

The Glass

Cameron Macdonald - 2005

Stevo felt sadness cover him like a dank mist as he had let Macca down. It was Stevo who talked Macca in to bringing Wellies and Briggo along on the grounds that they would behave and take it seriously. They also promised never to tell another soul – that promise didn't last long either.

A wooden radio, box-square with stiff sharp edges, stood in the corner with an illuminated circular dial. It was playing low – Michael Jackson was tooting Billy Jean.

Taking a final swig from his glass Macca threw his orange Tupperware beaker into the kitchen sink with a splash of white soap suds up the window. “Follow me lads,” he said with a shine in his twelve year old eye and a mischievous stretch of his teeth.

They all made their way up the constricted staircase with Stevo following Briggo in the rear.

Macca's room was spacious. It was built into the roof. Its walls jostled with strange angles that, in the limited light, cast unnatural shadows of geometric shapes on the linoleum floor. The walls were painted in light brown just as the builders had left them six month before. There were no pictures or posters or dirty marks on them unlike Stevo's room with its scratched skirting, flaking walls and torn posters daubed with Hitler moustaches under each celebrity's nose and dart-marked face.

A skylight in the ceiling focused a narrow beam of light on to the single bed like the apse over the altar of Stevo's local church – the place he hated going to each Sunday. Somebody walked over his grave. The bed was sheltered in a purple bobbled blanket, ready to cuddle and protect Macca that night from the goblins they would raise soon in the cupboard. The boys all stood around the skylight gazing upwards, head back on shoulders and mouths gaping, as if taking confirmation. Macca told them with delight that he could leave the skylight's blind open and watch the stars and the moon from his bed as he fell asleep.

Stevo loved the idea of falling asleep under the moon and stars like Macca. Castlefields, a seventies council estate where he lived, had such high and small windows that he had to stand on his bed to see anything out of them.

Macca stomped across the room with the pride of a great leader and opened a door to a walk-in closet. He stepped back and without a word intimated with his deep set blue eyes that they all should move through. The boys all conceded in quiet agreement with Stevo heading the group.

The closet, about six-feet by six-feet, was desperately dark. With no windows and subdued light passing the crowded door the place whispered good evening to the boys like a lost female spirit. Stevo stopped at the entrance looking for the floor. His eyes needled his nerves as they pulled focus and stretched his pupils wide. The others pushed at him from behind. He resisted, expecting the floor to fall away in front of him and send him tumbling through the black universe. Macca pushed passed and pulled a cord hanging from the ceiling; a sixty-watt bulb splashed unadulterated electric light across a brown scratched table that cowered in surprise in the middle of the room on ground draped in tan lino.

A circle of cards labelled A to Z, yes & no, and zero to nine fringed the scratched desk with a dusty glass, upside-down, snoozing in the centre.

“Welcome to my communication centre to the other side,” Macca said in a ghoulish voice as he pushed through to the tight space.

The ceiling was low and slanted to the acute pitch of the roof, filling the area with claustrophobia. Stevo, pushed further in by Wellies’s elbow, reached down and picked up one of the cards.

“Don’t!” shouted Macca. “It’s bad luck to take a card from the circle.”

“Too late,” Briggo hissed through a mouth packed with too many teeth over Stevo’s shoulder, and spitting all over him he added, “he’s already moved it!”

Wellies edged back to the doorway. “I don’t know if I want to do this,” he said, in the usual ‘Wellies is scared’ voice that he puts on when ever the boys are about to do something daring like jump off the canal bridge, explode a banger in a milk bottle, or knock and run Harry The Bastard’s front door. He scratched his dry eczema scaly skin with a rasp that Stevo cringed at hearing.

“Me neither,” Briggo added, pushing his bulk weight passed Stevo.

“Don’t be such farts, you two,” Sparky interjected, scratching his mop of blond hair. “It’s just a game. Everyone knows this is just pretend. You two are a couple o’ turds! Huh, scared of a glass.”

Wellies stopped his edging to the door. He hated it when they said he was scared. He wasn’t; it was the thought of his father that held him back. If he found out what Wellies got up to that night he would have killed him stone dead no doubt. The belt in the wardrobe glittered in his mind. He took a gulp.

“It’s bad luck. My brother said so,” said Briggo. “He saw the Exorcist once and told me about it. This girl summoned up some ghost an’ she got some evil in her.”

Wellies’s thought of the belt surfaced like a dark submarine in his mind. He began to edge back toward the door as he listened to Briggo and what could happen. He knew his dad would kill him if he got eviled by Macca’s glass. He looked at the table and sweat tricked down his cheek. The glass seemed to be breathing in the middle of the cards, crouching on the wood as it glistened under the dull naked bulb like a wily alligator.

