

The Spa House

Water

by Sarah Peacock

Part One of a quartet based on Air, Earth, Fire and Water

The spa house, or bath house, as it is more commonly known, lies hidden like a jewel sunk into the navel of the surrounding council estate.

The estate is gargantuan and red brick, having the look of permanent hangover about it; listless and grimy, yet scratch the surface and you'll find a soul. Strangers often find themselves lost, retracing their steps over and over. This is just the way of the place. It warms slowly to outsiders, as if taking them in and considering their worthiness but once you're accepted it becomes a place of safety, a place to withdraw to when the world seems too much. It becomes as good a home as any other.

Untamed weeds curl upwards, thin but defiant between the cracks in the pavement that the council never seems to fix. In between well loved houses with neat herbaceous borders and freshly starched net curtains lies the odd house that has fallen by the wayside through neglect, usually reflecting the chaos of the lives of the inhabitants.

The houses tumble inwards and downwards towards the site of the spa house, surrounded as it is by a small coppice, dark and sinewy. It's as if someone has half closed a pop up book as the houses cling precariously to the edge of the valley as it folds in upon itself. The place is quiet, punctuated only by the sounds of the nearby motorway and yap of the odd stray dog.

When you arrive in the grounds of the spa you will notice that there is a change in the air. Tiny, almost imperceptible, there is a change in atmosphere that some folks can't cope with. Some people find themselves glancing behind them nervously while others feel the hairs on the backs of their necks stand to attention. The spring itself has fallen into disrepair. The water flows the way it always has done, clear and cold from beneath the hill but the pool is now dark and stagnant. It is

like looking into the eyes of a dead thing, decomposing, lifeless. The bath house itself is a fairly modest red brick Victorian building with lead lined windows that are now shuttered through repeated attacks of vandalism. The house crouches as if waiting for the next phase in its life to begin, craving action and attention.

Mick sits in his council van and eats his sandwich. The rain pours incessantly and he shivers as the wind howls, tearing through the estate, slamming gates and dragging litter through back gardens. It's a good sandwich made fresh by his wife this morning. The crusts are cut off the way he likes and there's just a dash of mustard on his ham. He looks at the house he's been called to and tuts to himself. It sits awkward among better maintained properties with its one boarded up window and car parts littering the front garden. It reminds him, strangely, of his Dad after his Mother's death in the way that it has let itself go, oblivious to the order around it. He fiddles with the radio for a moment listening idly to static as it refuses to pick up any kind of recognisable signal and then makes a decision to get back to work.

He steps out of the van, grabbing the clipboard from the dash and steps up to the dishevelled house. Rechecking the paperwork, he knocks loudly on the front door. It's a good few minutes before there is a clinking of keys in the door and it opens cautiously. The woman's face behind the door is greasy and her eyes are red and swollen. She looks at him without emotion.

“Yeah. What?”

“I'm here to look at your problem with the drains.” He says, forcing a smile. He prides himself on being a good employee and always making a positive impression on his clients.

“In the back.” She mutters and shuffles out of the way in her dirty carpet slippers as he steps in and down the hall.

The backyard is a mess. Filthy water billows upwards from the drains. The place stinks of decomposing matter and raw sewage. The whole yard is flooded and the filthy torrent threatens to cross the threshold into the house. Discarded remnants of the summer spin anti clockwise caught in a whirlpool. A child’s bucket and spade butts up against a deflated paddling pool in the wash. The woman gestures half heartedly at it,

“Started this morning. Never had this problem before. Bloody mess.”

Mick stands poised at the edge of the impending chaos and scratches his head. He grew up on this estate. He understands everything it has been through. He knows many of the inhabitants and counts them as friends and neighbours but he can’t help feeling a dislike for this woman. its her inhumanness, the way that nothing seems to touch her. To Mick she seems as plastic as the tat that fills her house. He shakes his head. This generation are little more than idle consumers. Things used to be different round here.

