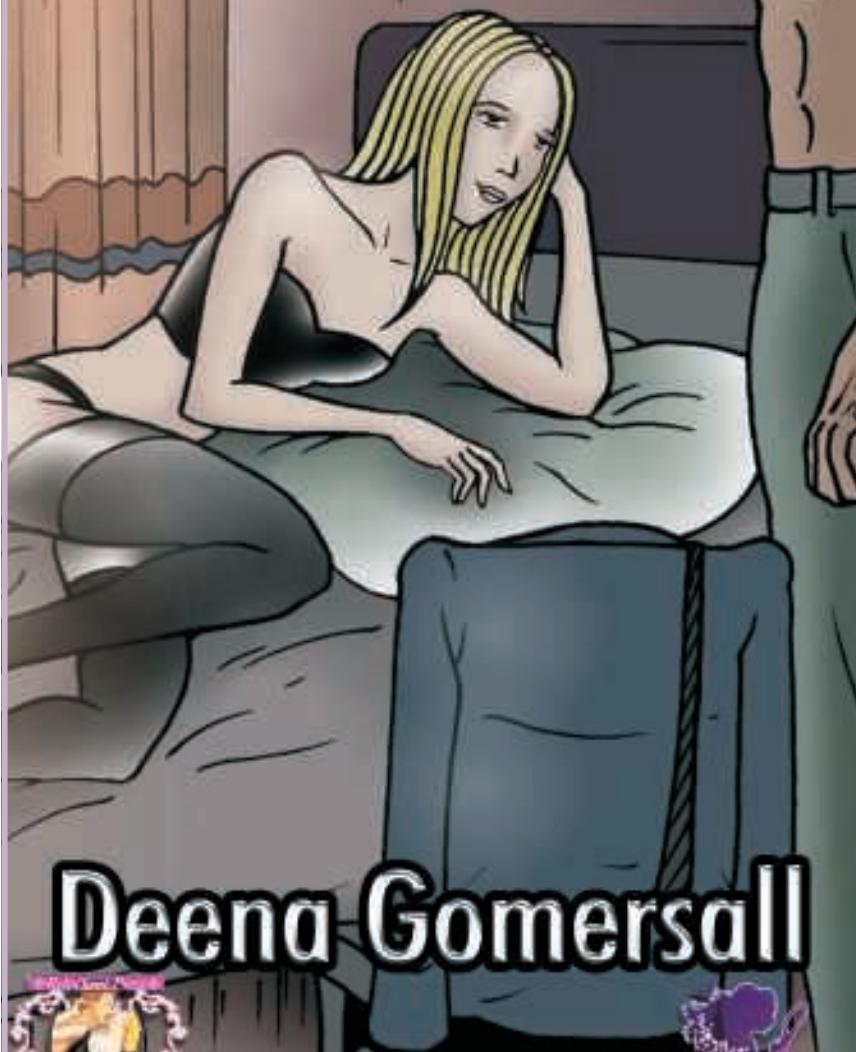


The Pendlebury Witches

Part 2



Deena Gomersall



A "New Woman" Novel



Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

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For information address
Reluctant Press
P.O. Box 5829
Sherman Oaks, CA 91413
USA

Call toll free (800) 359-2116

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The Pendlebury Witches

Part 2

By Deena Gomersall

Day 12 – Wednesday 26th October

The following day Dan was to be completing his Level Four powers and there were many incantations and chants made to help him achieve that level. It was significant and Harriet said that it would only be for three hours as it would take a lot of energy from all of them. Dan planned to follow Stewart's advice and keep with the programme... as Stewart had said, he may need his extra powers before it was all through and he didn't want to raise suspicions.

After the session was over, Harriet was all smiles. "You have done well, Phoebe, and you are now just

one level away from where you need to be,” she told him. “We have raised the most power you had within you, you have to build more; greater levels come with time and much more work. If you stayed as you are, you could build on what you have and become a greater witch and do far more good for the Earth.”

“Stay as I am? You mean stay female. No thank you,” Dan laughed. “After three more days and doing whatever it is I am needed to do, I am keen to going back to being male and returning home, to the States and to my girlfriend.”

Harriet cast off the remark. “Ah, who knows what the future has for us, eh? You may yet change your mind. Meanwhile, now that you are a Level Four, I want us all to go outside and see what you can do with your new powers.”

Dan followed the others into the grounds of the house. By concentrating and directing his thoughts, Dan again managed to produce fireballs in his hand but he also managed to levitate various objects, including some large, heavy boulders. He was also able to look at objects such as boulders and use his power to send them hurtling forward. He could create fire just by staring at a space. It was all amazing to him and made him feel very powerful.

