

# Chapter 1 - A Disgruntled Client

Sunday 20th July, 2019 - 5:50 pm

A powerful odour billowed from a stick of incense on the shelf at the far side of the dark room. Light from the outside sunset squeezed through the gaps in the horizontal wooden blinds covering the large windows overlooking the street.

The smoke took on a beautiful orange hue from the sunset and broke apart when hit by the ceiling fan in the centre of the room. From the hall, a series of loud, ungraceful footsteps bounded towards the door that had *Ghosts Be Gone! Spiritual Consultant* worked onto the wavy glass with black decals.

"You damn fraud!" A male's voice boomed before the door violently swung open and crashed into the wall, shattering the door's glass pane and the sign along with it.

A big, burly man in a suit with a crooked jaw and receding hairline entered the room. His recently polished oxfords clicked against the white oak floorboards. He inhaled and exhaled with a ferocious look in his eyes.

"Now, now. Don't lose your temper, sir. Has your wife run off with a ghost? No, of course not, that's stupid. An ugly brute like you wouldn't have a wife. A prostitute perhaps?" A man with a grey long coat and a fedora sat on a lavish brown leather chair behind an equally exquisite desk.

In the centre of the room, between the desk and the door sat a square coffee table with two chairs at either side of it. Less comfortable, but of the same quality as the armchair.

The man's face reddened, his nostrils flared, and his eyes were drawn to the smoke from the incense. He took a deep breath, awkwardly walked around the table, pushed passed two of the chairs, placed his hands either side of the desk and stared the aggravator.

"You insignificant little speck. My wife, and that's right, I have one. She came to you with the deluded thought that our house is haunted, paid you with the money from my bank account and you have the balls to insult me?"

"Ah, Mr Cavendish, I know who you are. Your wife kindly warned me that you might show up all 'angry-like'. I went to your house, I exacted my services, I got paid, and I left."

"And was there a ghost?"

"Oh, no. Your wife could not have been more wrong about the haunting. But I did let her speak to her mother, and prevent any malicious spirits from entering your house in the future."

"What utter rubbish. Spirits just give you con men a reason to steal from the stupid. Transfer my money back right now before I wring your scrawny little neck."

"Ah, Pafu. Would you mind convincing this very kind gentleman to leave? He just doesn't understand that I did my job well." He leaned back in his chair and relaxed.

"As you wish, master Carthwright." A light and fluffy voice sounded from the middle of the room.

"Got someone hiding under your desk or something?"

"Nope, just Pafu."

A small, red panda appeared on the table between them. Quickly, Pafu grew in size, and her body changed more into the shape of an unnaturally large tiger. Cavendish's mouth and hands trembled, and he took several steps back. Pafu's fangs elongated, and her eyes glowed like a red from hell. With a mighty roar from her monstrous mouth, the unmistakable smell of shit began to emanate from Cavendish's pants and mix with the scent of the incense.

Mr Cavendish's face turned white, sweat poured from his body, his eyes formed the beginnings of tears, and he stood there in shock.

"Leave us, if you'd please." The man behind the desk leaned forward and watched Cavendish, who didn't move in the slightest. "Pafu?"

The beast took a single step forward. Cavendish let out a short squeal and fell on to his behind.

"Sure, of course, whatever you say, I'll leave..." Mr Cavendish scampered to his feet, turned his body around and proceeded to leave the spiritual consultant's office.

"Oh, and I'll forward you the bill for the door."

"O- okay..."

"Thank you for being a lovely customer, if you ever need my services, don't hesitate to call!"

With his dignity soiled just like his underwear, Cavendish sprinted from the room. Pafu returned to her original size and jumped back onto the lavish desk.

"Was that good enough, Adam?" She swayed with pride and lifted her chin.

"Pafu, you were brilliant! You set the mood completely with the whole master thing and changing from sweet and innocent into a horrifying beast. If I hadn't seen it myself a dozen times, I might have crapped myself too." Adam burst out with laughter and scratched under her chin.

"He was a jerk anyway, it was worth seeing that dumbfounded expression in his face."

Pafu joined in, with a sweet and cute laugh. Adam lifted her up into his arms and pet her.

A well-dressed man with glasses knocked on the open door and cleared his throat. He seemed awfully confused. First, a man ran past him in fear, spouting gibberish while smelling of shit. After that, to him, Adam was petting the air in front of his chest with one arm forming a cradle.