Reluctantly, he goes back to the van for his tools and returns. He’s never seen anything like this before. Usually he’s called out to leaky taps, u bends, broken stop taps and the likes. Occasionally he has to clear a particularly stubborn drain but he’s never seen anything on this kind of scale. There’s just so much water. its not clean water either. For a start, it stinks and he’s sure he can see raw sewage and left over food swimming about in it. its coming out of the drains at a right old force as it seems to be creating a whirlpool. He can feel the woman behind him and he turns abruptly to see her idly staring over his shoulder.

“Funny.” She says exhaling a grey cloud of cigarette smoke.

He raises his eyebrows in anticipation.

“I had a weird dream like this last night.” She taps her cigarette and leans against the door jam crossing one leg over the other. “I don’t normally dream see? Not with all this lot keeping me up at all hours.” She motions at the discarded toys in the yard. “But last night it was as vivid as anything. I was at the old Gell Street baths in town. Me Dad used to take us there once a month for a splash about when we was kids. Well, I was there again, right as rain I was and I was in the shallow end treading water an I felt something against my foot. So I looks down.” She narrows her eyes and leans forwards dramatically. “I looks down and there’s a face looking up at me. The eyes are all bulging an that and its grabbing at me bleeding feet.” She shakes her head in disgust. “Awful it was. I put it down to the curry we had last night. Must have been off or something..”

Mick rifles through his tool bag to demonstrate that he’s here to do a job. He’s too much of a gentleman to say anything but this is only one of a string of jobs he’s got on this afternoon. She’s not the first with this kind of problem. All the same, he’s listening. He glances up at her while she’s not looking. She’s turned her back to look through the kitchen drawers for another packet of cigarettes. She’s a large lady and she resembles the state of the house she lives in. Shape and form have ceased to have meaning. She simply exists, unaware of her own image. He shakes his head. He likes a woman who looks after herself. Not stick thin like some of these young girls you see nowadays but well presented. Well turned out as they used to say. Laura’s always looked after herself in that way. Even when the kids were small she always made an effort – shoes shone, hair done up and a smudge of lipstick. He is proud of his wife in the same way he is proud of his well kept house. Everything in order and as it should be. Not like this mess he grimaces as he steps out

into the knee deep water.

I was here long before they came. Long before there were words and there was meaning. For a long time I simply slept, waking only to listen to the call of wild animals and the howl of the wind across the marshes.

I nestled here, safe in her belly, providing life force and promise.

Then, one day the wind came brutal and screaming. It laid the land bare and froze everything to the core. I nestled here, cooler but still waiting as giant splinters of ice cracked the earth and I found myself tumbling, spewing forth into the brightness, exposed.

When the people came they named me. They claimed me as their own, not understanding that I can belong to no one.

I watched as the year's circle turned. At first they lived in the shadow of the caves. Each season seemed to bring a different group. I watched as they discovered fire for warmth and protection. They formed bonds of affection, mother to child and man to woman. They learned to hunt the larger animals when the cold and dark closed in. They learnt to survive. As time passed they began to tend to the earth. They planted seeds and cared for them. They gathered their food with pride and they settled here. The caves gave way to new shelters made from wood and stone and straw.

Some among them had not forgotten their ties to her and they understood me better. They decreed me special, apart and they brought me gifts. I was like a child at first. I would eagerly

accept their gifts, their shining distractions and talismans. I took them greedily and without suspicion.

Soon I came to realise that they expected something in return. A healing, a curing of some sickness. At first I balked at such an unceremonious request. After all, the gifts I can bestow are not mine to give. True, I carry them through me. My very soul contains them but in truth they are part of her and I a part of her too. All the same, I must confess that I had become a little attached to these people, my people. You see, over time I had come to think of them as mine. Perhaps it was the fact that I was so lonely, so isolated since I had sprung forth from the earth below. I had observed, learnt and finally understood these people. I knew what they feared. I knew what they treasured. I saw what they dreamed. Their consciousness had become enmeshed with mine and I revelled in being a part of something once more.

So I gave them small gifts in return. At first I was careful. I gave a small healing here, a blessing there. I was careful not to give too much. I never promised anything.

