

## The Presence

### Chapter 8 – Trouble In Libya

**“A phone call requesting an instant conference call. Adie hated that, it interfered with her routine and if you had a child, routine was everything. There had already been emails about the death of two students in Libya.”**

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With hindsight, Nick should have foreseen the trouble in Libya, but as they say; hindsight is always twenty-twenty vision. Nothing was likely to be quite like prodding the Presence with a stick, more than a couple of students camping out in the tomb, which it seemed to think of as home. Libya was almost straight south from London, just one hour ahead. Nick had the call from Louise in Tripoli, almost as soon as she'd heard the dreadful news. It seems there was evidence of intimacy between the two students, shagging in other words. Not just prodding the demon with a stick, but shouting 'yo-momma' at it too.

“But we agreed, Louise.” Said Nick. “None of the students were supposed to enter the tomb. At least not until we were there. Look over the exterior.....Then get back to base camp.”

Second year degree students, they were probably still in secondary school when Nick had last been in Libya. Nick had seen pictures of them though, on the college website. Diane and Roger, who were probably crazy about each other and planning for kids and an affordable flat, somewhere near the end of the Northern Line. Now they were two dead and mutilated bodies in a morgue somewhere in Tripoli.

“Henrike thought they were too inexperienced, it's all my fault.” Said Louise. “There are only so many times you can give people instructions. If it was dark, they were supposed to sleep in their vehicle, or return to base. They obviously decided to have a romantic night in the ruins.”

“How bad was it, Louise ?” Asked Nick. “Have the police mentioned the condition of their remains ?”

“Remains.....What a dreadful word, Nick.” Said Louise. “To me they're still Roger and Diane, the two students who seemed intent on breaking all the rules. The police say many of the wounds were deep, very deep. They're blaming the deaths on a pack of wild dogs. Being honest, that suits the university. I can hardly inform their families about what might have really happened.”

“I feel so bad.....No one should have died.” Said Nick. “Will this cause you problems operating in Libya ?”

“The police will eventually issue a report to our insurers.” Said Louise. “Nothing will happen quickly, but if we can't insure our volunteers.....I can see a lot of arguments with our insurance company. If I'll still be in charge of any future archaeology projects ? I honestly have no idea. The university have always considered me to be a little accident prone, according to the rumours.”

“Fuck.....I don't want to cause you any more problems.” Said Nick. “We can hire helpers locally and keep well clear of your team. I'd appreciate copies of any pictures Diane and Roger took of the temple interior. Apart from that.....We'll stay out of your hair.”

Nick heard Louise rummaging on her desk. She was thinking it through, weighing up the pros and cons of washing her hands of him. He knew he'd still get some help from the university, when his desk computer came to life. An old machine, it seemed to hate coming out of power down mode. An

email had just arrived from Louise. It was actually several emails, containing every image Diane had taken of the interior and exterior of the ruins.

"Thank you Louise, the email has arrived." Said Nick.

"Image 1237 is particularly interesting." Said Louise. "I'll still help you all I can, Nick. The students would probably revolt if I tried to stop them getting involved. They'll carry your gear for you and act as an unpaid taxi service. When you enter the ruins though, you and your people are on your own. Send me a text and I'll give it seven days. If I haven't heard from you by then, I'll get an anonymous message sent to the police. I still.....Think you're crazy to go in there."

"Fame or fame and fortune, Travis calls it." Said Nick. "Our dead bodies will make the top news item in every country around the globe, or.....We'll both have bestselling books and get on every chat show in the free world. I'm hoping for the second option."

Nick could hear her shuffling things on her desk again. He'd known Louise for years; it was her who'd talked him into giving creative writing lectures at the university. She was agitated, thinking that everyone in his group, might die in the ruins. He wasn't psychic, he knew because he was wondering the same thing.

"Do you know the full history of that place?" Asked Louise. "It goes back so far.....There have been deaths there since before the Sumerians ruled those lands."

"I know, Louise.....I know it all." Said Nick. "We've been busy here, delving into old books and even older scrolls."

