

The PPS

by Lola Lariscy

More people were coming in. Leonora felt like a freak show. Alright, so maybe she was in a freakish state, but that was a comment on her current state of being, not a comment on her as a person. She tried to remember this each time she was surrounded by strangers trying to bury their revulsion and/or morbid curiosity. She drew on the five years of therapy she'd taken before the incident. At the time she'd resisted, but now she was grateful her mother had pushed her.

Nothing kicked anxiety into gear like a spirit possession. Nerves rattled within her body like pinballs in an arcade machine. She doubted she was getting her medication. The spirit probably spit it up. Damn spitting spirit.

She sighed. What did these people want? To try to communicate? To find out ancient secrets from Babylonia? Ha! Someone already tried that. They found out first-hand how the sacrifices in Nippur had been performed. Yeah, that hadn't been a banner day in her household. Her mother had vowed to stop lookie loos after that. Only serious paranormal investigators may apply.

Leonora could not tell her mother this, but she really thought it was time for an exorcist. Yes, it was nice to hear the validation from the investigators that it was, indeed, ancient Akkadian she was spewing. She felt a certain relief when the investigators' eyes shown with belief. However, none of this was helping her get her body back.

Her poor mother was exhausted. She could tell. She rarely dressed any more, and her already-loose nightgown was hanging off her shoulders. Her eyes were hooded and her voice hoarse. Probably not as hoarse as Leonora's, but her mother didn't have the spirit of a Babylonian warrior woman inside her. Or, maybe she did and Leonora just assumed that was her mother's personality. Her mother was fierce.

The groaning was back; the deep, guttural intonations. Those hurt her throat the worst. Soon the bed would start shaking; she'd start shaking. Oh! Yep. There it went. Leonora's

wrists were bound to the posts, so she couldn't fall from the bed, but she slid a little. The bed lifted. The spirit was challenging the visitors; figuratively showing them her teeth.

Whoever they were, they weren't backing away. Her mother was torn between going to Leonora and pushing these people out. The room was suddenly darker. Leonora could see the spirit's shadow in front of her. It was large. It appeared to be writhing, twisting itself out of Leonora. The spirit was confronting the visitors.

One of the visitors broke away and approached her mother, flashing a paper. Leonora's mother didn't appreciate anyone forcing anything in her face. Hundreds of campaign volunteers over the course of Mrs. Finley's lifetime would confirm this as fact.

"What is this?" Mrs. Finley demanded as she pushed back at the woman.

"We are representatives of The PPS, The Paranormal Preservation Society."

"Excuse me?" Mrs. Finley asked, still pushing the woman toward the bedroom door.

The woman waved the document. "We have a court order to demand cessation of any exorcism."

Mrs. Finley halted, shocked by the assertion. "What? What

do you mean you want us to cease?"

The woman shoved the paper in Mrs. Finley's face again. Mrs. Finley knocked it to the floor.

"You do not have the right to evict this spirit. This spirit has as much right to inhabit the physical plane as you do. I am Mrs. Elia Castleway, and I represent The Paranormal Preservation Society. We are the voice of the spirit world. Our goal is to preserve and protect spirit in the physical world."

Mrs. Finley stopped pushing the woman. She looked up at her with disbelief. "So, you're like the ghosts' self-appointed lawyers?"

Mrs. Castleway nodded. "Yes, though I believe we're appointed by fate, not by self."

"How in hell did you get a judge to sign off on this?" She grabbed the paper from the floor, studying it. "Governments don't even acknowledge that the paranormal exists. Why would a judge sign off on an order like this?"

Castleway narrowed her eyes, her lips dipping into a smug, sweet expression of victory. "It helps when the judge is possessed. The spirit only acts out when the judge is alone. No one but us knows he's inhabited." She laughed. "The only reason we know is another spirit told us. They tattle on each other sometimes like that."

