

The Pendlebury Witches

Part One



Deena Gomersall



A "New Woman" Novel



Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

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The Pendlebury Witches

part 1

By Deena Gomersall

Wednesday 5th October 2016.

“You are kidding me! You’ve got to be freaking kidding me!” Dan exclaimed in a low voice.

His girlfriend, Jodie, looked at him, trying to gauge whether his reaction was something bad or something good. He had just opened up his mail which had included a letter with a British stamp and postmark on it. The letter had looked official.

“What? Come on, Dan, are you going to share with me or not?” she finally had to ask as Dan slumped down into a seat, still holding the letter aloft and gazing at it.

“Honey, I’ve got a letter from the UK here. Apparently I have inherited a house from some Great Aunt I never even knew I had,” he finally revealed.

“Oh my gosh, Dan! I’ve heard of such things happening. People in America finding they have long lost family in Britain and other places and inheriting country estates and manors.” Jodie gasped, suddenly having visions of being a lady of the manor, a wife of a country squire.

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves here, honey,” Dan said, bringing her back to reality. “According to this letter it’s just a country cottage in the north of England... but I bet it will bring in a fair few bucks if I sell it on the market, or we could even use it as our holiday retreat home and let it out when we aren’t using it,” he suggested.

“That sounds pretty cool, Dan. Though, imagine if it was a big mansion home and you were like, related to the Queen, or something.”

Dan just smiled at her daydreaming. “I have to go view it next week, apparently, in order to claim it. I’ll book some time off work. We can have a short vacation over there, do a bit of sightseeing and see the cottage,” Dan then suggested to his very attractive Latino girlfriend.

“What? Why next week?”

“What’s wrong with next week? Is it too short notice for you?” Dan questioned as he saw the look of disappointment on Jodie’s face.

“What’s wrong with next week? You should know what’s wrong with next week, Dan; I have that major modelling shoot in LA starting next week and lasting six weeks. Why can’t you just go view it when it’s convenient to you?”

“I don’t know; it’s just what the letter says. For some reason it has to be next week. Can’t you postpone the shoot?”

“Are you for real, Dan? I cannot just postpone some thing like that; models are coming from all over North and South America.”

“Okay, Okay, I’ll phone the guys and see if I can alter things. I’ll just say I have lots of work commitment,” Dan conceded.

Half an hour later, Dan had to break the bad news to Jodie. “Those Limeys aren’t budging; they say it’s either next week or the home is falling into the hands of the local authority. Apparently they wanted to bring the home down and redevelop the surrounding land... Probably why they are being so unwilling to let me change the date, they don’t want me inheriting it and losing money. Well, I’ll show them, I’m standing my ground and I will be there,” Dan stated resiliently.

“If they want to bring it down and redevelop, then maybe it’s in a pretty bad state; it may cost you more to repair it than it’s actually worth,” Jodie suggested glumly.

“Well, I’ll never know unless I go and look, will I? Maybe the Brits are just trying to put me off from claiming my rightful inheritance,” Dan countered.

“You’ll have to go on your own then; I have to be in L.A,” Jodie told him sadly but firmly. She had never been to Europe and would have loved going along with Dan to see the place and do a bit of travelling.

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Friday, October 14th

Jodie came along to the airport with Dan. She would be flying to Los Angeles herself in two hours after he left; they thought it would be nice to choose the same day to go their separate ways.

“I hope everything goes well over in England, Dan, and that the cottage is all quaint like the ones you see in pictures. I’ll call you every day while I’m away. Love you, honey,” Jodie told her boyfriend before giving him a loving parting kiss.

“Yeah, I’ll phone each day as soon as I work out the time differences... I don’t want to be trying to ring you while you are working. Knock them dead with that, darling, I know you will do well,” Dan responded before they had a longer goodbye kiss.

“LYATF,” Jodie said to him

“LYATF,” Dan replied.

With that, Dan began pulling his medium-sized suitcase to the departure gate and turned to wave Jodie goodbye before going through.

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In the North of England, a woman whom one would have assumed to be in her mid -forties, with long wavy hair flecked lightly with grey, opened the door of her home and stepped outside, looking into the sky.

