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to know my name is

By C. L. Hammermeister

cassidy@wehracoustic.com

818.388.5186

For a long while, I was left alone. It wasn't peaceful, by any means. But it was solitary. Then, they began to come.

They always came in groups. Small. And each time they came bearing some new technological wonder. As if anything they came up with hadn't been created and re-created countless times in the eons that preceded them. Yet they come.

The first time, I was amused - or whatever approximation it is I muster. I watched patiently as they waited for night, preparing their tools and electronics. I watched as they entered the abandoned church. As they poked around, fiddling with this or that. I watched as they defiled the sanctuary. MY sanctuary.

Yet they come. And while I approached the situation with a sort of mild curiosity at first, the novelty quickly passed (as novelties do), and I became bothered by the increasingly frequent disruptions. I decided to do something that some might consider out of character, but they would be ill-informed; I decided to respond.

The first groups were nothing like the one before me now. Separated by more than time. More than technology. These... kids... are arrogant. Entitled. Ignorant. Gullible. Too reliant on their technology. Too enamored by their entertainment. Unable to see the truth for what it is. Too ignorant to heed the past.

It was not long ago, by my count, that exorcisms and burnings were common - it wasn't for naught. But these ... children, in their flippant disregard came two, four at a time. Cameras were accompanied more and more by phones, the cameras themselves now thermal or infra-red. As if transversal planes were so easy to capture. No bother. The more that come, the more careless they get. And so it begins again. And so it will end.

It always starts the same. This time is no different. They would walk in unannounced, save for the distant rumbling of combustion engines upon their approach. More increasingly, they came with various recording devices, with ways to broadcast in real time. Fundamentally little changed, but now they spent an inordinate amount of time setting up this new "equipment." In the past, if I ever did choose to indulge their fantasies, these methods became increasingly convoluted. This carried on for a time, but such things quickly became troublesome, at best. It was not long before

the intrusions tired me, and I really made my presence clear in those moments. Yet they come.

This time, their number was three - two males being goaded on by a female. They began like the rest, fussing over equipment whilst attempting to "contact me," as if I were not here independent of the notions of time and space. I have always been here. I have never been here. Or, perhaps most accurately, does it even matter? They could not know this, of course, but I had long ago abandoned the concept of forgiveness; it did not suit me.

They began on the main level, picking their way down the pews, exaggerations for an audience unseen. The church had seen better days. But then, so had I. Depending on the season and time of evening (they always come in the evening), I knew how the light would cast, and with this I would toy. Simple illusions - deceptions of the eye not much more than parlor tricks. Probes to the psychological warfare that was about to transpire.

As expected, the illusions illicit nervous giggles, and encouraged further participation. It was begging to become dark now and I could feel myself once again communing with this place. They began activating lasers, lights, and other devices they had prepared - children's toys that no longer amuse me, but can serve their own purpose. For instance, as they made final adjustments, I decided to sap the energy out of the room. Now, this will drain a battery at a fairly rapid rate, but is indiscriminate, and any other source of energy will drop as well. Including theirs. As evidenced by one of the males excusing himself outdoors after becoming sickly. When he returned, he did so with a fourth - a woman who must have just arrived. What was it the kids were so fond of saying? Ah... the more the merrier!

Once they were satisfied with their various devices, the two pair reconvened back in the church's sanctuary. They began plotting their "investigation," though the terminology always baffled me; it had been quite a while since any true scientist had come to investigate me. I imagine this must be how Hercules felt fighting the hydra; strike one down... except, I could not possibly know how he felt. He was not my son.

It's not their fault they don't know me yet. Well, not directly their fault, at least. Not that it was of any matter. They left the sanctuary and proceeded to split up, each taking a different area; a common mistake among these so called "professionals." I decided to follow the somewhat boyish, heavysset investigator as he walked back down the aisles. As he passed by the altars, a curious thing happened - I can only describe it as "hope," but clearly it was merely some amalgamation. As he approached the narthex, he turned, slid a curtain to the side, and sat down in the confessional box. My cup runneth over.

He just sat there talking at his phone. No one was tacking back. This had gone on for a few minutes when passing curiosity turned into a sort of hateful boredom. But I wasn't done toying with him yet - we barely knew each other. And he must know my name. They must all know my name.

