

Through a Dark Glass

Steven Berryman



Prologue

Alyson Gardner-Hoyte looked through the window. Or at least, a casual observer might have thought that's what she was doing. In fact, she was studying the window itself. Not so much the frame; years of practice had taught her to recognise the high grade English craftsmanship from the mid-seventeenth century. That was of passing interest, but only peripheral interest. The woodwork was far too new to be of help.

No, it was the glass itself that really held her attention. The size was right; almost too perfect, as if someone had placed it in her way to tease her. And the colour? The light was not ideal, but it looked good. She leaned in close, her eyes flitting over the surface looking for clues and markers. The tell-tale metallic clouding in the corners, the odd imperfections that betrayed the age of the pane. Alyson dug deep into her memory, trying to remember details; it was so long since she had seen the real thing. Then she cautiously extended a hand and gently touched the surface with a fingertip. The minute imperfections in the surface acted like an electrical charge through her hand, making her jump back and bringing a smile to her face. She stood looking at the glass, for a few more seconds, biting her lip and trying to contain her mounting excitement.

Only now did she adjust her focus and take a minute to look into the room beyond the glass. That too comforted her. The style was familiar; a house, large, homely and solid. It might have been built in her own time and although even from here she could see that this house was similar to the mansion she had grown up in, it had a very different style to it. England, of course, she was in England now; all brick and stone. She was looking into a long room with doors leading off each side and an alcove in the distance on the left. A balustrade at the far end of the room suggested a flight of stairs descending, perhaps turning in front of a large, ornate window. Yes, this was good; a quiet upstairs landing seemed much better than a living room or downstairs hallway.

Movement.

Alyson shied quickly back from the glass as a young man emerged onto the landing from one of the doors. He turned towards her for a second and paused as he to look at his reflection in the glass. The man was smiling at his own reflection, but Alyson felt unsettled as if he was staring right through the glass to where she stood. Then he cocked his head to one side, flicked a stay lock of blond hair back into place, turned quickly away and walked towards the stairs. She watched him as he walked down a few steps, turned and then carried on down, confirming her theory about the layout of the space. His bright blue eyes were already embedded in her memory. He looked..... well, friendly.

There was one last test. The only one that really mattered in the end and she didn't want to be interrupted. Perhaps she should wait; no the excitement was too much, she had to know, now. Okay. Alyson closed her eyes and focussed her thoughts for a few moments, then she reached out again until her thin fingers were touching the surface of the glass.

One. Two. Three.... she pushed forward and first her fingers, then her hand disappeared into the surface of the glass as easily as it had been a sheet of water.

She flashed her eyes open, hardly daring to look.

Yes! She could still see her hand on the other side of the glass. Her heart leapt. How many years had it been since....? Movement again. The top of a head grew into a dark haired young lady walking up the stairs.

Alyson quickly whipped her hand back through the glass and let go a cry of joy that would have stopped the traffic; had anybody outside her own private world been able to hear her.