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Inside a Frame

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Jed slammed the door behind him as he left his car, thinking about Katrina. Her decision to dump him was a source of pain that did not seem capable of going away. He walked through the forest with images of Katrina returning to his head. Memories of her repeatedly telling him that she would never come back to him at a café were breaking through his mental defences, eating away at any possibility of the two of them being reconciled. He hoped that the trees surrounding him would offer him a means of hope, a means of temporarily escaping the hurt she inflicted on him. He looked at the trees as another form of reality independent of human malevolence but their presence afforded him nothing. Jed realised that his surroundings were void of meaning like the strangers behind that counter who showed no concern for him after Katrina shoved him in the chest and walked away. Although the café was gone from his visual perception, the residue of pain that was caused by a single experience could not disappear. Jed simply sat himself down at the foot of a tree, hoping for relief. He suddenly remembered a book in his possession and took it out from his bag. *What's wrong with me?* He could not understand how his memory of what is good could fade so quickly in such a short space of time. With his realisation that an opportunity for healing was present, he was determined to make the most of it. The book was called *Another Life* by Cassie Harper. It was the autobiography of a young woman who left the occult and experienced a much better life afterwards. Jed was about to open the book but saw something happen above him.

As Jed saw the image from the corner of his eye, he had a certain doubt regarding the reality of what he saw. He turned to his left and looked up at the tree where he saw a raven moving in a way that made him uncomfortable. This time, there were no doubts in his mind about what he was seeing. The raven made three successive loops in the air before returning to a branch. *I thought he was dead.* Jed briefly turned away on account of the memories which the raven evoked in his head. He placed the book back in his bag. His mind returned to his experiences with William the Enchanter when he was alive and the evil practices he engaged in when Jed was a member of the Enchanted People, William's underground society. He thought that he was free of the residue of those memories until he saw the raven moving the way it did. He took a look back at the raven. It stared directly at him before making those same successive loops and flying away. Being aware of the power of the Enchanted People, Jed was familiar with their ability to take possession of animals and use them as they pleased. The movements of that raven were exactly the same as birds that were previously possessed by William. After he died, there were no more known cases of possessed animals behaving like that. Jed clearly remembered the bullet which passed through William's head, leading to the dispersion of the Enchanted People. Jed could only think of one possible explanation for the bird's behaviour. Someone must have gained the power that William possessed during his life. As he walked in the opposite direction of the tree which made him uncomfortable, he

was convinced that William could not be resurrected. Memories of that bullet were clear in his head.

As Lyle entered the café, Katrina made eye contact with him as they exchanged nods. Meeting up with each other at the front counter, Katrina held up a bag that was in her hand. “I’ve got it.”

“Let’s go inside.” Leading Katrina through the counter, Lyle opened a door that led them down into a corridor. “How did you kill it?”

“Strangulation.”

“Was anyone else present?”

“No, I was alone.”

“What time did you kill it?”

“Around midnight.”

“Excellent. Let’s go in.”

Lyle led Katrina into a room. He turned the lights on and locked the door behind him after Katrina entered. The part of the room near the entrance was filled with distillation tanks, glass bottles and other equipment while the opposite end consisted of operating equipment such as knives, scalpels and anaesthetic. After Katrina gave the bag to Lyle, he placed it on an operating table and took the frog carcass out of the bag. He used a knife and a pair of gloves to remove the intestines and deposit them into a plastic container. He then pulled out the liver and squeezed its’ bile into a test tube. He then removed his gloves and transferred a few drops from the test tube into a bottle of green liquid. He handed the bottle to Katrina.

“Here you are.”

“How will I know that this is going to work?”

“Just try it out. If it doesn’t work, I can give you something else.”

“What about the portal?”

“You want to come back again?”

“Yes, I’ve been doing everything you asked.”

“O.K., I’ll meet you there tonight. What time do you want meet?”

“Seven o’clock.”

