

## The Presence

### Chapter 3 – Motor Mouth’s Podcast

**““My accountant told me to choose a stage name, mainly to keep the personal and business finances separate. Not that big a deal then, but now.....That was bloody great advice.” Said Eric.”**

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There were a lot of steps between Mary’s flat and the front door at the bottom of the staircase. When the postman had always arrived at between eight and eight fifteen, Mary had only needed to go down and up again, once. There had been strikes and upheaval at the Royal Mail; their regular postie had even left to work somewhere else. Now the post could arrive as late as ten, which meant Mary trudging up and down several times. Occasionally their post wasn’t delivered at all that day and turned up as a huge heap the next day. No one had ever asked Mary to be post monitor, but she knew the job was essential.

“Oh, good.....He was on-time today.” Mary Muttered.

A table to the left of the door, with wire baskets above it. Nothing locked or secure, the first person to see that day’s post, tended to leave it on the table. Everyone in the block knew Mary placed the mail in the correct basket for each flat. New people learned quickly, or received a telling off from Mary. A simple system that meant Mary Seeley knew exactly who lived in which flat and who might have a few problems. Financial problems mainly; it was amazing how much could be learned from just looking at return addresses on envelopes.

“No letters for the new woman.” Mary mumbled.

She knew Drew’s full name of course and had kept her ears open when the police were going from door to door. There had been trouble where the new woman had lived. A block of flats in Clapham, one police woman had looked visibly shocked by what had happened there. Not that Mary was surprised; she had a good nose for wrong-uns.

“Probably some sort of scam.....She looks the sort.”

There were several letters for Nick, one with his agent as the return address. There had to have been a sharp edge on one of the letters. Paper cuts were part of Mary’s life though and some could be nasty. Mary put her finger in her mouth; it seemed the best way to avoid dripping blood everywhere. There on the wall in what looked like blood, was just one word.

‘BITCH !’

Large letters, just below the mail baskets. It hadn’t been there a second ago, yet there it was. Mary admitted to getting on a bit, actually getting on quite a lot. Her mind had always been sharp though, she prided herself on it. She moved away from the wall, still tasting her own blood in her mouth. Mary shook her head, as if trying to wake up from.....Something. Blinked her eyes a few times and that awful word had gone. The wall painted beige, was pristine once more, even if it was a little grubby. Nick’s letter though.....There had to be blood all over it.

There wasn’t; all of the post for Nick Rees was in clean white envelopes, without even a trace of blood. The taste had gone from Mary’s mouth too. When she took her index finger out of her mouth and looked, there was no paper cut.

“That’s.....Impossible.” She muttered.

Mary finished putting the right post in the correct baskets, before going back to her flat for tea and maybe a couple of garibaldi biscuits. Yes, what had happened was worrying, but her routine had to carry on as normal. Mary dreaded to think what might happen if the post wasn't correctly monitored and sorted.

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Denise had a flat on the landing below Mary. Denise, known as Den at work, usually lived on her own. She had a healthy libido though, needs that sometimes refused to be ignored. It wasn't unknown for her to bring a man home, which she considered to be no one's business but her own. Den worked for a famous firm of solicitors in the city. Currently a legal secretary hoping to become a full PA to one of the main partners. He'd even been on TV a few times and was rumoured to be headed right for the top. There had been promises about Den being there with him, when he got the huge corner office on the top floor. Not that she'd get too excited; not until it actually happened. "You can't pay the bills with promises." She muttered.

At about the time Mary was doing her mail monitor duties, Den was ready to leave for work and looking for her keys. There was a metal dish in the hallway for keys; it even had 'Keys,' etched into the nickel plated metal. A present from her sister Merika; something for her new flat in Islington. Den's brow furrowed as she looked at the shiny but empty dish.

"I know they were in there."

