her.

'We don't need telling, Rosa - we already saw it all for ourselves. Tina, my parents and I were driving in the car when the disc flew towards the rocks and then the whole family went down the coast path and we saw the figures on the rock as well...'

She could hear Rosa gasping with relief on the other end of the line: 'Thank the Lord, Pauline. I mean, I was beginning to think I'd been hallucinating or something. What are you going to do about it? I feel a bit awkward about it, seeing as how I own the rock, but... well... I mean, what *can* I do? What can *you* do? Who's going to believe any of this - I hardly believe it myself. If you hadn't all seen the same thing, I don't think I *would* be believing my own eyes...'

Another pause. Pauline eventually excused herself, promising to phone her back when her confused thoughts had settled.

She turned back to Billy. 'Rosa saw it, too. She saw everything, love, from the hotel, through those binoculars of hers.'

Billy didn't look up: 'So I gathered,' he mumbled to himself, then stood up suddenly. 'Right then, let's try and get a bit of normality back into the house...'

He took her by the hand and led her into the front room.

'All right, kids, your mum's told me what you all saw. It is fantastic and a bit frightening, I know, but *no* more so than what we've already lived through. It's not the same for your grandparents, though - this is the closest they've ever been to whatever it is that's happening here. Remember that. When I fetch them in here, I don't want you all talking non-stop about it, all right? Try not to make anything of it, try and change the subject if you can. Don't upset them, OK?'

There was no reply, just an embarrassed silence. Billy turned around; Pauline's parents were standing behind him. Before he could say anything, her mother leaned forward and laid a hand on his shoulder.

'It's all right, Billy, it doesn't matter,' she nodded, smiling slightly. 'If you could just run us back to Milford Haven now, I think that would be best. Do you mind, Pauline?'

Pauline came over and kissed both her parents on the cheek.

'Of course not. Maybe that would be best...'

She watched the children gather around her parents and was grateful that they weren't making too much fuss with their goodbyes. Though her parents were obviously anxious to get as far away from the farm as possible, and soon as possible, as soon as she knew that her mother, in particular, wouldn't like leaving the family alone in such circumstances.

'Ready, Mum? Dad?'

Her parents nodded and with a final wave to the children now gathered at the window to watch them leave - they made their way out and her mother turned to Pauline at last moment and, hugging her, said: 'You shouldn't stay in this place, love. For your sake and for the sake of rest of the family, you should leave before the worst happens...'

And with that, they were gone.

Pauline's gaze lingered on the lane long after the car had gone, leaving only a cloud of dust behind it. She suddenly felt vulnerable again, remembering with frightening clarity the night that light had chased her down that very lane - and the thought made her shiver. Turning back to the house, she could see the children's faces still framed in the window; the same window where that silver figure had stood that night and watched herself and Billy so intently.

And now, after all these weeks, it was happening again.

They - whoever, or whatever they were - were back. She couldn't rid herself of the memory of those two solitary, silver-suited figures, standing on Stack Rocks looking back at her and the family.

Had they seen them? How could they have failed to? But what were they doing there? What did they want?

She looked up into the darkening sky of the gathering dusk, then down on to the horizon behind the house, from which she could just make out the distant shape of Stack Rocks looming out of the sea. (>ill.right<)



Were they still there? Would they be back? For some explicable reason she felt that, despite her inclinations, she already knew the answer.

Whatever was happening to them, wasn't over yet.

Not by a long way.

Ten

Billy paused at the end of the path to catch his breath, but not for long. He was already later getting home than he'd intended. Dusk was already falling and he wanted to be home before it got dark.

He looked around him. Gloom and shadow everywhere. He shivered. This place spooked him worse than ever at night. Thankfully they were now well into December, and mid-way through the calving season. He was more grateful than ever about that; it meant it wasn't much longer that he'd have to leave home every night at midnight to check the herd. Night time was no time to be out alone these days - and the cowsheds were no place to be. *He'd never felt the same about the sheds since the night the herd had disappeared and materialised again at that neighbouring farm, and the morning when the sixteen cows had somehow been transported from one paddock to another in a matter of seconds.*

Was he imagining the aura the place had taken on since then? Surely not. It was different. Unpleasantly different. The cows were still in a state of perpetual aggravation, of course - still restless at night and stampeding into the electrical fences during the day, and they were still off their food and giving an abnormally low milk yield - but it went beyond that. The actual place itself felt different. The sheds and outbuildings were normally bitterly cold at night in the winter - chilled by the wind that blew in over the cliffs from the North Atlantic - but not this winter. ***The air around the farm buildings was now inexplicably warm at all times and unnaturally still.*** No wind ever seemed to blow there. And it was always so deathly quiet.

For some reason, the rooks (crows/kraake) hadn't returned that year to cluster in the trees nearby and there were no starlings swallows swooping around in the skies like there used to be and should have been.

He started on up the path, past the paddock enclosures and into the forecourt outside the cowsheds, the dim light the single bulb that burned constantly outside the building barely lighting his way. He'd check on the herd on his way home. Normally it would be routine, but not now - not with all that had been happening in recent weeks, ever since Pauline and the kids had watched the figures on stackRocks. Ten days after that, at this time in the evening, he had checked on the herd just as he was about to do now, only to find they had disappeared again - every cow, all one hundred of them had gone. Every stall was securely shut, the cowsheds were firmly padlocked and chained, but the entire herd had vanished. The owner of one of the nearest neighbouring farms to

Ripperstone Farm - Clover farm - had come rushing down to say the herd had suddenly appeared in the yard in front of his farm and were around up there. Billy had had to go and herd them back. Since then, the same thing had happened, at the same time of night, on three different occasions at intervals of ten days. Billy's nerves were now at breaking point and he was ready for any eventuality. It was just as well. His worst fears - that he would permanently lose any of his stock - had been realised. Over the same period, two cow and three calves had vanished completely from securely fenced land, while the herd had been grazing in the lower field overlooking Stack Rocks - where the twins had first seen the disc land and scorch marks had later been found.

He had explained their loss to the owner of the farm by saying they had stampeded over the cliff edge. He hadn't wanted to lie, but what else was he supposed to have said? Who would have believed that five animals had just vanished into thin air in as many weeks?

And tonight? What would he find tonight - or *not find*....?

He leaned cautiously over the cowshed gate and peered into the darkness, not knowing quite what to expect, and then sighed with relief as his eyes, now accustomed to the dark, made out the shadowy shapes of the cows, still neatly stalled inside. Thank God that tonight, at least, they were safe. He could relax again. Well, up to a point. There was, in fact, little time for relaxation around the farm these days - or nights.

He always seemed to have so much more work to do recently, particularly with Clinton now refusing to work at nights anywhere on the farm, or during the day in any of the lower fields. Not that he could blame him. Clinton had borne the brunt of some frightening experiences himself since the incident on Stack Rocks. Only two days later he'd come rushing into the farmhouse one afternoon, looking frightened out of his wits. Billy had sent him down to the lower field to repair some fences and within the hour he'd returned.

'That's it, I'm not going down there again - never again,' he'd insisted, his voice trembling with shock. 'I'd just started work down there, on the fencing - I was crouching down, trying to strengthen a fence pole - when suddenly the shadow of this figure behind me blotted out the light. The sun was so bright, the shadow was as sharp as it could possibly have been. For a moment, I thought it was you, Dad - come to check on me - but when I turned round I was alone, there was nothing, nobody there at all. I ran all the way back home and I mean it - I'm not going down there again, at least not alone...'

Clinton's help with the fencing was invaluable and it was inconvenient to say the least, but Billy had agreed. Clinton was obviously - and understandably - badly shaken up by what had happened, and it wasn't the only thing that had frightened him. A week later, at this same time of the evening, at dusk, on his way up the same path Billy had just walked, he'd seen what he'd described as '*a tall, shape-less column of light*' drifting up the path ahead of him, towards the farmhouse. He'd watched it glide up the lane and past the house and then fade away before rushing indoors, and telling what he'd seen. In the weeks since then, he'd not mentioned either incident again, but had seemed to become more introverted than ever. Pauline hadn't escaped the phenomena, either. Alone in the house, just after darkness fell, she had been looking out of the "window of the front room one night, when the house and surrounding area - had suddenly 'lit up like daylight' as she had described it. The dazzling brightness had lasted for a couple of minutes and then, as suddenly as it had 'happened, it was over. Darkness fell again.

Billy shook his head. Was it any wonder this damn place spooked him so much these days, what with everything that had been happening - particularly recently? **The conclusions were obvious. It was as if they were being surveyed, studied; as though his family was being watched, his livestock being experimented with.**

The thought chilled him and he shivered, instinctively pulling his collar up as he did so. He looked at his watch. Six o'clock. He'd better get a move on. The kids would already have got back from school, Clinton would be home from work at the farm down the road and Pauline would have served up dinner some time ago. He'd leave checking the herd's feed until later; he'd have to come back to the cowsheds at midnight to check on the herd in any case.



Turning to make his way home, he smiled to see the welcoming lights from the farmhouse, just a little way up the drive. He couldn't wait to get there. It was strange, though, how alienated he felt on his own farm, with his own family and livestock around him; it was like he didn't belong any more.

He surveyed the scene; the cold, barrack-like, grey cement farm buildings looming behind him; the skeletal shapes of the naked trees bordering the drive ahead, silhouetted against the night sky, swaying eerily in the evening breeze.

He quickened his pace.

But what was that ahead? Headlamps? A torch or lantern, perhaps? There were lights up there on his right, just beyond the outcrop of bushes that hung over the edge of the drive, opposite the house.

He stopped abruptly in his tracks, straining his eyes to try and make out what it was. Whatever it was, it was quite still, but shimmering brightly. If only that damn bush wasn't obscuring his view of it.

He inched forward a little, moving slightly to his left, trying to get into a better position to make it out.

Useless. It looked like two lights, not one - the headlamps of a parked car, perhaps - but he couldn't see properly. He'd have to get closer. He'd move over to the opposite side of the drive from it, staying close to the wall of the house, and make his way up until he was opposite it.

If only it hadn't rained earlier, he wouldn't be making so much noise. Splash, splash, splash. Damn it. But why worry? Why not make a noise? He couldn't explain it to himself, but somehow discretion seemed to be the better part of valour and, well, with everything that had been happening...

And now... there it was. A light - no, two lights - two shimmering columns of light, about the same shape and dimensions as human figures, side by side, glowing luminously, quite still, like sentinels.

What the hell were they? He felt himself flatten against the wall, hoping the shadows created by the lights from inside the house behind him would hide him from view. But from the view of what? Could 'they' see? Were they creatures, or machines - or just some sort of reflection, optical illusion? No... they were *living* things. He was sure of that. He just knew it. But what were they doing here? What did they want?