"Do those travelling with you know everything?" Asked Louise.

"Yes, they do."

"Come and see me when you get to Tripoli."

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Drew had noticed that Nick worked to a different idea of time to most people. He obviously knew when things were urgent, but didn't react to urgency the way most people did. Nick tended to be on time for things, mainly because of an incident with a tutor while he was at college. He'd told her the story one pizza and wine night. About a particularly humourless bastard, who'd threatened to get him chucked out of university if he kept turning up late for every tutorial. Professor Joyce had also mentioned that would mean the end of his student grant. After that, according to Nick, he'd never been late for anything. A small exaggeration, but on the whole, he could generally be trusted to turn up on time for the important things.

"I guarantee he'll be here, Betsy" Said Drew. "He always remembers the important meetings."

Drew had called his mobile and sent a text. No answer on the call and, so far, no response to her text about his agent being there for a meeting. The three word text from Nick, was a relief.

'On my way.'

"On his way, Betsy." Said Drew. "He isn't far away, just the other side of Essex Road. His much loved bike is going into a lockup behind a shoe shop. The amount of love he gives that old motorbike.....I do sometimes get a bit jealous."

"Writers.....They're all overgrown children." Said Betsy. "And the men.....They're the worst."

Drew had never met Betsy Nagle, though they had talked on the phone a few times and exchanged quite a few emails. She'd pictured Nick's agent as one of the tough lady lawyer types, so loved by American TV shows. All fancy clothes, Blahniks and attitude. In real life, Betsy was quite small, with grey hair and a friendly smile. She reminded Drew of her favourite aunt.

"Can I fill up your coffee?" Asked Drew.

"Yes, please.....I know I shouldn't, but is there any more fruit cake."

“Yes, of course.” Said Drew.

Drew’s mother had firmly believed that if a visitor wasn’t chewing at something, they had to be hungry. Despite trying hard not to, Drew had inherited some of her mother’s social skills. There was always a selection of nibble in the fridge. Coffee filled, more fruit cake and Betsy looked happy. It was still a relief when she heard Nick using his key to open the front door.

“It’s me.....Just need to wash my hands.” Shouted Nick.

There was mention of his bike fitting nicely into the lockup and how there was room for a box or two of personal items, just in case. The just in case had already been discussed and tended to mean if their block of flats was a heap of ashes by the time they returned from Libya. By the time Nick was in the lounge, Betsy was taking several documents out of a briefcase.

“I don’t normally do this sort of thing.” Said Betsy. “For some reason I often end up doing things for Nick Rees, that I’d never do for the majority of my clients. Ideally, you should get a family member to be your executor, if the worst should happen. Or a really good friend would do.”

Drew knew why Nick wanted his agent to be the executor of his will, should there be a catastrophe in Libya. One of his relatives had died and the family had become, in Nick’s words, greedy parasites. So many rows and arguments, over what hadn’t been a huge amount of money. Words said that could never be unsaid. Nick’s family still had one or two permanent feuds, over Uncle David’s will.

“I’ve seen too many rows over wills.” Said Nick. “I much prefer you looking after my final wishes, if it should come to that. Not that I intend to end my days in the Libyan Desert.”

Drew had been to see the solicitor dealing with the sale of her flat in Clapham. They’d put together a two page will, leaving everything to her mother. Not as generous as it sounded. Drew’s bank account held just under four thousand pounds and her flat might not sell for enough to pay off the mortgage. Mind you, her mum could hardly yell at her if the worst did happen.

“There will be fees for doing this, Nick.” Said Betsy. “I’m going to ask you to sign a letter saying you agree to the terms and fees.”

“Yes, no problem.” Said Nick, as he signed a pile of documents.

“Alright, no diverting of your post, I’ll get one of my people to come over here twice a week. I know the famous Mary thinks she’s mail monitor. Do you think she’ll be a problem ?” Asked Betsy.

“No, the last I heard.....Mary will be living with a relative for some time.” Said Nick. “She saw the window cleaner being killed.....The police are assuming she saw a burglar kill Bert. She might never recover from what she saw.”

