

From Portent

We were realising with a kind of synchronicity that the moon's light has slipped behind a cloud. So. Half-seeing, half not wanting to see. We were now confronted with the brutal knowledge that it has most definitely not been moonlight on the glass. It probably took place within no more than a few seconds, yet it seemed we had always been there. As if nothing else had ever happened and even more so, as if nothing else ever would.

Something was stirring, something beyond comprehensible shape and noise. Something like the gruesome and rotten core of all our fear made flesh. A chill swept through me and an icy sweat lashed me. A scything wing attacked our skins, magnifying each cold tentacle of sweat. I don't know how I coaxed any word to my lips, yet somehow they happened from me.

'Shadow in the windae et six a'clock!'

I felt Mairsy grip my wrist. Some ratified crippled thing like an impression of a horse head whined as if at a restraining bit. We made to turn, pivoting slowly, but were still unable to completely break from the spell. A leatherous shadow, stripped of like, snaked up a distorted hand. It climbed the glass, backlit as if by candles or a smouldered fire. Some half-man shadow left behind in a Faustian stoop like the ghost of some frustrated kink of anger, caught like a stocking on a snag of air.

A sound came. The only vision I can bring of that particular sound is of a long hoof carving into floorboards. The sound and shape of limping agony dragging the notches of its diagonal and blood drained days against the rough grains of our knowing.

The dim light flickered. Something tore at the dancing curtain, catching what to us was murder in our awkward off-flight.

The mad world rang with the bellows of utter panic, tearing at clouds in our minds for the moon's good fire. One tiny piece of glass fell from the broken window. It took light years to land but when it did, when it struck the stone, it was the sharpest, smallest yet cannon-sized starter gun I'd ever heard. It thawed our immobility and off, off we went. We raced from those windows and over the grass. Sliding off balance at times, but never slowing one iota. Over the wall like ninjas. Through gardens like bouncing labradors. Over the bonnets of cars. Up Chain Road. Down Dee Drive. For two miles we raced wi' the coming light. Street after street rose wi' the milkmen. House after house sat as we flew past.

I collapsed in bed. Hollow with thunder in my aching lungs and, odd as it may seem, I slept peacefully that morning.

I always remember the dream I had that morning. I was flying a strange translucent kite from a hill or a mountain on a summer's day.

That was the last time I ever saw Mairsy. I left for Wales the next day to visit my aunt and cousin. I came home two months later and soon started high school.

On my first day Hugh Mckinstry said that the Mairs family had moved away. I thought it weird that they had never mentioned anything, anything at all about moving off.

I'd never thought of that night until Tuesday of last week. I'd picked up the Sunday supplements. Did the usual rounds of the reviews and came across an article on science meeting parapsychology. It was about a theory that electro-magnetic charges which are inside and around every animate and inanimate object. It said that force fields in and around certain places and things (life energies) can, and do, record events and at certain times play images back whether anyone is watching or not. The theory stated that commercial science has for too long focused on medicines and machines. The professor, from some London university or other, said that too much proof now exists for these two areas to be separate (science and the supernatural, that is). His theories nicely intermingled folklore with physics, astronomy with astrology, computer sciences with telekinesis and time travel to space travel. He further added that we are moving into an age where we are beginning to cross-fuse our technologies to create a science pertaining to all the levels of existence. Of which, he said, there are too many at this moment to actually count. I had almost turned the page when I saw the professor's name, DJ Mairs. I wonder. I'll always wonder.