“She nearly died when this vicar came round to her bedroom to save her, and she killed him in the end, ‘cause she was possessed by the devil an’ stuff,” Briggo quivered.

“Briggo, you scaredie-cat!” Stevo jeered. “What’s up with you? I thought you feared nothing. Flash Gordon you said... You’re more like his screaming bird. Come on, we’re all here together, don’t be such a tart! You too Wellies,” he added, turning to Wellies as he caught him in the side of his eye trying to edge out of the door. “It’s just a laugh – besides, the more the better. Just ignore Briggo, he’s talking bollocks. Aren’t you, Dale Hardon?”

Stevo blocked the exit as Sparky settled Briggo and Wellies, saying that Briggo was Flash and Wellies was Zarkov, and between the two of them they would kick any evil sprits in the nuts before they got to us.

“It’s just a game, Lads,” Macca added.

“Ladies more like!” Stevo taunted.

Sparky pushed a glance over the table that Stevo understood. Too much taunting and they would leave out of pride, not fear. Sparky could solve the fear problem, not the

pride one. Stevo never was much good at politics. He left that to Sparky who was a long friend, and master at talking Stevo out of trouble.

Macca lit some long white candles that he produced from a small cupboard next to the table.

“Okay, I’ll give it one go, but no messing, an’ if I get possessed I’m gunna get you, Macca, and you too, Sparky!” Briggo said through his chubby tightened jowls like Churchill telling Hitler to leave Poland.

“What about Stevo!” Sparky protested.

“Yeh, you as well, Stevo!” Briggo added, continuing in the spirit of the occasion with: “An’ when I get you I am going to chop your conkers off and feed them to the dogs of Hell!”

“Cerberus!” Macca interjected

“Cerber what?” Wellies sniggered, dropping to the floor and pulling off his tired wellington boots.

“Cerberus is the three headed dog that stands outside of the Greek gates of Hell,” Macca said as the four boys listened quietly in astonishment of his knowledge of the subject.

Wellies looked up to Briggo from the floor, tugged his trouser leg and whispered, “Macca’s scaring the shit out o’ me. He knows way too much about this shit.”

“Yes Stevo, I will have your balls fed to Cerber-what’s-his-face, the Greek dog from Hell if I get possessed by the devil an’ stuff!”

Sticking two fingers up to Briggo, Stevo turned back to Macca to await his next move.

Wellies stood and the yellow smell of his cold clammy feet filled the gap and nibbled at the four boys’ noses.

“Wellies, is that smell you?” Sparky said holding his button mushroom snout.

Briggo grabbed his own nose as if in the trenches under a gas attack and nasaed a comment of disgust. He thumped Wellies in the arm who protested with the look of a toddler not sure whether to cry as the adults all laugh around him, or join in and laugh. He held back and looked at Stevo for support.

Stevo always had a soft spot for Wellies. He knew his home life was harder than Stevo’s. Wellies went to the same church as Stevo and saw his father leer over him in the pews as if he knew of every unholy thought that tripped his dirty little boy’s head. He was a tall gangly man full of Christ, righteousness, and Irish whisky. His mother was a mouse, twitching her nose, nervous with ticks and scratches. Wellies’s eyes, under his father’s, were sad and faithful like a whipped and starved dog’s.

“Come on Macca,” Stevo said, moving the attention from Wellies. Wellies’s eyes jumped in thanks. Stevo understood his praise and moved his sight to Sparky.

A warm smile cut through the thick stifling air. Sparky was a good friend.

Stevo’s mind travelled back in time to when he and Sparky were as young as six. He was looking up as Sparky was looking down on him through the weeds and bushes, as if peeking through thick green stage curtains. Stevo lay wrapped around his sister’s crashed bike. Bernard, as he was back then, found him entangled in ragged weeds at the bottom of hard unforgiving concrete steps that broke the bike in two and nearly Stevo’s head. Stevo didn’t know it then but that one ‘help me, I’m hurting’ look sealed a

relationship that took them through to adulthood and Stevo's last flickering leukaemic breath years later in Walton Hospital.

Macca lit four candles and was just lighting the last one. "Huddle 'round lads," he said, "let's get down to business."

The boys stirred closer to the table and darted glances over to one another in the dim light. Five candles flickered in the corner and shadows dashed and darted across the table to their flickering radiance mingled with the sluggish light from the sixty watt overhead.

Feeling anxious Stevo mopped his brow of sweat and edged in a little closer to the tabletop. The glass trembled and like the other boys looked up at Macca who seemed to have taken control of the show; they all placed their trust in him and consoled themselves that he knew what he was doing.

