

## The Presence

### Chapter 19 – Brown Bear Revisited

**“Jerry Zale still had a bloody, bruised and broken lump of flesh; where he’d once had a nose. He and Celia, his photographer, live in girlfriend and part time conscience; would have both still been in prison. No phone call, the Libyan police didn’t believe in those, or it seemed, any rights for those being detained.”**

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Henrike had been holding her hand for the entire hour it had taken to get Naomi out of the hospital on a trolley; and for the private ambulance to reach Tripoli International airport. Louise had arranged it, through the get you home part of the university’s student medical cover. It was going to take Naomi a while to heal after surgery for a replacement knee joint. Louise hadn’t been comfortable with the interest the police were taking in her, so moving the student to London; had seemed a good idea. Doing it suddenly, with no notice to the authorities had been a bit cheeky, but Louise would get all the blowback. Henrike was going to London with her.

“Are you alright ?” He asked Naomi. “I know all the moving you around, must be uncomfortable.”

“Way beyond uncomfortable and sometimes into quite painful.” Said Naomi. “Not that I’m complaining.....I quite like Libya, but not the attention of the police. It’ll be nice to get home.”

Henrike had noticed all the students thought of the university in London as home, no matter where they might have originally come from. Often home was a small room in student accommodation, but that room in London was always considered to be.....Home.

“Of course, I won’t really relax.” Said Naomi. “Until I hear the plane is at thirty eight thousand feet and heading for London.”

“A huge insurance company booked you onto the flight.” Said Henrike. “The British embassy took an interest and even the UN sent a few messages to the government in Tripoli. All of it arranged by Louise....Trust me; no one will delay our plane taking off.”

There was a slight holdup at a side gate to the airport, as the ambulance was checked over and their documents verified. Henrike understood the need for a little bureaucracy. You couldn’t let just anyone onto the airport grounds, even if they had turned up in an ambulance. One of the security people looked under the ambulance with mirrors on the end of poles.

“We shouldn’t be long now.” He said.

“If I don’t get on that plane.....I’ll scream so loud.....Everyone in the airport will know something is wrong.”

Would they try to grab them both as they tried to leave the country ? It all depended on who ‘they’ were. The police had told them not to leave the country, but someone at the insurance company had said they had no right to say that. Deep inside, Henrike was having a severe panic attack. Luckily, he was really good at hiding it.

“No one is brave enough to make Louise angry.” He said. “I’m sure we’ll soon be in the air.”

Through the gate, with no further interruptions. They’d been told the ambulance would go straight out to the aircraft, but it still seemed strange. No departure lounge, no taking off belts and shoes and shuffling along with the other shoeless and beltless passengers.

“All this fuss, just for my bad leg.” Said Naomi. “I’m a bit embarrassed.”

“Enjoy the attention.....I’d like to always jump all the queues.” He said.

As the ambulance staff began to get Naomi ready to move, Henrike felt her grab his arm.

“We mustn’t let a return to normal break us up.” Said Naomi. “I know we talked about complications because of existing partners, but we can’t drift apart. Promise me you bastard....Swear to me that after a week at home, you won’t forget me.”

“I promise.....Actually; I was hoping you’d move in with me.” He said. “After you’re out of hospital of course.”

Two people in airline uniforms arrived and were helping to get Naomi and her trolley out of the ambulance. It seemed they’d be using a hoist to get her onto the plane. It’d be awkward, but Henrike was determined to finish their conversation.

“I swear it.....I want you to live with me.” He said.

“How long for ?” Asked Naomi.

“A long-time of course. I was hoping it might be forever.” He said.

Really awkward to kiss her, the hoist wasn’t designed with snogging couples in mind. One of the ambulance people actually applauded as they hugged. No mention of marriage, that would add a few complications. Henrike kept hold of Naomi’s hand for as long as he could.

