

## Dib-Dab

The sky was as black as coal and the clouds were iron heavy. The ruins of the old school were outlined against the full moon; they looked like claws or ruined teeth. In the foreground, battered graves waited with little welcome or comfort. They were guarded by ancient stones that cast long shadows over the burial ground.

One of the graves was disturbed and fresh soil was scattered over the flowers and the messages of memory that lay damply in the grass.

A bitter wind groped across North Shields from the river.

An old man was limping his tired way home from the Sportsman in Preston Village. The streetlights flickered above his head and the brightest stars were dimmed by the thick clouds. When he passed the graveyard, the old metal gates creaked in the grumbling wind.

A whisper: the snatch of a song. A giggle that dissipated into the air like the smell of wet leaves. Through the gloom, he thought he saw a little girl. He thought he saw a little girl amongst the gravestones. He'd had six pints: she looked like she was above the gravestones. He rubbed his sore eyes. Six pints or not, it was too late for a little girl to be roaming around the cemetery.

He pushed open the gates: he thought they were usually locked at this time of night. Tendrils of mist wriggled and squirmed: some seemed to reach for his throat. He spoke but it came out as a croak (he blamed that on the cigars): 'Here, you should be at home, you.'

There was no sign of the little girl. The man shuffled forward until he was at the very edge of the fresher graves. A bat swooped low behind him and he spun, startled. He laughed at his nerves and muttered to himself: 'bloody old fool.'

The old man bent to read the message on one of the notes that were protected by plastic wallets. They looked like they'd come from the school down the road. A sodden tie, grey and crusty, had been trodden into the earth.

*In memory of Abbie:*

*Another star in heaven.*

*God only takes the best.*

*Sleep tight little one.*

*Your with the angles now*

They clearly didn't focus on spelling at school anymore, the old man thought with a grin, but that was the last thing he ever thought and the last time he ever grinned.

Like electricity, from above his head, a merciless shriek and the sharp glint of steel. Air and oxygen briefly disappeared to leave nothing – just the absence. The void was filled by the ragged thrust of a needle nosed creature, clad in a navy jumper and black pants. Maybe the last thing the man ever saw was the embroidered logo of 'John Spence High School' almost masked by mud and new blood.

And then there was just the body of the old man, twisted and bent, draped over the grave.