

Excerpt from Witch House

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Besides the mysteriously placed candles leading us into the room, there were others, which Lilith had placed and lit herself, positioning them as before in the corners of the room and on the table, forming a triangle with the incense burning in the middle. She instructed Carlos to get a chair from the kitchen, since Dominic had grabbed the end chair and pulled it alongside Ursula. Once we all gathered around the table, Lilith started us on instructions.

“I don’t know what you all know or think you know about séances,” she said, “but this is serious business. Spirits are, by their nature, confused souls. The fact they are here, trapped between the layers of abstract dimension and the physical world, indicates their vulnerabilities. They do not want to be here, yet they cannot move on. Their situation is a predicament, and the longer they stay, the angrier they become. That is what makes séances so dangerous and unpredictable. So, forget what you think you know, forget what you have seen on TV or in the movies.

“The reconstitution of dark energy is a grievous affair of the soul. A spirit in a state of reconstitution risks eternal desolation, should its particles defragment prematurely with some measure of energy dispersing on this side of the spiritual divide and the rest on the other. Once that happens, it is impossible to fuse the mixed energy together again, and the spirit is essentially dead. This, my friends, is the true meaning of a lost soul. In some Indian cultures, they believe you can hear the remnants of these souls howling in the winds. They cry to find their way back to the ones they love, but it shall never be. So take this as seriously as any matter you have taken before. Bear what pain you might, should it come to that. Assume what stress abounds and endure the worst if the burden arises. Remember it is not simply a life you save if called upon, but eternal afterlife. Do for this soul what you can, for I have no doubts that you would wish nothing less for yourselves.”

I do not think any of us had expected such a bombshell from Lilith. The way Carlos and Dominic’s mouths hung slack, you would have thought the echo in the room would resonate indefinitely. The silence broke when Dominic swallowed first and asked, “You think he’ll try to hurt us?”

Lilith answered truthfully. “He might.”

“Will he kill us?” This from Carlos.

“Probably not. He is angry; he is not vengeful. Think of him as a kid throwing a temper tantrum. If we talk to him nicely, he should remain calm.”

“What if I shoot him?”

“No Carlos, you can’t shoot him.”

He soured his face some. "Rats."

"Are there any more questions?" No one had. "Good. Let's begin." She snapped a twig from a potted ficus that had spilled half its dirt and placed it across two of the candles, allowing their flames to ignite at each end and begin a slow march towards the middle. Next, she put her hands upon the table, palms up and opened. I sat on her right, with Ursula on mine; Dominic, as I mentioned, sat beside her with Carlos between him and Lilith. We gathered hands and gazed reflectively upon the candles. "Join me, now," she said, "and fear not, for the spirit moves at our beckon call." She began.

"Hear ye, spirit, announce thine name, come show thy self upon this flame; come hither thou where light burns yonder; embrace what fires now make thee stronger."

Ursula joined in then.

"Hear ye, spirit, announce thine name, come show thy self upon this flame; come hither thou where light burns yonder; embrace what fires now make thee stronger."

By the third verse, the boys and I got it, and soon a hushed chorus rang in unison.

"Hear ye, spirit, announce thine name, come show thy self upon this flame; come hither thou where light burns yonder; embrace what fires now make thee stronger."

I would like to say that this mantra continued for only a dozen verses or so, but the truth is that I really do not know. It may have continued for much, much longer. After the fourth or fifth go around, I found myself strangely consumed by the process. My body felt lighter than air. My mind fell into a state of hyper-concentration where all I could do was channel my thoughts towards this one goal. I tried to pay attention to my surroundings, but found my focus narrowed to only the flames creeping along the ficus twig, and beyond that, Carlos, who seemed every bit enchanted as I.

At some point, Lilith stopped the incantation first, though I did not realize that until Ursula stopped, too. After I stopped, Spinelli stopped, and a single verse later, so did Carlos. We looked up then. The fire burning along the twig had died. Only a charred bark-less stick bridged the two candles. I saw Lilith look toward the ceiling and I followed. What I saw made my heart skip a beat.

"What is your name," said Lilith. The others were also now watching the apparition hovering above us. He looked not quite solid, but not transparent either, his facial features blurred and undistinguishable.