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Drew had been invited into Mary’s flat for coffee. Actually, Nick had been invited, but Mary had tolerated him inviting his girlfriend to go with him. Drew knew that Mary Seeley was never going to be a friend. She was important to the block though, even if everyone said she was annoying. She was needed, the way every tiny village needs a local policeman. Mary watched out for littering and dogs crapping on the pavement, without it being picked up. In keeping an eye out for such minor problems, Mary had seen a lot of other things. Drew had been told by Den, that Mary had spotted at least two would-be burglars. There had also been a case of domestic violence, which Mary had reported to the police. Drew had also seen Mary cry, when Bert the window cleaner had been killed. So, all in all; Drew was becoming quite fond of the block’s self-appointed, one woman militia.

“I hope you’re back home for a while.” Said Mary. “Where was it you’ve been.....Tunisia wasn’t it ? Places like that are too hot for me.....And don’t get me started on foreign food.”

“Libya, Mary.....We were in Libya.” Said Nick. “Most of the time we ate well. There was one period living on ration packs, but they weren’t too bad.”

“Oh, the American army ration packs were wonderful.” Said Drew. “I could happily eat them now, even though we’re living in the takeaway heaven of Islington.”

“Army rations.....You seem to have had some adventures.” Said Mary.

Nick was good at censoring himself on the fly; he was an author after all. Drew listened, as Nick told the story of finding the temple in the middle of the Libyan Desert. No blood in the version for Mary though, no mention of Travis dying. There was a description of gold artefacts though, enough to get Mary quite excited.

“.....Honestly, Mary.....Priceless gold objects...” Nick said.

Drew heard the sound as she settled back in her chair and let Nick weave his tale. A kind of muttering sound, that eventually became a voice. A quiet voice, but definitely a voice. It was as if the voice was talking to other people. In French at first and Drew knew just a little student French; enough to buy a few litres of wine and fast food. Then the voice began muttering in English. There was mention of dreadful events in Paris. Many had died it seemed and Aleister Crowley had ended up stripped of his powers.

‘.....He became magically impotent.....Can you hear me, Drew ?’

“Yes, I can hear you.”

She’d spoken out loud; the other two were now silent and looking at her.

“Sorry.....I know it sounds nuts.” Said Drew. “I was answering the voice in my head.”

“Oh, you’re not crazy, Drew.” Said Mary. “I hear them all the time.....Sometimes in what I think are foreign languages. It means no harm.....It won’t hurt you.”

Drew could have hugged Mary at that moment. A bit of support, comfort that she wasn’t losing her mind. The voice was back though and being quite insistent.

‘It can’t happen again, Drew.’ Said the voice. ‘I failed in Paris, I didn’t help enough.’

“Is that Aiwass ?” Drew asked.

‘Yes....I am Aiwass. Nick created this dreadful state of affairs....Make sure he knows that. He needs to act, tonight if possible. The summoning needs to be completed. Tell him, I can’t hear you telling him.’

Oh wonderful, she was going to be the ears and voice of a pissed off guardian angel. Drew hoped Nick understood the words weren’t hers. As for poor Mary.....She’d have a lot of juicy gossip to tell her niece.

“Aiwass is in my head, Nick.” Said Drew. “He says the problem is your fault. No more messing around, we need to go to the Brown Bear tonight. You have to finish the summoning.”

She actually moved closer and held his hand.

“I’m saying this.....No one else should die because you fucked up.” She said.

Poor Nick, he had the look of a man who’d been enjoying a harmless anecdote with an admirer, only to have a snake appear and bite him on the backside.

‘That’s it.....Tell him I have a place where Baphomet can be banished back to the dark places. It can be done....Tell him, I want to hear you tell him.’

“Aiwass can help.....He knows a place where we can send Baphomet back to hell.” Said Drew.

“Who is Baphomet ?” Asked Mary.

“Someone very bad, Mary.” Said Nick. “Alright....James will be here soon and he wants to act quickly. We’ll do it tonight.....Time to revisit the Brown Bear.”