“Dreadful, but it means Mary won’t run off with your post.” Said Betsy. “I’ll get Florence to pop over and pick it up. She has cats, so she can pet yours while she’s here. We will open all your post, Nick. You just signed a letter giving me permission to do that. Any unusual bills will be paid and.....Yes, you have just signed a waiver, indemnifying my company against any claims for potential over payments. Fees.....Yes, we did mention those. Oh what else ?”

Drew didn’t want to tread on anyone’s toes, but there was only Nick and her there. And of course, Betsy had asked the question.

“I know Nick asked you.” Said Drew. “What do you think about getting the news media involved, before we go to Libya ?”

“It would guarantee massive book deals, if we can get some of the major names involved.” Said Nick. There had to be a resurgence of pen on paper notes. No more sticking everything in an organiser, or entrusting the data to the phone company’s cloud. Carl Wood had dug around in a briefcase for a well-used notebook and Betsy did the same. She scanned back through quite a few pages.

“I did some research and I had Florence call a few people.” Said Betsy.

“How is your new PA working out ?” Asked Nick. “She always seems very helpful when I call.”  
“Efficient, friendly.....Even after I told her how Amy died.” Said Betsy. “I can see Florence becoming a fixture of the office. So, no filling her head with weird stories, Nick.”

“I promise to behave.....But getting back to the news people.” Said Nick. “There’s a need to generate funds fairly quickly. Some of it can pay off the legal fees you’ve paid on my behalf. I was thinking of a freelancer I know. Tell her everything and then let her run with the story. If she’s half as good as I think, she’ll get the story into the Fleet Street heavyweights. I need the money and so does Travis. We could both get book deals on the back of the news stories, with some nice signing fees.”  
“I think we should do it.” Said Drew. “Get the lady journalist in and give her everything.”

Drew had her new job and she’d seen Nick’s online bank account. Neither of them were genuinely poor, but money did seem to be rushing in one direction, out of the account. Air tickets, supplies and equipment in Libya. Not to mention the expense of living in Tripoli while finalising plans to enter the ruins. Travis had put into the pot, but he had a family to house and feed.

“Yes, in theory, telling the news media is a good idea.” Said Betsy. “As I always say, any exposure is good exposure. Done right, it should get you a deal on a future book. There might well be an option for a movie from a streaming TV company. My only worry, is that the publicity will send eager journalists looking for the ruins. The local police will probably sell them the location for a few dollars.”

“I know what you’re saying.” Said Nick. “The site isn’t well fenced and the university might be able to keep a few students out of the tomb, but journalists.....They’ll have no trouble getting inside.”

“We can give everyone lots of warnings about the ruins.” Said Drew.

“The more warnings, the more journalists will go there, it’s human nature.” Said Betsy.

“If they ignore the warnings and shit happens.....It’s not our fault.” Said Nick.

“Be careful, you may have to live with the consequences of that decision.” Said Betsy.

“Anyway.....The world has too many journalists.” Said Drew.

They were looking at her, as if she’d suggested they ate a puppy for lunch.

“What ?.....Travis wants to do it, Adie told me.” Said Drew. “We have to let the story out and see where it takes us. Get her in, the lady freelancer.....See what she thinks.”

“Makes sense.....If the story sucks, she’ll know.” Said Betsy. “Not that I think it does, but she will be the expert.”

“Yes.....I’ll call Sovi Björlund today and get her here as soon as I can.” Said Nick.

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A phone call requesting an instant conference call. Adie hated that, it interfered with her routine and if you had a child, routine was everything. There had already been emails about the death of two students in Libya. Travis wanted to revisit the idea of getting on a plane to Tripoli. Adie wasn’t sure how she now felt about the risks involved. One thing she was sure about.....A hurried conference call wasn’t going to help.

“I hate hurrying Silas off to bed early.” Said Adie. “I look forward to reading to him.”

“I know, but it doesn’t happen often.” Said Travis. “We’ve got James on the line this time.”