Since quitting his job as a removalist a few days ago, Jed had successfully managed to remove all ties with former members of the Enchanted People, including Jake Rollins, a fellow removalist who stayed with Suburban Removalist Services, after Jed’s departure. Despite having high expectations that his emotional state would improve after this decision, he was still the same. His anxiety from being dumped by Katrina a fortnight ago did not change. The only thing that Jed could do was to try to take his mind off her by doing activities that she did not engage in such as using coconuts in food preparation. He was hoping that thinking about Katrina’s allergy to coconuts could turn off the negative effects she was having on him. He grated a coconut on a board and mixed it in with milk, ice, sugar, a sprinkle of cinnamon, a teaspoon of vanilla essence and a scoop of ice cream in a blender. The ingredients soon turned into a mixture that was pleasing to his eyes. He immediately opened the lid and enjoyed the smell. As Jed poured part of the smoothie into a glass, the doorbell rang. He looked through the window to see who it was. It was Inspector Victor Mills. On this occasion, he was not dressed in his uniform. He simply wore a long sleeve tee shirt and a pair of jeans and had scratches on his face as well bandaging around his neck. Entering the foyer, Jed opened the door. They exchanged greetings as Jed made a gesture for Victor to come in.

“It’s good to see you again.” Jed said as he offered his hand to Victor who shook it.

“Yes.” Sweat was going down Victor’s face as he made his response.

“You need a drink? I’ll get something for you.”

Jed collected the blender, his glass and another glass which he placed on a tray before escorting Victor to the lounge room where they seated themselves. Jed filled the other glass with his mixture and handed it to Victor.

“Thank you.” He took a sip. “You must be wondering why I haven’t contacted you all this time.”

“Yes, I gave you a text message three years ago. You never responded.”

“That experience took a toll on me. I left the police force the next day.”

“Why?”

“It was the first time I ever killed someone. I still haven’t gotten over it.”

Victor took a sip from his glass with a look of slight relief forming over his face. Jed immediately turned his gaze away from Victor as memories from the past came back to him. He remembered the darkened room where he was tied up as Victor fell to the ground on his knees after William the Enchanter put a hex on him. He recalled Victor pleading with William to put his knife away as he came forward before Victor took out a gun hidden in a pocket and shot William in the head. Jed returned his gaze to Victor.

“That’s a nice drink. You sure know how to make a good smoothie.” Victor put the glass down.

“What smoothie?”

Victor lifted the glass up in front of him. “This one here.”

“Oh yes.” He shook his head in embarrassment. “I was in another world.”

“Don’t worry about that. I’m in a mess just like you.”

“What’s wrong? That experience three years ago?”

“No, it’s what’s happening now.”

“Now?”

“Yes, strange things are happening to me and nobody believes a single word I say.”

“You can tell me. I won’t say anything to anyone.”

“This week alone, I’ve had three experiences where animals tried to kill me. On Thursday, a cat followed me into my house as I entered the front door. It tried to tear its paws into my face and bit me. It managed to scratch me a few times before I killed it. On Friday, a raven crashed through the window of the kitchen and managed to peck me on the neck before I shot it dead. Today, a frog entered my back yard as I was hanging my clothes.” He leaned back against the sofa briefly before resuming his speech. “You’ll find this hard to believe but I’ll say it anyway. It had a knife in its’ mouth. It was ready to attack me. On that occasion, I had my gun with me. I shot it dead straight away.”

“How are you expecting me to help you?”

“I’d like you to protect me.”

“You don’t need protection.”

“I fear for my life.”

“There’s nothing to fear.”

Tears fell down Victor's cheeks as he shook his head. "You're the one who told me that William can do magic. You're the one who told me that he can possess animals."

"Yes but he's dead."

"What if he's still alive?"

"He can't be alive, you killed him."

Victor removed the bandage from his neck, exposing a stitched up cut that was a few inches long. "You told me that he could possess a raven. That's the kind of bird that attacked me. You might be able to explain something else." He lifted up both of his sleeves to reveal scratches on both arms. "The cat was so fierce that it managed to scratch both my arms and my chest." He lifted up his shirt to reveal scratches on his chest.

