

# nightwatch

*by* Peter Wood

Cindy smiles; her right hand, nails manicured and painted rodeo-red hold the receiver.

The left hand fingers create and break a complex cat's cradle with the phone cord. A glass of white, bottle half drunk sits on the table.

Cindy nods to the voice on the other end. A bubble of 'uh-huh's' and 'go on's' seep out.

Breaking the cat's cradled cord she examines her fingernails. She notices a crack in the paintwork, sighs to herself. Makes a mental note to cover it over.

Cover it over, paint over the cracks. There's been a lot of that recently, hasn't there?

'All I'm saying, love.' finally breaking the monosyllabic but considered noises, 'if you want to come home,' she takes a swig.

Cindy stands, walks over to the desk side drawer, glances at the week-to-a-page diary, 'then that's alright with us.'

Scanning down to the weekend dates in the diary, she sees its clearly marked as a weekend break to Bristol. A romantic? weekend to Bristol.

Silence on the other side as she returns to the table.

'You still there, love? Hello... Hello?'

The voice returns, preoccupied.

'There you are, love. Like I say..'

There's humming and ha-ing. In that accident black-spot of indecision, Cindy mentally crosses her fingers; please say no, please. Please.

A coal bucket of guilt drops inside. This is your daughter. How can you wish that!

Cindy takes another swig, then pours another. A pause, then a decision is made.

'Of course it's alright, we'd love to see you, love. Let me know when you're...'

An interruption, she hesitates, 'Taxi. Oh, ok, whatever's best for you, love.'

Cindy swallows the wine, yawns.

'Love, it's late..'

Brief goodbyes and goodnights, then the phone's replaced.

Truth is, unsteady on her pins, Cindy doesn't feel tired, not in the slightest. The coal-pit deep crags beneath her eyes may've deepened so she barely recognises herself in the mirror, but she isn't tired. Sleep tired at least.

She scribbles out the diary entry, makes a mental note to phone the special-anniversary celebration hotel stay first thing. She'd not yet mentioned it to him upstairs so he'll be none-the-wiser.

Cindy climbs the stairs, hears her snoring hubby, puts on the light, clambers into bed. Before she switches out the light she notices the spider-crack paintwork of her fingernails again.

A quick dab'll put it right.

As always,