"When I say so," Macca whispered through the hum of the quietness, "you all need to put your right finger on the top of the glass. I'll turn off the light first. Okay?" Macca said looking for confirmation from the terrified six eyes around the table.

They all nodded to Macca's demand with a gulp. The glass shimmered in trusting agreement.

Wellies let go a nervous giggle to the ridiculousness oddness of the situation.

"Wellies, you in or out?" Macca snapped with growing annoyance in his voice to the lack of seriousness in the room. Macca had not picked up that the mood was deadly serious and the only way the boys were dealing with their personal demons was to look to the others for some sort of relief, whether that was a nervous smile or shuffle of feet.

"Sorry, I'll do it," Wellies said, with an apologetic tone in his voice the same as he apologised to his leering father that morning for creasing his bedclothes.

"Well stop pissing about then!" Macca donned an air of annoyance and his voice cracked though the air like an axe on steel.

"Okay," Stevo defended, smiling, "Macca, calm down." He could feel his heart beginning to beat a little faster and could understand Wellies's earlier laughter, brought on more out of nervousness than humour. It was all getting a little too serious for the boys, though Macca was really getting into the role of Ouija Master and missing the fear that filled the air around the others.

To Stevo and the others, it seemed that Macca was a little too clued up about all of this calling on ghosts shit, and a little overzealous. He looked over to Sparky and could see similar concern in his expression. He was standing next to Macca looking nervously between Stevo and the glass in the centre of the polished table. His face was flushed and he shuffled from foot-to-foot in anticipation. The flickering light from the candles glistened from the glass's polished surface like that of the sparkle from the actor's teeth in a Colgate toothpaste commercial. The only thing needed was the twang of the triangle that accompanied the cheesy smile.

Macca moved to the light switch cord dangling from the ceiling by the door and with a wry smile over the table, and a school boy mischievous glint in his eye he reached up and tugged it.

In a snap the room was plunging into an incandescent orange glow from the flickering candles in the corner and the room collapsed around the five, filling the air with stifling fusion where shadows joined shadows.

In the gloomy candlelight, Briggo, holding his breath in silence, moved his face through the shadows closer to Wellies's ear. "BOO!"

Wellies jumped out of his skin, knocked the table, sending some of the cards in front of him spinning to the dark floor, and had the glass jump out of its glow with a rattle and sprawl over the desk.

"Wellies, ya great bit hairy tit!" bellowed Macca. "You've broken the circle. We're all in for it now. We're all screwed!"

The boys all looked at Macca. Their faces filled with shock.

His face eyes pierced the gloom with a rage that unnerved them all and brought the room to a dead silence.

Stevo had known Macca since early junior school and only once had he seen Macca look so angry. That was when he fought Martin Holmes outside the school gate. Stevo could see Macca's eyes glaze over crimson as he held Martin's head in a headlock and swing his fist into Martin's snivelling nose. It exploded poppy blood all over the pathway and Martin's face. Macca swung again. Blood split the air and splattered Stevo's white shirt. He recalled his sister going ballistic when she saw it with all shades of red from the deepest crimson to the prettiest of pinks.

"It wasn't me, it was, BeOw!"

Briggo stared at Wellies with disdain followed by punching Wellies in the same arm as before to kill it. "Briggo's the name to you, knob!" He pulled his fat shoulders back and with a gust said, "anyway, 'twas not I who spilled the cards, 'twas thee! Oh and," he dropped the pirate posh for throaty Liverpudlean, "call me that again and I'll spud yer, Stretch Armstrong!"

"It was you, we're all cursed now, 'cause you broke the circle. If I get possessed, me dad 'll come 'round your 'ouse and do you!" replied Wellies, rubbing his aching arm.

Stevo and Sparky laughed aloud to the bickering situation, though both were quickly brought back to earth with a stabbing side glance from Macca, who was showing signs of deep stress brought on by the two idiots: Briggo and Wellies and Stevo and Sparky's lacklustre view were spoiling the plans he had made to make this day perfect.

"Briggo, why did you call him Stretch Armstrong?" Sparky asked, smiling out of curiosity through the orange flitting shadows of the claustrophobia.

"'Cause he's made of rubber too, like what wellies are," Briggo said, giggling aloud, "you know like 'is boots."

Wellies picked the cards up from the floor with his eyes dropped from the others, as if to ignore the hurtful comment of his so called pal. He replaced the cards, neatly on the table and said no more to Briggo.

"What's wrong with you, Wellies? You're a plant-pot!" Macca shouted, getting redder and hotter, and even angrier than with Martin to the distractions around him.

"What?"