“From his hotel ?” Asked Adie.

“No, he’ll be at the flat.....Nick and Drew’s place.”

Nick and Drew’s indeed, that had all happened a little fast. Mind you, according to Travis, Nick Rees had a tendency to be a loner. The sort of man who probably needed a stable, long term relationship. Adie was relying on the time in Libya, to decide if Drew was perfect for Nick, or some kind of gold digger.

"When are we linking up ?" Asked Adie.

"Now.....Right now."

"But.....I wanted to change."

"You look great.....Sit down, I'm linking us up." Said Travis.

She had on what she thought of as mum clothes, Silas had even managed to splash her blouse with raspberry yoghurt. No time to change, they'd have to accept her as she was. There would be at least two more links before the plane took off. Adie was determined those calls wouldn't be as hurried. The screen flashed a few times, before she could see all three of them, sitting close together to fit in the camera's field of view.

"Hello, Uxbridge.....I heard you had rain today." Said Nick.

"All we've had lately is rain." Said Travis.

"You'll have seen the information about the deaths of Roger and Diane." Said Nick.

"Yes.....Yes, a truly dreadful business." Said Adie. "I'm assuming talk of wild dogs is complete bollocks."

"You assume right.....Our new friend seems to have been annoyed." Said James. "Sleeping in the temple and performing acts of sexual intimacy. He, it or she, reacted in the only way it may have to show annoyance."

"It brutally killed them both." Said Nick. "So.....No sex while in the ruins....It really might be the death of you."

"Oh, Nick." Said Adie.

"Too soon ? Sorry.....I do have a weird sense of humour." Said Nick.

"Does our new friend have a name, besides a lot of scratches and marks in old Sumerian ?" Asked Adie.

"We do, but it can never be spoken." Said James.

"I know.....I just need to see a name for this damn thing." Said Adie.

James held up a sheet of A4 paper, which he brought close to the camera. Too close, he had to move back a bit to get the words in focus. Letters she recognised, she had been worried it'll all be in something weird and obscure. There were click marks, which she knew about, but had never actually attempted to use.

"A lot of clicks in the back of the throat." Said Adie.

"Yes, the !Kung people could pronounce its name, the Bushmen of the Kalahari. Luckily none of them are likely to see the words. None of us could speak the dreadful name, nor should we try. I think we're all agreed, that no name we discover should be spoken out loud, demon or angel."

"Yes.....Yes, makes sense." Said Drew. "Can we get onto the real reason for the link ?"

"Fine.....In view of the deaths in Libya.....Are we all still going ?" Asked Nick.

"Can I go first ? I've been thinking about this all day." Said Adie

Everyone shrugged, which she took to mean yes.

"I don't see that we have much option." Said Adie. "We need to go now, much more than we did before. It has killed in Clapham where Drew lived....And who could forget that poor window cleaner ? He was killed where Nick and Drew live. So.....Not going to Libya obviously isn't a safe option. We can't simply ignore it and hope it goes away."

"It seems to get around, or has it got minions that do its bidding ?" Asked Drew.

"Despite what you see in the movies, most demons can't zap around the world at will." Said James.

"There is only one of them, a very powerful being with the ability to step in and out of our world, to go anywhere it chooses. We're dealing with something very powerful and dangerous."

“So.....We get to the ruins in Libya.” Said Drew. “Are we killing it in some way, banishing it to a place yet to be named, or binding its powers ?”

“Binding.....To be honest, I think it’s the only option suited to our abilities.” Said James.

“Fuck.....You’re saying we can’t kill it or banish it, so we’ll have to settle for a binding spell of some kind ?” Asked Travis.

“Sadly.....That is exactly what I’m saying.” Said James.

“Coffee.....I need coffee.” Said Adie. “I need fifteen minutes to recover from that revelation....At least fifteen minutes.”

“Alright.....Leave the connection live and we’ll start again in fifteen.” Said Nick.