I had, on one privileged occasion, the opportunity to see something similar, though not exactly, when I witnessed the manifestation of a paranormal event unequalled until then. It involved the apparition of a young woman metaphysically transported through an out-of-body experience called bilocation, a phenomenon where the conscious entity leaves the body temporarily and then returns. Unlike death, however, this entity leaves the life essence with the body so that it does not die, thus coexisting in only one dimension, but in

separate places. It was the first time I had ever witnessed anything so utterly awe-inspiring, and if not for that, I do not know if I could have believed it now.

“Will you tell us your name?” This again from Lilith. “We want to help you. Please talk to us.”

Still, he would not respond, and I wondered if it was because he had not fully reconstituted. He had no recognizable face, unlike the woman I knew who could bilocate. In her case I could make out every detail, every subtle nuance, even her tears. However, this was different. From what I could tell, I believed that he could hear us. Though he looked around at us all, he returned his attention to Lilith when she spoke. I think Ursula noticed that, too, as she tried her hand at coaxing his attention.

“Kind spirit,” she said, “be not lost so sorely in thy grief, for I know what sorrow your heart doth shed.”

The ghost turned to Ursula. I saw Spinelli squeeze her hand tighter, and in doing so, squeezed mine as well. I said to him, “Easy, boy, she knows what she’s doing,” and his hand relaxed.

Ursula continued. “I think not of those what hath wronged me now. `Tis thine fate they seal not mine. Look upon my face, good man, see whence I came. I know what pain doth cripple thee, for thou and I hath tread the dark alike. See what scars upon my neck bear witness to; that my collar sees not what wounds thy rope makes, doth not my wounds heal. What knave fellow hath done this I ask not, and thou should ask not as well.”

The ghost responded unpredictably, I think. Perhaps Lilith and Ursula expected what happened next, but I sure did not. He fell away in a shifting cloud, sinking lower and taking on a more solid form, though still not entirely recognizable.

We continued holding hands, as he floated around the room, all of us watching his movements to the extreme we could without turning our heads. Only when he passed through me and went around Carlos, could I see what likely killed him. I have been a cop a long time and have seen many unfortunate things, though none as unfortunate and disheartening as finding an otherwise healthy young man dead of a gunshot wound. Such was the case with our ghost friend now, for low and centered on his back was a hole the size of a grapefruit, the kind of hole a shotgun blast makes at close range. Lilith said the ghost was pissed. Now I could see why.

“We thank thee,” said Ursula, addressing the ghost after he completed his rounds about the table and stopped behind her. “Thou hast by light of fire welcomed mine and worthy souls of gentle kind. We call to thee for want of naught, but to free what thou doth hinder. Speak now, thane, what say ye might and I shall lend my body to thy will.”

At this point, we were all looking at Ursula and her shadow ghost. From the corner of my eye, I saw Lilith give a nod, which Ursula returned. The ghost then moved forward, disappearing into Ursula’s body and turning her skin stony white.

“What is your name?” asked Lilith.

Carlos, Dominic and I looked at her sharply and realized immediately to whom she was speaking. Our heads ping-ponged back to Ursula in time to hear her respond in a voice not her own.

“John.”

“Hi John, I’m Lilith. I see you know Ursula.”

Ursula smiled. She moved her hands to her chest and began rubbing her breasts. “Yeah, she’s purdy.”

“Yes, I know she is, now keep your hands off her, John, or I’ll send you back.”

She dropped her hands and folded them on the table. “You ain’t the boss of me.”

“I am for the next few minutes.” She snapped her fingers and the three red candles on the table flared at her command, blinding us briefly before dying back again. “So, what’s your gig, John? Why are you so pissed?”

John replied, “You are in my house. Why?”

“We came to see the house because it’s for sale.”

“Nuh-uh. I ain’t sellin` it.”

“It’s not up to you. You are gone now. The house doesn’t belong to you anymore.”

“Does too!” he shouted, and when Ursula slammed the heels of her palms on the table, the three candles teetered. “You all think I don’t see what’s goin` on here, but I do. I see.”

“You see what?”