"You've put Y before X! Don't you know the alphabet?"

"He's literate!" Briggo said, in an unveiled attempt at mocking Wellies.

"Sorry," replied Wellies, quickly fixing the cards, sniffing up and rubbing a bead of green slimy snot from his nostril with his sleeve.

"Illiterate, you mean," Sparky said. "Not literate, that means he *can* read."

"That's what I said! Didn't I say that Macca?"

“Who gives a shiny shite? Not me, that’s for sure! Are we ready now!” said Macca impatiently, as he visibly counted to ten under his breath.

They all nodded and concentrated back onto the cold table and the prone glass surrounded by the cards.

The messing about had been a good respite for Stevo who was starting to enjoy the ridiculousness of the situation. He was as nervous as the others, if not more so, about calling ghosts from where ever they lay; knew, as sure as people die, that they were prone to march into his world afterwards and seek out lonely souls. By riding the wave of stupidity that the others had smoke-screened around him his mind put behind him his mother’s suicide and the rotten dreams of her writhing to Hell in the hosepipe connected car.

Macca coughed nervously and placed his finger onto the glass’s base with a porcelain look in his childhood complexion and crisp waxen blue eyes knifing through the gloom. In an instant the silliness that Stevo was hiding behind fell through the floor to the Earth’s hungry core.

In silence the other boys did the same as if mind read and ordered. Stevo placed his on last. He could feel the coldness of the base of the glass. It felt too cold, well below room temperature. It moved slightly as the boys jostled for position shoulder to shoulder.

“Have you had this glass in the fridge, Macca?” Sparky asked, adding, “it’s freezing.”

“It’s possessed. It’s ‘cause Briggo knocked the cards,” chipped in Wellies.

“No it’s not possessed!” Macca snapped, cutting Briggo’s about to rebuttal pose. “It’s just Sparky’s stupid imagination!”

Stevo’s heart began beating hard, as were the hearts of everybody in the confined space of the dark cupboard. He felt light-headed and clammy. He told himself off under his breath in an attempt to get himself focussed.

Noticing that Briggo had the wrong hand on the glass Stevo nudged him, whispering in his ear to change hands. He looked at Macca who had already noticed and had withdrawn his hand awaiting Briggo to get it right.

“Macca, you’re taking this all a bit serious. Calm down, it’s just a game.” Briggo said, as he swapped hands.

Macca leaned forward looming from the orange glow of the candles and speaking softly replied, “don’t upset the spirits, or they’ll have you.”

Briggo looked on with disbelief in his eyes.

Macca went on, “my ma told me that her friend’s brother upset the spirits when he did a Ouija, and he was made sorry with an evil curse.”

“What happened,” whispered Wellies, bright eyed and with that desperate interest for mystical answers in his voice that came up with $E=MC^2$.

“He got possessed with a big boil that killed him.” Macca said.

“What sort of boil?” Sparky pushed in with disbelief in his voice.

“He was at a’ Ouija board séance and he took his hand off the glass when the spirit was in it. He went home, and the next day he went to the toilet and guess what he found on his jocks?”

“A big fat curly pubic hair?” Briggo said, cackling to himself.

Stevo kicked Briggo in the shin and spat at him to shut up and listen. Briggo and Wellies were getting on his nerves now with their messing about and the mocking of

Macca. He was as scared as them but at some point you've got to be a man, take a breath, and leap off that twenty foot bridge into the freezing canal, hoping to avoid the shopping trolleys that patrol the deep like hungry sharks.

"No not a pube! He found a boil as big as a melon."

"No, honest?" said Sparky in amazement.

"What happened then?" Wellies said, drawn in by the story.

"He tried to squeeze it like a zit but it wouldn't pop. It was so painful that he couldn't walk and had to be wheeled about in a wheelchair until he died, which wasn't long after he pissed the spirits off."

"Why didn't he go to the doctors?" said Stevo.

Stepping back further into the shadows, Macca raised his voice a little and added a tone of suspense by raising and lowering the intonation through his words. "He did. The doctor told him that he had never seen anything like it in all his life, and he was a really old doctor." Macca paused and the room remained in silence but for the flitting puff of the five candles and the hiss of a water pipe behind the eavesdropping skirting boards.

Stevo looked around and could see Sparky, Wellies, and Briggo staring at Macca as he continued his story.

"The doctor said that if he cut it out, he would die 'cause he would lose too much blood. If he did survive, he would lose his family allowance and would turn into a woman."

"A woman, that's awful!" Wellies hissed.

"You mean he would lose all of his tackle. I'd rather die than be a woman!" Briggo shouted.

"He must have thought the same," Macca said, "so he never got no surgery."

