

# FARRADAY

## BRIEF

There's a street in Edinburgh called the Street of Sorrows. It used to be called Mary King's Close but in 1561 it was boarded up and buried. Now, it's a tourist attraction deep beneath the seething streets of this bustling capital.

Organised ghost tours shepherd sightseers in and out of its timber doorframes; each tourist hopes to catch a glimpse of something paranormal. But few do. It will take an extra special visitor to drag the street's only ghost from her hiding place.

Muireall hates being dead. She hates moping around in the dark, trying not to eavesdrop on people's private conversations. But more than that, she hates cats. When she was alive, during the reign of Mary Tudor, cats were treated with deep suspicion. They were creatures of the night, friends to witches and warlocks, useful for catching rats, but dangerous in the wrong hands. And that's why, when one makes a bed in her simple shrine, in what used to be a backroom of the Severed Arms Pub, she has to evict it!

Her spirit takes on its earthly form. With her mind focused on the cat, she pictures the close, as she knew it centuries ago, full of the sights and sounds of medieval Edinburgh. And in a flash, the cat is gone. It hardly has time to catch its breath before it lands at the feet of a young page, newly arrived in the city from London. His name is Kindred Ward, he's cold and hungry and now he has a cat to care for!

Kindred celebrated his fourteenth birthday yesterday, on a boat anchored in the Firth of Forth - he is desperate to prove himself. The cat, Farraday, celebrated his sixth birthday a week ago with a bowl of Whiskas Select and a fresh litter tray - he is desperate to get back home. But their fates are tied together by a magic born of tremendous suffering and neither will have their way.

Destined for some higher purpose, they stumble down the Royal Mile, the main artery of ancient Edinburgh, skirting danger at the mouth of every junction, so that by the end of the first chapter, they've met half the thieves and murderers in town. They can see why the city is known locally as Auld Reekie, as the sights and smells that have already assaulted their senses have left them shaken and disturbed. Soon, they've paid the ultimate price for their childish naivety, allowing themselves to be strung up in their own flat by a city-paid official. Looking, to all the world, like a sad and sorry match for the town's cutthroat traditions, they await their terrible fate.

But the next chapter sees their fortunes suddenly improve. The two make an incredible escape and from then on, pledge to overcome whatever the world throws at

them, together. Each subsequent chapter ends with them apparently coming to a sticky end, but begins with them making yet another miraculous getaway. Eight chapters, eight chances and eight lives later, they are living on their wits. They have run out of options and must figure out what mystical power is shaping their future, before it is too late.

Just in time, they stumble across a young girl fighting to enter a blockaded street. Her parents are trapped inside, left to die on the wrong side of a split-wood door marked with a red cross. Supposedly, their neighbours have the plague and for this reason and this reason alone, they have both been sentenced to death. The whole of Mary King's Close will remain under lock and key until the Provost agrees to lift the Quarantine Order in place over it. It is 19th March, 1561, a date that will eventually be engraved on Muireall's own tombstone. The stakes can't get any higher...

Kindred and Farraday waste no time rescuing the unfortunate occupants of the close who have, in fact, been drugged. But the evil lord provost, Lucius Braxfield, who is behind all this mischief, manages to elude them. Chased to the edge of the city by the respected Town Guard's Regiment, he escapes towards Stirling. In a valley somewhere north of Linlithgow, he finally meets his bloody end at the hands of a long-forgotten adversary.

At last, Farraday is released from the spell that's held him captive in ancient Edinburgh for almost a year. He hears again the whispering of voices on a clichéd ghost tour, shuffling around Mary King's Close. But to everyone's surprise, he chooses to stay with his new friends, in the middle of the Middle Ages, rather than return to the hustle and bustle of the twenty-first century. Kindred's future in Auld Reekie also seems settled, as he's finally accepted into the city's Great Guild of Master Blacksmiths. He, like Farraday, has found a prosperous and exciting new life for himself in the magical capital of old Scotland, and he's not about to give that up, not for anything...

## **SYNOPSIS**

Transported back in time by MUIREALL CHORMAIG's furious phantasm, FARRADAY enters a realm where life is cheap and those with feline features are treated with suspicion. From a sixteenth century gutter, he stares up at the bony ankles of a boy no more than a year older than him and meows for his attention. KINDRED WARD, who has just arrived from London on the morning tide, reaches down and strokes his ginger back. Together, they drift through the cutthroat streets of Edinburgh, heading for the Severed Arms pub, from where they'll strike out on an adventure that will all but cost them their lives.

Whilst looking for a pair of hoodlums in Leith's infamous Wine Quay, they uncover the illegal activities of a well-organised smuggling ring. Immediately, they set about exposing

the guilty parties but the chain of command goes right to the top. The head of the city's Trade Guilds, Edinburgh's all-powerful Lord Provost, is behind the illicit importation of French Claret. LUCIUS BRAXFIELD, the most corrupt provost Edinburgh has ever had, is siphoning money from a hundred different sources to fund the building of his new home on the edge of town.

Lucius is determined to silence anyone who gets in his way and sends an assassin to kill Kindred, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to see where Kindred's life ends and Farraday's begins. By sending the vile assassin crashing through the rotten staircase of their bijou residence, Farraday seems to have traded one of his nine lives for that of his master. The Provost's plans are thwarted and Kindred is left bruised but alive.