(ill.>not of the particular event- only pemade of rune via gimp>)

He daren't move. He knew, somehow, that he had better not. The family - what about the family? Had they noticed the lights yet? He prayed silently to himself that they hadn't - and wouldn't.

God, he felt vulnerable where he was. And still, right there, nearly opposite him across the drive, glowing in the darkness, the, luminous images remained.

Far to his left as he peered down the side of the house, he could see the light from the front room beaming into the front garden and could hear the faint sound of the television from inside. How he wished he were in that room with them.

He directed his gaze back to the light ahead of him. 'Still they didn't move. . . or did they? Yes. . . now they were moving . . . first one, then the other . . . drifting, gliding, floating slowly over the ground away from him, away from the house, still close to the hedgerow opposite but moving slowly up the drive, out of the receding glow from the windows of the house and now being swallowed up by the inky blackness beyond.

And then, as he watched, gone. Gone, in the blinking of an eye, gone, with the suddenness of an electric light be' mg switched off.

Billy bowed his head and let out a gasp of relief. For a moment he didn't move but stood quite still, savouring the calm he suddenly felt within himself.

'Billy?'

The sound of Pauline's voice, calling out to him from the porch, shook him out of his trancelike state.

'Here, love,' he called back to her, seeing her silhouetted in the light of the porch and looking anxiously down the drive, 'down here, by the wall...'

He saw her look further to her right and along the side of the house.

'What are you doing there, love?'

He went over to her, took her by the arm and led her into the house. Once inside, she could tell immediately by the bewildered expression on his face - that something had happened.

The children, she explained, had already had their dinner and were now watching television; she'd put his dinner in the oven to keep it hot. While he was eating, he could tell her all about it. Billy smiled at the suggestion and felt as comforted as she had intended him to be. Since the Stack Rocks sighting, they had pledged each other that they would share any future experiences and not keep any Secrets. It was better, they decided, to be prepared for any eventuality and forewarned was forearmed.

He told her exactly what he'd seen. She listened to him without interruption and showed no emotion, though he could tell she was unnerved. The fact that such phenomena were now nothing new to either of them did nothing to allay their fear. The conclusions were as obvious to Pauline as they were to Billy; they were definitely being closely observed by... well, by some intelligence or power beyond their understanding, and the interest in them hadn't diminished, it had intensified.

But to what end? What was it leading to? It was waiting for that answer that remained so frightening...

When Billy had finished relating what he'd seen, he fell silent, sipping his coffee, staring vacantly into space, his thoughts seemingly a million miles away. If Pauline was worried, it was no more so than he was. She would busy herself tidying up after dinner and then packing the kids off to bed. There was, in fact, something important she wanted to talk over with him, that was directly related to what had happened to him that evening, but it could wait until tomorrow. She'd let him drink his coffee in peace and then have his customary bath, before he went back down to the cowsheds to check on the herd. After what had happened, that would be the last thing he'd want to do, in any case. Dwelling on it would only make matters worse.

*

'Sleep well?'

Billy chuckled at the irony of Pauline's question as he sat down for breakfast the next morning. She *must* be joking, he thought to himself. His midnight check on the herd the previous night had been the most nerve racking yet. He'd actually rushed the whole procedure, with only half an eye and half his concentration on what



he was doing. Normally he'd have spent over an hour with the herd, at the very minimum, but last night he'd run all the way down there, cast a quick look over the animals - just to see whether any of the pregnant ones were ready to calve - and had then run all the way back. Pauline, bless her, had stayed awake until he got back.

'Yes, slept like a baby,' he grinned across to her, 'when managed to close my eyes...

She gave him his egg and bacon and sat down next to moving the morning paper out of his reach, so as to his fullest attention. She'd purposely got the children to school a little earlier than normal and persuaded Clinton to leave early for work, so they could have a once to talk on their own.

'What's up, love?' Billy asked her. He could tell she something on her mind.

'We're going to have visitors tomorrow. . . 'she began slowly, stopping abruptly when she saw the expression on face. Not that it surprised her. She knew the hesitant tone in her voice was probably giving her away and he knew what was coming next.

And you don't mean members of the family coming over for Christmas?' he asked, frowning now, 'but some-to do with UFOs or suchlike - more of those so-investigators or whatever they call themselves. Pauline, how *could* you have, love, after all we agreed...?' He banged down his coffee cup and fumbled irritably for cigarette. She knew he would probably guess what she done and be furious and she hardly blamed him.

It was almost a year since everything had started happening to them, and for most of that time they had tried keep as low a profile as possible. Living with such phenomena had been hard enough to do, without having suffer the sort of ridicule, humiliation and inconvenience they had originally endured after they made the mistake of telling the local papers about the light that had felled her home that night and then the silver-suited figure she and Billy had seen at the window. After those reports had come out, life had, for a time, been unbearable. The press - local and national - had reported their story in such a tongue-in-cheek fashion that Billy had felt they been made to look ridiculous, and he seemed to have right, to judge from the comical but cruel remarks that some of the locals had made at her expense; At the other extreme, there were the locals who had believed their story, but rather than sympathise, had been openly hostile. And that wasn't all. There had also been the UFO enthusiasts and investigators who had pestered them day and night with phone calls and letters - some were obviously the product of cranks, others were from enthusiasts who seemed to know their subject well - all of which had stretched their nerves to breaking point. On top of everything else had also been the commercial exploiters, anxious to cash in on their situation and to persuade them to cash in on it as well - there had been the television producer who had tried to persuade them to sign a contract to report their experiences only to his current affairs programme, the film executive who wanted exclusive rights to their story for a documentary feature film, and the local hotelier who wanted to include the farm as the main attraction of UFO holidays he planned to operate.

The more they had become the focus of attention, the more their friends and neighbours and the local newspapers had implied that they were making up the stories, and ridiculed them, and the more they had been pestered by the UFO investigators, enthusiasts and cranks. But had they been able to get the one thing they really wanted -help? Absolutely not. They had told the police that their 'property had been trespassed upon, their possessions and livestock were going missing, that their property had been damaged and they had even suffered physical harm from intruders, yet the police had admitted there was nothing they could do to help. They had told the local RAF base and their MP what had been happening, who had in turn told the Ministry of Defence, but what had happened when the authorities had been confronted with numerous witnesses of the phenomena and substantial physical evidence to show that spacecraft and spacemen *had* been seen near their Top Secret establishments? Absolutely nothing - except that the Ministry of Defence first admitted that something strange was going on and then changed their minds a fortnight later.

It was no wonder that shortly after they had seen the silver figure at the window, Billy had decided that - apart from the reports they filed with the local BUFORA investigator - they would keep secret everything that might happen to them. It was obvious that nobody believed them ept the authorities - and *they* were too frightened to acknowledge what was going on. All they could do was to suffer in silence, as it were, and hope the 'intruders' would go away of their own accord.

This they had done for the best part of nine months, during which the UFO activity in the area had ceased, the Press had stopped taking any interest in them and most their friends and neighbours had long since forgotten what had originally happened to them. Only the occasional UFO enthusiast or investigator now telephoned to see if they had anything to report and their answer was always same - nothing to report. At least, it had been, until that, previous day when she had talked for a long time on telephone to a UFO enthusiast who had seemed to her to be particularly intelligent, perceptive and knowledge-able about the subject and, more to the point, he seemed sympathetic. He had eventually asked her if he might me down to the farm and meet them and talk to them - and she had taken it upon herself to agree.

It was this news that she was trying - as gently as possible - to break to Billy.

'Yes, love, it is somebody to do with UFOs,' she admitted to him, 'but before you get too annoyed, hear me out. I know what we agreed about keeping everything to ourselves, but this man - Paul Palmer - does seem to have a of ideas about what's been happening here, and he seems very sympathetic. He really does seem to know at he's talking about and let's face it, love, things are getting worse recently, not better. You know you're as worried as I am. We could do with a few answers and if he could at least help us to understand what's

happening, well that would be something, wouldn't it...?'

Billy looked at her long and hard. She was right, of course. Things had been getting a lot worse lately and they just couldn't go on like this, living from one week to the next, never knowing what to expect or how to deal with it.

'When is he coming?' he asked her.

'Tomorrow...

'That soon?'

'It's the weekend - the only time he can afford to take off from work,' she told him. 'He's a farmer, like you - from Norfolk. He's coming down with his fiancée, Janet. They should be here about lunchtime. The twins can sleep in with Keiron and Clinton tomorrow night and they can have that room and stay the night. OK, love?'

She reached across the table and squeezed his arm.

'Of course,' he agreed, 'to tell the truth, it'll be a blessed relief to talk to someone outside the family about it after all this time. He must know more about this sort of thing than we do and if he can shed any light on what's been going on - or advise us how to cope with it - then it's got to be worth it...'

He could see the relief in her face as he agreed to her plan. Poor love, he thought to himself, she's certainly been through a hell of a time, particularly recently. He hadn't been at all easy to live with in recent weeks - he knew that - so bewildered and worried had he been about what was happening to the herd.

He'd look forward to meeting Palmer and hearing what he had to say.

*

'Well, what do you think?'

It was Saturday night, almost Sunday morning. Billy had just got in from his midnight check on the herd and was in no mood for a lengthy conversation, but he could understand the enthusiasm in Pauline's question. Paul Palmer and his fiancée - who had spent the whole of the afternoon and evening talking with them - had lived up to their expectations.

He slid into bed next to Pauline and, propping himself up on one elbow, turned to her and nodded, smiling as he did so.

'I think you were quite right to invite them down - you know you were. Very nice couple, they are - and they talked a lot of sense, if you ask me. Lord knows if any of his theories are right, but they certainly sound logical and right, well... a lot of what's been happening makes sense, doesn't it?'

she nodded and opened her mouth to speak. Billy held a finger to her lips.

'sssh- love..., enough. I'm shattered. We'll talk in the morning, OK?'

he leaned over and kissed her gently on the cheek, turned the light out and rolled over. In no time at all, she could hear him snoring, but she was still awake, her thoughts racing as she tried to remember and assimilate all they'd been talking about that day.

Billy was right, a lot more was clearer to her now - not always comforting. They were still no nearer exactly what was happening around them, but they had a few theories to consider. Paul - a university psychology graduate who had devoted a considerable amount of spare time over the years to studying the paranormal - seemed to be as well-read on the subject as it was possible to be. A shy, well-mannered young man - who seemed ideally suited to Janet, a quiet, introspective girl - he'd listened attentively to all their recollections, had been familiar with many of the phenomena and had a variety of interesting theories about their experiences. They had talked solidly for the best part six hours but had still felt they could have talked for longer. Paul had stated his position right from the start - he believed the phenomena - the discs, the lights, the figures and all the disruptive activity that had accompanied them - were of what he had called 'extra-terrestrial origin, though not necessarily of the same origin. All the evidence suggested there could be no other explanation and most of what she and Billy had described apparently tallied with other, identical, well-documented reports from all over the world. What made their experiences so special, though, was their regularity over such a long period of time.

