

Helen

A short story for Christmas 2023 set in South London, Greenwich to be precise. Have you ever lost someone and had a dream about them. A dream that felt so real, so intense, so intimate....That part of you refused to ever admit it was just a dream ?

Word count approx. 5,840

Triggers; Yes, just about everything. There is a hell of a lot of sex.

□

Helen Lee's twins were taking part in their first nativity play during their first year, at their first primary school. It was a huge thing for them and Helen. Five years old and already starting to talk like grownups. Tasha had been given the part of an angel and much to her annoyance; Becca had been chosen to be one of the shepherds.

"Someone has to be a shepherd." Helen had told her. "You have to be the best shepherd that audience has ever seen."

They'd started having their kids early, Phil and her. The idea had been to have kids while they were still young enough to embarrass them at parties, or something like that. Helen was twenty five and had the twins and a seven year old son called Warren. Alright, Warren had arrived earlier than planned, but they'd been so young and so in love. Helen had never regretted being pregnant in her late teens and she now had three great kids.

"Oh mum, Tasha looks so sweet." Helen said.

"Stop sighing and take some pictures, or we won't have any." Said Pat.

Another advantage of having kids while relatively young. Helen's mum was probably on the low end of the average age for a grandma. Pat, short for Patricia, was just coming up to her fifty first birthday. Everyone needed a friendly hand to squeeze at school occasions, so Helen had brought her mum.

"Poor Becca, she was right.....The shepherd costume is awful." Muttered Helen.

"Someone has to be a shepherd." Said her mum.

It was like the words of a ritual, passed on from generation to generation. Some poor kid had to be a shepherd, just pray it wasn't your child. Helen had a camera on her phone that took decent pictures. Mike knew how to get them off the phone and onto an ancient desktop PC, that she used for Twitter and Instagram. Mike was a grocery delivery guy who'd brought her food up to her flat a few times. Quite a task when you lived halfway up a council tower block. He'd been amusing and she'd been in need of cheering up. He now stayed over some weekends, though she was still unsure how far she wanted the relationship to go.

"Did you get the wise man dropping his parcel ?" Asked Pat.

"Yes, poor kid.....He'll be joked about for years."

Everything was so normal, even Helen being there without Phil. They had married and there had been so many plans made for the future. He hadn't left her, or beaten her, or any of the other dozens of reasons some of her friends had ended up as single mums. Phil had been a good man, who'd been involved in a routine traffic accident. Eighteen months ago, though the two uniformed police on her doorstep, one male, one female.....It still felt like it had happened yesterday. Phil was

just one of the sixteen hundred people killed in traffic accidents that year. All very ordinary, all routine.....And it had ripped her life apart.

"Is that it?" Asked her mum. "They should say if it's over."

"Yes, of course it is mum.....They all came on and bowed. Come on, we'll get some pictures up nice and close."

Her mum hung back a little, as Helen gently elbowed her way through a mass of happy looking parents. She took pictures of anything and everything. Warren might think it was naff now, but she'd wished her mum had taken pictures of her primary school friends.

"I told you Becca.....Best shepherd I've seen in a nativity play." Said Helen.

"Next year, I want to be a wise man." Muttered Becca.

Tasha was destined to be a supermodel, that was obvious. She waggled her angel wings and posed for anyone wanting to take her picture. Was there an official school photographer? If there was, Helen hadn't noticed one. Her phone could play up if she took too many pictures, so Helen put it in her pocket. Just as well, as she might have dropped it.

"No, that's impossible." Helen said.

"What's wrong mum?" Asked Tasha.

Phil had been there, stood near the fire doors at the back of the school hall. It was him, there was no mistaking anyone else for the man she'd shared a bed with for years, the man who'd fathered her three children. Helen wanted to scream out his name, but the kids would think she was crazy.

"Nothing.....I thought I saw someone, but it's not them."

There one moment, as clear as day, she was certain of it. The next he'd gone and there was no one there. No one, not even a man she might have mistaken for Phil. The twins were still fussing around their friends and being fussed back. Her mum was back with her by then.