Next, Lucius Braxfield instructs a slaughterhouse manager to set his two pet boars on Kindred. In a heavily overlooked yard behind his busy premises, he sells tickets to Kindred's last battle with the savage animals. But once again, it is Farraday who exchanges a cat's life for his masters, allowing Kindred to flee the scene unharmed.

Before long, Kindred has found himself a sponsor and started working as a Blacksmith's apprentice, but the work dries up as the evil Provost squeezes every tradesman in town. Thankfully, Kindred finds alternative employment with the captain of the Town Guard, WILLIAM BLOODRAIL, carrying water for his brave men from the city's bustling wells, to their overcrowded barracks.

While Kindred toils through the Grassmarket, a yoke and two heavy buckets slung across his shoulders, Farraday chases rats in the castle grounds or snoozes in the shade of a great yew tree. The popular pair make a big impression with the residents of the castle, improving conditions for the various regiments lodging there. And by providing abundant clean water, and reducing the rodent population, they gain acceptance in a tightly knit community.

Kindred's diligent labours are rewarded still further when a young girl notices him at the well. Slowly and from a distance, he falls in love with the beautiful ARABELLA, who works as a maid for one of the city's powerful judges. Eventually, they meet in a local tavern (with Farraday acting as an unwilling chaperone) but their evening is ruined by an ugly bunch of English mercenaries who harass them from the next table. The FIFE ADVENTURERS have been brought to Scotland by the Provost to tame the Highlands and Islands and deliver the fabled riches of the Orkneys to the Capital. First though, Lucius Braxfield will ask them to tidy up a few 'loose ends' in his own backyard...

Kindred and Farraday are unlucky enough to be just two such 'loose ends' and so, are thrown off the Castle Rock by the ruthless Adventurers. Another of Farraday's lives is sacrificed to spare that of Kindred's as they plummet headfirst from the castle ramparts into a giant manure pile off the King's Stable Road.

Thankfully, things settle down for a while after that and the pair are able to concentrate on their jobs as blacksmith's apprentice, waterboy and rat-catcher. Then, as

Farraday's curiosity draws them into the dark wynds and closes of the Fleshmarket, events take a sinister turn. From a cellar window, they watch a crooked man throw a bag of crying kittens over his shoulder. Hurriedly, he carries them to the shores of the Nor' Loch where they are unceremoniously sunk in its stagnant and poisonous waters.

From the steep banks, Farraday and Kindred, watch in horror. The sack disappears beneath the surface, leaving only a thin froth of bubbles to mark the place where the kittens disappeared. Leaping into action, Kindred and Farraday rescue them but contract Typhoid in the process. By the time they've both recovered, Farraday has only four lives left to carry the two of them forwards.

Lucius Braxfield discovers that Kindred and Farraday are still alive when he sees them shopping in the busy Lawnmarket and directs his chief mason, in charge of building his splendid new home in the High Riggs, to capture 'the damndest cat in all Edinburgh'.

'I want that cat entombed in the walls of my kitchen,' he demands, 'by the end of the week. Everyone knows good luck flows from a wall with a dead cat in it!'

The stonemason promises he can deliver the goods (because in the Middle Ages such cat-centric superstitions were commonplace) and true to his word, catnaps Farraday the following afternoon. Lucius takes delivery of the drugged animal on his estate a few hours later, and immediately makes plans to have him cemented into place...

Kindred and Arabella race to the High Riggs to rescue Farraday but find only a pair of white kittens behind the soft mortar of a newly built chimneybreast. They are just about to give up and go home when they notice a bonfire burning in a nearby thicket. An evil band of witches, in league with Lucius, have decided to feed Farraday to the flames instead of interring him in the walls of his brand new, fully-fitted kitchen. Another popular medieval custom suggested sprinkling the ashes of a cremated cat into the foundations of a new house was every bit as lucky as bricking it into the wall!

Kindred and Arabella burst through the smoke and trees just in the nick of time. They rescue Farraday but are pursued by Lucius' guards who seem to have been conjured, miraculously, from the wood-smoke. Behind Kindred's securely bolted garret door, he and his cat finally relax but over the next few days, their health deteriorates. Farraday's tail, singed by the witch's bonfire, becomes infected and he soon surrenders yet another life. Kindred suffers too as his cat's fifth bite of the cherry ebbs away. The link between them is growing stronger as their fates become ever more tightly enmeshed.

In the meantime, William Bloodrail has decided that as captain of the Town Guard, he cannot allow the Provost's smuggling activities to continue. To this end, he has formed a new regiment, known as the Town Searchers, to root out any corrupt officials and impound their goods. The Searchers set off towards Leith's bustling Wine Quay with Kindred and Farraday in tow, to seize Claret barrels unloaded without a proper Bill of Lading. But instead, they come face to face with the Provost and his private army.

The Provost's men dispatch the Searchers and throw Kindred and Farraday into the Tolbooth's stinking jail. The trumped-up charges they're held on reek of government sleaze and council corruption but there's nothing anyone can do for them. After two weeks of incarceration, they are literally starving to death when they hear of the Provosts' latest foul deeds. In the dead of night, he has despatched his bloodthirsty militia to murder William Bloodrail in his own bed.

Kindred and Farraday are still reeling from this news, when the city's chief protestant minister, JOHN KNOX, enters their cell, ostensibly to read them their last rights. In a rotten corner of the dilapidated Tolbooth he explains to them the error of their ways, before taking off his hooded cassock, to reveal that he is in fact, none other than Kindred's best friend and sponsor, JOHN HERMAND.