But why was it happening to them at all?

The key, he thought, was probably in their location. Leaving aside any theories about the possible relevance of the ancient burial site on which the farm was built, or the fact that it was situated where a number of 'ley lines' crossed each other (ley lines are often considered to be tracks of the earth's magnetism, along which UFOs chart their course and from which they draw their electromagnetic power), Paul was convinced the location was significant for a number of reasons.

To begin with, global UFO activity around army, navy and air force establishments had been widely reported for many years. St Brides Bay being the location for a missile station, a tank range, a jet fighter base, and an underwater radar scanning installation - much of their activity being Top Secret - was it any wonder any extra-terrestrial intelligence would be interested in what they were doing? Who knows, maybe some of the Top Secret activity there was directly connected with the UFO phenomena? The presence of such phenomena in their particular area might, all things considered, be far from surprising. Quite the contrary. To those familiar with such things, it was highly predictable.

Then again, the Coombs family and Ripperstone Farm also presented the perfect opportunity to study human life. They were a large family of varying ages, living in a suitably isolated setting where the close observation of human behaviour presented no problems. Similarly, they were surrounded by acres of open country that would prove ideal for moving around undetected and taking samples of soil, foliage etc. Then again, the study of animal behaviour was also facilitated courtesy of Billy's herd, as were opportunities to take samples of the livestock for necessary scientific analysis (much as we on Earth have taken samples from the Moon for scientific analysis). All in all, the particular area in which Pauline and the family lived could not have been more ideally suited for extra-terrestrial research - it quite simply had everything.

And *was* that what had been happening? The evidence seemed to suggest it was - and hence the reluctance of the authorities to admit they knew anything about it and their clumsy attempts to hush it up. The numerous sightings of ufos in the area - apart from their own - and such physical evidence as radio-active scorch marks on landing sites were proof enough of their presence. And their interest in the family? What about the lights that had followed Pauline's car? The silver-sulphured figure watching them at the window? The figures seen prowling around the house at night? The disembodied 'silver hand' that had touched Pauline while she slept? The black shape Keiron had seen floating around in the front room? The shadow of the figure that had appeared behind Clinton in the fields? The two strange-looking visitors who had arrived and vanished so mysteriously? The 'light images' and silver figures that had repeatedly drifted by the farmhouse at night. The objects that kept going missing?

It all suggested that they were being closely watched, scrutinised, as were the animals on the farm, but to a far greater extent. In their case, they had also been experimented upon - taken away, en masse, in the process, and later replaced elsewhere in what could well have been exercises in the possibility of de-materialisation, teleportation and re-materialisation.

Pauline rolled over in bed and reached out for her cigarettes, next to her on the bedside table. It was useless trying to sleep. The sum total of Paul's conclusions made her senses reel. The idea of spaceships and their alien occupants, making repeated visits to the area - or even permanently based nearby - in order to closely observe the family, their life-style, and their livestock, as well as the neighbour-military installations, *still* seemed too fantastic to be true, even after what she and the family had seen, so often, with their own eyes. Yet, in a way, it made perfect sense.

As Paul had said, there were supposed to be something like hundred million planets in their own tiny galaxy alone, that science estimated could support some sort of life. What sort of life? Well, as Earth was one of the youngest planets in the galaxy, the chances of life being more advanced than us were not so much possible, as highly probable, even inevitable. And that being the case? What would be more likely than for extra-terrestrials to do exactly what mankind was attempting - interplanetary space travel?

She turned over restlessly for what seemed like the hundredth time that night, sleep still eluding her.

To begin with, she'd felt better being able to rationalise what had been happening to the family after such a long period of confusion and uncertainty, but now she wasn't so sure. At least she'd previously been able to tell herself -however unconvincingly - that what was happening just *couldn't* be happening because it was impossible. But now?

She took a long pull on her cigarette and noticed her hand was trembling slightly. Maybe knowing such things hadn't helped as she had hoped. Perhaps their original ignorance had been comparative bliss, after all.

The cigarette was making her feel drowsy, so she stubbed it out half-smoked and rolled over on her side, feeling sleep finally catching up with her.

*

'Damn it...'

Billy swore under his breath as he looked out of the rain-lashed kitchen window at the gloomy, overcast morning outside. Typical - on one of the few occasions that they had people over to look around the farm, the heavens just *had* to open and deluge the place. Thank God that, in true rural fashion, he was wise to the elements and prepared for the worst; Pauline could get those two spare pairs of Wellington boots from the cupboard under the stairs for Paul and Janet to wear. Their two guests were already sitting at the kitchen table, having been woken up at the same time as he and Pauline that morning, thanks to the boisterousness of the children who were over-excited at having guests to stay. Neither had minded their rude awakening, though. As farming folk themselves, they were used to getting up early.

Billy went over and joined them at the breakfast table. The children and Keiron had already left and now that there was some peace and quiet in the house, they could all concentrate on organising what they were going to do for the rest of the day. After breakfast he would have to go down to the cowsheds to see that the herd were put out to graze. It would be a good opportunity for Paul to see for himself how unnaturally the cows were behaving; he'd been particularly interested in the phenomenon of the herd vanishing and later materialising elsewhere, for of all the things the family had experienced, only that particular phenomenon had been without precedent as far as he knew. He had heard of several well-documented cases of livestock vanishing without trace after UFO sightings - or their mysteriously mutilated carcasses being discovered, later - but he had never heard

of so many animals disappearing in the blinking of an eye and reappearing some-where else.

Billy studied his expression as the two of them - together with Janet - made their way down the muddy drive from the farmhouse to the cowsheds. To begin with, they talked in silence, each of them looking furtively around, their imaginations stimulated by the amount of talking they had been doing previously. Janet was the first to speak, as they rounded the corner of the drive and entered the fore-court outside the sheds.

'It is. . . warm here, isn't it?' she said softly, glancing nervously at Paul, 'very... still and quiet...'

Paul nodded and glanced over at Billy.

'Just as you described it,' he muttered, 'and it's always like this?'

'always,' Billy told him, beckoning them both to follow over to the sheds. The three of them made their way inside and walked slowly down the corridor between the stalls. Paul and Janet remained silent throughout. Eventually, their tour of inspection completed, Billy solicited their help to herd the cows out of the shed and into the open docks opposite for their morning feed. Eighty-six of cows went into the larger paddocks the remaining fourteen - all maiden heifers who had to be segregated - into the smaller one opposite it. Once the job was done, the three of them leaned on the gate of the larger paddock to catch their breath.

Paul looked troubled and Billy asked him what the matter was. Paul sighed, looked across to Janet - who was standing on Billy's other side - and then back to Billy.

'Well, I don't know, Billy - it's probably nothing, but I had this dream last night that was . . . well, so vivid it really shook me up. I was so shaken when I woke up, I couldn't get back to sleep again for a couple of hours. It was just so clear, so real I don't dream a great deal as a rule, but this was . . . well, like nothing I've ever experienced before. It started with my looking down on the farm from a great height - from what vantage point I don't know - and then looking out across the countryside and St Brides Bay, over Broad Haven and RAF Brawdy and beyond. In the distance, over the horizon, I could see this gathering cloud of what I knew to be gas of some sort. It was hanging over the air base and gathering in volume as I looked at it, and moving down the coast. As I watched it moving closer I could feel a sense of terrible danger, but I knew I was too far away to be able, to warn anyone here about what was happening. I wanted to be able to warn everyone to move out of the way of the cloud - or to move them myself...'

He fell silent for a moment, turning away from Billy and looking up into the sky.

'Maybe "they" know something we don't know, about some disaster that's going to happen in this area, connected in some way with all that Top Secret work that's going on up the coast? Maybe something nuclear? **Maybe they're getting ready to intervene and evacuate everyone from the area and that's why they've been experimenting with the herd - moving them from one place to another?** Or perhaps they're just trying to give elaborate hints as to what you and the family should be doing for your own safety - in other words, move out of the area?'

He shrugged, diverting his gaze from the sky and looking back at Billy: 'Normally I'd have said nothing about a dream like that and just put it down to an over-stimulated imagination but, as I said, I never dream in the normal way - or I never remember dreams I may have - and this dream was so vivid, so damn *real*...'

The words trailed away. He shrugged again, turned away from Billy and Janet and began walking slowly across the forecourt, over to the adjoining, smaller paddock.

Billy turned to Janet. She was looking worried. 'It really did shake him up, Billy,' she whispered, 'I've never known him to be so worried about something like that...'

Billy squeezed her arm reassuringly: 'Never mind, love,' he said, trying to sound as comforting as he could, 'come and see our newest calf...'

He beckoned her to follow him and hurried after Paul, who was, by now, standing looking into the other paddock.

'These are the maiden heifers?' he asked Billy. 'At the moment, but not for long, I hope,' Billy chuckled. 'Come and see the newest delivery - a beautiful calf; arrived the night before last.'

He ushered both his guests around the corner to the stalls where cows and their new-born calves were kept for the first few days after the birth.

Opening the top half of the stable door, he indicated for them to look inside, where the calf was sleeping, snuggled up against his mother's belly. Paul and Janet were suitably enchanted and impressed, but he didn't let them disturb the animals for too long before locking the shed up again. They made their way back, around the corner and into the forecourt outside the cowsheds. Opposite the sheds, on their right, were the two paddocks they had just left.

Empty.

Billy stopped dead in his tracks, his right arm instinctively raised in front of Paul and Janet to prevent them coming further, as if to protect them from some unseen threat. He looked long and hard at the scene that confronted him.

Two paddocks, side by side, each with heavy iron gates -each one four foot tall and heavily chained and padlocked. Inside, strewn on the ground, was the newly distributed hay for the herd.

But the herd? Gone. Eighty-six cows from the larger paddock, fourteen from the smaller one. He, Paul and Janet had been leaning on the paddock gates watching them, only minutes before.

But now they were gone. Vanished.

It was, of course, impossible. Yet it had happened. Again.

'My God, they've gone . . . they've all gone. But they were there, just a minute ago. We saw them, we all saw them, right there...'

Paul had now brushed his arm aside and was walking quickly over to the paddocks, muttering as he did so.

Once there, he took hold of the enormous gate of the bigger paddock and shook it violently, rattling the chains.

