

The Presence

Chapter 21 - Aiwass

“What do we need to do ?” Asked Florence.

“Good to have you back with us, Florence.” Said Nick. “Just keep me upright, I’ll do the rest.”

Nick felt for power within the shrine, exactly as his dream self had once done.’

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People talk about walking through the pain, of ignoring the agony. Up until that moment, Nick Rees would have said it was impossible for him to walk. Just putting his weight on his feet, caused him to begin sweating from the pain. There could be no walking through it. Then Nick remembered a dream, one of many he’d had while in Libya and barely remembered. A dream about the shrine, which was still glowing with a cold red light.....

“Help me up.....I need to put my hands on the shrine.” Said Nick.

“You’ll open up the wounds again.” Said Drew.

A quick look around and Nick knew they’d have to deal with Baphomet, just Drew and himself. James was lying on the ground, unconscious by the look of it and bleeding from a head wound. Adie was with him, using a scarf to wipe blood off his face. Florence was there, but seemed in shock. Her eyes were staring blankly at the muddy side of the sinkhole. Marwa was alert, but she was above them, shouting the occasional words of encouragement. Marsha wasn’t there with them; she must have avoided falling into the hole. As for Baphomet.....The demon gatekeeper was nowhere to be seen.

“We’ll need to do this, Drew.” Said Nick. “Actually I need to do it, but I need you to help me get there. An old fashioned laying on of hands, Drew. I need to place my hands on the shrine.”

After two steps, Nick screamed. Florence seemed to wake up, though she still hadn’t said a word. With her one side and Drew the other, they managed to get him to the stone shrine. It looked even more like an ancient church font, once he was close enough to rest most of his weight on it.

“What is this thing ?” Asked Drew. “Was it placed here by demons like Baphomet ?”

“It was here long before Wren added the spire.” Said Nick. “Way back, when the church here was new and having problems. Someone senior in the clergy, someone with money and a lot of belief in the old ways, had an occultist pour power into this shrine. My guess would be someone from the reign of Elizabeth the first. Perhaps the famous John Dee himself; repurposed an old warrior’s tomb.”

“What do we need to do ?” Asked Florence.

“Good to have you back with us, Florence.” Said Nick. “Just keep me upright, I’ll do the rest.”

Nick felt for power within the shrine, exactly as his dream self had once done.

“Found it, the shrine is set to block evil entering our world.” Said Nick. “The red glow is where the dark minions are trying to break through from the other side, the dark side.....First, I need to set the shrine to block nothing.”

“But.....Won’t that let the demons into our world ?” Asked Drew.

“Eventually, when the open gateway is noticed.” Said Nick. “I never said the plan was perfect and.....It’ll take a while for them to break through. I need quiet now, to concentrate on getting this right.”

James had been worrying Nick, but he was now sat up and talking to Adie. He must have taken a nasty blow to the head while falling into the hole. Poor James, even in the poor lighting of the red glow, he didn't look well.

"Light.....I need you all to turn on your lights." Yelled Nick. "They won't like the light; it'll give us a few more precious minutes to send the Presence back to hell."

Adie turned on the light James had around his neck, before turning on her own. Everyone turned on their battery lamps; Marwa even aimed hers into the hole. Even if the light didn't deter the creatures of the dark, it made Nick feel better.

"If you believe in anything.....Now is the time to pray to your God, or Gods." Yelled Nick.

Nick didn't know how he knew where to aim the power in his body, he wasn't really sure of anything. There had been the dream and in the dream it had worked. He ran the palm of his right hand over a section of the shrine, which looked polished by many hands. Whose hands had run over the ancient stone many, many times? He had no idea, but they'd probably never worshipped a Christian God.

"Help me Aiwass.....Please help all of us." Shouted Nick.

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Florence Glynn wasn't sure if she was supposed to hang onto Nick, but she did it anyway. Drew was still trying to support him, so Florence put her arm around him and tried to take some of the weight off his mutilated legs. The shrine in front of her was glowing now, everywhere Nick touched. It was as if he was painting the stone shrine with his hands. He spoke in what sounded like Latin, the equivalent of whole pages of something that made the shrine glow brighter.