The three of them flee the city, staying with friends in Linlithgow while they plan the fall of Lucius Braxfield. Kindred is horrified when a revolting shiver in the pit of his stomach announces the loss of yet another of Farraday's nine lives, this time caused by their lengthy stay in jail and the meagre rations the two of them shared. He hates to think that in some way his continued survival is linked to the dwindling number of lives his loyal cat has left, but is buoyed by the plans he and John have made to bring down the corrupt Provost.

A week later, they return to the city at night, searching for evidence of Lucius' underhand dealings and almost by accident, stumble upon precisely that; a quiet, residential street besieged by his private army. The Town Guards have been paid to help out too, sealing off Mary Kings Close, consigning all its occupants to a slow and terrible death. The Provost claims his actions are for the greater good of the city as the poor people of the district are infected with the Plague. In fact, he wants to build on the valuable land beneath their jumbled, tenement houses. The architectural plans for the new Council Chambers lie open on his writing desk, as the last nails are hammered into the doorframes of the condemned houses in his way.

Kindred, Farraday and their friends manage to steal the plans and accuse the Provost of murder, but can't save the inhabitants of Mary Kings Close, at least not for the time being. Instead, they march up to the great square in the shadow of St. Giles Kirk and convince the assembled crowds of the Provost's wickedness. Musketeers are summoned to apprehend him but Lucius Braxfield escapes to the Girth Cross where he claims sanctuary. At the same time, the crowd sweeps down into Mary Kings Close and helps free all the wrongly imprisoned people from their boarded-up dwellings.

Chasing Lucius into the Lower Canongate, Kindred, Farraday and their friends eventually catch him and clap him in irons. But the wily provost bribes his jailers and drives away from the city in his black carriage as the curfew bell tolls the hour. Soon though, the arresting cry of 'Stand and deliver!' brings his coach to a shuddering halt on the Stirling Road. At gunpoint, he bargains for his life but will never again see the light

of day. For the highwayman who has accosted him is none other than Gillis Bloodrail, William Bloodrail's long lost brother.

Gillis has heard how the evil Provost ordered the execution of his kinsman but still cannot bring himself to kill him in cold blood. He shoots him in the leg instead; leaving him to the mercy of the wolves he can hear howling in the nearby mountains. Turning his back on the crippled Provost, he drives his money-laden coach back to Edinburgh.

In the rain-drenched streets of the Scottish capital, the mysterious magical energy that transported Farraday through time crackles back to life. Sparks fly as a young girl named Muireall gives him a grateful hug for saving her life. His actions have spared her soul more torment than she could possibly imagine and for that, she is eternally grateful. Is it possible that this was the very reason Kindred and Farraday were thrown together in the first place, to save her the horror of haunting Mary Kings Close for five hundred years?

It certainly seems that with Muireall's fate assured, Farraday is destined to return to the 21st century once more. Unfortunately, he has fallen in love with Arabella's tabby cat, BONNIE and doesn't want to go. At the very last minute, he jumps from Muireall's arms and breaks the spell that's enveloped him, losing his penultimate life in the process. Both Farraday and Kindred seem to suffer the effects of this defiant act and fall into a heavy fever, which lasts for several days.

Thankfully, they recover at last and with the Provost out of the way, Farraday's ninth life looks set to last a long time. Kindred senses the link between him and Farraday is now broken and that his life is truly his own again. He recognises too what a miracle it is he has survived his first year in Edinburgh. He is accepted into the city's Guild of Blacksmiths and looks forward to a prosperous future.

# FARRADAY

## Prologue

The driver of the little green van hit the brakes a fraction too late. His bonnet dipped, his tyres squealed and his passenger lurched forward in her seatbelt but there was no way he could have missed it...

On the busy pavements either side of the road, bystanders froze, for an instant and closed their eyes. There was a thud, like the sound of a tennis racket smacking a wet ball. The van kangarooed to a standstill and its engine stalled. Then there was silence.

Everyone within earshot peered morbidly into the shadows beyond the smoking nearside wheel.

‘Someone’ll have to tidy up the mess,’ thought the men.

‘Someone’ll miss him,’ thought the women.

But they were all wrong because the young, ginger tom who’d leapt into the busy flow of traffic on Princes Street a moment earlier, hadn’t a scratch on him. Calmly, he licked his paws and stepped into the morning sun, accepting the warm admiration of the crowd. With the stateliness and grace of a swan, he strutted from the scene.

‘Careful next time please,’ his chilled eyes said as they caught those of the shaken driver, ‘you nearly cost me a life that time...’

## **Chapter 1 – The Severed Arms**

The procession of torch-bearing soldiers thumping down the Royal Mile reminded Kindred Ward of a herd of stampeding elephants clad in rusty body armour. No man was wearing more than a heavy kilt, with a plaid over his shoulder, but each had arms and legs like tree trunks. They marched through the drizzle towards Edinburgh Castle as if they'd happily have carried on for another hundred miles without a break. Some had pikes, others had swords, but none had any regard for anyone or anything that got in their way.

Kindred edged out of sight. His legs were tired, his belly was empty and his fingers were blue with cold. He'd been travelling hard for days. He desperately wanted a place to rest but knew he'd be lucky to find one. A room was being prepared for him, he'd paid a months rent for it upfront. But his landlady had said it wouldn't be ready until after lunch. 'One-bed, one-bog, one day's notice,' she'd said simply.

