

# The Black Crystal Ball

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*You're about to discover what Caroline sees...*

The rain had been falling since mid-morning.

Not heavy, not dramatic—just a steady, miserable drizzle that soaked into everything and made the day feel longer than it should have been. The windows were streaked with it, the garden looked dull and defeated, and inside the house the air had taken on that familiar, restless feeling of being cooped up too long.

George picked up Caroline from her night shift at the Kortts Centre at 0700 as usual on a Sunday morning.

Caroline turned the key, pushed the front door open with her shoulder, the weight of the night shift still clinging to her like damp fog. The house was still quiet, the girls obviously not up yet. It was the kind of quiet that only existed when everyone else was awake, but somewhere else. She kicked off her shoes, hung her jacket on the banister, and exhaled a long, tired breath. George asked her if she wanted a tea or coffee, but she declined and started off across the living room.

The living room was dim, curtains half-drawn against the early morning light. She crossed the room, intending only to climb the stairs and collapse into bed, but paused as a faint shiver ran across her skin. A cold thread, like someone trailing a fingertip down her spine.

“Overtired,” she muttered, brushing it off.

Upstairs, she changed into an old T-shirt and slid beneath the duvet. Sleep took her quickly, but it wasn't the soft, drifting kind. It was sharp, immediate, and full of shadows.

She dreamt of a dark surface—glass or stone—reflecting nothing. A sphere suspended in blackness. Something moved behind it, a shape she couldn't quite see, whispering without sound. The sphere pulsed once, like a heartbeat.

Caroline jerked awake, heart thudding. The room was still. Too still.

She rubbed her eyes. “Just a dream,” she whispered, though she wasn't convinced and she tried to get back to sleep.

George stood in the kitchen, rummaging through the fridge while the girls hovered nearby.

“Dad, can we go somewhere today?” Christine asked, bouncing on her toes.

“Somewhere fun,” Samantha added. “Not the supermarket.”

George closed the fridge with a sigh. “Well, your mum’s sleeping, so we need to keep the noise down. Somewhere out of the house would be good.”

Christine’s eyes lit up. “There’s a Psychic and Mystic Fayre at the community hall!”

George raised an eyebrow. “A what?”

“You know,” Samantha said, “crystals, tarot cards, weird people in scarves. It’ll be fun.”

George hesitated, then shrugged. “Fine. But if someone tries to sell me healing moon water, we’re leaving.”

The girls cheered.

The community hall smelled of incense and old carpet. Stalls lined the walls, draped in velvet cloths and glittering with crystals, charms, and hand-painted signs promising insight, clarity, and spiritual awakening.

George walked behind the girls, hands in his pockets, trying not to look like a man who’d been dragged somewhere against his will.

A woman with silver-streaked hair and too many bracelets beckoned them over. “Come, come. Let the energies guide you.”

Christine giggled. Samantha nudged her father. “Go on, Dad. Let the energies guide you.”

George rolled his eyes but stepped closer.

Across the room, there was an old man sat behind a stall next to Madame Zena, Spiritualist and Palm reader.

On the table before him, along with quite a few crystal balls of various sizes, sat a black crystal ball, perfectly smooth, sat on an intricately carved wooden stand. The ball seemed to be absorbing the light around it.

He felt an odd pull towards the ball.

“What’s this made of?” he asked.

The old man smiled slowly. “Obsidian. But not ordinary obsidian. This one has... history.”

George snorted. “Everything here has history.”

“Not like this,” he said. “This one chooses its owner.”

The girls exchanged excited looks.

George picked it up. It was heavier than he expected, cool against his palms. For a moment, he thought he saw something shift inside it—like smoke curling behind glass.

He blinked. It was gone.

“How much?” he asked.

That sir, is Eighteen pounds and not a penny less. It will come with the stand and the black silk.

“What’s the silk for?” George asked. “Its all explained in the books you will buy later on this morning”. George put down the crystal ball and said he’d think about it.

