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For Anthony.

If in doubt, install a bigger turbo...

CHAPTER ONE

I hate obnoxious people. Especially *dead* obnoxious people. I took a deep breath and let it out slowly.

Centre and focus your energies.

Think calming thoughts.

I rolled my eyes. What a load of bullshit.

“Right. Let’s get this show on the road.” People were looking at me expectantly and it was making me feel uncomfortable. I felt like a cheap magician at a kid’s party who was expected to perform miracles. “We’re all ready for you, William. Come and talk to us.” Silence. I fidgeted impatiently with a button on my jacket sleeve as I waited.

Come on, William, do something, I begged silently. Anything...

Finally, hairs on the back of my neck began to stand to attention as the room temperature plunged. The little girl sitting in front of me stared into space with teary eyes as an alien voice began to rumble incoherently from her throat. My heart began to pound.

I glanced around the front room of the little terraced house in South London. The soft pastel colour scheme and light pine furniture had become a familiar sight to me now. I saw my best friend and colleague, Lynette, shift beside me as she pulled her jacket closer around her. She focussed the camera on the child.

“Okay,” I took another deep breath and tried to gather my thoughts. “William? I know you’re here with us. Shall we go from the beginning? Can you tell me why you are here? What do you want?” The child’s wide brown

eyes flickered between my face and the camera lens poking over my right shoulder. Her hands clenched tightly to the edge of the sofa. My heart went out to her; the poor thing was terrified.

“This is my . . . home. The question is, what do *you* want? I . . . did not invite you . . . in.” The voice was deep and rasping. The voice of a middle-aged man. The tones were strained and I could hear a hint of anger emerging already. Poor William always seemed to be angry about something.

In the deathly silence that followed all I could hear was the gentle hissing of the camera behind us as it filmed our bizarre conversation. The little girl’s mother sat to my right, eyes wide and staring as the male voice continued to grate from her daughter’s mouth. A solitary tear coursed down the girl’s face and dropped onto her navy cotton dress. The child looked to her mother and her face began to crumple. I could sense the mother’s desire to rush to her daughter’s side and comfort her but the rules had been clear from the start: no interference once the possession had commenced. I placed a restraining hand on Elizabeth’s arm until she finally relaxed back into her seat. I ignored William’s questions; I had an agenda of my own and I intended to stick to it. I wasn’t about to allow a spirit with an attitude to take over the proceedings.

“What year is it, please?”

“1792. Why are you asking all these questions? Always . . . ridiculous *questions!*” My hands were shaking as I reached forward to adjust the tape recorder between us. I wanted to make sure it picked everything up. A ‘possession’ is something you never quite get used to and it’s always guaranteed to get the adrenaline flowing.

“What is keeping you in this house? Is there something you need to do? Something you want?”

“What business is it of yours? Get back to the kitchen where you belong, woman. You should be seen and not heard.” Blunt. Angry. Very William. I sighed heavily. He was being his usual helpful self. The look in the girl’s brown eyes was unsettling; a faint glimmer of contempt burned in them. I rubbed my face wearily with one hand and leaned forwards to rest my elbows on my knees. “Believe it or not, William, *I am* trying to help you. We’ve seen quite a lot of each other recently, but I don’t seem to be doing too well at winning your trust.” After all my years as a paranormal investigator, there were times

when I still found it difficult to come to terms with the fact that a lot of my days were spent trying to communicate with dead people. Some spirits were glad to find someone who could help them. Some, like William, weren't. Some, like William, would prefer it if I fell off a cliff, never to return.

"This has gone on long enough. I think it's time for some home truths here." I spoke choosing my words carefully. The unwavering stare from the girl continued, it made me want to squirm in my seat. I braced myself. "William, you *died* in 1792."

"Do not speak to me!" The words were nothing more than a hiss. "Pox-ridden whore! Get away from me *and get thee back to the pit you came from!*" A tiny fist beat down onto the sofa, punctuating the words as more and more of William's jaded personality seeped into the child's soul. I swallowed nervously. This was not how I'd imagined things would go.

"Come on now, William," I coaxed, "there's no need to be like that."

"*Get out! Out of here! Bitch of Satan, telling your lies!*" His voice roared in my ears, quavering with passion. The little girl rose and stumbled over towards where I sat, poised on the edge of my chair. I was too busy staring to realise what was coming. A delicate hand rose into the air and came slamming down onto my cheek. The burning sensation was immediate and I knew my cheek was already going red. Lynette gasped and Elizabeth came to her senses, catching hold of her daughter who was now sobbing uncontrollably. Assured that the spirit of our dear friend 'William' had left her child, she cuddled her close, murmuring gently to her. Personally, I had no doubts that we had just had an encounter with a man who had died over two hundred years ago—Lynette and I had searched the house meticulously on our first visit for microphones and all the other sorts of paraphernalia hoaxers use to try and pull the wool over our eyes. I reached down and turned off the tape recorder. I cleared my throat and rubbed my cheek gently. The temperature began to creep back up to a normal level once again.

