

The **Vanishings**
of Brompton Town

Part One
The Beginnings

Red Flag

Welcome dear reader, to a troubling tale of terror, mystery and mishap. This tale, if you dare to read it, will tread into the darkest corners of a cobwebbed room that no-one wants to shine a light on. It will lead you down an untold lane of harrowed history that you can never run back from. Dear reader, steady yourself and listen when I say that after reading this, you may not make it back to how you were before. It will make you question every creak and clatter forevermore.

But, you must forgive me. You see, as sinister as this journey might be, it is a tale that simply must be told, laid bare for the world to see.

So steady yourself, and think twice before you venture on. No one will judge you for fearing what lies ahead.

Residents of Brompton, you are excused, you can most definitely stop reading now. Close this book forever and pretend it doesn't exist. Burn it, launch it into the sky, hand it to your worst enemy. If you *are* foolish enough to venture onwards, just don't shoot the messenger. For what lies between these pages is a tale that starts, and ends in your very own cobbled streets.

For readers who may not be so familiar, the town of Brompton is a very special place for those of spookier persuasions. A small slice of Medway, Kent, it sits on the great isle of England, held tight between the towns of Gillingham and Chatham. It lies just out of sight of the main road. Kept, like a hidden secret.

Now it is time to share this story. Hold tight, as we proceed with the greatest caution.

And don't say I didn't warn you.

The Boats that Docked

Our tale takes us back in time to a cold night in 1643. Brompton town had been getting busier and busier as of late. Overcrowded naval ships travelled ever more frequently across the high seas to dock on the River Medway in the nearby Chatham Dockyard. As anchors dropped and hatches opened; out came the sailors, thick with grime from weeks at sea, and the rodents they shared their quarters with.

One night, a group of rambunctious sailors yearned for a merry night on dry land after their sea legs had settled. They were set on getting drunk in one of Brompton's vast array of ale houses. They decided on the Brickmaker's Arms, and there they guzzled many an ale as they watched bare-knuckle boxing and sang songs arm in arm. Roland, a thirty-five year old sailor from Deptford flicked a jumping flea off his shoulder before sauntering out into the night to find his Chatham Wife. His shipmate Ralph, watched him go before bellowing out another sea shanty. He wiped the sweat off his brow and itched once again at the crusted rash on the side of his mouth before coughing heavily into the smoky pub air. Seeing double, he waited a moment for his bloodshot eyes to focus, then swigged down on his ale and roared into the revelry.

The sailors loved a pub crawl. As Ralph coughed and spluttered his way across the town, little did he know, he would not see past next week. For this was not any cold: poor Ralph was *riddled* with smallpox. A smallpox that would steadily take over his whole body and fill it with pustules and lesions, fatigue and fever. Steadying himself on the side of the bar, he tried to quell the overwhelming nausea in his stomach and decided it was time to take the sorry stumble back down to the docks. As he bid farewell to the barman; he choked on his words and fell into a lengthy coughing fit. Unfortunately for the residents of Brompton, it took just one tiny molecule of his infected insides to travel onto the surface of the bar for the smallpox to spread like wildfire.

Smallpox Takes Hold

Mildred Wright watched the smallpox unfold from her home. It was the fourth bout of smallpox Brompton had seen this year and she was horrified each time by the way it took hold. She was an older woman, wisened across the years by watching the world around her. She took time to navigate the Earth and listened to what it could provide, gaining medicinal wisdom from the deep studying of nature. This relationship with the world had protected her from the illnesses that made so many around her sick. It led her to live a full life to a ripe older age. She watched as her skin turned older, with each wrinkle possessing a deep knowledge that she cradled with gratitude. She was eternally grateful to the Earth and the spirits for this kindness it gave her, but she wanted more than anything to protect the helpless children that had started to fall sick and fade away before their time. As she watched this latest bout of smallpox take hold with a vengeance, she decided that enough was enough.

You see, Mildred Wright had a gift. A gift so special that she could not utter her abilities to another soul: at least in this world. Her connection with the Earth and with the spirits alike had given her the power to open the portal between Earth space and *The Otherworld*. There lied the realm that moved beyond the constraints of

everyday human life. It was where the spirits roamed and powers existed beyond the imagination; where time could stand still and you could play with the whispers of the wind. A magick place, some might call it.

Mildred knew that calling on the good spirits of *The Otherworld* would be the only way to defend the town against disease. This was something she had to do.

So, after deep and careful thought, Mildred planned to cast a protection spell over the whole of Brompton. It would be the hardest act she had ever undertaken, and would undoubtedly exhaust her, but she wouldn't allow the community to face any more grief. With this spell, they would be protected from all future illness, including The Great Plague, which she knew would soon come to the shores of the River Medway.

Mildred had to admit that there was great risk involved with an undertaking of this proportion. It needed meticulous planning. She would have to call on the spirits and open the portal to *The Otherworld*, offering herself as a medium where she could transcend between both places. Whilst she had been successful in making numerous concoctions in her time, she was anxious about this spell because there was a fine line between summoning the good and bad spirits in *The Otherworld*. The only thing that differentiated the two was the addition of one flower in the potion; the broom flower. Bright yellow it was. Unmistakable. But with this being a flower found all over Brompton, being the origin of the town's very own name, she knew she would never make the mistake of adding it.

