

## The Presence

### Chapter 11 – Top Hats Tumbling

**“Drew pushed with the end of her lamp and it sort of unrolled out of the cloth. The body of a child, that was very small. Actually it was the body of a baby, but Adie’s mind was refusing to accept that. So dry in the temple, that the body hadn’t rotted.....”**

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Sovi Björlund quite enjoyed train journeys, though flying to London would have been quicker. That meant passports though and tickets with names printed on them. Sovi knew the way the system worked. The police would be seriously looking for her by now. The West Coast Express train from Manchester had its faults, but it had one big advantage. As long as you’d bought a ticket, no one cared who you were.

“Before we reach London, I’ll redo your hair and makeup.” Marsha had said. “By the time I’m finished with you; your mum wouldn’t recognise you.”

No hair dye, Sovi had drawn a firm line in the sand about that. Marsha had done a little shopping though, before they’d boarded the train. There was a pair of dark glasses that covered her eyes and much of her upper face. Marsha worked on her in their seats, fluffing up her hair until she looked like a Nordic version of Claudia Winkleman. Then there was the genius part, a skin foundation for her neck and face. That added the coffee with a dash of cream look. When Marsha gave her a small mirror to look in, Sovi barely recognised herself.

“Wow, I look.....Like Nilgun Zekai the woman in the downstairs flat where I live. She’s about thirty and her family came from Mersin in Southern Turkey.”

There had been no problem leaving Euston Station in London, but Sovi hadn’t expected there would be. Her dark glasses and skin tone would confuse facial recognition software. Not that the best software was anywhere near as good as the media liked to say. It was still very slow and by its errors, loved to accuse innocent people of heinous crimes. Sovi wasn’t short of funds and always set every potential story a budget. At the moment, relatively little had been spent on the Denise Morgan and Stuart Goodford dalliance.

“Hire something nice.....I have a card linked to one of my backup bank accounts.” Said Sovi.

Despite a certain jobsworth image, Britain still had a belief that you are who you say you are, as long as it’s not for illegal purposes. Marsha was using her own driving license, with Sovi providing the funds. Maybe not totally legit, but probably not that illegal either. They hired a nice chunky Mercedes, which looked the kind of car people thought twice about messing with. Marsha called Den at work, while Sovi drove.

“She’ll leave early and be home by four.” Said Marsha. “Poor Den.....She sounds really pissed off.” They needed a decent car; there was no telling how far their travels might take them. There were also other requirements for them to be an efficient team.

“A hotel next, something nice and not too far from Den’s flat.” Said Sovi. “It needs to have decent WiFi and privacy.....No paper thin walls. No pubic hair on the shower floor either.....Somewhere you’d let your grandma stay.”

“I know somewhere in Stoke Newington.” Said Marsha. “Not cheap, but Eric has used it a few times. He’s had no complaints. It’s only about two miles away from Den’s place.”

“Two miles is fine.” Said Sovi. “Once we have accommodation, there’s tech to buy. Half a dozen burner phones, a decent make of laptop PC, and a handful of thumb drives.....A backup drive too, just in case. We’ll think of other things too, as we browse the shelves. Have you seen a decent tech shop in Stoke Newington ?”

“Now you mention it.....No.” Said Marsha. “The staff at the hotel will know somewhere.”

Eric was a marmite character, but the management of the hotel in Stoke Newington, were obviously fans. They liked Marsha too, which speeded up and simplified booking in. All that was required was a card with some cash on it, and Sovi had several of those. A small suite was booked, with two separate bedrooms. Eva Nilsson from Oslo would be paying for the suite. A name Sovi had invented when obtaining the preloaded Visa card. Marsha found a tech shop within walking distance from the hotel.

“The manger recommended a place on Albion Road.” Said Marsha. “N16 Digital.....He said to mention his name and we’ll get a discount.”

Of course Sovi had forgotten to add a video camera to the list, but noticed them on the shelves in N16 Digital. Surprisingly cheap and as with just about everything these days, it had a WiFi link and USB. Once everything she’d bought was in one pile, it looked as though she was setting up her own IT department. In many ways, she was.

“Damn, a printer.....We need a cheap colour printer.” Said Sovi.

The store had one for free, but the cartridges were expensive. Sovi grabbed the free printer and added it to her pile of purchases. The pack of cartridges she added, stopped the free printer being that much of a bargain. Marsha had been busy for a few minutes, talking to one of the sales guys. She had three computer games in her hands.