"Open the way.....Open the Gateway!" Yelled Nick.

The shrine cracked open, with a sound like an explosion. For a moment Florence forgot about Nick, as she saw the bones of a warrior inside the shrine. It was a tomb after all, complete with what remained of a long dead warrior. He still had the bone fingers of his right hand, wrapped around a badly corroded sword.

"Open the gate.....I command you, open the gate." Shouted Nick.

Another loud bang, as the shrine fell apart. Nick picked up the ancient sword and held it up, as if blocking an attack. Florence couldn't see anything attacking him, but Nick kept waving the sword around. The red glow stopped, as suddenly as turning off a light switch.

"It's done....Nick did it!" Shouted James. "The gateway between our world and hell, is now open." Baphomet appeared, there was a chance he'd been there all the time. When the red glow vanished, Baphomet stood out as the last red light in the sink hole. There he, or it was, right up against the far wall.

"Where is your guardian angel, Nick Rees?" Asked Baphomet. "You've opened the gate, but Aiwass hasn't the courage to face me."

Just a flick of his right hand and something flew from Baphomet towards Nick. A dark ball of something, which exploded as it hit the broken shrine. Nick was thrown back, but Florence still managed to keep her arm around him. The light was poor; her own lamp was no longer working. Drew's was though and it was showing Nick's face.

"Oh.....Look what that bastard did to him." Yelled Drew. "It's not right.....It isn't right."

Nick was still conscious, but that meant he had to be feeling a lot of pain. The entire left side of his face looked melted, like candle wax. His left eye was gone, mixed in with what had been his left cheek. Through a gap in his face, Florence could see Nick's teeth. He was muttering something and

she might well have been the only one to hear his words. He was almost whispering about it all being his fault.

“.....Take me Aiwass.....I offer my life.....Send the Presence back to hell.....” Muttered Nick.

Nick died with Florence’s arm around him, she felt him stop breathing. Drew began screaming and in the middle of all that emotional chaos, Aiwass arrived. A he, a her, or perhaps a creature impossible to define by gender. A glowing figure about the same size as a bulky human, but there were no clearly visible features. Aiwass said something to Drew about redemption. Florence couldn’t hear much; the conversation was quiet and not intended for her.

“You must leave this world.” Aiwass yelled at Baphomet.

“I don’t think so.....You don’t have the power to banish me.” Shouted Baphomet.

Aiwass said nothing, he simply aimed his right arm at Baphomet, the Presence which had claimed so many lives and caused so much misery. Maybe Nick had given his life to be used in the fight, or maybe Aiwass always had the power ?

“Destroy it.....Send it back into the perpetual darkness.” Yelled Adie.

No mention of Travis, but Florence knew why Adie hated the demon. Aiwass waved an arm in the direction of Baphomet, before thrusting the arm into the ground. Still no words, but Baphomet began to scream. Down he was pulled, into the cold, damp ground. Slowly at first, before speeding up. His finally screams seemed to come up out of the ground. Florence knew it was over, when Aiwass vanished. Drew was crying, the really hard crying that can eat a person’s soul if it goes on for too long. Florence hugged her, but said nothing.

“Crap.....Climbing out of here won’t be easy.” Said Adie.

“Shall I call the cops ?” Shouted Marwa, from above.

“How many times.....No cops.” Yelled James.

“I told her that.....Several times.” Yelled Marsha.

“The Gateway..... The shrine has been destroyed.” Said Florence. “Surely.....We’re leaving it wide open ?”

“The Gateway is gone now.....Never to be used again.” Said James.

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The timing was dreadful, but an empty coffin funeral for Travis, had been booked for a while.

Catering had been arranged and cars booked for family and friends. Adie had even booked a room at the local leisure centre in her part of Uxbridge. Walking distance from her house.....Everything was too well booked, arranged and organised.....To cancel.....

