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THE WITCH OF WOOTTON MARSH DON FALGRIM

by

Synopsis

All is not as it seems in the sleepy village of Wootton Marsh. Strange things have been happening and yet there seems to be no answer. Cars and machinery suddenly stop working, things disappear without explanation, people fall ill unexpectedly, while others are miraculously cured. As more and more strange occurrences develop one thing becomes clear, the mysterious Fanny Legge and her faithful dog are not all they seem.

With many twists and turns, the story builds to a dramatic climax, when finally the truth is revealed, leaving the reader with more questions than answers. Is it conceivable that witches and ghosts do really inhabit our world? Are we absolutely sure there are no other life forms on this planet of ours?

Chapter One

**March 1st 1983.
Lewin's Farm, Babingley Marsh,
near King's Lynn, Norfolk.**

Jim Lewin stomped into the kitchen, his oilskins dripping rainwater, gleaming in the morning light.

"Take them off Jim, for God's Sake, and get those wellies off. I don't want to have to clean this floor again, I only did it yesterday."

Betty left the frying pan sizzling on the Aga, the ripe smell of bacon permeating the whole kitchen, to assist her husband off with the yellow slicker.

"Bastard thing's done it again."

"You mean Freda?"

"Every bloody time on the Hump, it seems."

"You haven't had her serviced for yonks, saving money you said," Betty hung the dripping oilskins on a peg in the old conservatory as Jim eased off his boots with the remover, shaped like a beetle, concreted into the doorstep.

"Don't rub it in, love, it's wet, cold and I'm hungry."

"God, the bacon!" Betty rushed back into the huge kitchen to pull the pan from the stove, "Blast, look at that, burnt to a frazzle. Why don't we flog that wretched thing, buy a new one, we can afford it."

She up-ended the pan into the swillbin, lay fresh rashers in the pan.

"There's nothing wrong with Freda. She goes like a good-un. I don't know what it is. Every time I take her over the Hump it seems to happen."

Betty jiggled the frying pan, the bacon sizzled fiercely, looked at her husband pityingly, "Sounds like witchcraft love."

Jim sat down gingerly, scowling with pain, "It's true," he protested, "Started in the shed first time. I take it along the track to start on the field and then she just dies on me just as I cross the Hump."

Betty deftly threw the crisp rashers onto a dinner plate, broke two eggs into the pan, using her left hand only. "You say that every time I say Freda needs a good servicing, get Wally out to look at it. Your back's bad, have a rest, Bobby can do Slades for you. He's got nothing better to do, let him earn his keep."

"Wally'll love coming out in this." Jim waved his hand to indicate the rain pouring in slanting rods past the windows.

Betty sliced the eggs onto the plate, threw a slice of bread into the pan, dunked it in the bacon fat until it was golden brown took it over to her husband, "You want a Neurofen?" He nodded, "Betty it hurts like buggery!"

"Lifting those bales yesterday. You aren't a young bloke any longer you know."

"Yeah, he is getting geriatric Mumsy."

Robert Lewin entered the kitchen from the old servant's stairs.

"Shut the door," cried Betty, "If you're as fit as your Dad when you get to his age you can think yourself lucky."

Robert mimed playing a violin, poured himself a mug of tea from the outsize teapot. "What's for breakfast? What's up Pop? Old age galloping on." Robert sat down at the long refectory table, next to his Father.

"Freda's packed up again," Betty selected four more rashers of bacon and tossed them into the pan.

"Don't tell me," Robert held up a hand, "I've been shanghaied again, plough Slade while he sits in the lounge studying form."

"Bout time you earned your keep young feller-me-lad," reproved Betty, "Instead of swanning around strumming that guitar polluting the countryside in that banger!"

Robert sang, "Tell me the old old story, you're speaking disrespectfully about the woman I love Mumsy."

"You can make love to Freda for a change today," Betty was tart, she jiggled the pan.

"Jesus, look at the weather, why can't we leave it until tomorrow? One day isn't going to make any difference, I'll get soaked and cold."

"Because it won't get done, you'll think of another excuse in the morning. Your Father's back's playing up, now do your duty and help out."

"I was going to Norwich this morning."

"Come on son, it won't take long, four hours should see you through."

Jim's face creased with pain as he forked bacon and egg. "That'll make it midday, I promised to meet Tracy in Norwich for lunch, I'd never make it."

"Phone her, tell her she can come here instead."

Betty did another left hand job on two eggs.

"If Freda's packed up it'll take Wally two hours to fix it, it'll be four o'clock before I'm through. I can't expect Tracy to sit around here all that time, listening to Dad tell her all about his war experiences, bore her out of her skull."

"Put her off, if she's anything like, she'll understand." Betty fried another slice of bread.