"I don't doubt what you're saying. Those animals were possessed but they weren't possessed by William. I saw the morgue records on the following day. William is officially classified as dead."

"You told me that William was the only one who could possess animals. If he couldn't do it, who could?"

"I don't know."

"There's something else I need to tell you."

"What is it?"

"Those three ladies are dead?"

"Really?"

"Yes, they were all killed by a wild dog. It happened this week."

Victor's reference to murderous animals combined with the deaths of three former victims of William was shaking the remaining traces of stability in Jed's thought processes. Images from a cellar were being materialised in Jed's mind as the appearance of three young woman became clear within his memories. He remembered the women when they were gagged with both their hands and feet tied up before being used as guinea pigs in William's experiments to discover a means of possessing human beings. All the shocking abuses he committed against those women were coming back to him with full force. Jed felt the guilt of having hid the truth of these abuses for over a year. He even felt guilt about his deal with the police to escape prosecution for his past crimes. Jed knew better than anyone else that his solitary reason for reporting William to the police was to avoid the consequences of a jail sentence. As Jed's sense of guilt was having the better of him, he recalled the door of the cellar opening as Victor and William met for their final confrontation before William cursed Jed as a traitor

and placed a hex on him that left him frozen. Jed turned his gaze away from Victor. Victor immediately responded to this by lifting himself off his sofa and standing in front of Jed.

“Don’t you believe me?”

“No, things don’t happen like that.”

“Do you have a phone book?”

Jed opened up a drawer that was near to his sofa and took out a phone directory. “I’ll look it up myself.” After finding the page reference number for the local mortuary, Jed dialled the number on his landline.

“State Mortuary, Carole speaking.”

“My name is Jed. I’m a friend of three ladies who recently died.”

“What are their names?”

“Audrey Howard, Kelly Shaw and Melinda Baker. Could you give me the cause of their deaths?”

“I’ll look them up in the computer. I won’t be long.” For a few moments, there was complete silence until the woman returned to the phone. “I don’t want to say this but I’ll say it. All of your friends were killed by a German Sheppard.”

Katrina sat down on a chair beside Janet’s bed and took hold of her hand. Although Janet was barely able to open her eyes, she recognised her sister as she squeezed with the little amount of strength that she still had. Since her cancer become critical only a few days earlier, she lost her ability to speak. Her only forms of communication were restricted to a nod, a shake of the head or a squeeze of someone’s hand. Katrina took out a bottle with green liquid inside it.

“I can cure you.”

Upon hearing these words, Janet’s eyes were fully open. She even managed to form a smile.

“Do you want to be cured?”

Janet responded by nodding her head.

“Take a sip from the bottle. You’ll fall into a deep sleep but when you wake up, you’ll be fully healed.” Katrina opened the bottle but briefly held herself back. “I’ll give this to you but you need to make a promise to me. You need to promise that you won’t tell anyone that I was here. Do you agree to this?”

Janet nodded her head. As Katrina was ready to feed Janet, she opened her mouth. Foul tasting liquid dissolved into Janet's mouth like an uninvited object protruding into her system as her taste buds felt a strong sense of repulsion. The effects of that foul taste caused Janet to frown in displeasure until drowsiness took over her and she closed her eyes. Katrina looked at her watch. It would take approximately three minutes for Janet to die and then be resurrected. As she waited, she took a look out the window. A blue Volvo was entering into the car park. She observed it carefully before it parked into a bay. She immediately knew who the occupants were. Jed and Victor. Taking out her mobile phone, Janet used its' camera appliance to zoom into the front of the car and take a photo. Soon after the snap was taken, Jed stepped out of the car. Katrina immediately responded to this by leaving the room with a realisation that she would not witness Janet's resurrection.