"Can you have waking dreams?" Asked Helen.

"I don't know.....Why?" Asked her mum.

"Remember how I had dreams about Phil? I just saw him again mum. I've been tired lately, but dreaming when I'm wide awake.....That's new."

"He hasn't been gone for that long." Said her mum. "I think dreams show us what we most fear and what we most desire. Awake or asleep, I can't see how that makes much odds. You want to see Phil again, simple as that."

~ ~

Saturday was soccer practise day for Warren, his last chance to put on his football boots before the Christmas holidays. Helen didn't have a car, so it was a case of everyone getting on the bus. It was nice in a way, travelling as a family and meeting other soccer mums on the 386 bus. The weather forecast was chilly but dry, which was a huge plus. Bringing home three drenched kids was a nightmare. It wasn't a long journey to the playing field, though just long enough for the kids to squabble. Helen pulled Becca off another girl, while trying to hide that they'd been fighting.

"Girls.....They're so silly." Said Warren.

"You won't say that when you're older." Said Helen. "You'll be begging the twins to bring their friends home."

"No way." Muttered Warren.

Helen thought of her own awakening to the fact that not all boys were smelly and the spawn of Satan. She'd been about ten, when she'd realised some boys were quite nice. By the age of twelve she was obsessed with some of the boys at school and doing her best not to let her mum know.

Helen didn't envy her son; she wouldn't have gone through all that again, for all the tea in China, or all the coffee in Colombia.

"No, Becca.....Hit Tamsin again and there'll be no Christmas presents." Helen said.

An empty threat, her kid's presents were bought, wrapped and hidden up in the loft. When they were big enough to get up there, she'd need to find a new hiding place. Empty threat or not, it didn't stop Becca from crying. For at least the eighth time that week, Helen wondered if she was the worst mum in the entire universe.

She didn't know the woman sitting the other side of the bus. A little older than her maybe, with two boys about Warren's age. The woman rolled her eyes at her, as if to say 'kids huh?' And Helen felt a little better about her parenting skills. They were there, the familiar stop near the familiar changing hut and a familiar field.

"We're there.....Pick up everything." Said Helen, while other mums said something similar.

Tasha was about to leave her gloves on the bus, for about the dozenth time. Off the bus and through a gate that was always unlocked when they arrived. Who unlocked it ? As far as Helen was concerned it could have been fairies, but was more likely to be a guy from the local council.

"Oh....It is cold." Said Helen. "Cold enough for a white Christmas."

"Yippee." Yelled Tasha.

It was a Saturday routine that included the twins getting a little fractious after watching their brother kick a ball up and down the pitch, for what had to feel like hours. Some weeks it felt like hours to Helen. Warren enjoyed it though and it did get them all out of the flat. When she'd been left with three young kids and no husband, her wonderful, friendly landlord, had become far less friendly. He wanted her out and a trip to see someone at the council, had confirmed he could do it.

"Holiday let, Mrs Lee.....You've a holiday let agreement." Said the man from the council.

"But.....We moved in before the twins were born."

"Still a holiday let I'm afraid."

She'd made a joke about being prepared to live on the top floor of a tower block in Beirut, which seemed to be somewhere fairly undesirable in TV shows. Not the top floor, but the council had given her a flat halfway up a tower block. The lift always worked though, something her neighbours kept telling her was a big plus to living there. Another part of their Saturday routine was a choice of sweets from the corner shop on the way home. Warren scored a goal, something that didn't happen every week, or even every other week.

"Yes.....Did you see that ? Warren scored a goal ?" Yelled Helen.

The twins went crazy and a few of the other mums smiled. Being a soccer mum was competitive though, so none of the other mums cheered.

"Do we get extra sweets ?" Asked Becca.

Her bad mum alarm was clanging like crazy, but to hell with it. Her son had just scored a goal.

"Yes.....But you're not buying one of everything." Said Helen.

