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The Bridges We Burn
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Ghost on the Second Floor

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” -Ephesians 6:12 ESV

What happened? Well, I’ll tell you what happened. That girl with the unkempt hair and long white dress showed up again on the second floor. Staring down at us from behind the small rectangular door glass while every nurse clocked in for their evening shift at Our Sisters of Mercy hospital. And she did not look happy.

Where did she come from? I don’t know. She mysteriously appeared two months ago during that stormy weekend when the power went out. And then she kept showing up every weekend after. I tell you it’s been unnerving because no one, and I mean no one, knows who she is or why she is there. Always during the evening shift. Always performing the same set of rituals. First she stares down at us when we arrive. Then she runs back and forth along the second-floor hallway like a 350-lb linebacker blitzing the quarterback, causing the entire first-floor roof to shudder under the impact. And then she laughs hysterically for an hour in this super unhinged way. After that, she usually goes quiet, but we can still feel her presence like a humid day. And you know that’s just not good. I don’t know how we know, but we do.

“She’s a ghost,” Davina insisted, “A spectral spirit. A poltergeist.”

“Maybe. But I don’t think Amy’s a ghost,” I replied - I decided to call her Amy because I didn’t want to keep referring to her as “ghost girl upstairs - “Maybe she’s just lost and confused.”

“Don’t name her for heaven’s sake! Why did you name her! Oh my gosh. Oh my gosh! She’s a multo! A poltergeist! Lord help us if she’s a not a *masamang Espiritu*. Naming her will only keep her around.”

Davina was worried. She, like most of our fellow Filipino co-workers, had an intense fear of ghosts. It was cultural.

“Ghosts aren’t real, Davina,” I told her.

“Yes they are. There as real as you or I.”

“No, they’re not. Not if you believe in God. Aren’t you Catholic?”

“Yes.”

“And don’t Catholics claim the bible as authority?”

“Of course.”

“Well, you can’t be a Catholic and believe in ghosts.”

“That’s not true. How so?”

“Well, the bible tells us all people who die go to a place called Sheol. Catholics call it purgatory – which is where all souls stay till Jesus comes back. And since they are in Sheol, no human spirit can walk the earth after death in any form. Therefore, no ghosts are real. You can look it up in Acts, Ecclesiastes, Genesis. Dozens of places in the bible.”

“Well, what about demon spirits?” Tina interrupts. “They exist. The bible definitely talks about them. They even possess people.”

“That’s another place people misinterpret the bible. I mean how can evil take over a person who has been created by God? The Holy Spirit wouldn’t abide by such a thing. It would

be a desecration. I don't think God, who made us in His image, with soul intact, would ever allow for such a thing."

"Then how do you explain what the bible says about demon possession?"

"I don't have to. I think the bible is clear. Evil spirits can influence humans, sure. They can manipulate and even take advantage when and where possible if any person opens up to them. But they cannot indwell our souls or make us do things against our will. We have free will, you know. God given free will. The people in the bible who have been "possessed" were only being influenced by evil through their own choice to follow that evil in belief and action. Not physically possessed. More like they were under the influence of a drug. Or like when someone says they have your heart. They don't actually possess your heart. We just say that to explain how we feel about someone else in an intimate sort of way. No one actually possesses your physical heart. You would die."

Davina and Tina weren't buying it.

When Amy first appeared, I admit I had momentary doubts whether she was a spirit or a real person, but decided she could only be a real person. Her behavior, however, made such distinctions near impossible to convince my colleagues otherwise. I kept trying though.

"Look," I said, "She's most likely a former patient who found a way to sneak up to the second floor without being seen. She's probably decompensating and needs help."

But the second floor was locked up like Fort Knox being that it served as the hospital storage space for generators, emergency supplies, and a long-term medical dispensary. The only way to get up there was either the service elevator next to the security station where the hospital security staff sat or from inside the locked psychiatric unit itself via a service stairwell at the back of unit four. Which our regular on-duty hospital security guard, Kenny, assured us no one had done in some time. Not to mention he possessed the only key in a locked drawer at the front desk at all times and wouldn't even open the drawer for his dying grandmother if she asked.

No, I wasn't thinking ghost. A former patient. But after confirming all current patients were accounted for, and no former patient even closely matching Amy's demographics, Davina insisted a spectral visitation was the only other viable option for her presence. A presence needing a cleansing ritual to get rid of.

I wasn't biting, so I simply asked Kenny if he would go upstairs and deal with the issue. He did. The next time Amy showed up, we called him, and he went upstairs. But in less than ten minutes, he came running down faster than I believed him capable and, forgive my pun, looked white as a ghost. Then he quit on the spot. Not his security job, mind you, but he did immediately quit his hospital post. No reason given. He just quit and drove away. While Amy laughed that unhinged laugh of hers.