Jed handed the paper work he recently completed to the receptionist and returned to his seat as he waited for a response in regard to receiving clearance to visit Janet Robinson. He shook his head in disagreement with a policy he considered in relation to his circumstances. As he had not visited Janet for more than three months, he was required to fill out the same visitor form he completed when he first visited her half a year ago. He was impatient to see her not because of any concern for her as a person who was terminally ill but because he hoped that she could write something down on paper regarding Avalon Manor. Memories of the words 'Avalon Manor' were recurring in Jed's mind with a tremendous sense of pain as he recalled the moments when Katrina dumped him. After taking out the mail from the front letterbox of the home that was shared by him and Katrina, Jed opened up an envelope that was addressed to Katrina from Avalon Manor. His next memory was seeing Katrina come up from behind him to pull the letter away from him as she screamed that their relationship was over. As this memory of Katrina's anger confronted him, he became even more confused regarding her erratic behaviour.

"Mr Jed Rhodes."

Jed turned around to see the receptionist call out to him. She left the counter, ready to escort him to Janet's room.

"Are you ready to see Janet?"

"Yes."

The receptionist escorted Jed to a room at the far end of a corridor and walked away. Jed thanked her and opened the door. To his astonishment, Janet was sitting upright and looked to be in perfectly good condition unlike half a year ago when she could not even talk.

"Hello Jed."

Jed looked to his left and to his right before returning his attention to Janet. “Am I dreaming?”

“You’re not dreaming. This is real.”

“I’ve got to feel you, I still have doubts.” Making his way toward her, Jed put his hand out and touched her forehead. There was no temperature. “How can this be?”

“It just happened.”

Jed shook his head with conviction. “Things don’t happen like that. Maybe one of the doctors or some quack gave you medicine.”

“Nobody gave me medicine, I just recovered.”

Jed reacted to this by leaving the room. When he reached the lobby on the ground floor, he looked through the hospital visitor record sheet to discover that Katrina visited Janet only a short time before his arrival at the hospital. Being aware of Janet’s lie of evasion, he knew that he would have no chance of trusting her in regard to Avalon Manor. Not long afterwards, Jed returned to the car park to see his car cordoned off with bollards and security tape as police and forensic experts surrounded the car. What he saw was almost the complete opposite of Janet’s apparent healing. A large hole was smashed into the front windscreen as the bloodied remains of a body was covered in a blanket. Jed simply reacted to this by covering his head. He was filled with remorse over his attitude to Victor’s claim that he feared for his life. *Why didn’t I take him seriously?* Now it was too late for Jed to regret his lack of seriousness towards Victor’s plight as a forensic expert used a dust pan and broom to gather remaining shards of glass into a bag. With both Victor and the three women gone, Jed was convinced that he would be the next target. Making his way towards his car, Jed caught the attention of one of the police officers.

“That’s my car, that man in there was my friend.”

“Do you have a licence?”

“Yes.” Jed handed the licence to the officer who checked his details against information on a tablet.

“Our records indicate that you’re the owner of the car. If you don’t mind me saying this, you’ll be required to fill out an incident report.”

“Will I get my car back after the report is done?”

“Not tonight, we’re doing a murder investigation. Our forensic team will come back tomorrow morning to finish their work.”

“Does anyone have an idea how my friend was killed?”

“Witnesses claim that your friend was mauled by a German Sheppard.”

After Katrina placed her swipe card on a sensor, the gates opened for her car to enter into Avalon Manor as she patted a German Sheppard on the passenger seat. Lyle was standing outside the front entrance. Katrina parked her car in a bay that was close to the entrance to meet up with Lyle with the dog following behind her. They exchanged greetings as Lyle handed Katrina an envelope containing a pass card. She took the card out.

“How long will it last?”

“The pass card will last the whole night.”

“Will you be joining me?”

“No, I have a commitment regarding another client. I have to go.”

