

The Seance

“Are you coming or not?” Francesca’s high-pitched, grating voice came from behind Nick. She stood with her friends, all giggling and being generally annoying. It was a cold night, the wind groping at the hairs on Zara’s neck as she stood shivering in the door.

“Please Zara,” Nick whispered. She was still unsure, but she gave in to his pleading eyes.

“Oh, fine. Yes, I’m coming.” Zara called, her voice high with nerves. Instant regret swelled inside her, but it was too late now.

The seance had been Francesca's idea, naturally. Nick had managed to get Zara an invite, although she didn’t want one. She had always been taught to stay away from these kinds of things.

“Well, hurry up then, because Marlene has to be back by nine, and we need to get going.” " Francesca said, ushering Zara out of her own front door. Nick and Zara shared a look, and he mouthed “*Sorry,*” again. She rolled her eyes.

As they trekked through the woods, Zara’s sense of unease grew and grew. All of the other girls were acting as though it was just a big joke, and that this huge, abandoned house out of town was completely safe. For Zara, it was like a horror movie, and she was terrified.

The group trekked beyond the footpath, and into the nearby woods. As it was autumn, the leaves were sparse on the trees, and the trees themselves were gnarled and foreboding. The sun was setting, leaving the party drowning in the orange scraps of the remaining sunlight. Francesca veered off the path suddenly, her disciples following obediently into a dark, overgrown gap in the shrubbery. Darkness was the only thing they could see down the tunnel. “Sorry.” Nick said sheepishly as they got further and further into the abyss that was the woods.

“Are you scared?” Zara asked him, as she almost tripped over a thick root on the ground.

“I mean, I’m not scared about the seance, but I’m scared of that house. Something about it is just... not right.” He replied. Zara shivered.

“Me too. But I’d be a liar if I said I wasn’t scared about the seance as well.”

“You’re *scared?*” Francesca interrupted, laughing. “Awww, poor you. Don’t worry, It’ll be fine, as long as nobody *dies.*” She pouted her lips jokingly, before turning back to lead the party up the hill.

Zara ignored her. “You seriously owe me for this, Nick. You know how much I hate Francesca.” Zara said quietly.

“I know. I just really want us to be popular, and this is like, our only way in.”

“I don’t want to be popular. Especially if it means spending time with these idiots.” Zara heard one of the girls ask if there would be a wifi signal, and scowled. “I rest my case.”

“I know. I’m sorry, but-”

“*Shh!*” whispered one of the girls suddenly. “What’s that?”

There was a rustling sound coming from a bush nearby. Zara tensed, slowly started to back away, Nick following. They had only moved a few paces when a blackbird burst out of the

bush, chirping curiously and flapping away. Zara jumped out of her skin, as the girls erupted into laughter.

“Oh my god, why did that scare me so much?” Nick whispered. Zara nodded but made no reply. “Tess,” Nick said to one of the girls, the one who was worried about the wifi signal. “How are we going to get in?”

“Don’t know,” was the girl’s response. “But I swear to god if there isn’t a wifi signal I’m leaving.” Zara rolled her eyes.

“Tessa!” Francesca summoned, and Tessa moved ahead to rejoin her. They fell back a little behind the group as they turned a corner, and the house emerged from behind a hill as the woods started to recede around them. The house itself was made of wood so old it had begun to tilt slightly to the left. “It’s just like a horror story,” Nick whispered in awe.

The door was locked. As the girls were bickering amongst themselves, Zara and Nick paced around the building. It was old, the wood was almost grey, and the whole area around the house smelt so strongly of damp the pair could almost taste it. The wood panels on the walls were soft after so many years in the rain, and crumbled in Zara’s shaking hands.

“This is such a cliché. ‘Oh let’s go to a really old stinky but definitely not haunted house and try and summon a ghost! How *fun!*’” Zara mimicked, slightly hysterical.

“What are you two doing?” Francesca appeared around the corner, hands on her hips.

“Erm- trying to find a way in.” Nick said quickly. “I found one- the window.” he gestured to the beaten window slightly above his head. “One of us could get in and open the front door.” “Good idea,” Said Francesca sarcastically. “But we’ve got the door open now anyway.” She mumbled something under her breath that Zara didn’t catch. “Come on.”