“Can I have these ?” Asked Marsha. “Old classics, they will run on the laptop you chose.”

“They’ll all run just fine.” Added the sales guy.

So, Marsha was a computer games nut, who’d have seen that coming ? It didn’t seem to fit in with crystals and a statue of Gaia. Sovi agreed to the games going on the pile and paid for the lot with another preloaded Visa card. Pamela Åkerman on the card this time, a high school English teacher she’d had a brief girl crush on. The promised discount was disappointing, but the sales guy threw in a few pens and another classic game from the 80s.

Back to the hotel and there is no such thing as a fast setup for a new computer. Come to think of it, Sovi had never tackled a five minute job on a PC, that hadn’t taken less than an hour. Never like that on TV shows though. The super hacker touches three keys and zap, the world is saved. Sad that it definitely wasn’t like that in real life.

“Well, the hotel WiFi is fast.” Said Sovi. “The bad news is Windows wanting several hours to do....Whatever crap it needs to do. Are you hungry ?”

“I’m always hungry.” Said Marsha.

“How about.....We find somewhere we can get a burger and coffee ?” Asked Sovi. “We can get repeat coffee until it’s time to call on Den.”

“Good idea.....And I can give Eric a quick call.” Said Marsha. “His face will be going purple by now. He hates having to listen to the overnight phone messages.”

“You two have an odd relationship.”

“It is not a relationship.....But yeah, I know what you mean.” Said Marsha.

They found a café in Cross Street, just along Essex Road a little from the block where all the problems seemed to be happening. It seemed strange that no news media outlet had linked everything together, but they hadn’t. It happened sometimes, when the weather was good and

there'd been a few juicy stories recently. It wouldn't last though. Sovi didn't have long, to sell her 'Top hats tumbling' piece to one of the tabloids.

Aide Givens didn't want to be first into the temple interior, but she also didn't want to be last. The nervous one of the group, hanging about at the rear. James looked what he was, a retired accountant. There were all the stories though and Nick saying that if anyone survived to go home, it would be James and whoever he'd dragged out of the ruined temple. Aide got as close to James as she could, without it being awkward. As always, her husband was at the front, being the expert on everything and anything. That used to annoy her when they'd first dated and it was beginning to annoy her again.

"On your own?" Asked Nick. "Can I join you? Drew seems to be arguing with your husband at the moment."

"That would be nice.....I don't want to walk in there on my own." Said Adie.

It was a bright day, with the sun at the perfect angle to light up the interior of the temple. There were a lot of holes in the walls, but some areas of darkness remained. Adie turned on her lamp and noticed that Nick did the same. Their partners were still having a heated argument about something. They seemed oblivious to their surroundings, as though it was a day trip to a British stately home. They hadn't even put their lamps on.

"Travis!" Adie yelled. "Turn your lamp on."

"Didn't I?.....I thought I had.....Sorry." Said Travis.

James entered the temple next, with Marwa right at the back and last to enter. The youngest of their group by a long way, the local woman looked quite nervous.

"Should we light a fire?" Asked Marwa.

"No, we'll not be here when the sun sets." Said James. "Plus.....The smoke from a fire will hide our enemy. We are here to simply look around, to get a feel of the place."

"Who did you say built this place, James?" Asked Adie.

"They will have had a name for their people, but no record of it exists." Said James. "Easiest to call them the prehistoric tribe who lived in this part of North Africa."

"It killed them all; I saw it in Nick's dream." Said Drew. "All those people who built temples and sang its praises.....For some reason it wiped them out in a single night."

"We need to focus, there is a plan." Said James. "We go to the outer wall and keep to it, while going around the temple. If we find anything important, we take pictures and notes. If we find nothing, we leave.....For now."

James was right of course, he always seemed to be right. Adie had listened to the plan, but fear had driven it out of her mind. Her husband arguing with Drew hadn't helped, though that now seemed to be over.

"Can we leave now?.....Please." Asked Adie.

"No." From all of them, though Marwa said it first.

"Fine.....But I had to ask." Said Adie.

James went first, trudging over the sandy floor of the temple. There was part of a mosaic in one place, though no one seemed in a mood to look at it. Later, there'd probably be more interest when Louise heard about it. James put his hand out and touched one of the huge stone blocks, which still gave the temple several solid walls.