They exchanged farewells before Katrina knocked on the front door bell. Soon afterwards, she was greeted by a butler. She showed him the pass card. Knowing who she was, the butler led her and the dog up to the top of a spiral staircase and opened the door to the first available room before handing her a flashlight and leaving. Katrina used the flashlight to probe around a room that was filled with multiple glass cases of stuffed animals on both the left and the right. The collection was comprised of various reptiles and amphibians such as lizards, toads and frogs with eyes that glowed in the dark. Each iris glowed with a form of redness containing a slight tone of both orange and yellow that almost resembled the brightness of a small flame. Being aware of the rules associated with this room, Katrina would not contemplate turning the lights on as she knew that a frame within the room had power that was generated from the presence of darkness. She approached an empty frame at the end of the room with a portable wooden cabinet beside it. Knowing that she was not allowed to open the cabinet, she kept a good distance from it and would not even touch it. She pressed her pass card against the surface inside the frame. It immediately came to life with images from the other end of it depicting a cavern where multiple flames could be seen in the background. Suddenly, an image of a man appeared inside the frame. Upon seeing him, Katrina bowed down in respect.

“You can look at me now.”

She returned to giving him eye contact. “My dog has done well.”

“Let me look into its’ eyes.”

Katrina stepped to her side to allow the dog to come forward. The dog stared directly into the eyes of that man as he did the same to it for several seconds. The man then turned his attention to Katrina.

“Your dog has done well but there’s still one more person that needs to be dealt with. You know who I’m talking about, don’t you?”

Katrina simply nodded her head in agreement.

Jed stepped down from the bus, ready to return home. As he walked, he continually looked to both sides of him. Nobody else was around. Despite the calm that surrounded him, he was filled with fear over what happened outside Arlington Public Hospital. The memory of that crime scene was lingering in his head. Although he seriously considered asking for police protection, he eventually opted not to do so. He knew very well that if he told the police that he feared he was being targeted by a possessed dog, they would have thought him to be crazy. As he continued walking, he was resolved to the belief that the police would never have offered him protection under his current situation. Returning home, he searched through various cabinets until he found his hand gun in the lounge room. He loaded it with bullets and checked the alarm system on a panel in the foyer to see that it was still activated. It was on. He thought back to his experience at the hospital and wondered if there was a connection between three events that he either witnessed or knew about with the events being Katrina’s secret visit, Janet’s recovery and Victor’s death. He was particularly perplexed about Janet’s recovery and her lie that nobody visited her. *Why did she deny that Katrina was there? Could Katrina have magical powers?* These questions recurred in Jed’s mind until he recalled Katrina’s abrupt rejection of him regarding his previous intrusion into her mail.

He could immediately see a similarity between the mail incident and Janet’s lie. They were both cases of evasion. Jed simply concluded that Katrina and Janet were both hiding something and assumed that this evasion had something to do with Avalon Manor. He thought back to Victor’s death, wondering if Katrina had any connection to it. Although he never knew of her being involved in the occult, he was fully aware of how Katrina had previously read through his diary with his permission. He looked back to memories of this reading of his diary with a realisation that she showed absolutely no interest in his previous dealings with the occult. *Could she have changed?* Jed thought very hard about this question as he contemplated the possibility that Katrina could have been involved in Victor’s murder. As he tried to find an answer to this question, he returned to thinking about Katrina’s evasiveness regarding Avalon Manor. Before the mailing incident, she was always good to him. After it happened, she wanted to have nothing to do with him. With this realisation, Jed was determined to track Katrina down and find out what she was hiding from him.

There was a shake of the front gates as the alarm suddenly went off. Jed immediately reacted to this by collecting a flash light and going into the laundry room where he switched off all sources of energy on the power board. As the lights went out, Jed crouched down in silence. Reaching the lounge room, he looked out the window to see if anyone was there. Nothing could be seen. Nothing could be heard. He loaded his gun with a clip. The alarm was still going off as no other sound could be heard. *It's probably a stray animal.* Jed sat down on a sofa and rested his gun on his lap as he waited to see what would happen. He continued to look out the window and saw something. Suddenly two tiny sparks of red light were coming closer to him. Jed switched the flash light to high beam and placed it in the direction of the sparks of light to see a German Sheppard staring directly at him. It immediately propelled itself through the window as the sound of smashing glass could be heard. With the flash light covering the dog's outer form, a bullet passed through its' head as it fell down onto the floor. Jed brought the flashlight down on the carcass. There was no blood coming out from its' bullet wound. The damn thing was a zombie. Returning to the power board, Jed switched all the lights back on. He looked through the contacts section of his phone for the phone number of Eddie Clarke and rang the number.