It was a routine, one she'd gone through every time she'd arrived home, since moving in. Keys in the dish, the instant she walked through the door. Coat off and hung up and then her phone went on the coffee table in the lounge. At some point her natty, but small bag, went on the chair in her bedroom. Yet, there it was.....An empty key dish. Den might not have started to feel nervous, if it hadn't been for Mary's intruder. Mary had struck Den as being a tough old bird, someone unlikely to call the police unless the intruder was genuine. Den looked and the chain was still there, stopping anyone getting through her front door. There was a decent deadlock for when she left for work and two heavy bolts for when she turned off the TV and went to bed. Everything looked fine; no sign of the door being opened....But then again, Mary had claimed her door hadn't been broken open.

"Never mind, new locks next week." Den muttered.

They were all doing it; nearly everyone in the block was updating their locks and bolts. Den had decided on an expensive lock someone at work had recommended. It was impossible to have keys cut for it. Every extra key had to come from the manufacturer and there were hoops to jump through to get those. Den had a look about and saw her keys in her kitchen, on top of the washing machine.

"How did ?..... I must have been so damned tired."

Her phone beeped; there was a text from work. An automated text to say her boss was running late and wouldn't be in the office until after lunch. Good, there'd be no need for her to rush all the way to Angel Tube. Den put her hand out to grab her keys and.....There was nothing there.

"Shit."

There was no possible explanation, but her keys were no longer on the washing machine. Self-doubt began of course; there was no other sane conclusion. She'd imagined seeing her keys; it had to be that, didn't it? Her flat was quite small, just three paces to see her front door and the dish her sister had bought her. There were the keys, resting where Den knew she'd put them the night before.

They were in the dish.

"Fuck.....I must be going crazy."

Self-doubt again, it was the only way to avoid thinking the impossible. As her hand closed over the keys, Den almost expected to find her hand was empty. No, her precious keys were in her hand. She left the flat, her hand shaking as she locked the deadlock.

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Wednesday evening and Drew had the flat in Islington to herself. Suki was there too of course and her cat had settled into their new home, remarkably quickly. Cats tend to be all about their territory and Suki was strutting about as though she owned the place, apart from the twenty hours a day put aside for sleeping when she became a sofa ornament.

“Our first evening alone, Suki.” Said Drew, while stroking her cat.

Cats could see more than people saw. There had been times when Suki had stared for so long at a particular place in the lounge. That had been in the ill-fated Clapham flat. Since coming to Islington, Suki had been calm and relaxed. No long stares at things Drew couldn’t see, which was definitely a good thing. There had been a strange vibe in the block in Clapham, long before she’d spoken the name of Aiwass. Nick had called just after she’d got in and barely taken off her coat and the damned heels she wore for work. They’d talked about all sorts, including the recent intruder incident with Mary.

“Mary hates me.” She’d told him. “Not just her, some of the other residents are giving me really creepy looks. Things have happened, but no one is telling me what.”

“When I get back, we’ll invite a few of the neighbours in for wine and nibbles. Remember Drew, that you have as much right to be there as any of those giving you strange looks.”

“I’ve got thick skin, I’ll be alright.” She’d said.

“Good.....Did the hypnosis book guy.....Oh; his name has gone out of my head....”

“Travis Givens you mean.” She’d said. “He called me at work and confirmed he’ll be here at about nine. I’m hoping he’s as impressive as his website.”

“A friend of a friend’s friend recommended him; you know how these things work. If you like the look of him, get him to come back when I’m there.....Saturday if you can.”

“I will.....How is Manchester ?” She’d asked.

“Manchester is fine.....But the hotel is a bit grim.”

After a description of the dreadful sounding hotel, there had been a mutual I love you, to end the call. Drew was still having a problem with the L word. Alright late at night after really good sex. But to end a phone call.....It was what you said to an aunt, or your mum, not to a lover.

“It’ll get easier to say.....I’m sure it will.” She’d mumbled.

Drew had gone out to get a takeaway, an Indian meal from a place next door to the supermarket she was getting quite fond of. She’d also bought a decent bottle of white wine and a few packets of junk food. Put in bowls on the coffee table, it would look alright. Travis Givens was on a quick book signing and promo tour of a few bookshops in London. He had to be used to impromptu meetings. A lot of smiles and writing his signature umpteen times, and dedications to people’s kids and spouses.....Before getting back on the train to.....