Did he regret leaving London in such a hurry? No, he hadn't had much choice. Did he regret choosing to make the bulk of his journey by boat then? No, not really, the North Sea had been calm and the merchants he'd travelled with from Pickleherring Quay had been decent enough folk. Still, if he'd known a week ago his quest for a new life 'up North' was going to be this tough, he'd have made a will before he left!

'You there!' shouted a barrel-shaped man from his ground floor window. 'On your way.' Kindred ducked instinctively but it was too late, he knew his clumsy movements had only served to give away his exact location. 'Go on!' the man continued, heckling him from his vantage point several yards away, off to his right somewhere, 'Get yourself gone!' Kindred caught a glimpse of him through the spokes of a giant cartwheel. 'The jowls of his chin flapped about,' he thought, 'like the gaping sails of a big ship, whenever he spoke.'

'Sorry,' Kindred called out, standing up suddenly. He didn't know what he was going to say next, to make this man leave him alone, but he had to try something. 'This yours?' he asked innocently, pointing to a pile of rotten wood and rusty iron pretending to be a haywagon right in front of him. 'I'll keep an eye on it for you, if you like?' he offered. 'I assume it's yours? A fine twin-axle model eh? Would I be right in saying it was last serviced about a year ago?'

'More like ten years,' he thought quietly to himself, but telling the truth was unlikely to win him any friends in the present circumstances. The man leaned further out of his window, letting his fat belly spill onto the cracked sill. 'Clear off!' he warned Kindred clearly. 'Or I'll have you flogged.'

Kindred pulled himself completely out of sight now, drawing his long coat tightly around him. Not an inch of him showed around the edges, but the man didn't care how



invisible that made him, he was determined to be rid of him. He left his window and came immediately to his front door. He was holding an ash pan in both hands, full of glowing hot coals.

'Now get lost,' he barked. He stepped irritably over his threshold and marched straight across the street. Kindred was crouched (quite pathetically) in the gutter, half in and half out of the thin brazier light falling, like the rain, from above. 'Get lost or I'll set them sorry rags you're standing in alight!' the man demanded one final time.

Kindred recognised, regretfully, that at last the game was up. Sniffing and shivering like a wet dog he tipped himself forward, falling unsteadily off his heels and began to walk away. The only place he had left to go was the crowded street he'd found so frightening five minutes ago. He'd decided to seek refuge from it, for fear he'd be trampled to death by the hordes of people thronging through it. Now he had no choice.

The pavements were overflowing with people as before, like reeds pushed to the side of a churning river. It was a mad crush of nameless bodies, with the army calving a swathe right through the heart of it. Hats, wigs, capes and shawls disguised every face, so that Kindred felt distrust brewing in the pit of his stomach.

A shallow gutter caught him off guard as he struggled to keep his head up. His foot sank into it and his ankle twisted round. Unable to stop himself falling, he cried out but no one was about to offer him a helping hand. He rolled awkwardly into the path of a passing shirehorse.

Its hooves pummelled the mud either side of his narrow shoulders. 'Was this the end for him?' he wondered. 'It was certainly a miserable way to go...' Luckily at the very last second, he caught a break. The rider dug his spurs into the horse's soft flank and instead of driving him face-first into the mud, it swerved and whinnied. Kindred slithered instinctively away, keeping his arms close by his sides.

He thought he'd made it, thought he'd survived, when a sudden volley of canon fire frightened the stupid animal right back on top of him. It bore down on him this time, a retired army nag with fat, slobbery lips peeled back to reveal a menacing row of yellowed teeth.

'Edinburgh had him at its mercy,' he thought as he lay there, waiting to have the life squeezed out of him by a size-nine horseshoe. He recalled briefly the door to his bedroom in Threadneedle Street, where he was born and where he'd spent by far the best five years of his childhood. How he wished he could just push it open now and flop down on the comfy mattress in the corner. The smell of fusty wigs from the wigmaker's shop below came to him unbidden, and he drank it in, long and lingering. But the image and the smell were soon gone again, leaving only the rushing sound of water in a nearby drain and the sniffing of an impatient horse in his ear.

Kindred had turned fourteen the very day he'd left London. His mum wasn't yet used to the idea he could tie his own shoelaces, when he'd decided he had to make a break for

it. But circumstances beyond his control had forced his hand. He had no choice but to strike out on his own. What would she think if she could see him now, spread-eagled in the mud, with everything but his internal organs soaked and stained?

He cowered lower, praying the shirehorse's great, grey head would pull itself back but it didn't. Instead, it breathed a plume of white vapour into his tired eyes and crunched on its heavy bit. It seemed to be weighing up whether or not it was worth the effort of crushing his feeble pelvis. Its armoured rider barked orders to the rest of his regiment and they caught up with him.

Kindred was soon surrounded by a sea of crashing hooves. He couldn't help flinching and wincing with every heavy footfall. He began to edge away again on his knuckles and knees, only daring to move one limb at a time. But it was hopeless; a cry went up, spurs bit into horseflesh and everywhere front legs punched the air. In an instant, the road turned itself inside out, becoming a dense, dirty spray. And Kindred knew his number was up.

He froze, his heart in his mouth, listening to a legion of horses break into a hard gallop, wondering when exactly the deathblow would come. But incredibly, miraculously, it did not. Somehow, he had remained completely unharmed. The yawning castle-keep at the end of the street gobbled up the riders, and in an instant, all was silent again.