Mildred waited until the dead of night on the next full moon, and waded through the long, wet grass to build a fire. She placed her black clay cauldron on top of burning embers, and for the next few hours, began the summoning. She slowly dropped herbs and wildflowers from her apothecary that she had so carefully gathered across the past weeks. This was going to be a long process, and she wrapped her shawl around her as the air grew colder.

A Conman Comes to Town

The Physician was a spectacled, travelling conman filled with a lust for money and a fake degree in medicine from Oxford University. He loved money more than anything in the world, and as smallpox raged across the Medway towns, he hastily moved his practice to Brompton to find his fortune. He had gotten evermore greedy as his wealth accumulated from the people who begged and pleaded for his help in saving their loved ones. In desperation, they threw their life's savings at him; which was often pittance with these peasants, but it added up. His plan to be rich was flawless, these diseases were coming in at speed and with no-one possessing knowledge of how to heal them, he would never be found out as a fake. He was steadily becoming accustomed to the finer things in life and nothing could threaten his lavish lifestyle. Or so he had thought.

That was until he had noticed Mildred Wright for the first time a few months ago. It was her old, sagging skin that made her stick out. No-one round here made it past fifty and yet here she was, hunched over and rattling

around making old bones and still going strong. She was ancient. Since then, he began to notice how she never fell ill, how she listened to the trees and muttered under her breath and how she watched the town in anguish as new bouts of sickness took hold. He knew what she was. This WITCH, she was up to no good. He had snooped on her enough to know that she was planning something to stop the sickness taking hold. The sickness that made him rich from the pain that it caused. He would not have this old hag take away his easy moneyspinner.

No. He thought. The people must stay sick.

If the spirits were on her side, he didn't stand a chance. And so he planned to sabotage her. He really couldn't care less about witchcraft, but the superstitions of old women would play in his favour, what with being a man, and one of great standing in this gullible little town.

The Moonlight Spell

The Physician had taken to watching Mildred Wright: The Witch, everyday. He needed to sabotage her at a point where she was most vulnerable so that she wouldn't catch him in the act. He had followed her all day on her mission and now he watched her, under the moonlight as she murmured to the sky. Now was his chance. She was in a trance with the rising steam of the cauldron, rich with the soup of her gatherings. He could see she wasn't present in the world, for she was entering another in her mind.

Excellent, he thought. She would be completely unaware of his presence. And so, he sauntered over and snatched her notebook from the long grass.

The page was open on a protection potion. And below the careful sketches of each wildflower was drawn out with their names written in black ink. At the very bottom were the words that got his heart racing: 'DANGER: AVOID ADDING THE BROOM FLOWER AT ALL COSTS'.

He chuckled, this was just too easy. It even included a sketch of the broom flower, which he found after about five minutes searching in the shrubbery. He gathered up as many of the bright yellow flowers as he could and raced back to the cauldron, plunging them in. Feeling smug, he then ran to the police station down at the Docks, to report her as the witch responsible for whatever was to happen next.

For this really was a recipe for disaster.

The Spirits Rise

Mildred was mid trance when she felt the air change and a great darkness thick with grief take hold. She cried out in dread as she witnessed the portal to *The Otherworld* fill with spirits so terrifying she would have fainted if her body wasn't frozen in fear. The spirits used her body as a vessel, passing out of her mouth and into Brompton town as she howled out in pain. The protection spell had been turned upside down and plunged into the most terrifying curse. Fear and anguish would haunt this town for centuries to come.

Soon, the curse was complete and Mildred regained control of what was left of her body. She sank to her knees, pale and shaking. It had sucked the life out of her, and she grew so weak that she collapsed, the world turning to darkness.

A few hours later, Mildred barely noticed the police's heavy hands haul her up and throw her into the Maidstone cells, or the proceeding trial that took place, or the fire that burnt her at the stake as people spat vile hatred through stabbing fingers and laughed as she burnt to ash. Her heart was broken, and the guilt consumed her. That was the worst pain of all. All she had wanted to do was protect; and now the town faced something much, much worse than just disease.

The Afteryears

Every Autumn since that fateful day, under the light of the first full moon, the hauntings in Brompton begin. People across the centuries fell sick with fear, hearts stopped in sleep at horrors that they saw, and the burliest of men ran ragged across Brompton town as though in a fever dream. The townsfolk became possessed. Even The Physician, responsible for this mess, grew fearful. And on one particular night, as he laid in his bathtub of gold leaf drunk on honeywine, he met his misery as the bathwater turned to a fire so hot that all that was left for his servant to find was a pile of ash and a pair of shattered spectacles. He met his end just like the witch who burnt at the stake for his wrongdoings. Did she take her revenge? Only the spirits know.

Over the next hundred years, the hauntings grew so intense that the town trembled in terror as each September rolled over to October. People stopped sleeping altogether in fear they would never wake up. Then, in the 1800s, half of the town suddenly vanished overnight. The other half fled, in search of anywhere where they were not held hostage to the fear that the spirits reigned down. They ran as far as their legs could carry them, leaving all their possessions behind. They hid in the ships ready to be taken to faraway lands or risked their lives on the streets up London. They would take anything over another night in what some claimed to be hell itself.

