



SINS OF
THE PAST
ASHLEY
MANNING

ONE

I know it's bad, but all I can do is stare out at the rain. Last visit of the day and I'm going to be out in that. I've listened to Mr. Farrington's speech countless times. He never remembers me. Every time the same speech. Farrington Manor. His family's home for generations. How his fathers money troubles had lead to them not being able to renovate after it started to crumble. How they moved into the city where the name didn't mean much to anyone. The world had changed.

After the first couple times, I just ignored it. I would sit there and be someone he could talk too. I'd

heard it before. It was just the ramblings of an eighty-something year old man. If he moved into the city penniless with nothing to his name, then how can he afford the money for private home care. He says that his families past plagues him and he can't move on, that he's never held a real job. It's all stupid. Some made up fantasy to tell people. Maybe some of it's real, but not enough to listen to it over and over again. Especially when he gets to the racist stuff.

I suppose it's important that I'm not completely English. My dad is, but my mum's family is from India. My name's Chloe, by the way. If anyone was asking. Early twenties. After I left school I focused on getting trained as a home carer. Not the most glorious

career, but after seeing my grandparents become so vulnerable in their last days I wanted to help anyone I could. It's a calling, and most of the times I love it, but Mr Farrington has just caught me on a bad day. A long day. And it's raining outside. He only wants someone to listen to him. Listen to his story, that's all. The story of his crumbling manor. The walls falling in on themselves, as if the house was eating itself. He remembers lightning, spreading itself out in the sky outside his bedroom window. A child at the time. His dad coming into the room and picking him up, running out and not looking back. Being thrown into a car and driven away. Turning back and watching the house crumble in the flashes of lightning.

It's a good story, but come on. I'm not alone in thinking it's kind of dumb. No offence to Mr Farrington, but it just makes no sense. It's so dramatic. A child being ripped from his home as it crumbles around him. His dad's gambling problems makes sense, but the house falling like that.

I snap back into the room just as he's getting to the part where his dad mixes a load of pills with drink and kills himself. That much is true. I looked into the family and found newspaper articles about that. Nothing about the Manor. The next bit is what starts to irritate me. The way the world has changed and he no longer recognises the streets he was raised on. The second his dad died the streets were filled with

immigrants and all he could do was try and cope. Says England isn't his country any more. The first time I heard it I nearly stormed out, and refused to come back. Have some pure English carer. But then I spoke to my boyfriend. He said it wasn't anything to worry about. Just repeating nonsense he's heard, and that as long as he doesn't get threatening to me then I should just ignore it.

Today I'm not listening though. Somehow time has gone faster and I can now leave. Wow, that makes me sound like a bitch. I'm not normally like this, but as I've said. Just one of those days.

“I'm sorry, but I've got to go now.” I said, calmly.

“Fine. Go, you people are just too rude to finish a

conversation. I hope there are better ones than you, or this is a waste of money.”

This is new. I want to ask him to clarify what people I am or point out that he claims to have no money, and hasn't held a job. How can he pay for this if his story is true. But I fight the urge and go to leave. I tell him when I'll be back again, and remind him to call the 24 hour phone line if he needs anything. We're being paid to help him, and will do anything, the same old stuff.

For a second I feel like I can't leave, but I've helped him into bed, given him his medication and it's time for me to leave. It's not like he knows I don't have another visit after him.

I take a deep breath before running out into the rain. Didn't bring an umbrella, of course. Bus stop is a bit of a distance from here. At least I have a coat. God, I'm so glad today's over. It's not even been that hard, I'm just tired. Just moved into a new house. First with my boyfriend, Anthony. We've been dating six years and finally saved up enough. He went to university, hence the delay. It's just been a long week.

TWO

I'm walking down a shop isle looking for some bread, in our new local shop, when I get a call. Someone from the Care Office.

I answer the phone with “Hello.”

“Hello Chloe?”

“Yes, Everything alright?”

“I'm calling to inform you that Edmund Farrington passed away last night in his sleep. We just wanted you to know and ask if you were able to make your visit yesterday evening. Hate to ask, but you know, rules are rules.”

“Oh, God. He's dead. He seemed fine last night. I

can't believe it. Yes I made the appointment. He seemed fine.” A cold shiver travels over my body. “Nothing out of the ordinary. I can't believe it. What happened? That's just so weird. He seemed so normal.”

