

I live in a world of facts

This story is set here, <https://www.aberaeron.info/en/welcome-to-aberaeron>

SFX: Room atmos

What I'm about to relay is one of the most bizarre episodes of my entire life. And I'm not the fanciful type. Quite the opposite. I live in a world of facts and material realism. I'm not by any stretch of the imagination what my mother would have called 'a nutter.'

So. To paint the backdrop, after Julian and I separated I realised that the house was too big to rattle around in on my own and that I really should make it pay its way. My friend Pamela said I should offer bed and breakfast and at first I thought it was the most ridiculous idea I'd ever heard. I could barely boil an egg. But she persisted and her argument eventually made sense. Playing in the orchestra might have been regular work – I play cello - but I was never going to be able to afford a yacht, and after all, I was now on my own. And as I say, the house is large. And expensive to heat. So. I did it.

The house is, I have to say and I don't mean to brag, in a beautiful location.

SFX: Room atmos out

SFX in: sea, seagulls, wind, little bells in, basically the sound of Aberaeron

It's the kind of setting you see on television dramas about traumatic relationships. It's terribly romantic. The house sits on the harbour-side, cradled by the hills all around. At night, the little bells tinkle on the boats and there's a multi-coloured string of lights that really make the place look really rather festive. All year round. There's a pub, and a decent restaurant and coffee shops and the sea and whatnot. So yes, thinking about it objectively, it was a wonderful place to come to stay.

SFX: sea, seagulls, wind, little bells out

Music in – something suggesting an optimistic future

I had little cards printed and I made a simple website – wasn't as hard as you'd think, actually – and suddenly I was in business. I bought bedding and cleaning products and practised making full Englishes and I before long I was fully prepared. I admit I was a bit nervous. I mean, it's not easy opening up your home to complete strangers, is it? And as I said, I'm on my own, now.

Music out

SFX: Room atmos in

The first person who came to stay was a businessman. I don't know what he did for a living but he was no bother. And he left the bathroom in a decent state, so, you know, I was grateful. I had another few – a couple on a walking holiday, a woman who did watercolours, a thin young man who said he worked with The Internet Of Things (I have no idea what he was talking about) and an elderly lady who'd come here to scatter her husband's ashes. (You'd think that'd be depressing but

honestly, we had a hoot. She was such fun. I was sorry when she left). And then there was the seventh guest.

Sfx: Room atmos out

Music: Long, slow, high violin notes

All the others had made their bookings in very conventional ways. You know: filling out the form on the website. Sending emails. Ringing me up. But the seventh guest wrote to me. Through the post. Longhand. With an ink pen and beautiful notepaper. I was rather charmed. I mean, nobody does that any more, do they? Well, I don't.

Music develops – a mournful violin, with a subtle drone affect swelling underneath

So this envelope arrived one morning and I saw it lying there on the mat and it sort of drew me to it. I know that sounds mad. I can't explain it. I just knew I had to open it immediately. The paper felt as though it had been wet and had dried. It was sort of cockled. The ink on the address was slightly blurred in places, as though droplets had splashed it and smudged the writing. But the handwriting was beautiful – looped and curled and ornate. The writer, I was sure, was a person of culture.

There was no stamp, which was curious. And the letter inside was requesting a room for a week – a rather longer stay than I was used to offering my guests. I remember worrying if I should change the breakfast menu a little in case it got samey. The author said they'd be arriving in three days' time in the evening. Would I have the room made up?

The author had a very elaborate signature and I couldn't quite read it. I didn't know if I'd be welcoming a man or a woman. It was all quite mysterious.

Music and drone effect out

SFX: Room atmos in

Anyway. The day arrived and I got the room ready as usual and waited. I remember feeling rather anxious. I didn't know why, because there was no reason. But I sat in the front room in the dark so I could keep a lookout for whoever was going to arrive. So I could welcome them straightaway.

SFX: deeper drone in, with very subtle 'heartbeat' sound underneath

The evening darkened and just after seven o'clock there was a knock at the door. Whoever was there didn't think to use the bell. It was lucky I was close enough to hear them. If I'd been on the top floor, they might have been standing there a while. I hadn't seen them approach. Perhaps I'd been distracted, watching the boats bobbing on the harbour as the tide went out.

Music out

SFX: drone and subtle heartbeat remains and develops

SFX: front door opening

I opened the door and standing there was a young woman.

She was very slender, with skin that was almost translucent, and long blonde, colourless hair. She was wearing a long coat with what I thought was a long skirt and boots. I wondered if she was an artist or a drama student. Her eyes were very large and grey. She never looked at me. I remember that. She never set her eyes on mine. I wondered if she was nervous or if something had caused her not to trust people enough to look at them directly. Her voice was very quiet, like an exhalation.

SFX: drone and heartbeat out

SFX: Room atmos in

I welcomed her in and did the usual chat about money and keys and breakfast time and whatnot and I asked her if she was ready to go up to her room.

SFX: Footsteps ascending wooden stairs under the following

She walked ahead of me up the stairs and went straight to the room I'd set aside for her. Which was lucky really because there were so many other doors she might have tried.

This will do, she said. And then she closed the door. Without looking at me.

SFX: wooden door closing

I hadn't even had chance to show her the room, or the kettle or explain about the quirks of the shower. I didn't even know her name and hadn't had chance to check her in properly.

Oh well, I thought. I'll do it in the morning. I imagine she's tired after her journey, wherever she's come from.

SFX: Footsteps ascending wooden stairs

And I went up to my music room to do a little practice.