There was an air of beauty about her even though her mouth was turned down and there was a glint of cruelty in her eyes.

Two slightly younger looking women, with the same air of beauty, both of whom had dark hair; one long and curly, the other with a shaggy mane that flowed halfway down her back, followed her out and stood just behind her. "She is on her way, my sisters," was all that the first woman said.

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Dan slept for long periods of the seven and a half hour flight and it was mid-afternoon when the plane touched down at Manchester Airport in the North of England.

Having done his homework, Dan then caught a service bus to the town of Nelson and from there, booked a taxi that would take him to his destination.

"Where you off to, Gov'nor?" the taxi driver inquired as Dan climbed into the back of the cab.

"I'm wanting to get to High Fell cottage in Pendlebury village," Dan replied.

The driver looked over his shoulder to his passenger. "You're American aren't you? Why you wanting to go to Pendlebury, then?" he inquired with a sound of surprise in his voice.

"I've inherited a cottage there."

"High Fell... you say? That place is well known-of around these parts."

"Really? Why's that?" Dan asked with interest, now wondering if it was somewhere special.

"Just is. Got a lot of history to it. Dunno if everything you read about it is true or not, though."

"What kind of things?" Dan pressed.

“Ain’t for me to be saying, Gov. You just read a thing, that’s all. I’m sure you will make your own mind up.”

The driver couldn’t be pressed any further and concentrated on his driving as they made their way through countryside and then more into the wilds. Dan noticed a large looming hill along the way which had a foreboding look to it. The cottage was actually situated about half a mile outside of the small village and lay close to a huge wooded area. The skies had darkened and light rain was falling as they came to their journey’s end.

Along the way Dan had phoned the estate agent to give an approximate time of their arrival and there was a red Citroen car parked up at the end of a wide muddy path awaiting him.

Two people got out of the car and put up umbrellas as Dan exited the taxi and paid the driver. A woman in her early thirties, wearing a dark trouser suit, and an older, balding man, in a grey suit, approached.

The woman smiled at him. “Mr. Hamilton, I presume? I hope you have had a pleasant journey... I do apologise for the British weather. My name is Jackie Clarke, your estate agent, and this is Mr. Francis Hopewell, the solicitor for your Great Aunt, Ms Mabel Chattern’s estate.”

The two had walked to where Dan was standing as Jackie Clarke had made her introductions and Dan now shook the hand of both people.

“The instructions that I have, as outlined in the letter to you, Mr. Hamilton, is that you are the sole benefactor of the cottage and its contents. I am afraid there is no large amounts of money in the will for you, By all accounts your Great Aunt was an impoverished woman who lived a simple life until her death.”

“When did my Great Aunt die? I haven’t been informed,” Dan asked.

“Two years ago last August. It has taken time to track you down, Mr. Hamilton. We maybe never would have if not for a local woman who came forward to us and gave us details... just as the local authority was trying to get a court order to pull the place down.”

“A local woman? Why would anyone around here know of my existence or where the hell to find me?” Dan inquired, raising an eyebrow. “I didn’t even know of having a Great Aunt over here until you contacted me.”

“I cannot answer that, but from her lead we did a trace and we can confirm from our records that you are indeed a blood relation to Ms Chattern. That is basically all we lawfully need to know.”

Jackie Clarke then took a set of old looking keys from her purse and held them up. “So, if you are ready, Mr. Hamilton, all we need to do now is show you the property and have you sign a few papers. I hope you don’t mind if we get on with it... I wouldn’t mind getting out of here before it gets much darker; something around here gives me the creeps.”

Mr. Hopewell smiled for the first time on his otherwise solemn face. “Women, eh! Out from the bright lights of town and everything is eerie to them.”

Dan smiled back as Jackie led them down a path of small flat rocks. As they cut through overgrown bushes, a very old looking cottage emerged in front of them.

“Welcome to High Fell cottage, Mr. Hamilton,” Jackie announced.

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Inside the cottage Jackie lit wall-mounted oil lamps as they passed through the old oak wood front door, illuminating a narrow corridor. A kitchen was to the left and a living room on the right. The floor was made of stone and other than old rugs here and there, was bare.