So Brompton became deserted. For fifty years, people didn't dare enter its boundary. Pubs were strewn with half drunk flagons of ale that grew moldy tops, homes held stagnant suppers and half read books. Brompton became a ghost town.

A Ghost Town Rises

Time has a power in making people forget. And as the years rolled by and a deep and painful recession pulled people ever closer to poverty; the town of Brompton and its empty houses became irresistible to people who had nowhere to turn. What's more, the government, under pressure from the threat of another war looming, hastily identified the abandoned site as the perfect place to build a new barracks. Perhaps this is why you won't find any word of the harrowed past of Brompton in history books; for it had been wiped by the state, and, over time, memory had helped it fade.

By 1812, Brompton was packed with riffraff once again. The spirits who had had no humans to haunt for almost half a century, simmered down to just a rumour. They fell silent, in wait for the town to find its feet again. Brompton had moved on from the overgrown meadows, farmsteads and densely packed wooden huts to grow into a mini metropolis of new homes, cafes, pubs, schools, churches and hospitals. On any morning, you might find soldiers training up and down newly paved streets as children sang rhymes and pubs filled up with laughter and merriment, just like old times.

The hauntings became stuff of ancient memory. Folklore told in the pub over candlelight. Yet superstition stayed strong from the eeriness you could still find clinging to the air. The spirits watched as the town return to normal, until they couldn't resist rising once again.

Part Two
The Vanishings

One Stormy Night

It was evening late in October 1825 and dear Kit Miller was absolutely knackered. The long trek back to Brompton in the dark and pouring rain after a hard day's work was the last thing he needed. Why did he not think this through? In the papers they called it the storm of the century and yet he didn't even think about bringing an umbrella as he left the house with bleary eyes that morning. Kit stifled a yawn and started the journey from the station back to Brompton. The wind howled around him, pushing him onwards into the vast open space of The Great Lines.

With clouds heaving above, Kit fell into a daydream for the brighter morning, where he had eaten his breakfast of boiled eggs and soldiers on the little patio outside his newly painted home on Prospect Row. His belly rumbled at the memory and he quickened his pace. This commute was new for Kit, who had only recently landed the job of his dreams working as an illustrator for the Kentish Chronicle. His first proper job, and it was doing something that he loved more than anything in the world. He was so proud of this great step into adulthood, purchasing a home that he could proudly afford with his very own paychecks. For some reason, property was so much cheaper in Brompton than the rest of Kent, and so he was able to buy an entire house on the quaint cobbled streets of Prospect Row. Three whole floors! True it needed a bit of work, but he was so overjoyed that he had even grown fond of the old wallpaper and fraying carpets.

Yawning again, Kit had to admit to himself that since moving in he hadn't been sleeping so well. He felt his eyes grow heavy as he ventured towards home, clutching his briefcase close to protect it against the wrath of rain.

There was something special about this briefcase, for it contained more than just Kit's newspaper illustrations. Of late, Kit had become a little... distracted at work with drawing something quite different. Something that if his bosses were to see what he was up to every time they looked away, he would lose his job and find himself in a right old sorry state. Let's just say, if a stranger were to open Kit's briefcase, they might jump out of their skin at the sight of what lay inside.

You see, since moving onto Prospect Row, Kit had been having very dark dreams in the dead of night. Dreams so vivid he was trapped in paralysis, unable to move as figures entered his room and stood above him as he slept. These dreams, they felt so real he thought he would never wake up. But each night, somehow, he managed to shake in a violent startle out of his slumber, with his body laying damp in a cold sweat and his heart raced.

But this wasn't the strangest thing. Though what he saw in sleep he could never utter out loud, his hands could speak freely through the fear. Each night after he woke, Kit often found a pencil clutched between his clammy fingers with the figures that haunted him forged out on paper. He dared not tell anyone about the sleep drawings, and although what he drew made him shake with fear, steadily it had started to consume him. It absorbed all of his attention away from the humdrum of reality and he started building up a library of ghostly

drawings. They now lay tucked within a secret compartment of his briefcase. To anyone else it might seem ridiculous, but for Kit, it was like he was in a trance that he could not snap out of, even if he wanted to.

Tired Eyes

The storm raged on and Kit was so exhausted by this point, he didn't see the twisted branch that had been taken from the old oak tree above by a great gust of wind and now laid in wait on the path below. Kit's feet lumbered forwards as his eyes steadily closed until suddenly, he was jolted back to unsteady reality as his foot hit the branch and he tripped, hard. Feeling the jerk of his body falling forwards, Kit attempted to save his briefcase by lobbing it onto the nearby bank of grass as he nobly sacrificed himself. A loud squelch surrounded his ears as he landed in a deep, dank puddle and felt the sorry slick of wet mud climb up his trouser leg. Kit cursed his luck as his hand-me-down suit soaked up any shred of looking like the oh-so-wise adult he was trying to be all day in the busy office. It was just another soakin' for this Medway lad.