"I'm sorry Elizabeth; I didn't think he would react quite as badly as that. Perhaps I could have put it to him in a slightly better way. He's an incredibly obstinate man."

Elizabeth smiled wryly as she enveloped her daughter in her arms and stroked her hair tenderly. The little girl buried her face against her mother's chest and sniffed wetly.

“After some of the things he’s come out with in the past, I thought he took it quite well.” I knelt down in front of Elizabeth and gently touched the back of the girl’s hand.

“Amy? Are you alright, sweetheart?” A brief wiggle of Amy’s head confirmed that she was indeed alright. “You did a great job, you know that?” A tear-filled eye peeked out from her tangled fringe of hair. “Special girls like you deserve a special treat.” It was corny, but corny often worked in situations like this. “How about a lollypop for later?” I smiled and offered a colourfully wrapped sweet to her that I’d been hiding in my pocket. The smile she bestowed on me made my spirits rise. “Tell you what, I’ll give it to mummy to look after, how’s that?” Another nod. We were still friends.

Elizabeth scooped Amy up and moved towards the door. “I’ll just go and settle her down.”

She shuffled past me, stepping over the gadgets I had laid out on the floor when we had been setting up for the interview. The door clicked shut and I looked at Lynette as Elizabeth took Amy up the stairs to her room.

Lynette arched her eyebrows and came round to sit by me. “Well, that was different.”

“He’s is a hard nut to crack.” I said, watching her scoop up the electronic thermometer and electro-magnetic field detector from their positions on the table. “Did you see the reading on this when William arrived? It shot off the scale. It’s only just come back down again.” Lynette grinned. “You know, I really love my job!”

“So do I,” I agreed, “but why is it always me that gets attacked?” It had only been a few months since Lynette and I had been asked to investigate poltergeist activity in a grand old stately home in Sussex. Whilst fitting motion detectors in the kitchen, a saucepan had come flying out of nowhere and had smashed into my forehead rendering me unconscious. I have a scar there now, cutting through my right eyebrow in a pale arc. I hadn’t been impressed. I’d been trying to grow my fringe to cover it up but for it to be long enough to do that it would be permanently in my eyes. I supposed I would have to go for the rugged look instead and show the scar.

Lynette Matthews and I have known each other since the age of three. We went to Nursery school together and had been through many scrapes and arguments since. I wouldn’t be without her. We kept each other on an

even keel. The sun was shining through the window onto Lynette's hair as she busied herself with packing away and I thought back to when, at the age of six, she had asked me to cut it for her. She'd told me she was sick of it and wanted something different. Being the obliging best friend that I am, I'd sat her down and started trimming away. The problem was it had looked uneven when I'd finished I had to keep going back to even it up again and again. After half an hour or so Lynette's mother had come in to see what we were up to and had a blue fit. Gone were Lynette's honey blonde flowing locks—hello hacked elfin style. I'd rather liked it and even Lynette had said she liked it once the hairdressers had tidied it up for her. Lynette's mother, on the other hand, had taken a little more time to see the lighter side. I had been banned from their house for a fortnight.

Lynette was the prettier out of the two of us and that had grated on me a bit when we were teenagers. I'm only human after all. It always seemed to be me comforting her when she split up with a boy, never the other way around. I'd never seemed able to get a boy to start with. I had been a touch on the heavy side with poor skin and no fashion sense whatsoever but Lynette was sylph-like with big blue eyes and a mouthful of perfect white teeth. Bitch.

When it had come to deciding on a career, both Lynette and I had known exactly what we wanted to do. We studied for a diploma in Paranormal Investigations and haven't looked back since. We've visited some amazing places together. America, Transylvania, Greece and Egypt to name but a few. We've investigated every strange event you can imagine from reported vampirism to the old 'faeries at the bottom of your garden' scenario. Some of them had been hoaxes so obvious we had taken much joy in pulling them apart and humiliating the client. You would be amazed at what some people try to pull off to make a bit of money. Some cases though have been so frightening I'm amazed my hair hasn't turned white overnight. I've been hurled across a wooden panelled dining room in a mansion in Buckinghamshire, dragged out of bed in a Scottish castle and have run shrieking from a face that appeared to me in a mirror one evening whilst in a Welsh pub.

We had been dealing with 'William' and his tantrums for about a month. I'd finally come to the decision that we had extracted as much information as possible from the manifestation and it was time to try and lay his spirit to

rest. From personal experience, exorcism doesn't work. How would you feel if a stranger tried to force you out of your own home? It would really piss you off, wouldn't it? The same applies with spirits. If you march in and start throwing orders around they tend to get a bit irritated. I had hoped to be able to reason with William but he was a cantankerous sod with the opinion that women were a waste of skin. Elizabeth came tramping down the stairs and into the front room.

"Is she alright?" I asked.

"She's fine." She paused thoughtfully for a moment as she glanced around her front room. "This will sound ridiculous, I know, but I think she will actually miss William once he finally goes."

"If he finally goes," Lynette smiled. "He's not being overly helpful at the moment."

"He'll go," I said quickly, noting the look of worry spreading over Elizabeth's face. "It's just a matter of time."