'But' it's still locked . . . it's padlocked tightly . . . dear God, what happened to them... Billy?'

He turned and looked blankly at Billy, a stunned expression on his face. Janet was now standing at Billy's elbow, silent, her hand over her mouth, shaking her head.

Billy shrugged, but said nothing.

Paul walked slowly back towards them, putting his arm comfortingly around Janet and gripping Billy by the arm.

'It's true . . . it really is true. I never really doubted it, but. . . to see it with my own eyes. . . it's incredible

He looked over his shoulder, back at the empty pad-docks.

'But where have, they gone, where do we look for them?' The expression on Billy's face told him everything.

Together and in silence, they made their way back to the farmhouse.

The moment Pauline saw them arrive, she knew something had happened. Billy ushered Paul and Janet into the front room and then steered her into the kitchen.

'Get some tea for everyone,' he told her, 'we all need it...'

'Something happened out there?' 'You know it did...'

She went over to where he was sitting at the kitchen and put an 'arm around his shoulders.

'Oh Billy, not the herd again?'

He nodded. 'We've got to go and look for them again.. strange, but even after all this time and all that's happened still can't quite believe it. It's the same with Paul...

he believed everything we told him, but when it happens.. .well...'

He looked up ,at her. She was looking as frightened as e felt. Then she smiled, half-heartedly.

'Go and see how they are,' she told him. 'I'll make the tea and then you better get the car out and go and look for the herd...'

she nudged him on his Way. As Billy approached the door of the front room, he could hear Paul and Janet talking inside. By the tone of their voices, they sounded worried. Hearing about such phenomena was obviously one thing, witnessing them was something else again.

he went in and sat with them, and together they went over all the theories they had previously discussed – including the dream Paul had described having the previous night. After a few minutes Pauline arrived with the tea and by the time they had drunk it, they had managed to put the situation into some sort of perspective.

'And now,' announced Billy, eventually, 'we better go try and find out what happened to the cows this time...'

Pauline went out into the hall to fetch their coats. As she did so, she felt that familiar feeling of dread sweep er her. No matter how often these things happened to them, she could never shake off that feeling. She was glad, this particular Sunday, that Clinton and the rest of the kids were out. It was hard enough trying to cope with this of situation at the best of times, but with visitors coming to stay . . . well, it would have been too much. She looked at her watch. Eleven o'clock. In an hour or so, clinton would be home from visiting his friends at a near-by farm and the twins would be back from seeing their grandparents in Milford Haven. She'd see Billy, Paul and Janet safely on their way and then get down to making the lunch.

'I don't know how long we'll be, love,' Billy told her, as he put on his coat, 'we'll start where the herd has turned up before - first at Dale Farm and, failing that, at Clover Farm. We'll be back as soon as we find them. I'll take the car, leave it wherever I find the herd and collect it later, OK?'

She followed him to the front door and kissed him on the cheek.

'Be careful, love...'

Billy nodded and followed Paul and Janet outside, pausing for a minute and smiling reassuringly at her before he got into the car.

As she watched the car rumble up the drive and out of sight, she said a silent prayer to herself.

She put any further morbid thoughts to the back of her mind and went back indoors. Maybe, in some way, the mystery would solve itself this time and there would be a logical explanation for what was happening. But how could there be? How could there possibly be an explanation? But a reason, perhaps?

*

Billy turned the car sharply at the end of the lane into the driveway of Dale Farm.

'This was where I found them last time,' he told Paul, as he pulled up outside the farmhouse, 'right here, milling around in the yard and around the outbuildings...'

He looked around: 'But not this time, I think. Wait here and I'll have a look around. I'd rather not see the farmer. It was embarrassing enough trying to explain how the herd got here the last time - and I don't want to go through all that again...

Paul and Janet said nothing - neither had spoken since they had left the farm, so bewildered did they seem about the whole business - but they nodded in agreement.

Billy left the car and walked quickly across the yard in front of the farmhouse, towards the sheds nearby. They were all empty, the cows who normally occupied them were obviously grazing out in the fields - like his should have been. Beyond the sheds, the paddocks. Empty again.

He hurried back to the car.

'No, nothing there,' he told Paul and Janet, 'we'll try down the lane at Clover Farm. They *must* be there...'

He glanced across at Paul, then over his shoulder at Janet and grinned, trying to disguise the inner nervousness felt. The expression was empty, though. He knew it -so did they. Until they found the herd, none of them would be able to relax. It wouldn't be long now, surely? They must be at Lower Ripperstone Farm. Minutes later, his worst, hidden fear was realised. The herd wasn't there. He searched every building, looked into every paddock, even walked into the fields behind the farm. Everything was just as it should have been and his herd was nowhere to be seen. He'd have to look elsewhere. But where, for God's sake?

He walked slowly back to the car, the stillness of the deserted farm belying the growing panic he felt inside. What would he tell Paul and Janet? Where should they look next? What if he never found them - they were his livelihood, he'd be ruined...

'We'll keep looking. Don't worry, Billy - we'll find them...'

Paul was trying to sound encouraging as they weaved their way down the back lanes but the more that he and Janet tried to reassure him, the more panicky he began to feel.

Two hours went by. He lost count of how many times his gaze scanned fields full of cows that were never his, and of how many local houses, farms and homesteads they paid fleeting and fruitless visits to.

And now they were back where they started - outside Dale Farm again.

Billy pulled the car into the lay-by opposite the farm entrance and turned to Paul.

'That's it. We've covered everywhere,' he told him, 'they're gone for good this time...'

Paul didn't seem to hear him, so intently was he looking at something across the road. Billy looked to his right, following the direction of Paul's gaze..

Then he saw them, too. The cows, milling around in front of the farmhouse. Dear God, they were *his* cows -he could clearly make out the green and yellow tags on their ears.

Hurling the door of the car open, he rushed across the road to confirm the fact, Paul and Janet close on his heels.

Yes, it was them. He looked around frantically for Martin Chambers, the farmer, who would surely be able to give him an explanation as to how they had got there. Behind him, he could hear Janet trying to badger an explanation out of Paul: 'But we looked here before, Billy searched everywhere here,' she was insisting, 'they weren't here before, how can they be here now?'

Paul was saying nothing. How could he, thought Billy. There was, as ever, no explanation. Where the hell was Martin? He walked across to the farmhouse, but hadn't got there before he heard Martin's voice from the side of the house.

'Billy - there you are. What the hell's going on here? What on earth are all your cows doing up here again? All one hundred of 'em suddenly appeared in the yard. One minute they weren't here, next minute they were all over the place...'

Billy looked blankly at him. What could he tell him? It was just as before. He'd have to lie.

'Got a new stable boy,' he told him, 'he was supposed to be herding the cows to a newer pasture for me - leaving me to entertain our house guests over there - but he obviously got confused, let the herd get out of control or something. He's probably panicked and gone back to the farm and is waiting for us right now. I'd better get moving...'

He patted the puzzled farmer on the back, and hurried back to where Paul and Janet were already gathering the cows together at the entrance to the farm, and making ready to herd them down the drive and back to where they belonged.

It was a full half hour before the three of them managed to get the nervous animals the half mile home and safely locked in the paddocks again. None of them spoke during that time, though they knew they all shared the same sense of bewilderment over what had happened. Billy was aware of how mixed his feelings were, how confused and fragmented. He felt, at one and the same time, amused by the ridiculousness of the situation that had just confronted him at the farm, frightened by the implications of what had happened, and relieved that everything had turned out all right. Though he didn't ask them, he felt Paul and Janet shared the same feelings.

Pauline was waiting on the porch of the house, surrounded by the children, when they got back. She'd put their lunches in the oven to keep them hot and in no time they were sitting in the kitchen eating the welcome meal whilst reliving the experiences of that morning.

The meal was barely over when they heard the knocking at the front door. Pauline went to answer it and came back looking stunned.

'It's Martin Chambers,' she announced, her voice to almost a whisper, 'he says the herd is back at his

farm again...'

Billy stared at her, but made no reply. Nobody else in room spoke, but just looked incredulously at one another.

'Billy. . ?'

There was a note of real panic in her voice now. Billy went over and put an arm around her.

'back again? They're back again? But they can't be,' he insisted, 'it's a mistake, he's made a mistake. We just brought them back - you saw us...'

He looked around, at Paul and Janet, at the children, as to solicit agreement. There was none - just a sea of bewildered faces.

'Where is Martin - outside?'

Pauline nodded and followed him out into the hall.

'What's going on, Billy? What's happening? Why has it happened again - it's never happened twice before, like this...'

He could feel her trembling and stopped mid-way to the front door to give her a squeeze. 'It's all right, love, it's a mistake,' he assured her, 'you misunderstood what he said, that's all...'

He opened the front door and before either of them spoke, he knew by Martin's expression that there had been no misunderstanding.

Martin confirmed the fact. Fifteen minutes after he had watched Billy, Paul and Janet herd the cows down the lane, he'd looked out of his window and seen them milling around in his yard again, just as before.

'You'd better check your fencing or the locks on your paddocks,' he grumbled to Billy. Billy promised he would -and that he'd be up to Dale Farm in a few minutes to bring the herd back.

Martin seemed satisfied, but went off grumbling. Billy walked down the drive in the opposite direction, towards the paddocks to confirm what he already knew.

Sure enough, there they were, securely padlocked and chained - just as he had left them, twenty minutes ago -but they were now completely empty.

He stood rooted to the spot for a moment, gazing blankly at them and shaking his head. How? Why? What was it leading to? How many times had he asked himself those questions? *Was Paul right? Were they being teleported somehow by some unseen intelligence, for its own experimental purposes or in order to tell him something? It was too incredible.* How could such things be happening?

He looked up into the overcast sky above him. What was up there? *Was there some intelligence of some sort, watching him, right now?*

He dropped his gaze hurriedly and looked nervously around him, at the farmhouse up to his left, the paddocks in front of him, the outbuildings at the end of the drive to his right, the cowsheds looming up behind him. It all looked even bleaker than it normally felt, stiller and more sinister.

He looked at the ground around his feet - and noticed something that unnerved him still further. Since they had brought the cows back, it had rained. The ground was now muddy - yet the mud outside the paddocks was undisturbed. That meant only one thing; if any person, or animal, or animals had moved on this spot recently, they would have *had* to leave tracks. **Yet there were none, except for Billy's footprints. The cows had gone - but not by walking out of the paddock...**

He felt himself tense up even more than before, and looked around again nervously.

'Billy?'

He looked around. Pauline was calling him from the house and beckoning for him to come over. She was quite right - he'd promised Martin that he'd go and fetch the herd immediately. He'd better go. Pauline, bless her, had all the children into their warmest clothes and Welling-boots and they were already waiting for him, to give a hand. Keiron and the twins could help him, Paul and Janet with the herding, while Clinton drove back the car, which was still up at Dale Farm.

