

The Presence

Chapter 7 – Air Tickets

“The Jeep was how he’d left it, the door left open and the keys dangling from the ignition. Silly really, but no car thieves were likely to be lurking in the Libyan Desert, waiting for a badly secured Jeep to turn up.”

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Denise Morgan was surprised when her boss had come straight out with it. A married man who’d never shown the slightest interest in her, at least not in that way. Good friends and they worked well together, but sex.....The invite out for a meal, a date. That had been a surprise. Stuart had used the word date and he’d asked about coming back to her place, after they’d been out for a meal. There was no linkage implied, between sleeping with Stuart and getting the position she’d been promised. In her mind though, sexual intimacy could only improve her chances. Being a good PA was pretty close to being married, but without the sex. As they’d come out of the restaurant, Den had given the taxi her address. Fuck it.....He looked great for his age and being honest, she had often wondered what Stuart would be like in bed. Any woman PA, who claims not to have wondered that about her male boss, was a liar. Stuart had been good at it, attentive with plenty of stamina. Den hadn’t been concerned about whatever seemed to be haunting her flat. Her bladder was complaining and rolling onto her other side, didn’t cure it. Den got out of bed and headed for the bathroom. No light.....Turning on the light turned on a fan, which drove her crazy.

“Am I crazy ?” She mumbled. “He’ll expect this again.”

Den peed and then sat there for a minute or two, thinking things over. Would her boss want her to dump Ben, her semiregular boyfriend ? That might cause trouble; she’d begun to really like Ben. Was she driving herself nuts with imagined what-ifs ?

“It might be a one off.....Don’t over analyse it.” She mumbled.

Then there was the seven ton, huge bull elephant in the room. If her boss expected to regularly share her bed, she’d have to tell him about the three am scratching sound and the chair on the ceiling. It would actually be a relief if it all turned out to be nothing but a one night stand.

“Why does sex always make things so complicated ?” Den mumbled.

A quick wipe, but no flush. Like the damned fan, the flush was annoying. It seemed to carry on forever and the bathroom was right next to her bedroom. Into the bedroom and there was Stuart, sleeping like a baby. Very little light, just a glow from a streetlight, coming round the edge of the curtains. Everything in monochrome, it looked as though there were dark shadows on Stuart’s face and on his pillow. Den suddenly felt cold, very cold. She had an idea what the dark shadows were and thought Stuart would be immune. She could understand Ben being hurt; he’d been there many times over a long period of time. Stuart though.....Why would it resent him ?

“Shit.” Den whispered.

She put the passage light on and half closed the bedroom door. There was still enough light to turn the dark shadows red. Why hadn’t Stuart woken up, it must have hurt ? Several deep scratches on each cheek, which had bled quite a bit. His face was red, the pillow was red.....It felt as if everything she looked at was stained with Stuart’s blood. Yet there he was, sleeping soundly and seemingly

unbothered by what had happened to him. Den sat on the bed and gave her pounding heart a chance to slow down. She turned on the bedside light.

“Stuart.....I need you to wake up.” She said.

The blood looked so much worse with the extra light. There were spots of it on the wall, on the beige wallpaper she loved. Spots on the bedside table and a large stain on the sheets she’d found while rummaging about at a Harrods sale.

“Stuart.....Wake up.” She said, quite loudly.

No reaction, he just carried on sleeping. Supposing he didn’t wake up, ever. Den knew she overanalysed things, but her boss in her bed.....Injured and not waking up. It might not be a total disaster, but it would be close to it. Crap ! Where did his wife think he was ? Den held Stuart’s hand and began to squeeze, quite hard.

“Wake up !” She yelled.

Stuart’s eyes opened and Den’s mind still wouldn’t let her feel relieved. Supposing he saw the blood and screamed ? They didn’t know each other out of work, in civilian life, as it were. He might be a panicker.

“Stuart.....There’s been an accident, but you’re fine.” Said Den. “You’re alright, just a few small cuts.”

Just a few small cuts.....As if that was going to calm anyone down. Stuart sat up in her bed and for a moment, he stared at the blood on his pillow.

“You’ll be fine.....Do you want me to call anyone ?” Den asked.