"Hello, Eddie speaking."

"Eddies, it's Jed. I need your help."

"What can I do for you?"

"Can you collect metadata from someone's phone?"

"Yeah, I can do anything."

"Can you do it now?"

"Yeah."

"Excellent, I'll be there soon. See you then."

"See you soon."

Hanging up his phone, Jed was aware of the tools that he would require if he were to extract the information he needed from Katrina. He collected his tool set containing instruments such as a pick set, a rod and a wedge as well as an extra cartridge of bullets before leaving the house. He placed the tool set in the left storage box and the extra bullets in the right storage box of his motor bike as he sped off. He thought back to the dog and tried to work out who could have been responsible for sending it out to kill him. As he thought about the dog, he realised the short interval of time between the end of Katrina's hospital visit and the dog's attack on Victor. *Could Katrina have been responsible for this?* He doubted that an affirmative answer to this question could be true as he had never known Katrina to have violent tendencies during the years he had known her. A few minutes later, he arrived at

Eddie's house where he was led upstairs to a room with the most advanced technology for data transmission such as various adapters and transceivers.

"You spoke about Metadata! Who do you want me to collect it from?"

"A former girlfriend, her name is Katrina." Jed opened up the contacts section of his phone and showed his details of Katrina to Eddie who inserted the details into his phone. He opened up a computer program called *Metadata Lookup* and inserted Katrina's number into the program. He then connected his mobile phone to a transceiver attached to his computer and rang Katrina's number. He put a finger to his mouth as he looked at Jed while the phone was ringing.

"Katrina speaking."

"Hello Katrina, it's Lonnie from Total Perspective Communications. I'm ringing to know if you would be interested in hearing about our mobile broadband plans."

"No, I'm not interested."

"I understand how you feel but the current deal that's taking place won't take long to explain. It will only take a few minutes of your time."

The phone immediately went blank. Eddie clicked the "Find Location" tab on *Metadata Lookup* and found the address from where Katrina had answered her phone. The location was 5 Huntingdale Drive, Bluestone. Eddie switched to a program called *Satellite Observer* to obtain a visual perspective of the residence. It was a large three storey mansion in the country that had no other active houses in its' vicinity. There was a note on the web site stating that all the houses that previously existed on the street were destroyed by a cyclone six years ago and that Avalon Manor was built shortly after this disaster. Eddie scrolled around the street to see that the ruins from the previous houses remained as ruins. Eddie turned around to look at Jed.

"Are you still interested in going there?"

"Yes."

Jed simply shook his head as he saw a sign reading 'Welcome to Bluestone' on account of a part of him not wanting to be present in that town. Despite his own state of personal

displeasure, the other part of him that wanted to be reconciled with Katrina as well as being curious as to why she dumped him won out. He reached the local tavern and parked his car in one of the bays. Entering a bar, he passed through an atmosphere of cigarette smoke where the vast majority of seats were already taken by patrons. He ordered a glass of martini and probed around the bar for another person who could also be alone. In a corner of the bar, he could see a young man with glasses sitting by himself at a table. Jed slowly made his way towards the man.

“Could I have a talk with you?”

“Sure. What would you like to talk about?”

“Do you know of a house in Huntingdale Drive?”

The man simply answered by nodding his head. He looked very uncomfortable regarding the question that was asked of him. Despite this, Jed was determined to ask further questions.

Jed took a sip of his martini before continuing. “I only asked you a question, why were you uncomfortable?”

“That house! It’s something people don’t like talking about.”

“Why?”

“People believe that it’s cursed.”

“How can it be cursed? It’s only a house.”