“I feel guilty.” Said Drew. “It’s as though Nick’s death has hijacked the ceremony.”

“Don’t feel like that.” Said Adie. “Travis wouldn’t have minded.....Underneath all the usual guy stuff, all the jibes at each other; I know Travis thought of Nick as a really good friend.”

Drew wasn’t so sure, Nick had once talked about punching Travis; hard and right on his nose. Not that it was the right time for that kind of honesty. She nodded at Adie and held her hand.

“Are you staying on in London ?” Asked Adie. “Or going back to America ?”

“We took precautions before getting on the plane to Libya, I think everyone did.” Said Drew. “The flat is mine, left to me in Nick’s most recent will and testament. I got it all, even the long term rights to his literary works. I won’t starve and neither will Suki. I’m staying in Islington and even hoping to.....Eventually, become friends with Mary.”

“And.....One day it might snow in the Sahara desert.” Said Adie.

They both giggled, until one of Adie’s relatives gave them a disgusted look. It was a strange funeral, with half of the mourners being there to feel miserable about Nick dying. Not that they’d been able

to recover the body. As they'd climbed out of the sink hole, the ground had closed up. James had said it was probably the work of Aiwass, the guardian angel. The police had called the following morning, intent on arresting Nick. Hearing that he'd vanished during the night, didn't seem to surprise them. Author of authentic horror goes missing.....It was the stuff of dreams to Betsy, who said it would add a million to the book sales. Betsy Nagle was already hiring ghost writers for the book, which still didn't have a name. Everyone wanted the book and the subsequent movie, to be a huge success. Not just because of the money.....They'd be a permanent record of what they'd all been through, though Nick's death would need a lot of airbrushing.

"May I ask you something?" Asked Adie.

"Wow, must be serious, you've never asked before." Said Drew. "Alright.....And yes, I really did love Nick Rees."

"No, not that; we all know you two were soulmates." Said Adie. "Florence saw Aiwass talk to you, after Nick had.....Passed on. Can I ask what he said to you?"

That was so personal, that Drew hadn't mentioned it to anyone. Aiwass had mentioned there being no promises, but what he had said.....It seemed to at least offer hope. It seemed ridiculous, given what they'd all seen, but Drew still didn't think of herself as being that religious. She believed in some things though.

"I want your promise." Said Drew. "You tell no one else.....Ever. Is that agreed?"

"Of course.....I'll take the secret to the grave." Said Adie.

Not the best words for what had become effectively become a double funeral. Now she'd got that far, Drew was quite keen on someone else knowing.

"Aiwass told me that anyone may be redeemed.....Even the irredeemable." Said Drew.

"That sounds as though he's saying....."

"I know.....I know." Said Drew. "Now we never talk about this again.....Ever." Said Drew.

Betsy caught her, good old reliable Betsy. There was more talk about ghost writers and screenplays, but Drew was beginning to get used to it. All far too soon after Nick dying, though Betsy knew very little about what had occurred at St Dunstan's. Betsy leant in towards her, with a glass of sherry in one hand and a piece of cheesecake in the other.

"Eventually.....The body will have to be found." Whispered Betsy. "Otherwise it will.....Complicate getting his estate in order."

"Are we talking about Nick, or Travis?" Asked Drew.

Good, Betsy was looking uncomfortable. Yes, the book and the movie had to carry on, but Betsy didn't need to be so obnoxious about it. Was she though? Drew had similar worries about Nick's estate being hung in limbo for years. Drew gave Betsy a gentle hug.

"Sorry, Betsy.....James has all that in hand."

"Good." Said Betsy.

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Despite really being a student, Marwa had been perfect as a temporary PA for Louise. The girl had never made a drama out of a crisis, or a crisis out of a drama. Maybe it had been the effect of so much daily low level stress in Tripoli? Whatever the reason, Marwa had been able to handle anything Louise had thrown at her. Maybe not always handle it in her stride; the girl could lose her temper, but never with Louise. Now Marwa was in London, Uxbridge to be precise. Not for ever, but the authorities had given her the paperwork to stay for a while.....