More lamps were lit prompting Dan to ask a question. "Pardon me for asking, ma'am, but does this place have electricity?"

"We are pretty much out in the wilderness out here, Mr. Hamilton. I am happy to be able to tell you that there is an electricity supply from a generator down in the cellar, but not for lighting as there are no light fittings. There are a few mains sockets... one in the kitchen for a microwave or kettle... though there is also a stove which has normally been used for cooking by your Great Aunt. There are three sockets in the living area and one in each of the two bedrooms."

Dan was left far from impressed as he was used to modern day living and creature comforts. He would be even less impressed when he learned of the septic tank for toileting.

In the living room was an old threadbare armchair, a bookshelf containing some very old and dusty looking books, a table and a rocking chair and an open fireplace. The whole structure seemed supported by varnished wooden beams.

Dan was led up an old rickety staircase with creaky banister and shown the larger of two bedrooms. An old-fashioned bed with posts was positioned in the centre of the room and there was a large oak wardrobe and a dressing table. The floor was actually carpeted and there was a television set and an

electric bedside lamp. Dan had to admit the room seemed warm and cosy looking.

Back downstairs, Dan put his name to a number of legal documents and deeds to the cottage.

“The home is now yours, Mister Hamilton; you can live in it right away,” Jackie announced, placing the keys on the table and sliding them over to Dan with her finger tips.

“I don’t know about living in it right away. The place needs a lot of work on it and it is obvious it hasn’t been lived in for a few years. I would be really grateful if either one of you could drop me in the nearest large town so that I can get myself a room for the night,” Dan asked.

Jackie pulled on her lip with her teeth. “I was going to go straight back to Manchester from here,” she said apologetically.

“I only want dropping off somewhere, anywhere, that may have a hotel or guest house along the way,” Dan informed her.

“I can give you a ride back with me; I live and work in Burnley, it’s a half hour’s drive from here,” Mr. Hamilton offered.

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Saturday October 15th

The following day Dan was back over at the cottage and loaded with several bags full of cleaning products to start the process of cleaning out the house from top to bottom.

He also ordered two dumpsters to be delivered to throw out lots of the old stuff that cluttered up the

place. He pondered on throwing out some of the old furniture and replacing it with modern and he also wondered about getting in a landscape gardening team to clear much of the overgrowth that was even growing up the sides of the house.

All in all, he wondered just how much this cottage could cost him before he saw any end results.

He had taken many of the old and worn books from the shelves to dispose of and was carrying an armful of them to one of the dumpsters when he saw a woman, standing on the path leading to the cottage, watching him.

“Hi there. Can I help you at all?” Dan inquired inquisitively.

“Good morning to you. You must be moving in. Are you planning on throwing those fine books away?” the woman asked, brushing locks of her long dark hair from her face, blown there by a fresh breeze.

“Well, yes. That is my intention, Ma’am,” Dan answered.

“Oh dear, I don’t think that Mabel would be too pleased at you throwing her books away in that skip. Some of them are well over a hundred and fifty years old, you know and, I would imagine, quite expensive.”

“Oh, you knew my Great Aunt?” Dan questioned, taken by surprise.

“Indeed yes, Mabel and I were very close up to her passing.”

“I never knew her. I was notified of her death and, apparently, I am the only heir of hers, which is why I am here. I have inherited this place,” Dan informed the middle-aged woman.

“Your Great Aunt, you said... which means your Mother is the child of Lottie, Mabel’s sister... and then you must be Daniel.”

Dan was now even more intrigued and placed the books he was holding down upon the ground rather than throwing them in the dumpster. Here was someone who actually knew his Great Aunt and, more so, apparently, knew of him.

“I’m just in the process of cleaning, I only flew in from the USA yesterday... but can I invite you in for a coffee? I’d like to know more about my Great Aunt, if that is okay with you? And this place, if I can.”

“Do you have tea? I do not drink coffee?” the woman asked.

Dan pulled an apologetic expression. “Sorry... just the coffee, I picked some up in a convenience store this morning before coming back over here. I’m staying in a place called Burnslea.”