“Damn.....I’m normally good at remembering this stuff.” Drew muttered.

She’d be alright once she’d met him and there was a face and voice to hang the details on. Drew had even used Nick’s rinky-dink printer to get colour prints of a bio and a bit of background from the Travis Givens website. She put the bowls of nibbles on the coffee table and looked at the bio again.

“Canadian, Suki.....I like Canadians.” Said Drew. “Now lives in.....Uxbridge. Well, he won’t need a long haul jet to get home. Educated at.....Yada-yada.....Ahh, he mentions owning two cats. No claws Suki, if he wants to stroke you.....You let him, alright ?”

Travis was important; he might be able to reveal what had happened to Nick, during the missing hours in his mind, after he'd summoned the demon. Travis turned up at just after nine and the voice on the entry phone, sounded very Canadian.

"Come on up." Said Drew. "Second floor.....No lift I'm afraid."

Most people arrived looking fine, maybe just breathing a little faster than usual. Nick had mentioned a few visitors arriving at the flat door, looking as though they needed to be put on oxygen for a while. Travis arrived with a smile on his face, while taking the stairs two at a time. Drew deposited Travis onto the sofa in the lounge, while she went into the kitchen.

"White wine alright?" She shouted. "I hope it is.....There's beer in the fridge."

"White wine is perfect." Travis shouted back.

By the time Drew was in the lounge with two glasses and an opened bottle of wine, Suki was being a bit of a tart. There was her cat, purring like crazy as Travis rubbed her ears.

"I see you've met Suki." Said Drew.

"She's adorable."

Wine and Travis claimed the bowl of cashew nuts. Small talk for a while, she found out he'd been born in a town called Goderich in Ontario. A genuinely small town with a population of about seven and a half thousand. Travis had come to Britain when he was about twenty five and he was now forty one. His online Bio had mentioned a wife and a young child, but Travis didn't mention any names. Reciprocation had occurred, with Drew telling him as much of her history, as anyone could be expected to put up with. After the wine glasses were refilled, Drew got down to business.

"As I mentioned on the phone, Nick is in Manchester. He's doing a podcast and will be home at the weekend."

"I nearly did one of those." Said Travis. "Some are alright, but others seem to be a way to get dodgy content past the scrutiny of some social media sites. Lots of anger and venom."

"Yes, Nick wasn't keen." Said Drew. "His agent said he needed the exposure.....And Nick tends to do what Betsy says."

"My agent is a bit like that; I think they all are." Said Travis.

"Yes, but would any of them take a bullet for you?" Asked Drew.

The joke was one of Nick's, though Drew had no problem with stealing it. There was a chance Travis would look at her as though she was a crazy person. Luckily he got the joke and laughed, quite a lot. Suki was on the guy's lap and Drew had drunk a glass of wine pretty fast. Not drunk, but the edges had definitely been taken off, whatever alcohol took the edges off. She'd have no problem with telling Nick that Travis was fine, someone they could work with.

"The idea was for us to chat and if we got on.....I'd ask you to come back Saturday and talk to Nick."

"I need some assurance that I can use the procedure in my books." Said Travis. "There's no pay, which I can accept and understand. My books sell well, but I need to be able to use everything in those books. Nothing can be too personal to use. I will need the patient to sign a standard waiver of their right to privacy."

Terms like procedure and patient made it all sound so medical. Drew knew Travis was a million miles away from being a stage hypnotist, but Nick wasn't crazy and in need of treatment.

"That won't be a problem.....I have something to tell you." Said Drew. "The patient in this case is Nick Rees. He has lost hours of memory from around the time of the summoning. We're both hoping you can give him those memories back."

“My books are based on real life, but as I say on the back cover.....Everything is a work of fiction. The books now cover twenty three cases, but I’ve actually dealt with four cases of memory loss caused by possession.”

