

Bourne toWrite...

creative writing
workshops

Haunting

by Mary Brannigan

It is far harder to kill a phantom than a reality, for the phantom comes at you in the dark of night and the glare of noon. It reaches for you in the middle of a party or as you stand at the sink washing dishes. It whispers, "never forget that I know what happened". What wouldn't you give to annihilate this tormenting ghost that dogs your steps through life. Where is the magic bullet that could lay waste its awful power to disturb your peace. Someone suggested counselling as a means of leaving the tormentor behind in the consulting room. All that did was make the monster even stronger, increasing its power. Next came hypnosis which added other long buried enemies to the mix, with phantom absorbing these into its arsenal.

"This was not your fault" said friends, "just put it behind you". So you took on extra duties, working from dawn to dusk, which occupied your mind till bedtime. Then came the dreams, when this monster held sway with nothing to modify it.

It started so long ago , just after your tenth birthday, that day in the wood. The bluebells carpeted the ground and the birds sang their hearts out on that lovely day. The picnic rug was spread with treats and all seemed well with your world. That was before. There was no warning, just a reaching for your hand before the onslaught. Then you were running, running so fast; heading for home and safety. Then you were in bed being given hot milk and hearing comforting words. It took months to come to some kind of recovery, as the memories began to slip away to what they called your subconscious. You understood nothing of this, only that he had gone somewhere else.

But later he would visit you, the phantom. Year after year at the most unexpected times he would suddenly be there again, standing over you; interrupting the happy times, to taunt you. "I know all about it" he'd say, transporting you back to the bluebell wood. You began to hate the colour blue and to fear trees. Always you'd keep to open spaces and places where people gathered.

Until now, as you stand with your friend who has persuaded you to return to this place, where you met him. You take her hand, trying to pull her back into the open, to safety. But she has planted her feet firmly on this ground, keeping you anchored with her. She says, "you must face it down or you'll never know peace". Then suddenly you see him, no longer just a shadow, but a living being. Yet something is different. He is no longer a powerful presence, but a pathetic excuse for a man. He looks so sad, so needy as he whispers "come to me".

This time you do not obey. You are almost as tall as him, and instead of terror, you feel something else. Anger, red hot rage fills your heart and you lash out towards him. In that instant he starts to fade and then disappears. His strength has dissipated in the face of your fury. Tonight you will sleep undisturbed, knowing that you are the strong one.