“Well done, Phoebe. Of course, moving and levitating objects can be useful but the prime reason for gaining your full potential of powers is for spell casting. With our powers and yours combined, we can bring a magic to save the world,” Harriet told him, smiling.

“And does that include using it for necromancy?” Dan asked, not able to help himself.

Harriet shot Dan a hard, questioning glare, then composed herself and smiled. “What do you mean by that, Phoebe dear?” she asked.

Dan knew he had spoken out of turn and tried correcting himself. “You said to me something about how we needed to raise a witch from old... a powerful one, didn’t you? Isn’t that a form of necromancy?”

Harriet seemed to look right through him before replying. “Well, yes, I guess so dear; I didn’t say we were raising the dead, just her spirit... if we can. But that doesn’t concern us right now.”

They returned indoors for lunch with nothing more being said.

After they had eaten and as the day outside was mild for the time of year, Dan thought he would be brave.

“Harriet, would you mind if I went down to the village again today? I went back to the church yesterday whilst Connie and Flick went to a bar. I found they keep lots of old books, records of things to do with the village. I’d like to look through them to see what there is about my great aunt and family.”

Dan was using the same tactic he had used with the vicar but wasn’t sure how Harriet would feel about his delving into historic records. Harriet had been well aware that Dan had gone to the church yesterday, from Constance, and had wondered if he would get around to disclosing the fact.

“That’s a wonderful idea Phoebe, it is good that you want to learn more on your family history and, as I have said to you before, be seen around the village by the locals,” she replied.

So it was that Dan, dressed in jeans and a white sweater and leather jacket, made his way, yet again, down to the church.

As he arrived in the village, he saw a newsagent's along the main shopping street and it occurred to him, although he had been up on global affairs when he had left the States, that he hadn't any knowledge of recent world happenings.

Picking up one of the daily tabloids made it easy to see that what Harriet had been talking about, world events that could escalate and bring about the end of the world: North Korea was testing long range ballistic missiles with a range such that a nuclear warhead could reach the United States, South Korea too were concerned about this and both America and Japan were objecting strongly. The States were looking at building missile launch bases in South Korea and China was protesting about that.

Another paper told of how Russian jets were attacking Syria with the loss of many civilian lives and there was worldwide condemnation over that, too. Meanwhile, tensions between the States and Russia were at a high. With a change of American presidency imminent, who knew how that was going to affect relationships between the two countries?

It gave Dan a chill when he thought of all the consequences and Harriet's warnings now seemed to be ringing true as he made his way over to the vicarage.

Hector wasn't home in the vicarage. For some reason that was much to Dan's disappointment, but his wife, Mary, opened up the archive room for him.

Now that he had some idea of where to look, Dan soon found books that told of the witch trials which took place in Lancashire between 1564 and 1630.

Specifically there was quite a lot written on the witch trials around 1612 which described various witches who had been executed. Not surprisingly Dan found reports of The Chatterns, Pendykes and Storragess and of the hanging of Bernadette.

In everything he read, he found at that time the hunting and killing of witches had been outlawed by the British government and it stated that only the Storrage family had evidence against them of evildoing.

So, in both cases, what Harriet and Stewart had told him was true, but was Harriet really now planning a murderous revenge on the innocent ancestors of those who had persecuted her family? He wanted no part of that.

In another book Dan read about Pendlebury Hill where many witches were hung on the gallows or burnt at the stake. He was interested to read of a road that led up to the hill and, in a field nearby, there was the grave of Bernadette Chattern.

The time was quarter past three and Dan wondered if he had time to visit the area, his interest was so piqued. No matter what, Bernadette was part of his family history.

As Dan had worn jeans and flat shoes into town, he decided they would be suitable for such a walk. There was a miniature book that had a map inside, created over a hundred years ago. Dan decided he could borrow the book and a magnifying glass to help him locate the site.

As he followed a road out of the village, in the far distance, dark and foreboding, stretched Pendlebury Hill. That was his compass; to aim for the hill.

Perhaps the whole idea had been unwise. As he got close to the area marked in the book the time was already five minutes to five. It had taken him an hour and forty minutes to get there ... downhill and the sky was already starting to get dark.

Dan was wondering whether to cancel his mission and just turn back for home when he saw a square block of stone over on the left side of the road. This stone had been described in the book along with a drawing of it.

The stone stood about three and a half feet high and probably a foot along each side. On top of it were deep but very weather-worn engravings. Dan had no idea of what they stood for but they made him shudder. The stone was very old.

There were three pointers also engraved on the stone. Dan took the little book out and used his magnifying glass to see which of the pointers he should follow across a wide barren area of moorland.