As his trouser leg clung uncomfortably to his skin, Kit recovered himself and looked around to check that no one had seen his mishap. The streets were deserted, of course. Who would be out on a Tuesday at eight pm in weather like this? He retraced his steps to find his briefcase, nestled in the long grass and breathed a sigh of relief.

Struggling forwards, drenched, Kit gripped hard onto his jacket and held his leather briefcase so tight that his knuckles turned white against the horizontal rain. He desperately didn't want his drawings to get damaged in the storm. But, it was... relentless. The rain battered his body and the wind howled so hard that it made it painful to think straight. As he reached the brow of the hill, it seemed impossible to put one foot in front of the other. He needed shelter quickly. But nothing was around. It was him and the vast darkness of The Great Lines that lay ahead. He tried to beat the rain and run forwards, but it was no use, and so let his legs fall and sat on the wet floor, holding his head in his hands. Hopeless, he wallowed in his own misery.

The Otherworld Inn

Just then, through the wind, he heard a sound, was it... laughing? The clinking of pint glasses, the raucous melody of drunken sailors? He opened his eyes and jumped to his feet, and there, in front of him was a pub. The most beautiful pub he had ever seen. How had he never noticed it before? He laughed with relief! For inside there was a cosy fire, and the warm sing-song of merriment. This was just what he needed- a fine moldy Kentish ale to soften the edges and warm his bones. The smell of roasting chestnuts emanated from the building and his mouth salivated at the thought of the steam when he cracked one open.

As he approached the entrance, he looked up and saw a sign swaying gently in the wind, which had now turned to just a gentle waver. The sign rocked to and fro, with the words hanging in mid air: *The Otherworld Inn*. He headed for the glowing light of the open fire with a smile in his heart. His drawings were saved! And he could dry up and wait out the storm. The door opened and the barman beckoned him inside with a long bony finger.

Kit left his briefcase under the cover of the entrance way so as to take off his wet coat. Grinning, he stepped inside.

The door slammed shut. All the revelry fell deathly silent. Kit's heart skipped a beat as he tried to process what was happening. Then, Kit's breathing shallowed into a whimper as the slow turning heads of the strangers in the pub all looked up and together stared straight into Kit's eyes, revealing figures he had seen before.

Figures he had drawn before.

Kit shrieked, pure bloodchurning terror fell out of his mouth. But it was too late. Paralysed once again with fear, Kit watched as the figures encircled him and then left the pub, out into the night. His eyes watered. He had never been so scared in all his life. Still he could not move.

One figure was left. A frail figure, hunched over so he could not see her face. She made her way over to Kit as though she was gliding across the floor. Pale skin. This woman was not of this time. She grabbed Kit's hand and with shaking fingers pointed into his chest and murmured "*Welcome To The Otherworld, Kit*". Kit knew this woman more than the rest, for she appeared to him at the end of every dream. Wearing an old lace shawl that covered hollowed bones, her long hair fell over her face and spun down to the floor. Her eyes were black pits. Kit tried to run for the door but the door had vanished. He knew this wasn't a dream. He was wide awake this time. Trapped forever in a living nightmare. He tried to scream, but now there was only silence.

Kit Miller was never seen again.

In the long grass

It was October 1950 and the sun rose timidly in the Autumn sky. A deep red dawn rose upon the robins who chirped a morning melody with the cobwebs who played with the stillness of the wind. The first frost clung to the grass.

A group of kids were playing football in the park. One of them suddenly slipped on something as they went to score a goal, falling flat on their face. The other kids laughed, but the one that fell was very confused. After wiping the mud off, they retraced their steps.

Peering over they saw the cause. There half buried in the ground, was an old fashioned briefcase caked in mud.

The kid roared over to the others, and they all ran over to see what the fuss was about. Together they recovered the briefcase and undid the buckle to peer at what was inside.

There lay Kit's drawings. Wet but otherwise untarnished.

The children carefully traced their fingers over the figures etched onto the paper. You could tell in your gut that these were not drawn by a person from the present. In truth, though they wouldn't admit it to each other, it frightened them. What they saw made them shiver, despite the unusually hot day.

The Great Fog of 2025

Peculiar happenings had always been a part of growing up in Brompton, and the strange stories of things going bump in the night were often shared down Tracie's Cafe by the locals over a brew. This Autumn of 2025 was especially eerie, for a great fog had descended onto the streets so thick you could cut it with a knife. It was nothing like the town could remember.

Lennie, or Grandad as everyone knew him, was the bearer of all the goings-on in the town and was wise with all sorts of spooky stories from across the years. He and Tanya, the second biggest gossip in Brompton, were always nattering about the latest drama, and if there was any ghostly goings on, it wasn't long before the whole town knew about it.

Well, the great fog that had taken over Brompton only added to the excitement. It had already gathered a smattering of local press who gathered outside Tracie's desperate to catch a ghoul on camera. This would be Lennie's claim to fame, as he spoke to the news presenter about all the hauntings in Brompton he himself had experienced.

Amongst all the thrill and the buzz, some residents who had been around long enough to hear the more hallowed stories of the past, were deeply troubled. "*People are on edge!*" Amanda, the Avon lady, was first to report to Tracie and Will after doing her rounds, as they cooked her a fry up down the cafe.