The next weekend, the security company shift supervisor, a young weightlifter named Mikey, arrived looking annoyed for having to fill in at Kenny's post. He also seemed particularly put out about the whole Amy thing, which he must have heard about from Kenny, but wouldn't give any details what was said.

Our co-worker, Tina, whose husband was good friends with Kenny's younger brother though, heard Kenny went home that night from the hospital, climbed under his covers, and refused to speak further. Then, on Sunday, he got up early, went to church, and returned home stating he had accepted Jesus Christ as his personal savior, was born-again, and his soul was now safe from hell. Which surprised Kenny's wife because Kenny, a veteran soldier from the Afghanistan war who did not scare easily, had always claimed to be an atheist. Something she had known since the first day she met him in high school.

Mikey, when pressed, admitted he had spoken with Kenny about the incident, but did not think any of it sounded right.

"None of what he said really makes any sense," Mikey advised, "I'm not going to repeat it out of respect for his family, but he sounded all mixed up and pretty deluded. I think he might have had a stroke or something. I told him he needs to see a doctor, not a priest."

When Amy appeared that evening, Mikey didn't blink twice before heading upstairs with determination to resolve the matter. But ten minutes later, *he* came running back down looking scared, hyperventilating, and sweating unnaturally.

"Yeah, umm. Yeah, umm, it's all good. I, umm, I have it handled. No one go up there," Mikey stumbled and mumbled. "I'll, umm, yeah, I'll send someone to replace Kenny's post in a little bit." And then *he* drove off.

When he did, Amy started laughing in that horrible way.

No one wanted to go upstairs after that. Not even I and I didn't believe in ghosts.

Mikey, to his credit, did return with a team of security guards the following morning to search the building. But there was no sign of Amy, and everything was where it ought to be upstairs. So Mikey declared the matter closed and advised us not to call anymore because he was too "short staffed" to return with another search team anyway. He replaced Kenny with Clarence who would now staff the hospital security post in the evenings. Ironically, Clarence was partially blind and extremely hard of hearing. He never seemed to see or hear anything. Which might have been Mikey's point.

"She's been talking about you guys a lot," Little Suzie whispered across the nursing station one evening while taking her nighttime meds, "She's really pissed. Not at us because she says we are like her. We're trapped. But you guys. Man is she mad at you guys."

"What did we do?" I wondered.

On the evenings Amy appeared, our more sensitive patients – the few who tended to be internally occupied - started asking about the "lady waiting upstairs." They were inured to strange crying and laughing and loud noises in a locked psychiatric unit and were more curious why Amy was allowed upstairs when they weren't.

"She really has a grudge to grind against you guys," Chuck mentioned. "I don't mind her talking though cause she's much nicer to us than other are."

Amy did have one unique effect on our patients. For some mysterious reason, on those “Amy” nights, *all* of our patients, including Chuck and Little Suzie and whomever, would go to bed early. Then they would fall into deep sleeps and remain as motionless as, well, you know. Such stillness left us nurses with almost four full hours of eerie quiet till the end of our shift. Which was downright unnerving. We couldn’t resist huddling together on those nights though no one particularly admitted they were scared. And we also started gossiping, as nurses do when they sit together, telling ghost stories of our own to dispel the feelings of dread over Amy’s presence.

Davina and all the Filipino nurses had similar ghost stories which tended to relate how some beloved family member had passed away only to re-visit them post-mortem. Usually to say they had died and loved them. Erik G’s story took the cake though because he claimed his grandmother’s ghost visited him when he was twelve years old and, without a word, hiked her skirts up to pee standing up in the vegetable garden right in front of him. No rhyme or reason why she did this. But Erik was adamant it was his grandmother, that she was deceased, and that she had urinated.

“That’s a little weird, Erik.”

“Yeah, well that’s what happened. I try not to question the why.”

As a college educated nurse, I did not believe in ghosts. And as a God-fearing Christian, I did not believe evil spirits held any dominion over me. So I told my own ghost story to my co-workers as a way to highlight how ghosts did not really exist.

“When I was 16,” I began, “my friend Jay and I were hanging out at the beach when we met a couple of girls from the valley. Lovely girls who, thanks to Jay, became interested in spending some quality time with us. But it was late, and neither Jay nor I had a place of our own. We knew though, if we went to the nearest baseball field, the team dugouts would serve as the perfect make out location. One dark dugout for each couple. So we picked up a few wine coolers at the girls’ request and drove over to the Harvey West baseball field. Which just happened to be directly across the street from the oldest cemetery in the county. Evergreen

cemetery, to be precise, where the first settlers of our town had been buried more than one hundred years ago.