But as the settlement grew I became more pressed to give. I watched one day as a wooden cart arrived at the now pallisaded settlement and two young women and an elderly man were helped down from it. I sensed straight away that they were different. They were tall and held themselves differently. The elderly man possessed the most authority while the two women possessed the most power. It was a bright day despite the fact that long days of warmth and light were giving way to longer nights of cold and dark. The sky was flecked with grey and the trees were just beginning to shed their mantles of amber and deepest red. The settlement was busy with activity. Smoke drifted across the damp roofs and the sound of cattle mixed with the wailing of babies as people paused to watch the newcomers arrive. They weren't used to seeing new faces. There was the odd trader who made it this far north usually trading area and exotic objects such as the skilfully wrought axes of

bronze that I saw occasionally. But these weren't traders. They had a look of otherness about them. The women wore long woollen cloaks of the brightest blue I had ever seen and the man wore a cloak of green. Around their necks they displayed exotically wrought torques and the women sported intricate designs of blue whorls and spirals upon their exposed skin.

The head of the village greeted them and they were escorted to the main meeting house where they would conduct business. Soon after they built a new dwelling near to where I existed. It was marked as slightly separate, as 'other', away from the settlement. This amused me. These people saw things so diametrically, so delineated. One area for the living. One area for the dead. One area for domestic duty and one for sacred acts. They seemed unable to see things as I did, as they truly are. They called the women 'priestesses' and they were treated with fear but also with reverence. Now, instead of the folk from the settlement approaching me directly and asking for help they would visit the priestesses and consult them. I did not trust these women at first. They were unfamiliar. I could not understand the way that they spoke. The colour of their eyes and skin was strange to me and their ways even more alien. They appeared not to be content to be human. Instead out of desire or of duty they sought to be more. They would mix up strange concoctions of plants they had collected from the foot of the nearby hills and they would imbibe it and chant in a mesmerising low tone. I was able to see their essence, their energies rise above them and it disturbed me to see humans acting so.

As night crept over the settlement, its fingers tentatively claiming what was rightfully its own, one of the women would sit outside her makeshift dwelling and gaze up at the waxing light of the moon. She would sing a sweet low lament, some memory of her homelands and I would watch rapt as a single tear formed in her amber eyes and clung to the olive skin of her cheek. I felt for her thoughts, her raw emotion, a trick I had learned over the centuries and I gasped as I found it, hidden

deep inside. She longed for home. She longed for her family and her tribe. But more than this she longed with desire for another human being, a man.

This was very strange. Mick paused, up to his elbows in slime and sewage. There was no blockage to the drainage system that he could discern. The water seemed to be coming straight up out of the ground somehow. He'd come across problems from time to time, usually an old well that had given way when the water table had risen, and water had found its way out from beneath the bedrock far below, creeping up to the streets and houses above.

But he knew this area well. There were no old wells around here. He watched glumly as a new swell of water bubbled to the surface and an old careworn child's bear filthy with sewage twisted in the current just below the surface. It tugged at an old memory of long summers watching the kids playing in the yard at home. Their cherubic faces giggling and looking lovingly up into his own. At that age he'd found it relatively easy. They were so tactile and would eagerly curl up in a warm ball on his knee as he told them old stories. But as they'd grown older they'd somehow drifted further away and he'd looked on helplessly with little way of demonstrating his love for them. He'd provided what they needed, gone without so they could get better education but it was a quiet kind of love with little return. He straightened and stepped towards the woman whose house it was.

"So?" she mouthed, her shoulders hunched the way she always did when talking to officials.

"I'll have to call in a favour from the depot I'm afraid. its nothing like I've ever seen before. They might have a better idea."

She looked unappeased. Her brow furrowed and she let out an expletive.

“So what am I supposed to do in the meantime then? We can’t live like this. its like the bleeding third world it is..”

“Sorry Madam, there’s not much I can do at the moment. We’ll be back as soon as we can.” Mick found himself repeating the words he always used with difficult or disgruntled clients, a little like a mantra.