“You all are protecting him.”

“Who?”

She crossed her brows in scorn. “I didn’t do nothing`. He didn’t need to shoot me.”

Lilith leaned in on her elbows, squinting lightly, the candlelight reflecting in her eyes like dancing nymphs. I knew she was not looking at Ursula, rather into her, beyond her soul and through the veil concealing the parasite within. “Who shot you, John? Is he still out there? Is that why you are angry?”

Again, Ursula’s fists rocked the tabletop, spilling hot wax down the sides of the candles and onto the cloth. “Don’t play dumb with me.” She looked to Carlos and pointed. “You!”

“Me?” I could see the lump in his throat withdraw when he swallowed.

“You’re a cop, ain’t ya?”

“Yes.”

“You stinkin` bag-a-shit. What are you doin` in my house? You should be out lookin` for the prick that did this to me.”

“Hey, just a minute now.” Carlos pulled back in his chair, adopting a more defiant posture. “I don’t even know you, Mister. Maybe if you tell us—”

“No!” Ursula sprang to her feet, kicking her chair out from under her butt and sending it across the room. “Get out of my house, now!”

Spinelli jumped up and grabbed her by the shoulders. She palmed his chest and shoved him into the wall. I stood; Carlos stood. Ursula put her arms out, and without touching us, drove us both back into our seats. She stepped back and whirled her hands above her head, spinning out a swarm of flies as thick as rain. I yelled to Lilith, “Do something!”

She stood, clapped her hands twice and snapped her fingers. Once more, the candle flames surged, setting the room alight in a triangle-shaped tower of fire that scorched the ceiling raw. “Be gone!” she cried, and at once, the flames retreated. The swarm of flies pooled overhead in a thick black cloud, hovering and heaving as a single breathing entity. I looked to Ursula. She seemed dazed and unaware. Spinelli returned to her, clasping her hands within his and pulling them to his chest.

“Ursula? Are you all right?”

She smiled at him softly. “Methinks now, for thee hath only to hold me.”

“I will,” he said, “I will keep you safe.”

Lilith said, “How `bout keeping it in your pants, Romeo?” She looked up at the ceiling. “Those are horse flies. Any second now they are going to descend on us and feast!”

Carlos stood with arms splayed and began herding the two toward the door. I reached for Lilith’s hand. “Coming?”

“Sheeah, it was my idea.”

We made it as far as the living room before the massive blizzard of flies began pouring down on us. They bit Carlos first; perhaps being the tallest made him an easier target. He let out a yell as though someone had stabbed him. I thought he was overreacting until the son-of-a-bitches got to me. Then I felt his pain, like a jab in the back of the neck with a rusty nail. Spinelli fell victim next, and then Ursula, their cries echoing Carlos’ and mine throughout our retreat. We charged the front door hard and fast, spilling out onto the front lawn, bent in a crouch and swatting indiscriminately. Once outside, the flies all seemed to vanish, and if not for the welts on my neck, I might think they were never there at all. We stood in a loose circle there, half-moaning, half laughing, rubbing our wounds to numb the pain; all but for Lilith. I noticed her standing idly by, watching us quietly with one hand on her hip, the other relaxed by her side. I said to her, “What’s with you? You didn’t get bit?”

She treated the question like a nuisance. “Of course not.”

We all stopped to look at her. “Why not? You were the last one out. They should have sucked you dry.”

“They didn’t bite me because I didn’t panic. They can smell that, you know.”

“What?”

“Sure, when you panic, your blood pressure goes way up. When that happens, your blood rises close to the surface of your skin. That way when they bite you, they get more of what they are after.”

Carlos said, “Why didn’t you tell us that before? We could have all just walked out of there calmly.”

“Oh, come now,” she said, grinning. “What fun would that have been?”

I dug the car keys out of my pocket. “Say goodnight, boys.” I pointed to Lilith. “Don’t forget. We have a deal.”

She folded her arms at her chest. “I didn’t forget.”

I watched her expression morph into something devilish, the way it does sometimes when she is planning a surprise for me. That alone did not worry me. When I noticed her teasing grin turn seductive, however, I knew I had more coming than what I bargained for.