Drew liked the honesty, but four seemed a very small number. His website mentioned Travis having some success with such matters. What did some success actually mean ?

“I have to ask..... How many of those four cases ended well ?” Asked Drew.

“Half were a success; two patients had total recall of lost memories.” Said Travis. “In one case there was no improvement and as for the fourth. It worked well, probably too well.....The patient died.”

“What do you mean by worked too well ?” Asked Drew.

Poor Travis, he obviously didn’t enjoy talking about professional failures, who does ? Judging by the look on his face, something truly dreadful had happened.

“His family have asked me not to write about that patient.” Said Travis. “I can give you a brief outline, but no names or personal information. I can see no harm in telling you the patient was a man, a qualified medical doctor.”

“Can I take notes ?” Asked Drew.

“Yes, of course.....Anyway, the poor man had been involved in a summoning and thought it was all a joke, a bit of harmless fun. All fun and games, until.....He woke up with blood on his clothing. Worse still, his wife and children were missing.”

“How old were the children ?” Asked Drew.

“No details.” Said Travis. “His family are wealthy enough to afford the best lawyers. I have already been threatened by them. A wife and two beautiful children is all I can say.”

“Fine, Travis.....Tell me what you’re comfortable to tell me ?” Asked Drew.

Travis looked terrified; she was definitely going to warn Nick about the wealthy family with the expensive lawyers; just in case he was tempted to use the story in a horror novel.

“The doctor suspected he’d sent his family into hiding.” Said Travis. “That he’d told his wife to stay hidden until he came for them. Only, he couldn’t remember where they were. The occult can be a dark place, I’m sure you’ve seen the murky side of it ?”

“Oh yes, Nick and I have seen the murky side.” Said Drew.

“Often things are not as they seem.....I found those hidden memories while the doctor was under hypnosis. He hadn’t sent them away; he’d killed his wife and children and dumped their bodies. Did I help him, or ultimately cause his death ? I’ve often wondered. The poor man took his own life, before the police could arrest him.”

Yes, she and Nick had seen the murky side of the occult and the dark side. Yet the ending of that story from Travis, left her feeling cold. They arranged for him to return on the Saturday. Just as he was leaving, Mary came out of her door. Wonderful.....She’d be telling the whole block that as soon as Nick was away, she’d been entertaining strange men.

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Nick had spoken to Eric Hardy, the motor mouth, only twice and neither call had lasted long. Eric could almost shout about the topic of the day to order. Zero sincerity behind any of the angry rhetoric, Eric was definitely in it for the fame and money. Everything from to the evils of vaccinations to Britain being full and the borders needing to be closed. Nothing too overtly racist, but there was no mistaking the message. If one topic became too hot to handle, Eric dropped it and moved onto something else. Eric’s podcasts were full of his anger and rage, yet Marsha had told Nick it was all part of a motor mouth persona; pulled on and off as required.

“Eric doesn’t actually believe in much at all.” Marsha had told him.

Marsha Miller was officially Eric's PA, but she seemed to look after everything that went on in the small office where the podcasts were recorded. Everything from making sure the equipment worked, to keeping the small kitchen stocked with coffee and nibbles. She'd also recommended the crap hotel Nick was staying in, which he'd take a while to forgive. There had been quite a few calls from Marsha and one thing came across above everything else. Whether from advertisers or donations from certain groups, there was money to be made out of anger filled podcasts.

Nick had used a cab to get to the address of the recording studio. He hadn't been expecting anything that grand, but it was a converted shopfront. No names anywhere, not even on the doorbell. Marsha opened the door and had a quick look at the street, before closing it behind him. He assumed it was Marsha, they'd never actually met. She had told him that the Eric Hardy empire usually comprised of just Eric and her.

"The public.....They either love Eric, or hate him." Said Marsha. "This week.....They seem to be generally ambivalent. Come out the back, it's where the magic happens."

