

# KEEPSAKE by Jeff Jewson-Fleming

**Winner of New Eastbourne Writers  
Mystery Short Story Competition April 2011**

‘Amy was sleepwalking last night.’

I hadn’t really listened until Angie said those words. I dropped my chisel and stepped away from the loosened stonework, and sipped from her coffee mug. When I handed it back a film of dust floated on top and I wondered how long she’d been speaking.

‘Sleepwalking? Is it connected to her imaginary friend?’

‘Likely.’

Amy’s ‘friend’ was not another sweet little girl but something scaly with a beak for a mouth, horns and wings. Apparently it swooped round the cottage at night chirruping to her.

‘Is sleepwalking serious?’ I asked and Angie nodded.

‘She woke last night and says she followed it downstairs. She was asleep in the dog basket this morning. Maybe all the renovation is unsettling her.

‘I can understand that, the cost alone...’

Be serious Ben. Sooner we get the kitchen rebuilt the better.

I nodded and turned away and threw the hammer at the crumbling wall. There was an almighty crash. I grabbed Angie and bundled her outside and we stared as plaster dust billowed through the open doorway.

‘Sandwiches on the terrace, dear?’ I nodded glumly.

After lunch I called Riley, a builder friend. He arrived quickly with his sons. We examined the damage together. In no time two Acrows supported the ceiling while his boys cleared away rubble. We pitched in too. When Amy arrived from school the kitchen was clean. She joined us admiring the new hole while Riley gave his judgment,

‘That wall was buckled and bowed outwards. Could have fallen anytime.’

Amy clinging to Rileys leg, stared solemnly forwards. I thought she might cry but Riley picked her up, careful not to bang her head and held her into the space to get a good look.

‘It’s a doll!’ she said.

‘What is love?’ I asked.

‘There’s a dolly inside.’

‘There is something there.’ said Riley handing Amy to my wife. ‘I’ll fetch it’.

Riley leaned into the foundations and pulled. He grunted then straightened and placed a doll shaped dirty bundle on the kitchen table. Before I could unwrap it Angie stopped me and asked Riley's boys to take Amy to play football. Amy didn't like that but soon squeals of laughter drifted through the door.

'Go on Ben.'

I set about the wrappings. Soon the kitchen table was covered in miniature grave cloths and dust and a figure lay before us. It wasn't anything real but a wax doll shaped like a demon. Its mouth was a dead birds beak and crow feathers protruded from its shoulders representing wings. I stared knowing what Angie would say, 'Amy's creature. The one she described.'

'Well, she must have...'

'How could she? It was buried in that wall.'

Riley looked bemused so I described Amy's new 'friend'. Riley nodded,

'Your ancestor Colin Beamish, that you got this place off. They called him Beastly Beamish. Bad man, bad family going way back.'

'Yes.' I said curtly. And I thought about the old man, how I was the only person he'd ever liked, how I'd used that to get money out of him and then cut him dead when I got my degree and a career. I'd hated being nice to him.

'No-one was more surprised than me when he left me the cottage.'

'Locals called him a witch and worse, poisoning water, laming cattle, breaking people financially to get their land. The vicar said whatever enemies he'd made in this land he'd make more in the next.'

The kitchen desolation was nothing like what was settling round my heart. What had we unearthed?

'Been in that wall a long time. Country ways I suppose. Don't believe in such things myself...but...'

'...if anything looked evil, this does.' I finished for him.

'These things can resonate with children, Ben, especially girls...'

Suddenly Angie was all bustle and energy. I'd almost forgotten she was there.

'Can you rebuild the wall tomorrow Riley? Ben get the barbecue. We've more than enough for all of us. You and your boys hungry Riley?'

Riley nodded then said, 'Afterwards I'll take Amy to her grans for you. She loves the Landrover.'

Three hours later, everyone was happy and full, especially the Riley boys who had

emptied our freezer between them. As the last of the bonfire turned to ashes I found a spade and put the little wax and feather bundle on it. Everyone watched while I held the spade over the flames.

‘Wait.’ said Angie.

‘Why?’

‘I’ve been thinking. We don’t know why it’s here. Maybe its not evil. Maybe it’s a...a church gargoyle to keep evil away.’

I glanced at Amy sleeping in Riley’s arms. There was no chance she could hear.

‘You know this place’s bad history. I stake my life there’s nothing about the church in that thing.’

‘We don’t know...’

‘It was walled up Angie. You don’t do that to nice things.’

‘What if it wasn’t to keep it in, but to keep something worse out?’

‘Its not the bogey man Angie. Such things aren’t real.’

No, I suppose not.’

I looked at the spade, where the effigy was beginning to melt.

‘You want this back indoors?’

‘Burn it.’

The wax clung momentarily to the spade then fell into the embers. It burned well.

That was that. Riley took Angie and Amy over to grans. They would return next morning after I’d scoured that hole for more secrets. I went to bed with the last of my scotch. I read awhile but the bed felt very empty. I turned out the light and slept.

That was yesterday. This is now. Something just woke me and I can hear odd noises downstairs., dry rustling noises. Not tiny like Amy’s pretend creature but something furtive and heavy. The kitchen door hinges just went. I think it’s found the staircase...