"Yay for Warren." Shouted Tasha.

Helen looked at her son and behind him, right near a corner flag, was a man. He was waving at her son and seemed to be cheering. Helen knew the body shape and the walk. Faces can be deceiving at a distance, but you never forget the way someone you love moves and walks. It was impossible of course. No simply wandering off.....Helen looked over the nearby mums. There was Gillian who had to be in her early seventies. Gill boasted of having more kids and grandkids than the old lady who lived in a shoe.

"Gill.....Can you ?" Helen yelled, while pointing at the twins. "I'll only be a minute."

“Yes, of course.....They’ll be fine.” Said Gill.

“Alright, I won’t be long.....Stay near Auntie Gill.” She told the twins.

The Saturday matches were fairly informal affairs, but a mum taking a shortcut across the pitch wouldn’t have made her flavour of the month. Helen didn’t want to run either, that might alarm the twins. She began to walk around the pitch, knowing what she hoped was true, was impossible. Phil was dead; it couldn’t be him moving about near the corner flag. There was the walk though, the way he stood with his arms in a certain position. It was him, it was Phil.

“Phil !” She yelled. “Phil.....I know it’s you.”

A few turned heads; she’d be the crazy lady on the 386 by next week. Poor devil and then there were her kids....Poor things. She could almost hear the gossip. Around the goal end of the pitch and Helen knew he’d be gone. Like last time, he’d be gone as soon as she got close. No, he was there and it was Phil, her Phil.....There was no mistaking him now. Still a good twenty feet away, but she recognised the man she loved at twenty feet. Helen felt light headed and close to fainting, as Phil gave her a quick wave. Hand up, just the fingers wagging. It was Phil’s wave.

“No.....Don’t go.....Please.....I love you.” She shouted.

The distance stopped making sense. Phil wasn’t running, yet he was twice as far away. She ran, but he was getting further away, until he went through a hole in the fence. An old hole in the wire, probably used as a shortcut by the local kids. Helen carefully ducked through the hole and.....There was no sign of her husband. The road went to left and right and there was a cul-de-sac in front of her. No sign of him in the cul-de-sac, so she went to the right. Lots of houses, but no sign of Phil. Left and it was the same. No one, not a solitary pedestrian, just houses with cars on driveways.

“Fuck !” She yelled.

She sat down on the curb and cried, more out of anger than anything else. He’d been there; Phil had been just a few yards away. There could be no crying in the front of the kids, so she got it all out of her system. One advantage with having young kids, was having a few packets of tissues in her pockets. Tissues wiped and rubbed and dealt with dozens of messy disasters. They wiped away her tears and by doing so, they made her feel better. Helen stood up and looked up and down the street, as if willing Phil to appear.

“It was you.....I’m not mad, it was you.” She muttered.

Back through the hole in the fence and she was feeling pretty much her old self, as she thanked Gill for watching the girls. She’d buy her family as many sweets as they wanted from the corner shop, plus a tub of ice cream for herself. It felt like the kind of day that should end with candy and ice cream.

~ ~

“Come outside mum.....It’s really sunny.”

Helen Lee had dreams after Phil had died, though suffering from dreams seemed the best description. Anxiety dreams about letting him down in some way. In one she’d received a call from the hospital, saying there’d been a mistake and he was really alive. Dreams had no nonsense filter and she’d felt guilty about getting rid of some of his things. Old clothing mostly, she’d woken in a sweat, still wondering how she could replace what had been thrown away.

“You have to come outside, Warren scored a goal.”

Dreams about her mother, friends, even some of the other soccer mums. Always letting people down in some way, mostly by not being able to find places. Favours undone was a big factor in her dreams then, the ever present idea that she was forever failing in some way. Places she knew were never there, though she was sure she was in the right place. Blame and anxiety had been her nightly

companions for months. Now things were better, though she sometimes still woke up sweating. No memory of the dream, which in a way, was worse.

"Hey, sleepy head.....Your son just scored a goal." Said Phil.