“Burnley,” the woman corrected. “I’ll pass on the coffee but I would be happy to come in and talk with you. My name is Harriet, Harriet Pendyke.”

Dan stretched out his hand in greeting and was taken back by how cold the woman’s hand was. “Daniel, Daniel Hamilton... but please call me Dan. Your hands are cold. How long have you been standing outside? I’ll try getting the fire going to warm you up... though I’ve been having trouble trying to light it.”

“Don’t worry about me, young man; I am used to the cold around here. You go make your coffee and I’ll get your fire started for you,” the woman offered.

Dan was surprised on his return to the living room to see a fire roaring in the hearth.

Harriet smiled and waited for him to sit down in the armchair; she herself was sat in the rocker.

“I was thinking, Harriet, while I was making my coffee, as you knew my Great Aunt and also knew of me... are you the woman who gave the solicitor and estate agent a heads up as to where to find me?”

Harriet just smiled again without giving confirmation to the question.

“But... how did you know where I lived? How did you even know I was American?”

“The local council was hell bent on knocking down this cottage after your Great Aunt passed away. I stayed them off with a court order. They tried again a few months ago and I then suggested that they try finding an heir to the property before pulling it down.”

“Why are they so keen to pull the place down? I mean, it’s pretty old but the foundations are solid and it’s out of the way out here, not like it’s in the way of some huge development plan.”

Harriet rolled her eyes and there was a fleeting look of anger. “The local councils around here destroy everything. I have had many a dealing with them, as has my past family. They are all worthless souls... the government too... quite worthless.”

Dan decided not to pursue the matter as he could tell it seemed to be upsetting his visitor and the words she spoke sounded chilling. “Well, it’s in my hands now and I’ll make sure it comes to no harm. I’m not sure what to do with the place though... I may rent it out as a holiday retreat.”

“Why not live in it yourself, Daniel; it has been in the Chatterern family for a great many generations,” Harriet suggested.

"I kind of miss home and having the simple things in life like electric lighting, hot water, a proper toilet and air conditioning," Dan laughed.

"You youngsters are so lazy, shying away from a bit of hard work, expecting everything to work for you at the flick of a switch. Well, I mustn't detain you for much longer. I shall be off."

With that, Harriet was up onto her feet and heading for the door. "I shall call back and see you again my dear, and I'll tell you more," she said as she departed.

It wasn't until she was gone that Dan realised he'd not had an answer to his question of how she had known where to find him. He laughed inwardly as he replayed the woman's words in his mind... about how youngsters like him expected all the mod cons in life. Either she was older than she looked or surely she grew up herself with all those expected conveniences. She couldn't be too much older than he was.

Dan continued working through the day, cleaning floors, windows, grimy areas and lots of cobwebs. As it began to grow dark, he phoned a cab to run him back to his hotel and decided it would be worth his while trying to rent a car while he was moving back and forth.

He had just locked the door of the cottage to walk out of the garden to wait for his cab when he saw a young woman standing in the shadows of a thicket of shrubs. The girl was striking. She had long blonde hair and was dressed in a black dress and a long black hooded cape. The dress fell to above her knees and the white nylons she wore on her shapely legs contrasted with her otherwise black outfit.

"You're new around here. Hello to you," she greeted with a smile and a soft feminine voice.

“Hi. I seem to be attracting visitors today. I’m Dan Hamilton, pleased to meet you,” Dan told her as he approached the attractive young girl.

“Oooh... you are an American. I’ve never met an American gentleman before, and so big and strong. My name is Constance...Connie to my friends. Pleased to meet you... Dan,” she replied, rather flirtatiously.

“Yes, I am from the USA, my Great Aunt used to live in this cottage. She passed away and it has been left in her will to me,” Dan informed her as he gazed into her face. The girl had a very pale, porcelain smooth complexion other than her rosy cheeks. Her eyes were elaborately made-up with thick black eye-liner that extended beyond her eye in a tapering streak, making her eyes stand out. Her fine, blonde hair cascaded almost down to her waist.

“All alone in a big cold cottage, let me know if you need keeping warm on these chilly October nights,” she then shamelessly invited with a giggle.

Dan blushed slightly at the girl’s sudden audacious invitation. “Well thank you Miss, but I do have a partner back home who I love very much.”