George and the two girls went around all the stalls. Although he knew the ball was very attractive, he wanted to know more about it, so he bought two books, Scrying for beginners and The history of the crystal ball through the ages. They wandered around more stalls and George went back to the old man at the stall. "OK, I'll take it". "Yes, I thought you would", said the old man. "I said that the black silk would be explained in the books you were going to buy, well you bought the right ones". Reiterated the old man. "How did you know?" quizzed George. The old man gave him a barely discernible, knowing wink, as he took a twenty pound note from George. The old man passed him a note on a piece of paper and pressed it into George's hand. "Read this when you leave here and not before", said the old man.

They all went out to the car park to get into the car to go home. George pulled out the keys from his pocket and the note slipped to the floor. He bent down and picked it up. He opened the carefully folded note. Inside, written with black ink, was the note. It said

*Let there be no curse or swear*

*its ears are everywhere*

*With care thou seeést true*

*What this ball will bring to you*

*Eighteen pounds you'll spend,*

*this crystal ball I vend.*

*The stand and silk are free,*

*Caroline will wake 'fore tea.*

"Now, how did he know about that?" George said aloud, "What's that Dad?" Samantha asked. He told them what the old man had done when he went to the stall the very first time and what the man had told him to do with the paper on leaving to set off home.

George got out of the car and made his way back into the hotel, his curiosity aroused. He went straight to the corner of the room to where the old man's table was. It was now occupied by Zena, Clairvoyant.

"Where is the old man?" George asked Zena,

"What old man?" She replied.

"The old man who was on this stall before you came here?" "I have been here all day", said Zena

George looked around the room to make sure that he wasn't in the wrong corner. He looked at Zena with mistrust and went to the next stall adjacent to Zena's. He asked if the stall-holder had been there all afternoon and if he had seen an old man with a stall anywhere in the building. The stall-holder said he had been there, indeed, all afternoon and that there wasn't a man of his description, anywhere on the premises. George thanked him and walked out of the hotel to the car. He got in the car and Samantha asked him which stall he had been to. George told them about the stall where he had got the black crystal ball and stand, and, the silk square from. Samantha and Christine replied that they hadn't seen that stall. They had been all round the room and that the only stalls that had been selling things, were the central one. "How do you explain this note then?" He produced the folded note that was given to him by the old man on the stall. It was as he had said. The writing in black ink was still there in rhyme.

Later on that evening, Caroline woke to the smell of dinner and the muffled sound of the girls arguing over the TV remote. She stretched, feeling the remnants of the strange dream clinging to her mind.

Downstairs, George grinned at her from the sofa. “You’re awake! Come see what I bought.”

She joined him, still groggy. He held out the black crystal ball, resting on a small wooden stand.

“What do you think?” he asked proudly.

Caroline frowned. The moment she saw it, her stomach tightened. It was the sphere from her dream. The same darkness, the same coldness.

She reached out, fingertips brushing the surface.

A flash—sharp, bright, overwhelming.

A woman screaming.

A corridor smeared with blood.

A man’s shadow turning toward her.

A heartbeat that wasn’t hers.

Caroline gasped and snatched her hand back.

George laughed. “Static shock?”

She forced a smile. “Something like that.”

But inside, her pulse hammered. The dream. The coldness. The flash. It wasn’t coincidence.

The ball sat on the table, silent and perfect, as if waiting.

And Caroline knew—without knowing how—that it hadn’t chosen George at all.

It had chosen her.

George sat at the dining table with the black crystal ball positioned directly in front of him, elbows planted, chin resting on his hands. He stared at it with the intensity of a man trying to will a stubborn appliance into working.

Nothing happened.

The ball remained perfectly still, perfectly dark, perfectly indifferent.

Samantha wandered past with a bowl of cereal. “Dad, you look like you’re trying to hypnotise it.”

“I’m giving it a chance,” he muttered.

Christine leaned over his shoulder. “Maybe it doesn’t like you.”

George shot her a look. “It’s a lump of volcanic glass, It doesn’t like or dislike anyone.”

