

## The Presence

### Chapter 4 – The Symbol

**“Nick had no idea what the local supermarket was called, just that it always had everything he needed. Just round the corner in Essex Road, it had effectively become Nick’s store cupboard.”**

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Suki was on her lap, which helped bring Drew back to reality. Nick was still there, holding her hand and looking concerned. Wherever the dream had taken her, it had been hot and dry. There still seemed to be the scent of tropical flowers stuck in her sinuses. It had all seemed so real, yet it had to have been just a really intense dream. Travis asked the question again.....

“This creature, this being.....What did it look like, Drew ?”

“It didn’t look like anything that had ever been human.” Said Drew. “It was its voice that really scared me and.....Those eyes. I felt for certain that looking into those eyes for too long, would make me lose my sanity.”

“What was its voice like ?” Asked Nick.

“It was wrong Nick, so wrong.....As though an animal had learned to talk, but it was still very much a wild beast. You must know, Nick.....I was reliving some of your dream.”

“No.....I can remember a few sounds and the smell of flowers, but.....Everything else has gone.”

Poor Nick, it was her turn to hug him. All those memories he’d been hoping to regain, memories from the night of the summoning. It had to be terrible to know you’d had them in your head, only to lose them again.

“Please, I must insist.....We had a deal.” Said Travis. “I need every detail for my book. What did this thing look like ?”

“Leave her alone for a while.” Said Nick.

“No, he’s right.....Later on, I’ll draw what I saw.” Said Drew. “I’m no Rembrandt, but I did once keep myself in beer at college by drawing portraits. Now.....Right now, I need to sleep.”

“Sorry, I sometimes get a bit over intense.” Said Travis. “Can I borrow your sofa ?”

“Yes, I’ll get you some bedding.” Said Nick.

Drew went to the drawer in their bedroom, where Nick kept paper for the printer. Really crap paper he bought from the local supermarket, it was a dull grey colour when it came out of the packet. A few sheets would go next to the bed, in case she had the urge to draw the thing she’d seen. Nick had a few pens in the drawer, the multi-coloured ones he seemed to love. They were all over the flat, though only half of them worked. As she tested the black ink option on the paper, Drew remembered the symbol on the wall, of wherever she’d been. She drew the symbol about four times and it was right, exactly what she’d seen. Somewhere inside her, an artist’s instinct was yelling at her that it was wrong.

“But that’s it.....I know it is.” She said.

“Are you alright ?” Shouted Nick.

By the time she was back in the lounge, the sofa had become a passable bed for Travis. He’d probably wake up with Suki sleeping on his head, but he had two cats of his own. He had to know all about cat foibles and general weirdness.

"I drew something I saw there, in the tomb." Said Drew. "Or it might have been a temple. I know I got it right, but it's wrong.....I must be going crazy."

Nick looked at the drawing of the symbol and then Travis spun the paper around a few times. Their guest smiled and actually laughed as he prodded at the paper.

"I know.....I now know where you were, or were shown." Said Travis. "You couldn't have been there; the tomb was a ruin when the Romans arrived in Libya. Demons can do that; transport you into a memory that looks incredibly real. For some reason no one understands, the dream state can effectively be.....A reflection of past events. Do you have a mirror?"

"There's one in our bedroom." Said Nick.

Their bedroom, it seemed the spare bedroom was now officially her walk in closet, which was nice. As Drew held up the drawing to the mirror, she knew the image was right.

"I have no idea how I know, but the reflection is the right way round." Said Drew.

"Ahh, the tomb of Gaiseric, King of the Vandals." Said Travis. "It isn't of course, he was buried elsewhere. Some know it as the tomb of Septimius Severus and he too was buried somewhere else. To be honest, no one genuinely knows who the tomb was built for. Today it's a ruin in the Libyan desert. As for the symbol Drew remembered.....No one knows what it means, but it's carved everywhere."

To Drew the symbol was like a huge arrow, pointing to where she needed to be.

"We have to go there." She said.

"I tend.....To agree." Said Nick.

"I want to go too.....I might get an entire book out of this." Said Travis.