Fresh coffee was nice and a break gave Adie a chance to change her stained blouse. She really wasn’t looking forward to another session of ‘How powerful our enemy is.’ Luckily, it seemed Drew had just looked at the pictures poor Diane had taken.

“I never noticed.....Has everyone got a copy of Image 1237 ? Yes, I know it’s disappointing at first glance.....But look at it, really look at it.” Said Drew.

Adie had looked at it, they’d all looked at the picture that Louise had been excited about. It was just some out of focus smoke from the fire, against a very dark background. No matter how often Adie had looked at it, there was nothing earth shattering about Image 1237. Well, other than a young woman had given her life to take the fifteen hundred or so photographs.

“Time is crucial.” Said Drew. “Just arrived inside the ruins; they had no fire then. There was no fire, so there could be no smoke.”

“Crap, you’re right.” Said James. “This means, we have a picture of it.....The Presence.”

“Does that mean we have power of it, or it over us ?” Asked Drew.

“I honestly have no idea.....I’ll need to think about it, and.....I know someone who can run the picture through some very clever software.”

“Run them all through it.....No knowing what might pop out of the shadows of the ruins.” Said Travis.

“Can we give updates by email, like we always have done ?” Asked Drew. “Can we take a simple vote about going to Libya. A put your hand up if you still want to risk life and limb in Libya ? Sort of thing.”

“Great idea.....I have a few things to do before bedtime.” Said Adie.

“Yes, I’d like to check in on Denise.” Said James.

“We’ll do it then.” Said Nick. “Hands up if you think we should still go to the ruined temple in Libya.”

Every hand raised, though Adie hadn’t thought the result would be any different. They really did have no other option. Take the fight to their enemy, or risk being killed in their own homes. Going to Libya was the choice out of two fairly grim choices.

“I declare the vote won by those wishing to go to Libya.” Said Nick.

“Wishing to go is over stating it.....We have no other real option.” Said Adie.

“Has anyone got an age for the dead students ?” Asked Travis.

“They were both twenty.” Said Nick.

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Just getting everyone to the airport together and on time, was hard work. Drew had dealt with the logistics of it all, helped by Adie. There had been some discussion on using different flights on different days. Splitting them all up over a three or four day period. Not so much paranoia, as a growing respect for the homicidal ability of their enemy. Some would say that interfering with modern technology was beyond the usual modus operandi of demons and their kind. There had been a rail disaster in France though, many deaths to allegedly kill one person. That had been attributed to demonic forces and the occult. In the end they’d used the air tickets Drew had bought,

from a travel agent near where she worked. Money was a factor of course, changing dates and those going would have been expensive. There were book deals at an advanced stage, but so far, no money had changed hands.

“Oh, Hi Adie.” Said James. “I thought you were sitting with Travis.”

James Larner, retired accountant and consultant on supernatural forces, had expected to be sat next to Drew. The seating had taken up a large amount of one of their conference calls. What it said on the tickets was going to be ignored. Travis wanting to be sat next to his wife, had turned into a ten minute argument. Yet there she was, getting herself comfortable, five rows away from her spouse. “We had a fight this morning.” Said Adie. “So, you’ve got the pleasure of my company....And No, I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Fine.....Just nudge me if you change your mind.” Said James.

“What are you hoping our.....Escapade, will accomplish ?” Asked Adie.

Oh, goody.....Adie was going to include him in whatever was going on with Travis, whether he liked it or not. It all came down to dreams and concerns, some of which he considered to be private. He’d lost the battle in a small number of exorcisms and there had been deaths. In a way, he constantly hoped to rebalance his karma by a few triumphs. A few saved live to balance the books. Though he did sometimes wonder, if there was anyone up there, keeping a tally. James leant towards Adie, hoping to keep their weird conversation private.

“Ideally.....I’d like to destroy the Presence.” He said. “Realistically, I’d settle for making sure it doesn’t hurt anyone else.”

“Do you think the demon might still be inside Nick ?” Whispered Adie.

“That is a possibility that can’t be ignored.”