Mrs. Finley gave one final push and the intruder was out. Mr. Finley, Leonora's father, hadn't been able to get a grip on anything that was happening. He got hold of his wits long enough to expel Mrs. Castleway down the stairs and through the front door.

Two days later the exorcist arrived. She wasn't a traditional exorcist; the Finleys weren't traditional people, so they didn't search for a traditional solution. The Priestess swept the sage bark around the room. She recited a prayer of love, of family, and of territory. She demanded the spirit leave where she was not wanted, and go back to where she belonged.

The spirit answered in waves of French. Leonora guessed she'd had time to learn lots of different languages. She couldn't understand the speech word for word, but she understood that the spirit was refusing. She was claiming Leonora as hers.

Leonora struggled to speak out. Her voice never came. She heard a loud knocking on the front door, though. She heard calls of "Police" and "Open up" barreling down the hallway.

The door flew open and Castleway barged in, two police officers behind her. The officers seemed unsure of whether they were in charge or Castleway.

The room grew dark again, tinged with green sparks of fury. The exorcism had started, whether Mrs. Castleway protested or

not. Enraged, she grabbed the sage from the Priestess and extinguished it from within her palm. Adrenaline must have masked the pain, because in her fury, Castleway didn't betray a hint that she felt the embers.

In the mess of confusion, no one was speaking. For a few moments, no one moved. Leonora couldn't see much, but in the faint lamplight from outside, she could see the writhing spirit in front of her. She was crawling out. Leonora felt her voice in her throat for the first time in weeks. She started yelling.

"Mom! Mom! These people don't care what I want. Did any of them ever ask what I want? I want my body back. I want my life back."

At that moment you could hear a sage bark drop, which is, in fact, what they heard. If they could see Mrs. Castleway's face, they would have seen shock. If they could have seen her palm, they would have seen a charred circle.

Leonora looked at her mother, while Mrs. Castleway looked at the mangled mess of spirit removing itself from Leonora. Mrs. Castleway clearly didn't know what to do anymore. After a few moments, she remembered why she was there.

"That spirit needs to be put back into this vessel!"

Leonora didn't take too well to being referred to as a vessel. All of her anger and confusion welled up in that moment

to give her the strength of a Babylonian warrior woman. She pushed the shadow of the spirit toward the woman. She screamed as the force left her body and moved toward a new receptacle. "You want her so bad, you have her! Let's see how you like having someone else's life force inside you!"

Stillness followed. Absolute quiet. Everyone waited to see what happened. Leonora could tell the spirit was no longer intertwined with hers. She could still sense her, though, from the corner of the room to where Mrs. Castleway had been forced. Mrs. Finley recognized the milky-white eyes. Leonora recognized the uncontrollable shaking. *Had I looked like that?*

Mrs. Castleway began intoning in what Leonora recognized as Sumerian. Mrs. Castleway's pronunciations altered from sentence-to-sentence, leading Leonora to think maybe the spirit had only read the language. Still, it was impressive. Even the priestess was spooked. She re-started her prayers.

The other attendants from the Paranormal Preservation Society erupted in praises of joy.

"We've got what we wanted!"

"Come on!" He tugged at Castleway's sleeves.

"No! Get it out of me! I don't want to live this way!"

The other members paid her no mind. She was just in shock. She was a true believer in spirit rights; she knew that host

rights were not a factor. The spirit maneuvered Mrs. Castleway's hands to point through the window, up to the sky. Once again the words were Sumerian, though Leonora understood.

"What is she saying?" The priestess asked.

Leonora struggled out of bed and to the window. She looked up at the gray-mist sky. "She wants to go to where the sky is clear. She wants to see the constellations, like she did as a student in Babylon. She wants to relive her glory days."

The society members walked Castleway to the door. She looked back at the Finleys, tears streaming down her face. Already the spirit was clamping down on the native personality. All traces of Castleway—both her arrogance and fear—were fading. The spirit walked Mrs. Castleway out the front door, presumably to the New Mexican desert to see the stars, unhindered by modern obstructions.



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