

The Original Black Spider Letters

Pentrich July 1816

Me mam has took a turn for t'worse and I'm not surprised we all this rain and cold weather - June were really awful, it made you feel down.

She took to her bed in t'middle o'day often and looks really grey around her face.

T'skin on her arms were hangin' loose. I couldna ger her to eat at all.

I dunna know who asked for her but Mrs Turner came to see her. Old Mrs Turner is big woman wi loads a'kids who lives in a tidy cottage in between Swanwick and Pentrich, as long as I can remember she'wer allus there. She brought a basket full o'herbs and flowers and set about chopping them up in a wooden bowl. She gev me a handful of weeds, well they looked like weeds anyroad, and told me to mix them in some hot water. Mrs Turner got mam to drink all this tincture without stoppin' or tekín' breath.

She left after about a hour and as she passed me she said, "There's a leak in back corner of me cottage. I expect you'll not mind fixing it will you."

"I will Mrs Turner, thank you." I opened the door for her, she walked out and set off back towards Swanwick.

On the way out she whispered in my ear, "You ought to know that your mam's quite poorly and needs lookín' after. I'll pop by when I pass next week."

Well, mam bucked up when the sun shone for a hour or two and she sat in t'door hole for a while. I thought Ma Turner's physic might be workín'. I know it wer serious cos she's stopped all t'work and cleanín' she were doing for folks.

I went a walk to Ripley last Sat' day to get a few beers we me mate and to get out o'house for a while and get me head raight, I left me mam on her own. We went to t'Cock Inn in Ripley village centre. I noticed that Owd Tom were in t'back room wi a couple o'Ripley lads. I put me hand up to Tom but he didn't seem to see me, or perhaps didna want to see me or me to see 'im, if you know wa I mean.

Everywhere you go nowadays folks is whispering in corners and luckín' ower their shoulders. I get t'feelin' that's sommat's amiss, I really do. I remember saying to

me mate that everybody seems miserable, angry or, in a funny way, suspicious.

The whole area seems miserable, I think it's more than t'weather.

A week or so later me mam, her didna seem to be any better, asked me to sit by her bed. "I want ti talk to thee son, there's things you should know." I pulled up a stool,

"What's on thee mind mam?"

"You'll know that your dad and me never had any more kids, there's only ever been thee. I didna have any that died at birth, nor any miscarriage."

I shuffled about on me stool, I'd never heard mam talk like this, I didna know what to say.

"Well you see, your Dad had some sort a problem that stopped us having kids, he didna seem interested, he even spoke t'vicar about it. He thought it wer God's plan for 'im."

"That did't matter mam, did it?" I said that without thinking. I looked at me mam, I could see she were strugglin'. Then a thought come into me head. "But Mam, where did I come from then?"

"Well, that's what I wanted to tell thee. You see, you're not your dad's, if you knows what I mean."

This were all gerrin' a bit heavy for me. I had hundreds a' questions but I didna know where to start.

"Did me Dad know?", this wer all I could think a'saying

"Yes, he did, it was just before we got married. He wanted to look after me, he were a good man and I miss 'im. You know he never ill-treated me and until he got badly he kept food on t'table. It's a good job I've got thee we woulda bin in a mess good and proper."

Mam changed subject, "I'm gerrin' a bit tired, go an see Nany Weightman while I have a little sleep. A jar a'ale will do thee good."

I could tell she didna want to say owt else so I made her comfy and wandered off t'White Horse.

When I wrote these notes I didna know what to put, it were a shock but I see that mam wanted to be honest wi me.

Anyhow, when I got t'pub I sat wi a couple a'lads who were playing doms.

It didn't take long until I drifted into deep thoughts, I couldn't get what mam had said out of my head.

"What's up with thee, tha looks like tha's lost a threepenny bit and found a hapny." It were John, one of the village lads.

"I'm alright, it's just that me mam's badly and I dunna know what to do for her. Ma Turner's bin to see her so I'm hoping she'll take a turn for the better."

They all accepted this and nobody said anything else about it. It were normal in the village when someone were badly, the men didn't say much, it were never a subject they talked about. We all know that they either get better or they'd die and, most of the time, it didn't take long one way or the other.

I went back home after a couple of pints and found that mam had gone to bed. I were full of questions. I wanted to know everything.

I went to mam's side, she were lookin' no better, but she did manage a smile of sorts. I put me hand on her forehead, I expected she'd be hot as if I'd left fire burning, but she were stone cold.

I thought about it and I were becoming to understand a bit clearer, "Did me dad know who it was as were me real dad?"

"Yes, he did and it's a secret he took to his grave. It's that what I wanted to tell thee afore it's too late."

I looked at mam wondering what she were goin' to say next.

"Your real father is Thomas Bacon."

You coulda knocked me down with a feather. I stared at mam in a daze.

"Go on and get me a drink of water, lad, and I'll tell thee all about it. I need to get it off me mind afore it's too late."

I went to get some water, I thought to myself that it were twice she said 'afore it's too late.'

I came back with water and I knew straight away, mam were dead.