*

Pauline waited at the window for what felt like an eternity before she eventually saw Billy, the family, and Paul Janet appear in front of the house again, herding cows in front of them. She breathed a sigh of relief and rushed to the front door to wave to them, before going into the kitchen to put the kettle on for some much needed tea.

She had no way of knowing that it would be wasted again.

Within ten minutes of being padlocked up again, the herd would vanish for a third time and rematerialise at Dale Farm.



Eleven

December 18th, 1977

The rear lights of Paul and Janet's car were finally lost from view as they sped up the drive away from the house and into the night. Pauline snuggled closer to Billy as they stood in the porch.

It hadn't been a particularly cheery farewell Billy and their guests - not to mention the children - had been exhausted coping with all the recurring business with the cows and by the end of the day, everyone's nerves were thoroughly frayed. The children, in particular, had been very frightened when the herd had disappeared for the third time and Billy had literally had to plead with them to go with him to help him bring them back. Later, the twins had fallen asleep downstairs on the sofa, so nervous had they been at the prospect of going upstairs to bed alone; Ginton and Keiron eventually had to agree to have an early night so that their sisters could feel safer with their brothers sleeping in the next room. Pauline had, in fact, been relieved to get the children out of the way; the collective nervous energy that everyone had been generating as they sat around pondering on what was happening, had created a terribly unsettling atmosphere. It was a slim hope, but maybe - now that the rest of the family was asleep and their guests had gone - she and Billy could unwind a little.

Once inside, she made them both a cup of coffee and they stretched out in front of the fire in the front room, trying to savour the stillness in the house, but finding it didn't actually soothe them in the slightest - if anything, the silence surrounding them had a tense expectancy about it.

'I don't know if I can take much more of this, love,' Pauline eventually muttered to Billy.

'It was bad enough before, but now there's so much happening, so frequently, I just can't stand it. What if Paul was right - we're not only being studied, but we're being warned in some way to leave here? Either way, isn't it getting too dangerous here, now? Who knows *what's* going to happen next, or what it's all leading to? Anything might happen. If we are being studied, how long might it be before they start experimenting in some way with us? If by moving the cows they are trying to warn us to move because of some impending disaster, why have they now started doing it so much? Because the disaster, whatever it is, is going to happen soon?'

She fell silent, her eyes downcast. Please don't cry, she herself - be level-headed and try and help Billy decide what to do for the best. She felt him move next to her on the sofa and put an arm around her.

'We don't know what's happening, or is going to happen love,' he whispered, 'but it does look like it's all get-far too close for comfort. Even the kids, who were getting to be far less frightened than they used to be, are now as frightened as they were at the beginning when all first started. I'm more frightened about what's happening to them - or might happen to them - than I am about anything else...'

She put her head on his shoulder and started to sob, unable to control her emotions any longer.

so am I, love, so am I - oh, Billy, let's leave here, please, if only for their sake. Please, before it's too late.

He squeezed her to him and wiped a tear from her cheek.

'We will, love, we will,' he told her, 'tomorrow we'll making plans...'

He stood up, pulling Pauline to her feet.

'But now, let's get to bed ourselves. Enough's enough one day - right?'

She managed a smile and followed him out of the room, turning out the light as she did so.

Billy was right. Enough was enough. She wanted only to escape into sleep now and put the day behind her; besides, they both had a long day tomorrow - Billy at the farm and she back at work at the factory in Milford Haven for much of the day. Now - while he went down to the cowsheds to check on the herd - she'd make them both a cup of cocoa and lock up the house for the night.

She watched him wrap up in his coat and hurry out into the night. He was checking on the herd two hours earlier than he normally would have done, or should have done. It wasn't like him to break the habits of a lifetime - it showed how deeply affected he was by everything. She sighed and went into the kitchen. As she waited for the milk to boil, she leaned on the edge of the sideboard and gazed out of the kitchen window, out across the dark fields to the twinkling lights of Broad Haven along the coast.

And this is where it had started, right here, on a night like this, she thought to herself. My God, if she'd only known then what she knew now. If the world only knew what they knew now.

She finished making the cocoa and as she did so, heard the front door open. She met Billy in the hall and helped him off with his coat.

'Everything all right down there?' she asked him anxiously, aware that she was dreading the answer.

'Yes, love - fine,' he assured her, the nervousness he felt about going out alone at that time of the night registering clearly in his voice. 'Everything was in order, all the herd was there - but they're terribly restless, more so than they were earlier. I don't know, it's like they *know* something else is about to happen. If they could only speak, what a story they would have to tell!'

He put an arm around her and chuckled, but there was no real humour there.

They went slowly up to bed, pausing for an instant to look into each of the children's rooms. The twins had left the main light on in their room, bless them. They were obviously too frightened to go to sleep in the dark. Even and Keiron, in the next room, had left their door open.

Everyone, it seemed, was expecting something to happen -and fearing the worst. It was hardly surprising, Pauline thought to herself - not after the sort of day they had just all lived through.

She looked around the door into the boys' rooin and watched them sleeping for a moment, before going through to join Billy. He was already in bed, finishing his cocoa, and was in the process of settling down to sleep.

By the time she had undressed and snuggled in next to him, he was asleep. How she envied him the ease with which he always slept. No matter how tired she was, she never found sleep came to her that easily - and certainly not on a night like this, with all she had on her mind.

All the events of the day rushed through her mind again, as did Paul's theories about what it all might mean. And what now? Had Billy meant what he had said about the family leaving the farm? She hoped so. She wouldn't be sorry to leave, not now. Just think, it would be the family's last Christmas at the farm. Christmas? Huh... nobody really mentioned it, what with everything else they had on their minds, and it was only a week or two away. Never mind her job at the factory, packing everyone else's Christmas turkeys - what about theirs? She hadn't done any shopping at all. But who cared? What was more important was that the family was still around to enjoy the festive season...

She finished her cocoa and put the mug gently on the table, reaching out for a cigarette as she did so.

It was no use she wasn't in the least bit tired. What was the time? She glanced at the clock next to her: nearly mid-night. Maybe the cigarette would make her feel drowsy and help her sleep.

She turned out the light and rolled over on to her back, taking a long pull on the cigarette and blowing the smoke up towards the ceiling, watching it spiral eerily upward and then dissipate in the shaft of light that was beaming in through the bedroom door from the landing out side. That damn light wasn't going to help her get to sleep, but she *had* agreed with the twins that she would leave it on tonight, and a deal was a deal. Mind you, if she'd known the light was going to shine straight through the door and on to her side of the bed, she wouldn't have been so magnanimous. She couldn't even shut the door to block it out, either. That was another condition she had agreed to - she'd leave their door open that night.

She inhaled deeply on the cigarette and noticed her hand was trembling slightly.

Memories of the silver-suited figure at the window suddenly flashed into her mind.. . and the tall shadows that Layann had seen entering this very room on two occasions and the silver hand that had touched her on the arm as she slept and later immobilised it...

She hurriedly extinguished the cigarette and then rolled over on to her right side, into her customary sleeping position, curled up and facing Billy's back, so they fitted together like spoons. She pulled the covers up a little, so that only her crossed forearms were visible on the pillow in front of her. Please - let her fall asleep soon...

*

Oh hell... it was useless.

She adjusted her position slightly. The more she tried to sleep, the more awake she felt. And, somehow, the more agitated and nervous. That light from the landing didn't help, either, the way it shafted straight down on to her, sending a beam of light to illuminate her pillow like that. It just missed her face, thank goodness, but lit up the backs of her hands and her forearms as brightly as day.

She focused on the back of her hand, studying its contours, the pores in the skin, the blemishes, the perfect arrangement of little hairs. She smiled to herself. Why bother with counting sheep, when you can count the little hairs on the back of your hand?

She let her gaze wander down and along her forearm. Funny, she thought, how such an isolated beam of light, in the dark on one spot, seems to bring everything into such relief. And what a light... it seemed be getting brighter all the time... dazzlingly so..

She should close her eyes for a second. It was obviously optical illusion, but perhaps you could strain your eyes king at something so closely in such conditions?

She closed her eyes for an instant, then stretched the rs of one hand across the pillow and rubbed them gently.

That was better.

Or was it? Opening them again made the light seem all more dazzling. All she could see in front of her now the reflected glare off the whiteness of the pillow case beneath her, and the fleshy outline of her hand and arms crossed in front of her face... and, wait a minute, what as that? Strangest thing - like a transparent plastic tube some sort with what looked like a metal rod on the end it. Standing on her forearm, suspended over it, sticking it?

Christ, what was that?

Damn that bloody light... why *was* it suddenly so bright? it wasn't eye strain, it *was* brighter. . . where was it coming from, what the hell was happening here...?

she must have dropped off for a minute, be imagining this ... the bedroom door must have blown open, letting in the glare from the hall... she should close it... get up and close it... get up, now...

but wait... this felt she wasn't lying down, was she?... no, she was upright, curled up, hunched forward, arms across her face, but sitting up now . . . she wasn't lying down any more, wasn't in bed lying down any

more, she was sitting - but where?

Drop her arms... she must drop her arms... look into the light, concentrate, focus, look around...

she dropped her arms slowly to her side, instinctively shying away from the brightness of the light as she did so and peering sideways into the glare.

Was she just sitting on the side of the bed, staring into the glare of the light in the hall with sleepy eyes?

Surely she was. Her eyes were clearing now - or the light in front of her was dimming - and she could make out details, shapes in front of her.

Yes, the light was dimming.

She could see now. She could see clearly.

But what? What was all this? What was this place? Where was she?

She looked around nervously.

This wasn't possible. It couldn't be. She shouldn't be here - she *couldn't* be here. She was at home, right now, she was at home. She was in bed. She was with Billy. She couldn't be here. She didn't belong here. What was this place? Who were these people? What did they want of her?

A dream, this must be a dream. Mustn't it? Dear God, it must be... but how? How *could* it be, when it felt so real. Her night-dress - she was even wearing the right nightdress. She could still taste the cocoa she had been drinking and the cigarette she had been smoking. God help her, this *was* real, it *was* happening, she just knew it...

She must concentrate, look hard around her...

She was sitting on a bench, a long bench made out of what looked like white plastic moulded into the white plastic wall she was leaning against. The bench - and the wall - stretched away to her left in a wide semicircular shape. She was in a domed room. And at the end of the bench, at the end of the semi-circle, an enormous screen filling the opposite wall, dotted with lights that seemed to be flashing silently in sequence... red... blue... yellow
..... red... blue... yellow... green.