Deciding he had the correct one, Dan went in a straight line, using a distant tree to keep him on track. Then he saw it... a little to the left of the direction he was heading. Dan had expected to see a headstone but what it was, was just a grave-sized area bordered with old stones and a large round rock at its head. Many of the border stones had been cast aside long ago and the grave itself was sunken down. To Dan it appeared as though, many years earlier, the grave had been dug out.

The large round boulder had words engraved upon it, very worn, but Dan eventually made out the words to read: Hereth lay the body of Bernadette Chattern and unnamed baby. God rest their souls. 1612.

Dan turned cold. This was his ancient ancestry. He knew not whether her body still lay beneath the ground.

Returning to the square stone, Dan wondered what the other two markers pointed to. He had forgotten how time was getting on but he felt he wanted to explore further.

Following the direction of one of the other pointers, Dan found himself walking away from the track he had come down and over moorland. Looking ahead and to the sides for anything on show in the gloom, Dan spotted something in the distance. He headed for the dark shapes he could see, and, although the light was now fading fast, he began to make out that these were, large, looming, headstones that were very old. Some were broken, many tilted or fallen.

There had to be fifteen to twenty headstones, randomly rising amongst a set of trees. This was no usual graveyard... it was out in the middle of nowhere.

Again the stones were extremely old and the inscriptions hard to read but Dan had little doubt these were graves of the persecuted witches put to death. It was confirmed when he made out surname of Pendyke, Harriet's family. And he was shaken when he found one stone that had the name Pretoria Pendyke. Was this just a coincidence?

He did not know the surname of Pretoria, it had never been mentioned. Was the Pretoria back at the house related to Harriet and that name had passed through the generations. Or... could it be that this was Pretoria's grave? Had Pretoria been executed and had Harriet already used necromancy once before to bring her back?

The idea chilled Dan and he was starting to feel very uneasy. It was already quite dark and he needed to get back. Harriet would wonder what he had been doing all of this time.

Dan turned in the direction he had come... or so he thought, but the ground he was walking on was becoming increasingly marshy and wet. Then the last thing he needed, it began raining heavily.

As all around became gloomier and Dan's long hair became wet and sticking to the sides of his face, he felt himself walking upwards rather than on flat ground. He had not gone down hill at any point since he had left the road... he was now increasingly worried that he was lost.

There were more random trees scattered about... trees that he had not seen before... and then, another set of gravestones... this was not the same set; some of these stones were very tall.

Panicking a little, Dan, no longer wishing to investigate, turned away to walk in another direction, he had obviously gone wrong somewhere. He looked vainly through the dark, through the rain, hoping to see sign of the road. He couldn't even see anything of Pendlebury Hill, That, at least, would have helped if he walked in the opposite direction to it.

Now his feet were sinking in boggy ground and he could make out a large pool of water ahead of him. If he wasn't careful he could get bogged down, sink and drown. He almost felt like staying put until the light of the morning, but he was cold and wet. Could he survive that long and not die of hyperthermia?

Then Dan felt his blood run cold again. He suddenly had a feeling that he was being watched. He

now felt more scared than he had ever been in his entire life.

Shivering from the cold, Dan suddenly thought he heard a noise coming from the direction of the large water pool and glanced his eyes sideways.

In the gloom and seemingly walking over the top of the stretch of water was the shape of a person coming towards him. Within a few seconds Dan could make out it was the shape of a woman. Was this a spirit of some long dead witch out in these wilds? Dan would believe anything now.

Then as the form, seemingly floating rather than walking towards him, became even clearer, he saw that it was Harriet. Harriet had a very hard stern look on her face. Rather than being relieved at being found by Harriet, Dan was even more concerned now... she was a powerful witch after all. He was considering dashing away from her in fear, as she was fast and silently approaching.

Dan was terrified by the glare in her eyes as she came within arms' length of him and he turned, ready to run. Right at that moment, Harriet rose from the watery ground, rising upwards in front of him into the air. As her feet left the watery ground, streams of water ran off of her sandals. Harriet levitated right over the top of Dan's head, coming back down in the direction he had aimed to run in.

"What on earth are you doing right out here, Phoebe?" Harriet then asked calmly.

Dan paused to think before replying. "I said I had wanted to look at my family's history. I found a book that said Bernadette's body was buried out here," he responded, sticking to the truth. "I did find the

gravesite. It looked as though it had been disturbed a long time ago.”

“You silly child. It is quite dangerous out here; these marshes could suck you in. Had you said you wanted to come out here, I would have accompanied you and shown you where to look and kept you safe.”

“I’m sorry Harriet, I was just intrigued and it got dark so quickly. How did you know I was out here and how to find me?” Dan asked, mystified.

