Bourne toWrite... creative writing workshops

Family Ties

by Jane Hill

The bad blood rose in me, just like wine. Like a fine Malbec—thick and red—making me feel sick.

I'd managed to keep a lid on these vile emotions for years, but now my ancestors were taking over. All I could hear were their chants, with the blood crashing in time to the rhythm of my heart. Two thousand years of Grannies, Midwives, Goodies, Maidens, Crones, Devil's Whores, Wise Women, Hags, Baby Stealers, Cattle Killers, and more—all pounding on repeat inside my head.

It had only been during the last few generations—since Victorian times, really—that my kind had become socially accepted. If the Victorians loved anything, they loved a good psychic, especially one who could conjure genuine departed spirits rather than some charlatan who coughed up tissues as ectoplasm!

We'd had a lull after the Edwardians, even with all those deaths during the Great War. I think people found it more comforting to mourn the lost than to speak to them.

During England's Art Deco period of house parties and cocaine, it was a great wheeze to have a clairvoyant or medium on your payroll. Where do you think Mr Coward got the idea for *Blithe Spirit*?

For those not hosting grand gatherings, there were plenty of us doing the rounds of many a respectable front parlour—a situation that continued throughout the Second World War and up to the present day.

My maternal great-grandma Bates and my grandma both attended local Spiritualist churches, but my grandfather had no truck with any of it, so my mother and her siblings were sent off to public schools for cold showers and the like!

My eternal gratitude goes to Mum for never denying my gift and always believing in me. She could see it. Whenever I felt that things weren't right, she trusted me.

Once, after visiting the National Portrait Gallery on a trip to London with the Guides, I was followed home by a spectral painted man. I told Mum I was terrified, and she simply went around the house closing all the curtains so he couldn't see me indoors.

I've only ever discussed my 'gift' with like-minded or interested people. I've donated much of my time to giving readings to anyone in need who asks for support or healing. This way of life suits me perfectly. I enjoy meeting new people, and I take immense pleasure in seeing how grateful they are for the experience.

I rarely charge a fee. Sometimes I receive a bunch of flowers; sometimes a cake. Cash payments are always optional. All I ask is that they let me know how they feel a few days later.

Until, one day, a handwritten note was pushed through my door.

Reading it, I was chilled to my core. Suffice it to say, it was a litany of the purest hatred and abuse.

After receiving a further five similarly sickening notes, I invested in a video doorbell.

A doorbell that films people coming up the path. Who would ever have thought something like that could exist?

I was almost eager as I waited for the next noxious missive, which duly arrived. This time, it contained only three lines:

YOU CAN NEVER BANISH YOUR BLOOD
YOUR BLOOD IS YOUR LEGACY
BLOOD WILL ALWAYS RETURN

Shaking like a leaf, I pulled up the doorbell image on my phone—still marvelling at this amazing technology—and saw a dark, unkempt, straggly-looking person.

Their shape was familiar.

They looked as though they were screaming in pain.

Their face suddenly appeared in the sharpest focus.

I recoiled from the screen with a shriek.

Oh, please—not her!

Anyone else, I could understand.

I've fought against her all my life.

I beg of you all.

Please.

Not her. Not now.

No, no, no!
I sobbed, crumpling into a hysterical heap.
Not, not, NOT HER!
The pounding in my head was unbearable.
Not me.