

Reflections

After that the St Paul's project felt pretty irrelevant. I couldn't stop searching around me to see if I could see his face in the crowd. But there was no sign of him, only a slightly unsettling feeling of being watched. I peered at the bracelet a few times, and a couple of times I thought I saw the suggestion of movement in it, but nothing like the blinking I thought I had seen yesterday. The whole thing was bizarre.

Grace kept checking up on me as if I was some sort of invalid, and I was really relieved when it was time to get back on the minibus and go back to school. It was parked just round the corner and I jumped on and grabbed a seat at the back.

Grace still wasn't letting up.

"Any more apparitions yet?" The question was clearly meant kindly, but I didn't want to talk about it. I needed distracting, and the easiest way would be to distract her.

"Not a single one." I tried to laugh, and nearly made it convincing. "I think it must just be all the stress, especially now I've got Rob to worry about..."

"Good point," she agreed. "That is going to be a tricky decision. Tell me again exactly what he said?"

"I'd much rather you tell me exactly what your plans are with Jack," I countered, suddenly inspired. "Has he spoken to you yet today? I've never seen him take so much interest in anyone

before.”

We had been over all this in minute detail last night, but I had a hunch that it was one topic that Grace would be delighted to return to as often as possible. She radiated happiness.

She was soon off on a long description of all the texts he had sent so far today and what she had replied. It only took the occasional prompt from me to keep her on track. It was lovely to see how excited she was.

When the minibus finally made it back to school we had free time in which to work on our projects. Grace went off to the art department to stock up on the supplies she was going to need for her pictures. I quickly made my way up to the library and found a quiet computer in the corner.

It was a well-stocked library with a long bank of computers, but it was generally busy and you had to fight for spaces. By the middle of the afternoon though, there was no problem in finding one free. I sat in a quiet corner by the window and tried to organise my thoughts, reassuring myself that if I was going mad I wouldn't be so keen to find a rational explanation for everything I had seen.

My usual way to solve any problem was to Google the question, but this time I didn't even know what to type in – cloaked, untouchable people in St Paul's? I couldn't imagine that there would be much information on that. My fingers hovered over the keyboard for a moment, but I couldn't bring myself to type anything so stupid. I looked down at my hands and considered the bracelet. I rubbed the stone pensively, staring out across the playing fields where the netball team were thrashing some poor visiting school on a summer tour. As I watched I saw our captain, Helen, slam in another goal. The visiting team, their heads down low, really looked as if they wished it was all over.

As I glanced away from the window and down at the stone, I thought of the boy's face again. I smiled to myself and turned my attention back to the computer. At that point the sunshine suddenly broke through the clouds and lit me up, giving a clear reflection of my face in the screen in front of me.

He was right behind me, the sunlight illuminating his hauntingly beautiful face. I was so startled I shouted out loud and whipped my head around.

I was quite alone.

A finger of ice ran down between my shoulder blades. What was going on? Looking back at the screen, I could see the surprise on his face as I jumped up, knocking my chair over as I went. A few curious eyes lifted from books across the library, and as I quickly scanned around it was clear that there was nowhere he could be hiding. I felt another shiver of fear.

"What is going on?" Miss Neil came bustling over, talking very pointedly in a loud whisper.

"Um, I'm really sorry," I mumbled, searching for inspiration. Clearly I couldn't tell her I was seeing things. "A wasp!" it came to me suddenly. "There was a wasp in my hair but I managed to get it out before it stung me."

"Well, that is unfortunate, but do please try to keep the noise down. Not everyone has finished their exams," she hissed.

"Sorry," I muttered, picking up my chair and sitting back down as she retreated around the corner to her desk. I waited until I could hear that she was sitting down before I looked again at the screen.

The sun was behind a cloud, so the image wasn't so bright, but I could still see a faint shadow over my shoulder. As I watched the sun emerged, and, as the light brightened he came back into

focus.

He was breathtaking.

The sunlight touched his dark blond hair, making it almost gleam. His eyes seemed a darker blue in contrast, with impenetrable depths. But they were friendly, and a gentle smile played around his soft, full lips. The dimple reappeared in his cheek.

I took a deep breath, then stole a quick glance over my shoulder. There was nothing there.