He was looking at her with fear in his eyes, definitely fear.

“Did you do this to me ? Why did you do this ?”

Den backed away from the bed, Stuart’s eyes following her every movement.

“I didn’t hurt you.....I promise you, it wasn’t me.” Said Den.

Just the two of them in a small flat and he woke up with a gouged face, with bedding covered in his blood. Den hadn’t anticipated how it might look to him. She was almost naked and even her panties had a blood stain she must have picked up from the bed. Den got her gown from the wardrobe. By the time she’d done it up, Stuart was muttering to someone on his phone.

“I’ll make us some coffee.” Said Den.

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It wasn’t that Nick Rees had a blind spot for shop names; he just viewed them as not being essential knowledge. He still didn’t know the name of the supermarket he used all the time. Why would he need to know ? He knew where they were and that they appeared to stock everything he needed. Similarly there was a good shoe shop not far away, which did a good job of repairing his leather shoes. He had no idea what it was called, or the name of the man who ran it. Names were superfluous, even if Drew thought he should make the effort.

“Supposing someone asks where you shop ?” Drew had asked him.

“Why would they ? Sounds like being a bit too nosy to me.” He’d replied.

The guy who ran the shoe shop was a little older than Nick. A little on the tubby side with thick brown hair. Nick would have recognised him in a crowd, even if he hadn’t a clue what his name was. The man had a definite love of shoes; he stroked the three pairs of brogues that Nick had taken in for repair. They were required for Libya and although they weren’t badly worn, they needed repairing.

“The leather is a bit stiff.” Said the repair guy. “Have you been drying them on a radiator ?”

The same question every time Nick went in. You didn't seem to buy shoes from the guy; it appeared to be more like adopting them. There was always some comment that implied you weren't looking after them properly.

"No, never." Said Nick.

"HmMMMM.....Soles and heels on all three pairs?"

Unless he was buying new shoes, their conversation didn't vary much. Nick knew the guy though and Drew was always telling him to show more interest in the local community. Besides, a local business owner was likely to know someone with a bit of space in their lockup.

"There'll be ready to pick up on Wednesday." Said the shoe guy.

It was on the receipt of course, it seemed he'd been using Sammy's Shoes to get his shoes repaired. Nick would forget the name of course; his mind would consider it nonessential knowledge.

"I was wondering.....I have a classic motorcycle I need to put somewhere safe for a few months."

Sammy, if he was Sammy? Was looking at him quite intently. Nick thought that non-shoe related conversations in the shop, were probably quite rare.

"Normally it'd be alright." Nick continued. "There is the estate round the back. If the kids see it not moving for a while.....You know what I mean?"

"Yes, they can be right little bastards." Said shoe guy.

It seemed the guy Nick chose to think of as Sammy, had a lock up round the back of the store. It was in an alley leading off from Halton Cross Street. The location was superb and apart from a lot of boxes of very old stock, the lockup was fairly empty.

"Put your bike against the wall and no one will disturb it." Said Sammy.

Sammy wasn't averse to other items going into the lockup, while Nick was away on business. Just so long as they didn't block the entrance. Money changed hands, though nowhere as much as Nick had feared. Nick was given keys for the padlocks, and.....His beloved BMW motorbike had a safe place while he was in Libya. A few treasured personal items would go in the lockup too, just in case.

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James Lerner had been in the small hotel at Archway, reading various documents sent to him by email. Everything encrypted of course, the contents of some of the emails could have him arrested, while some.....Occultism was no longer a crime, but some might try to get him locked up in a secure psychiatric facility. The occult still made some of the nation's great and good very nervous. Nervous people in positions of power, could be extremely dangerous. He was right this time; there could be no doubt about it.

"The Sumerians knew you, but no one bothered looking." James muttered.

Biblical scholars tend to only be interested in the bible; the clue was in their name. The Devil, a monotheistic God....Heaven and hell, with its angels and demons. None of it was unique to Christianity, Islam or the Jewish faith.....The religions of the book, the Old Testament. Biblical scholars claimed the knowledge though and slowly, little by little, no one looked at anything older than the bible. Why look at Sumerian texts, when everyone knew demons didn't really exist in their day? Only they did exist and the name of one was on the screen in front of him. James had taken days to fully translate the name into Aramaic, before using a codex he'd obtained from a Rabbi in Jerusalem. There is was though, its name. Not that James would ever speak it out loud.