The man explained the story of the cyclone before proceeding to another issue which made him look even more uncomfortable. “Ever since the cyclone, people have reported seeing ghosts in that street at night. The lady who owns the house is living in a street that other people believe to be haunted. Even the workers who built the majority of the house eventually jumped ship. They claimed to have seen ghosts. They left the woman and her butler to finish the building of the house.”

“I’m thinking about knocking on the door and asking the lady a few questions.”

“Don’t do that. She’s a strange woman.”

“Have you met her?”

“No, I’ve heard about her from other people.”

Jed quickly skulled his drink down. “I won’t be letting anyone influence me. Have a good night.” He walked out of the bar, thinking about the warning that was given to him. Although Jed was not afraid of Avalon Manor, he thought about the possibility that what the man said could be true. He took a map out of his pocket and searched for Avalon Manor to discover that it was north of the tavern. He looked north to see a house on a hill in the distance with

ruins on both sides of the street where it was located. A few minutes later, Jed arrived outside the gates of Avalon Manor. He took out his tool kit from the left storage box of his motorbike and placed it in a small portable back pack. Jed then hid his motorbike behind a tree before using a rope to climb over the fence and into the grounds of the mansion. There were two vehicles outside the residence in the form of a grey van and a white corvette. Jed checked the front number plate of the corvette to discover that it was Katrina's car. In his desire to find clues regarding Katrina's behaviour and her attitude toward him, he remembered how she always kept a diary with her. Taking out equipment from his tool kit, Jed jammed a doorstop between the upper part of the front door on the right side of the car and the car's roof. He then inserted a steel rod into a space that was created between the outer rim of the door frame and the roof of the car, before guiding a rod down towards the lock button, and unlocking the car. Jed entered the driver's seat and looked through the glove box to find a diary among several other items. He flicked through the passages for the last few weeks to discover entries that related to claims of animals being resurrected as zombies.

The diary entries contained claims that a professional taxidermist named Lyle Burns would make potions which he sent to a man referred to as 'the Master' and would have them transformed into potions that could resurrect dead animals into undead creatures. He turned the diary a few pages to the present day to find two entries that made him very uncomfortable.

Saturday 2, February 2013

This afternoon, I gave the potion to Janet. She died and was resurrected as one of us. After this, I showed a photo of Victor to Casey who immediately killed Victor.

Tonight, I visited the Master and proved my loyalty to the him. I showed a photo of Jed to Casey. Casey will not come back till tomorrow. Tomorrow, I will find out if Casey is successful.

The truth of that passage struck the depths of Jed's heart. In the space of a few seconds, he realised how his constant attempts to find a way of reconciling himself with Katrina were totally in vain. Jed was simply reduced to accepting the written evidence that both Katrina and Janet were undead creatures like the dog. A tear fell down Jed's cheek as he was determined to leave behind the stupidity that persuaded him that Katrina could not have violent tendencies. A previous desire to be reconciled with Katrina was now replaced with a determination to discover all the lies and deception within her character that could transform her into a ruthless killer. With his knowledge that Katrina was the one who sent the dog to kill him out of obedience to her master, he needed to find out the identity of that master so he

could take out both Katrina and him, in the hope that his life would no longer be endangered. Putting the diary back in the glove box, he locked the car before leaving it and made his way to the front of the house. He took out a hexagonal wrench and placed it straight into the door knob while turning it back and forth with slight movements until it fitted perfectly. Jed turned the handle of the front door and slowly entered the foyer which was illuminated by a solitary chandelier.

As Jed took a careful look around, there were three options available for him. A room to his right, a corridor straight in front of him and a spiral staircase on his left. He decided to go along the corridor and took the first available room on his right. Opening the door, he found himself in a dining room that was decorated with a painting and the heads of stuffed animals such as a deer, a goat and a horse on three separate walls. Jed looked at the painting. It was that of an elegantly dressed woman with chestnut coloured hair who appeared to be in her early fifties. Suddenly, Jed could hear footsteps in the distance. He immediately hid himself behind the side of a cupboard that was directly below the head of a stuffed deer. The door opened with the sound of footsteps entering the room. Jed reacted to this by checking his gun. It was loaded. He put it back in his pocket while he continued to hide.