An ordinary soccer Saturday, but the pitch was now in their garden. The flat had no garden, yet there it was and it was full of kids kicking balls about. Hundreds of them, all shouting and trying to get a ball in at least two dozen goals. Dreams have no nonsense filter.....It had all seemed so real while she was in the dream.

"I made a Battenberg cake." Said Phil.

Phil could have burned a salad, yet he was slicing a huge Battenberg, while Warren poured tea into cups. The flat had no dining room, yet they were all in a huge dining room, which was nearly as large as the football pitch. The cake tasted wonderful, the best she'd ever tasted.

"Oh, that is delicious." Said Helen.

A quick Alice in Wonderland moment, where Warren was trying to hand her a cup of tea that was larger than her.

"Take it mum.....It'll go cold.....Go cold.....Go cold."

And she was in bed and hugging Phil, just after having sex. Hot, sweaty and wonderfully sticky in the afterglow. She brought her head round and they kissed. A wonderful kiss, she could feel his breath.

"I love you." She said.

"I love you too."

Wham, Helen was wide awake and looking up at the bedroom ceiling. Her heart was pounding and the sheets were drenched in her sweat. A dream, all a damned dream. Some parts of it had been a weird kind of ordinary, but that last part.....Helen touched herself and she was sticky. There was even that slight soreness after really good sex.

"Crap.....I must be going crazy." She muttered.

Kids could drive you crazy, but for Helen, they kept her grounded. Hard to allow yourself to go nuts if three young lives relied on you for just about everything. Her mum could be a great listener on a good day. Alright, on a bad day it could be like calling Lizzie Borden for emotional guidance, but at least her mum didn't repeat anything to her friends.

"Mum, have you got a moment?"

"Are you alright? You don't sound too good."

"I'm.....The dreams have come back, mum."

"Tell me about them."

Telling her mum about the everyday family stuff in dreams was easy. How that made her feel was harder, Helen had never found it easy to share her emotions. By the time she described the very real feeling sex.....Her mum had been on the phone for a while. Maybe she had somewhere to go, though her mum could be a bit of an emotional Jekyll and Hyde. At the first bored sigh, Helen realised the call had been a mistake.

"Do you really want my advice?" Asked her mum.

"Of course I do, that's why I called."

"You have Mike in your life now and the kids love him." Said her mum. "Concentrate on Mike and stop acting as though Phil will come back through the door.....He won't. See your doctor; he can probably give you more of the pills that helped before. That's it really.....I know it sounds awful, but stop dwelling on the past."

"Mum.....Why are you sometimes.....Such a bitch?"

Helen disconnected the call, before her mum could reply. She then looked at the phone for a few minutes, expecting a row when her mum called back. Her mum didn't call back. Some of what her mum said was true, which was why it hurt. Phil wasn't coming back and the kids did love Mike. The twins especially, probably liked having Mike around more than she did.

The evening had been arranged and her kids were looking forward to it. Mike was coming over for the weekend and he always arrived in time to say goodnight, tucking them in as Helen called it. He'd be there to go last minute Christmas shopping with them on Saturday. He'd still be there to have Sunday lunch with them, before going home late on Sunday evening. Helen was beginning to feel he'd be there a darn sight too much. Christmas had been arranged too, with Mike there for five days. If her mum had her way, he'd be moved in by Easter.

Mike had arrived and he was reading the twins a bedtime story. Helen had ordered a Thai takeaway and it had the makings of a really good night. It was the memories though and the definite feeling that the dreams of being with Phil, were more than just dreams.

"I heard laughter, what did they get you to read?" Asked Helen. "The food is on the way."

"My own version of Alice in Wonderland, with added sound effects."

Helen hadn't quite decided what to say to Mike. The relationship hadn't gone the way she'd expected, mainly because it was a relationship. The divorced soccer mums had filled her head with tales of horny guys, all too eager for a little fun, but running away from commitment. A widow with three young kids.....Helen had expected a man wanting sex a couple of times a week and a grope in front of the TV after a curry. Actually that was what she'd been looking for. A serious relationship so soon after losing Phil.....It had been a mistake. The doorbell told her their food had arrived.