Sniffing up hard to clear his nose, Wellies pushed the glass nervously. "How long after, did he live?"

"Not long, but before he died he went to see a grand witch in Transylvania, 'cause he was told that she could help him. He dropped his pants, which were specially made for him, and she nearly fainted with the size of it. She told him it was bad evil and that he should do another Ouija séance with the same people who he did it with last. He had to get in touch with the spirit that cursed him and beg for forgiveness.

Everyone stood astonished in the darkened room hanging on every word of Macca's.

Wellies, sniffing every few seconds, stared intently at Macca.

Briggo, wincing to the thought of the pain that the poor unfortunate went through, rubbed his crotch in sympathy every time Macca mentioned the pus-filled yellow mouldy carbuncle.

"So what happened to him in the end, Macca?" Stevo asked.

"He set up the Ouija and got in touch with the spirit. The man told it he was really, really, really sorry but the spirit wouldn't listen. He asked for the spirit's name so he would know who it was that cursed him."

"Honest," they all whispered together.

Macca paused, and whispered, "you'll never guess who it was!" he beamed, standing still in the gloom waiting for a response. His face half lit and glowing looked like an angry spirit itself.

"The Devil?" Wellies quizzed.

“Don’t be stupid, Wellies. If it was the devil he would have possessed him like in the Exorcist film,” Briggo said, nudging Wellies to one side and knocking the glass across the table.

Macca raised his hands, grabbed the glass, and took in a deep breath. “Jack the ripper!”

“No, honest?” Briggo gasped.

“Yes, and he refused to drop the curse ‘cause he had broken the circle,” Macca replied. Adding, “so if you break the circle you’ll get cursed and I won’t join in on the Ouija for you to beg forgiveness.”

“You would, I bet!” Briggo said under his breath, “I’d make you if it meant I was going to get a big boil and turn into a woman!”

Stevo looked at Sparky to see what his reaction was to Macca’s story. He had a veil of surprise over his face, mixed with a little disbelief: as if he had seen a hit and run or armed bank robbery. The same disbelief Stevo felt.

“Come on then Macca,” Sparky bellowed, “let’s do it!” He took a deep breath. “No farting about this time, everyone promise!”

The room went quiet for a second as Sparky waited for an answer of each of them.

They all promised in turn and everyone turned to Macca for instruction.

Replacing their fingers on the cold glass base, the boys settled down and placed their gaze back onto Macca for a lead.

Macca waited for total quietness, closed his eyes and began, in a low eerie voice, to chant across the table. “The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.”

He stopped as the boys all looked at one another questioning themselves on how Macca knew about all of this stuff.

Stevo was startled and jumped nervously when Macca began again.

“Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.” He paused again, opened his eyes, focussed on the glass and pressed hard with his crooked index finger on the sharp rim of its chapping base.

Sparky shuffled his feet and moved his spare hand up to his nose to itch it, purposely leaving the other hand glued to the glass in the centre of the table. “Where did he get all of that from?” he whispered to Stevo.

Stevo looked over to Macca with a nervous twitch in the hand resting on the freezing glass. “The bible, I think.”

“Is that right, Macca?” Wellies said spoiling the quietness and Macca’s concentration with his brashness.

“Hush,” Macca said, placing his free index finger over his lips, “revelations – if you must know,” he whispered through the stifling air hanging around them like a massive damp army trench coat. He paused and the cupboard air fell quiet once more.

Stevo took a deep breath in and out and saw mist coming from his mouth. He looked around; all of the others had similar steam coming from theirs as they breathed out too. It was as if they were in a freezer, but the air close and warm, was not cold. His mind tripped with fear. Macca had aroused a side of him that scared him the most – a spiritual side that he had suffered from for such a long time. It was worse now than when he lay alone in his small cuddling bed. It was the same fear that had him listen to the quietness

of the sleeping house, and place trust that his father was in the next room ready to save him should the angry spirits that took his mother come to grab his soul and pull it, and him, down to the steely depths of Hell. Only this time his father was not there to help. He was on his own. He felt so very alone – even though the room was jostling full and close like warm cyclonic air, and he could hear the deep breaths of his friends around him. He felt so desperately alone like the last tree to be felled in a farmer’s orchid. He nervously looked over to Macca. He too had steam coming from his mouth – only his was coming out of his nostrils like Tolkien’s Smaug, the angry dragon.

“Those spirits with no marks on forehead or hand. Good spirits! You are invited to join us. Is there a soul here to intercourse?”

Briggo sniggered and leant over to Stevo, “doesn’t intercourse mean shagging?” he whispered.

“Hush!” Stevo whispered back in anger, having been pulled from his loathing abruptly. “It means to talk too, Gobshite!”