The aircraft caused a pause in their conversation, by hurtling down the runway. There was the usual thump in the back of acceleration, which James still hated. Some people were choosy about the make and age of the jet they trusted with their life. James had long since formed a truce with his personal fear of flying. Rushing through the air at the speed of a bullet, in an aluminium tube, was so crazy, so mad....Then there was the prodigious amount of aviation fuel in the tanks. To James it seemed a minor miracle that any aircraft ever safely reached its destination. He was resigned to it now though and his heart rate rarely went over a hundred. Adie seemed less than fond of flying too. She’d been squeezing his arm, though he only noticed when she stopped doing it.

“I hate the thought, but.....If Nick died, would the demon go away ?” Asked Adie.

It was bound to come up, though no one had suggested a convenient accident to Nick Rees, might solve a lot of problems. Nick was a bit of an arsehole, summoning the damned Presence.

Underneath though, he was a decent guy.

“We can hardly murder Nick, as some kind of experiment in getting rid of demons.” Whispered James.

“No.....I wasn’t suggesting.....But if it came to it, us or him.....”

James wasn’t angry; his own daughter had voiced a similar idea. Stress, anxiety and fear for those we love, can turn anyone into a potential killer. James leant in and kissed Adie on the cheek.

“No..... Don’t even let the idea into your head.” He muttered.

“Oh.....Do you think that it might be influencing me ?”

“That.....Is another possibility that can’t be ignored.” Said James.

Better that Adie believed that she was being manipulated, than capable of considering doing away with Nick. In truth.....James had seen so many turn on their loved ones over the years. He wasn’t sure if the demon was inside Adie’s head, or it was her own anxiety. He held her hand, until the cart

came round with a meal. It was about a five hour flight from London to Tripoli, a flight long haul enough to get them a decent meal.

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There had been a thing with Travis and Adalind Givens. They'd gone into a full on sulk about being separated for the five hour flight. In the end the solution had been to separate both couples. If Travis and Adie couldn't be together, no one could. A childish solution, though Drew suspected she'd survive the flight with Adie sat next to her. It surprised her though when Nick sat in the seat next to hers.

"Sorry.....Do you want the aisle seat ?" Asked Nick.

"No.....I'm very pleased, but how did I get you instead of Adie ?" Asked Drew.

"The Travis household are having a spot of marital strife."

"Oh, can we help ?" Asked Drew.

"Poor naïve child.....Keep well clear of them." Said Nick. "It'll clear up pretty soon....Don't forget I know them. I've seen these minor emotional storms before."

"I am pleased I've got you." Said Drew. "I can lean against you if I fancy a nap."

"Nice to know I have my uses."

Drew had created a mental list of how sitting next to Nick might be useful. The list had been abandoned though she remembered most of it. Food was an important one; she was a bit of a fussy eater. Drew knew she could swap bits of her meal with Nick, while helping herself to what he had. There were definite advantages to travelling with a regular boyfriend.

"Oh.....We need to agree what meals to order." Drew said. "Your meal has to have something in it I like. Just in case I hate mine."

"I'm just a minion aren't I ? Alright, you can tell me what dinner to get." Said Nick.

"There will be other things.....I can remember most of my list."

"Jeez."

"I'll make it up to you, once we get to the hotel." Said Drew.

Nick grinned from ear to ear; he knew exactly what she meant. Drew dug through the magazines in the back of the seat in front and decided to kill off a few brain cells, by skimming the inflight magazine.

"I have talked to Betsy about us, our situation." Said Nick. "I can hardly give you a property with a millstone mortgage attached to it, but we did come up with a way for you to stay in the flat. Just so you know you'll still have a roof over your head.....You know; if I don't come back."

"I'm not sure if I'd want to live there, without you." Said Drew. "Besides, we're all going to return in one piece.....No problem.....You'll see."

Of course Drew had thought about it, the death of one or more of them. Any woman, who says she hasn't thought through the death of her partner, was lying. If Nick wasn't with her in the Islington flat, Drew had tentatively decided to go back to America. Not to live with her mum, but she knew people.....People with spare sofas.