And who was that. . . ? in front of the screen. . . a chair, there was a chair with a figure seated in it... a figure she could only see in silhouette against the myriad of flashing lights.

And to the right of the screen, off to her right-hand side? Just a void, a black void - a shadow perhaps? And more silhouettes? No... wait... they were moving forward now, slowly, towards her and stopping, still shrouded in the half-light.

2figures-she could make out two figures.. the same height and shape and. . . identical, they looked identical ...two... women? They looked like women... women in what looked to be dark-coloured, matching sweaters and skirts ... and both with long dark hair... just standing, side by side, opposite her, across the expanse of white floor that divided them, just looking at her, out of the half-shadow, saying nothing, doing nothing...

And further to her right, framed in shadow, the dim rectangular glow of an entrance, a doorway, a ramp leading down to - what?

She inched forward on the bench and leaned outwards try and make out the detail outside, the source of the dim light that was illuminating the entrance. A ramp? Yes, it was a ramp, leading down to... my God, a road, the main road, near Ripperstone Farm?

Surely not? But yes, she could make it out clearly now it *was* that road, she recognised it immediately, even the dim glow that was somehow illuminating the portion of it that she could see. . . and now, what was this . . . more shapes? People . . . there were people approaching the ramp out of the darkness and mounting it...

How many? three... four... there were five and... wait... they were, yes, human - and all women, women like her. But who? Did she know them? She couldn't tell, not in the dimness of the light and from distance, however hard she strained to see. If only someone would call out - or perhaps she should?

No, better not. But it was so quiet...

She sat back, leaning against the wall again.

God, who was that... someone, right next to her, next to her at her shoulder . . . one of the two men who had been looking at her from across the room but how? How had she got there? And now she was looking at her... closely... staring, just staring with those blinking eyes... blue eyes... clear blue eyes, like... the eyes Clinton and Rosa had described after those two mysterious visitors had called at the farm and the hotel. . . and that high forehead, the same. . . and the sleeked back hair, though longer than either of them had described . . . maybe she was the woman of her species

the sweater and the skirt seemed to make that clear... and the material, it was like the 'bluish tweed' of the suits of those other two visitors... yes, this must be the female equivalent, surely? Or - more likely, according to Paul's theory - a sort of specially contrived 'human-looking' illusion to make her, and the others, feel more at ease. A disguise? That wax complexion certainly didn't look real...

What should she do? Those eyes, those clear, unblinking eyes gave nothing away and there was no facial expression to indicate what she -or it-felt...

And herself? This was just too incredible, too fantastic -but frightening? No, she felt no fear - only fascination and wonderment.

She needn't feel frightened. She knew that. But how? She just knew. The more the figure stared unblinkingly at her like that, the more she knew that fear was unnecessary. What had she to be frightened of? Had she been

hurt? Had she ever been seriously hurt? No, of course not. What purpose would it have served to hurt her? And Billy - or the family - had they ever been hurt? Of course not. They had been frightened, maybe, but never harmed. It couldn't be helped if people were frightened by what they didn't understand, but if a little fear could lead to a greater understanding, then even that discomfort was worthwhile, wasn't it?

No, she had no need to worry and, besides, she was going home now...

Now? How? How could she be here and then suddenly be at home? She had to ask the figure... it was going now...standing... its shape silhouetted in the bright lights on the domed ceiling above... she had to squint up into the light to make it out, but even then it was hopeless... they were too bright... she'd have to shield her eyes against it, cross her arms across her eyes and then...

Better, that was better - and the light seemed to be dimming now.

And dimming.

She could take her arms away and look now.

Nothing. There was nothing in front of her... just the ghostly white shapes of her hands, lying on the pillow in front of her, picked out by the beam of light shining through the door from the hall outside. And Billy, the dim outline of Billy curled up in front of her.

She closed her eyes and went to sleep. Smiling.

Twelve

December 19th, 1977.

Billy grunted and looked blearily around the room.

Pauline was standing over him, smiling down at him, with a breakfast tray in her hands and a broad smile on her face.

'Breakfast in bed for my lord and master,' she chuckled, 'wakey wakey, it's seven o'clock...

Billy looked over his shoulder at the clock, on the table on her side of the bed, feeling totally disorientated. An early call so he could have breakfast in bed? What on earth was going on?

He propped himself up groggily on his elbows and blinked up at her: 'Thanks, love. What have I done to deserve this?'

'Absolutely nothing,' she said, chuckling again and leaving the room briskly, 'so make the most of it. I can't stand here nattering, I've got the kids' breakfasts to make.'

Then she was gone. He rearranged the tray more comfortably on his lap and savoured the sight in front of him. Eggs and bacon, sausage, tomatoes and even mushrooms. Toast and marmalade. A pot of tea instead of just a cup. He smiled to himself - then frowned. On a Monday morning? All this on a Monday morning? Very strange -especially as Pauline had to get off to work herself as well as making breakfast for the kids. Quite apart from all that, she'd been so shaken up by everything that happened the day before, he'd even planned to bring *her* tea in bed this morning and make the kids' breakfast, so that *she* could have a bit of a lie-in. And now this?

She was probably trying to put a brave face on things. Or - more likely - she was relieved at the thought of their agreement to quit the farm.

Good God, in the cold light of day he realised just what the move was going to entail and all the planning that would have to be done.

Ripperstone Farm wasn't only their home, it was his livelihood. Trying to find another position as a tenant farmer wouldn't be easy. Then there were the kids and the problems involved in rearranging their education.

It was certainly going to be a daunting task, but as they had both agreed the previous night, enough was enough. They had endured the phenomena - whatever they were -for very nearly a whole year, hoping that each time something happened it would be the last time. But it never was. More to the point, it had got worse.

He finished his breakfast and pushed the tray away, leaning back against the headboard of the bed and lighting up a cigarette. There would be no real chance to talk to Pauline about moving plans this morning but he'd prolong his tea break at four o'clock that afternoon, when she had got back from work, and they could talk then, in peace and quiet.

He could hear the kids clumping around, up and down stairs, in their normal morning panic to get off to school on time. How would they feel about moving, he wondered? It was true that they had been as shaken up as he and Pauline had been over what had happened the day before, but it was amazing how quickly children got over that sort of thing. They had all made a lot of friends at school - and Clinton at his local job - and they wouldn't want to leave them all behind, but it *was* for their own good, as they would certainly appreciate...

He put out his cigarette and swung out of bed. His early call would mean he could languish in a hot, relaxing bath for longer than normal, as well. He'd appreciate that luxury later on, for sure, what with all the guaranteed tensions the day promised.

Billy looked at his watch. Four o'clock. Great. Pauline would be back from work at any time and have the kettle on, and he certainly needed a cup of tea.

He looked around him, surveying the scene around the paddock and making a mental check that he'd done everything that had to be done. Then he set off up the drive in the direction of the farm. He'd be glad to get into the warm. He couldn't understand why he was so cold. It was normally so uncannily still and warm around the farm buildings, but today - for the first time that winter - it had been windy and bitterly cold. Most odd of all was that the thermometer confirmed it was no colder than it had been for weeks. Not only that, but he'd been noticing all day long that the trees around the farm - and the sky overhead - were filled with birds.

It was all very weird.

He hurried into the house, discarded his hat, coat and boots in the hall and was soon huddled over the open fire in the front room. Pauline had heard him come in and was soon at his side with a mug of tea.

'Kids in the kitchen?' he asked her.

'That's right,' she nodded, 'I told 'em to stay put because we wanted to talk. You do want to talk, don't you, love?'

Billy looked at her quizzically as he sipped his tea and savoured the warmth of it. She looked so bright-eyed and bubbly, considering what they were about to discuss. In fact, she looked more effervescent than he'd seen her looking for goodness knows how long. Compared to the sobbing helpless person whom he had consoled in this very room only the night before, it was a miraculous transformation.

'Yes, love. Remember what we were discussing last night? We've got a lot of talking to do, I reckon...'

He beckoned for her to sit down next to him, but she patted him on the shoulder instead and dismissed the idea.

'Not now, love, but I'll tell you what - why don't we drive over to my parents in Milford Haven this evening with the kids, after supper, and we can pop out on our own during the evening for a drink and talk then?'

He looked up at her, frowning now. 'But I thought...oh well, ok love, we'll do that, then...'
She patted him on the shoulder again: 'Smashing. Now, you carry on getting yourself warm while I finish getting the kids' tea. .

She swept out of the room.

Billy gazed contemplatively into the fire. He couldn't understand it. Going to see her parents that night? She hadn't ventured further than the front door at night for months - certainly not since winter had started and the evenings had drawn in so much earlier.

He shrugged to himself. He was past trying to understand anything that happened around this place any more. One thing was certain, though. It should be an interesting evening.

*

Dale 13 miles.

Billy sighed as he saw the familiar sign that heralded fact that they were nearly home. He'd been glad to get back. He'd had enough of this day. It had all been altogether too confusing. Pauline had been more chirpy and full of good humour that evening than she'd been for long time, and not in the least bit nervous of being out at night or even driving down this gloomy country lane where she had first been chased by that globe of light. At one point in the evening she had even invited her parents to come and visit them again at the farm and had assured them that 'everything was all right there now'. He determined to talk to her about that, in private, when they got home. She had no right to make such unfounded assurances - especially in front of the children and particularly in view of the fact that they still had to break the news to them about leaving the farm. Or were they? That was something else. . . when he and Pauline had popped out a drink during the evening and he'd tried to discuss what they were going to do on that score, she'd dismissed the subject out of hand as though there was no problem at all any more.

He just couldn't begin to understand it.

'Mum?'

The sound of Keiron's voice broke the silence and his train of thought. He was leaning over from the back seat, tugging at Pauline's sleeve.

'Mum . . . look up there,' he was insisting, pointing between them, up into the sky in front of the car.

Billy bit his lip. He felt inclined to tell Keiron to shut up, so frayed were his nerves, but he thought better of it. Such a sudden demand from Keiron in this particular place, at this particular time of night, would normally have reduced Pauline to a nervous wreck in view of what had happened here in the past. But not now, it seemed.

'What is it, love?' she asked him calmly, half turning in her seat to see exactly where he was pointing.

'There, there, I can see it too,' Layann was now squealing, as she pushed her way forward between the front seats to get a better view, 'it's a light, a bright light, a yellow light - see it? Look, up there, moving really fast across the sky in front of us

'Yes, yes, I see it now,' Pauline was saying, excitement registering in her voice but not, Billy noted, any sense of panic.

He looked up into the sky himself, high over the gloomy outlines of the trees that bordered the road ahead - and then he saw it as well.