"Your name gives your power.....But it also your weakness." James muttered.

It seemed Aleister Crowley was right; Aiwass was a good guy, a guardian of some kind. Not that James was going to speak his name either. Not yet, not until he was totally certain he was one of the good guys. He emailed the Sumerian script to Nick, with a copy to everyone else who seemed to

have an interest. It was a growing number and Nick had already muttered about getting the news media involved.

'Here you go.....The name of our monster, the Presence. Look, but don't speak it.' He added as text to the email.

None of them would be able to say the name out loud, there were too many back of the throat vowels. The Sumerians must have possessed a different voice box to modern man. The Bushmen of the Kalahari might manage to speak the name, but no one in Nick's flat in Islington. When his phone rang, James was feeling rather pleased with himself.

"Hi Den, how's life in Islington?"

Denise was upset, but not bursting into tears upset. When there was mention of being demoted in her job and being visited by solicitors.....She sounded angry upset and full of rage. The sort of angry where she might grab a baseball bat and try to alter a few people's attitudes. On the good side, she personally hadn't been injured.

"Don't do anything drastic, Den.....I'll be there in fifteen minutes."

Denise had thought the police would arrive, but Stuart was no fool. Once the police became involved, it all became public knowledge. Why had he been at her flat all night? Why had he lied to his wife about what he was doing? Some police officer with financial problems would call the press and.....Stuart being hurt would be linked to other strange occurrences at the block in Islington. Eventually there'd be a link to the deaths where Drew had lived. After that.....It was a special on Netflix, Stuart divorced and her..... She'd probably be looking for a new job.

"I wasn't sacked." Said Den. "They realised that would end up as a visit to the employment tribunal and get picked up by the news media."

James was there, looking concerned. He'd already tutted a lot, as he'd had a good look at the bloody pillow case and blood splattered sheets.

"What did his solicitor get you to sign?" Asked James.

"That was a mistake, I know that." Said Den. "I'm not being fired, just switched to a role in another department, with the same pay and seniority. I was so relieved not to be fired, that I signed their non-disclosure agreement."

"Can I see what you did sign?"

Den hesitated, but James was probably the only person she could trust. Ben worked for the same company as her and had probably already signed an NDA of his own. She gave James the envelope, containing the very long and complicated form she'd signed.

"No.....I didn't read it through before signing it." Said Den.

"Can I take this away?" Asked James. "I give you my word; no one will read it but me."

"Fine.....I know I was a fool to sign it." Said Den.

"You could have ended up with no job." Said James. "You did what you needed to do....And there was no police involvement. It could have been a lot worse. Try telling the local coppers that a ghost cut up your boss in the middle of the night."

"Yeah.....I can see that." Said Den. "At least I'll be able to pay the mortgage. The look on Stuart's face was the worst thing. I could see it.....He really believed I'd cut him."

"Tea.....My mum used to say tea made everything better." Said James. "I'm sure I can find your kettle and a few teabags. Can I get you a cup?"

"That would be wonderful." Said Den.

It had been a while, since anyone but her, had made tea in her kitchen. It was a nice feeling and James had also found her emergency packet of chocolate biscuits. As she drank her tea it began, the long and gentle questioning she knew was coming.

“Alright, Den.....Start from when you first noticed Stuart had been hurt.....”

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Once again, Drew was reading documents while walking along Cleveland Street. On a good day, she enjoyed the walk from work to Warren Street tube. Drizzle had been threatening all day, but she'd never needed to use her fold up umbrella. There was a small area of green, too small to be called a park. There was a wall though, where she could sit and look through the air tickets. Drew had picked them up at lunchtime and had already checked everything, but tickets to Libya.....It was beyond simply exciting. Tripoli International Airport was a bit different to her usual package holiday to somewhere on the Mediterranean. It sounded exotic, with a definite hint of danger.

“We're going.....We're really, really going.” She muttered.