"Just remember Betsy has a plan.....She'll come and find you, if the worst happens."

"Stop it, Nick.....End of conversation." Said Drew. "Sweetcorn.....I loathe the stuff. But I also hate wasting food. If there's sweetcorn on my meal, you have to eat it."

"Fine.....Will do." Said Nick.

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Sovi Björlund had done quite well as a freelance journalist. Nothing too heavy or complicated, she chose stories that the tabloids might like to pick up. Nothing political, unless it was a member of



parliament bonking his secretary. Sovi was no female version of Woodward or Bernstein, but at around an admitted age of forty, she was doing alright. A two bedroom flat in a reasonably nice part of Finchley and a second home in Stockholm, quite close to where her mother lived.

Not that you'd have known she was successful by looking at her. Sovi had taken sociology at college with a little added anthropology. She knew that if you were meeting a contact in the public bar of a pub in a grubby side street, you didn't look like you'd stepped out of Vogue. Sovi had deliberately cultivated a lean and hungry vibe, with a rock chick feel to the way she dressed. Even her phone had a crack in the screen. Look too affluent in her game and it was a definite put off for the cop with a few large bills, who had a secret to sell.

"Have a dig around, I know you're good at that." Nick Rees had said to her.

She'd known Nick once, in the full biblical sense. A casual fling after being introduced by a friend. Sovi still believed that nice girls didn't fuck guys they hadn't been introduced to. More to do with safety than old world etiquette. Most guys caught on that it was a fling and vanished quite quickly. For some reason, Nick Rees had kept in touch on a rather random basis. Never anything sexual again, but he'd pointed her at two or three decent stories. In return, she'd acted as an unpaid researcher on his one and only genuinely successful book. Nick had a certain charm though and she'd been happy to receive his call.

"Please don't stir things up for Denise Morgan." Nick had said. "Everything else is fair game, but Denise has had a terrible few weeks. One of my colleagues thinks she's close to the edge."

Had Nick been naïve, or had he wanted her to ignore the hands off instruction? There were lots of wonderfully gory details to grab the attention of a tabloid editor. Nick had told her about Denise and her boss though, which had the makings of something huge. Stuart Goodford was the boss who'd stayed the night and woken up with his deep lines cut into his face. Stuart was old money; his family were wealthy aristocracy before the Battle of Hastings.

To Sovi the story of Denise and Stuart was a classic top hat piece. Keep the top hats falling and you'll keep the public happy. As one of the old time silent movie moguls had said. After seeing nothing but more bad news in the press, the public loved nothing better than seeing a wealthy top hat come tumbling down. It was a form of social justice in a way.....Knowing that even the wealthy could sometimes suffer a little. Sovi merely saw it as a chance to add a few tens of thousands to her bank account, if everything went well.

"Oh....Nick! Did you really expect me to ignore the golden goose?" Sovi muttered.

Sovi was on her way to see Stuart Goodford, who was rumoured to be up for a knighthood in a couple of years. Destined to be the head of the law firm his family had run since the eighteen fifties. All of it before he reached the age when men traditional went bald and started chasing female temps around the office. A few chased male temps these days, but there was always a pissed off wife somewhere and a career that might be about to disintegrate. Sovi had called Stuart, giving him one of the journalists' classics.

"I intend to publish the story, as it is." Sovi had told Stuart. "You can live with the consequences of that, or you can see me. I will give you a fair chance to put your side of things."

He agreed to see her, they nearly all did. Sovi was ninety nine percent certain that Stuart wouldn't have asked his lawyer to be there. No one ever thought they were a bad person. Everyone wanted to give their side of the story. Those were two of the universal rules of freelance journalism.

"Inviting yourself into your PA's bed" Muttered Sovi. "I'm looking forward to your positive spin on that one."

In fairness Den Morgan did have a few signs of being a minor league gold digger. No one is perfect though and unlike her boss.....She wasn't married.

"Wow.....Nice house, Stuart." Sovi mumbled.