Another minute later, Kindred's shoulders finally relaxed. Once he'd got his breath back too, he headed for the crowded nearside of the street. Other riders were already pouring through the gates in the lower city wall and it was not safe to linger, even for a moment, in the middle of the road.

Kindred reached the edge of the crude medieval sidewalk just in time. These new riders, he could see, were no more likely to steer carefully around him than the fierce, armour-clad ones who'd gone before. Dressed in purple robes, the colour of mountain heather, these men wore their hair long, raking it back off their shadowy foreheads into flowing pony-tails that bounced as they rode, like their horse's manes. Their swords glinted in the light of more braziers protruding from the many lintels and window-frames that lined their path. They were clearly a brutal bunch, more brutal perhaps than even the last lot had been. But they were also a richer, wealthier looking lot. These knights had gold brocade sewn into the seams of their garments, and gold inlay worked into the hilts of their heavy weapons.

Kindred shuffled aside to let them pass with plenty of room to spare. His jaw dropped open as they thundered by, still not more than an inch or two from the end of his nose. 'Was that a king, or a duke at least he had spied in their midst?' He froze, staring wide-eyed through their shifting bodies, trying to catch another glimpse of him. There, in the very middle of the group, was a noble figure with a countenance quite unlike any of the others. He turned briefly to face Kindred, and to Kindred's utter amazement, he saw it

was not a king, nor even a *man* come to that! But rather a beautiful woman, dressed for battle.

Hoof, hair and bristling muscle charged ever onwards, towards the castle. Kindred began to realise he wasn't wanted on the pavement any more than he had been in the alley, or on the street. What could he do and where could he go to hide this time? Steel-grey eyes belonging to perfect strangers began to seek him out, boring their way inside his head, willing him to disappear, or at the very least, drop dead on the spot. His own eyes sought out the broken haywagon again, outside the house of the angry man with the bucket of hot coals. Somehow, he knew he had to make his way over to it – to Hell with his threats. His legs worked automatically and steadily he began to pick and dodge his way towards it. Before long, he was standing beside it once more, wondering whether third degree burns was a fair price to pay for a safe perch.

He noticed, with great relief, that the curtains in the angry man's front windows were drawn, and there wasn't a puff of smoke coming out of his chimney. Hopefully, he'd gone back to bed. There was a blanket and by the looks at least three bushels of straw covering the floor of the wagon. Maybe he too could get a bit of well-earned sleep before dawn? He tested his legs but found they were about as responsive as a pair of soggy, over-stretched springs.

He gathered himself, then rather inelegantly levered his limp torso over the wagon's high side and kind of fell in. He slumped to the bottom, turning onto his back straight away to stare up at the lonely stars. Someone drifted by on the same side of the road but did not look in. He smelt their musty clothes and sweaty body as they whistled past. 'Thank God, they weren't the observant type,' he thought. The wagon rocked gently from side to side on its twisted axle as the morning breeze stiffened slightly. And, all at once, Kindred began to feel drowsy.

He inhaled deeply, swallowing as if he expected he could swallow his troubles and reached out for that moth-eaten blanket to cover him. That was when he realised he wasn't the only one with designs on a few hours quiet kip in the haywagon. A mongrel dog, curled somewhere behind him, had sniffed him out and was moving towards him.

It snapped and spat as it came, like a well-oiled fire devouring the floorboards of the wagon. Its tail whipped to and fro like a mace, and its bark rang out, like thunder in his ears. He felt, once again, that his life was in real danger; 'Did the pace of things never ease round here?' he scoffed.

Slobber dripped off the dog's long canines. It fell in pools onto the streaked timber beneath it as Kindred hauled himself back upright. Rabid beasts were low on his list of *things to fight before he turned fifteen*, but it didn't look like he had any choice. The animal prowled round the edge of its lair, sizing him up. It had him exactly where it wanted him and it seemed to know it. It was obviously going to enjoy this...

Kindred decided this time there could be no running and hiding, he was going to have to face his enemy, head on. He threw caution to the wind and, trusting his body had the necessary reserves to pull off the stunt, dived straight at the dog's legs. The barrow tilted on its wobbly axle and he swept forwards, even faster than he'd expected, racing towards it, out of control. The dog's eyes sparkled expectantly. It could almost taste the blood pumping round Kindred's bruised body. But as the pitch of the barrow altered again, so did the animal's fierce expression. Suddenly it looked confused and bewildered. Kindred's head was coming towards it with all the force and pace of a bowling ball, and in a flash it realised there was no way it could ever react in time.

A split second later, Kindred swept into its legs and knocked it clean off its feet. It wheeled over, onto its bony back, and groaned in obvious pain. He wondered whether he'd broken its neck, he'd certainly heard an ominous *crack* as it fell. Not that he cared much, either way, so long as it stayed put for five minutes. He dragged himself to one side of the wagon while the dog whimpered like a puppy and licked its wounds. Its tail got caught in its sodden blanket. Kindred knew it would have to kick and writhe around to work itself loose. It looked suddenly pathetic, like a beetle squirming in treacle. He considered taking out his pocket-knife and slitting its throat, out of kindness. But he was too tired and too desperate to bother.