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By the time everyone had managed to get a few hours sleep, it had been around ten on the Sunday morning. By the time Travis and his bag of hypnotherapy essentials had been seen off in a cab, it wasn't far off eleven. Nick's idea of how the day would progress, involved a lot of napping on the sofa, maybe a computer game at some point, and an early night. Drew made the discovery that changed his plans.

"Oh, we emptied the fridge a bit last night." Said Drew.

"Travis can eat.....The guy must have hollow legs." Said Nick.

"I'll go to the supermarket." Said Drew.

"No, make a list and I'll go." Said Nick.

In the end they both went, it was easier to carry things and Drew had a better memory than him.

Nick had no idea what the local supermarket was called, just that it always had everything he needed. Just round the corner in Essex Road, it had effectively become Nick's store cupboard. Going past where his motorbike was usually chained up was mildly depressing.

"I'll pester the police in the morning." Said Nick. "It's crazy.....How much testing does my motorbike need?"

"Threaten to get the local papers involved, they hate that." Said Drew.

It wasn't a bad morning in his bit of Islington. Sunny intervals with a bit of a breeze, as the radio weather forecast had described it. So far, Mary hadn't been banging on his door to complain about the previous night's noise. Nick wasn't that good at connecting with his neighbours. When he saw Denise walking towards them, it took him a while to remember her full name was Denise Morgan and she worked for a firm of solicitors in EC1, or somewhere in that area. She was smiling, so it didn't look as though she was going to complain about weird noises in the early hours. Drew seemed

to have a knack for forming meaningful friendships almost instantly. She greeted Denise as though she was a long lost sister.

“Den.....I just wondering about your animated, inanimate objects.” Said Drew.

“Oh, don’t.....I’ve a scratching noise now, in the middle of the night.” Said Den. “Plus there’s.....Actually you won’t believe me. Do you have a moment ?”

“No problem.” Said Nick.

“Yeah, we were just Sunday morning mooching about.” Added Drew.

Den took them back into the block and up to her flat. Nick had been in there once before, just after he’d moved in. He’d needed to register with a local doctor and Den still had the list from when she’d moved in. There had been talk of a beer and pizza one evening, which had never happened. Den took them into her lounge and she didn’t need to tell them to look up.

“Wow, Den.....Is it glued to the ceiling ?” Asked Drew.

No high Victorian ceilings, the height of Den’s lounge looked to be about ten feet. To one side of the window and directly above her coffee table, was an ornate looking dining room chair. There it was, upside down and apparently stuck to the ceiling by its legs. The wooden chair looked like an antique. “Firstly, it’s not my chair.” Said Den. “I have no idea where it came from. As for being stuck.....Watch this.”

Den went into the kitchen and returned with a mop. She used the handle to push at the chair and it moved around the ceiling. It moved so easily as Den swung the mop about. There was no question of it being glued, yet it showed no sign of falling.

“You can probably tell, I’ve done this a few times.” Said Den. “I tend to leave it over something that won’t break if it falls.”

“That...Is impossible.” Said Nick. “You said it isn’t even your chair ?”

“No, never seen it before.” Said Den. “Heard a kind of grating noise at around three in the morning and....There it was.”

“Have you tried pulling it down ?” Asked Drew.

“Yes.....Try it, see what happens.” Said Den.

Drew could grab the back of the chair, if she stretched upwards. Getting a grip was hard for her, so Nick reached up and got a good hold on the back of the chair. It came down about an inch from the ceiling and no further. With both of them pulling hard, the chair refused to come away from the ceiling.

“I tried it, hanging off the damned thing at one point.” Said Den. “No use, it comes down a little, but no further. I was thinking of getting up there on a ladder and smashing it to bits.”

“It looks antique.....Might be valuable.” Said Nick.

“It’s not mine and although it will make a good conversation starter, it has to go.” Said Den. “If word gets around, the street outside will be full of nutters. And I’ll never be able to sell the place if I want to move. I know you two are alright.....I’ve read one of Nick’s books.”

“Great, which one ?” Asked Nick.

“The one they made into a film.” Said Den. “Why did they dump the priest ? He was the best character in the book.”

“I know.....The arguments I had about that.” Said Nick.