"Mr Cavendish, I thought I-" Adam looked up to see a different man at his door than before.

"The name's Reid Cusack. I'm here about your services."

"Come in, come in."

Reid shifted his foot forward and the glass cracked under his shoe. He stayed by the door and brought his foot back.

"Is this a bad time?" Frowning, Reid's eyes glanced between the broken door and the glass-covered floor.

"Not at all, not at all, sit down, and I'll get you a drink if you'd like."

"I'm good here."

"Proper business etiquette would be to sit down and discuss services."

"We've already done just that, Mr Carthwright. Several months ago, I paid for your full services after you were recommended by a good friend. You did a full cleansing of my property and made assurances that no demons would come back. But one has made its home in my house again. So please, do not talk to me about business etiquette."

"Demons don't exist, spirits, on the other hand, do. And that's impossible, my barriers are impenetrable."

"Well, you have been cutting corners, Adam. Printing runes onto talismans and chanting your power into them instead of drawing the runes while chanting. It makes a difference." Pafu whispered in his ear.

With force, Adam cleared his throat. The last thing he wanted was his clients to know his efforts are that of a lazy man. Reid looked at him with an unsatisfied expression.

"Very well, I can come and remove this newest spirit, and make barrier talismans that are ten times stronger for only a quarter of my usual price." Adam tapped lightly on the desk with his index finger.

"Free, or I'll be sure to tell the government you're not paying tax for these ventures on top of your benefits."

"Ah... You did some research I see. Free it is!"

"Good, I'll meet you at my property tomorrow. Let's say around noon."

"Of course, I'll clear my schedule."

"That's what I like to hear. Tomorrow. Noon. Don't be late."

Reid stepped out from under the doorway and left down the stairs outside. Not once did he consider stepping another inside. It was as though his suit or dignity would have been soiled if he entered.

"What a snobby bastard, strong-arming me into working for free." Adam smacked his fist onto the desk and then raised it into the air.

"It's your own fault for cutting corners."

"I suppose. But I was going to go to Matey's Potateys for lunch tomorrow." Adam burrowed his head in his hands, squishing Pafu in his arms.

"Eat something other than potato for once, it'll be a good change."

"Never."

"Your doctor did say you're at risk of getting high blood pressure if you keep eating so many potatoes."

"Potato is the epitome of love and all that is good in the world. The fluffiness and indescribably texture of potatoes is unbeatable! He also said if I keep fit, don't have too much salt, and don't drink caffeinated drinks often, it might negate the problems caused by overeating potato."

"You're a problem, child."

"You know it!"

Adam set Pafu down and sprung up off his chair. He gathered a dustpan and broom and swept the shattered pieces of glass from the door into the dustpan. After the mess was cleaned up, he covered the hole in the door with duct tape and walked downstairs. Pafu jumped carefully down each step and at the bottom, Adam turned the lock on his front door.

"Not a single paying client today, Pafu. My bills need to be paid." Adam sighed as he made his way back up the steps into his office.

"Maybe we should advertise on the internet instead of just in the newspaper." Pafu bounded up after him.

"You might be right. The days of old where word of mouth and newspapers are ending. Social media seems to be where it's at." Adam flicked the old-fashioned light switch next to the door and lit up the room.

He looked over his office. Beside the large window on the connecting wall stood three tall metal filing cabinets with four drawers each. Stacks of books rested on them but

undisturbed dust settled upon them too, they hadn't been touched in months. The books displayed titles like *Cleansing Spirits for Dummies*, *The Grand Tome of Exorcism*, and *Barriers, Wards, and Seals*.

Dodgy-looking awards hung on the wall above a brown leather couch. On the sofa sat a neatly folded blanket up on one of the cushions and pillow resting on top of that. A bin was nestled away between the couch and metal filing cabinets. Inside of the trash was a few used paper plates, plastic cutlery, and boxes displaying the brand name *Matey's Potateys* underneath a happy-faced potato man.

Against the wall on the opposite end of the room, a large dark bookcase full of books in all genres was placed. At either side were several bamboo plants and one large watering can.