Clearly distinguishable from the immobile, twinkling stars in the clear sky, a dizzyingly bright yellow spot of light was racing across the heavens.

He slowed the car to a crawl.

'What the hell is that?' he found himself muttering, 'shooting star? Comet? It's not an aeroplane, that's for sure...

The words trailed away. As they watched, it suddenly stopped for an instant, shot vertically upwards at tremendous speed, stopped again and then sped off in the same direction as before.

'See that, Dad, see that?' Keiron was insisting, tugging at him.

Billy nodded.

'It's just like before, just like what we saw before, but higher up, isn't it, Mum?' he was saying excitedly. 'And it can't be any of those things you said, because comets and planes don't do that, do they? It can't be ball lightning, either, not behaving like that - nor a satellite...'

Billy drew the car to a halt. Keiron was right. He was absolutely right. But hold on, what was this? The light had stopped again and seemed to be dropping out of the sky, growing brighter as it did so. Lower and lower... almost on the tree-silhouetted skyline... and now gone, as if into the trees.

'What happened? Where did it go,' Keiron was demanding, 'into the trees? It must be near the farm, then. Mustn't it?'

'KEIRON!'

Billy knew he should have told him to keep quiet earlier - he could hear the twins whispering nervously to one another and Clinton telling them not to worry. He glanced at Pauline, in the seat next to him. She was looking puzzled, a little worried, but in no way panicky.

'All right, love?' he asked her, nevertheless.

'Fine, fine - let's just get home . . . ' she whispered to him, simultaneously reaching over and squeezing his hand.

He put the car in gear and accelerated down the narrow lane to the turn-off to the farm.

Within minutes they had reached it and were rumbling down the gravel track.

On the right-hand side, just ahead, they could make out the lights of the farmhouse and beyond them, a little further down, the dim glow from the night lights around the cowsheds.

Billy decelerated, slipped the car into neutral and it ground gently to a halt outside the house.

They had all seen it, long before the car had come to a halt, but nobody had spoken.

It was as though they had all expected it to be there. Waiting for them.

Directly in front of them, glowing in the night sky, suspended motionless over the cowsheds was an enormous ball of bright orange light, with all the size and brilliance of the sun.

Without saying a word, the family left the car - Pauline first, then Billy, then the children - and walked slowly down the gravel drive away from the car, past the house and into the gloomy yard outside the cowsheds, their heads craned to look at the glowing orb above them.

There was no fear, no panic, no hesitancy as they made their way still closer to the object.

It was Pauline who broke the trance-like silence first.

'Beautiful, isn't it?' she whispered. 'Isn't it the most beautiful thing you've ever seen?'

Billy reached out in the darkness and took her hands. She glanced sideways at him and smiled gently, then looked over her shoulder at the group of children behind them.

'Watch,' she whispered to them, returning her gaze to the light again.

No sooner had she spoken, than the giant globe started to move, gently, swaying first to one side, then to the other, like a luminous pendulum, radiating its orange glow in a perfect arc on the muddy ground beneath their feet.

Billy glanced again at Pauline, her face bathed in the soft orange luminosity of the globe, and saw that she was smiling. She sensed his look, but without returning it, whispered: 'Keep looking, love. It's going...

He looked back up at the glowing object. For a moment, it stopped still in the sky and then, with frightening suddenness, streaked off, up and away from them, diminishing in size as it went, until it was barely as big as a distant planet.

He felt Pauline's grip tighten on his hand and, turning to her, noticed her eyes were glistening with tears. Gently he led her back up the drive towards the house, the children following silently behind them.

When they got indoors, the family sat in silence for a few minutes around the kitchen table, absorbing what they had just seen.

Billy spoke first.

'It's over, isn't it?'

He turned to Pauline. She nodded.

'You knew it, all along. But how?'

She told them about everything that had happened to her the previous night.

'A dream?' asked Billy.

Pauline said nothing, just smiled to herself and sipped her tea - but as she did so, nobody could fail to notice the puncture-like blemish on her forearm

THE END

EPILOGUE

This story - this true story - is now completed. *The uninvited* have left the Coombs family as dramatically and unexpectedly as they first arrived, but the mystery they brought with them remains.

Only one thing seems certain - they were there.

But, having shared the Coombs' experiences, you must judge that fact for yourself. I have related the story as accurately as was possible, spending weeks with the family, during which time each of them painstakingly relived their own experiences over and over again into a tape recorder. Their stories never varied. They all swear to the truth of what they have said, and have even offered to take lie detector tests to prove the validity of their experiences.

Conclusions are therefore easy to reach. The choice is simple. Either their story is a carefully concocted web of lies, or it is a vividly accurate, carefully reconstructed account of probably the most significant close encounters on record. There can be no half-measures.

I have absolutely no doubt which is the case.

In the beginning, I was sceptical, and approached the family with a mind more closed than open. The experiences the family claimed to have had seemed to belong firmly within the realms of science fiction and that suited me admirably at the time, for I had been commissioned by a magazine simply to write a suitably dramatic True-Life UFO Story to coincide with the opening in Britain of *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind*. It didn't matter whether the story was true or not, as long as it was topical and a 'good read'.

At the outset, I had little doubt which it was likely to be. I am now sure I was wrong.

The reasons are many and various. The Coombs family seem to me to be some of the most honest and down-to-earth people I have ever met in my life. They knew nothing of UFO phenomena when I first met them - same for the phenomena that they had experienced first-hand - and they had previously never believed in such things, nor had any interest in the subject (as I write this, not one member of the family has ever seen either *Star Wars* or *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind!*) **It originally took all my powers of persuasion to get them to tell their story at all**, and they persistently refused all offers of payment to do so - as they do to this day - for fear of damaging their credibility. It was only a combination of their fear of the phenomena they were encountering; their anger at the lack of assistance they were getting in their plight; and their genuine concern that such things should be brought to the attention of the public that eventually convinced them to allow me to recount what happened.

They are, therefore, neither 'UFO-buffs', nor sensation-seekers cashing in on a craze, nor misguided individuals labouring under some mammoth misconception - they are, instead, a very nice, ordinary, honest farming family telling their story in as simple and straightforward a way as they know how. It was the recognition of that fact that gave birth to this book.

But what a difficult birth! In the beginning - as more and more details came to light - I found myself thinking time and time again that it was just all too far-fetched and fanciful to possibly be true.

The more I got into the mystery, the more I began to find my scepticism diminishing, until any other explanation, other than the most incredible, seemed unsatisfactory, no matter how much logic told me otherwise.

Hadn't neighbours and the local police testified to the terrified state the family had been found in, when the spaceman had appeared at the window? Hadn't there been inexplicable scorch marks and radiation traces around the window? And scorched and flattened grass - again with radiation traces - where one of the UFOs had apparently landed? And the inexplicable draining of power from the electricity meters? The facts began to pile up, each seemingly more amazing than the one before, and none of the happenings could be explained in any rational way, neither could they have been devised or stage-managed to perpetuate a hoax. The only interpretation that made any sense was in the context of extra-terrestrial visitation. The Coombs had originally been frightened to tell anyone of their experiences for fear of being ridiculed, and I began to feel the same way - until, in the course of my background research into the subject of Ufology, I began to realise that neither I nor the Coombs were alone in our beliefs. I knew that the credibility of the phenomena had grown in recent years because of the vast numbers of reports that had been filed world-wide, but I had no idea of the volume of hard-nosed scientific opinion that now supports Ufology.

It rapidly became clear that there was no reason on earth why *The Uninvited* shouldn't be true. In fact, it was far more likely to be true than untrue. Cynics on the subject of UFOs and extra-terrestrial activity on Earth -

cynics like I used to be - generally share the same characteristic: complete ignorance of the subject they are so quick to dismiss.

It is hardly surprising. Ignorance as far as the public is concerned is bliss as far as the authorities are concerned. What our minds don't know, our hearts apparently won't grieve over. On the subject of UFOs, the rule of thumb was - and often still is - to debunk the phenomena by going to any lengths to explain them away, or simply by ridiculing them. There is an anecdote that typifies officialdom's line on the subject. During an extensive 'UFO flap' over Southern England reports of UFO sightings were flooding in from all over the place. Merlyn Rees, who was then the Minister of Defence, stood up in Parliament and made the following, fantastic statement: ... the source of a few of these lights has still not been identified - but I can, however, say that none of them was an alien object..

It was no wonder I took the Coombs less than seriously when I first met them and that - as a member of the press - they were so reticent to tell me their story. I had been conditioned to disbelieve them, and they had been conditioned to even disbelieve the evidence of their own eyes.

Now I share the family's anxiety that their story be told and be believed. I am as determined as they are that neither the authorities nor the media will, on this occasion, brush the phenomena aside, or explain them away. It is too important a subject to treat in such a way.

The authorities have already tried to gloss over, brush aside and generally suppress the telling of their story by their negative and evasive treatment of the people involved.

Consider the facts. Faced with an embarrassing number of reports of inexplicable UFO sightings in South West Wales in May, 1977, a Ministry of Defence spokesman admitted to a British national newspaper: 'We have had reports of sightings of unexplained objects in the West Wales area and the people who have reported these sightings are not nutcases, they are genuinely sincere people, genuinely concerned. We investigate every report on this assumption and we do *not* discount the possibility of intelligent life in outer space...

This might seem to be good news for the people - including the Coombs - who were being so frightened by the phenomena at that time. So, doubtless, did the words of Flight-Lieutenant Gowan, the community relations officer at the Royal Air Force's Brawdy Air Base near Broad Haven, who also seemed to give total credence to the phenomena when he admitted: 'There *have* been a flood of these reports and the ground sightings of UFOs do not, in time or place, fit in with our operations. We also accept the possibility of life in outer space and none of our radar units can explain these sightings...'

But there was no thorough, proper investigation into what was going on, to reassure the people involved that their interests and their safety were being taken care of.

There were investigations - and there probably still are - but they were all conducted furtively and evidence of them covered up.

Immediately after Pauline Coombs watched a UFO apparently crash into the cliffs near Ripperstone Farm, the area was cordoned off and Army personnel and Naval frogmen started examining the site, refusing to tell Billy Coombs - whose land they were on - what they were looking for. A little later, both Pauline and Billy Coombs were observed at their window by the silver-suited alien figure, and their neighbour across the bay watched a spacecraft and two similar alien figures near her home. In both cases there were scorch marks and radiation traces remaining after the sightings. The Coombses' neighbour wrote to their Member of Parliament for help, for reassurance that their safety was not in jeopardy. The MP wrote to James Welibeloved, the Under-Secretary of State for Defence at the Ministry of Defence, asking what was being done. One would expect the Under-Secretary's F4 Department at the Ministry to have received not only dozens of newspaper records of UFO and alien sightings in the area, but also the report filed by an officer from the Brawdy RAF Base who interviewed the Coombses' neighbour at length about her sighting, and asked her to keep their conversation secret. But the Under-Secretary replied to the MP telling him that the Ministry of Defence could 'offer no further information on the subject' and that - most incredible of all - '*we have no record of any other unusual activity in the area*'.