Maybe the Presence felt neglected, angry that it wasn’t the centre of attention. The chair was wobbling about, its feet making a scratching sound as it moved across the ceiling. It wasn’t leaving a mark, no paint or dust was falling from the ceiling.

“That’s it.....The scratching noise I keep hearing at night.” Said Den.

The chair began to sink into the ceiling, while still moving around. It took a while, a good ten minutes. Finally the last bit of the chair back vanished into the ceiling, without a trace. The ceiling looked perfect, as though nothing had happened.

“Who is in the flat above you ?” Asked Drew.

“You two.” Said Den.

“Do we have chairs like that ?” Asked Drew.

“No.” Said Nick.

“I wasn’t scared of the chair until now; it was just a weird oddity.” Said Den. “Now though, seeing it vanish like that. I’m really scared, Nick. From your books, I assume you must know people. It needs to be kept private, but can you bring someone to.....Deal with whatever is haunting my home ?”

“Like an exorcist ?” Asked Nick.

“That makes me think of movies and everyone being maimed, or dying.” Said Den. “There must be someone.....Someone who won’t go straight to the local papers.”

Exorcism was still an accepted part of the Catholic Church, even if no one wanted to talk about it. The problem was that every religious exorcism he was aware of, had ended up with a higher body count than some of the movies. Den didn’t need to hear that though, she needed reassurance and perhaps a few well-meaning lies. Den would be alright, it was only a chair. No one was vomiting green gunge, while their head spun round.

“I do know someone, a layperson, not a priest.” Said Nick. “No guarantees, but I’ve dealt with him before. If I can have your work number ?”

“I already have that.” Said Drew.

“Great.....I’ll talk to him and arrange something.” Said Nick.

“Why do these things happen ?” Asked Den. “You must have an idea, after all the research you mentioned at the back of your book.”

A fan and Nick had never even realised it. How many actually read the extras at the back of his books. Officially a much enjoyed add on feature, yet often there to meet a publisher imposed word count.

“Why all this to annoy and scare a lady in Islington who works for a solicitors ? Drew and I discussed this recently. To whatever is doing this, there will be an important reason. We may not understand their motivation, but there obviously is one. I promise to call the expert I know and call you, as soon as I can.”

“Was he the expert in the book ?” Asked Den.

Nick just nodded at her and wondered if he’d just made a huge mistake. The book was fiction; the victims only existed on paper. The expert brought in had succeeded, but the book didn’t have a happy ending. Horror stories with positive ending are usually rated lower by readers, than those that end badly for the main protagonists. Nick believed it was some kind of universal schadenfreude at work. Everyone wanted the bad guy to kill the good guys and come back in the next book or movie.

“Please remember, Den.....The movie was just fiction.” Said Nick.

It was after midday by the time they made it to the supermarket. Drew remembered what they needed to bring the fridge back to being fairly full again. She even tried to pay, but he got his card through the scanner before hers.

“Next time.....Your plastic next time.” He said.

They’d yet to work out a routine, but weekends were looking like times to get takeaways, with lots of ready to eat things in the fridge. Lots of nice things you could grab as a snack. Drew waited until they were at the end of their street, before mentioning Den.

“Can the man you know really help Den ?” Asked Drew. “You once told me you didn’t think religious exorcisms worked.”

“Catholic priests believe everything is about the devil wanting human souls.” Said Nick. “It’s the cornerstone of their belief, their faith. It blinds them and stops them looking for other motives for what demons are doing.”

“It’s not all about a chair floating against the ceiling, is it ?” Asked Drew.

“No, it’s not.....Nor is it all about ripping up Mary’s precious pictures.” Said Nick. “You’ll like my friend James, who I based the priest on in my book. He’s a good man.....He’ll do his best to help Den, I guarantee it.”

“The real father Jerome ?” Asked Drew.

“Yes, the real Jerome.....Who the film company cut out of the movie.”

Mary was just coming out of the flats, as they arrived. From the look on her face, she hadn’t forgotten all the noise the previous night.

“Good, I was hoping to see you two.....I want a word with you.” Said Mary.