Adam walked by the couch into the joining room, which was, in essence, a kitchen. With a microwave, a stovetop oven, a kettle, a sink, and cupboards filled with things that only existed to add flavour and variety to Adam's potatoes, it had everything he needed.

He boiled a few spuds on the stove for supper, added cheese and ham and sprinkled some herbs and spices for flavour. Even with all that extra flavour added, the food hardly touched Adam's tongue as he scoffed it down. He set the pillow down on the couch, fluffed out the folded blanket and cosied up to one of the corners before falling asleep.

When it came to his alarm, the only thing that annoyed Adam enough to wake him up was the sound of a child crying. So every morning, he would frantically swipe his phone to end the cacophony it would make, and the entire situation would wake him.

As useful as it had been, it never stopped him from snoozing it the first or second time each morning. This morning, somehow, Adam ended each alarm without completely waking up, and woke just before noon when Pafu's voice got through to him.

"Lazybones!" Pafu yelled, deep into Adam's eardrums.

"Ah! Okay, hey, I get it. It's time to get up. I should make you my alarm clock instead." Adam's eyes fluttered between open and shut until his vision cleared.

"If you want me to be your alarm clock, you'd best be prepared for it, because I'll change into my battle form and roar until your ears bleed."

"I was kidding, you know me, just a joke... What's the time?"

"A little past eleven o'clock. If you want to make it to the client's house, you best get a move on."

"Roger!"

Adam slid off of the couch, his legs wobbled and waned. On his way to the bathroom at the end of the hall, he stubbed toes and misjudged doorway widths and hit his elbows and shoulders on them. He cleaned himself up and opened his closet in the middle of the hall. It revealed seven sets of his previous outfit from the night before except for his long coat which there was only one.

Back at his desk, Adam sat down and pulled some red-backed paper out of a drawer. He set down a fine brush and an inkwell and started to draw runic symbols onto the paper while chanting.

"Oh, power of the heavens. Give me the strength to seal spirits who would do the innocent harm. Guide my talismans into the spirit realm where it may cleanse and enlighten unholy spirits."

His words turned into an indecipherable mumble after speaking the first part of the chant. As he chanted, the edges of the talismans glowed a dim golden hue until it faded. Adam repeated these words until a dozen talismans had been finished. He sat there and waited for the ink to dry, once dry, he opened his long coat and stuffed them into pockets that had been sewn in with great care.

Pafu, who had been watching the entire thing, sat on the couch and smiled.

"You know, I really don't like it when you watch me work." Adam leaned back in his chair and wiped sweat from his brow.

"I haven't seen you work like that for a while now. Does this mean you'll be working this hard from now on?"

"Not a chance, I'm doing this so that man will lay off me. He seems well off, so if I do a good enough job, he might talk to his rich friends about my services, and we can charge as high as we want!"

"And you're the same as always. I wish more could motivate you than money, potatoes, and women."

"If you're going to tell me there's more to life than those three things, you're deluding yourself."

"I don't see how you can say that without seeing the obvious problems associated with it."

Before Adam could say anything else, Pafu sighed and disappeared from view. *Call me if you need me, I'll be somewhere far enough to not hear your small-minded opinions, but close enough to listen to your pleas for help.*

"I won't need your help, I'll be finished faster than a high school kid after the end of year dance in the back of a station wagon."

No response filled Adam's head. He exited his office through the duct-taped door and down the flight of stairs into the city street. The sun had risen in the distance but was clouded by a light summer shower. A mixture of warm, and cold. Cars travelled by on the busy street, sirens wailed in the distance, and a neighbour from across the street shot him her usual judgemental stare.

"Ah, another glorious day in Eldham, if only any of them were glorious at all." Adam waved at his irritating neighbour in a friendly manner.

He pressed down a button on a set of keys. A car on the side of the road flashed its lights and the doors unlocked. A light blue spacious station wagon, older than Adam and kept in pristine condition. Upon opening the door, a wave of trapped heat rushed out. Adam entered it, flicked the air conditioning on, turned the key and clicked the windscreen wipers on.

"First job in a while, did I forget anything? Keys, phone, charms, incense, wallet, prayer bracelet... Shoes?" Adam checked for each of the items and sighed peacefully.

From his phone, Adam set up the directions to Reid's house from the contact details as one of his previous clients. He started the car up and listened to the instructions provided by the calming female voice that came from his phone during his drive.