Slowly, the group walked through the door. The entrance hall was cavernous; it had a huge double staircase leading to a balcony and a hallway, and two sets of double doors on either side on the bottom floor. However, the whole place smelt strongly of mould and was so dark they could barely see. The stairs were run-down and a lot of them were broken, and the threadbare carpet was faded and stained. The whole place was cold too. A gust of wind from outside blew in and disturbed the thick layer of dust that coated everything. And amongst all of this was the atmosphere. The whole feeling of the house made Zara feel terrified, and ill.

“Oh my god.” Said one of the girls in awe.

“It’s freezing in here.” One complained.

“Shh! Come on, let’s just get on with it and get out of here.”

“Wait!” Tessa said.

“What?”

“I *have* to call Brody. This place is insane.” She said, holding up her phone and trying to get a signal. Zara rolled her eyes.

“Seriously?” She whispered to Nick. He gave her a look.

“Come *on*, guys!” Francesca whined. “Let’s find somewhere with a table.” She moved first. Taking tentative steps forwards, she approached one door. The rest of the group hung back.

“What are you doing?” She scoffed. “It’s literally not even scary. Come on. I found the dining room.” Nick rushed forwards, Zara following carefully. The floorboards groaned loudly beneath their feet.

Inside the dining room was a huge, rotting wooden table, several chairs and lights all along the walls. There was a huge glass chandelier hanging on the high ceiling, which had a large crack running across it. The walls had once had light green wallpaper, which was peeling, faded and damp-stained.

“Hurry up guys, it's eight. I only have an hour.” Marlene said, looking with disgust around the room.

“Where's Tessa gone?” Nick asked as he sat next to Zara on the chair.

“To find a wifi signal.” One girl replied, exasperated.

“Ugh, we'll just have to do it without her then.” Francesca said. All the girls took their seats, Francesca of course sat at the head of the table beneath the chandelier.

“Of all the ways to spend my Halloween,” Zara grumbled. She had a feeling of deep, deep dread in the pit of her stomach. Francesca leaned over the table and placed a large candle in the middle.

“Turn the lights on, someone. I can't see a thing.” She said, rummaging in her bag.

One of the girls stood to flip the small, old fashioned switch in the corner of the room. The lights flickered on as she gasped and pulled her hand away.

“What happened?” Marlene asked as the lights flickered on, dully illuminating the room

“It shocked me! The switch!” The girl squealed, clasping her finger in her other hand and blowing on it. Francesca had managed to find her lighter and was trying to ignite the candle. Zara's breathing had quickened and was becoming shallower. Nick rubbed her shoulder in reassurance, but his eyes were wide and he was staring into space.

Francesca had finally lit the candle and was sitting looking at her phone.

“Why are you on your phone, Francesca?” Nick asked tentatively.

“Shush. I'm trying to find the thing I wrote down to say.” She said dismissively. “Here, I found it. Ok, you ready?” most of the girls were giggling. “Join hands, everyone.” She ordered.

Zara was between Nick and Marlene, whose palms were both drenched in cold sweat.

'Marlene's scared too,' She thought to herself as the knot in her stomach twisted tighter and tighter.

“Oh, spirits of the underworld,” Francesca read, before bursting into laughter. Most of the group laughed with them, except Zara and Nick. “Oh my god, shush. Let me do this.”

“Shouldn't we turn the lights off?” One girl pointed out.

“Well, do you want to get shocked by the switch?” Another replied.

“No, but it kind of ruins the mood if-”

“Shut up, you two.” Francesca said. “Oh, spirits of the underworld, we came here tonight to make contact with you.”