Sparky looked over to Stevo, bemused by Macca’s antics. He sniggered at Stevo as if to ask what was going on. Stevo knew as little as Sparky and was surprised by the dark-side that Macca was exhibiting. It was obvious that Macca was into this stuff in a big way, though never told Stevo about it, not until now that is.

The distant rough bark of a dog broke the silence in the tight room. Wellies sniffed a glob of snot and Sparky coughed the same. Stevo scanned the faces of all of his friends. Softly lit in the orange candlelight, they all looked intently at the glass in the centre of the table. His attention was grabbed as he felt the glass vibrate, and his heart nearly leapt out of his chest.

Wellies huffed in amazement, and dragging his hand away as if pulling away from a roaring fire, swung the door open and abandoned the room like a green sailor leaping out on sight of water beyond the bilge.

The other boys all squinted to the daylight streaming through the doorway.

Sparky and Stevo pulled their hands away too and quickly followed Wellies out of the room and piled on top of him as he lay face down on the purple bed with his head buried under the pillow. The two of them giggled as they flattened the scruffy boy under them. That was until they heard a voice shout “Pilio!” They both looked up from the bed together and squinted into the darkened closet.

A shadow filled the doorway and Briggo came bounding out like a rhinoceros running from a hunter’s rifle on the open Serengeti. In one massive movement he launched himself into the air and flew, like a grey heavy bird, the two yards needed to get him over the bed. With an almighty sigh from the three boys and the bed springs below Briggo landed.

The legs of the divan sighed and with a bang one snapped to the weight of the four of them, with the three below Briggo Effing and Geoffing at him and his excess weight. They all shouted for him to shift his fat arse and muttered their disapproval of his poor hygiene.

Briggo was not listening. He just carried on rolling around on top of them revelling in his own mischief.

Poor Wellies could barely breathe with all the weight on him as he kicked out. He eventually managed to wriggle free and lay on the floor next to the broken bed leg

laughing with his hair sticking in all directions, his pullover half over his head and a bead of green snot stretched across his cheek.

Macca stood at the doorway, arms crossed, with a disapproving grin on his face similar to that displayed by Stevo's sister when he turns up covered in dirt and dog shit after rolling down a muddy bank when playing best man dead with the other boys.

After a few minutes of madness, apologising about the bed, and fixing it with a stack of books the boys all collected themselves and returned to the candlelit room to try again.

"Right, no messing about this time, we're going to do this, this time!" Macca said in a cold stern voice.

The other four looked at one another smiling to their own antics.

"Is there anybody there?" Macca said with a wobbling nervous voice after they had all replaced their fingers on the crystal glass as if shouting down an underground tunnel.

Stevo detected that it was warmer than before. Looking up, he noticed that there was no more steam coming from any of their mouths as they breathed. With relief Briggo's antics had shifted his attention from his dreamscape. All of the eerie details had been broken, with his fears of loss and death disappearing back into the recesses of his mind. He looked at Sparky across the table. His best friend was smiling to himself as he concentrated on the glass. Stevo watched him intently: looking, scanning, taking in every move that Sparky made.

He thought about that first time they met after he had fallen from his sister's bike. How Sparky had comforted him in his pain and actually sounded interested in how he was feeling. Nobody in his life had, up to then or since, shown such compassion.

"Is there anybody there?" Macca tried, again.

The room was still and quiet as the boys stood motionless in the amber flickering candlelight.

Thump, thump.

Stevo's ears honed in on the sound, as did everybody else's in the little closet.

"Who was that?" Macca said, with great annoyance in his voice.

Briggo shuffled about nervously and began smiling as the other boys looked at him. "It wasn't me, honest!"

Sparky let go of the glass, followed by every one else. "For Christ's sake, Briggo, if you don't stop pissing about you can go home now. This shit is serious, isn't it Macca?" Pausing for a nod from Macca, Sparky carried on, "if you get lumps all over your balls it's your own fault. Now stop farting about!"

"Calm down, Sparky! Anyhow, it wasn't me it was the spirits."

"Spirits my arse! Come on Macca. Let's do this," said Sparky, showing absolute frustration and anger at Briggo for spoiling the momentum built up by the others.

They all replaced their fingers and got back down to the wicked business of calling for the spirits. Stevo felt that if anything happened this time with Wellies or Briggo they would all be going home as Macca's eyes said this was a mistake and he had had a belly full.

After a few calls for anyone, with the boys standing with milling minds of supper, and walking the dog, and what dad would say about being in late, Stevo's heart jumped back into action as the dozing glass woke up and jolted into life.