Like I said it was late. And so, it surprised us to find the field lights still on and their brightness bathing the dugouts in light. So much that anyone passing by would clearly see us, like maybe a cop on patrol. Fortuitously, we noticed Evergreen cemetery across the street did not have overhead lights, was dark, and had overgrown shrubs extending well back into the surrounding hills. We decided what the hell and walked the central path to the very back of the cemetery so the girls could drink their wine coolers and we could, hopefully, encourage a little make out session with them.

About thirty minutes later, as we sat on a couple of benches between two rows of gravestones, while the girls drank and Jay and I silently decided which girl we liked, I started looking around. There was enough ambient light from the moon to make out the shape of things, like Jay and the girls, but not really see details. Same for the gravestones. You could see them, but not read anything written on the surface.

“Hey,” I said noticing a bicycle lying behind a nearby gravestone, “whose bicycle is that?”

We all looked at the bicycle just as a deep, distinct voice from the grave replied, “It’s mine. The bicycle...is.....mine.” That’s when the dark figure rose up from the grave. At least seven feet tall, large headed with a wide formless body, but no visible arms or legs. I nearly fell over backwards into the bushes from looking up in fear.

Now, you know those horror movies where everyone runs in a panic to the car and the driver fumbles for the keys trying to unlock the door while the monster bares down on them? I believe that might be based on a true story. Jay and I jumped up and took off running for the car assuming the girls would run with us. They did, but not before we bulldozed past them, screaming, and running while the dark apparition climbed out of the grave.

Jay and I reached the car first. And while Jay fumbled for the keys, I kept him calm by yelling, "HURRY UP, WILL YOU! HURRY UP! WHAT'S TAKING YOU SO LONG?!? OPEN THE DAMN DOORS!"

Jay finally succeeded in unlocking the doors just as the girls emerged from the cemetery and ran to the car. I cannot say with certainty we would have waited for them had they not arrived in the nick of time, but it was a possibility. Only they did arrive which makes the whole question of chivalry a moot point and immaterial to discuss further. They arrived. And we *all* jumped into the car, windows rolled up, and doors re-locked staring back at the cemetery entrance trying to see if the ghost was still coming for us. Which he was.

The ghostly apparition emerged out of the darkness a few moments later revealing himself not to be a ghost but just some random homeless guy in beanie and heavy hoodie who had been sleeping in the graveyard. He walked out pushing his bicycle and carrying his sleeping bag, all the while laughing. Probably annoyed at having been woken up by a bunch of teenagers, but still laughing at our obvious discomfort.

"Thanks for the drinks," he called out as he mounted his bike and wheeled away. Next time get beer." I laughed realizing he had taken the wine coolers we left behind.

After a few minutes, Jay started laughing too, but the girls were having none of it.

"You guys left us back there. And YOU," pointing at Jay, "knocked over Sheila and made her twist her ankle. Just drive us back to our car now please. You guys are jerks and we're going home!"

"Cock blocked" as they say by a wine cooler stealing homeless guy riding a bicycle. Now that's funny.

"Well," Davina said after my story ended, "If ghosts aren't real, why don't you go upstairs and prove it. Find out who Amy is and what she is up to."

"I might."

Davina's challenge made me feel defensive.

“You know what, I just might. But I don’t think I should go alone. I mean, I don’t believe in ghosts, but that doesn’t mean Amy isn’t some unsettled person experiencing a psychotic break. She could be dangerous. I might need some help.”

I didn’t. I was a big boy. But I also had not forgotten the strange way Kenny and Mikey had reacted to Amy. If this was a prank, it was the mother of all pranks. I wanted some coverage to be sure.

“I’ll go with you,” Tina volunteered, “I’m curious to see who she is. Maybe she does need help.”

At the security station, I grabbed the security key from the drawer next to where Clarence was sleeping and headed up to the second floor riding the service elevator with Tina. As we approached the second-floor storage room, I swear I could feel Amy waiting. Malevolently so. The effect being all the hairs along my arms and the back of my neck stood up. I didn’t like it, but I wasn’t ready to admit defeat and run away.

I nearly did run when Tina reached out and grabbed my elbow.

“No. No. Let’s not do this,” Tina whispered fiercely. “I don’t like this. This doesn’t feel right. I feel all vulnerable like I need to pray for protection or something. I can’t do it. Let’s go back downstairs.”

I didn’t argue because it gave me reason to leave in relief. Because we both knew. In that moment we looked at each other and both knew Amy was standing on the other side waiting for us to open the doors and let her out. And she was decidedly not happy.