I looked back at the screen, where my reflection was still crystal-clear. He was right beside me. I stifled the urge to panic – there had to be some sort of rational explanation for this. I closed my eyes for a second, steadying myself. When I opened them he was still there, with a look of concern creasing his perfect features. As I looked at him he smiled gently, almost hopefully, and I felt my heart lurch.

I glanced around me. The library was silent, interrupted only by the occasional rustle of a page turning and a keyboard being tapped. The world was going on as usual. And in front of me something strange and supernatural was happening.

I took another breath and tried to rationalise things. I didn't believe in ghosts, so that was unlikely. Someone from another dimension? That was just plain silly. A trick? Josh just loved using the latest gizmos to wind me up, but he didn't have the technology to create this. Hallucination? It was the only option which made any kind of sense, even if it did mean that I was losing my mind. At least I was hallucinating an extremely high-quality fantasy man. The thought made me smile wryly.

As I smiled his whole face lit up, changing from concern to something which looked a lot like joy, and maybe relief. His beautiful eyes crinkled up, the gold flecks dancing in the sunshine.

How could my imagination have conjured up someone so spectacular?

This was ridiculous. I shut my eyes again, tearing myself away from that compelling gaze. I couldn't be going mad.

I thought back. This had all started just yesterday, when I first put on the bracelet. I had been wearing it when I first saw his face. And I had been wearing it again today. How had I managed to conjure up this vision of beauty from a piece of jewellery? The thought made me look down at it, the light in the stone dancing lazily in the summer sunshine.

I looked back at his face, and saw he too was considering my bracelet, his brow furrowing very slightly. He raised his hand, and I could see again the matching piece on his wrist. Despite its weight it looked fragile on his well-muscled forearm. My hand reached for the heavy silver on my own slimmer wrist. Was I going crazy, or was this exerting some strange influence over me?

Without stopping to think about it, I ripped the bracelet off my arm. As I did his face shimmered and was gone. I was alone again at my desk.

I gasped at the sudden change, looking around me to be sure. Nothing in the library had changed. The gentle sounds of pages turning and keyboards tapping continued around me. I fought back panic. What was happening to me?

I looked at the bracelet lying on the desktop. How had it done that?

I twisted and turned to examine it closely without touching it, thankful that I was in a very secluded part of the library. The bracelet sat there in the sunshine, flecks in the blue opal flashing red and yellow as I moved around it. Beautiful, but surely that was all? How could something that looked so lovely and harmless do

something so weird? I realised that my heart was pounding and tried to relax, to slow things down a little. But almost immediately I had to try it again. I took a deep breath and edged my finger towards it, resting just the tip on the still-warm metal of the band.

The stone darkened, almost as if a shadow had passed through it from the inside. I lifted my finger and the movement stopped. I touched it again, more firmly this time, putting my fingers inside and curling them around the metal. The shadow rolled across the stone again and suddenly he was back behind me, his reflection clear in the computer screen. His face was a picture of confusion, and panic. That was odd – why would he be panicking too?

I moved my hand away from the bracelet, and just as quickly he was gone. I realised that my hands were shaking so I took a deep breath, held on to the table tightly and sat up straight in my chair. The whole thing was bizarre. I seemed to be conducting an experiment on paranormal behaviour involving antique jewellery. Perhaps I should be in the physics lab where Miss Deeley and her instruments could record what was happening. Suddenly, part of me wanted to laugh out loud with the absurdity of it all, but a much larger part was beating back a wave of fright. I shook my head. "Focus!" I told myself sternly. I must try not to panic: becoming hysterical wasn't going to help. There was definitely no way I could share this with anyone, not even Grace. How could I begin to explain it? It was all far too peculiar, and I needed to work it out for myself.

My first priority was to go somewhere else. I couldn't risk doing anything more in here that would bring Miss Neil and a detention flying to my side. I needed to do this at home.

Luckily it wasn't long until the final bell, and I raced down

to the coaches, my mind spinning. I had picked up the bracelet with a pencil and stashed it securely in my bag, not daring to touch it again. I could almost feel it there, waiting for me. But however weird this was, somehow it didn't feel too threatening. Scary, yes, but only because it was inexplicable. I couldn't see how it could be dangerous, and the more I thought about it I realised I was actually more excited than anything else, and could hardly wait to get home and test some more theories. I almost managed to fool myself that I just wanted to test it, that the thought of seeing him again wasn't my main motivation.