On the highway, just before the road to Reid's estate, Adam parked the car. He breathed in through his nose and out through his mouth, readying himself for the job. His hands shook, and even with the air conditioner still blowing cold air, he was sweating.

"Pafu, can't you come out? You know I'm not too good with people without you around."

"Was that a plea for help, I heard?" Pafu reappeared and sat herself on Adam's left shoulder as though she had never left.

"Yes, yes. I need you here, I can take care of the spirit, just be my moral support for that condescending prick."

"Will do, no stories about that station wagon of yours though. It was bad enough to live through that night and see everything that happened after the dance."

"Deal." Adam laughed and cruised down to the estate.

Adam wound the car window down as he pulled up to a black iron fence with an intercom on the brick column beside it. A camera which was screwed into the brick was

perched above the intercom. A light above the camera turned green, and the lens of the camera tightened as it looked at Adam.

"I'm here under the request of Mr Cusack."

"Ah, the fake ghost hunter guy. I'll buzz you in."

A loud buzz sounded, and the iron fence slid to the right, opening the road up. Adam put his car back into gear. The light summer shower had moved into being heavy rain, and Adam clicked his wipers on. A white, two-storey Victorian-era mansion came into view.

"Last time I was here, this place stunned me. It could be because I'm not being paid for this, but the wonder has died for me." Adam glanced over the well-kept stone structure.

"Or because you know you have to see the pompous client that owns it." Pafu poofed herself onto the seat beside Adam.

Adam nodded and laughed. He reached the parking area out the front of the house and turned his car off. He took another deep breath and opened the door before stepping out. Adam pulled an umbrella from his messenger bag before popping it open. Pafu weightlessly climbed her way up to Adam's shoulder, and the two of them were greeted by a butler at the base of the house.

"Master Cusack is waiting inside. If you'll just follow me." He smiled, turned on his heels and walked away with a posture of pride and status.

Every so often, the butler looked over his shoulder until they reached the front door, which he opened and he bowed as they entered. He gestured to Adam to take his coat, but Adam politely refused. Adam lowered his umbrella, shook it off, did it back up and placed it back in his bag.

Art pieces that could pay for a year's worth of Adam's bills decorated the lobby. Priceless vases, paintings, and luxurious furniture. The room opened up to the entire house, a chandelier hung in the centre of the hall, most likely made from expensive crystal. Purple and gold carpet expectedly ran from the entrance up to a large open staircase that branched off both left and right to get to the second storey. Hallways stretched out and bent around corners throughout the first floor.

"Carthwright, at least you can make it here on time." Reid, with a smug expression, walked down the staircase to meet them in the lobby.

"A... pleasure to see you again, Mr.Cusack. Thank you for giving me a chance to correct my mistakes. Now, about the process, it will take a couple of hours to go over your house and test the seals, then I will find the spirit you say has made its home here. If you'd

please, I would also prefer it if you and any staff went elsewhere while this goes on."

Unrestful, Adam rubbed his index finger with his thumb.

"All of that sounds good, but I'm staying behind this time. I need to make sure you do it right."

"I strongly advise against that, the danger involved is high and if you, my client, were to be injured during the ritual, my reputation would plummet."

"How about this... If you don't allow me to see you finish the job with my own eyes, I'll let my business contacts and my media contacts know that you're a fraud. They'll know that you robbed me of my money with your extreme prices. Money that I need to use to pay for my sister's radiation treatment and recovery costs."

"But you can easily afford that, and I'm not even charging you for this."

"And? Anyone I tell doesn't need to know that. I need to see with my own eyes that you're successful so that this isn't a huge waste of time. I'd hate to move to another house just because of a damned spirit who doesn't want to move on."

"Fine, I guess you leave me no other choice. At least send your staff home then."

Reid looked at the butler who still stood in the lobby with them and smiled before sighing.

"Reginald, would you please let the other staff know they have a paid day off, then take the day off to see your daughters."

"As always, your kindness towards us is unparalleled. Many thanks, Master Cusack." Once again, Reginald turned on his heels and walked away.

"Now that that's done, spiritual consultant, do your thing." Reid scratched his head and furrowed his brow. "Don't you need high tech fancy equipment to find ghosts and all that?"