"Right.....We'll go clockwise." Said James.

"Why didn't it hurt the cops?" Asked Marwa. "They were in here for several days."

"They mean nothing to it.....There is that wonderful saying, they have no skin in the game. We do, even Marwa, now she's one of us." Said James.

"Wonderful.....If it gets me, my brothers will go after it." Said Marwa.

There was something the police had put down to some kind of auditory illusion. The sound of dripping water, in a place so dry, the humidity was close to zero. No pools, almost no rain and yet there is was, the clear and unmistakable sound of dripping water.

"Fuck the experts.....I know dripping water when I hear it." Muttered Travis.

"It's been measured many times." Said Nick. "Humidity in here is as close to zero as makes no difference. No humidity means no liquid water in here.....None at all."

"I hate to argue.....But that is dripping water, or I'll eat everyone's hat." Said Adie.

The stairs leading down weren't on any of the notes and maps provided my Louise. Nothing covered in sand that might have been missed, the wide stone steps descended steeply into the ground. As Adie looked down into the darkness, the sound of dripping water became louder.

"I take it no one measured the basement for humidity?" Asked Adie.

"There is no basement." Said Nick.

"We should go down there, right now." Said Drew.

"No.....Don't be crazy." Said Marwa. "This thing.....It will kill us, all of us."

"Apart from me.....It seems to need me." Said Nick.

"Photograph the steps, take notes.....Move on." Said James. "We have a plan and we are damned well going to stick to it."

"Fine.....But we should look down there." Said Drew. "Tomorrow maybe, but we should have a good look."

Travis muttered about putting Nick under hypnosis again, which might work better close to the temple. In their truck of course, no one had suggested being in the ruins after dark. Nick liked the idea of being hypnotised again and just like that.....They were moving away from the step leading down to below the temple floor. The next find was unexpected and truly horrifying. Drew found what looked like a bundle of rags. Not against the wall, the bundle was in the middle of what looked like a path against the temple wall.

"I've found something.....Not sure what." Said Drew.

"Careful, Drew." Said James. "There are deadly scorpions in this part of the desert."

Drew pushed with the end of her lamp and it sort of unrolled out of the cloth. The body of a child, that was very small. Actually it was the body of a baby, but Adie's mind was refusing to accept that. So dry in the temple, that the body hadn't rotted, it had become desiccated. It looked like a mummified baby from the days of the pharaohs.

"Christ ! It's a baby.....A dead baby." Yelled Drew.

"Remember ! We photograph, we take notes and we move on." Said James.

"No.....No.....We can't pretend we never saw this." Said Marwa.

"I'm not suggesting.....Look, there is no secret about why I survive, while I've seen so many die. I don't let myself be effected by things like this. It may have placed the body here to cause a reaction."

"It's normal to react with horror.....It's a dead baby, James." Said Drew.

"I know, but whatever is here might not let you remove it." Said James. "This is its home and everything in here belongs to it."

"Are you saying it might hurt us?" Asked Adie.

"I'm suggesting that anyone trying to remove the body from the ruins, may well be killed, torn apart as they try to leave." Said James.

Adie was terrified, she could feel herself shaking. She had a child back home, a child she might never see again if things went wrong. To her, James wasn't just an expert; he was the only one talking sense. She stood up.

"Come on; do as we agreed to do." Said Adie. "Photograph.....Take notes.....Then and only then, we move on."

Most of them moved, though Drew just glared at her, with a face full of attitude. Nick held Drew's hand and luckily, he was on the side of logic and common sense.

"I don't like leaving the poor thing here." Said Nick. "There is nothing we can do though, not yet anyway. If we call the police, the temple will become a media circus. We might as well go home if that happens."

"Alright.....But I intend to come back for the body." Said Drew. "For fuck sake, it's someone's child." "Which is what it wants us to get upset about." Said James. "This thing has been manipulating people for thousands of years."

"Alright.....You win James." Said Adie. "I know you're right, but please shut up for a while."

The dead baby was photographed a lot of times, as were the rags it had been wrapped in. One tiny baby, yet the effect on Adie's nerves.....She could have coped better with finding a dozen murdered adults.

"Oh.....It looks so helpless." Said Marwa. "I now agree with Adie.....Can we leave now, please?"

"We've almost arrived back at the entrance.....Not far now." Said James.