As Francesca droned on, Zara could feel Nick's hands tighten, and she could hear her own heartbeat. Her thoughts circled around her head in a whirl, and she could almost feel a skeletal finger tracing an icy chill down her spine. Without really paying attention to what Francesca was saying, she focused her attention on the flame in the candle. She watched as it

flickered and danced, trying to make it the only thing she could see... until it was the only thing she could see. The lights had gone out, and following this there were two loud crashes from above them, which made plaster crumble from the ceiling, followed by a barely audible *dink!* As the realisation of being plunged into darkness hit them, the group began to scream loudly. Zara could barely see, the only light being the candle, which was flickering so violently it was in danger of extinguishing. She stood, letting go of Nick's hand as he screeched. She felt her way along the wall until she found the light switch, and flicked it. Nothing happened. She continued flipping the switch, getting more and more hysterical as the lights remained off.

'Could this really be a message from the underworld?' Zara thought in a panic, running towards Nick, who was still screaming. The lights suddenly flickered back on, and revealed the horrific scene before them, which made the screams twice as loud.

It was Francesca, sitting quite still, a shard of glass planted right in the centre of her skull. Her blonde hair was sticky with clotting blood, and her eyes were empty and glassy. Her back was slightly arched, so she slumped slightly over the table. The group could do nothing but scream. One girl was frantically trying to revive her, by fanning her in the face, one girl had fainted, three had run out of the room and the rest were just open mouthed in shock. Nick looked as though he was going to be sick, and Zara felt the same.

'How has this happened?' Her mind was racing.

"What's everyone screaming about? Did it work?" Tessa reappeared in the door, but as she clapped eyes on Francesca she turned green and burst into tears. Zara stood, her head in a blur. "It's my fault," She was saying, no-one paying her any mind except Zara.

"Who has a phone?" Nick asked the group. Several of them reached into their pockets and thrust them out to him, tears and looks of horror on their faces.

"What do you mean?" Zara asked, comfortingly placing her arm around Tessa's shoulders.

"It's my fault," She said again, tears streaming down her cheeks as Zara led her to a chair. Tessa hugged her knees and rocked on the seat, all the while saying "It's my fault, It's my fault."

"999, *what's your emergency?*" The operator said. All of the girls began to talk at once, creating one continuous inaudible sentence.

"*One at a time please, girls!*" The operator said in a soothing but urgent voice. The girls looked at Zara, then at each other. No one was quite sure what to do.

"It- we- uh," Nick started, struggling to speak. "It's our friend,- I- I think she's dead."

"*Ok, can you describe what she's doing?*" The operator asked, very calm compared to how everyone else was feeling.

"Well, um, she's very still, and there's blood,"

"*Where is the blood?*"

"It's- coming out of her head, and there's a big piece of the chandelier stuck in it."

As Zara listened, she didn't notice Tessa stand up and move towards the head of the table. She took hold of the corpse by its shoulders, and shook them. Francesca's head wobbled lifelessly as Tessa hysterically wailed.

“Francesca, wake up. It was my fault, I tripped, I must’ve tripped,” Tessa sobbed, collapsing in a heap next to Francesca’s chair. Zara was puzzled.

“Tessa, what do you mean?” A few of the other girls had drawn their attention away from the operator and were watching intently, trying not to look at the body.

“I- I was looking for the wifi password,” Tessa began through sobs, “And I found this room, it must have been right above this one. It was some sort of storage room. There- there was a box on the wall.”

“An electric box?” Asked one girl.

“I think so, because when I flipped the switch inside, all the lights went off. But the switch gave me an electric shock, and I fell backwards. The force of me hitting the ground must have made the stupid stupid chandelier fall into her head. It- it's my fault,” Tessa finished, before collapsing into another fit of hysteria.

The rest of the evening was a blur of blue lights and sirens. Zara and Nick had slipped away to explore the storage room. The room was dark, dusty and reeked of mould.

“Something isn’t right.” Zara said, inspecting the electric box.

“What do you mean?” Nick asked shakily.

“Tessa said the reason the shard from the chandelier was her falling *above* it,” She said, leaving the room to look over the bannister in the hall. “And I heard *two* crashes.”

“So did I, but I don’t know what you mean,” replied Nick, not following.

“This room isn’t above the dining room. That room is next door. A parlour.”

“So?” Nick said. Sudden enlightenment dawned on him as the penny dropped. The pair went pale. Zara screamed, and the two fled.