"Will you stay for a cup of tea?" Elizabeth asked. I shook my head.

"Thanks for the offer but we need to go and write our notes up and decide what to do next. Look, if it's alright with you, I may ask my colleague, Jeremy, to come and finish things off. I think William might respond better *mano a mano*."

"That's fine. Let me know when to expect a visit." I picked up my bag and extended my hand to Elizabeth who shook it warmly.

"Don't worry, I'll call soon." We left. As we moved out into the narrow hallway with its nicely decorated walls and wooden floor I had the uncomfortable feeling that eyes were burning into my back from the top of the stairs. I didn't look back.

* * *

I leaned over my desk and tried to write up a report of the day's events but the words just weren't flowing that evening. I chewed the end of my pen and stared off into the corner of the room. I had quite a big office with wooden panelled walls and a plush red-carpeted floor. I'd acquired a few plants which were dotted about on window ledges to give the room a more "lived in" feel. I wondered who watered them because it certainly wasn't me—I'm

a convicted plant murderer. I could leave the poor buggers on a window ledge somewhere and not notice they had died until months later.

My mind kept on flitting back and forth to various investigations I'd been on before; I wasn't interested in writing tonight but I was determined to get the report finished or else I'd end up with a backlog of work. I had another case booked in for the morning, a haunted crossroads in Margate. Crossroads had always intrigued me. It's a well-known fact that people used to make a habit of burying suicides at crossroads so the restless spirit couldn't find its way home again and cause trouble. This crossroad was still a quiet back road, which was a relief to me as I didn't fancy having to sit by a roaring stream of traffic all day inhaling goodness knows what fumes. We had received reports of a strange fog appearing in the middle of the crossroads and it had been the cause of many an accident over the years. I stopped chewing the end of my pen and steeled myself to carry on and finish the report. Then the door flew open. Lynette strode across the floor towards my desk by the window and her winning smile made me immediately suspicious.

"Don't you ever knock, woman?" I smiled back, glad of an excuse to put my pen down again. I leaned back in my chair, stretching my arms behind my head.

"Since when have we ever knocked?" She collapsed into the chair opposite me and tucked a rogue strand of hair behind her ear. She leaned towards me and folded her arms on the desk. "I've got a great case for us." She looked at me intently, eyes sparkling.

"It'll have to wait I'm afraid." Her face fell and her expression made me feel like I'd just told her she would have to work the next six weekends. "Lyn, I've already agreed for us to go and have a look at this crossroads tomorrow."

"Aw, forget that, I'll ask Jean to go and have a look at it instead. This is *much* more interesting and it's only down the road in Regent Street."

"We can't just go gallivanting off because something sounds more 'interesting'—the crossroads could be 'interesting.'"

"What, a lost spirit causing a few cars to swerve about a bit is more interesting than poltergeist activity in the oldest library in London's West End? Sorry Heather, no competition."

She leaned back in her chair and it creaked under her weight.

“Have you finished your report on today?” I asked, aware of how much I sounded like a teacher chasing a student for homework.

“You know I hate paperwork,” she said scornfully, waving her hand dismissively. “I’m no good at all that writing.” She got up from the chair and wandered to the window. My office had a nice view, lawns that stretched for a hundred metres or so and then a screen of poplars at the end to screen the Paranormal Institute from the road. I left my paper-ridden desk and joined her at the window; my legs enjoyed the stretch after having been parked under my desk for so long. The afternoon was turning into a balmy summer’s evening. I sighed and Lynette looked at me from the corner of her eye.

“I want to go and make a preliminary investigation this evening.”

“Lynette! You’ve got to learn to finish one investigation before you move on to another one. The sooner the report’s done, the sooner we can hand it over to Jeremy to finish off the case.”

“Come on, Heather, don’t give me a lecture.” She lifted the catch of the tall, lead paned window, pushed it open and leaned out a little. The breeze caught wisps of her hair and they floated over her face. She brushed them away and took a deep breath of the evening air. “I just wanted to go and have a quick look around as it’s just around the corner.”

“But what about the report...?”

“I’ll worry about the report. I’ll do it tonight at home if it makes you feel better.”

“A bit,” I agreed. “You can’t go alone though. First rule of an investigation—always go in pairs, at least.”

“Don’t be such a fusspot! It’s only a library; if I get a paper cut then on my own head be it. Look, I’ll just go and ask the Librarian a few questions and then I’ll leave. I promise.” I sighed and pursed my lips. She knew she had just about won me over. “I’ll even call you tonight and let you know if I find out anything juicy. Do we have a deal?”

“You could persuade a blind man to buy contact lenses.”

“Is that a yes then?”

“Would it make the slightest difference if I said no?”

“Ummm...not really, no.” We grinned at each other and I laughed.

“Get on with it then.” She wrapped an arm around my shoulder, hugging me tight for a brief moment before skipping towards the door looking for all

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the world like a child on her way to the sweetshop. “And don’t forget to call me!” I yelled after her, but she was already out of the door and on her way down the hallway before I could finish the sentence. I turned back to face my desk and frowned at the papers sprawled across it. No rest for the paranormal.