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Marsha didn’t get up early and hurry into the studio on a Sunday, but she was always there by around eleven. Sunday was her day, her I don’t have to run day, as put into song by the Bangles. Eric was a good boss, but he was disorganised and resisted being better organised. If he thought of something important, it had to be done right then and there, at that moment. If he didn’t do that, he forgot all about it. Which meant she had to drop everything too and help him with whatever had drifted into his consciousness. Once it had been his cable TV being cut off because he’d forgotten to renew the payment on his card. Eric paid her well though, very well. So, to get things done without Eric being a nuisance, Marsha came into work on Sundays.

“Wish it was Sunday

'Cause that's my fun day

My "I don't have to run" day.”

Marsha softly sang as she unlocked the front door. She looked around before opening the door. There had been incidents when the public had been in a hate Eric period. Nothing too bad, but a loud and slightly crazy looking woman had followed her inside. She’d been shouting about misogyny, but it could just as easily been one of a dozen topics Eric ranted about and upset people. Marsha had started to give the street a good look over, before going inside. Once inside, she leant against the door for a few seconds, enjoying the.....Silence.

“If only it was like this on Monday morning.” She muttered.

Right through the building and into the area where Eric created his podcasts. As he wasn’t there to be annoying in person, he’d taken to leaving her notes on his desk. Everything from important matters she needed to know about, to telling her the toilet needed better soap. Ignoring his notes just made Eric extra irritating on Monday, so she picked them up. Actually looking at them could wait until she’d had some coffee. The machine on the main phone line was showing ninety nine messages, it always showed the same number, the maximum it could show. The average was about a third of them saying Eric was great, just what Britain needed. Two thirds were angry at Eric and often full of very inventive bad language. Three or four included death threats. In theory all death threats needed to be noted and reported to the police. Marsha never did that.....There were simply too many of them.

“Later.....I’ll listen to them.....Much later.” She muttered.

Out of the glass cubicle Eric worked in and over towards the right of the building. No looking at Eric's notes to her, they went straight on the desk she used for work. Unintentionally she saw the first note was about buying softer toilet paper. Angry for about two seconds, until she started to laugh. "Don't go changing, Eric.....I'm used to you as you are." She muttered.

Marsha had two desks, actually three if you included the table covered in newsletters waiting to be posted out. Eric called her second desk the company altar, but he'd never asked her to get rid of it, or turn it back into a conventional kind of desk. In the centre was a statue of Gaia, the Earth Goddess, which she'd bought on a holiday to Greece. Surrounding the statue were crystals of all kinds, most bought online and some had cost her a lot of money. Healing and protection crystals mostly, though a few were there simply because she liked the look of them. In the gaps between the crystals were shamanic items she'd seen at local fayres and again, online. Lots of herbs claimed to have healing properties.....Sage mainly, Marsha had a definite thing about sage. She wasn't stupid; Marsha knew the altar was an attempt to cleanse her soul. It was working for Eric of course. She'd bought a large, and expensive amethyst geode after one of Eric's particularly racist podcasts. "Oh, Nick Rees.....That aura of yours." She muttered. "I knew it was a mistake to bring you in here."

The locks were good, even her office had its own number pad to gain entry. No signs of a forced entry, yet someone, or something had been creating mischief with her altar. Marsha used a smouldering sage stick to cleanse the room and the burnt end had been used to smear the face of the statue of Gaia. Some crystals had been moved about, some turned upside down. The herbs too had been messed with, some ending up on the floor. No real damage, just childish mischief. "What do you want?" Yelled Marsha.

There was a laugh from above her and the sound of feet running over the floor upstairs. Just boards up there, it was used for archive boxes and some furniture that had come with the rental of the shop. They rarely went upstairs.

"I'm not scared of you." Shouted Marsha.

Extremist guys could be useful, especially if they had an obvious crush on her. After the invasion of the angry feminist, one of her admirers had given her a spray to carry. He'd tapped the side of his nose, when she'd asked what it was.

"Looks like pepper spray, but it isn't." He'd told her. "One squirt anywhere near their face.....They'll be too busy gasping and trying to breathe, to do you any harm."