An open window above and behind him screamed for his attention. It was fairly ten feet away from the edge of the cart and no bigger than a dustbin lid, but he felt, if he gave it everything he had left, he could probably reach it. The dog's eyes bulged. Its claws extended from its twitching, leathery paws, desperate to snag him with one last, desperate effort. But it was too late, it had lost this battle. Kindred was away, leaping high into the air, putting the beast's stinking den behind him; stretching far into the blackness, where he was sure he was about to find a solid, stone window ledge just waiting for him.

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A tatty piece of curtain flapped around his shoulder and he knew he was safe. With all the fury and desire of a down, but not quite out boxer, he grabbed a hold of it and gave it a sharp tug. Luckily, the curtain was suspended from some pretty meaty curtain rings, threaded along a serious chunk of Caledonian fur. The whole thing bore his weight easily and he slipped inside. Pale and shaking, he dropped gratefully into the safety of the dark room beyond.

At once, Kindred could see he was in some kind of larder or pantry. Bottles of wine and kegs of beer were stacked to the ceiling all around him. Outside, musket shots echoed across the city. He heard voices raised in alarm, then the dog's painful howling in the lull

that followed after. His blood ran ice cold, his coat hung across his back in tatters dripping blood and oily water on the floor, his heart still beat like a drum in his chest but he knew nothing could reach him in here. At least for the moment, he felt he could take a little time out to recover himself, letting Mother Nature work her magic on his shattered body.

He'd been walking, riding or sailing for so many days he'd forgotten what it was like to relax. Every muscle he'd ever heard of (and quite a few he hadn't) seemed to be aching at the same time. His eyelids were as heavy as two barn doors. He let them close and in so doing, relinquished all control of his stressed internal organs and weakened limbs. They immediately shut down, taking his mind with them, and he quickly fell into a deep and dreamless sleep; the first sleep he'd had in ages that hadn't felt forced.

Lying between two bulging sacks of barley, Kindred's torso and head were well hidden. The city throbbed with death and danger all around him, but he would not wake for several hours. When he did finally stir, the soldiers had gone and the first Scottish sunrise he'd ever experience was in full swing on the horizon...

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Cautiously Kindred crept from his hiding place to sit on the warm, stone windowsill he'd jumped through the night before. From there, he watched the comings and goings of a busy flea market outside.

'Jugs an' Basins!' shouted a monstrous man on the street below. He must have been seven feet tall with ridiculous, wiry-yellow hair that fell halfway down his super-sized back. 'Get your jugs an' basins 'ere!' He had a few pieces of earthy-brown pottery laid out on a trestle table in front of him. One of them was half full of a scum-topped, dark brown liquid; the other half seemed to have leaked out the bottom already...

'Port, Whisky, Claret!' shouted another man from the steps of a great church opposite. He was a midget, a tiny Irish leprechaun of a man, with a voice he could project like a town crier. 'Come on; spend your money while you've got it!' he bellowed.

'Feelin' short, sniff the captain's port.

Think the port smells risky, sup a dram o' whisky.

Or, sick as a parrot, down a slug o' Claret!

Under a starched awning nearby, squatted an obese woman with a string of chicken bones around her concertinaed neck. Kindred assumed she was some sort of soothsayer. A curled pigeon feather floated lazily past his window and as his gaze followed it, a thousand different sights and sounds assaulted him.

The mud-heaving streets of central, Medieval Edinburgh burst into life, right there and then, outside his window. Ox-drawn wagons stuffed with crude, wooden crates rattled past at a hundred miles an hour. Stooped women, wearing patchwork rags, drew

water from wells like clustered Texan oil derricks on overdrive. And gentlemen in smart blue tunics splashed, ankle-deep through puddles towards the sprawling castle.

Kindred was spellbound. He could almost hear the worn cobblestones sinking deeper and deeper into the oozing mud. He stayed exactly where he was for an age, soaking up the raw energy of the city. Eventually though, his growling stomach dragged him from his seat high up, in the lap of the gods, over mighty Edinburgh. He followed his nose into the next room and down an open flight of wooden stairs into a dingy, spit and sawdust pub called 'The Severed Arms.'

## **Chapter 2 – The Ghost Tour**

'Mind your heads,' suggested Roger Leadly. Roger's body was leggy, like a plant stem that had long-ago bolted for a distant shard of sunlight. He had a beard that made him look like a professor, though in fact he was anything but. The latest clutch of tourists in his charge entered the room after him. 'Come on,' he encouraged them, 'we can all squeeze in. This used to be a pub you know, called the Severed Arms...'

People with their eyes pressed to viewfinders or their fingers fiddling for spare batteries in their pockets smiled and nodded at him. Roger had worked on 'The Scary City Ghost Tour' for several seasons now. He knew the drill. First, you turned the listless little devils white with fear, feeding them terrifying stories of pain and suffering in old Edinburgh. Then you dragged them down, down into its dark heart, the claustrophobic confines of Mary King's Close, and let their imaginations do the rest.

'We're thirty feet below the tarmac and tyres of the modern-day city,' he gestured upwards. 'That's thirty feet of buckled walls, earth and decay. Thirty feet of grizzly, gruesome history,' he said dramatically. 'This *is* the street you've heard about, the street that time forgot. The street that was buried for centuries and then rediscovered in the early eighties. Accept no imitations. This is, the truly unique *Street of Sorrows*.'

Roger stroked the beams of the building he was slowly circling. 'Has anyone sensed a presence in here yet?' he asked casually.