Another ticket could be bought for Marsha, but it seemed very unlikely she'd be going with them. The tickets were dated for the Monday after she officially left her current job. Of course, she was going back to the same company after returning to London. For six months, her time was hers.....Which made her want to give an excited shriek. There was health insurance for everyone, the kind that gets you home if you're seriously ill. For about the third or fourth time since getting the documents from the travel agent, Drew checked the names.

‘Drew Benton....Nick Rees....Travis Givens..... Adalind Givens....James Lerner.’

James was a late addition and Drew liked to think of him joining them as her achievement. Two phone calls to Jackie, his daughter. Jackie turned out to be a bit of a soft touch. A few mentions of the dangers James might save them from in the Libyan Desert and she'd capitulated. Any dreadful injuries and the health cover included a private jet to get them home. It was there in the details of their very expensive medical insurance. Drew put the tickets and documents in her bag and began the last part of her walk.....About a hundred yards past all the shops and offices in Warren Street.

“I hope Suki doesn't get too upset.” Drew muttered.

Suki had already been moved once, out of the flat in Clapham and into the block in Islington. Den was looking after her and had suggested moving Drew's feline buddy, into her place for six months. That was too much of an upheaval; Drew knew Suki would hate it. Plan B, which Den had agreed to, was feeding Suki where she was. Nick was currently buying cat food by the case and cat litter by the sack full. Den was also going to spend time with Suki, giving her cuddles and ear rubs.

“We're really.....Fuck.....I'm going to Libya.” Drew mumbled.

Nick had sent her a few texts, based on second hand information from James. What had happened to Den's boss sounded nasty, but not that serious. Besides, none of them really knew him. Drew kept finding her mind justifying to herself, as to why she wasn't overly bothered by Den's boss ending up with his face cut, after a night of passion. It was hard to feel compassion for a stranger and he had a wife at home. Drew didn't want to inherit her mother's rather Old Testament morality. But sometimes.....He was Den's boss and he was married.

“Compared to what happened to.....That poor window cleaner.” Drew muttered.

Travelling a little later than usual, though the Victoria Line was as busy as ever. The boards were still lying, saying everything was hunky dory. By the time Drew came out at Highbury and Islington, she was nearly an hour later than she liked to get home. She sent a text to Nick.

‘Running late.....Is a takeout Thai alright?’

‘Perfect.....Buy lots, James is here.....Buy wine too.’

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James had seen his air ticket to Libya, and the certificate of travel medical cover. Jackie would like that, knowing that if he was seriously injured, he'd be repatriated quickly to the UK. The meal was good too, lots of different Thai dishes that they were all dipping into. To James though the Denise situation, wasn't as cut and dried as Nick and Drew seemed to think.

"Hmmmmm...Thai green curry and a decent drop of merlot." Said James. "After living out of McDonalds for a couple of days, I feel so spoiled."

"You did give us a name for our monster, the Presence." Said Drew.

"Yes....you're our hero of the hour." Added Nick.

A name none of them could pronounce, or even if they could....It might be suicide to say the name out loud. It brought up the question of Aiwass and the whole pronounce, or don't pronounce attitude. There had been something in the journal of a resident of Malta. A defrocked priest, who was known for obscure, but accurate, pieces of esoteric knowledge.

"I think we can now be sure, that the entity we've all been not naming, is now some kind of guardian deity, or angel." Said James. "That leaves the problem of why saying his name, seems to have caused the slaughter in Clapham."

"I've been wondering about that for ages." Said Drew. "It doesn't make sense."

"It does, if you think of it from a sporting angle." Said James. "I've been reading the journals of Chicca of Malta. Once a priest, before he began asking the dark forces for help. He seemed to think the famous demons and angels, were jealous of one another's fame."

"Now I understand.....The light has finally come on." Said Nick.

"Think of it as a Liverpool supporter in all their fan clothing, entering the Arsenal end at Emirates Stadium." Said James. "By naming the entity starting with A, you've stirred up thousands of years of enmity and hatred. Sensibly.....We should never pronounce any name.....Of Demon or Angel."

"Yeah, makes sense.....We should tell the others." Said Drew.

The others.....That brought James back to thinking about Den. Jackie had given him her view on the situation, which was a little morally doubtful. Still....Not going to Libya might put four people in mortal danger. Jackie had talked about the lesser of two evils and protecting four people, rather than just one. He'd already mentioned Den, as the Thai meal had been plated up.