Probably illegal, though Marsha kept it in the top drawer of her desk. She'd decided she'd rather be alive and having to explain the spray to the police, than dead. She picked up the spray and the key to the door at the top of the stairs. Everywhere was kept locked now.

"If I was sensible.....I'd go home." She mumbled.

No, Eric would go crazy if she left him the night's usual ninety nine messages to listen to. There'd probably be an angry podcast about the evils of telephone messages. She did leave a note on her desk about investigating noises upstairs. It felt a lot like trying to explain why there might be a corpse in the archive room, hers.

"Bloody Nick.....I know this is his fault."

Spray held up, Marsha climbed the stairs and unlocked the door. It smelt musty, the odour slightly mildew, with a little mouse added on. There were rodent traps everywhere, which occasionally lowered the mouse numbers by one. A trap near the archive room door had caught a mouse; its rotting body appeared to have been there a while.

"Hell, Eric.....You promised to clean out the traps." She muttered.

It was the one job she refused to do and Eric had solemnly promised to deal with what the traps caught. The room above her office was where they'd stacked the archive boxes. The usual invoices and paperwork any company generates by the box full. Their auditors had said to keep it all for six years, before getting it shredded. The smell of corruption was worse in the archive room.

"Crap, Eric.....No wonder the place stinks on a hot day."

Marsha crept from one row of boxes to the next, the spray held up in front of her. Like cops on the TV, she kept the spray aimed where a bad guy might appear and she was ready to use it. On the bare boards and above where her altar had to be, was the body of a rat. It was huge, the largest rat Marsha had ever seen. Not dead long, it still looked reasonably intact and free from corruption. It did cross her mind that she'd heard rats running about and the laugh.....Had only existed in her own head.

"Damn.....I just need a holiday; somewhere hot and sunny."

'Marsha.'

She spun around, expecting to find nothing and that it was just anxiety and fatigue causing her mind to play tricks. Instead she was face to face with it, something stood between her and the door. Like a mixture of smoke and shadows, it moved a little towards her and Marsha moved back. She heard her own voice repeated back to her, the words she'd spoken.....It now felt a long time ago.

"I'm not scared of you." Echoed around the room.

'You seem scared now.'

It was the shape of the thing of smoke and shadows. It wasn't now, nor had it ever been, a living, recognisable being. Its shape was wrong and there was a lack of symmetry. All living things had symmetry, from the smallest bug to the largest dinosaur. It was almost as if.....It was defying creation by being so, horrendously different. Marsha aimed the spray at where its face should have been and pressed the button. The entity in front of her merely rippled, as if shrugging off the spray. 'My turn.'

It came at her fast and Marsha held up her hands to fend the thing off. There was no obvious contact, yet there was pain in her right arm. She'd put on a plain white blouse that morning and there was a growing patch of red just above her elbow. Blood, the damn thing had cut her. Marsha turned around but there was no sign of the thing of smoke and shadows. The stench seemed worse now, the stink of mildew and rotting mice.

"Damn you, Eric.....You should clean up the fucking traps." She yelled.

There was a first aid kit downstairs in her office. A good one, it had seemed a wise investment at the time, considering how many death threats Eric was receiving. Marsha grabbed her right arm in her left hand and squeezed, hoping to slow down the bleeding.

"Oh.....I hate the sight of blood." She muttered. "Especially mine."

No locking the door at the top of the stairs, Marsha was close to running, as she came down the stairs and headed for her office. The first aid kit had never been used. Her blood was the first to drip over the metal lid and stain the contents. She ripped open a pack of large wound dressings, before taking off her blouse. Everything she touched was being given a bright crimson stain.

"Fuck !" She yelled.

There was a general purpose antiseptic cleaner in the tin. Marsha used a lot of it on the wound and then wiped it with her discarded blouse. The blouse was finished anyway, too stained to ever wear again. More of the cleaner and another wipe. The wound was long, but not deep. Once she had the dressing free of its sterile covering, it went over the wound. A firm press to stick it to her arm and Marsha felt in control again. Around her, everything seemed to have at least a few spots of her

blood. She used the antiseptic gunk to clean her hands and at last, she felt able to touch things. What had it used to cut her ? The wound had looked so clean, like a razor cut.