Music: Cello music in – ideally Elgar's Nimrod

Whenever I play music my mind sort of drifts while my fingers and my arms do what they've been trained to do for years. I was playing some Elgar and I was overwhelmed with what I can only describe as melancholy. And before I knew it, tears were streaming down my face. By the time I realised I was crying – although I didn't know why – I'd been playing for about three hours. The fingers on my left hand were sore and my wrist was stiff from bowing.

Cello music out

Enough. I thought. And went to bed.

SFX: subtle drone and heartbeat sound in – very very subtle

But as I passed her door I got the strangest whiff of damp. Just outside her door. Nowhere on the landing. It was perplexing.

SFX: drone and heartbeat out

SFX: opening curtains

SFX: sea, seagulls

SFX: cutlery and crockery on wooden table

SFX: Room atmos

Anyway. The next morning I awoke early, keen to make a good impression and complete check-in. I went into the kitchen and prepared everything. I set the table in the dining room and set out the fruit juices and pastries and so on.

SFX: subtle clock

And I waited for her. And she didn't arrive. I wondered if she was very tired and was having a lie-in. I didn't want to disturb her, nor did I want her to miss her breakfast. I didn't know what to do.

SFX: 'seaside' atmos out

SFX: clock out

I stop serving breakfast at 10. And by 10.30 I realised that I really should get on. Besides, I was due to meet Pamela for coffee. So I went out.

SFX: Wooden door opening and closing

I had various chores to do that day and by the time I returned, it was 3-ish.

SFX: Footsteps ascending wooden stairs

I went up the stairs and stood outside her room to see if I could hear her. There was nothing.

SFX: Drone and subtle heartbeat in

No sound. Just the strange smell of damp. Like a pond or a well that had been made stagnant.

SFX: Drone and heartbeat intensifies ever so slightly

I went in, expecting to make up her bed and tidy round. But when I got inside, it was as if she'd never been there. The bed didn't look slept in. There were no belongings. It was as if she'd disappeared.

SFX: drone and heartbeat out

SFX: kitchen noises – cutlery, kettle, teaspoons

As there was no work for me to do I went into the kitchen to make a cup of tea and then headed up to my music room.

SFX: Footsteps ascending wooden stairs

Music: cello practicing scales

I started to play some scales, just to warm up and I sort of got lost in it. And again I found myself crying. Actually crying. I don't know why but I felt profoundly, deeply sad.

Music: cello scales out

I turned around to set down my cello and suddenly she was stood there, wearing her coat.

SFX: drone and heartbeat in

I don't know how long she'd been there.

I'm sorry, I said. I didn't know what else to say. She smiled and said: 'He used to play that. In this room.' And then she left. She just went.

SFX: drone and heartbeat intensifies

I called after her that we should complete her check-in and what would she like for breakfast the next day. But she didn't reply and I couldn't see her in the darkness of the landing. There was just this damp smell again.

SFX: Room atmos

SFX: sea, little bells

I sat in the front room looking out at the little lights across the harbour, listening to the bells on the boats as the sea rocked them. I must've been there a long time because when I came to my senses, it was pitch black.

SFX: Opening internal wooden door

SFX: feet on wooden flooring

I walked out of the front room and into the hall to make my way upstairs and there, leaning on the newel post was my cello.

SFX: Drone and heartbeat quite intense now

I hadn't moved it. I hadn't put it there. And as I looked at it, it started to move. It stood itself upright, away from the newel post and started to rock from side to side. As if someone was holding its neck, moving it.

SFX: Feet running on wooden floor

I ran back into the front room and slammed the door behind me.

SFX: Internal wooden door slam

SFX: Drone and heartbeat stop abruptly with the slam

I just needed a moment to gather my thoughts and collect myself. I couldn't quite believe what I'd just seen. After a few minutes I opened the door and went back into the hall.

SFX: Slow opening internal wooden door

(slight echo effect on voice) And it had gone. The cello wasn't there. I swear it had been.

SFX: Footsteps on wooden stairs, internal wooden door opening

I went up to the music room and there it was, just how I'd left it. It was the oddest thing. I thought I was going mad.

SFX: Room atmos in

SFX: Crockery, teaspoons

The next morning I got up early as usual to prepare breakfast for my guest. But again. Nothing. She didn't come down.

SFX: Room atmos out

Just before 10, I went up to her room and knocked on the door.

SFX: Footsteps ascending wooden stairs

SFX: knocking on internal wooden door

I wanted to tell her that breakfast could only be served for a little while longer and could I make her bed or help her. I don't know. I just wanted to talk to her. To look at her.

There was no response. I knocked again.

SFX: Knocking on internal wooden door, and underneath the following for a couple of seconds

And again. But nothing. I called out a tentative 'hello?' but nobody replied. So I went in.

SFX: Slow opening of internal wooden door

SFX: A 'flat' effect on the voice, no EQ, a bland sound

The room was empty. Just the smell of damp. The bed hadn't been touched. There was no sign the shower had been used. There were no tissues in the waste-paper basket. The room was pristine. As if nobody had ever been there.

SFX: Bland sound out

I never saw her again. I don't know her name. She hadn't eaten anything or used the bed so she'd not, strictly speaking, incurred a charge as I hadn't done any work for her. All I'd done was open her letter and let her in. Another curious thing was that when I looked for her letter, it wasn't there.

SFX: opening and closing of wooden drawers.

SFX: Rustle of papers, as if looking for something

SFX: Room atmos in

I'm very careful with paperwork, but it simply wasn't there.

SFX: sea, seagulls, in

SFX: Long, slow cello notes

SFX: drone, heartbeat

SFX: the wind gathers underneath the following

I have no explanation for what happened. But I can tell you it did. Sometimes strange things happen. They just do.