But even as he said it, he felt a faint sting of irritation. He’d bought the thing because it felt... interesting. Mysterious. A bit of fun. And now it sat there like a smug ornament.

Caroline entered the room, hair still damp from the shower, looking fresher but with a faint crease between her brows. She paused when she saw the ball.

“You’re still at it?” she asked.

George straightened. “I’m just... seeing how it works.”

“It doesn’t work,” Christine said cheerfully. “It’s just a shiny paperweight.”

Caroline moved past them to make tea, but she couldn't help glancing at the ball. Every time she looked at it, she felt a faint tug in her chest — like a thread pulling taut.

She tried to ignore it.

Tried to pretend the dream hadn't happened.

Tried to pretend the flash she'd seen last night was just exhaustion.

But the moment she turned her back, she felt it again — a cold ripple across her skin.

She set the kettle down a little too hard.

George noticed. "You okay?"

"Fine," she said quickly. "Just tired."

He watched her for a moment, then turned back to the ball. "Maybe it needs a ritual. Or a spell. Or something."

Samantha snorted. "Dad, you don't even believe in that stuff."

"I'm open-minded," he said defensively.

Caroline took her mug and sat at the far end of the table, deliberately avoiding the ball's line of sight — if a ball could have one. But even from across the room, she felt its presence like a pressure behind her eyes.

She closed them, breathing slowly.

And then it happened.

A flicker.

A flash.

Not as strong as last night, but sharp enough to make her grip the mug with both hands.

A corridor.

A door swinging open.

A man's heavy footsteps.

A woman's breath hitching in terror.

Caroline's eyes snapped open.

The mug rattled against the table.

George frowned. "Caroline?"

She forced a smile. "Just... dizzy."

But she wasn't dizzy. She was terrified.

Because the vision — whatever it was — hadn't come from her imagination.

It had come from the ball.

And it was getting stronger.

A knock came at the front door. The old lady from the council flats, told him that she had just seen a boy bend down and pinch the wheel trims off his car. She described the boy. George peered round the corner, saw the boy and gave chase. The little bastard was much too fast for him. I should have put some shoes on he told himself. The thief turned round and called George an old shit. George, out of breath now told the lad to 'go and take a running jump off a high building' or words to that effect and left it at that.

He would remember who he was, and wait for him going past the house. One of these days....! There had been a spate of wheel-trim thefts in the last couple of weeks. The little bastards! In broad daylight, they would go round the other sides of the cars and just bend down and steal the wheel trims. He saw them do it once without realising what they were doing. He knew now!

Bedtime, a few hours later, George turned to put his arm around Caroline to find she wasn't there! The bathroom light was not on, so she couldn't be in there, he thought. The stairs light was not on either. George now stood at the top of the stairs. He peered down into the hall-way and saw a faint glow coming from the front room. He shouted "Caroline... are you down there?" No answer. He tried again. "Caroline...Are you down there?" Still no answer. He decided to go down the stairs. He trod carefully down the stairs in the dark. As he neared the front-room door, the glow disappeared. He cautiously looked into the front room.

It was in complete darkness now. He turned the light on. There, sat at the coffee table, cross-legged on the floor, was Caroline, staring into the black crystal ball. George called softly to her, but she didn't answer. He edged nearer towards her, but still, she didn't move, or look at him. George passed his hand in front of her eyes. There was not a hint of recognition, or movement from her eyes. As he went to take the black crystal ball from the table, she looked at him. "What am I doing down here?" she asked sleepily.

"I was going to ask you the same thing" George said as he put the black crystal ball back onto the mantelpiece.

As he put it down, Caroline rose from the floor with a shriek of pain. "How long have I been sat here?" she said rubbing her aching legs.

"I don't honestly know, Caroline, but I think we should go back to bed now. We'll talk about it in the morning." As George turned the light off.

Next morning, it was uneventful, George setting off to the office, Caroline to work at the kortts Centre for a day shift, both girls off to school.