Prospect Row

Rodney and Rita of Prospect Row lived just far enough from all the commotion of the little high street. They were keen gardeners and the kindest of neighbours, taking it upon themselves to put box planters full of pansies on the street, if only to brighten things up a bit.

They were both having their morning cuppa over Classic FM, gazing out of the window and pondering on what to do. The concern for the autumn leaves that had fallen overnight was shared between them, as the leaves were

now hidden by the thick fog that blanketed the floor. What a terrible hazard! It would only take one poor soul to trip and it might be a long old while til anyone found them. They couldn't just leave it like this outside for the neighbours, but with Rita's bad hip she couldn't take the risk of falling. So Rodney finished his brew, then promptly put on his woolen hat and set out with his broom to sweep up the pavement.

Rodney unlatched the door and stepped out into the coldness of the day. The quietness felt strange beyond the door, and as he started to sweep up the autumn leaves, the only sound that met his ears were the wires on the broom as they touched the ground. No birds sang. The silence was bleak. It was like the fog sucked out the sound around him.

After a solid ten minutes of sweeping, Rodney had to admit that it was pretty eerie. He wanted to head back inside as quickly as he could but there was this last bit of road to do and he would feel so guilty if someone were to fall after his lack of effort. So he kept sweeping, and started whistling a tune to put his mind at rest. Try as he might, he couldn't shake the strange feeling. It started in the back of his neck and then a long chill fell down his spine. He felt as though something was watching him. Looking up, he saw nothing at all, but the sense that something was off made him sweep a little faster.

Then, in the distance, he heard the unmistakable crunch of leaves as someone, or something, walked over them. He looked up sharply, but there was nothing. It must be his imagination playing tricks on him. But there it was, again. The crunching was getting closer.

By this point he was too far away from his house to run back inside without tripping up the curb. "*Rita?*" He called out, "*Is that you love? I'll be in in a sec, don't you worry yourself!*"

There was no reply. Just the crunch, crunch, crunch as the heavy treading got closer and closer. Rodney was trying so hard to not to be freaked out. It was probably just one of the kids playing tricks on him. But, this felt different.

Suddenly, he heard a high-pitched noise. It did not sound human. He couldn't place it until he heard the scuffle of hooves, and then a huge horse revealed itself in the mist. Usually, Rodney was fond of horses but this was something else. Its eyes were hollowed and it moved like it was glitching. The horse was dressed in a saddle and stirrups, but there was no rider on him now. It got closer, until it was only a metre away. Then it proceeded to stare at Rodney. Rodney's heart raced, but he fell into a trance so deep it meant he couldn't look away; couldn't run away. He was transfixed.

The horse rose up onto its hind legs until it was higher than Rodney two times over. Its body loomed, making shadows in the mist as it let out a painful screeching sound. As the horse landed, it bolted towards Rodney as though it was going to trample him. Rodney snapped out of his trance and went to run, but his fear made him forget the pile of leaves that he had been carefully sweeping. He tripped and fell backwards into the blanket of

fog. The horse bolted through where Rodney once stood towards the barracks. It jumped over a metal gate that dropped into the abyss.

Rita heard the commotion outside, and ran to the door. She pulled it open and called out “*Rodney, is that you... are you ok out there?*”. But Rodney had vanished into the fog. She panicked and then ran back inside to try and call the police on her phone. But her signal was dead, and the house phone line had been cut.

Rumours down the Cafe

The next day there was a furore down Tracie’s cafe. Word had travelled that Rodney had vanished. The neighbours John and Jenny were looking after poor Rita who was really shaken up without Rodney by her side. The Brompton fog hung thick with despair as superstition wavered into a reality.

By this point, you might wonder how the community of Brompton were navigating to Tracie’s through this fog. Well Paul, resident of Amherst Hill, was a ropemaker down Chatham Dockyard, and happened to have some leftover rope going spare. He was a pretty inventive chap and so with some of the locals he had fashioned a rope system to guide people between Tracie’s Cafe and The Cannon Pub, if they could make it to the park gates which acted as the centre point. Well the town couldn’t miss Tracie’s famous fry up, could they! As the bacon sizzled in the pan and the old jukebox played out songs from the seventies, the regulars slathered butter on their bread and drank their coffee.

So back to dear old Rodney, Lennie claimed that Rita had been laughed at by the police down the phone when she finally got through to them at her neighbour, Elaine’s house. The police hadn’t taken action, because Rita has stated that before he vanished she had heard the neigh of a giant horse that was “*not of this world*” out in the streets. “*Wait 24 hours, love, before reporting anyone missing*” they had said to her, and then maybe they “*might do something*”. Typical. Jenny was in bits! So that night, Lennie had taken it into his own hands and had gone on the internet to do some careful scrolling. He had discovered that there was indeed a horse from 1870 who was famed at the time to have bolted and dropped 42 feet from the barrack gates right there in Brompton. They had all better be extra careful these coming days, Lennie warned, joking that they should form the neighbourhood watch for ghosts.

Mel of Melville Court

Mel was new to Brompton. She had packed up her life in the big smoke on a quest for a quieter life in the suburbs. She skipped into a one bed in Melville Court without looking back. Mel loved Autumn, and this fog gave her a genuine excuse for not going outside or seeing anyone at all. Bliss.