Not far from Mornington Crescent tube and the street was much nicer than Sovi had expected. A really nice three storey house that had one unforgivable flaw. The main tube line for the area was the infamous Northern Line. Mind you, Stuart probably had a driver to get him to the office on time. Sovi crossed the street and rang the doorbell. A quick examination of how she'd appear to Stuart Goodford.

"Shabby chic with a splash of rock chick.....Perfect." She muttered.

Perfect, but there was no one to see the way her rather worn skirt, went well with her vintage bag. No one came to answer the ring. Sovi tried another four times, leaving a respectful gap between rings. She noticed the door wasn't properly closed. Freelance journalists were like cat burglars, open doors were always thought of as an invitation. She stepped into the well-lit hall and announced her presence.

"Hello.....My name is Sovi Björlund.....I am expected." She shouted.

A large black and white cat came to look her over, but quickly went away again. According to her quick and shallow research on the house, there was a wife, a cook and a maid in the building at that hour. Plus of course the man she'd come to see.

"Hello.....Anyone here ?" Sovi yelled.

Not quite dark out, but not quite light either. Dusk, the time so loved by burglars and street robbers. Nothing is ever clear to see at dusk, every description has to be treated with caution. Sovi followed the light....Heading out of the hallway and into a well-lit room. No one there, but there was an open briefcase on a table. Where Stuart had intended to see her ?

"Hello.....This is Sovi Björlund." She shouted.

Common sense was yelling that it was time to retreat to the outside street and call the police. There was something very weird going on. As Sovi's mum had often said though, her daughter had been born with no common sense at all, not one tiny bit of it. Follow the light again, into what looked like a family room, somewhere to watch one of several flat screen TVs. There, pushed backwards over an armchair, was Stuart Goodford, tipped to be one of the youngest knights of the realm on record. He was dead and after touching his cold body, Sovi knew he'd been dead for some time. Where were the staff, and his wife ?

"Hello.....I need help !" Shouted Sovi.

Stuart was recognisable, but the deep hole in his chest and the amount of blood.....It wouldn't take a doctor to declare him dead. No look of horror on his face, just shock. As though he'd been attacked by someone he knew and trusted. Sovi would keep the monster of the occult thread as a backup for now. Angry wife of wealthy, unfaithful entrepreneur slaughters husband, would play better in the short term. Sovi used her cell phone to call the police. A quick call and a very polite young lady at the other end. Someone would be with her very quickly, though she was asked to keep the line open. As Sovi looked around the room, she saw what was probably the body of Mrs Goodford.

"Crap.....There's another here, a body. I think I might have found his wife." Said Sovi.

"I recommend that you leave the building until the police arrive."

"I'll be fine."

It wasn't Sovi's first rodeo, as the saying goes. She'd seen a lot of messy death during her years as a journalist. There had been a farmer in Taunton, who'd been far too fond of underage girls. He'd used a shotgun to take away most of his head. Mrs Goodford was bad though, maybe even worse than

the farmer. Someone, or something.....Had tried to jam her behind a large and very solid looking radiator.

“Fuck.....That’s a bad way to go.” Sovi muttered.

It was a large bore radiator, the kind seen in old Victorian era school buildings. A heavy cast iron radiator with a gap of about three inches between it and the wall. The woman’s face was left as if she was looking over the top of the radiator. The rest of her had been shoved into the tiny three inch gap. Several of her arm bones were sticking out of the sides of the rad. Sovi managed to get over a dozen pictures of the scene on her phone, before the cops arrived, closely followed by the ambulance.

“Get her outside, the building hasn’t been secured.” Someone yelled.

It took a cop on either side, escorting her out of the house, before she realised they were talking about her. Personally, Sovi felt sorry that Stuart was dead, though she felt more sympathy for his dead wife. As for the story.....It could now become something huge and that meant there was the potential to make big money. Top hats tumbling, weird things going bump in the night and now grisly deaths among the aristocracy. It might be the story that bought her a new car and maybe the new kitchen she’d been thinking about for some time.

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