"Can we get back to Den.....And how to protect her?" Asked James.

"Oh, that again.....It's insoluble, James." Said Nick. "Don't over think it.....You can't be in two places at once."

"I agree, I just need you both to say it." Said James. "Say you want me to ignore Denise and go to Libya.....And I'll use the air ticket."

"Oh, crap.....James." Said Nick. "Why are you always like this? Leave your fucking conscience at home for once. We need you in Libya."

"Four of us; just one of Denise.....I want you to use the ticket." Said Drew.

James simply stared at Nick; they'd had similar situations before. In the end Nick would fold....He always had in the past.

"Fine.....It's what you want me to say." Said Nick. "Please leave Den and come to Libya with us."

"I will.....And if there consequences from that.....We will all share the blame." Said James.

"You should have been a fucking Jesuit priest." Said Nick.

"I very nearly was a priest." Said James.

"Before we fly out.....I want a little history, on why we had to have that moment of madness." Said Drew.

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~ Libyan Desert ~

They were pleased to have found the ruined temple, but it was the wrong time of day. They had instructions and not following them could have consequences.

“Don’t enter the site after dark, the structure might be dangerous.” Louise had told them.

Louise was a professor and although she appeared to be friendly, she’d been known to bite. They were to find the ruins, look over their general condition and report back. Ideally they’d have found the temple in the morning, but it was now close to dusk. There wasn’t even much in the way of dusk in the Libyan Desert.

“From being able to see alright, to blackness.....All in a few seconds.” Henrike had said.

Nonsense of course, but there wasn’t that much of a dusk. Henrike was attached to them while he finished his PhD thesis. Quite low on the pecking order, but even he outranked them. Roger and Diane were second year degree students, the lowest of the low. It was a miracle they’d been chosen for the archaeology team in Libya. Diane was driving the Jeep, they took it in turns.

“We found it, the tomb of Gaiseric, King of the Vandals.” Said Diane. “Complete bollocks of course.....He’s buried somewhere a long way away from here.”

“It’ll be dark soon.” Said Roger. “We could sleep in the Jeep and look the place over in the morning.”

“I know we should.....But we have our bedrolls and decent lights.” Said Diane. “It’ll be fun to sleep among the ruins. Probably warmer in there too, once the night cools everything down.”

Being a couple had its advantages. And they had both been moaning about the general lack of privacy at the main camp. Just them inside the ruins, with no one else within miles. It definitely sounded pretty damn good.

“Louise though.....She’ll have our teeth for cufflinks.” Said Roger.

“She’ll never know.” Said Diane. “I’ll grab the cooler box.....You can beep our location. Come on Roger, where is your sense of adventure ?”

“It’s hiding from Louise.....Alright. A night in the ruins does sound good.”

The cooler box wasn’t cold, but it did have a lot of dry food inside it. There were also several five gallon containers of water. Warm water of course, but the temperature seemed to matter less when you were really thirsty. They had state of the art lights, with batteries that could last for months on a full charge. There was also a pretty good first aid tin, just in case someone got bruised, bashed or cut. Their college had faults, as just about everyone agreed, often. When it came to health and safety though, they made sure everything that might be needed, was provided.

“Can you get the flare gun ? I’ll grab a water container.” Said Diane.

“Will do.....I can carry both bedrolls too.....If it helps ?” Asked Roger.

“It does.....Thank you.”

Their cell phones didn’t work of course; they had to be many miles from the nearest tower. They had a box of tricks though, that logged their position by satellite and allowed them to send short text messages. Beeping everyone called it, though Henrike insisted on calling it linking up with the matrix. ‘We’re there. Found the ruins.’ Typed Roger.

The send button beeped as he pressed it and their exact location was linked to the message. That was it easy-peasy. If for some reason they went silent, the rescue team knew where to look. It was another way their college attempted to keep them healthy, safe and most importantly.....Alive.

Roger picked up their two bedrolls, after hanging his light around his neck by its strap. He played rugby for a hobby, but it was still a struggle to carry everything they needed from the Jeep. Puffing a

little and sweating quite a bit, he headed towards where he could see Diane, as she entered a gap in the ruins.