".....and keep the change." She said.

Not that she was suddenly Rockefeller, but a takeaway and a bottle of wine on 'Mike stays over nights,' had become a bit of a tradition, including a tip for the delivery guy. It wasn't a tradition she was hoping to change. No serious talk over the meal and the first of two DVDs had been played. Even if Mike went crazy and stormed out, at least it wouldn't spoil their meal. Helen picked up the next DVD and it was a sort of horror my M. Night Shyamalan. Some people liked his stuff, but not her. She placed it back on the coffee table.

"I wanted to talk to you about Christmas." Said Helen.

"You think five days is too much.....I knew there was something."

"To be truthful, it's all too soon." Said Helen. "I think this Christmas should be about the kids and me having a family Christmas.....Just us."

"Are you dumping me?" Asked Mike.

"No.....No, unless you want it to end?"

She held his hand, which didn't feel enough. Helen spun herself around and ended up sat on Mike's lap, arms around his neck.

"I've upset you and I didn't want to upset you." Said Helen. "It's too soon for you to be here for Christmas, but I like what we have. For now, that's all I want.....Can't we keep things as they are?"

"I bought things.....Presents for you and the kids."

Crap, her internal reckoning now had her down as bad mum of the decade.

"Come round a couple of days before Christmas.....The kids will love seeing you."

"Fine.....It's just that.....I had to move so many shifts about to get those five days off." Said Mike.

"I'm really sorry.....Are we alright, Mike?"

"Yeah."

He was smiling and Helen knew Mike wasn't about to chuck his toys out of the pram and storm off. Was she being selfish wanting to stay as they were because it suited her? Probably, but she was learning and didn't feel guilty about it. Mike picked up the DVD from the coffee table and pulled a face.

"Oh, one of his weird films.....Got anything else?"

"Hmmmmm, there's Silent Hill on the shelf." She said.

"Perfect."

Helen took the dirty plates into the kitchen. They'd be washed up in the morning, another 'Mike Night' tradition. There was nothing scary about it, or in any way threatening. As she turned away from the sink, Phil was sat at the kitchen table. Clear as day, nothing vague or ghostly about him. He looked as he'd always looked in life, right down to the blue shirt she'd bought him.

"Phil." She said.

Not a word from him before he vanished, but he did smile at her for a second or two.

"Are you alright?" Called Mike

"Yeah, put the DVD on, I'll be there in a minute."

~ ~

Christmas Eve and Mike had dropped off the presents the night before. All wrapped up with nice paper portraying Santa on his sleigh. Labels to say who got what, they'd gone under the tree to await Christmas morning. Helen had similarly wrapped a present for Mike, which he'd taken home with him. A cordless electric razor, as he was constantly moaning that his current one took ages to charge. The kids had looked sad, Becca had even cried. Young kids are resilient though, tougher than most people give them credit for. They'd been through so much in their young lives. Mike not being there for Christmas seemed forgotten by Christmas Eve morning.

"Hurry up.....We've presents to deliver." Said Helen. "I'm sure you all want to see grandma."

"Oh yes....We can't miss grandma." Said Warren.

It was the whole not being Rockefeller thing, there was only two presents to deliver, because that was the extent of available cash. A bath mat for her mum and a box of smelly stuff from Boots for her friend Gill. Mike's razor had come from Freeman's and would be paid off in monthly instalments. On the bus again of course, though at a time of day that made it a bit of an adventure. The kids enjoyed it all, including the two drunk guys shouting abuse at each other.

"What does wanker mean, mum?" Asked Warren.

"Erm.....You'll know when you get older."

The standard go away reply her mum had used on her. Helen had promised herself she'd be different.....There were times though, when a quick 'you'll know when you're older,' saved a lot of embarrassing and awkward explanations. Besides, it was the truth.....He would know when he got older.