This was just the first of many similar cases that day. He found himself gazing nonplussed at back yard after back yard full to the brim with sewage and filthy water. Some houses had succumbed to the onslaught and downstairs rooms were a weird mix of mud, raw sewage and sodden household ornaments. As he drove home he hoped that his own house hadn’t been affected.

Luckily, being one of the streets higher up on the vast estate they had escaped unscathed but even as he carefully took off his work boots and stepped into the warm kitchen full of cooking smells he could hear Laura gabbling away on the phone excitedly to her friends on the estate. The air was full of speculation. Some it seemed, blamed the old workings rumoured to lie beneath the centre of the estate although Mick had always understood that the mines had been opencast. Other’s blamed nearby builders who were busy laying the foundation for new homes.

As he settled onto the sofa and picked up the paper, idly flicking the telly on with the remote, he caught the end of the local news. They were covering the story of the flooding on the estate. The shots were of the estate from above. He recognised some of the streets that he’d visited that day. He sat forward in his chair and called Laura away from the phone. As he sat there amazed to find the very place where he’d grown up and still lived on the telly he suddenly realised that the flooding spread in an arc. As he leant closer he saw that the concentric circles of filthy water

surrounded the Victorian spa house like the ripples of a pond. The spa house in the centre shone like a brightly polished stone that had been thrown in spitefully to cause chaos. He blinked as Laura entered the room.

“What’s the estate doing on the telly then?” She stood in the doorway her mouth hanging open.

“It’s the flooding isn’t it?” Mick said over his shoulder, vaguely in her direction.

“Martha said its the builders across the way. They’ve cut through a pipe or something.”

“Wouldn’t cause floods of this size.” He answered irritably.

As if in answer she vanished through the doorway back to the safety of the kitchen. They had an unwritten rule that when Mick got into one of his moods she and the kids kept out of the way. Much earlier in the first days of their marriage she had tried to intervene. She’d thought that by talking, by cajoling, she would be able to draw him out of the black moods he sometimes descended into. But she’d learnt that he wanted to be left alone. It was simply his way. He would stew for a few days. He would talk little and when he was forced too, it was with irritation so it was always better to keep well out of his way.

That winter a sickness came to the settlement. It came with the snow and it seemed as the thick wet flakes settled on each roof in turn that the inhabitants fell sick. It would start with coughing during the night but within a matter of hours a terrible fever would descend and those blighted would eventually lose consciousness, tossing and turning, caught somewhere between the

worlds of the living and the dead. The priestesses finally deemed it essential to leave the confines of their makeshift dwelling and come into the village. They went from house to house muttering blessings and striving to drive away the evil spirits that hung in the air thick with sickness. They would burn herbs to keep the fetid smells of death at bay and they would prey to me.

I finally relented, healing just a few to keep them happy. It was of course, a misuse of my energies. I knew that I should not be doing this, interfering with the flow of life and death but after so many years side by side with these people I couldn't help myself. Maybe there was part of me that had too become infected with sickness but this sickness instead left something mortal inside of me.

As the depths of winter gave way to the first signs of spring the sounds of the dying gave way to the beating of hooves upon the earth. New arrivals. The early shafts of sunlight glinted off their armour and the sound of metal rang out as the leader of the small band of these newcomers entered the village, his sword raised. These people too, I sensed were not local. They had the salty smell of my sister the sea about them and they had the same olive coloured skin and dark hair as the priestesses. They spoke differently to the locals but one of the men dismounted and translated to the village elder who had emerged from his dwelling. A short but heated exchange followed and the village elder finally seemed to relent and bid that the newcomers enter his dwelling for discussions. However he bade that they leave their weapons outside and reluctantly they did.