He was preparing to exit the confessional. Doesn't he know what was confessed here? With an impulsive thought I clawed at his neck, barely sedating the violent lust it spurned. The deep scratches immediately swelled red, drawing long, thin lines of blood. His quiet whisper was replaced by a primal scream. Within moments the others joined him, now leaning against an arched column. He showed the others his wound. Curiously, it didn't

dissuade them, rather, it encouraged further participation. Well, except for the heavyset one. He decided to lick his wounds and run home, so to speak. No matter. The others radiated with... desperation!

As they discussed their next move (half to themselves, half to their phones - an increasingly common tactic lost on me) I found it rather peculiar the boy was the only one compelled to leave.

Now, I am not confined to this house; I reside here by my own choosing, so to speak, in the sense I could choose to be somewhere else. That said, it does suit me quite well, and I it. Point being, I can go outside. And so I did.

The chubby, boyish "investigator" stood a short ways off by a pair of cars, but this time was talking on his phone - not to it. Clearly neither car belonged to him. As he appeared to wait for his ride, a tiny pebble hit his shoe, cast from the darkness. He didn't even flinch; so I threw another. This one hit his denim pant leg hard enough he stood straight up, as white as a sheet, and let out a surprised yelp before instinctively holding his breath, eyes wild with fear. Not one to look a gift horse in the mouth, I stepped into the gray between the shadows. Just enough for him to see my fleeting silhouette. He was dead before his body hit the dirt road, my name but a mask.

Upon my return, I found the remaining three (two females, and another boy, if you're keeping score) had decided to stick together. Not knowing the fate of their friend, their number seemed to embolden them. Yet again, they checked their equipment, each recording the other two. It was all quite comical, really. On a whim, I made all three of their flashlights blink, looking for a reaction. Amazingly, these fine scholars determined this to be a

favorable interaction. As if their friend hadn't been scratched moments before. Again, "professionals." They pressed onward in the void until they came upon the ladder leading to the second story steeple.

The remaining boy, in a stupefying act of bravery, volunteered to go first. The two young women watched as the boy ascended into darkness. He was barely visible by the time he reached the top landing, at which point I once again revealed myself from the shadows. This time emphasized with a whisper. A single word. An ancient name...

The boy went limp, falling back into the depths. He landed squarely on the metal crucifix, which violently tore through his midsection in a grotesque display of broken ribs and flesh, until he forcibly came to rest against the arms of the cross. The girls stood shocked as the kid attempted to speak, impaled as he was, but no words would escape his lips. Only blood. And of that he said plenty.

Having finally been awoken from their fantasy, it was time for the girls to step into mine. For fear is a powerful emotion. To some - it's pure terror. But to others - pure elation! So why not add a little fuel to the fire? Or more specifically, just the fire? Fear blinded them; though they had yet to understand the source. As such, whilst running down the center isle back the way they came, their screams were hollow - meaningless to me without proper virtue. In consolation, I know this time when they reach the doors, they will be locked. I locked them.

Nearby there was a small alter of sorts, adorned with various objects such as pentagrams, crystals, and candles. The candles were not lit; a trivial matter. With but a thought one of the candles ignited, toppling into the

rubble before further igniting some tapestries reaching up to the wooden beams.

One of the girls was openly sobbing by now, and both were choking and gasping for air. They did not have long; the smoke was obscuring visibility. Soon, there would be no oxygen left. Eventually, the flames would come.

The crying girl began to hyperventilate, and succumbed much quicker than I had expected; I felt a sense of disappointment. No matter, the other female - the sole survivor of the group for now - moved to attempt an escape through a stained glass window. She rose, readying to break the window when she paused; the stained glass depicted a burning church. This church. Then, her heart stopped - figuratively for now - and all sense of urgency washed away like a receding tide. There, emblazoned in the stained glass motif, she saw herself. In the church. Burning. Dying.

Ah, jubilation! The girl's screams crescendoed inside me, before stopping abruptly.

As she fought for consciousness, coughing and fighting for air, I stepped through the flames beside her, and it was then she understood the nature of her fate. She collapsed, dropping to her knees. Eyes wide. Lips trembling. I thought perhaps she was trying to speak. No matter. I kneeled to her level, evening our gazes. I smiled wide, my serrated teeth glistening in the flickering light of the fire. I leaned in as the dark abyss of eternity began to claim her. The stench of a thousand years of decay on my breath, I whispered:

“You were correct in that this is a place of worship. But it is not the
havens you will find worshipped here. For, to know my name is “