“I know it can be difficult. We just wanted to inform you.”

“Do you need me to come down to the office?”

“That won't be necessary, I'm sure. I'll call you if we need your help, but you know he was in his eighties. A long life.”

“Yeah. Still though, quite a shock.”

“I'm sorry, but I've got to go now.”

“Oh, okay. Don't worry. Speak soon. Bye.”

I turn to Ant.

“He's dead. Mr Farrington.”

“That racist old guy? What a shame.”

He was choosing between two loaves of bread.

Looking at the dates on them.

“Don't be like that.”

“Sorry. Didn't mean to be rude. You alright?”

“Yeah, just a shock.”

The last thing he said to me was weird. Never said anything like that before. Should I tell Ant? Should I have told the woman on the phone? He was still alive and well. This wasn't my fault. I was rude to him though. I'm not sure what to think. I barely knew him. He told me the same story and I knew nothing else. I

looked him up at one point, his family. But that's it. Why do I care so much? I'm aching all over as if I was close to him, when the last time I saw him I didn't pay attention to most of the things he said. Does that matter.

“What do you think?” Ant asks.

“What?”

“The biscuits. Cheap, or branded.”

“Doesn't matter.”

“You alright?”

“Yeah.”

“You sure. You don't look it. Upset about the old man?”

“I don't know.”

“Come here. Don't worry about it. He was pretty old, lead a good life.”

“Did he?”

“What do you mean.”

“His story.”

“You mean the one he made up. Just because his dad killed himself seventy-odd years ago doesn't mean it was all bad.”

“It must have came from somewhere.”

“What are you on about, come on. Just forget about it. Focus on other things.”

I can't just forget about it. I was the last person on Earth to see him alive. I left that house in a hurry for no reason other than to get home out of the rain. Away

from him and his story. I stand next to Anthony as he pays for the shopping. I just can't focus. I don't remember a lot of the shop, just walking around focusing on other things. Something catches my eye. A man walking passed the window. He stops for a second and looks in. It's him. Mr Farrington. It has to be. As clear as day. Ant pushes me slightly to make me move. I blink and he's gone. As we reach the outside I look in every direction, but can't find him. Maybe I should tell Ant that I saw him. But then again that would be insane.

I've read about it before. Seeing people who are recently deceased. It's not uncommon. A way of dealing with it. Projecting thoughts onto the world

around us. Perhaps to trick us into believing there is something after this. But now we know better. I just need to stop thinking about it. I knew this was part of the job. People die. I'm going to have to get used to that. We all are.

I spend the rest of the day with Ant, watching tv, unpacking boxes, a bit of lunch. It's when dinner is ready, and Ant is walking in with his cooked steak, and a beaming smile across his face, that I give in.

“There's something that's been bothering me.”

“Huh?”

“I know you don't want to hear it. All I do is go on about work, but it's the last thing he said to me.”

“Mr Farrington? I told you to stop focusing on it.”

“I know, but there's something that I just can't shake. When I left yesterday, he got a bit angry with me, had a go at me. Called me rude, essentially. Not like him. Normally he said the same things. He didn't even know me. Could never remember me. And it was always the same. But this time he got angry. I could see it, and still. I left.”

“He was an old man. His mind wasn't what it used to be. He was probably acting weird because he knew, in a way, that the end was that close. He was probably scared. Can you imagine that.”

I know Anthony is trying to make me feel better, but it didn't work. The old man, sitting there in his house alone, knowing the end was coming. Watching

the world as it flickers like a candle before someone licks their fingers and closes them on the desperate flame. Maybe he didn't want to die alone. That's all it was. His last cry for some company.

“Maybe.”

“It's for the best, he couldn't have had much of a life anyway. He couldn't remember a thing, and who would want to live in a world where they couldn't remember you. I know I wouldn't.”

Ant picks up our plates and carries them to the kitchen, smiling back at me as he walks across the threshold.

Normally something like that would at least make me smile, but it just didn't seem right.

That's it. I'm not going to think about it. Just focus on the TV. Think about nothing but the comedy and drama in front of me. Come on, I know I can do it.

THREE

We went to bed late that night. Ant wanted to watch a film, the first film in our own house. I want to be excited about that but I just can't. Can't even remember what the film was called. Dead Down, or something like that. Don't care. It's not important.