They'd done a clockwise circuit of the walls, ending up back at the main way in and out, of the ruins. There it was in a pool of sunlight, a second bundle of rags. Drew began screaming and yelling that they should never have come to Libya.

"Stop it ! Stop screaming !" Yelled Adie. "This is what it wants.....It wants us to panic and run away."

Adie had gone beyond feeling terrified. She had viewed James as a kind of lifeboat. Someone tough to cling to when the shit hit the fan. Now she realised that he really did have the right idea. The Presence was manipulating them, though she still couldn't understand what it gained from the resulting panic and hysteria. Adie ignored another mention of scorpions, as she knelt next to the bundle of rags.

"Adie.....Please don't touch that thing." Said Travis.

Adie pulled at the rags and it unrolled, to reveal.....More rags. It took several attempts to get at what had been wrapped up in yards of material. It turned out to be a few very old pieces of wood. Sticks really, from the days when the temple had been surrounded by lush, green vegetation.

"Shit.....Now it's playing with us." Said Nick.

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Florence Glynn liked the manor, she liked it a lot. It was the kind of house she'd had fantasies about owning, when she'd been about fifteen. Her pop music career was going to make her millions. There'd be a private jet of course and a bad boy man in her life. An actor probably, with a troubled past and hints in the press about a wild sex life. Along with the bad boy and the jet, there'd be a house very much like the manor. Florence never had been the Dua Lipa of her day, but her demo disk had been mentioned once or twice on a commercial radio station.

"I have been contacted by the police and you were right." Said Betsy Nagle.

"I'm a suspect aren't I?" Asked Florence. "I knew it.....I bet they like me for all of it. The dead window cleaner and shoving Liliija's husband up into the ceiling space."

"They never gave me details, but yes.....You do seem to be their number one suspect." Said Betsy. "Ridiculous.....Karl was a big guy." Said Florence. "As if I have the strength to do that to him."

"Now Den's boss has been killed and his wife.....The police need a quick result." Said Betsy. "They'll settle for anyone as the killer, even my harmless PA. I told them about your excellent references and the family connection. One of them called Barlow had the nerve to laugh about that."

Florence could sympathise with the cop called Barlow. Hawley Harvey Crippen had been a doctor, with no doubt superb references. That hadn't stopped him murdering his wife.

"Am I safe here ?" Asked Florence. "Is it a question of not if, but when the police arrive at the front door of the manor ?"

"You are safe.....No one else comes here." Said Betsy. "I'll get my driver to order your groceries, as though they're for me. No one should be able to trace where you are. Even the police won't suspect you're hiding in a five million pound luxury manor house."

"Yes.....When you put it that way." Said Florence. "What is the long term plan, Betsy ? Do I hide here until the cops lose interest ? That might take them a while."

"Quite quickly, the police will find a better suspect." Said Betsy. "You need to be patient."

There was no better suspect, because no living person had carried out the killings. Betsy knew that, so the implication was obvious.

"You mean a suspect better than a skinny woman who weighs about a hundred and twenty pounds. A suspect a jury will happily lock up forever." Said Florence.

"No getting a conscience, Florence." Said Betsy. "There is only one person you should be worrying about.....Yourself. Are we agreed on that ?"

"Yes.....Don't worry." Said Florence. "I'm not the sort to make anonymous calls to The Grauniad."

"Good.....Now, I brought a notebook." Said Betsy. "Think about what groceries you need for next week. Everything has to go on the list. No popping out to the corner shop for you."

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Denise knew Marsha from numerous phone calls and quite a few texts. Marsha knew all the major players in the deadly game, with whatever haunted the Islington block of flats. Marsha had actually been cut, a wound that had required a trip to hospital. That meant Den trusted Marsha, but she didn't know the woman with her. The way the dark haired woman came into Den's flat, didn't improve her first opinion of her.

"Did you see that, Marsha ?" Asked the woman. "Straight past a copper....Looked him right in the eyes and.....Nothing. I could walk past my own mother looking like this."

"I could feel my heart pounding." Said Marsha. "I thought the police would be gone by now."

Den was beginning to put two and two together and no doubt, making eight, or maybe even twelve. Den could tell the police had downgraded her from suspect in a murder, to woman who might have cut her boss after a lovers tiff. They still called her and visited the flat, but it all seemed a box ticking exercise. There was obviously a new suspect and Den thought she might be looking at her.