Marsha on the phone had an accent that sounded like Birmingham, maybe from the Dudley area. He'd built up an image of her that was totally wrong. Not quite everything wrong, her voice had sounded as though she was in her mid-twenties, which seemed fairly accurate. Marsha had the skin tone often described as coffee with a large splash of cream. A parent or a grandparent had probably been of Asian origin. How did she square that with working for Eric ? He probably paid her very well.

"Is the hotel alright ?" Asked Marsha.

"To be honest, it's a bit crappy." Said Nick.

"Yeah, I did wonder." Said Marsha. "We get a few writers, usually wanting somewhere cheap. If you come again, there's somewhere much nicer."

The front of the shop looked dreadful, almost derelict. Through a solid looking door with a keypad and it was a different world. A well-furnished and comfortable looking outer office. Through a glass wall was the recording area, complete with soundproofing tiles on the walls and a state of the art mixing deck. BBC radio would have been proud of the setup and Nick had seen a few radio studios. He'd done a few breakfast broadcasts when the critics had been saying wonderful things about the movie version of his book.

"Wow, this is.....Wow !" Said Nick.

"Podcasts are no longer all two guys making them in a garage." Said Marsha. "We use the same level of recording precision and clarity as a commercial radio station. Quality is the thing these days."

The advertisers probably insisted on that, though Nick didn't want to mention that. He liked Marsha and suspected he was going to like Eric when he wasn't in his shouty bastard persona.

"I did a couple of Radio 4 morning spots." Said Nick. "I can truthfully say, your kit might be better than theirs."

"Thank you Nick, that's nice to know." Said Marsha.

Behind the glass was Eric Hardy, smiling and waving at them. Nick had done some research for a novella based around a mental health facility, an old fashioned asylum in America. Who was on what side of the glass had been important in institutions like those. On one side were the doctors and nurses, with the patients on the other side. More than just symbolic, everyone had liked the glass.....It let people know where they belonged. Eric opened the door to the recording area and Nick could hear that well known voice.

"Nick, come on in.....I'm sure Marsha will have coffee on the go and a few doughnuts. No hurry today, no broadcast deadline. Would you like coffee and a few minutes to relax ?"

"That would be nice.....And a doughnut." Said Nick.

Marsha smiled and went off to wherever the kitchen was in the building. As Nick watched her go through the glass walls, he realised he was now on the side of the glass where the inmates did their thing.

“Once we begin, I’ll start with a little background from your bio.” Said Eric.

Nick had seen pictures of Eric, they were all over social media and there was a website. A little thinning of the hair, though not bad for a man in his early fifties. Tummy trying to climb over the belt on his trousers, but again, not too bad for his age. The smile was nice, though a little unnerving. In the pictures for his podcast, Eric was usually looking angry and red in the face.

“I will need a copy of the podcast.....My girlfriend is keen to hear it.” Said Nick.

“Yes, no problem. Marsha will make sure your agent gets sent a copy too.” Said Eric. “I noticed you’re with Betsy Nagle....Tough lady, but one hell of an agent.”

Marsha brought coffee and doughnuts and it was nice to have a few minutes to relax. There was the inevitable small talk. Eric mentioned his real name being Eric Marshall and Eric Hardy being his stage name.

“My accountant told me to choose a stage name, mainly to keep the personal and business finances separate. Not that big a deal then, but now.....That was bloody great advice.” Said Eric.

“How did you pick Hardy as a name ?”

“There was an actor who seemed to be in everything. Wonderful actor’s voice and very distinguished looking. His name was Hardy, so I became Eric Hardy.”

Eric began the podcast with a quick intro, which was accurate and had just the right level of flattery. Betsy would like that. As she was constantly saying, he needed the publicity, he desperately needed the exposure. His book was mentioned, though most of the intro dealt with ‘The Expert,’ the movie based on his book. Loosely based on his book, though Nick had stopped mentioning that so often. All fame is good fame, as Betsy sometimes said when trying to get him to do things like Eric’s podcast. She’d even scribbled it on a compliments slip attached to one of his royalty cheques, along with ‘God is good.....you’re working.’ Eric was nodding at him, the big moment had arrived.