I've been dozing off slightly all night. Ant is completely out, but I just can't drift off. Keep on getting that feeling that I'm falling, and then take a step to steady myself only to wake myself up. Hate that at the best of times. Not tonight. Please just let me get some sleep. I just want to wake up tomorrow and feel better, to be able to focus on different things. Not

start to wonder how they found the body. Who found the body. Did he fall down the stairs. They didn't say anything like that on the phone, but why would they? Did he die in his sleep? Somehow knowing would make it better. At least I think so.

My leg starts itching, as if there is a bug crawling over it. I shiver and go to scratch it. There's something warm on my leg. I can feel it. A hand clutching me. Want to scream, but can't. Want to roll free, but can't. Do anything. Beg that Ant wakes up. Maybe I'm dreaming. Something is stopping me from moving. Is this sleep paralysis? Something is scratching at the bed. The wooden frame.

After trying to move, for what seems like hours, I

finally roll slightly to see him. Mr. Farrington is sprawled out on the floor, in the same clothes as the last time I saw him, one hand reaching up at me while the other grips my leg. His eyes, a deep black. There's an odd light coming from him. His face, scared. His mouth wording something I can't understand. Skin clutching his bones. Thinner than normal. Bugs start pouring out of his ears, nose, mouth, eyes. Swarming the room. Flying and crawling everywhere. They're on top of me, biting and scratching me.

And then it's over. I blink and everything's gone. I can move. Ant's still asleep. The old man isn't there. None of the bugs remain. What do I do now? It must have been a dream. But it felt so real. I want to wake

Ant up, but that would be stupid. He wouldn't believe me, but at least I wouldn't be alone. At least until he told me it was a dream and roll over back to sleep. I start crying, unable to stop.

I can't stay in the bed. The clock says 3:16am, but I have to get up. Maybe just get something to drink. Yes, a drink. That'll help. I swing my legs over the bed and let out a little scream. What if he's under there, waiting for me.

No, can't be like this. It was a dream. Just a vivid dream. Come on, I can do this. Get up and get a glass of water. Nothing strange about that. Come on. The first toe hits the carpet and relief spreads over my body. He's had his chance and he hasn't attacked me

yet. Just being stupid now. He's not there. It was just a dream. He's been on my thoughts all day and it's just my strange reaction.

I put my hand down onto the wooden frame to push myself up, but there's something there. A little bump. Not wanting to wake up Ant, I reach over and grab my phone. Unlock it, so it lights up my face. Wincing I face the phone towards the frame. Scratch marks. Pretty deep ones. It's a new bed and I'm positive they weren't there. My heart races. Breathing stops. Pick my feet back up. Don't have a choice now. Have to wake up Ant.

“What is it?” He says after me shaking him.

“He's here.”

“What?”

“I thought it was a dream, but Farrington is here.
In the room.”

“What? Don't be stupid. Go to sleep.”

“Listen to me. Look. He did that. I'm not imaging
it. Those are there.”

Ant gets up and leans over the side of the bed. I
press my phone so it lights up again. He winces, but
he can see them too. They were are. Clear as anything.

“What is that?”

“Scratches. I felt him on my leg, could hear him
scratching and there it is.”

“There's someone in the house?”

“It's him. He's here.”

Ant gets up, fully awake. He checks under the bed, and then tells me to wait. I wait, counting the minutes. Silence is my company. Not even the ticking of a clock. No sound from the wind outside. Just my slight breathing and the surrounding silence. I don't feel as scared now that the lights on and Ants awake. He thinks I'm mixing things up, that there is someone else in the house, but I don't care. I feel so relieved. Did I actually just see a ghost? Me of all people. I'm not the most spiritual of people, but I wouldn't rule it out. Just seems weird that I would see one. Ant comes back into the room.

“There's no one here. Did you definitely see someone.”

“I saw him. Mr. Farrington. I saw him. He was in pain. But it was definitely him.”

“What caused those scratches then?”

“He did.”

Ant doesn't answer, he just breathes heavily as he looks closer at them. I know he doesn't believe me, but that doesn't matter. I know what I saw.

FOUR

I wake up in the morning, feeling very refreshed and for some reason happy. I can't explain it. I should be terrified. It was a creepy sight, but I feel good.

“You seem chirpy this morning,” Ant says as I walk into the kitchen.

“I just feel good. It's Sunday. Another day to ourselves, we're living together, everything is good.”