“Come out. You’ve been caught.”

It was a woman’s voice. Jed did not respond.

“If you don’t come out, we’ll get the police.”

Jed immediately came out of hiding to see a woman with exactly the same features as the woman in the self portrait along with three other people. The other people were Katrina, Janet and a man who appeared to be a butler on account of the clothes he wore.

“Leave now.” The woman said.

Jed did not respond. He was filled with apprehension that there could have been someone else or some other people behind the door. As Jed stood his ground, Katrina stepped forward.

“There’s nothing to fear. Denise is an honest lady.” Katrina continued to come closer. “I’m not going to hurt you. I just want to have a talk.”

“Stay back.”

When they were about an arm’s distance apart, Katrina put out her hand as if to touch him. “I just want us to be back together.” Jed’s instincts impelled him to move back as Katrina used her other hand to lung forward with the thrust of a knife from one of her pockets. The blow barely missed Jed’s chest as he made contact with the wall and fired his gun. After the bullet passed through Katrina’s head, she sunk to the ground without any traces of blood. With Jed still holding the gun, he picked up the knife.

“I’m only going to ask you once. Anyone who doesn’t cooperate will suffer the same fate as Katrina.” They all responded by nodding their heads. Jed continued with the knife in one hand and the gun in the other hand. “Where is the Master?”

Denise immediately gave eye contact to Jed. “He’s upstairs on the top floor.”

“Which room?”

“The first one. Go up the spiral staircase and take the first room on your left.” She took out a pass card from her pocket. “Tap this pass card onto a blank frame. He will appear to you.”

“You must be joking.”

“I’m serious.”

“If you’re lying, I’ll make you pay for it. Now lie down with your faces on the ground.” As they did what was demanded of them, Jed used the knife to rip strips from a table cloth. He used the strips to tie up both the hands and feet of the three of them before he left the room. Reaching the top of the stairs, Jed entered the first available room and switched the lights on. Jed paid no attention to the stuffed animals on both sides of the room as he looked directly at an empty frame with a cabinet beside it. He reached the frame and tapped it with a pass card. What he saw filled him with shock. It was William the Enchanter. He immediately took out his gun and started firing shots. To his surprise, the bullets passed straight through William’s head and body. Jed continued firing bullets until there was nothing left. He checked his back pack for a spare cartridge of ammunition but it wasn’t there. It was in one of the storage boxes of his motorbike. William simply smiled at him as Jed turned away from his gaze.

“You left something behind. I have a friend who can make up for your mistake.”

The door of the cabinet opened up to reveal the presence of a raven staring at Jed. It immediately flew up in the air to do three successive loops before returning to its original position. It started chirping with a sinister sound. Jed knew that sound. He immediately turned around and ran for the door. It was locked. Jed looked back at both William and the raven.

“Before you suffer your fate, I’ve invited a few witnesses.” A door opened at the back of the room as Denise, Janet and the butler made their way to where William was. “I’m going to do you a big favour. I’m going to turn the lights out. It won’t hurt so bad.”

Within seconds, the room was covered in darkness. The only forms of light were the eyes of William, the witnesses, the stuffed animals and the raven. Panic took over Jed’s emotional state as the raven tore away at his face and neck. It continued to peck away until Jed’s existence faded into total blackness.

Biography

Jason Constantine Ford is from Perth in Australia. He works as an employee at a book shop. He has over a hundred publications of poetry and fiction in various poetry and literary magazines, ezines and journals from around the world such as the Cortland Reivew, the Criterion: an International Journal in English, the Muse: an International Journal of Poetry, Bewildering Stories, and Poetry Magazine. The major influences on his style of poetry are William Blake, Edgar Alan Poe and Gerard Manley Hopkins. Jason's main influences for short stories are Bram Stroker and Phillip K. Dick. For correspondence, contact Jason at jasonconstantinford@gmail.com .