“.....and after a word from our advertisers; yes, we need to keep the lights on. We’ll be back with Nick Rees, right here in the studio. Nick will be telling us about a trip to Libya in his student days.”

Two adverts, both for medium sized companies selling products globally. There really did seem to be money in angry podcasts. Not that Nick had heard that side of Eric, but the day was young.

“Nick.....Why would a student and two of his friends, head for Libya and not somewhere like.....Ayia Napa ?” Asked Eric. “I know which I’d prefer.”

Nick could see the tone Eric wanted to set for the interview and he was happy to play along with it. Crazy students in the desert was an angle Betsy would love. Add on a large helping of long dead occultist and it would make ideal podcast material.

“I was travelling in the footsteps of Aleister Crowley, Eric.” Said Nick. “The famous occultist and self-professed magician. I was looking for something he’d found.....Way back in about nineteen eleven, or so.”

“Were you hoping to learn something about the occult ?” Asked Eric.

“I had my own ideas on the occult.” Said Nick. “Actually, I was trying to correct something Crowley had got wrong. A summoning that was wrong when he tried it in Algeria and again when it was attempted in Paris, some years later.”

“What was he trying to summon.....Does the bogeyman have a name ?” Asked Eric.

“A demon and you never name them.” Said Nick. “Named on a podcast that thousands might hear.....No, if you’re sensible you never say their name out loud.”

“Hundreds of thousands, Nick. I put out a popular podcast.” Said Eric. “So a kind of say its name three times, spin about and the monster appears, huh ?”

“Yeah, you’ve got the idea.” Said Nick. “I did find the scroll I was after, so we did achieve our goal out there, up to our necks in the sand.”

Nick laughed and Eric joined in. A couple of radio interviewers had chosen to play the movie interviews for laughs and Nick had received the most fan mail from those broadcasts. Sometimes, people needed a light relief piece and as Betsy would say.....He desperately needed the exposure.

“All’s well that ends well.” Said Eric. “You found the scroll.”

“Indeed I did.”

Eric hadn’t done any research; he didn’t have that kind of podcast. He probably wouldn’t have gone for the light relief style if he’d known they’d lost a local guide out in the Libyan desert. He’d gone off one night into a sandstorm and everyone had assumed he’d be alright. After all....He was their guide for the less travelled parts of the Libyan desert near the Great Oasis. He’d been found three days later, with several deep wounds in his chest. Worst of all, a good part of his face had been eaten, bitten at according to the police. Wild animals had been blamed, but Nick had always wondered about the death of Khaled. Dig up artefacts never intended to be found and there could be.....Consequences.

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“I’m just glad you were treated alright.” Said Drew. “I listened to one of Eric’s podcasts online....He sounds a very unpleasant guy.”

“Eric is a pussy cat in real life.” Said Nick. “It was Marsha who got a bit weird, just before I left the recording studio.”

Nick had arrived back at the flat quite late on Friday night. He’d needed to get a taxi from the train station as the tubes had stopped running. They’d had ‘glad you’re back,’ sex though it was carried out in a woozy state, almost on autopilot. Drew had a new client to look after at work, a supplier of perfume for men. Yes, it seemed there was a growing market for smelly stuff for the man in your life. Drew had brought home a few samples for Nick to try out. She’d spent a lot of Saturday on her laptop, putting together a marketing plan for her new client. Travis Givens was due to arrive soon and she was only just catching up on Nick’s time in Manchester.

“I thought you liked Marsha ?” Said Drew.

“I did.....Actually I probably still do.” Said Nick. “She showed me where she worked and her desk.....I’ve never seen so many crystals and shamanic items on one person’s desk.”

“I thought that would make you kindred spirits, Nick.” Said Drew. “Do I need to worry ? Are you getting a bit smitten ?”

Nick had gotten on really well with Marsha over the phone and genuinely.....Drew was a little relieved that Nick had called Marsha a bit weird.