"Tracy doesn't understand farms, she's been genteelly brought up, nurtured in a cultivated environment of stocks, shares and money."

"If she marries you she'll soon have to learn, won't she?"

Betty handed him the plate, "Eat that, I'll phone Wally." She went to the medicine cabinet, took two tablets from a packet, "Get those down you love, ease it a bit!"

"Better tell Wally to bring the tow truck," Jim swallowed the pills and washed them down with tea.

"Oh no, not the Hump again?" Robert mopped his egg with dry bread.

"Fraid so son," Jim massaged his lumber region, "Kevin reckons that's an old tumulus, bung full of mystic powers."

"He's worse than a bloody witchdoctor, I bet he has chicken bones hanging behind his bed."

Ellen Lewin was titian-haired, lithe, full breasted, and resembled her Father, bare footed and clad in just a towelling robe.

"How'd you know that?" Robert placed two rounds in the toaster, "You been there?"

"I wouldn't have anything to do with that shit, he's creepy. Hair like black treacle, a little mouth and a face full of acne scars. He drinks mint-tea, no dairy products, always whingeing about pollution and telling us all about ley-lines, at long, boring length."

Ellen poured herself some tea, then watered it down under the tap. "What's a... one of those you said just now?"

Jim arose careful to keep his back straight. "An ancient burial ground, usually located where ley-lines cross."

Ellen sat down at the table as Jim eased himself into the armchair adjacent to the Aga, "You have been with him."

Robert was triumphant. "Do me a favour, brother."

"How'd you know about ley-lines then?"

"I'm not your Tracy Middleton, beautiful and brainless, I can read."

"She's highly intelligent."

"She's fooled me, the only intellect she possesses is between her legs." Ellen sipped her tea.

Betty returned from the phone in time to hear this, "That's enough of that talk young lady, I thought University education was supposed to elevate your mind?"

"The only elevation Uni teaches you is how to keep your legs crossed against all the randy males Mumsy. Education is confined to a study of the Karma Sutra."

"God help us!" Betty lifted the bread from the toaster, tossed it front of Robert, "Marmalade's in there!" She indicated the cupboard and inserted two more slices into the toaster.

"What did Wally say?"

Jim lay back, closed his eyes. "Be down in half an hour, get togged up Bobby, he'll need you to steer Freda, you can give him a hand."

"Bout time the lazy bastard did something, apart from shagging that moon-faced cow Tracy. She pregnant yet? Don't suppose she's heard of the Pill... too plebian for her."

"Ellen, I won't have that kind of talk in my house, do you hear me?"

Betty waited for the toast to pop up, the smell of toast and fried bacon permeated the kitchen.

"You're a dinosaur, Mumsy, this is the end of the twentieth century."

"What's all this about these ley-lines got to do with the Hump?"

Ellen spelled it out for Jim, "Roughly speaking, it is reckoned they're like a printed circuit that covers the entire planet, act like a conductor for energy flowing all over the earth."

"Take no notice of that crap, Dad. Kev's a weirdo, like that Fanny Legge. They'd get on well together."

"There's nothing wrong with Fanny, just a little odd that's all, all those cats she keeps, looking for herbs all the time."

Betty began clearing the soiled crocks from the table, then loaded the dishwasher, "She's made some pretty good predictions in the past."

"Do us a favour Mumsy, she's as bent as a corkscrew, a fruit and nut case."

"What kind of power goes along these lines?" Jim sat still trying not to move unnecessarily.

"Nobody has been able to prove anything." Ellen put more bread in the toaster.

"It's all a load of crap, that's why," Robert chomped away at his toast.

"Kevin reckons that ley-lines cross over the Hump. This force disrupts anything alien, like electrical discharges that interferes with the flow of this energy, like the body rejecting transplants."

"For someone who thinks Kev Wilson is a nutter along with Miss Legge, you've certainly swallowed a lot of his brand of crap," said Robert, "Spent a lot of time with him, have you?"

"No, I haven't, you asshole. Just because you're too thick to embrace new ideas." Ellen removed the toasted bread.

"Never mind arguing, get your Dad's oilskins on ready for Wally when he gets here," rasped Betty. "We don't want any more fairy tales."

"Why is it Freda always breaks down when you drive her over the Hump then?" demanded Ellen. "Happened last time, a couple of months back and then just before Christmas, and if I recall correctly Wally couldn't find anything wrong with Freda, she started again as soon as he'd towed it off the Hump."

"How come his truck didn't break down then?" Robert pulled on his Father's oilskin trousers.

"He didn't drive onto the Hump, you had to get a longer tow rope," Ellen crunched dry toast.

"Sounds a little weird to me love," said Jim, "It is true though, Wally couldn't find anything wrong with Freda on both those occasions."