His party lifted their heads to him expectantly. This was terror tourism sure, but they still expected to be spoon-fed their information, rather than find anything out for themselves.

'In this room?' Roger went on.

No one spoke.

'There's supposed to be a ghost. Legend has it, a young girl died in here when the Black Death swept through the street in the middle of the sixteenth century.'

His audience looked around, uneasily like children in the queue for Terror Tower at Disney. For no good reason, many of them drew their zips up to their necks or fastened the top buttons on their fleece-lined jackets.

Roger grinned inwardly. 'A professional clairvoyant was down here,' he was just getting warmed up. He could feel his juices beginning to flow. 'Not that long ago actually. And she insisted this room was the home of a really unhappy spirit. She spoke to it as a matter of fact!'

People on the edge of the group stepped towards Roger now, not even conscious they were doing it. He'd seen it happen a hundred times before; a triumph of instinct over reason.

'Don't worry,' he reassured them. 'I've never seen her myself, and I've spent many hours wandering around down here. I've poked my nose in where it wasn't wanted; down a narrow shaft, through a plaster wall, and never sniffed out so much as a dead rat. Mind you,' his eyes narrowed, 'I know other guides who've felt things, or heard things, in here. In this very space.' He rolled his eyes. 'I even know one woman who quit, on the spot, because of what she saw, right over there,' he pointed.

An elderly woman's face fell as his finger sought out the spot where her husband was standing. 'Walter!' she snapped. 'Come out of there. Walter!' she reached out and grabbed his shirtsleeve. 'You're in the way!'

Walter shuffled apologetically towards the centre of the room. 'Sorry,' he mumbled. 'Dropped my lens cap.'

'The candles and flowers you see in the corner,' Roger Leadly deftly directed the group's attention to a shrine in an alcove opposite the main door, 'were left by other visitors, all for the ghost. So you see how it's captured their collective imagination. They wanted to be sure she had something to play with if ever she got bored. The doll, I think, is of particular interest.'

Everyone moved around. They wanted to see this doll especially. Some of them had heard about it on the television.

'The doll,' Roger continued in a voice that could easily have been adapted to plug movies in movie theatres up and down the country, 'was left by the clairvoyant herself. Apparently, the number of sightings has dropped significantly since then, so maybe it's working, cheering the wee girl up a bit?'

Roger ushered his group into the next chamber. 'Fancy a pint?' he said, making a joke, albeit a rather weak one, '...because this room used to be the bar...' A few people stayed behind, ogling the doll for a second or two longer. Roger's voice grew fainter. Soon, there were only two people left, trying to photograph themselves with the doll by holding their camera at arms length in front of them. When they left, the room was completely empty.

The group trundled on, their overlapping conversations eventually turning into a distant chatter. Now there was hardly a sound to break the silence of the cursed box room

with the child's shrine in it. The little doll on the shelf watched and waited until everyone was gone, before blinking and letting out a shallow breath.

She lay, as she had done all the time the tour party had been there, prone in front of a gaudy bouquet of artificial flowers, her sequined dress catching the light from the end of the corridor every now and then. For a moment, nothing around her moved. The room was as perfectly still and silent as a tomb. And then, beneath a glassless window frame, a furry ear twitched. A smudge of ginger, with paws as soft as silk, crept from its hiding place and sniffed at her.

For the first time this year, a cat had managed to join a Scary City Ghost Tour, just as it began to descend into Mary King's Close. And this cat's name just happened to be Farraday.

Farraday was a regular house cat with big, flat paws, a wide jaw and a flash of white on his chest. This flash, tucked right into the nape of his neck, was a funny shape, like a blacksmith's anvil. But apart from that, he could have been anyone's Marmalade or Tigger. He was nothing much to look at, quite your average mongrel pussy-cat really.

When he slept, on the bleached, laminate floor of his owner's conservatory, he was a picture of suburban calm and tranquillity. He wasn't lazy, but neither was he a particularly big fan of exercise. This was the first time, in fact, he'd ever ventured below the tired streets of Edinburgh, in search of food. Little did he know now, it would almost certainly be his last.

'Mary King's Close was interesting,' he thought idly, 'but no more interesting than a number of narrow wynds he knew of up top. He couldn't think why he'd ever bother coming back down here. There weren't nearly enough over-ripe litter bins to sniff at for a start!...'

The empty husks of long-dead moths and woodlice circled around him as he swished his tail nervously about. Cold brick, dry dirt and brittle timber seemed to be all that was around to explore. He tested every nook and cranny for an attractive scent, but all he found was the smell of cheap, duty-free perfume and cigar smoke left by the tourists.

Until of course, he discovered the shrine in the corner, the cluttered shrine the clairvoyant had started for the unfortunate plague girl. The two brown eyes of the baby doll in the corner caught his eye in particular. They seemed to be poking fun at him, though even Farraday knew this was quite impossible. Still, his clumsy attempts to scratch out a rat or a mouse from somewhere secret seemed to have amused it. He scowled. The tour party moved away, even further along the corridor and Farraday was left completely alone with the beady-eyed doll. He sidled past it, deliberately rubbing his cheek across the hem of its starched dress.

Marked with that unique blend of musk and dried cat food he was especially proud of, it would be easily recognisable as his plaything in future. Perhaps its eyes would leave him alone now he'd labelled it as his own too. But no sooner had he finished spraying its



left foot from a healthy distance with urine, than the atmosphere of the whole room darkened. A breeze stirred the mildew air. Farraday shivered, which wasn't something he did very often and took a step backwards. One of the candles on the shrine fell over, making him jump. And the doll... well the doll actually appeared to wink at him!

