

Face to Face **by Eleni Konstantine**

The keys rattled in my hand. I couldn't make myself stop shaking. Being a scorching Australian January day, the shiver was not due to the cold. Instead an all consuming fear rippled through me. I had tried in vain for the last two years to forget this house and all that ever took place here.

Calm yourself Clare. I took a deep breath, steadied myself as much as possible and placed the key successfully into the lock. Taking another deep breath, I turned the key and pushed the door open. I gazed inside, afraid to step over the threshold in case the sadness and the memories would overwhelm me.

'To late for that,' I muttered and entered the house.

It had been in November two years past that had changed my life forever. I had been alone in the house preparing dinner, and waiting for my husband, Jimmy, to come home. He was late, and an overwhelming anxiety had enveloped me but I had put this down to premenstrual tension. Oh, how I wish that is all it had been!

The telephone had rung. Its noise had sounded menacing as it vibrated throughout the house. Instinct told me that something was wrong.

'Mrs Lambert?' a deep voice on the other end had enquired.

Something had been wrong all right, I now thought as I gazed down the hall toward where the kitchen was. Jimmy had just been in an accident and he was in a critical condition. I had rushed to the hospital in a state of shock. Everything around me appeared to be in slow motion. It was as if it were hours before I reached the hospital rather than the twenty minutes it actually took.

I hadn't had a chance to say goodbye as I had been too late. My husband's injuries had been fatal. From that moment on an inconceivable pain, anguish, and emptiness had entered into my life. A hold which continued to this day.

I stood in the hallway of the home that Jimmy and I had bought together, had lived in together, and had intended to raise our family in. After Jimmy's death, the house had invoked too many memories. This is why I had gone away to a country region to work in a small art

gallery. I had tried to find solace there, but the pain would not subside. Two years later, the agony was still there. Nevertheless, it was time to come home.

'Jimmy,' I whispered as tears gathered in my eyes. 'Damn you Jimmy, why did you have to leave me?' I screamed down the hallway. The only response I received was my echo.

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Sitting in front of my dressing table, I removed my make-up as if in slow motion. In my mind's eye I recalled memories of my life with Jimmy. In the mirror, a movement other than my own caught my eye. I looked toward the movement and focused my gaze. Fear gripped my stomach. A transparent figure stood behind me in the mirror.

How could I not have known that someone was in the room with me?

In that instant, I turned around. Nobody was there! Okay Clare, get a grip.

I closed my eyes, took a deep breath and swivelled my chair to be facing the mirror. 'Just mind tricks. You've been spooked about coming home girl. No wonder everything appears to go bump in the night.'

I opened my eyes and looked into the mirror.

Sure enough, the figure still loomed. Compelled by fear and curiosity, I looked up, into its face.

'Jimmy.'

I must be having a breakdown, I thought.

Even if this was true, Jimmy's face continued to stare back at me with a crooked grin from ear to ear.

'Hi Clare.'

Ice had frozen my body but I had to turn around to double-check that nobody was there. So I turned around and was confronted with an empty room once more. My breath became short and my hands started to shake. Panting, I turned to face the mirror and Jimmy's form once more.

'Come to me Clare,' he said, as he raised his arms out to me.

I closed my eyes tight and opened them a few moments later. I hoped that his image would disappear for my sanity's sake, but at the same time I wanted it to stay. My very soul cried out for him.

'I've missed you Snowy.' The image whispered.

I looked at my reflection in the mirror, and my hazel eyes stared back. My wayward brown curls were tied back in a ponytail. Jimmy had once commented that my skin would put Snow White to shame. Hence his pet name for me, Snowy.

I shifted my eyes to Jimmy's athletic frame.

With his blonde hair, piercing blue eyes, slightly bronzed skin, and his crooked grin. I had always thought he belonged on the cover of a romance novel. He had laughed when I told him so.

'Just call me Fabio,' He had whispered tartly in my ear.

Tears filled my eyes. My life had ended the day his had. He was my soul mate and he now looked at me from within the mirror.

I wiped away the tears and smiled at him. My heart leapt when he flashed me his dazzling smile in return.

'Come to me,' he repeated.

I searched for a red lipstick and scrawled with it on the mirror in big bold letters, 'I'M COMING.'

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Katrina started to sort through Clare's things in the bedroom. There wasn't that much to pack as Clare hadn't had a chance to put everything away.

Katrina sighed. Finding her sister dead on the bed had rattled her, but what had unnerved her most of all was the smile that had been plastered on Clare's face. She had looked so peaceful like an angel ascending to the heavens.

Clare's heart had apparently just stopped working in her sleep. It was baffling as she had always been a healthy person. However, she had not been herself since Jimmy died. Maybe it was true when people said that people died of a broken heart. It seemed so in her sister's case.

Sighing, Katrina placed a bag on the bed and thought she heard her name being whispered. She looked toward the doorway but no one was there.

She searched the house but discovered nobody. Putting it down to her imagination, Katrina returned to the bedroom. As she turned toward the dressing table, she stopped short.

There in the mirror were the figures of her sister and her brother-in-law. Jimmy held Clare around the waist and they both smiled at her.