Grace was on the coach, but I didn't want to talk about what had happened earlier, or what the next steps should be with Rob or Jack. I knew that if she started asking me questions about what I had seen in St Paul's I wouldn't be able to lie convincingly, and I wasn't ready to share it with her just yet. I wanted to think, as my head was bursting with ideas about what I needed to do, and I needed to consider each one.

"I'm feeling a bit off," I explained, guiltily. "My head aches. Maybe I did eat something odd earlier..."

Grace looked concerned for me, but she took the hint and didn't press me. I could hear the usual buzz of conversation, but managed to fade everyone out and consider my options. It seemed to me that there were three possible explanations, some more likely than others. It could be Josh and his tricks, but I was sure that something of this scale was beyond him, so that wasn't really worth considering; it could be some sort of projection from the bracelet; or it could be that I was going mad and hallucinating. The best-case scenario was the projection answer, but I was getting increasingly afraid that I was losing my mind.

When Josh and I finally got home, Mum and Dad were

out. I needed to make sure he wasn't going to disturb me, so was pleased to see that he was helping himself to an enormous quantity of food from the fridge. He was clearly going to be busy for a while, so I ran upstairs.

My small room was still a complete mess from last night's sleepover. Ignoring it all, I shoved all the junk from my desk to one side, clearing enough space to work. I went back and checked the door. Downstairs I could hear the sound of Josh watching the kitchen TV, so he wasn't about to disturb me. I carefully shut the door and turned to face my desk, my heart hammering.

My bag was sitting there, its secret waiting for me. I thought about what I was going to need. My desk lamp was pretty bright, but my laptop was not terribly reflective. I took my mirror off the wall and propped it up in front of me. Next I got out my mobile and called up Josh's number. Then if I needed help I just had to press the green button, I reasoned.

I could barely contain myself as I reached for my bag. I fished the bracelet out with a pencil and laid it gently on the desk. It sat there glistening in the lamplight, and I felt my heart rate increase. I knew now that it definitely wasn't just excitement about the strange phenomenon I was about to test. I was excited because I was about to see his face again. Whatever the consequences, I wanted to be able to look at him properly; I wanted to see him smile again. I hesitantly reached forward for the band.

His face appeared in the mirror immediately I grasped the silver. He was behind my right shoulder, looking just as if he was about to whisper something in my ear. My heart leapt at the thought. His eyes, which were so blue they ought to be cold and threatening, looked unbelievably inviting. The mirror gave a much clearer reflection than the screen in the library. I could see his

perfect skin, the highlights in his hair, and the gentle curve of his lips as he started to smile.

Taking a firm grip on the band in one hand, but holding my mobile ready with the other, I turned to check behind me. Nothing. He was still only in the mirror. I couldn't begin to work out how this was happening: the laws of physics just didn't allow it. But there he was, smiling gently, almost as if he could read the argument going on in my head.

As if he could read my thoughts...

I dropped the bracelet as if I had been electrocuted, and his face was gone in an instant. Could he read my mind? My cheeks flamed as I considered the implications of that. What exactly had I been thinking?

I took a deep breath. "Stop it," I told myself sternly, "just finish checking it out." And, anyway, did it matter if a strange reflection could also read my mind? It wasn't as if he was real. I looked at the bracelet. I *had* to figure it out. I was sure Josh wasn't responsible, so that left projection or insanity as my choices. I considered the stone, peering at it from every angle. There was absolutely no way it could generate any power. There was no space for even a tiny battery, so it seemed unlikely that it was projecting an image. The only way to check though was to put it inside something thick, then try again. I rummaged quickly in the pile of junk in the corner of my room, and found an old metal cash box. I dumped the contents on my bed and laid it on the desk.

I sat back down and turned the box so that the lid opened away from me. Really carefully I hooked the bracelet with a pencil and lowered it inside. I closed my eyes tightly for a moment as I felt a small bead of sweat run down my back. This was worse than the exams. Slowly, slowly, I reached around the half-closed box lid

and grasped the bracelet tightly.