"This will either be the night I remember for years.....Or a complete disaster." He muttered.

Louise was worrying him. Their leader had more than a few control issues. She was quite capable of sending them both home, if she felt they weren't treating her instructions seriously. Sweat running into his eyes and it was nearly dark, when Roger dropped everything just inside the ruined temple. Diane had placed her light on pile of rubble. It lit up the grubby temple fairly well, or at least part of it. Roger wasn't easily spooked, but there did seem to be a lot of dark places near them. Even their lights seemed to enhance the places of darkness, with sinister shadows.

"Remember Willows giving that talk on Libyan wildlife ?" Asked Roger.

"Old Windy Willows.....I took lots of notes, but still can't remember most of it."

"There are dozens of deadly snakes and insects." Said Roger. "Something called a death stalker scorpion and horned vipers. That is without the packs of wild dogs. If we're sleeping here, we need to build a fire.....A large and impressive fire."

There was dry wood, or more accurately a lot of dead branches and twigs. There were a few stunted trees nearby, which might once have been part of a wood. The dead branches looked very old, but they burned well. They didn't have to go far to build a large fire, which was just as well. Neither of them wanted to walk into the shadow filled parts of the ruins. Roger began to wish they'd slept in the back of the Jeep.

"Did you hear that ?" Asked Diane. "A rustling sound.....I keep hearing it."

"No, I didn't hear that."

Roger had seen things just out of the light. Out of the edge of his eyes, he'd seen something move. Like smoke where there was no fire or flames. He almost mentioned it, but Diane didn't need his anxiety added to hers.

"The fire will keep us safe." Said Roger. "Just about every wild creature is scared of fire....It's instinctive."

The old wood burned too well, they were constantly having to top up their supply. As they got into their bedrolls, a romantic night seemed the stuff of dreams. They cuddled, but Diane kept looking at a large dark area near a stone with strange carvings on it. Roger finally heard the quiet rustling, which made him think of venomous snakes.

"There is nothing to fear.....This is silly." Said Diane.

He hadn't expected it, which didn't mean it wasn't welcome. Diane undid his trousers and pulled his boxer shorts down a little. There was room for her hand, and by the time she touched him, he was already fairly hard.

"Forget the shadows.....Touch me, Roger.....I want you inside me." Said Diane.

No getting fully undressed, he undid her trousers and enjoyed getting his hand inside her knickers. Normally there would have been their routine. A little oral, before getting down to the main act of the night. It wasn't a normal night though; the penetration and thrusting began very quickly. It felt like yelling at his fear, sex as a reaffirmation of life. Diane was gasping in his ear and all too soon, it was over. He could see her smiling face in the firelight.

"That was.....Amazing." Said Roger. "I love you, Diane Sperry."

"Yeah.....You're alright too, Roger Walters." Said Diane. "Alright.....I'll admit it, I love you too."

Roger didn't remember falling asleep, just waking up and still holding Diane. The fire was lower than it had been, but still giving off a lot of warmth and light. Diane was disentangling herself from him and doing up her trousers.

“Sorry.....I have to pee.” Said Diane.

“Don’t go far.”

“I won’t.....Behind the nearest large stone.” Said Diane.

Roger watched as she threw more wood on the fire, before walking towards a large stone slab. As he saw Diane go behind the stone, he fell asleep. When he woke up, he was alone. No panic, Diane was probably washing, or getting clean clothes from the Jeep. Roger made sure his clothing looked respectable after the previous night’s intimacy.

“Diane.....Where are you ?” He yelled.

The fire was still burning, though it was now just a few flames and mostly ashes. Light outside, he could see sunlight coming through the gaps in the ruins. Not much light, it had to be close to dawn in the Libyan Desert. There was no reply from Diane.

“Miss Sperry.” He shouted. “Are you alright ?”

Roger stretched a little to relieve the stiffness in his joint. Sleeping in draughty, cold ruins had been romantic, but not very healthy. Really, he was giving Diane time to return, from wherever she’d gone to. The Jeep, of course she’d gone out to their Jeep. It was the only thing that made sense. Grown women didn’t simply vanish.

