

Jack's Echo

Whoever said that being dead was a bad thing? Sure, there's little in the way of pleasures of the flesh, but there are compensations. Walking through walls for example; I haven't paid to see a play, or a movie for that matter, since I died.

There's an excellent performance of *The Great Gatsby* on at the Court Theatre this week. I've occupied several of my ectoplasmic evenings watching the players recreate 1920s New York. There's a certain sense I get, right where my chest used to be, when the actors get something exactly right.

Moon doesn't understand my obsession with plays. She's more of a movie lady herself. She spends a lot of her time at the cinema and I think that's where she gets most of her ideas about me. Moon is the only living person so far who's been able to see me properly. When I first shuffled off the coil I made a great song and dance about appearing to the living. No matter how much I rattled, moaned and carried on, no-one batted an eyelid. Dogs seem to notice me, but there's only so much meaningful discussion you can have with a canine.

Moon's supposed to meet me after tonight's performance. We have a regular meeting place under a sculpture in the Arts Centre. I quite like it, it's an impression of a house, black lines hung in the air. A ghost house.

A shame I can't live in it really.

I drifted through the wall at the theatre as the actors were taking their well deserved bows. When I was a lad I used to think it would be a grand thing to be able to peek into the women's dressing room unseen. I can't do it now of course, but the flicker of my eleven year old self thrills to know that I could if I wanted to.

I concentrated and drifted in the direction of the sculpture. Sometimes I pass one of the Ghost Tour guides herding tourists through the old buildings. I'm always tempted to moan and rattle at them, but I'm worried that one might actually see me and die of heart failure.

I got there before Moon. I'm always there first. She moves quickly despite her artificial leg but nothing beats being able to float through obstacles to speed up your travel time. To kill some time I drifted up to the ghost house. It's really fibre glass tubes hung from support wires so thin you'd swear it was floating there on its own. A tag down below declares it be *The Echo* by a man named Neil Dawson. I wish I'd been able to meet him while I could still shake hands.

"Jack?" I look down. I see Moon's small round face looking up at me from under her hat. Hats are Moon's one indulgence; lately she's been favoring cloche hats from the 1920's. I've been trying to persuade her to come and see the *Great Gatsby* with me; she'd at least enjoy the hats.

"Good evening Moon. New hat?" She's told me my voice sounds like I'm speaking from a long way away.

"Isn't it great?" Moon smiled. She's got perfect teeth.

"Indeed. You look splendid this evening, as always." I offer her an arm. It looks as solid and real as hers is to me. "Shall we take a stroll? We could wander by the Peacock Fountain."

"No can do, sorry Jack. I need to stay away from the Gardens for a bit." She looked at the ground.

“Got caught out did you?” I gave her arm a squeeze. She’s never been comfortable with her profession. Still, it keeps her in hats.

“Yeah. Esmeralda caught me on her patch and I had to make a break for it. That woman’s got issues.” She shook her head. “Anyway, that’s not why I’m here.”

“No?” We walked out onto the street. Moon got a bit of an odd look from an elderly woman walking her dog. The dog looked at me and wagged its tail.

“I finally found something for you.” Moon spends some of each waking day looking through old archives for me. She’s convinced I must have been a part of the Art’s Centre; and if she can remind me of my past, I’ll drift off into the afterlife.

If there is one.

We walked up Gloucester Street. Moon chattered away about something she found on the Library’s website. Apparently they’re celebrating their 150th birthday this year and have a whole lot of old photos. I’ve never been able to get the hang of the internet. I have a hard time pressing the keys for one thing.

We stopped outside the Centre for Contemporary Art. Another one of my favorite haunts. Good or bad the art there always makes me feel something. The more I can feel the more solid I am. The more grounded. That’s why I like spending time with Moon. She makes me feel like a person.

“Look!” Moon whipped a black and white photograph from her coat and flourished it at me. Someone had taken a picture of an old Library. It looked down onto several men seated at a square wooden table. Moon’s filed fingernail rested over a man in the middle seat, looking up at the photographer. “That’s you isn’t it?”

She was right, it was me. I’d been wearing an awful old suit, and I seemed to have more neck than head, but it was me alright.

Of all the rotten luck.

“Well? Aren’t you going to say something?” She tapped the photo again, hopping up and down on the spot. “That’s you!”

“Yes. Yes it is.” For the first time in my un-life I felt like I needed to sit down. I’d always wondered what it would be like to remember my life. Moon had told me about movies where people’s memories flashed back into their minds like a thunderbolt. My life crept back into my head like a fine-fingered mist.

“Jack? Are you alright?” Moon’s eyes were wide.

“Oh dear.” My memories told me who I’d been. I didn’t want Moon to know.

“Did you find anything else? Anything at all?” I said.

“No, nothing. Are you remembering something?” Moon reached out a hand to my shoulder. She’s the one person who can touch me; everyone else just passes straight through.

Behind her, shadows began swirling and I saw strange humanoid shapes half visible inside. I felt cold biting into me as I looked at them. There was an afterlife and it was waiting for me.

“Moon, I don’t want to go.” The shadows began to solidify. Moon followed my gaze, her sight sweeping right through them. Evidently the shadows were just for me.

“Can you see the light Jack? You need to go to it.” Tears leapt out of her eyes and ran down her face. She pushed me away, gentle but firm. “I’ll miss you.”

“We need to go Moon, now.”

“You need to go Jack. Go to the light.”

“There is no ruddy light!” One of the shadow men stepped out onto the street. It was tall and lean, its long arms almost touching the ground. Its face was completely blank. No eyes. No ears. Like a man under a hood. “Run! Go home!” I took a step away from the creature. Its arm snaked out and grabbed my wrist. Cold shot through me, so cold it burned into me.

Moon gripped my other arm. The creature turned and began to pull me towards one of the shadows. Other long smoky arms reached out to me. I screamed.

“Jack!” Moon hauled in the other direction. “Tell me what’s going on!”

“I don’t know. Just pull.” I yelled. I’m not strong. My proudest moment as a ghost was moving an iron door handle on the Provincial Chambers doors half an inch. Moon was stronger, and together we heaved against the shadows. Moon might not have seen them, but she must have felt them.

“Are you alright dear?” The old lady with the dog was staring at Moon. It must have looked pretty strange, a pretty young lady standing at a forty five degree angle and screaming at nothing. I’m surprised she stopped. The dog growled and leapt at the creature, sinking its teeth into its leg. The thing hissed and let go of my hand sending Moon and I sprawling onto the ground. The dog shook its head and continued to tug at the creature, shaking it so hard it started to come apart.

Moon and I collapsed back into a heap as the thing came apart altogether. The hissing cut off suddenly, punctuated by a loud bark from the dog. I looked up. The old woman reached out to me. She smiled.

“Kia ora ghosty. Need a hand?”