Soon after the newcomers arrived there was a tentative excitement in the air. Change was coming. I watched as a caravan of animals and carts arrived laden with goods. Within a few weeks some of the locals were instructed to clear their dwellings and work was begun on a new structure. This new structure, I soon realised was to be vast and impressive built out of stone brought in on horses. Many men were employed in the construction and they camped nearby. At night I would

listen to the sounds of their singing and stories as they floated across the fire pits. More foreigners arrived. This time they were employed to create beautiful floor designs and gaudy but impressive displays upon the walls of the new structure. Soon after, a new family arrived. I sensed these were to be the new inhabitants and I also sensed that they weren't overly welcome but the locals had little choice in this matter.

The new arrivals were tolerant of the priestesses but there was a tension in the air that I'd never felt before. The priestesses it seemed were wary of the new arrivals and the balance of power had changed once more. The new family had people that served them and every morning one of these servants would walk humbly down to the place where I resided and collect water. As they neared they would often glance nervously over their shoulder and then when they were sure that no one was watching they would pull small offerings from beneath their tunic. Some bread, a little honey, the hard cheese that the newcomers made. The servant, a young girl with nervous eyes, would lay these offerings at my feet and would call to the old ones in earnest, asking for kindness, for love and for freedom. These things were out of my reach. I could heal the sick. I could grant small wishes but love was something beyond my capabilities – only to be found at the very source from where I came. I watched helplessly as her numbered days wore on and she wilted before my eyes. Each sunset erased a little more of her hope until she curled in upon herself and gave up. As the harvest moon waned I saw her life force depart and the light of hope flicker out in her eyes.

The building grew in stature and wealth. It became more ornate and the floors and walls shone with expensive trinkets. More servants passed through its impressive gates and more hope was lost. Others arrived. The occupants of the villa greeted them warmly. Their appearance was simple, their clothing quite drab by comparison to the priestesses, and they carried a humbleness with them that I had not witnessed before. In time, they drove out the priestesses and preached the

worship of a new one, claiming that this was the only true path. They brought new customs and new ways. The new customs seemed awkward and alien. I watched people perform them and saw that they lacked passion and depth. I wondered what had driven the people to turn their backs on the old ones. They chose to create a new dwelling near to the villa that was simply constructed from wood and used this dwelling to worship their new God.

Many years passed. The once proud villa fell into disrepair and decay. I watched as few people passed. Some stopped only to rest on their journeys. Others robbed building materials to create new dwellings elsewhere. Over the years the buildings appeared to sink back into the ground and the grassy mounds swallowed up what traces of their lives had remained. Long grasses whispered over the hidden lumps and bumps and the seasons marched on.

The surrounding land was cultivated to feed a nearby village and occasionally I would witness a plough pulled by heavyset shire horses, the blades of the plough smoothing away the pains and worry lines of history. Rooks cawed amongst the harsh tree lines. A terrible plague shook the village that Autumn and many came to me begging for me to take away the cloud of illness that hung in the air. All around me I witnessed loss and pain. I was pushed to take more and more, ever mindful that one day this would have to end.

Mick reluctantly answers another call. Yet another flooded drain. This has got wildly out of control. He drives through the estate and watches as people step nimbly from buses, treading carefully through the debris left by the floodwater. The water spreads outwards like a stain across the estate, absorbed by and gnawing away at everything it touches. Mick shudders involuntarily. He muses over what he saw on the telly the night before. The water definitely seems to be coming from the spa. Could it be that the old spring under the spa has ruptured for some reason? As he pulls up at his next job, he eyes the house unemotionally. The curtains are drawn and everything appears

abandoned. A child's bicycle lies on the pavement outside, the wheel still spinning and glinting in the sunlight, as if it has only just been dropped.

"Like the bloody Marie Celeste" He mutters to himself.

He knocks loudly at the door and waits. No answer. He knocks again and steps around the side of the house, inspecting it for signs of life. Suddenly, a woman pops her head out of the back door facing this one.

"You won't get any answer there." She says.

"Oh?"

"Bairns gone down with a terrible illness. Doctor came and they've ended up rushing him to hospital poor mite.."

"I see." Mick stands awkwardly and wonders what to do.

"You here about the drains?" More of her body emerges from behind the door.

Mick nods.