Harriet just laughed. “I’m a witch, remember? Not much gets past me.”

Harriet then held out her hand for Dan to take. “Come, I’ll get us back to the road and home. It will be a late meal for us tonight, it has already gone seven o’clock.”

“So, did you do anything else while you were out this afternoon, Phoebe?” Harriet quizzed as they made their way back to the village on foot.

Dan had expected a roasting from Harriet, after going all that way out without informing her and possibly getting totally lost, but she was surprisingly calm and pleasant. He knew not to mention anything about her talk with Stewart though.

“No, nothing. I went to the church like I said and started to read through a few books. I found one about Bernadette and it said she had been buried around here.” Dan repeated his story. “I was just curious to go to the grave; I thought I could get there and back easily.”

“And you haven’t been talking to anyone at all, over the last couple of days?” Harriet asked.

“Well, none other than the vicar and his wife who let me into the archive room,” Dan lied.

Harriet asked no more but her face hardened briefly from his reply.

Back once again at her home, Harriet had Dan quickly take off his wet things and gave him a soft gown to wear and a blanket to wrap around him. She had him sit in front of an open log fire in the snug to get warm. She gave him a hot drink that tasted like blackcurrant.

“We can’t do with you getting your death of cold dear, not when we are so close. You won’t have enough energy to get through your Levels of Power Five with a streaming cold,” Harriet gently chastised him after getting herself into a nightgown and sitting by him.

The drink was a special cocktail that she had made up and would continue to feminise Dan’s mind as well as allowing her to get into his head.

“Phoebe, sweetheart. Remember I told you how the villagers were responsible for the deaths of many witches... persecuting us and murdering us?”

“Yes, Auntie. One of the books I read today gave a long account of what had happened around these parts,” Dan honestly replied.

“Indeed. The government had already decreed that it was illegal for the common folk to execute a witch... but that did not stop them. There are still people today of that same mind... still wishing us harm. Beware of whom you speak to as some will try to get into your head and lie about us, tell you untruths about both ourselves and them.”

Dan knew just how powerful a witch Harriet was by how she had managed to stop him from returning to the states. He guessed she may have some idea about him talking to Stewart and decided to come clean about her talk with him.

“I did actually talk to someone in the village yesterday, I should have told you. But he told me that all that you wanted was to get revenge on the people who had harmed you. He... he said that Connie, Flick and Bridgette had once been men, sons of some of the villagers that had harmed your family.”

Harriet looked directly into Dan’s pretty face. “It is true that those three were once male and yes, I did it as an act of revenge. I took their sons and heirs and made them wanton females... to shame them. Maybe I acted impetuously but you must consider the anger that I felt at the time, watching my kindred burned to death... watching my unborn grandchild burned in her mother’s belly...

“All of my family, Phoebe, we had done nothing wrong. Our spells and potions were only ever made for good purpose. We never killed anyone. I could have done far worse to those three boys. Look at them now, they are happy, and they have an endless life of youth if they want it.”

Dan was almost feeling sorry for Harriet and how unbearable that period of time must have been for her, but her mention of doing far worse suddenly hardened him. “Far worse? You mean like killing them slowly with a deadly painful disease... like Ebola, which you threatened to do with my family and girlfriend if I did not do as you wished,” he stated in an icy tone.

“That was wrong of me, Phoebe, and it was just that, a threat. I never would have done it. I was just

desperate to save the world, save its entire people... over seven billion souls. You know yourself; you are intelligent enough to be aware of what is happening in the world today to know I speak the truth to you.”

The potion that Dan was drinking and Harriet’s words were working on Dan’s mind. It had been wrong of the villagers to illegally burn and behead witches. It seemed there still was resentment to this day, even though Harriet was trying to save mankind. He decided he would not waver in trying to help her.

“I saw graveyards out there, at least two different sites. I found that one had the inscription of Pretoria Pendyke upon it,” he then said, wanting to know that truth.

“Yes, Pretoria was one of my family, a Pendyke like me. That is my family graveyard, all of my kin. As witches we were not allowed to bury our dead amongst the common folk of the village. We had to bury them out in a remote spot on the moors. There are five graveyards out on the moors, including the Chattersns.”

“So, did Pretoria die and you raised her from the dead?” Dan questioned.

Harriet laughed. “Oh no, my darling, that which you found was Pretoria, my sister, Our Pretoria is from a different family, the Storrases.

“And I was told that you had a son. What of him?” Dan then asked.

Harriet looked grieved. “Yes, I do have a child. He would have been the father of Bernadette’s baby. He also practiced the arts, he was a warlock.”

“You say he was; is he dead?”