"It's true that spirits leave behind trace amounts of temperature changes and can interfere with electronics, but a true spiritualist can see them with their naked eye." Adam tapped just below his right eye to indicate his claim to be a true spiritualist.

"Whatever you say, just... do your job then."

"Yes... sir."

Adam sighed, he viewed the room they stood in, checked the entrances and exits, chanting during the entire experience. Without a word spoken to Reid, he walked from one place to another. Each ward was checked for damage or loss of strength all while Adam tried his best to ignore all of the expensive luxuries that Reid could afford.

"An hour and a half and you've done nothing but speak in tongues and walk around inspecting the rooms."

Adam ignored him and viewed the last of the rooms on the ground floor. Sweat beaded down his face and his breathing quickened. They reached the base of the staircase that connected the first floor to the second and Reid barred their way with his body. Although, Reid standing in there didn't do much against the large opening either side of him.

"No more ignoring me! What are you doing? What have you even done?" Reid stretched his arms out in an attempt to block Adam's path even more.

"You're holding up my process. I have done a few low-level chants to test the strength of the wards I've placed, some wards needed to be restrengthened, and I'm trying to find any wards that have been completely broken or that have somehow failed."

"And wards are?"

"In a sense, they're barriers. In this case, these wards prevent spirits from entering your house."

"I see, continue then, we don't have all day."

*You're the one who stopped us...* "Move then, if you'd please." Adam stepped past Reid after he dropped his arms and they climbed the stairs.

As he stepped off the last step on the staircase, Adam felt a surge of spiritual pressure. His confidence shrunk and his instinct stabbed at him. Everything told him to step back, but he pressed on. Ignoring the room that the pressure obviously came from, Adam found several wards that were utterly destroyed and reworked them from scratch, stronger than before.

After grabbing a piece of paper from his coat, he set it in the centre of each of the rooms and sat down, he closed his eyes and chanted, pushing out his spiritual energy. He spoke the words of his chant over and over, getting louder and louder as he did so. The paper in each room burst aflame after a time and disappeared without leaving a trace of ash.

With one room left in the building, Adam cleared his throat and stood in front of Reid, barring his way as he did to him at the base of the staircase.

"Don't think you're done until you've been in every room." Reid struggled to speak as he fought against Adam's arms.

"Don't go-"

Reid pushed his way through, opened the door and stood there plainly. He turned to face Adam with a smug look on his face. But Adam's face had dropped in comparison the moment the door opened. Pure terror filled his mind, his body quivered, and his eyes watered.

A flash of cold sweat flushed from his body. He pulled his right hand into a fist so tight that the fingernails against his skin might have drawn blood.

"Don't know why you would have blocked my way. There's nothing in here." Reid shook his head and raised his hands towards the ceiling,

"A... Ghast." Adam swallowed.

Although Reid could not see the immediate danger he put himself in, Adam and Pafu could. The giant, shadowy, formless figure radiating dangerous spiritual pressure said otherwise. The force that poured from the ghast churned Adam's stomach and tackled his fight and flight response.

As tall as the unnecessarily high ceilings, human in shape, with thick dark purple mist shrouding its body. Nothing like Adam and Pafu had ever gone against. *No wonder it took apart my wards so easily. Since it didn't hurt anyone here, it must have been waiting for me to come back here.* Adam shook his thoughts off and stared at the brutish evil spirit.

"Ghast? What are you on about?" Reid looked around the room curiously.

"Reid, stand back!" Adam rushed forward and opened his coat.

"What're you-"

Adam pushed Reid out of the way, pulled a few talismans from the sleeves in his long coat. He threw them, guided by his spiritual energy and they landed on what looked like the forehead of the evil spirit. The spiritual pressure died down, and Adam laughed almost hysterically.

"That's it? It wasn't ready for me?" Shivers blasted all over Adam's body and his eyes glazed over. Hysterical, he hoped it was the end, but the fear ate him up inside.

"Adam, we're not done yet!" Pafu jumped from his shoulder and reared up onto her hind legs.

As Pafu had said, it wasn't over. The spirit screamed a deafening roar loud enough to force Adam and Reid to cover their ears, and the talismans burned up. The pressure of the spirit forced Adam to his knees. Reid's eyes widened, and he fell backwards, onto his wrists. The spirit had entered in the living world enough to be visible in the eyes of ordinaries.

