

A French Ghost: Vivien Wilson

I didn't believe in ghosts, well, I didn't, until the night we had to spend a night alone in the old barn in the Dordogne in Southern France. We were visiting Felix, my old boss, who was renovating an abandoned farm. We'd joined a group of others who were all there to help him turn the place into an art school.

'You'll be sleeping up there', Felix said pointing to the old barn. 'It's mediaeval, but the foundations date back to the Romans. There's no power but I'll give you a candle. Of course, you can always sleep on the floor in the farmhouse if you'd prefer'.

As night fell, we clambered up the ladder brushing aside centuries of cobwebs. The room was vast, with a stone fireplace at one end and two shutterless windows overlooking a graveyard at the other. We slipped into our sleeping bags and lay down on our two small camp beds and lit the candle. Huge shadows flickered across the room. The giant fireplace gaped dark like a leering mouth. I closed my eyes and tried to sleep. Something touched my arm. In the candlelight I caught sight of a large millipede, its thin wiry legs zigzagging madly across my pillow. I flicked it away and closed my eyes again and hoped for sleep. I woke as the church clock chimed. I counted twelve; it was midnight. I wondered about the people who had once lived here and why the place had been abandoned. Felix had mentioned something about a girl who'd gone missing. The old guy who'd come to install new plumbing had muttered something to him about a girl falling down the ancient well in the courtyard. Felix had asked in the village, but nobody wanted to talk about it. Leaning against the crumbling stone barn that afternoon, I'd peered down the well but could see nothing. I dropped a stone to gauge its depth. It was deep, very deep. Now, lying here in the stillness, I shivered at the memory. The church bell began to chime again. Again, twelve chimes. An uncanny guttural noise emanated from somewhere in the room. Suddenly a bat flew in through the window, its shadow terrifying as it flapped around the room.

We grabbed the candle and our sleeping bags and were down the ladder and across the courtyard to the farmhouse in seconds.