"It's a right mess. Mine's the same. Water all over the back yard. Filthy it is. Her next door had it coming under the door too. Wouldn't be surprised if that's how the poor mite got sick."

"Can I have a look?" he says.

"Come on through." The woman steps out into the shared yard between the two houses and pushes open a rotting gate. He's not surprised to find she's still in her dressing gown.

The yard is almost two foot deep in fetid, stinking water. It bubbles up from beneath like there's something alive down there. Mick shakes his head. He's never seen anything like this before.

They drive in silence. The brake lights of the car in front bounce off the torrents of rain water running down the road and throw splintered light shows through the windscreen. She's cold so she pulls the thin denim jacket tighter and wraps her arms around herself. Out of the corner of her eye she assesses him. Average build, average height, average complexion. She sighs. At least he'll be easier to forget. He suddenly swerves into the curb and applies the brake.

"Here?" she enquires, raising her eyebrows.

He nods and opens the car door signalling that she should follow.

They're at the bottom of a steep hill, the car concealed in a slight dip in the road as it twists its way towards a small copse of trees. She follows him as he walks through a gap in the trees marked as a public footpath. She's done multi story car parks, industrial estates and some of the grubbier local parks but this is a new one. She can hear the squeak of his trainers on the wet path as he walks with urgency into the trees. She pauses for a moment, feeling nervous. She's also wary when a client takes her somewhere new and unfamiliar. She should really tell one of the other girls where she is. Just in case. But it's a cold night. She's wet through and she's freezing. She tells herself if she can just get this one over with then she can get home and get a fix. They emerge from the trees and she's pleased about this. She can see a little more clearly now. The moon is out tonight and as she glances up into the sky it emerges from behind a curtain of cloud and casts a cool white glow over their surroundings. They are next to some kind of pool. She looks around cautiously, feeling unseen eyes on her. She can hear the soft plop of ripples as the water tumbles feebly out of

the mouth of a small man made waterfall. Behind the pool sits an old Victorian red brick building. It looks faintly medieval, like the architect was trying to capture a fairy tale past to the place that never existed. She imagines what it would have been like when it was built. In her mind's eye she sees bath chairs rattling unceremoniously over the cobbles, pushed by austere nurses in starched uniforms. She can see the vacant faces of the sick and hopeless as they are led to the bath house in a vain attempt to cleanse them of the sickness that corrupts their minds and bodies. Like an unholy baptism she can see a young man, his face contorted with fear and anger as his head is forced under the water and his family stands to one side praying that their pain and shame be taken away.

With a jolt she realises that the grimace on the young man's face is before her. He is ripping off her tights, his eyes wild and inhuman. He pushes her down into the long grass and nettles and forces her head down to the pool's edge. She feels that something is wrong. This is getting out of hand. This is not like it usually is. He wants to hurt her. She can feel his fury and lack of control. She tries to talk to him, to calm him down. Sometimes things can spill over. They reign in their emotions so tightly, all the hurt, all the pain, all the feeling that sometimes they use her to release it and it can get out of control.

"It's ok." She murmurs but she can hear the fear breaking into her voice as she speaks.

He replies by pushing her head down harder and suddenly her face is so close to the water that she can smell it and see it in minute detail. It is dark and little moves beneath the surface, like looking into the eyes of something dead. She can smell the stink of decomposing matter and the sludge fills her mouth and nostrils as she gasps for breath. As she begins to lose consciousness she thinks she can see the water rising. All around the edge of the pool, there are beings clawing their way out like the first signs of life millions of years before but there is something wrong with these. They carry the stink of sickness and death.

“So what’s wrong with the little one then?” Mick asks, leaning on the gate as he surveys the mess.

“Doctors don’t know. They said it looked like bubonic plague but they don’t seem to believe it themselves. No one gets that anymore do they? I mean, I remember learning about it at school but that was hundreds of years ago wasn’t it?” She shakes her head as if affirming the doctors disbelief.

“Well you can’t trust these doctors can you.” Mick starts to gather his tools. This is another job he’ll have to refer back to the office. its much more complicated than he imagined.