Mel had been a little apprehensive about moving into the area because it was such a tight knit community, and was a little shaken when on her first day in town, she took a stroll onto the high street trying to find a breakfast and inevitably headed to Tracie's. When she told the regulars that she had moved into Melville Court, they started harping on about all sorts of ghostly goings on. She brushed it off. She had always been skeptical about smalltown stories and gossip and with the company of her two cats Sid and Simon, she had all the protection from any ghoulish drama she would ever need. Besides, this was a new build... right? An estate where she was surrounded by people. She didn't want any nonsense, not even from ghosts, and so she had kept herself to herself since then.

It was Friday. Her routine 'Big Night In' - face mask, candles, the lot. Finishing work at half four, she slammed her laptop shut and put on her slippers and fluffy dressing gown, settling in for the night. She popped the box on for her daily routine of The Chase with a glass of vino and a ready meal. Gorrr she just *loved* a bit of that Bradley Walsh, nothing could shake her when he was by her side. Everything needed to be right for this night in, and for that she needed her cats sitting on her lap, pawing at her legs and purring their comforting song of normality. She sighed with frustration, and paused the TV, calling out into the silence, "*Where are my boys... Sid ... Simon!*" . She longed for them to nuzzle her as they usually did, sitting on her all evening as she stroked them and giggled at Bradley's terrible jokes. Usually by this point they would have sauntered into the room, so she sat puzzled for a few moments before sighing as she hauled herself out of her armchair to see where they were.

As she turned into the hallway she saw them both. Side by side. They were motionless and silent as statues, staring transfixed at the wall, so close their noses were almost touching it. Mel watched them for a few seconds confused and then shrugged, she thought they might just be getting used to the new space. She pushed one of the cardboard moving boxes towards them with her feet in the hope they would jump in and chill out. It was Friday after all.

Mel topped up her wine in the kitchen and sunk into her armchair, grabbing a blanket for her lap.

She was halfway through the show when one of the chasers dropped the question -

"What did Melville Court of Brompton, Kent used to be back in 1827?"

A hospital | Barracks | A prison

She stopped and gawped at the TV. The Chaser looked straight into her eyes and said,

"Well Mel, what will it be?"

She gawped and then laughed. The powers they had with modern technology these days. She should write into the TV people to say how it had made her night.

"B for Barracks" she shouted into the air and then shrugged when The Chaser said that it was in fact A, a hospital.

It wasn't long before Mel had dozed off in the armchair. Hours passed. And then she woke with a start, feeling disconcerted. The TV had switched itself off leaving the living room in darkness. Her mouth was dry and she desperately needed some water. Rubbing her eyes, she reached over to the table to check her phone. It was 1am- she tapped at it wanting to do a little scrolling to help her wake up, but the internet was down. She sighed, and went to put her phone back on the table next to her.

As she did, she jumped out of her skin. For the angle of it reflected a glint in a pair of glasses perched on a face in the corner of the room. Silently staring back at her. For a second she dared not to move, she held her breath and felt her heart thump across her ribcage. In case whoever it was had somehow missed she was there. Then she heard the wheels of a trolley as it came squeaking down the hallway towards her. The figure got up from the chair, and stood silently. She blinked and tried to pinch herself awake. The trolley sound got closer and closer until a hospital bed was wheeled into the room.

The person pushing it was a nurse. Wearing a pinafore and smelling of must. Mel's heart felt like it was going to jump out of her mouth. The figure from the corner of the room came forward towards her. He looked like a physician with a pair of rounded spectacles. He said nothing for a moment, and then summoned the nurse. Mel didn't realise that in her hand this nurse held a needle. She screamed as he spoke the order: *"Take Her Away"*.

Mel tried to move away but her arms were in straps as the world turned over and she found herself on the hospital trolley. She felt the needle enter the side of her neck and her vision go blurry as the nurse put a gas mask over her head. The last thing she experienced of this world was lying on the trolley as it went back down the corridor to where her cats were still staring at where the wall once was. Now she saw it was an operating theatre.

Down the Cannon

“Can you believe it, it’s happened again! This time it was Melville Court. Never seen anything as bad as this before in all my years livin’ here”. The fried bread Tracie was cooking smelt extra good today, with all the hustle and bustle going on. The fog continued, if anything it was even thicker.

By this point, there had been two reports of vanishings in the space of a week and the police had started to take notice. They had issued a statement and put a cordon around the whole of Brompton. No one was allowed to step into Brompton and no one in Brompton was allowed to leave. The news crews gathered outside the cordon, hoping to catch a glimpse of a ghost. Residents were on strict curfew between 8pm-8am and could only collect goods from the outside world at the quarantine point on Middle Street. The lockdown was indefinite until the fog had lifted and the vanishings had stopped.

The strict curfew meant one thing: the late night banter in The Cannon pub needed to start at midday instead. If it wasn’t for the horror and the fear the fog brought, these would have been considered the glory days for The Cannon at a time when so many pubs around were shutting down. Following Paul’s clever rope system from Tracie’s, you would be guided to a pub door to find inside as much revelry as there had been back in 1842. Card games in one corner, karaoke in the other, arm wrestling out the back, even old fashioned storytelling in the centre, right at the bar where the landlord served pork scratchings and pickled eggs. This was the community of Brompton, and you could never take that away, no matter how scary the world outside might seem.