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Jerry Zale still had a bloody, bruised and broken lump of flesh; where he’d once had a nose. He and Celia, his photographer, live in girlfriend and part time conscience; would have both still been in prison. No phone call, the Libyan police didn’t believe in those, or it seemed, any rights for those being detained. It had never been made clear, exactly why they were being held.

“I told you I’d remember.” Said Jerry. “Marker 87 and the blue boulder.”

“Here.....We need a hole here.” Said Celia, while pointing.

No digging themselves this time, no more ruined nails for Celia. Louise had arranged for two tough looking guys to go with them. As far as Jerry was concerned, two tough guys in their thirties, meant no more digging for him, or Celia. Not American tough guys, they spoke with English accents. Both armed and no one went around with a concealed carry in Libya, unless they were crooks or intelligence operatives of some kind. Jerry was betting on them being from British intelligence. Not that he really cared, he was just happy to have a little protection, in a country he was beginning to dislike. The two minders hadn’t given names, so Celia had christened them James and Bond. They dug down to the buried statue in just two or three minutes. Mind you, they had shovels, not just bare hands. Bond handed Celia something wrapped in a grubby bath towel.

“Is this it ?” Asked Bond.

As Celia unwrapped seven pounds of pure gold statue, everyone reacted. James and Bond were actually smiling, which was a first. Probably not because of anything magical about the statue, or anything demonic. Jerry was still slightly worried the statue was having some kind of effect on anyone who came near it, but.....He tended to think pure gold always had that effect. The colour of the precious metal, the texture if you touched it. There was something about pure gold and if it was some kind of magic, it had been there since the beginning of time. Celia wrapped it up again and passed it back to Bond.

“That’s it.....Please give it to Louise and thank her for helping us.” Said Celia.

“We need to hear you say it.” Said James. “You wish us to give this statue to Louise at the university ?”

“Yes.....We do.” Said Jerry. “Though I’m hoping you’ll stick with us until our plane is on its way to.....Where are we going honey ?”

“Houston dear.....Then a connecting flight home.” Said Celia.

“Our plan is to look after you both, until you leave Libyan soil.” Said Bond.

“Thank you.” Said Jerry.

No need to hire a budget saloon this time, the Brits had their own serious looking SUV. For a second or two, Jerry wondered about the fate of the car they’d hired and driven into the Libyan Desert. To hell with it, the hire company could bill him for it. All he wanted to do, was get home to Abilene. There was one other thing on his mind.....Another call to Nick Rees, to find out what he knew about Aiwass. Their minders were thorough; they filled in the hole they’d dug, before leaving the vicinity of Marker 87.

“Do you want to get something to eat ?” Asked Bond. “At this rate, we’ll arrive at the airport, two hours early for your flight.”

“No.....We’ll get something in the departure lounge.” Said Celia.

Jerry understood, they’d both expected to be unwilling guests of the Libyan police, for quite some time. He just wanted to hear an airline pilot, say they were about to land in Houston, Texas. Luck had saved them, and the amount of clout Louise had in Tripoli. An old friend of Jerry’s, had seen them coming out of their hotel; while being almost dragged by several cops. Good old Frank Jefford had called someone, who was rumoured to know a guy, who worked for the CIA. In the end, someone had the good sense to aim Louise at the Libyan authorities.

“Unless you want to get a burger on the way to the airport ?” Asked Celia.

“No, I’m with you.....Let’s get checked in and waiting to board the plane.” Said Jerry.

Any airline in the world can have delays, they were almost the norm. Four hours later, Jerry gave Celia’s arm a squeeze, as the pilot said they were climbing to cruise at around thirty five thousand feet. The pilot even had an American accent.

“After that.....We’re non-stop to Houston.”