He looked around as did the others for mischief. All of them seemed as surprised as he did to the glass's sudden animation. Sparky's eyes were transfixed by the movement and Stevo noticed that steam coming from his best friend's mouth reappeared as before. Only this time it was thick, tinted orange, and had clear definition as if drawn into the air in front of him. His thoughts were quickly dragged back to him lying in his bed with the cold night nipping his shoulders and its noises filling his ears: the creak of a stair-riser, click, click of an insect behind the skirting boards, the rumble of a train in the distance all had his ultra sensitive state fill his body with goose pimples and shivers.

Stevo's sight filled with colours – darkened ones that ebbed in the shadows of his vision. He opened his eyes wide, stretching his irises as far back as he could, and looked up at the ceiling. The swathing shadows cast upon it by the candles looked like mystical Arabian dancers waving their bodies from side to side to an innate tune.

His arm was jolted by the freezing glass. Its noise had him grimace as it screeched across the surface like a train on emergency stop – steel on steel. The glass halted as abruptly as it began. It hissed and shook like the locomotive waiting for the engineer to push it forward.

“Yes!” Wellies shouted. “It’s on the YES card!”

The room fell quiet again as the glass, North Pole cold, lurched into life and returned back to the centre of the table.

Stevo stood still, mesmerised by the action of what should have been an inanimate object. “What now, Macca?”

“What’s your name?” Macca said.

Briggo looked at Macca, nervously nudging him. “Sod its name! Ask it if it’s a good spirit or a bad one!”

“Do you want a cup o’ tea?” Wellies interrupted, giggling to himself.

“Hush!” Sparky whispered across the table.

The glass lurched back into life and shot over the table in one single movement to the card labelled NO.

“No. No what? What does it mean, Macca?” Briggo asked in such a rush as if he were about to miss the last bus.

“I don’t...”

“Can anybody see that smell?” Stevo interrupted.

Everyone turned from the glass and eyed Stevo.

“See a smell, how can you see a smell?” Briggo said, in his usual ignorant, mocking voice.

Stevo looked at him and scowled. He felt embarrassment fill his face as he realised that he had slipped. “I meant smell – can anyone smell that horrible stink!” Stevo stuttered.

“I can smell it, can’t you Macca?” Sparky said, jumping in and backing his pal up to Stevo’s relief.

The smell filled Stevo’s nose – and eyes too. The colour was strange. A colour and smell he had never come across, or was likely to ever again. It was a mixture of banana skins and violet purple though it had radiance to it that filled his peripheral vision with Day-Glo luminance. The colour was not static like the others he usually saw with his nose. This had movement to it – a strange rhythm that he desperately tried to figure out but for the life of him could not.

“You okay Stevo?” a voice said, dragging him from his kaleidoscopic concentration.

Stevo didn’t answer. The colours around him were consuming his mind. They were beautiful yet he could feel something tormenting in them. They wanted him to follow them, but Stevo felt dread, danger, imminent disaster, terror.

“Joe Jitsu calling Dick Tracy, Come in Dick Tracy!” Briggo said to others in his usual piss-taking voice. “You look like Stevie Wonder at the piano singing I just rang,” he added with gusto.

Wellies laughed with glee but quickly shut up with a glance from Macca. “Wellies, don’t encourage him. He’s a tit as it is without being a tit with a dick. You okay, Stevo?”

“I am fine, Macca. Is it still here?” Stevo asked.

He had not realised that he had been so distracted by the smell as to alert the others. Focussing back on the cold glass he tried to ignore the assortment of colours that continued to consume his vision. Instead he attempted to live with them, see through them though they filled his mind with avoidance at all cost. He had seen these types of visions before – just after his mother had died. He remembered with terror lying in his bed late into the early hours with a nose full of colour, but he had never seen something so bizarre and terrifyingly enchanting in his mind’s eye as this.

The boys continued quizzing the glass for some time as Stevo suppressed the spectre haunting him. They had a myriad of questions for the glass from, ‘how old was it?’, to ‘was it horny for sex?’. Surprisingly enough, it was. Wellies even asked it if it owned a pair of wellington boots though was not convinced that it was not coerced into giving a false answer when it spelled out DICK. To confirm his worst suspicion of foul play, it replied to Briggo’s follow up question of, ‘Do you think people who wear wellies are knob-heads?’ with a lightening dash to the YES, followed by a dash back to the centre and back again to the YES, as if to demonstrate its resolve.

They were just wrapping up concluding that it was just a mind game when Briggo announced that they never asked the glass dwelling spirit its name. After some coaxing of the spirited glass, it began an arduous pursuit across the different cards spelling its name one card at a time.