"Sorry Den, this is Sovi Björlund." Said Marsha. "She's the freelance journalist I was telling you about. Nick knows her.....You can talk freely to her."

"Are you on the run from the police ?" Asked Den.

"Sort of is the honest answer." Said Sovi. "It comes with the territory in certain parts of the world, but not usually in London. I wasn't arrested, or charged.....They seem to think I witnessed more than I told them. The police aren't keen on my story conflicting with the official view."

"Sovi never hurt Stuart.....She arrived at his house after it happened." Added Marsha.

"You were there.....At Stuart's house ?" Asked Den.

"I was, for some time." Said Sovi. "I took picture, which are on several cloud servers. Stuart and his wife were dead when I arrived, but I don't think they'd been dead for long."

"Come into the kitchen, I'll make you coffee." Said Den. "I can make you both something to eat, if you're hungry?"

"We've spent an hour in a burger place, but coffee would be nice." Said Sovi.

"Yes, for me too." Said Marsha.

The police were telling her very little and then out of a clear blue sky, had fallen a witness to the whole dreadful thing. Sovi might not have seen the murders, but she'd seen the immediate aftermath. That would do, it was many times better than knowing nothing. Den made the coffee and they were all sat around her kitchen table.

"I've read everything you told James, Nick and Drew." Said Sovi. "By tonight I should have it all copied off my cloud server and onto a new laptop. I've also got the pictures I took of Stuart's house. You may see them, but as you two were.....Intimate. You're likely to find the pictures upsetting."

"I slept with Stuart once and that felt like a requirement for getting a promotion." Said Den. "So no, I'm not going to fall apart from seeing pictures of his dead body. Tell me about that day Sovi, I want to hear every dreadful detail."

"It's a two way street, Den." Said Sovi. "I have information you want and I need you to authenticate various things you've told James and Nick. I also need your signature on a few documents. I'm hoping you'll come to our hotel in the morning."

Marsha was sat there, sipping her coffee and keeping out of it. Den understood, though she'd always hoped the huge story never happened. Viral they called such things on social media. Gone would be her privacy, to be replaced by journalists on her doorstep and calling at all hours. It would unleash the property price killing hell, she'd been hoping to avoid.

"I can't sell the story, unless I have a verifiable source." Added Sovi. "No story and Nick might not get his book published. The whole financial house of cards, may well come tumbling down."

"But.....No pressure." Said Marsha.

That made them all chuckle. As Den laughed, she came to a decision, that might well mean her looking for a new job, and having to look for somewhere else to live.

"I told James that I'd put my name to everything I said, if it was needed." Said Den. "I will ring in sick and come to your hotel in the morning. Being picked up would be nice though, I hate finding my way around on buses."

"I'll come and pick you up." Said Sovi.

"We'll both come, she might get lost." Added Marsha.

Den topped up everyone's coffee and when she sat down, she put her hand over Sovi's.

"I still have nightmares." Said Den. "The truth will never be anywhere near as bad as my imagination is putting into my sleeping hours. Tell me.....Everything about when you arrived at Stuart's house?"

"As long as my new PC has finished updating, you can see the pictures tomorrow." Said Sovi. "I arrived and the street door was unlocked and slightly open. My guess is that the cook and maid saw something terrifying and fled the house. Can't be sure, but they're not listed as dead on any news reports."

"Sounds logical." Said Den.

"Are you sure you want to hear the nasty stuff?" Asked Marsha.

"Yes.....So, Sovi has gone into Stuart and Poula's house....Carry on." Said Den.

"I'd spoken to Stuart on the phone, but his wife, Poula....She was still just a name in a file and a picture I'd grabbed from Facebook." Said Sovi. "I shouted a few times to announce being in the

house, but no one replied. There was a large cat, but it wandered off. I found Stuart first, draped over a large armchair in what looked like the family room. He had a lot of very deep wounds and looked to have died from what serious TV crime shows call exsanguination. Stuart Goodford had bled to death and it had probably been quite a quick process.”

“Fuck.” Said Den, who found herself crying.

“We could stop there.....If you want ?” Asked Sovi.

“No.....Tell me about what was done to his wife ?”

Her hands were trembling and the tears were flowing. Stuart had been a decent boss once, but he’d changed with time. He wasn’t the sort of man to cry over, but there she was, her cheeks wet from grief.