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Nick Rees hadn’t been looking forward to James arriving. Once their rock, he’d not been the same since Travis had been killed. Add on an obvious crush on Adie, that didn’t appear to be reciprocated; and James was.....As Drew had said that morning, a mess. Still, an old friend is still a friend, even if they’re going through bad times. Nick ran down the stairs, after James had rung the outside door to their end of the block. Was James even still talking to him ? There had been a few words over the phone and now James seemed to only talk to Drew. Nick opened the door and smiled at his old friend.

“If we’re going to fight.....Can it wait until we’re in the flat ?” Asked Nick.

James smiled at him and Nick knew things were going to be alright. Drew had spoken to him over the phone and she'd obviously charmed him, as she charmed everyone else.

"No fights.....Can I get a hand with my bags ?" Asked James. "I was hoping to stay here.....Seems more sensible than my usual bed and breakfast at Archway."

"Yes, of course.....Out home is your home." Said Nick. "Crap.....What is in this bag, rocks ?"

"You know me; I brought all my exorcism paraphernalia.....Just in case."

"Ahhh, the teeth of saints, the eyeball of St John.....Maybe even a few nails from the cross.....That kind of thing ?" Asked Nick.

"You'll see it all when I have need of it." Said James.

Three bags, two fairly light and one really heavy. Nick was puffing by the time they reached the door to the flat. Drew was waiting there to hug James and welcome him into their home. James was taken into the kitchen, for coffee and toast.

"If you're starving ?.....I do good scrambled eggs." Said Drew.

"They are wonderful." Added Nick.

"I must admit.....I only stopped twice on the drive, both times just for coffee. Those scrambled eggs sound wonderful." Said James.

In the end, everyone had the eggs, with some bacon added to the plates. James seemed happy to be finally getting to the Gents toilet in the Brown Bear. It was obviously a strange anomaly, a piece of time and space, locked forever at a certain time, on the day Nick had attended someone's company leaving do. Everything they'd been through, because Nick wasn't good at handling ridicule and rejection. No one was good at that, but most don't cause trouble on a biblical scale. For the first time in months, Nick felt ashamed of himself.

"Did Nick mention my dream ?" Asked Drew.

"We were too busy carrying the bones of saints." Said Nick. "James has a bag full of them."

"Ignore him.....No he didn't." Said James.

"Aiwass came to me, last night." Said Drew. "More than just a dream, I felt him guiding me. We went to somewhere, a ruined church in Central London. We need to get the Presence to follow us there. It seems that is one of the few places where there is a gateway between light and dark. The Presence can be banished if we get him to the ruined church."

"Does this place have a name ?" Asked James. "There are a lot of disused churches in London."

"Aiwass kept referring to it as the Gateway." Said Drew. "As soon as I woke up, I scribbled a few drawings of the place. A ruin now, but it still looks beautiful. Do you recognise where it is, James ?"

Drew put several drawings in front of him.

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James knew the ruins well; he'd even been there quite a few times over the years, when he'd worked in London. Still used as an open air church, he'd heard there were regular Sunday services. Originally built around one thousand AD, though the building had suffered more than its fair share of problem, both major and minor.

"Your drawings are very good, considering you were drawing a memory of a dream." Said James.

"Do you know where it is ?" Asked Nick.

"I do, I've actually been there. This is St Dunstan's, what's left of it. Pretty grounds now, lots of green space and plenty of places to sit on a Sunday and ponder, on whatever you usually ponder on. An ill-fated site, it doesn't surprise me that it was built over a gateway between this world and.....Somewhere far, far darker."

"You mean a gateway to hell ?" Asked Drew.

“Oh, I am a man of faith, yet I’m not sure if there is a real hell, certainly not an area of the underworld; where sinners burn for eternity. Eternity is a very long time, dear Drew. I can’t think of anyone who can deserve that after their three score years and ten. I’m sure even the worst tyrant is nice to someone. Let’s just say a gateway to somewhere the Presence would call home.”