“Yeah I suppose it is. Did you want any breakfast?”

“Not at the moment, I want to have a wash first.”

I go back upstairs and into the bathroom. After washing I start brushing my teeth. Ant always calls me

weird for brushing my teeth before eating, he hates that minty taste, but it's never bothered me. Just a habit I can't break out of. It is a little weird I suppose.

I put the toothbrush back and head towards the door. For a second I feel dizzy. Reach out to the wall for support but don't get it head goes fuzzy and spins around and around and around the world goes black for a second, and then things start to come back into focus, and normality returns. Don't know what that was.

The handle on the door won't move.

“Ant, stop it!” I shout.

No reply.

“Come on.”

The door isn't locked, so this shouldn't be happening. No reason for it. I start panicking, knocking on the door and shouting for Ant. I try running at the door, jumping into it, but it doesn't budge not even slightly. I feel dizzy again, but this time only for a second. I try the door again, and this time it opens.

I immediately close it. Or at least try to. Freezing cold winds throw themselves through the door like a puppy at newcomers, attacking and swirling through the room. I can't shut the door, so I let it swing free. Crashing into the wall before settling in line with the wind. I step outside and don't know what to think.

A cave, but only a small one. I can see outside.

Mountains. What is happening? Am I still dreaming? Am I just insane. Step out of the bathroom, out of the cave and onto a path going up the mountain. I look right and follow it with my eyes. I'm freezing. I just don't understand. This has to be a dream. I've got to do something. Just walk. This is a dream. I slipped over in the bathroom when I felt dizzy and I'm in a coma. That's the only logical thing. I have to just follow this path and then I'll be free. I wrap my arms around my body and start walking. I'll find my way through this. I have too.

As the path starts to turn, leading me into the mountains, I see something. A figure in the distance, but I can't see it clear enough. With rock on both

sides, towering above me, I almost want to turn back. I've made my choice now, I have too. Blistering wind howls passed me and leaves me helpless. Why is this happening to me. If this is a dream, it's too real. I can't stand it. I want to drop to my knees and give up. What's happening.

I carry on walking for what seems like an eternity and finally I see the figure again. This time it doesn't disappear. I walk towards it. A woman, with long black hair. A white dress, but not pure white. A dirty white. Old and ragged. She's just standing there, facing me, rocking back and forth slightly on the spot. I get closer.

“Hey!” I shout. “Can you hear me?”

No answer.

“What's happening!”

As if somehow she would know.

“Please.”

I don't say anything else. She isn't going to answer. Probably can't hear me. I'll have to get closer. She must be able to see me, and she doesn't look intimidating. Maybe she is my spirit guide.

Apart from the swaying she doesn't move, her rags cling to her, even in the wind. There's something just not right about her. Call it a gut feeling. I just know it.

Her eyes. Or more precisely, where her eyes should be. There's nothing. A void. Darkness. Two

holes in her face. It's not grotesque like in a film where you can see her skull and scarred skin. It's just nothing. She's smiling, with cracked lips. And I know she's looking at me.

“What's going on?” I ask, not really expecting an answer.

She stops swaying and crunches her hands into fists. Is she going to hit me? No, she just disappears. There's a slight glow where she was standing, like an orb. It's fading away. I try to grab it, prove that it's there, but I miss. Her smile is there in my head, imprinted.

In my mind her lips move – Follow me.

I carry on walking until another small cave

becomes visible. There's another door inside,
completely out of place. My fate lies behind it.

FIVE

The door leads to a small graveyard. About five old and decaying headstones, within a circle of trees. It's night, with a full moon high in the sky lighting up the small clearing. The door is embedded into one of the trees, and slammed shut behind me two steps after entering the graveyard. None of the names are readable as I weave between them. There is something really calming about the clearing. Probably the lack of wind after the mountains just moments before. Wait. One of them is, Farrington. As if that's supposed to be a surprise. I get a little closer to the writing. Underneath the word Farrington is the word "Follow"

scratched into the stone. There's a crack of lightning, my heart starts racing and everything goes black. Another crack and then I can see it. In the distance; Farrington Manor. Another flash and it's gone, the moon is back and I can see clearly again. In one of the trees behind the grave stones a door has appeared. It swings open and inside I can see my bathroom. I walk through, knowing what I have to do next.

To be Continued...