“I hadn’t noticed Poula Goodford, until I was on the phone to the police.” Said Sovi. “I saw her face and thought it was an hallucination. Her body had been jammed between a heavy old radiator and the wall. Her head looked as though it had been placed on top of the rad, but it was still just about attached to her neck. I doubt if we’ll ever know why demons do these things.....Poula’s death was so brutal. It doesn’t make sense.”

“She was the one innocent party in it all.” Added Marsha. “.....Sorry...Not that Stuart deserved to die.”

Marsha was never going to win a prize for tact, but she was right. Poula had been the victim of Stuart’s infidelity.

“Pick me up at eight in the morning and I’m yours for the day.” Said Den. “I’ll go through whatever you need me to and sign anything you want signed.”

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“I don’t care if I get ripped apart.” Said Drew. “At first light I’m going to enter the temple and recover the body of that poor child.”

Nick had already told the woman he loved, that he wouldn’t let her. He’d promised to tie her up if necessary, or even damage one of her ankles, to make her immobile. He wasn’t a violent man, but he’d do anything to stop Drew effectively committing suicide. Drew hobbling about on one leg, was better than a dead Drew.

“I told you.....I won’t let you.” Said Nick.

“You.....You won’t let me !” Yelled Drew. “I’m my own person.....You have no right to say no.”

“Right and wrong don’t come into it.” Said Nick. “I love you and.....I will tie you up if it comes to that.”

They’d eaten, a fairly basic vegie lasagne cooked by Travis. Dark out now, which didn’t mean Drew wouldn’t make a try to recover the dead child during the night. The atmosphere in the truck had improved, but had become far worse after the sun had gone down. It was the closeness of the temple of course and all those thousands of years of evil. Nick had noticed the effect of old churches, the way hundreds of years of prayer, seemed to leave a positive atmosphere. Mosques and synagogues were the same, like batteries for some kind of positive force. If that was the case, the ruined temple had to be the opposite, a battery fully charged with evil intent.

“You were affected by the last hypnosis session, Drew.” Said Travis. “We’re now close to the temple, so the result may be.....Truly staggering. Please relax and be part of the procedure.”

“Yes, it’s not much to ask.” Said Adie. “And it might finally give Nick closure on what happened at the original summoning.”

“Fine.....I promise to behave, but only until dawn.” Said Drew.

“All this will be recorded won’t it ?” Asked Marwa.



"Yes.....All in glorious HD on our new cameras." Said Nick.

"I'm tired, it's been a really crap day." Said Marwa. "I'm going to bed.....I'll watch the recording sometime tomorrow."

"Oh, are you feeling alright ?" Asked Drew.

"I'm fine.....Just really, really tired."

"Alright.....Shout if you need anything." Said Adie.

By the time Travis had positioned the cameras; Drew was holding Nick's hand and refusing to budge.

"I'll be quiet as a mouse, but I'm staying with him this time." Said Drew.

"Fine.....Physical contact may enhance any secondary affects you feel." Said Travis.

It was great, as if the serious arguments hadn't happened. They had though and they were likely to kick off again in the morning. For now though, Drew was holding his hand and looking concerned.

"Don't fix what isn't broken.....We'll use the same procedure as last time." Said Travis.

Travis was good at using his voice. Of course he was, there had to have been hundreds of hypnotised people as his patients at one time or another. Everything from people not wanting to over eat, to stopping smoking, to cutting down on the booze. Travis had done it all, but his main love was relatively rare. The understanding of what happened when an individual was possessed. Or, claimed to be possessed. By his own admission, some of his subjects had turned out to be fakes.

"Nothing can hurt you Nick; everything is in your mind." Said Travis.

"We're not going back to the Brown Bear Pub, Nick." Said Travis. "Whatever happened there is locked in a loop and can wait. I will talk you back from ten. At one you will be inside the temple again....Not as it is now, but as it was when the Presence slaughtered his followers."

"It saw me last time.....It tried to hurt me." Muttered Nick.

"Trust me.....Nothing can hurt you. I'm counting back, Nick.....Ten.....Nine....."