"Dad, the only reason that crate breaks down is because you don't have it serviced properly." Robert pulled on his Wellingtons.

"We don't have trouble starting Freda, she's as good as gold, all that rubbish about servicing just to milk more cash out of us." Jim handed Betty his mug and nodded towards the teapot.

"Well, we'll soon find out won't we?" Ellen pointed out the window, "Wally's just arrived and he doesn't look too happy."

"Who'd be happy in this bloody weather? It's pissing down."

"Don't use that kind of language in my house young man," rapped Betty, pouring more tea for Jim.

"Ploughing Slade in this weather, stupid. Should have been done last autumn like all the other fields. It'll be waterlogged with all this rain."

There was an imperative hammering at the door to the house inside the conservatory. Wally Thompson was lean, balding, swarthy, tall. His close-set eyes were black, his cheeks hollow and he always looked in need of a shave. Ellen swore he hadn't washed his engineer's overalls in all the time he'd been handling the Lewin's farm machinery. Apart from the fact he rolled his own, which added pungency to a compote of oil, diesel, grease

and dirt, he suffered from body odour and chronic halitosis.

Betty and Jim had long learned to tolerate the miasma, which accompanied Wally. He was a genius with machinery and his charges were reasonable. Robert could endure it for a reasonable period. Ellen's oral toleration threshold was fragile so she kept her distance. Like most halitosis sufferers Wally was blithely unaware of his problem, always insisted on speaking with his face thrust into that of his correspondent.

"Freda again, is it?"

Wally advanced into the kitchen and went over to the teapot, he poured himself a mug full. There were oily finger marks on the mug, "Where is she?"

"The Hump," offered Robert, bravely unflinching when Wally gave a guffaw at close range.

"Good job I brought the long tow-rope!"

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**Monday, March 1st, 1983.
Lewin's Farm, Babingley
Marsh, near King's Lynn.**

"Why do you say that?" Jim tried to ease himself from the arm chair, wincing with pain.

"Fanny Legge was gathering those weeds along the lane yesterday on the marsh, said the spirits were strong. Said that you had a bad back."

Wally brought out the pouch containing the makings, and began rolling a cylinder, he licked the paper with his green tongue.

"You're kidding us, of course?" Robert's oilskins crinkled as he moved.

Wally scratched a match on the leg of his overall, lit the evil spindle, puffed out a cloud of choking smoke, "No, why? Have you got a bad back, Jimbo?"

"Lifting bales yesterday."

"She reckons she could cure it for you if you let her," Wally sucked smoke in, his cheeks denting like a crushed can of Coke.

"Incanting over the chicken bones?" jeered Robert, grinning, wafting away the poison cloud enveloping Wally.

"Seen Bill Watson lately?" Wally quaffed tea from the oil stained mug.

"Not since Christmas, the party at the village hall, remember? Betty tried to ignore the noxious cloud that rolled round the kitchen. He'd just been to the chiropractor for his slipped disk, didn't look at all well"

"Don't tell us, Fanny gave him the treatment and he's cured?" scoffed Ellen.

Wally nodded, exhaling twin columns of di-phosgene in dragon tails.

"Hasn't had any pain since she laid hands on him last month. Bill reckons it's a miracle. I'd give it a whirl, Jimbo, wotcha got to lose?"

"You're making this up, of course?"

"Cross my heart, Betty."

Wally was serious, "Ring Bill up, ask him."

"Fluke" declared Robert, "Bill was probably getting over it anyway."

"He was on the verge of having surgery, BUPA."

Wally drained the mug, then refilled it. Betty hastily added milk from the bottle before Wally touched it.

"Cancelled the appointment."

"Witchcraft comes to Babingley" Robert headlined, "Our reporter told us that Funny Fanny is now raising the dead in this remote Norfolk village. Bring your granny's corpse to Babingley for a full resuscitation."

Wally shrugged, blew ash from the end of his cigarette without removing it from his mouth. "If I had your problem Jimbo, I'd sooner go to Fanny Legge than I would to old Lassiter, I tell you. He'd tell you to take an aspirin and a hot bath and rest up for a week."

"I find it hard to believe," Betty looked longingly at the canister of air freshener on the shelf over the sink, "Bill's suffered from that disk for years."

"Come on Wally, let's get on with it. I've got to do Slade today, instead of snogging with my girlfriend. I'll be sexually frustrated," said Robert, "I don't suppose Fanny Legge could cure that."

Wally grinned, showing his yellow fangs, advanced pyorhea "Willy's just bought the old Priors, going to have it done up, going to cost half a mil. I'd marry her son. You'll be laughing all the way to the bank. He's a multi-millionaire. That should cure your problems."