~ ~

A minor victory, her mum had apologised for calling her a loony. Not those words, but that had been the meaning. Helen had given her mum a nicely wrapped bathmat and received some beautiful looking parcels to go under the tree for Christmas morning.

"Don't rattle them, one is quite fragile."

"Sorry, Grandma." Said Tasha.

Her mum knew the seventh rule of the universe, or maybe the sixth. Never give young kids anything fragile for Christmas. It had to be her present, which Helen thought about for the rest of the day. By

the time she was tucking in the kids, she'd decided it was probably a set of storage jars she'd admired in a shop on the high street.

"Just one more sleep." Muttered Becca.

"Yes, Santa said you're not to get up until eight this year." Said Helen.

"Yeah.....Right." Said Tasha.

They'd be up at five, they always were. Warren was the worst, he'd open his presents at three in the morning if she'd let him. Into the lounge and Helen confirmed the time of the TV programmes she wanted to watch. Nothing seasonal, one of the Freeview channels was showing a couple of old horror films, one after the other.

"Can't beat zombies and body snatchers." She muttered.

A bottle of cheap white wine from the fridge and a box of chocolates hidden in a cupboard for months. There it was, wedged behind some tins of soup and out of even Warren's reach. Nothing fancy, but it was a large box of chocolates and she'd probably eat the lot before going to bed.

"I've decided.....Happiness is all about having a few small treats." She muttered.

The zombie film was great, plenty of blood and guts all over the place. The second film was a typical eighties B movie, lots of weird dialogue and little action. Weird considering it was a horror film, but it had been a long day. Helen drifted off into a nap, which became a deep sleep....

"Don't turn Tasha upside down, she'll throw up." Said Helen.

"She enjoys being dangled upside down." Said Phil.

Not their first Christmas, probably their second. The twins looked so tiny, but Phil was right....They both seemed to enjoy being dangled by their ankles. The lounge of their old home was full of laughter. Warren was opening a present and Helen remembered what it was. A dream about what had been, a wonderful family Christmas. If the dream followed real events, which they rarely did, Warren was about to open up a games console.

"Wow.....A Nintendo." Said Warren.

"There are more games in another box." Said Phil.

Money for extra presents in those days, stocking fillers as her mum called them. Far too many sweets for the kids really, but after all, it was Christmas. No socks, Helen had received so many pairs of socks as a kid from aunts she never really knew. She was determined her kids were never going to suffer the dreadful feeling of opening up a present and finding.....Socks.

"Oh, wow.....Colouring pencils." Yelled Becca.

Gloves were allowed, mainly because her lot seemed to be eating them. There had to be some reason they lost at least two pairs every winter. Warren was holding his new gloves, as though they might bite.

"Oh.....Did we get gloves again?" Asked Tasha.

"Stop losing them and I'll stop buying them." Said Helen.

Time shifted forward and Phil was carving the turkey, as Helen plated up the vegetables. The best cutlery, actually their only cutlery, was already on the table. Phil had bought a box of Christmas crackers that were supposed to have really nice presents inside. They were spread across the table, waiting until after Christmas dinner, to be pulled. Helen still had the tiny nail clippers she'd found in her cracker. Not very functional, but she'd treasure them forever.

"Alright urchins.....I think we're ready." She yelled.

Like a speeded up film, dinner was over in seconds and Helen was laughing as the tiny nail clippers came out of the cracker.

"I never usually win anything out of these things." She said.

Faster the dream took her, until that wonderful afternoon was just a whirl of emotions. The kids playing with their presents, Tasha had even said her gloves were nice. The high speed whirl stopped with her undressing to get into bed. Their bed, her and Phil's, in the nice bedroom in their old rented place. They'd kissed, her hand had grasped his dick, working it a little to get him really hard.....Another change, another place and it wasn't part of that night, after that wonderful Christmas day. Phil was still there and naked, though the bedroom was her bedroom, the one she'd never shared with her husband. They were in the flat halfway up a tower block and she was naked and ready for Phil to enter her. She could smell him on her skin, it was no dream.