“Diane !” He shouted.

No reply, which meant he was going to walk to where they’d left the Jeep. Roger saw the blood on the stone slab and at first, he didn’t realise what it was. It looked like paint on the stone, thick and wet red paint. All on its own, just one splash of blood about three inches across.

“Shit.....Where are you Diane ?” He shouted.

Diane was near where they’d entered the ruins. At first it looked like a wild animal had killed her. Their group had been warned several times about packs of wild dogs, so he knew they were a problem. Diane had been ripped apart though, not eaten. Their flare gun was in her hand.....Why had she been carrying it ? Had she wanted to use it as a weapon ? Roger found himself down on his knees next to her body. He was crying, partly for her and partly for himself.

“We should have slept in the Jeep.” He mumbled.

Roger wanted to cover the remains, but the police might not like Diane’s body being disturbed. Once he beeped that Diane was dead; the college would contact the police. They might not arrive quickly, but they’d be on their way. Roger left Diane as she was, though he did shove the flare gun down his belt.

“I’ll find something to cover you.” He muttered.

The Jeep was how he’d left it, the door left open and the keys dangling from the ignition. Silly really, but no car thieves were likely to be lurking in the Libyan Desert, waiting for a badly secured Jeep to turn up. Roger turned on the box that connected them with the outside world. He typed a few words and deleted them.

“If I say Diane is dead.....They’ll think I’m a head case.” He muttered.

He looked at the window on the machine, where what he typed became green characters on a light blue background.

‘Diane seriously injured.....Need immediate help.’

He pressed the send key and was rewarded by the usual beep. Nothing was going to happen fast, he was miles from anywhere. Soon though.....A large number of first responders would turn up. Roger grabbed a thick coat Diane had thrown over her bag of clothes. He took the coat to put over her and give her a little dignity in death. Away from the ruins he seemed to be able to think clearly. What the

hell had killed Diane ? He'd only heard of bear attacks causing that much damage. As far as he knew, there were no bears in the Libyan Desert.

"Leave it.....Soon cops with guns will arrive." He muttered at himself.

Stay outside in the open air, after he'd placed the coat over Diane's ruined body. There was something in the ancient temple that could pull people apart. Who it was, or what it might be, were almost immaterial.

"Just stay away from it." He mumbled.

As he entered the ruins, there was that feeling again; as if every shadow was watching him and waiting for just the right moment to.....Roger shook his head to clear out whatever was going on in his mind. He was into conspiracy theories as much as the next bored student on social media, but he'd never felt genuinely paranoid before. He carefully placed Diane's coat over her face and upper torso.

"I was going to propose.....Once we were back in the real world." He muttered.

Love was hard to define, but Roger had been sure of one thing for a while; he'd loved Diane Sperry. He'd wanted her and the small house in a quiet town. He'd wanted the two point four kids and maybe.....A dog and a couple of cats. Love wasn't hard to define, it was downright impossible.....But he'd found the real thing and now Diane was dead.

"Crap.....What am I going to tell your parents ?" He muttered.

Or his own parents and then there was Louise to face. Roger heard a noise behind him and turned. Nothing, not really.....Just some kind of optical illusion he'd seen several times. Like smoke hanging in the air, always near a dark part of the ruins. An hallucination ? Roger was quite willing to believe he was losing his mind. Going insane might actually be a relief.

'Roger.....Roger Walters.....You're not welcome here.'

The voice was coming from a very dark part of the ruins, an area where the sunlight hadn't penetrated. There was smoke there, swirling around; occasionally looking too solid to really be smoke.

"What.....What do you want ?" Asked Roger.

'She never really loved you, Roger.'

The flare gun caught on his belt, but it came out with a bit of a tug. Roger aimed it at the swirling smoke and fired. The flare was so bright, it hurt his eyes. The smoke actually parted and let the flare pass through. Roger had no more ammunition for the flare gun, so he threw it his nebulous enemy.

"What the fuck do you want ?" Yelled Roger.

As it came at him, Roger finally saw its eyes. Glowing yellow eyes that had never been human. There were pains in Roger's chest and neck, as though he was being stabbed. The pain in the back of his neck got worse and worse, until.....

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