James had heard about the history of St Dunstan’s. He’d never have admitted it and it was the only case he’d come across; but he felt it was a church that should never have been built. Not over that particular existing pagan site. Christianity often took over existing sites of various older religions. “The church was demolished twice, mainly because it was about to collapse. Numerous fires and renovations, over hundreds of years.” Said James. “Even Christopher Wren became involved in the battle, with whatever had once been worshipped there. He build a wonderful steeple, which was so heavy, it nearly caused the church to collapse, yet again. Massive damage in the great fire of London and.....In nineteen forty one, the Luftwaffe came close to finishing St Dunstan’s off. Yet, the battle goes on and the site is still used for open air services.”

“It sounds an awful place.” Said Drew.

“Actually, it’s a wonderful place for picnic on a sunny day.....Lots of grass and trees.” Said James.

“So.....After the Brown Bear, we lead the Presence to St Dunstan’s ?” Asked Nick.

After the Brown Bear, James doubted if anyone would be in a condition to do much at all, but James was beginning to think of them as his fighters again, his troops in the battle. There was nothing to be gained by damaging their morale.

“Yes, but not tonight.” Said James. “Once Baphomet has been summoned, we’ll need to do what all warriors do.....We’ll regroup and rest up for a day.”

“But he might hurt people.” Said Drew.

“Oh yes, he might.....We can’t lose the battle, Drew.” Said James. “That’s why we need to rest before going to the ruined church.”

“How do we get the Presence to enter the Gateway ?” Asked Nick.

“I have a few ideas, but first we need to finish the summoning.” Said James. “Actually Nick, we’ll be there for support, but you need to finish the summoning.”

In truth, James was hoping for some kind of divine assistance from the mysterious Aiwass. He wasn’t even sure what was meant by a Gateway at St Dunstan’s. It definitely wouldn’t be a hole in the ground, with a sign above it pointing down to hell. More than likely it would be a shrine of some kind, now deep in the ground. Somewhere with so much residual power, that it could cause damage to the church for centuries. Even sending the Luftwaffe wasn’t impossible.....Ill-wishing with enough power, could even kill. As for getting the Gateway to swallow the Presence ? James really was hoping for a hint from Aiwass, whoever he, or she, really was.

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Adie had promised to come, but promises were often made to stop people pestering. There was Silas to consider, leaving him as an orphan was too horrendous to think about. Her mother and sister were nice people, really, incredibly nice people; but the thought of them bringing up her boy.....Adie really had no intention of going to the Brown Bear pub.

Marwa knew that, but was determined to find her way to London and the pub not far from Old Street Tube. There had been maps printed off the internet and lessons on using the Tube. Actually, there had been a long conversation about what the Tube was. Underground trains must have sounded like something mystical, to a girl brought up in Tripoli. The lessons had convinced Adie that her new lodger, really was very much a stranger in the very strange land of Uxbridge. Then there was

the guilt, for letting a young student go to her doom. She would either be killed, or crippled for life, Addie knew it. In the end, it was all far simpler, to drive them both to London.....

"This is Cross Street.....The street you marked on the map." Said Marwa. "I can see places we can park, but I have no idea what all the yellow lines mean."

"They could mean a towed away car." Said Adie. "We're too late to mess around though.....I'll park in the closest gap and hope for the best."

Adie parked and grabbed anything essential, mainly the bag with her purse in it. Modern living didn't demand much, but it required plastic and at least one form of photo ID. Her driving licence would do. Marwa was enjoying herself, looking around, as if trying to memorise everything she saw in London.

"Don't wander off, Marwa." Said Adie. "Sorry, I know you're not a child, but it's easy to get lost."

"I have the map and we need to turn right onto.....Yes, Essex Road." Said Marwa. "We're definitely going in the right direction."

Adie began to wonder if there was more than good luck on their side, when she heard someone yelling out her name. A woman just paying off a black cab, while looking around, as if slightly lost. A young black woman in her mid-twenties, who was trying to hold onto a bag and not drop her money.