Pafu transformed half-way before she was interrupted when a wide of the spirit's arms smashed her into the wall. Adam grabbed the last of his talismans from his coat. Circling around the spirit, Adam chanted and placed talismans on the floor until he'd created a ten-sided star.

"From this decagram, I bind you. With the chains, I secure you. And with my strength, I will hold you." Adam sat his right fist in the palm of his left hand and stood before the spirit.

For a moment, the area around them went quiet. A flash of white filled the room and silver chains shot out of each talisman on the ground, wrapping around and binding the spirit. The spirit struggled against its bindings, pulling and stretching them while letting out another deep and painful wail that, this time, shook the room. The links in the chains bent and deformed. An arm tore free.

The hand whirled past Adam and grabbed Reid. When it pulled back its arm, Reid's body remained on the ground, though his soul was grasped within the hand of the evil spirit. A translucent mirror image of Reid wriggled and squirmed, trying to get out of his situation the best he could, and he noticed his body on the ground beneath him.

"What's happening to me?" Reid shrieked and struggled even more fiercely to break free from its grip.

"Shit."

Adam rushed forward. The spirit broke free of the chains, and its free hand swept for Adam. Sliding underneath it, Adam avoided being flicked across the room like an ant and placed his last talisman onto the spirit's chest. An extremely fast chant left his lips as he watched Reid's spirit be pulled closer to the gaping abyss that resembles a mouth.

"I banish you to the depths of hell, where you may think about and reflect upon your evil deeds in this life and the next!" Adam finished the last sentence of the chant loudly and stretched out his hand, releasing his spiritual pressure along with the last of the chant.

Unfazed, the spirit pulled Reid's soul closer to its mouth. Adam felt a small push on his leg, and an overwhelming amount of spiritual energy filled his body. Again, he released his energy into the talisman and the spirit stopped moving.

A golden glow enveloped around the spirit. The body of the spirit distorted itself and shrunk, pulling its existence into itself. Reid's soul was dropped onto the ground, and the spirit vanished, leaving behind a white glow that faded away. Blood trickled from Adam's nose, and he grabbed a handkerchief from his back pants pocket to catch the rest. Adam's attention turned to his companion, leaving Reid to deal with his mistake.

"Pafu!" Adam scooped Pafu's battered spiritual body from the ground and held her close in a cradle made with his arms. "How do we put his soul back into his body?"

"Actually caring now, are you?" She winced as she rolled her body around in the cradle.

"This is not the time, Pafu, my reputation is at stake here!"

"Of course, that's what it was." Pafu coughed painfully. "A little appreciation and care would be nice every now and then, you know. Well, I don't know of a way to do it."

"You don't? Darn it! Anyway, this isn't going to kill you, we've both been through worse."

Adam pulled his phone from his pants pocket and called for an ambulance. He recited the details of the incident aside from the supernatural stuff and left it at saying Reid fainted and won't regain consciousness. He gave them Reid's address and raced around looking for the intercom and gate switch so he could let the ambulance drivers in when they arrived.

By the time the sirens blared, Adam had found the digital screen to unlock the front gate and let the ambulance in. Once at the mansion, he guided the paramedics to Reid's body.

They checked his breathing, normal. They checked for injuries, none other than a couple bruises from the fall, including one on his head. They tested the reaction to light via his pupils and there was no response. They propped him up on a stretcher and took him down to the ambulance.

As though tethered together, as Reid's body moved, his spirit was forcibly pulled alongside it. Adam followed along, suffering slightly from the fatigue that comes with dealing with spirits.

"You better find a way to get me back in there, or I'll sue you!" Reid yelled furiously, but the threat of a lawsuit didn't even begin to scare him as much as his possible fall in reputation did.

"You wouldn't be able to sue me if I don't find a way to put you back in there," Adam whispered loud enough for Reid to hear.

The paramedic pushing the stretcher looked at him quizzically but shook it from his mind, focusing on his task. Reid's expression halted with his mouth open and his eyes glazed over. The paramedics pushed the stretcher into the back of the ambulance and requested that Adam followed behind in his car as the police may want to have a talk to him, and so he did.