It spelled WILLIAM swiftly, though began to wane at the rest of THE CONKEROR, – dropping the QU for a K in the process – though the boys were patient enough to give it time to finish. After which, the boys all whispered to one another that they should bid the good spirit fare thee well.

Briggo smiled and nudged Stevo next to him. “I’ve an idea,” he whispered, “why don’t we see if we can make it mad.”

“Oh, I am not too...”

Before he had time to finish, Briggo coughed to clear his throat and asked, “are you a gay boy, William Of The Conqueror, or where ever you’re from? I bet you bum boys didn’t you, you gay-bod!”

Macca looked up and intently stared at Briggo.

The other boys followed and the room fell silent.

Briggo looked around the table. “What,” he said, with a mischievous smile slapped across his chubby face. “It’s just a game.”

The glass lurched into life and circled around the cards, touching each one as it arrived, and dashing to the next in the line.

The boys laughed at each other as their arms jolted to the vicious movement of the glass. Like Stevo they thought they were all doing it because that's what they would have done if they were the spirit in the glass. After all there wasn't really a spirit there at all they all thought.

But Stevo tried to let go of the glass as it moved in hard deliberate dashes from place to place. His finger was stuck as if it had been welded to the frosty crystal. He looked across the table at the others; they too showed alarm in their faces.

Sparky was tugging at his arm with his free hand, trying to pull his frosted finger from the glass's scratched worn base.

Stevo's eyes shot to his right as a shadow in his peripheral caught his attention. Its movement and colour filled his nose with more banana skin smells, overpowering his receptors and in a split second and making him feel stomach churning sickly. He closed his eyes to try to fill his vision with black nothingness, like he did in his bed after those dreams of his mother's dead staring blank eyes. It was no good! It was so strong that it enveloped his vision with its florescent colour in rhythmic dance. It was romantic, love, passion, joy all in one swishing changing colour; but deep inside Stevo could see a dark colour tone that ebbed and flowed like a pulsing lighthouse. That core was torment horror, anger, pain and all the wretchedness of the dead, all bundled up in to a singularity of dark lightening matter.

"Look at the glass!" Wellies shouted as Briggo let out a deadening yawp of breathe and terror.

Stevo opened his eyes and through the blinding colours spotted the spinning glass on the other side of the table, dashing around like a whippet dog on speed-cocaine.

The room dimmed as one of the candles extinguished itself. Then another went out. The boys looked at each other with terror in their eyes.

"Oh my God!" shouted Macca.

"Briggo, I am going to kill you for this!" Sparky shouted.

"Me too!" Wellies added. "We're all gunna get big boils, and me dad'll kill us!" with a distinct sobbing in his voice.

Another candle went out and the light became barely enough to see the glass's death dance.

As the lights became dimmer in the crowded box they all trembled and cried together.

Stevo's colours became more and more and more pronounced. His vision was so clouded he could barely see anything bar a glint of light from the glass's frosty surface. He could feel his heart clattering in his chest like a pan lid on boil. His mouth had a dryness that made it difficult to swallow, which he was doing, trying to do, at a rate of knots, and the bitter taste of a dirty copper coin covered his tongue.

In a whoosh the remaining candles went out and the room was quenched into pitch blackness. Stevo could hear the glass scratch, clatter and scurry over the cold hard surface of the table. He could feel its violence as it changed direction and rattled to stop before moving again, back-and-to, round-and-round. It began to circle the centre of the table, no longer visiting cards, just spinning and spinning like a whirligig. Then it

launched across the table with the five boys connected to its base and left the surface of the shiny timber.

It dragged them with it into a heap of boys as it hit the wall, smashing into minute pieces around their spinning heads.

From their heap on the floor Macca jumped up and lead the dash out of the darkened room with all of the others piling through the small doorway, all at the same time, in the same hurry. Wellies, collecting his boots, tripped over in the middle of the gap though this did not stop Briggo from exiting over him, leaving a black shoe mark, and later size ten bruise on his back in the process.

They all rattled down the stairs, slipping most of the way and collecting carpet burns on knees, elbows, and arse cheeks. They stopped and regrouped out of breath in the kitchen and refused to return to the room to collect any of their belongings.

Wellies thanked the Lord for grabbing his wellington boots in time.

Briggo suggested to Macca that he should have his dad seal up the room, as it was evil, adding that he would not sleep in that room in a million years, for a million pounds.

The late evening was drawing in and they all bade, in hidden relief, a goodnight to Macca at his front door and agreed to get the bus home rather than walk the two miles back home in the dark. There was a problem though. Wellies had no money and the others between them had only enough to get themselves home.

Briggo smiled, he had a plan.