"Leaving me stuck with Alyssa." Muttered Louise. "I suppose in fairness, she does try hard. It's just that.....I was used to Marwa."

Alyssa was on loan, the main way Louise had acquired quite a few temporary helpers. Louise had never had a male PA and had no intention of ever hiring one. She liked her girls, as she called them. Alyssa, her current helper, was on loan from the university's administration department in London. A call had gone out by email, asking for potential volunteers to work in Libya. Just for a while of course, until the backlog of work had been dealt with. A backlog that would soon be married and bringing up its young. Alyssa had turned up with a huge smile and a can do attitude. Louise was already beginning to hate her.

"The men from the secure storage people are here." Said Alyssa.

"Have you checked their identities?" Asked Louise.

"Erm.....They knew where to come and what needs to be boxed up." Said Alyssa.

All valid as a way of justifying letting crooks make off with a priceless gold statue. Louise wasn't angry with her new girl, she had told her quite a few times to.....Work on her own initiative. The statue though, that might well be the most valuable artefact in Libya, maybe in the whole of North Africa. Good of the American journalists to give it to the university, but they could hardly take it home with them to Texas.

"Call their office and confirm their identities." Said Louise.

"Sorry.....I'll do it right away." Said Alyssa.

Alyssa seemed so sensible, so focused; definitely not the sort to imagine things. Yet, barely four days off the plane from London and she'd claimed to see something 'creepy' to use the girl's own word for it. Now she was reluctant to go near the gold statue on her own.

"I saw a glow, Louise." Alyssa had said. "A reddish glow that.....I know it sounds silly, but I was suddenly terrified and I don't scare easily. That thing is.....Creepy."

It was the gossip of course and being fair, there had been deaths at the temple in the deep desert. Alyssa might have only been in Tripoli for a few days, but she'd have heard all about the gory reputation of the ruins. The statue was the only surviving artefact from that dreadful place.

"The sooner it's boxed up and in a vault.....The better." Muttered Louise.

Louise couldn't resist going to have a look at the two men sent by their bank. A good solid bank, Louise had once checked them out. Not the sort of bank who'd misplace a gold statue worth more than.....Louise had given up on trying to price up a priceless object. The statue of a woman with the head of a goat, was incredibly old. Probably created before the peoples of North Africa, were working with gold. That in itself, had to add a lot of zeros to the value of the statue.

"Good.....I'm glad you're taking it away." Said Louise. "I didn't like having it live in a stationery cupboard.....Given its value."

Two men, one looked local, but the other looked like he'd just got off the plane from somewhere in Europe. They had a crate on a trolley, with just the top to go on the crate, once the statue was in there. Louise had noticed that every find of significant value, had to be moved on a trolley. She had no idea why, but assumed it was something to do with those dreadful words.....Health and safety.

"Yes.....Won't take us long and we'll be out of your hair."

Gold, it had to be the gold. Louise saw the statue give a little glint of gold, as the men shoved bubble wrap around it. Alyssa must have seen the same sort of thing. Then all the gossip had turned the glint of yellow, into a terrifying reddish glow.

"I did call for their IDs." Said Alyssa.

"I'm sure you did." Said Louise. "I'll leave you to it."

It happened just as one of the men, used a staple gun to secure the lid of the crate. A little noise and Louise instinctively looked. There it was, a faint but definite reddish glow. It was coming from the

head of the statue, which looked like a goat. By the time Louise was sure she'd seen it, the men were wheeling their trolley down the corridor. The worrying thing, was that Louise could feel her heart going crazy, full on tachycardia. She was terrified, yet had no idea why. Louise returned to her office and sat quietly at her desk for a while.

"Idiot.....Getting myself upset." Said Louise. "All nonsense, just a glint of gold under LED lighting.....I'm getting worse than the students."

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The end and I know there are some out there who like a few stats.
Total word count 130,095, which is about 434 novel length pages.