No record of what the Army and Navy discovered after their examination of the cliffs near Broad Haven?

No record of the numerous newspaper reports of eyewitness accounts of UFOs and aliens near Army and Navy installations in the area?

No record of the extensive interview conducted between an RAF official and Pauline and Billy Coombs' neighbour?

What happened to all these records?

It was initially this mysteriously secretive attitude of the authorities that made me wonder if there was, in fact, more to the Coombs' story than actually met the eye, and the same attitude eventually compelled the family to tell me the whole story. *They felt, at the time, that nobody else would listen to them and were desperate to somehow bring the subject to the attention of the authorities for fear of what would happen next.* The phenomena they experienced may now have ceased, but that is not to say they might not happen again, either to them, or to some other family.

Their fears are well-founded, not only because of their own personal experiences, but also because of what is happening elsewhere - and the body of scientific opinion that now supports their fears.

Elsewhere in the world, sightings of UFOs are being reported to various agencies at the rate of one hundred a day, every day of the year. Over 2,000 reports of UFO landings (featuring inexplicable scorch marks and/or

radiation traces) have been made world-wide, in the past thirty years. In 1973, seventy well-documented accounts of 'close encounters of the third kind' - alien contact - were made. Last year, in Britain alone, more than 600 UFO sightings were recorded - double the number of the previous year. The authorities world-wide have done their best to explain away as many of these sightings and contacts as possible. But many responsible, level-headed members of the public - including politicians, scientists and armed forces personnel - are reporting too many clear, closely-observed sightings of inexplicable things, for sustained cover-ups to now be either possible or unbelievable.

From 1949 to 1969 the US Air Force conducted what they called Project Blue Book, ostensibly to investigate UFO phenomena *but actually to publicly debunk them*. The 1,000-page Condon Report, published in 1969, came to the conclusion that no further consideration should be given to the subject of UFOs, as two-thirds of all the sightings they had investigated had proved to be either natural phenomena or hoaxes.

Nobody could believe the decision to stop the investigation - least of all Dr Allen Hynek, the eminent American astronomer who had led the investigation for twenty years, who decided to branch out on his own and devote the rest of his life to examining the phenomena. **His verification of the fact that Project Blue Book was just one enormous 'cover-up' is now a matter of record - as is the fact that Project Blue Book was never, in fact, closed down; it just went underground.** The authorities thought they would be able to explain away all the UFO reports that came their way. When they realised they couldn't, they deemed the subject to be too hot for the public to handle and decided to continue the rest of their research in secret. What is known as the 54/12 Group - within the Central Intelligence Agency - has thus been secretly monitoring all American UFO reports for the past ten years.

But now pressure of public and scientific opinion has grown so strong that President Carter - who has himself seen a UFO - has authorised the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (which landed man on the Moon and has robot spacecraft probing the solar system) to spend £10 million over the next seven years on 'A. Search For Extra Terrestrial Intelligence'. He has also - even more significantly - instructed the 54/12 Group to release 900 secret files on UFOs for publication. These developments, together with other research, may at last lead to proof of what many of the world's scientists already suspect: that there *are* extra-terrestrial intelligence observing civilisation on Earth. A British national survey recently showed that, in the past, nine out of every ten people who had had a UFO experience had failed to report the experience for fear of ridicule. It remains to be seen whether American attitudes will spur British authorities to treat the subject more seriously and encourage people to report everything they experience. It is the Coombs family's hope that their published recollections may spur others to come forward with their UFO experiences and so force the authorities into a thorough investigation. American opinion polls showed that 51% of all Americans believed in UFOs in 1973, and that 11% had seen them. In 1978, 81% believed in them and 15% claimed to have seen them.

The phenomena are increasing - and so should investigation into them.

As Dr Philip Morrison of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (who is co-ordinating President Carter's Search for Extra-Terrestrial Life) explains: 'We don't have to assume there are other planets like our Earth in our galaxy because mathematically there *must* be...'

Are they trying to make contact - the sort of contact that the Coombs family have experienced? The Ministry of Defence may seemingly dismiss their experiences, the media and cynics may sneer, but a large body of scientific opinion will be treating the story of *The Uninvited* with the serious consideration it deserves.

As Britain's Dr Paul Davies - a theoretical physicist at King's College, London - points out: 'What most people who dismiss UFOs as a load of rubbish just don't realise, is how convincing the evidence is in some cases. If you have 500 cases, all describing the same UFO activity that can't be explained, then you probably *do* have something new to our science...'

As Professor Wickramasinge, the Head of Astronomy at Cardiff University puts it: 'I would have thought that there have been enough UFO sightings in the last year or so in Wales for there to be an excellent case for a thorough investigation. The Ministry of Defence would have to be involved, because there should also be astronomers, meteorologists and geologists called in...'

But it doesn't seem to matter how dramatic or potentially significant the Coombs experiences were - the MoD just aren't interested, or aren't prepared to *show* their interest. When members of the armed forces have UFO experiences, they are sworn to secrecy, and little action is ever taken. In May of 1977, thirteen RAF personnel in Broad Haven made a clear daylight sighting of a UFO flying over their Air Base. Checks showed that it was neither an aircraft nor a satellite, but no action was taken.

But Squadron-Leader Tim Webb - who oversees the advanced instruction of fighter pilots at the Brawdy Air Base - believed his son's story that he and most of his school had seen a UFO in a field near their school. 'I've yet to see a UFO,' said the Squadron-Leader, 'but I think there has to be something supernatural or paranormal going on here...'

Blind faith, or common sense? The latter, surely. When dozens of people of all types repeatedly describe seeing the same UFO phenomena, often in groups, and in daylight at close quarters - and the same scorched-earth and radiation trace evidence is left behind to be examined the conclusion is inevitable, however unlikely it may at first appear.

It's a conclusion that is based firmly on science fact, *not* on science fiction.

Even by conservative estimates, there are one thousand million planets that are capable of supporting life.

Considering what such a comparatively infant species, on such a young planet as Earth, has managed' to do in just twenty-five years of space travel, is it any wonder that so many scientists view the likelihood of extra-terrestrial visits to Earth by other civilisations as being not so much likely, as downright inevitable?

Would a visit to Ripperstone Farm be so extraordinary, housing as it does a family of seven of varying ages and stages of development, and affording the perfect opportunity to study not only the human species, but animals as well, in total privacy due to the isolated setting? Better still, nearby there are a number of Army, Navy and Air Force bases, some engaged in top secret research, to be studied. Just for good measure, Ripperstone Farm is also set at the cross-over of two Ley Lines - those mysterious lines that seem to trace grid patterns of Earth's magnetic force - along which UFOs seem to navigate and draw electromagnetic power of some description.

But who knows the reasons for the extraterrestrial activity in the Welsh Triangle - that's for the experts to decide. The Coombs only want the phenomena to be acknowledged, never mind explained.

They know they are likely to have little scientific support in this country, but have taken solace in the knowledge that science and scientists in other countries are taking seriously the sort of phenomena they have witnessed.

A recent survey of the membership of the American Astronomical Society, conducted by Peter Sturrock - a physicist at Stanford University - revealed that *over half* of the membership now considered UFOs 'worthy of serious consideration'.

Dr Jastrow, who is the' director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies in New York, believes extraterrestrial intelligences are currently trying to make contact with Earth, having monitored high intensity radio and TV signals that have by now reached deep space. 'Word has reached these distant beings that there is something going on here,' he affirms. 'They know we are here they must want to know more...

Former Director of American Air Force Intelligence, General John Samford, warns: 'If we persist in refusing to recognise the existence of UFOs in our air space, we will one day end up mistaking one of these craft for a missile and shooting it down and the worst may be upon us...

Former American Navy Missile Chief Admiral Delmer Fahrney confirms his belief in their existence: 'There are, indeed, reliable reports to indicate that there are~ extraterrestrial craft entering our atmosphere regularly at very high speeds that are controlled by thinking intelligences...'

Will we soon be able to examine, under President Carter's new programme of investigation, these reliable reports? Most of America's astronauts are hoping so. On a four-day flight in 1965, astronauts James McDivitt and Ed Mitchell both reported being shadowed in their capsule by an alien craft that they refused to believe was human-made. 'I'm not satisfied with NASA explanations that I saw my booster rocket in orbit with me,' said McDivitt. 'It was in the wrong place at the wrong time to have been that. . . 'He further claimed that he made an in-flight estimation of the speed the accompanying craft was doing.' It turned out to be over 17,000 miles per hour. He took extensive film footage of the craft and wrote a report of the sighting in detail. After handing them in to the authorities when he returned, he never saw them again.

Astronaut Gordon Cooper sympathises. 'The American Space Agency and Government know very well that intelligent beings from other planets regularly visit our world in an effort to enter into discreet contact with us and observe us. They have an enormous amount of evidence to this effect but have hitherto kept quiet in order not to alarm people... 'Cooper knows what he is talking about. Like his other astronaut colleagues, he has had close looks at alien space-craft himself.

And so the expert opinions run. Stanton T. Friedman, an American nuclear physicist who has worked on space-related nuclear technology exclusively for the past fifteen years, says he is genuinely worried about the lack of investigation into such experiences as the Coombs have had:

'Encounters frequently occur between people on Earth and spacecraft and their occupants,' he asserts. 'There are hundreds of reports I know of, of creatures seen near their craft. Sightings by highly responsible and respectable people are much more common than most people realise. Reporting and detailed investigation of these sightings is much less common than I, as a scientist, would like

One of Friedman's eminent colleagues, Dr J. J. Kalizkewski, a Cosmic Ray Scientist with the US Navy, agrees with him: 'Such is the certainty of the existence of UFOs, that I think the Government must now set up a 24-hour UFO alert with radar, telescope, sky cameras and other instruments, to accurately monitor their activity...'

Pauline and Billy Coombs, their family, their friends and their neighbours would whole-heartedly agree. Their participation in the UFO story is now completed - for the moment, anyway - but the final chapter of the story is far from written. The mystery continues to unfold.

Maybe, ultimately, the choice belongs to all of us. To accept or to reject, to suffer the consequences either way.

We are *not* alone. It is scientifically stupid to assume we are. We know that now.

And yet they remain the unbelievable, the unacceptable, the unwelcome - the uninvited.

Clive Harold.
Ripperstone Farm. January 1979.