Manor Street

Days passed with not a lot of goings on, to the dismay of Lennie. A few figures in people’s windows here and there. Some night screams. At one point in The Cannon, the landlord swore they saw the rowdy landlady Hetty Bernthall pouring herself a pint at midnight. The very one that caused havoc back in 1852.

It had reached day twelve of the great fog, and the teenage twins Sasha and Victor of Manor Street were at home, bored. At first the helicopters and the thrill of being in another lockdown sent the twins viral; reporting from the inside, they steadily grew their online following from daily tales of life in the great Brompton fog. But living with their parents, cooped up for this much time was driving them nuts. For the twins, this week had turned into an eternity. Sasha’s mates were posting every day about their nights out. Victor had fallen head over heels for someone at college and now it looked like they were cracking on with someone else. Neither of them could take it anymore.

They decided that enough was enough. One thing was top of their list tonight which they simply couldn’t miss. There was this massive party their mates were throwing in an abandoned warehouse up in Margate. It was quite literally all anyone was talking about online and there was not a cat in hell’s chance they were going to miss it.

But how could they possibly get out of this one? There would be no way to get past the cordon with the surveillance going on there. It was going to take some thinking, that was for sure.

So, they hatched a plan to sneak out after everyone had gone to sleep. It was a flawless, mission impossible style stroke of genius that the twins were very impressed they had come up with. Brompton was full of conspiracy theories online and it wasn't long before they had found out about the secret World War Two tunnels underneath Brompton. Victor had stalked down the video maker in an urban explorer forum and paid for access to his map of the tunnels which he now clutched in his hand. This would be their ticket out of there.

That night, they waited until their parents were asleep, treaded lightly down the carpeted stairs and jumped out the living room window. They raced up Maxwell Road and into the opening of the forest, where they clambered over the military wire and found the hatch as per the video. Viktor had nicked a crowbar from the garage and after snapping open the rusted padlock, with great effort, they forced the hatch open. It creaked so loudly that they both looked around in case anyone had heard them. Then, they looked down the hatch together at the vast darkness that waited for them.

Was the party really worth it? They both had the same thought, then with nervous laughter they nodded. Sasha took the lead, stepping onto the top rung of the ladder that descended downwards into the darkness. She steadily descended from the great fog down into the tunnels below, with her clothes in her bag and her headtorch firmly on her head. Viktor came in next after looking around one last time. He was sensible to leave the hatch open just in case they needed to turn back. He didn't want to be caught out like they were in the horror films.

The air grew chilly as they landed on the floor of the tunnels, and they allowed their eyes to adjust to this new underworld. What was this place?! Corrugated iron lined the walls, and the smell of musty wartime entered their noses. Cracked flaked painted signs on the walls pointed ahead, and it truly felt like they were stepping back in time. It was both scary and thrilling and so good to be out of the house, away from their parents. They got out the map they had marked out and started their route.

An hour passed and they were doing pretty well in this labyrinth of tunnels. If they lost each other they might never find the way out. But they were almost there. It was creepy to say the least but it was maybe five more minutes and a few more turns and they would be out. They turned the corner, holding hands as they pushed through the final door. They were ready for outside air. Ready to partayyy.

But through the door, they found a tiny room. It was a total dead end. Viktor started to panic, had they taken a wrong turn? But Sasha reassured him it was right. She was the calm one. She got out her phone to check her GPS, but there was no signal. So she quietly put it back in her pocket and searched the room for their next step. Her phone light shone on some drawings, etched into the wood, and what appeared to be a blanket on the floor. The drawings were of the same beast they had as children sung about at school: The Brompton Beast. And next

to them scribbled out in ink was the rhyme they used to sing. She started to hum the tune as it jogged at her memory;

*Hear this tale, Oh ye, Oh ye
When the Great Lines Crow caws
one, two, three
Hurry now, you must take heed!
For The Brompton Beast shall crawl to thee*

Ohhhhh

*You can't outrun the Brompton Beast
You can't outrun the Brompton Beast*

*With hair so thick you cannot see
The truth this beast reveals to be
From the barracks to the old hospital and the ropery
The Brompton Beast will follow thee*

Ohhhhh

*You can't outrun the Brompton Beast
You can't outrun the Brompton Beast*

*Hurry now, it's time to hide!
Before the Brompton Beast appears by your side
And with a chill as eyes turn wide
Not even foxes screech their usual cry*

Ohhhhh

*You can't outrun the Brompton Beast
You can't outrun the Brompton Beast*

*As its howl rises from the tunnels below
Brompton fall silent to its mighty Bellow
That echoes around these old cobbled streets
Making hearts pump loudly to its trudging feet beat*

Funny, she had never noticed the mention of the tunnels before. But she smiled, the legend meant that someone must have been in here recently, which meant that the way out was nearby. Sasha had always been the optimistic twin, and she was sure they were close.