“Eric, I’m commandeering your Glen Fiddich.....The good stuff.”

Back across the building to where Eric worked and into a cupboard where he kept a little booze, for special occasions. Was getting attacked by an apparition a special occasion ? Marsha decided she’d earned a few glasses of decent scotch. After the second mouthful, she deleted all of the ninety nine unheard messages on the main office line.

“He never gets back to any of them.” Marsha muttered.

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They were back and the fridge was full again, or at least less like something from a documentary on malnutrition. They’d even bought a few tins of tuna as treats for Suki. Fresh coffee and Drew had been wandering about the flat, looking a bit lost and bored. Nick was quickly getting to know her moods. Travis had been there all Saturday night, so there had been no opportunity for sexual intimacy of any kind. She might call him a sex maniac, but it was still worth asking.

“We could.....If you fancy the idea; go to bed for a couple of hours ?” He suggested.

“That would be nice.” Said Drew.

Sex and a short nap afterwards.....It was three hours before Nick was sat on the edge of the bed, looking for his boxer shorts. Drew was having trouble too.

“Can you see my bra ?” She asked.

“Yeah.....On the chair, tangled up with my boxers.”

“How did that happen ?” Drew asked.

“Like pillow cases turning inside out in the washing machine.” Said Nick. “There’s something deep going on with clothing, which no one really understands.”

Drew called him an idiot, though she did kiss him before heading for the bathroom. Nick only checked his phone because he remembered it making noises while he and Drew had other things to think about. Two texts from Marsha asking him to call and then a voicemail, which sounded a little intense for a Sunday afternoon.

“Marsha wants me to call her.....Sounds serious.” He shouted.

They’d stopped closing the bathroom door the first morning they’d woken up together.

“I knew it.....Fancies you.” Yelled Drew. “Gagging for it.....We women can sense these things.”

It had to be serious, Marsha had left a message on the landline too and that sounded even more like a shriek for help.

‘Call me Nick.....I’m sure you’re to blame, sort of.’

Nick hit the play button again for Drew to hear the message and she shrugged.

“I bet she wants you to go to Manchester again.” Said Drew.

“Won’t happen, I’m too busy.”

“You wait.....Manchester again, I’d bet anything on it.” Said Drew.

Nick knew he viewed urgency in a different way to most people. If someone ran in shouting fire, his likely response would be to make fresh coffee and think about. He’d been through some pretty traumatic events, the mind begins to disassociate.....Or something like that. He’d done a few online searches about it. They were both hungry and there was coffee and a snack, before calling Marsha. He put her on the speaker so that Drew could join in.

“Hi Marsha, sounds like you really want to talk to me.” Said Nick.

“This is Drew; I’m on the line too.”



“Hi Drew.....I think you brought something here with you, Nick.” Said Marsha. “I knew it.....That damned weird Aura you have. It’s still here.....The Thing you brought here stayed here. It cut me; the fucking thing dug something into my arm.”

“Oh, that sounds bad.” Said Drew.

“Did you thoroughly clean the wound ?” Asked Nick.

He knew as soon as he asked. Marsha had all the crystals, she understood about cleansing everything after coming into contact with things like the Presence.

“Of course I did.....I’m not an idiot.” Snapped Marsha.

“Sorry, Marsha.....What did it look like ?” Asked Nick.

“I’ve seen it.” Said Drew. “Like a shadow you can see in the dark and.....Like something dreadful....A creature of evil, something no woman ever gave birth to.”

“That’s it.....Or there might be a more than one.” Said Marsha. “We need to talk...All three of us. When can you get up here, to Manchester ?” Asked Marsha.

Drew was smiling at him and giving him that look. The look that yells I told you so, without the need to utter a single word. If they married and were still together in their eighties, she’d still be giving him that look. Luckily, there was a genuine excuse for not going back to Manchester.

“Love to be there, Marsha. I know you’ve heard of Travis Givens.” Said Nick. “He’s now involved with this and we’re likely to be going to Libya quite soon.”

“How soon ?” Asked Marsha.

“We’ve got to arrange the details.” Said Nick. “An exact date is hard to give.”