“Yeah but he’s not the only one is he..” She leans forwards conspiratorially and lowers her voice, “There’s been four this last week down this way. Him on the corner, he’s got a different illness he has and they can’t work that one out either. its as if his mind’s just gone. Jabbering something awful he was when they took him away all strapped up in the ambulance..”

Mick didn’t like the way this conversation was heading so he made a pretence of looking intently at his clipboard and then turned to go.

“Next job..” He nodded at the clipboard.

“Mind how you go.” The woman shouted after him. “Don’t go catching anything!”

Until that night I had never fully understood the cruelty and viciousness that they were capable of. It was true that before then I had seen them enslave each other and become drunk with power but I had never witnessed anything like that. Over the years the houses had crept closer and the concentration of human life had become denser until I was surrounded, almost trapped by the pressure of emotion and need around me. My power was beginning to falter and each day I absorbed more of their pain and sickness. I became of the same mind. I could hear all their thoughts, I could sense all their fear, I could feel every heartbeat. I was becoming full, contaminated.

At first I thought there was just the one. He strode with something stronger than determination into the clearing surrounding the pool. His eyes were dark and unfathomable. Then I realised that there was another with him. She felt lighter somehow, like she carried her spirit loosely, tethered behind her carelessly like a child's balloon. At any moment, I feared that a gust of wind would carry it away. As he grabbed her by the wrists, I could see what was driving him. It was anger and fear, all stirred up into a quagmire of distress that threatened to spill over at any moment into violence. But there was nothing I could do. I watched helplessly as he forced her to the ground. His anger and fear spilled forth into her as he smashed her face against the stones at the water's edge. She cried out and in that moment I felt all the emotion, all the pain, all the hopelessness and death that I had taken over the centuries well up inside of me and erupt.

Mick arrived home to find Laura busy in the kitchen. Familiar cooking smells and the sound of the local radio station drifted under the door. He felt weary beyond belief as he opened the door and went to his wife.

As she turned and she saw the look on his face her mask of domesticity slipped. “What is it?” she asked fearfully.

“They found a body.” He sat heavily on the tarnished kitchen stool and let his head fall into his hands. She felt uncomfortable seeing him like this. He was normally such a strong man. He kept everything close to his chest – his love, his fear, his anger. It seemed like he was losing control and it frightened her. She stepped forward tentatively.

“Mick?” She laid a hand trepidatiously on his shoulder.

He crumpled under her touch and she folded him in her arms.

“What is it? What’s the matter love?”

He looked at her with blank eyes. It seemed like he was somewhere else, somewhere unreachable.

“They were clearing the drains. Because of the floods. They decided the source was the spa pool. They were dredging it, hoping to clear the water..” He didn’t finish the sentence and she watched as the tears rolled down his lined cheeks.

“They found her.”

“Who Mick? They found who?”

“It wasn’t meant happen like that..I saw her every Tuesday. It was just my way...of dealing with things..it helped..”

She stepped back shaking her head. “I don’t understand.”

“It was just that one time. It got to be too much. I couldn’t hold it in any more. At first it just trickled around the edges. I would find myself getting angry at folk for no reason. I’d shout at the kids. I’d fantasise about hurting people..”

Laura stepped back away from him trembling.

“But it just kept coming. That night, it was like the banks broke. It all came crashing out and I just couldn’t control it..I hurt her. I did it..”

They say that time is a great healer. Maybe it is. For me time means little by their scale. They have retreated now. No one likes to come here anymore. Not since they found her. All around me winter thaws and spring curls just around the corner waiting to unfurl. Deep down inside of her, from where I came, I can feel the new growth taking. The warmth spreads slowly now, like the tentative hope that weaves slowly but carefully through the human community around me. Nothing remains the same. Everything moves on. The pool is much clearer now. The water flows like broken crystal, rolling over the rocks and tumbling into the green depths. Maybe they will return some day. All around me human life continues – their lives flowing and receding over Her like breaking waves just waiting to be absorbed once again.