"Adie..... Adalind Givens." Yelled the woman. "It's me.....Marsha from Manchester."

Had they ever met face to face ? Adie didn't think they had, but she knew the face. Yes, there had been a conference call once, to try to get Marsha to go to Libya with them. Sadly, Marsha had been far too sensible to join them.

"Marsha.....Are you coming with us to the Brown Bear ?" Shouted Adie.

"Of course I am.....Good grief, look behind you, Adie."

Adie turned and there they were, walking along the other side of Essex Road. Faces Adie would have known anywhere. Nick in front, with Drew behind him, talking to James. Poor dear James, she had rather left him in Limbo after getting off the private jet in Kent. There was everyone who'd been part of it, all conveniently in the right place at exactly the right moment. Adie knew that someone was helping them, maybe even trying to give them an edge.

"James.....I'm over here !" Shouted Adie.

Crossing the busy main road wasn't easy, especially with Marwa just a few paces behind her. Two women, obviously in a hurry. The traffic didn't exactly part for them, but a few drivers did slow down for them. Once on the pavement, Adie went straight up to James. No hug, she wanted to see his face as she spoke. Adie did grab both of his hands in hers.

"James, I am so sorry." Said Adie. "So much had happened and I kept thinking about how I'd explain the death of his father to Silas. I feel as though I abandoned you once we got off that wonderful private jet. Please forgive me."

"There's nothing to forgive.....Are you here to go with us ?"

"I am.....I'm hoping to get a little revenge for what this thing did to Travis." Said Adie.

Then they did hug, though it was touch and go, as to who hugged who first. Marwa was leaning against the window of a shop, grinning at them. Essex Road was busy, though Adie didn't know if that was normal, or it was just a busy night. It seemed that everyone involved in the evil done by the Presence was going to the Brown Bear. Not Den, but Adie had heard she'd moved home and had a new job. More than enough to keep her occupied.

"How are we getting to the pub, James ?" Asked Adie. "You all seem to be walking."

"We are.....Until we get on a tube at the Angel." Said James. "Far easier to use the tube, especially when none of us are sure how long this summoning might take."

"A tube.....I've never been on one of those." Said Marwa.

"Then tonight you're in for a treat." Said James. "The Northern Line is famous, or rather infamous.....Lots of problems and delays."

"Wow.....I don't mind." Said Marwa.

Nick and Drew wandered over, bringing Marsha with them. They'd gone from being a few individuals, to a group large enough to cause a blockage on the pavement.

"There are lots of coffee places between here and the Angel." Said Nick. "We can sit and chat there.....If we stay here, we're likely to get arrested for obstructing the highway, or something."

"I have a heavy bag.....Can I leave it somewhere?" Asked Marsha.

"We can all help by carrying Marsha's bag for a while.....Agreed?" Asked Nick.

Lots of nodding heads and James was first to relieve Marsha of her heavy bag. It seemed that Drew had decided it was time for something to be put to a vote.

"High Ground.....I vote that we go to High Ground for coffee and nibbles." Said Drew.

No one else offered an alternative. It seemed they were going to High Ground, without the need for a single hand being raised. Den not being there became a conversation starter as they walked, with no one really sure if she and Sovi had ever mentioned coming with them to the pub, with its odious toilets.

"I've never seen inside a gents' toilet." Said Marwa.

"You haven't missed much." Said James.

"Just don't tell your mother, Marwa.....She'll go nuts." Added Drew.

For Adie it wasn't going to be her first time. There had been a beautiful boy at her sixth form college. They'd used a cubicle in the boys' toilets, to consummate their mutual lust for one another. Not ideal, but it was the only place they could think of. Adie decided it was all far too personal to mention to the others.

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The Brown Bear hadn't changed; Nick had never considered it would. It seemed a long time ago since he'd tried to summon something nasty in the Gents' toilets, but in reality, it hadn't been that long ago. He was in front, as they all walked down the back alley, which led to the large and rather noisy pub.