“I’m in London the week after next.” Said Marsha. “Eric has a conference and wants me there to take notes. I’ll have a hotel to stay at and a food allowance.....I won’t need looking after. Can we meet up then ? All of us, I haven’t met Drew yet.”

“I’d really like that.” Said Drew.

Drew and her ability to form instant friendships. They were going to get on, Nick knew it. Just so long as they didn’t gang up on him.

“Yes, we’ll arrange a day and time when you’re in London.” Said Nick.

“You can come over for a wine and takeaway.” Said Drew. “How is your arm ? Was it a bad cut ?”

“Long but not deep.....I was thinking of going into A&E anyway.” Said Marsha. “I can’t tell them anything, but given who cut me. Be nice to know there’s nothing taking root in my arm.”

“Yes, that sounds a really good idea.” Said Nick. “Let the good old NHS get a look at it.”

The call was over before Drew commented on any of it. Nick was in their bedroom, printing a few details on staying safe while visiting Libya. Like everything online there were contradictions, but his agent would know; Betsy Nagle seemed to know everything.

“I like Marsha, she sounds nice.” Said Drew.

“Yes, Im sure you’ll soon be buddies.” Said Nick. “Rather than a takeaway, shall we eat out tonight ? There’s a new Italian restaurant near Packington Street that I’ve been meaning to try.”

“Sounds great.....No plates to wash up before we go to bed.” Said Drew.

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About ten on a Monday morning and James Lerner was in his shed. Not just an ordinary shed, it was unquestionably the best, the king of all garden sheds. It had definitely cost him enough to deserve such a title. The purchase of the shed came just after he’d taken early retirement at sixty. From being the chief accountant for a casino in London to being retired and buying the Rolls Royce of sheds. Somewhere to keep his garden tools and sit in, on a nice spring morning. As James cleaned the cutter on his lawn mower, he realised it was still raining and cold out for the time of year.

"I saw Mrs Booth in ASDA." Said Jackie. "She wants that old pond of hers dug up and a rockery built where the pond is now."

"Oh, big job.....That's a concrete pond." Said James. "I'll need to hire a Kango to break it up. Not cheap.....Do you think she'll be willing to pay?"

James had sold his London home and bought a cottage near Harwich in Essex. Why Harwich? Jackie was his daughter and lived a short distance away. His wife, who was never named, had run off with an English teacher and now lived in Stourbridge. An English teacher! Christ, was the woman mad?

"I mentioned it was bound to be expensive." Said Jackie. "Didn't seem to worry her.....Be a good job for you, Dad. It'll keep you in Guinness and chip suppers all summer."

Jackie liked to pop in; he suspected she was making sure his cooking hadn't killed him off. She was also his unofficial and unpaid marketing executive. Her chats to locals in supermarkets had brought in a lot of work. He didn't need to work, but having the king of sheds and not using all the tools inside it.....That felt like some kind of heresy.

His gardening business was thriving, especially in nearby Dovercourt. There were a lot of small elderly ladies with huge gardens in Dovercourt. All those gardens needed a little TLC. James also carried out the occasional exorcism, though he only ever charged for his out of pocket expenses. Very rarely, he was asked to give a little consultancy on the occult for movies and TV shows.

"Nick Rees has been in touch." Said James. "I may be going up to London for a few days."

"Him! Did you ever get the money you were owed?"

"The film company did give me some pay." Said James. "It was hardly Nick's fault that they decided to cut my character from the movie."

"All that time and you are the expert used in the movie, Dad." Said Jackie. "Everything you told them, everything you contributed to the script.....All for next to nothing."

His daughter was right of course, she usually was. Nick had felt let down too, there had never been a general release for the movie. James was happy to put it all down to experience.

"Water under the bridge.....A woman living on her own might need my help." Said James. "I'm sure you wouldn't want me to say no. There have been some strange things happening to her, a lot of things going bump in the night."

"Just be careful, Dad. I heard the woman who worked for Nick was killed."

"Paula you mean, Paula March." Said James. "The police reported that as a dreadful accident. I'll be fine.....If I feel out of my depth, trust me.....I'll get the first train back home."

"Good."

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