“Hey, you can tease, but she got super strange.” Said Nick. “Told me I had a really bad aura and needed to talk to someone about it.”

“Talk to who ?”

“I never did find out.” Said Nick. “She mentioned Niki and said I needed to be very careful. By then I was outside of the pavement and feeling a bit emotionally battered.”

“How did she know about Niki ?” Asked Drew.

“She probably looked you up online.” Said Nick. “Everything that happened in Clapham is on a news media site somewhere. I’m hoping Travis doesn’t want to talk about it.....It must still be hard for you. Did you know her well ?”



“Not really, I just fed her cat if she was away and she occasionally looked after Suki. If Travis needs to know, he needs to know. Though.....I am hoping he doesn't ask.” Said Drew.

“Sometimes reality is too horrific for a horror story.” Said Nick.

Drew mentioned Mary trying to avoid her, but Denise still being reasonably chatty. Den had told her about things in her flat moving about, though she seemed to think Mary's intruder had made her imagine it.

“Cultivate Den a bit.” Said Nick. “I don't like the sound of things moving about on their own. Talk to her Drew, become one of her buddies.”

“I'll do my best. Just hope she doesn't join team Mary.”

Travis arrived a little late and of course, Suki greeted him like an old friend. Her tail straight up, Drew's cat was on his lap about a second after he'd sat down. The horror writing hypnotherapist mentioned his high blood sugar level, but still accepted a piece of cheesecake and a glass of wine.

“Thank you for coming back.” Said Nick. “If possible.....Could we do the hypnosis procedure now.....Tonight ?”

“I see no problem with that, though I think you're wrong about who you summoned.” Said Travis.

“Why ? Who do you think Nick called up ?” Asked Drew.

“I have no idea, but I'm sure it wasn't that.....Entity you don't want named.” Said Travis. “I've done a lot of digging through my own library and a colleague visited the British Library reading room. Add on a lot of trawling the net by my wife and.....I'm sure Crowley was right about.....That named being is probably a good guy.....A positive spirit of some kind.”

“Do you think it's a guardian angel ?” Asked Nick. “Crowley had that idea, but he wasn't at his best by then.”

“But he was when he visited Algeria.” Said Travis. “At that time, Aleister Crowley was one of the tiny number of occultists to have genuine power....Immense amounts of it. He rarely made mistakes then.....Not a guardian angel, but definitely nothing to be feared.”

“Back to my question.....What do you think Nick did summon ?” Asked Drew.

“That I intend to find out.” Said Travis. “Let's get Nick in a really comfortable seat and begin the hypnosis.”

“Do I need to put Suki in the bedroom ?” Asked Drew.

“No, your cat looks relaxed and happy.” Said Travis. “If she starts to look less relaxed, we may have a problem. Have you been hypnotised before Nick ?”

“Once in my teens.....A guy at a Pontins holiday camp made me cluck like a chicken.”

“I'll take that as a no.” Said Travis. “I'd like stage hypnotists to be banned.”

Suki seemed to be taking her duties seriously, as observer of all things not seen by humans. Her cat was wide awake, alert and standing at one end of the sofa. Drew was worried she might be caught up in the fluncheon, or whatever it was called. She had a friend who claimed to have been affected when being in the audience of a famous hypnotist. Probably crap, but Drew was taking no chances. She kept on the far side of the lounge, while Travis went to work on Nick.

“Relax, Nick.....You'll be fine.” Said Travis.

There was mood music, played on a portable CD player. It seemed Travis favoured whale song, which was a bit cheesy. It worked though and as Nick was given all the instruction about relaxing and counting down from ten, Drew was beginning to feel quite sleepy.

“You're safe, Nick.....Nothing can hurt you.” Said Travis. “Be there, back in the gents at the Brown Bear pub. It's that night, when you're just about to say the ritual. You're trying to summon a demon.....What happened then ?”