"Looks like a busy night." Said James.

"It always is busy, though I've never understood why." Said Nick. "The place has very little charm and the beer never seems cold enough."

Drew beat them both to the doors and there was a loud growl of pop music, as she went inside. Sometimes the Brown Bear had live groups; up and coming local bands. Despite that, the pub still seemed to be thriving. James was still thought of as the organiser, the one with a plan that might get them all out of the place in one piece. He got them in a circle.

"I know some of you feel awkward wearing them." Said James. "Don't take off the crucifix I gave each of you, they're important."

James had a kind of satchel over his shoulder. He'd produced several crucifixes from it, while they were suffering an almost inevitable delay on the northern line. He seemed to have a lot of the small silver crucifixes, on chains to go around the neck. James had so many that Nick wondered if there was a place where exorcists could buy them in bulk, at wholesale prices. Nick didn't mind wearing the tiny piece of silver, but Marwa had muttered about. She was after all, a Muslim.

"What else is in your natty looking satchel, James?" Asked Adie



"You'll see, if there is a need for them." Muttered James. "Now.....We all need to order a drink and blend in a bit, before we go downstairs."

Nick had the list; it was another task that had been taken care of, while their tube had lurked in a tunnel in the vicinity of Old Street station. He bought the round of drinks and then wandered out into the rather small, tatty garden area. Despite not supposing to group up, Drew followed him.

"I used to come in here a lot." Said Nick. "In the end, I decided the popularity of this place is the location. There are a lot of people working in the area and very few half decent pubs."

"I quite like it.....There's a vibe; a good vibe about the place." Said Drew.

"Yes, I'll give you that.....There is a good atmosphere."

No agreed time to wait until they went down the stairs and into the Gents' toilet. Not that Nick thought all of them going together would have been a problem. Once through the door, they'd be on their own. They be in the strange copy of the toilet, forever locked in a tiny segment of time; the one where Nick had failed to finish a summoning. No customers of the pub could get to where they'd be, so why stagger when they went ? It didn't make sense, but James had come up with the idea and James needed to feel in control again.

"All these people, all looking so happy." Said Drew. "In a way, It makes it more scary. In that dreadful old temple, we were expecting something awful to happen. But here....."

"Go if you want to; wait back at the flat." Said Nick. "I promise to never hold it against you, or even mention it."

"No, we're all one big family now." Said Drew. "I'm scared shitless, but I'm not running away."

They kissed, a proper snog. A really over the top, public display of inappropriate affection. Then as far as Nick could tell, it was time for them to enter the rather grubby, smelly Gents' toilet. There had been a long discussion with James, where consequences had been mentioned. Finishing the summoning might mean the tiny pocket world in the toilet, merging back into the real world. The consequence if that happened ? James was fairly certain they'd all die, hurtled out of existence in the blink of an eye.

"Hold my hand, so there can be no chance we're separated." Said Nick.

Through the doors and there was Marsha, right in front of them and wrinkling her nose.

"Oh, it smells really awful in here." Said Marsha.

"I promise, you do get used to it." Said Drew.

"How long does that take ?"

"About an hour, or so." Said Nick.

"Shit !" Muttered Marsha.

They all arrived looking scared and a little disgusted with where they were. Nick didn't feel insulted by the general revulsion at the hygiene of the Gents' toilet. He hadn't caused the general grubbiness and anyway.....All pub toilets tended to be dreadful, sometimes even the Ladies' facilities. No roll call after Adie and Marwa arrived; they all knew everyone was now there.

"Alright, no going through the plan again." Said James. "Time to get the summoning finished and move on to the next stage. There is a potential for catastrophe, once this frozen place in time, is reunited with the real world. It might gradually fade away, giving us time to leave, or.....We might cease to exist. You're all here of your own free will, so I'm not going to lie to you. Anyone wishing to leave, should go now."

No one left, which was nice; though Adie had a question.