He sniffed (cautiously he'd have to admit) at its dimpled cheeks. Plastic, nail polish and of course cat pee were all that he could smell. He sat beside it for a moment, planning his next move, when a muted scream actually seemed to waft out of its full, red lips. He couldn't believe it. The scream began to climb the walls around him. What was going on? He shrank nervously into himself, hoping if he closed his eyes for a second or two, then opened them again, everything would be all right. But it wasn't.

Instead, the scream got louder and louder and louder. While at the same time, its pitch rose higher and higher and higher. Until, all at once, it was a blood-curdling shriek in his ears. What on earth was it? He began to fret. Swirling and circling through the window, into the street and back again, the sound came at him like an angry wasp. It danced over his head and swooped through his legs. It was clearly tormenting him, hoping it could drive him away with its one note, resonating in his head like a jackhammer. It could hardly get any worse, and he knew instinctively if he could have run from it he would. But he could see quite well from where he stood, the gate that led to the surface was locked tight shut.

Unsure what to do then, he hissed and clawed at the glitter-painted doll, assuming, in some way, it was responsible for everything. The veins behind his eyes started to throb painfully. In frustration, he grabbed the toy in his mouth and shook it. But this had precisely the opposite effect to the one he'd been hoping for. Now an insane howling began to drip from the ceiling, clawing at every fibre of Farraday's body. His spine arched and his long tail extended. An invisible force pushed him backwards, so that he fell awkwardly to the floor. His paw stuck fast in the head of the doll and the mood of the room darkened even further.

Blue lights crackled in the air, the temperature dropped and a thin mist began to envelope him. Farraday tumbled backwards, over his own feet. He felt he was being dragged away somewhere, but where? His head hit a stone and his mind clouded over. Consciousness slipped away from him and he was left helpless and exposed, upturned like a beetle.

Around him, the room changed. The floor melted into a pool of stars, the ceiling evaporated into a seamless velvet drape, the walls parted, folding back on themselves and the fireplace retreated as far as the far distant horizon. When Farraday finally awoke, all he could see was a wooden torch, flickering against a stone wall and a cold, black space pricked with stars where a No Flash Photography sign had been.

To his surprise, he heard the sound of laughter through a low archway opposite him. He got to his feet and walked slowly towards it, passing a ladder and a wet paintbrush on

the way. A building, by the looks of it a dingy, spit and sawdust pub lay before him. There was a brand new sign over the doorway but Farraday had never learnt to read so was unable to tell what it said. Still, the illustration beneath the scrolling letters made a lasting impression on his addled brain. It was of a swollen, human hand, hanging limply from a slashed human arm. The shoulders were missing, the arm ending in a mess of tendons and muscle. A severed arm, you might say.

The pub was open for business. The noise coming from inside was incredible. And oh yes, there was a date daubed on the wall, just below the wavy line of fresh, white paint. The year read *one, five, six, one*; or fifteen sixty-one if you knew how to talk person. Just 447 years earlier than it had been five minutes ago then...

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Farraday tried to steady his nerves and edged inside the pub. There were an awful lot of bare legs and big boots trampling about, beyond the tight doorway. He weaved his way through them, looking for a safe place to sit and watch the strange goings-on of the even stranger folk occupying the building. These were not the same people he'd been exploring the Close with earlier, they were a whole different breed it seemed, far more like monster-people than roly-poly people.

'A full measure!' demanded one man, a burly, pale-skinned specimen (bigger than three normal people) standing eight rows back, but facing the bar.

'Never had any complaints,' yelled the barmaid over the heads of a dozen more drinkers, swaying and singing in front of her. She pulled a pint, her blackened teeth threatening to fall out of her mouth, into the tankard the whole time and held it out ready.

'Come on! No scrimping!' he bellowed. 'I need a proper drink. A big, *fat* drink like the ones you give your regulars.' He was bald, with a wart on his neck the size of a golf ball. Farraday doubted he had a conservatory at home, let alone a radiator with a soft cat basket underneath it...

The girl behind the bar raised her thick eyebrows at him, then overflowed his two-pint, pewter jug over her sweaty, sandal-clad feet. 'Sup up then,' she said, catching a coin he'd tossed in her general direction, 'and you can squeeze another one in after that.'

The man grunted and marched away to his table. Reversing into his seat, he caught someone with his elbow. 'Watch where you're goin'!' he swore loudly. Farraday cowered behind a sturdy chair leg, waiting to see what happened next. But to his surprise, the boy he'd clouted so carelessly round the ear did not respond.

He was wearing a stained ruff, a mangled hat and a torn pair of leggings setting him apart from the rest of the crowd, who were mostly wearing slack cotton trousers and open shirts. The hilt of a sword poked up from the folds of his coat, but he did not reach for it.

‘Sorry,’ he said, bowing low at the waist. His coat dropped back still further, revealing a second blade lashed to his leg. Small and sinewy, the boy had a steely quality as plain and easy to see as the piercing green eyes glowing either side of his dirty nose. He seemed determined not to make a scene though.

The murmur of conversation returned to the smoky booths dividing the pub into sections. And the low, black beams that leant the whole place a furtive air, retreated again into the ceiling. Farraday let his tail brush someone’s leg and relaxed, just a little.