Drew tried to stay awake, but there was something about singing whales mixed with that relaxing voice. Travis should use that voice for something, she thought, before realising he was doing just that. One moment asleep, the next her body jumping slightly as she tried to wake up. It reminded Drew of how she'd been at college, after having little sleep during revising for her finals.

"Repeat that Nick.....Describe it to me again ?" Asked Travis.

"It had killed them all, I think." Said Nick. "The floor was covered in blood.....I never saw it hurt them, but they were all dead."

"How many, Nick ? How many had it killed ?"

Drew drifted again, after noticing Suki wasn't relaxed anymore. Her cat was making the crying sound she made when upset and she was staring at Nick, as though.....As though he was now something that scared her. Drew could have only slept for a few seconds, but Nick was screaming when she opened her eyes.

"It can't hurt you, Nick." Said Travis. "It's just a memory, you're not really there. Remember that.....It can't hurt you. Describe it; tell me what you're looking at ?"

"No.....Looking will mean seeing those eyes again." Yelled Nick. "I refuse to see those terrible eyes.....Never again."

It was only a memory, why was Nick making such a fuss ? Drew went back in the chair, as her mind decided she needed to rest. Not a five second pause; before going back to all the stress and danger. Somewhere in Drew's mind, a sleep instruction had been given. She even felt tired in the dream, before realising it was a dream.

"This is Nick's dream.....I can't be in Nick's dream." She muttered.

An old building with walls made of stone blocks. Maybe a temple or a tomb, there was no way to be sure. A large area lit by just two fairly dull lamps, which was actually a blessing.

"Nick.....Oh, Nick.....You never said there were so many." She mumbled.

Whatever had happened seemed to be over. Drew had never seen so many dead bodies, even in movies. As Drew got up from the couch she'd been sitting on, she had to place her feet carefully. Hundreds of dead, maybe thousands, so many she had to place her feet in the gaps between them. "Where am I ?" Drew shouted.

Night outside, she could see through a window that was really just a gap between the stone blocks. Scent in the warm air, the subtle fragrance of tropical blooms. It was a hot climate there; Drew knew she had to remember that, it was important. Lots of blood on the bodies, though none of it looked fresh. There was a constant feeling that whatever dreadful thing had happened, it was now over. Outside seemed a good place to go.....Out into the clean air of a tropical night. On the way, Drew saw a huge symbol carved into a wall.

"Remember.....Remember.....This too, is important." She muttered.

She wasn't in Nick's dream; she was there, really there. Drew realised it was more than a dream, when her ankle was scratched by rubbing against the edge of a stone. Physical pain from that scratch and there was never genuine pain in dreams. Not agonising, it was only a scratch. It made her realise though, that she was there, a tropical climate a long way from home.

"Oh, Nick.....Where has your dream sent me ?"

Drew was almost outside, when something moved among the dead. It was the presence that dwelt there, she knew it with the same certainty she knew her own name. She saw the face and eyes, before seeing the body that had never been human. Hands that had spilled so much blood, yet the being still craved for more. Being, demon, monster.....Devil ? Drew decided that from now on, it

would be simply the Presence. It saw her and those dreadful eyes seemed to look into her soul. Those hands.....They wanted to grab hold of her throat and rip it out.

“Don’t be scared, Drew.....I will never hurt you.”

The eyes were bad enough, but that strange voice. Like an animal had managed to talk, but it remained an animal. Drew knew that looking into those eyes and listening to that voice.....It could quickly mean the loss of her sanity.

“No.....No !” Drew yelled.

She closed her eyes and put her hands over her ears. Drew began to scream and carried on screaming, even when someone was trying to hug her. It was his scent she recognised, the smell of someone she cared for and trusted.

“Wake up, Drew.....You’re safe.” Said Nick.

Suki was howling and Drew’s first thought was how much complaining Mary was likely to do, mainly about the noise. She opened her eyes and kissed Nick, before hugging him hard enough to leave bruises.

“I don’t know where I was.....I saw it Nick, I was really close to it.” Said Drew.

“What did it look like ?” Asked Travis.

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