"Oh.....I've missed you, so much." She mumbled.

As his dick entered her, Helen had a sudden understanding that it was a dream, yet was more than just a dream. It felt strange and definitely right, yet not quite right. A contradiction really, because sex with Phil had always felt right, as if she was with the person she was always supposed to be with. Sex with Mike was different, though always really nice. Nice, that dreadful word often used as a minor insult. Sometimes Mike could make her feel those waves of pleasure moving up her body. There had been genuine gasps of pleasure. Most of the time it had been satisfying a need, which was usually enough.

Not with Phil though, sex had rarely been anything other than wonderful. Helen brought her knees up and wrapped them around Phil's back. His thrusting was sending the wonderful ripples of pleasure, right up her body. When she'd been a nervous teen virgin, petrified of getting pregnant and....Being honest, pretty scared of the whole sex thing. Her more experienced friend, Kate, had told her about the wonders of penetration. Kate had actually described it as ecstasy. Probably a word she'd read somewhere and Kate was no more experienced than her. Ecstasy was a kind of Disney Princess word to describe plain vanilla fucking. As Helen groaned and felt the pleasure sweep right through her, ecstasy seemed far too trivial a word for what she was feeling.

"Oh.....No, don't stop." She growled.

"I won't."

His voice.....The voice of her husband in a dream and it sounded right. For some reason his voice never sounded quite right in dreams, but now it did. Phil eased up a little and was probably trying not to cum. He had once claimed to be able to turn it on and off like a tap, but didn't all men lie a little about their sexual prowess, even Phil ? The hard thrusting began again and Helen felt the tingle between her legs, become a full surge of pleasure that refused to be contained. She bit his shoulder, hard.

"I.....Love you Phil Lee." She gasped.

"Love you too Nelly Dee."

His pet name for her, a play on her married name. Only Phil ever called her that. He thrust in very hard several times and collapsed next to her on the bed. There was a little blood on the sheet from her bite on his shoulder. It felt so real.....Even the smell of sex was just as she remembered and nothing usually had any kind of odour in her dreams. She looked into his eyes.

"Is that really you ?" She asked. "Am I dreaming.....It feels....."

Phil stroked his fingers over her cheek and kissed her. They had sex again and then again before the kids were likely to be getting up and shaking the boxes their presents were in. It was so normal, like other Christmases, but also different. Helen had set her alarm to go off at a ridiculous hour and she hit the off button after the first barely audible buzz. It was dark out, of course it was.

"My bloody kids wake the birds up on Christmas morning." She muttered.

Naked and under just a sheet, that was unusual. There was a feeling, like the afterglow, or as her first serious boyfriend used to call it, the freshly fucked glow. A few blinks of her eyes to wake up properly and she picked up the sex smell still on her. Helen turned away from the alarm clock and Phil was still there. It was impossible, she knew that. She wasn't some kind of loony who believed in all the crap about ghosts. Phil was there though, lying with his back towards her. Helen could even see her bite mark on his shoulder.

"Phil....." She muttered.

She reached out her hand and as she touched his warm skin, Phil faded away. It started slowly, but speeded up. First he looked a little unclear, like an out of focus picture. In less than a minute he was gone, leaving just a dent in the pillow. Helen grabbed the pillow and pushed her face into it, breathing in his scent.

"The kids.....Get it together you silly cow." She mumbled.

Legs swung over and she was out of bed. Clean knickers out of a drawer and her warm fluffy gown out of the wardrobe. Slippers on and she was ready to watch her kids go crazy for a while. Her eyes caught the bed again, just as she was about to open her bedroom door.

"That felt so real.....Was it real?" She muttered.

Maybe she was going crazy. Or maybe.....It was Christmas after all.

"Anything can happen at Christmas." She said.

~ ~
~ The End ~

© Ed Cowling ~ Christmas 2023

As always, this is a work of fiction. Any similarity to anyone real, or any organisation, is completely unintentional.