"How about that, Bobby? You can have it off in the Bahamas if you play your cards right, won't matter if she's pregnant, just like 'Room at the Top,'" Ellen tried to avoid the gas clouds threatening to engulf her, "I've got to wash my hair. See you again, Wally." She exited up the stairs.

"Sorry to bring you out in this weather Wally," said Jim grimacing.

"It'll start as soon as we move her off the Hump, Jimbo"

"The spirits are strong today," intoned Robert "Let's get with it. I'll have to get Tracy pregnant now in view of the news. I'd buy you a brand new tractor Dad, repair the cowshed, and the fencing."

"Just get on with it, never mind the dreams of love," warned Betty, "I don't suppose Willy Middleton wants you to marry Tracy, pregnant or otherwise. You're a commoner, no pedigree."

"Do the Middleton stock a world of good, inject some backbone into centuries of in-breeding. Come on Wally, let's go!"

Wally nipped out the cigarette, stuck it behind his ear, 'Think about Fanny havin' a gander at your back, Jimbo. Ring Bill up ask him!"

Jim finished his breakfast, eased his back against the chair, "Have to get Lassiter in, love. I'll be stuck here all week if I don't."

"Perhaps we should do as Wally said, let Funny Fanny have a look? She can't do any harm just incanting over you." Betty began clearing away the debris from the table.

"Oh come on love, you don't believe all that rubbish do you? Faith healing, laying-on of hands?"

"We haven't seen Billy down the Club for the past few weeks have we? Give him a bell, see what he says?"

Betty loaded the powder into the dishwasher, "He's not one to mince words, he'll soon tell you whether Wally's romancing or not."

"You're kidding of course? Billy would just give a belly laugh, tell you about chicken bones or Taro cards."

Betty shut the door to the washer and turned it on. The machine began to pump like an asthmatic donkey. "Ring him," she urged, "Can't do any harm."

"Give us the phone then. He's gonna believe I've flipped. He's always rubbishing Fanny and her cats, herb gathering, thinks she's a bloody witch."

Betty handed him the mobile and read out the number from a phone address book.

"He's gonna love me this time of the morning," grouched Jim as he stabbed at numbers.

Betty began clearing the table as Ellen came down the stairs a towel around her head,

"Where's the dryer? I suppose that half-arsed bastard's bugged it up again?" She began searching for the drier on the shelving.

"You're coming this liberal stuff too much, my girl. God alone knows what goes on up there in Nottingham, apart from being a seat of learning, Your language is atrocious."

"You're old fashioned Mumsy, language is language if the meaning is clear."

"I prefer to remain stuffy, if that's the case young woman, so less of the gutter stuff, understand?"

"Yes, ma'am!" Ellen gave an American salute, "Now where has he put that bloody drier? Always washing his golden locks, thinks Tracy likes him smelling of underarm and shampoo, gets her all fruity"

"Ellen!" snapped Betty.

"OK, OK, sorry, offending the old working class mores, am I?"

She rummaged amongst the books and piles of newspapers, "Wait til we're invited to the Priory for the wedding, old Middleton looking like an oyster with sulphuric acid poured all over him, sourpuss giving Bobby the evil eye over Tracy's swelling stomach, praying that the local press aren't around to speculate on when the bastard's likely to be dropped. That should be well worth recording on celluloid, and have you seen Mrs? .. Christ! Talk about Beelzebub... she's like Tutenkhamun's wife, just exhumed her from a casket, tarted up like a corpse in one of those American funeral parlours. She smells of formaldehyde."

"That you, Billy? Sorry to get you out of kip, who? Jim Lewin, Who'd you think it was, The Lottery manager. How're you doing? How's the old disc these days?"

Ellen stopped rummaging to listen, "He phoning Billy Watson?"she mimed. Betty nodded, finger to her lips.

"You're joking?" Jim looked over at Betty, and pointed at the phone with his free forefinger. "No kidding? Yeah, I've got back trouble, can't move mate, lifting bales yesterday, think I've done it in. You did? When? get away? she came to you? charged you a bomb, of course, nothing? Wouldn't take any money, donation to the cat refuge, is that all? sounds too good to be true. I guess you're right, yeah, I will, if she was able to do that for you, can't afford not to, can I? You're not kidding me are you? OK, sorry but slipped disks aren't easily cured and just Funny Fanny giving you the treatment seems a bit like a miracle, yeah, whenever you're in the Club next I'll stand you one. Thanks mate, be seeing you."

Jim telescoped the aerial and handed it back to Betty

"Well?"

Betty put the phone on the mantelpiece, "What did he say?"

"Fanny did what Wally said, cured him, hasn't had any pain, trouble since she did it last month."

Jim plainly found it hard to believe. Betty began shrugging into her plastic raincoat.

"What're you doing, love?" Jim looked alarmed.

"I'm going to get Funny Fanny over here," she announced.



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