Adam's exhaustion overwhelmed him the moment he sat in his car. He struggled to remain awake for the journey and arrived much later than the ambulance due to the fact they passed all traffic with their sirens blaring. When he reached the hospital, he passed out in the lobby due to fatigue.

When he awoke, one of the paramedics who brought Reid to the hospital was speaking with a police officer at the door. No longer in the lobby, Adam sat in a room he

knew was used to counsel and even determine whether someone needed to be committed into the psychiatric ward. But this time, he knew it would be for something else. Beside him was another chair and both faced a desk with a plastic storage container full of items obscured its thickness.

The cold sting of tight handcuffs burned his wrists and Adam looked down to see both hands cuffed to the arms of the chair. He shook his arms, but the handcuffs would not budge. Pafu appeared and rubbed against his cheek, and his nervousness eased. The police officer looked over, and noticing he had woken up, ended his conversation.

"That'll be all, thank you." The police officer waved the paramedic away and approached Adam. "Hi. Adam Carthwright, I presume?" He rested his back against the desk and sat a thermos, which had a strong scent of coffee, down.

"How'd you get my name?" Adam spoke coarsely, his words grating inside his throat.

"An understandable question, I suppose. I'm detective Fredrickson with the Eldham City Police Force. As a suspect in the cause of Mr Cusack's condition, I went through your wallet to find your ID."

"Ah..." Adam stared at the container on the table, deducing that it was his belongings inside. "I see."

"I'm told you were with Mr Cusack when he, uh, fainted. Is this correct?"

"Yes." Adam rolled his eyes and sighed. "Is all of this necessary? If I did cause what happened, why would I have called an ambulance or come to the hospital?"

Adam licked his chapped lips. Even the cup of revolting bitterness besides the police officer would be better than suffering a dry mouth and the beginning stages of dehydration.

"Seeing as though you were the only one with Mr Cusack when he suffered a head injury, it makes you pretty hard to ignore as a suspect. Regrettably, he has been left comatose as a result. Care to tell me what happened?"

"It's not like you'll believe me."

"If you aren't going to talk, then we can always throw an aggravated assault or attempted murder charge at you and have you serve a little time. It could give you time to think about an honest career change."

"Honest career? These unbelievers. Stupid ordinaries." Adam whispered to himself, and Pafu giggled, causing Adam to smirk. "Like I said, you really won't believe me."

"What, you were framed? You weren't there? I've heard it all before, and sometimes it's even true." Fredrickson shook his head and sipped his coffee. "After speaking with the butler of the house, who has a butler these days? Anyway, after speaking to him, I know that you, a-

"The police officer flicked through a notepad, trailing down his notes with his index finger. "Spiritual Consultant, that's what you call yourself? You entered his property to conduct some kind of ritual and get rid of a ghost. At that point, Mr Cusack sent his staff home for the day. If what that man said is true, you were the only one in the house after the butler relieved the rest of the staff, and that makes you the number one suspect."

"Could I please have a drink of water first? It's hard to talk."

"Of course."

Fredrickson left the room and brought back a plastic cup full of water with a paper straw. He held the cup close to Adam, and after the cup was drained, Fredrickson placed it on the table and cleared his throat.

"I believe you were about to tell me what happened."

"It was the work of the spirit. It ripped his soul out and tried to devour it, I stopped it, but Reid's spirit was left outside of his body with no way to return."

"Damn... That almost sounds rehearsed, did you think of that one up until the paramedics got to the house when you realised you didn't have it in you to kill him? Or during the small reprieve you had while I got you some water?"

"Get off my damn back! Pafu, you know I'm no good at this. I'm not used to people. Is there any way for you to make him believe my innocence and that the bad guy has already been brought to justice?"

"Sure is, but altering a human's memory is a messy thing, he may forget something else, like a wife, son, or daughter."

"Well, it's better than living with me in a prison cell, right?"

"Absolutely. I wouldn't be able to eat bamboo in a prison cell."

"Nor would I be able to eat potatoes."

Pafu leapt down onto the ground from Adam's shoulder and wandered up to the police officer.

"What're you mumbling about? Don't think you can talk your way into an insanity plea. This is a serious matter, Mr Cusack is good friends with the city council members and brings in a lot of income through his business dealings, putting him in a coma was the biggest mistake of-"

Pafu reached out and touched Detective Fredrickson's leg with her paw, and his body went limp. His eyes glazed over and he stood there, almost like in a trance.