It had to be windy outside, almost a gale. Nick could hear the wind bashing the sides of the old Russian truck. Only he wasn't in the truck and it wasn't the desert wind hitting the panels of their truck. Nick was walking across the floor of the temple and it wasn't a ruin. The floor had a colourful mosaic that had to be forty feet across. He'd expected the Presence to be portrayed in the mosaic, the creature of smoke and shadows. It wasn't though.....Nick recognised the likeness of Baphomet, who'd been worshiped by the Templars. They'd worshipped Baphomet as being symbolic of Satan. A depiction of Baphomet in a temple that old.....It didn't make sense.

"What is hitting the walls ?" Nick muttered.

As Nick reached the closest wall, something had broken one of the enormous stone slabs. In his dream, Nick saw the creatures as imps, winged minions of many Gods and minor deities. Tens of thousands of imps, were throwing themselves at the temple walls. It was madness, it was a battle of some kind...No, it was a war going on, an all-out war.

"This.....This is madness." Muttered Nick.

The temple wall collapsed, allowing thousands of demonic creatures to enter. They stomped over Nick, crushing his flesh and shattering his bones. For an hypnotic state where he was safe, the pain felt a long way from being safe. He remained conscious though and despite un-survivable injuries, he still lived.

"Oh, Travis.....Pull me out of this hell." Nick muttered.

Nick felt his crushed heart stop beating and for a time there was just darkness. When his eyes opened again, he was standing in the temple again. It was that night, which had happened a very long time ago. The floor of the temple was covered in the dead, everything from young children to the elderly. All of them dressed in robes, as if there had been some kind of celebration going on.

"Why.....Why did they all have to die ?" Muttered Nick.

There was the tropical heat again, with the smell of exotic blooms. Through a gap in the stones, Nick could see the stars.

"Don't be scared.....You alone are safe here....Even in a dream."

The voice that sounded more animal than human. Nick turned and the thing of darkness and shadows was there, as if examining the dead. The eyes had terrified Nick the last time he'd seen them, but now they didn't. There was something sad about the entity, as it touched its dead worshippers.

"Why did you kill them all ?" Asked Nick.

"I didn't do this.....It's your doing, Nick Rees." Said the Presence. "You have no idea of how much power you have in that fragile mortal body of yours. You summoned me and then decided I wasn't powerful enough to do your bidding. It was your decision to summon the mighty Baphomet."

The voice, the look, the eyes....All of them had once terrified Nick. The Presence no longer scared Nick. Now a few memories were returning and Nick knew he was hearing the truth. Details were still a little foggy, but he remembered attempting to call up Baphomet, The Gatekeeper.

"Again I ask.....Why ? I could never summon such a being." Said Nick. "What did I hope to achieve ?"

"You will remember and it is not for me to tell you. You were very drunk and the summoning failed. An aspect of Baphomet is perpetually stuck half in your world and half.....Somewhere even I consider to be unpleasant. Baphomet isn't pleased.....He came back through time and killed my worshippers. Easy for him to do....He is the gatekeeper."

"Why punish you ?" Asked Nick.

"You asked who could fulfil your demands." Said the Presence. "I was stupid enough to recommend Baphomet. We're now linked together in this, Nick. Left unresolved, we'll be stuck together for eternity."

"Why do you kill those around me ?" Asked Nick.

"The deaths made you focus on the problem. Without the deaths, you'd still be in your flat, writing those ridiculous books. There are other reasons, my reasons. With no worshippers, I needed a source of life energy."

Something was happening; the dream state seemed to be collapsing. Solid walls were turning from a reddish brown to grey. Nick knew the hypnotic dream would soon be over.

"I'm being pulled back." Said Nick. "Tell me.....What do I have to do ?"

"Go back to London and the gent's toilet in the Brown Bear. Finish the summoning, you'll remember how. Let Baphomet loose in your world. Then you must cast him into the abyss."

"How do I do that ?" Asked Nick.

"You'll work it out.....Firstly you need to bring Marwa back from the ruins. She doesn't realise the dead child isn't what she thinks it is. Save Marwa, you will need her."

"Why is she....."

No good, the dream world disintegrated. As Nick came out of the hypnotic state, he was screaming. Not just him, Drew was screaming too.

"Did you see it all ?" He asked her.

"Yes, you were such an arsehole." Said Drew.

"I know, all the memories are returning and I was a complete arsehole. You can all shout at me later, but for now. We need to rescue Marwa from the temple." Said Nick.

"Marwa is asleep on her bedroll." Said Adie.

"She must have sneaked out." Said Nick. "We need to rescue her.....Marwa is important."

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