Sasha was mid thought when both headtorches dropped out at the exact same time and the twins were both plunged into total darkness. Victor squeezed Sasha's hand tightly and they held onto each other as they heard a loud roar echo around the tunnels. They had to make a choice, stay and face whatever was coming for them. Or run.

With no light they started to feel their way back through the tunnel, and being twins, in total silence they were able to synchronise their movements. When they thought they were far enough away, Viktor let out a breath and found the matches he had stolen from his mum's candles. He shakily struck one against the wall.

The light shined on a face so hideous that the twins both screamed in synchronicity. For this was the Brompton Beast. The tale was true. They both ran as fast as they could, turning and turning in circles until they were so lost in this labyrinth, trapped in this dark underworld of Brompton forever.

Sasha and Victor had vanished, but the hatch had been opened. Leaving the rest of the residents at the mercy of The Brompton Beast and the others that had been trapped underneath for so long.

The Thirteenth Day

The thirteenth day of fog felt different. It was the thickest silence. As the day broke, the silence was picked up by a gust of wind that started to slowly move the swings in the park; the rusty squeak of the chains moved back and forth, back and forth. The wind gradually turned into a fury, picking up Autumn leaves and throwing them into spirals that cascaded into whirlwinds around the houses. The sound of a deep low groan carried on the wind and as it started to rage, the sound turned into a howl that made your blood run cold. The Brompton Beast had found the exit to the tunnels, and had climbed up and out into the daylight.

The fog climbed up and up, bringing figures of mist in their hundreds to batter on the doors of the houses. The wailing grew louder and louder. A storm was brewing overhead.

But this storm was unique. As thick, red drops of blood rained down on the town.

From the quarantine barrier, the press were none the wiser. To them it looked like a fine plain day with just the same blanket of fog. They yawned and switched off their cameras and poured out flasks of coffee, for the night was over. If only they could see what the residents of Brompton could see. They were in the eye of the storm. And it was a storm of pure hell.

But, you should never underestimate the residents of Brompton. They were prepared. Lennie and the Tracie's Cafe regulars had planned for this each morning over toast. They were ready for the worst eventuality. The main thing they decided was that they must stick together at all costs. Go down with the ship if they must, but the thinking was that ghosts don't do well with numbers. So they planned to meet at Tracie's and batten down the hatches. Paul's marvelous rope contraption by this point extended from the doors of residents out and over to the high street and so all they needed to do was leave their houses and follow the rope along the trail. Easier said than done. It was terrifying out there. But one by one, they managed. Tracing the lines across the rope until they got to the park. The wind howled around them and it was a matter of clinging on for dear life in the hope they wouldn't get blown away.

Eventually, they all got there. Tracie was already behind the counter popping the kettle on to make everyone a cuppa. When the last of the group entered, they shut the door and moved the jukebox in front of it so that they were firmly locked inside. The group had laid a series of traps for the ghosts that had been carefully devised from an email thread with the head of Fort Amherst's ghost detector group. They had also packed an emergency bag each, fully equipped with a torch, magnets and even garlic of all things! Well *anything* was worth a try. Will had laid sleeping bags out on the floor and the scene looked, in all honesty, like a really cosy sleepover- if it wasn't for the impending dread and sense of overwhelming doom. They huddled together in wait as the storm picked up to the speed of a hurricane. The sounds of The Brompton Beast got louder, getting ever closer as it crawled across Chatham Reach, round Khartoum Road and onto Garden Street. They sat in silence, hearts racing.

Suddenly, the jukebox turned on. All on its own. Tracie yanked out the plug, but it continued to play. It was a song that none of them had ever heard, even Will who knew his Jukebox back to front. An organ started to play a tune and then children started singing very slowly, the sound distorted by the warping of time. "*You can't outrun the Brompton Beast*" they whispered in high notes over and over.

Then they heard someone screaming outside, a woman's voice shook in fear "*Let me in*", "*Let me in! It's Coming!*". She battered on the door, her silhouette in urgent desperation.

"*We have to help them!*" cried Elaine, running to open the door.

"*No!!!!*" Shouted Will, "*It's a trap!!!!*"

Elaine hesitated, and the figure outside pleaded, touching their fingers against the glass.

Elaine's heart was too big. And before she could push the jukebox to the side herself, it smashed over to the other side of the room all on its own. She readied herself to turn the handle, hands clasped around it.

"*WAAAAIT*" Will cried, "*...Look at her feet*".

Elaine glanced down. She saw the figure, levitating inches above the ground. Elaine screamed and ran backwards. But the door had nothing holding it shut anymore.

Suddenly it flew open, bringing with it the figures from across the centuries. The residents were powerless as a little girl walked in, dragging a teddy bear across the floor, head tilted to one side. The song grew louder and louder until it rang through their ears. There followed a drowned sailor, as the shores of the River Medway came to lap outside the door and then start to flood the inside of the cafe. It rose up and up until they lost each other. Gasping for air, Lennie tried to haul himself out, attempting to find the rope to pull himself over to the Canon pub.

But it had been cut.

Then as quick as that, everything fell back to total normality.
A second to breathe.

In, out, in, out.

The kettle whistled.

"Time for Tea", Tracie spoke into the silence.

And after a moment, everyone chuckled with relief. It was over.

And then came
the roar.