In a flash his face was back behind me, reflected in the mirror. Not a projection then. I realised that he was actually looking quite distressed. My heart lurched again at the thought that I was upsetting him in some way. But suddenly he seemed to understand that I could see him again, and his face broke into a huge grin of relief. His beauty astonished me. Every time I looked at him he seemed more flawless than before. His high, straight cheekbones gave him an aristocratic air, and his lips... I sighed to myself looking at his lips. Curved in that inviting smile, his mouth looked strong but soft.

I took in the rest of him. He was wearing a loose white cotton shirt of some sort, open to reveal his throat and the top of his chest, and a heavy black cloak which was tied at his neck in a thick cord. The hood was thrown back, and I could see the strength in his neck and shoulders. If he was just a fantasy I had conjured up, I was doing a remarkably good job.

He watched as I completed my assessment, still smiling, then arched an eyebrow as if in a question. All I could do was smile back, blushing again.

So now I had managed to eliminate all the options but the most frightening one: I was going mad. But the more I looked at him and thought about what I had done, the less likely that seemed, too.

Maybe there was another option. I had never believed in ghosts, and as I thought about it, I realised I didn't believe in anything irrational, anything that couldn't be tested. But I *had* tested this, and it was proving that there was something – someone – there that couldn't be explained by anything I knew or understood. I felt another shiver of fear while I considered the

possibilities. Maybe he was a ghost, or from a different dimension, or even from another planet: suddenly all those ridiculous alternatives became real possibilities.

Fear had crawled through my stomach, making me feel sick. How was I supposed to deal with this?

The expression on my face must have been transparent, as his expression turned from amusement to concern as he watched me. So whatever he was, he had some compassion. I took a few shallow breaths to settle the queasiness. I had so many questions and I needed to start answering them somehow. Where could I begin? I decided to start with the mind-reading.

I sat up straight, looked him in the eye and bellowed in my head – WHO ARE YOU? His expression didn't flicker. I tried again. WHAT DO YOU WANT? Again there was nothing.

Well, it wasn't exactly scientific, I thought, but in the absence of any other means of testing it would have to do. He couldn't read my mind.

I realised as my arm began to cramp that I was still holding on to the bracelet inside the box. Feeling a little silly I pulled it back out and looked at it for a moment. When I looked back at him he was looking down at his own band, which was firmly clamped on to his left wrist. I thought I could see some strange emotion in his eyes: he seemed to hate it. And as I watched him, I realised that my fear was receding, that whatever he was I didn't really care: I just wanted to be able to see him.

I shifted in my seat and my hold on my bracelet loosened for a second. His image shimmered. His head shot up and I saw a new, pleading look on his face. He shook his head as his lips moved – *No! Don't go, please!* My lip-reading wasn't good but that wasn't difficult to decipher. His reflection then solidified as I realised

what I had done and I took a firmer grip on it.

It seemed that he was as keen to look at me as I was to look at him. I could hardly believe that his view was as good as mine. I decided to make the most of it and slipped the bracelet back on to my wrist, smiling shyly at him.

His whole body relaxed, his shoulders dropping as a broad grin spread across his face. *Thank you*, he mouthed, his melting eyes finding mine. I was mesmerised, and couldn't help putting my hand out to touch him. He was so clear in the mirror, just inches from my shoulder with his arm next to mine on the desk. I watched in the reflection as my hand slipped through his arm.

"What are you?" I whispered.

He looked pensive for a second, and started to reply. I couldn't make out the words so I shook my head. I couldn't understand anything he was trying to tell me. He started again slowly and I was concentrating so hard that the sound of a bell clanging made me jump.

I looked around me, feeling as if I had just been woken from a dream. My room was still there, still ordinary, but now touched with something wonderful. The demands of real life seemed irrelevant. The old school bell meant it was time for dinner, but I wasn't remotely interested. The bell rang again and I groaned. "I'll need to go downstairs for a minute. Will you wait?" I didn't even stop to think how silly it was to be talking to a reflection. Then he nodded and smiled.

I'll wait. At least that was easy to lip-read, I thought.

I smiled back, then leapt to my feet and ran downstairs, my mind racing with the implications of what had just happened.