"Once Nick starts the summoning, how long will it take ?" She asked.

“Most of it was done; I’ve just got half a dozen lines of Latin to read.” Said Nick. “Once I close the cubicle door and get on with it, everything will be over in a few minutes.”

An awful time for it, though Nick did understand why Drew chuckled. His choice of words could have been better. Marwa giggled and of course.....Giggling is infectious and everyone joined in.

“Yes, I think we needed that, but it’s time to be serious.” Said James.

“My first time here.” Said Adie. “Which cubicle will Nick use ? Is there anything we all need to do, or watch out for ?”

“Yes.....My first time down here too.” Added Marwa. “A little more information, please.”

“I think that’s a question for you, Nick.” Said James.

Nick actually felt his chest tighten, at the prospect of once again, explaining how he’d got too drunk and ruined the summoning. As for trying to summon a powerful demon to punish a woman who’d done him no real harm.....No, he was just going to give them the facts. He opened the cubicle door to show them the glow on the floor and the summoning circle.

“Just a summoning circle and I’ll be stood inside it.” Said Nick. “If the demon arrives feeling angry, this might be the last time you see me.”

“Nick !.....Stop it.” Said Drew.

“Let’s assume we’re all going home tonight.” Said James.

“Fine.....I’ll keep it positive.” Said Nick. “I step into the circle and read several lines in Latin. That should finish summoning Baphomet. At the moment we’re not sure if our Presence and Baphomet are one in the same entity. It does seem likely that they are.”

“Very likely that Baphomet is the Presence and causing all our troubles.” Added James.

There had been an argument over the point when James had arrived at the Islington flat. He hadn’t been certain then, but now he was. It seemed that James was using some mild gas-lighting to keep everyone feeling positive.

“Now, the complexity of fucking up the original summoning, should help.” Said Nick. “Baphomet will be released into our world. Not down here, this odious place is no longer part of our world. No guarantees, but Baphomet should be released out there somewhere, to a location in London.”

“Somewhere with a connection to places of darkness.” Added James.

Little additional comments were ruining his flow. Nick gave James the stink eye, until he received a nod to continue.

“Once I come out of the cubicle, this place is likely to disintegrate.” Said Nick. “When you see me head towards the door.....Follow me, very quickly. Don’t run, but don’t dawdle either. As for going after Baphomet once he leaves here.....”

“Let’s get this done.....Then we’ll move onto that.” Said James.

A massive hug for Drew and yet another emotional kiss. Marsha was between him and the cubicle door. Without asking for his permission, she put a talisman on a chain over his head and around his neck. Silver probably, though it was quite heavy. In the centre of the talisman was the unmistakable image of Medusa.

“I bought this on a holiday to Greece.” Said Marsha. “Believe in it, Nick. Have faith that it will protect you from evil and it will.”

“Thank you.” Said Nick.

An image of Medusa seemed odd, but Nick had been reading and researching on the mystical and the occult for a long time. If there was a shield enchantment on the talisman, it needn’t have any connection to the words and image. Nick stepped into the cubicle and closed the door.

“Any chance of a running commentary ?” Asked Marwa.

“No.....Leave him in peace.....Nick needs to stay focused.” Said Drew.

Two candles on the cistern, which he lit with the matches that had been there since, that dreadful night. Black candles, occult candles, maybe. Nick wasn't sure; he'd bought quite a few occult items, without being certain of their authenticity. He touched the talisman Marsha had given him; he even kissed the heavy silver metal.

“It can't hurt.” He whispered to himself.

Using just the candles for light, though some light was creeping in from where everyone was waiting for him to get the summoning finished and done with. Nick pulled a piece of paper from his pocket and looked at the lines of Latin. He knew it by heart, after reading it in his head, many, many times. A simple standard summoning incantation, which every competent occultist born in the last two thousand years would have recognised. Could it be as easy as that ?

Nick Rees read the words, slowly, carefully and out loud.....

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