“All the way back in America...that’s no fun, and will hardly keep you warm over here,” she continued with a flirtatious smile.

Just then a car’s headlights beamed through the growing darkness, illuminated the shrubs and trees as the cab Dan had called made its way down the track to the cottage. “It’s very kind of you, but I’m staying in a hotel anyway. Have yourself a good evening and it’s been a pleasure meeting you,” Dan told her as he made his way towards the approaching taxi.

As they moved away, Dan began wondering if this was the norm for English girls. He had never encountered a girl so blatant before. His thoughts were stemmed by yet another cab driver inquiring about why he was at that cottage, which took a repeat explanation along the way back to Burnley.

"It's a spooky place that is, a lot of stories surrounding it through the years, Mister," the driver told him.

"What? You mean like its haunted? I don't believe in ghosts," Dan told him, suppressing a smirk.

"Nah! I'm not talking about ghosts and stuff. From old folklore, that was one of the cottages of the Pendlebury witches," the driver continued.

Dan now burst into a laugh. "Witches...? That's absurd. That's even dumber than to say the place is haunted."

"You laugh if you want to, mate, but take a look in the Parish records... it's all documented. There were four or five families of witches living around the village back in the Sixteenth Century. Many were burned at the stake but some believe that ancestors of those witches still live around the area to this day," the driver warned.

When Dan got back to his hotel room he took off his shoes, slumped onto his bed comfortably, then rang Jodie on his cell phone.

"Hi there, honey, how's the modelling assignment going?" He asked.

"Hey there, lover. We are between shoots right now. I'm just outside having a cigarette. How's your day been?" Jodie answered.

"I keep telling you that you should pack those things in. My day's been good... interesting really. I

met a woman this morning who actually knew my Aunt, I've been propositioned by a young girl in her early twenties and... get this, I was told by this Limey taxi driver that the cottage used to house witches!" Dan laughed.

"Really?" Jodie answered in disbelief. "What was this girl like? Was she pretty? Tell her to keep her hands off my man, the bitch!" She was not even taking in the witches' story.

"Yes, she was very pretty," Dan confessed, "But you don't need to worry, honey, you know I love only you, and she doesn't even compare to your beauty," Dan assured.

"It's interesting about this woman who knew your Great Aunt. You should have found out more from her," Jodie suggested.

"She said she would be back around again and would tell me more," Dan answered.

Dan continued chatting to Jodie for twenty minutes before going down for a meal in the hotel restaurant, then calling it a night after a few drinks at the bar.

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Sunday October 16th

Dan was annoyed. It was a Sunday and no car rental firms he could find opened on a Sunday. Further, the driver who was running him from the hotel in Burnley told him that he would only drop him off in the village and that he would have to go the extra half mile on foot. The driver made the excuse that it had been raining overnight and the track down to the cottage would be wet and slippery.

At least the driver pointed him in the direction he would need to walk in order to reach the cottage and so he set off walking along cobbled streets through the centre of the village.

He had not got out of the village centre when he saw a girl selling goods from a cart... it was the same blonde haired girl he had seen by the cottage. His route led him past her and he saw she had a cart full of pumpkins.

The girl was again dressed in black dress and black hooded cape, again with the white tights and black two-inch heeled shoes. She smiled at him in recognition.

“Hello again, Mister American...would you care to buy a pumpkin from me?” she asked with a laugh.

“Pumpkin? What would I do with a pumpkin?” Dan asked.

“Well, if you don’t make a pumpkin pie you can always carve out the flesh and make a jack o’ lantern, that’s what most people are buying them from me for... it’s Halloween in a couple of weeks.”

“Halloween! Oh, yes... it will be. I hadn’t thought of that. But no thanks, I’m on foot and can do without carrying a pumpkin for half a mile.”

“It is a very good aphrodisiac,” the girl giggled, looking at him saucily.

Just then Dan realised that there was another girl with her who had been on the other side of the rickety cart which had paint flaking from its sides. This girl was a similar age to the first and was also very attractive, but she had fiery red hair instead of blonde... she too wore a black hooded cape with the cape drawn over her head.