"Detective Fredrickson, I am quite glad you were to find the actual culprit. If you'd please, I would very much appreciate you undoing my cuffs."

Fredrickson snapped out of the trance and smiled apologetically.

"Of course, Mr Carthwright, I apologise on behalf of the Eldham Police Force for detaining you while unconscious." Fredrickson took a step forward and unclipped a key ring with several keys off his belt and unlocked Adam's cuffs.

"All is forgiven, but where is my bag?" Adam rubbed his reddened wrists.

"Oh, of course! Right here."

The police officer opened up the container on the desk and handed Adam his belongings after unlocking the cuffs that bound him. Adam reached inside the bag and pulled out a small metal container. After flicking it open, he pulled out a card and handed it to the detective.

"If you or any of your friends come up against something that doesn't seem to be from this world, give that number a call, and if I'm not there, I'll call back when I'm available."

"If it'll make you forget the way you were treated, I'll make sure to pass this information on if I see or hear about anything like you said."

"Thank you. If you don't need me for anything else, I would like to check on Mr Cusack."

"Yes, that will be all. Sorry again for keeping you so long."

Adam left the room, belongings in hand and sighed. His racing heart had slowed, and he grasped his shirt at his chest.

"Pafu, you really did a number on that guy, he was all fire and smoke before and after he was an apologetic mess."

"I just made it so he had a couple of unexplained occurrences in his memories that he could easily believe were because of spirits and made him believe that the actual perpetrator had been caught."

"Where would I be without you?"

"Dead, several times over, and this time, in prison." With that, Pafu disappeared as her words lingered in the air.

Adam laughed haphazardly, "Yeah, you're right."

At the reception desk, Adam nervously asked an absolutely gorgeous nurse where Reid's room was situated. After she explained how; Adam left his business card and followed her directions. Two flights of stairs and five turns down a maze of hallways led him to room 202. An older woman stood over Reid's body with his hand in a tight grip, probably too tight.

"You asshole! Who's going to look after your sister now?" The woman shook Reid's hands and was about to slap him when Adam walked in.

"Y'know, I don't think it's nice to call the dea- the uh, comatose names like that."

Adam leaned against the door frame and looked at the woman from under his fedora.

"I'm the mother of this ungrateful bastard, I can call him whatever I want. Who are you anyway? Looks like you're some kind of private investigator from the sixties."

"That's exactly the look I've been going for! Thank you."

"Uh."

"Right, I'm a friend of Reid's."

"A friend?" Reid glided forward, screaming at him. "Friend, my ass, you got me killed!"

"Almost killed, I can still fix this," Adam whispered. "Miss Cusack, I was with your son when he fainted, his head hit a chair pretty hard on the way down."

"Oh, if he dies, that will be pretty interesting to have on his gravestone, 'felled by a chair'."

"Could I have a minute with Reid? I'd like to say a few things."

'Of course, I'm done here anyway.'" The mother scowled and stamped out of the room.

Ignoring Reid's cold stare, Adam closed the door behind him and sat down beside the bed. It would look strange if he were to walk around the room, talking to an empty space in front of him.

"So, that's your mother, hey? I guess I can see where you get your personality from." Adam scoffed, looking over Reid's lifeless body with regret.

"I am nothing like her, and that's not important. Why can't I leave this room?" Reid moved towards the exit only to be pulled back toward his body.

"In most cases, when a person dies, the spirit grows attached to an item, a person or even the place they died in. They tend to stick to that until they ascend, are exorcised, or in some rare cases, break free of their attachment."

"But I haven't died!"

"You're quite right, so I believe your body is still clinging to your soul. But, it lacks something necessary to accept it back in. Kind of like how when a person astral projects their soul, they can't move far from their body in that case. I might be able to separate your body from your soul properly how I would break the attachment between a spirit and their attached item or place."

"So, you can do that, but not put me back in my body."

"Yes, it's all complicated. But I promise you, I will do my best to find out how. I will also look after you while you're a spirit, so you aren't exorcised or eaten by another spirit."

"Eaten?"

"Yes, that's what that spirit was trying to do, eat you."

"You fucked up, big time."

"No, I didn't. I warned you that it might be dangerous, and then you went ahead and ran into danger, almost getting yourself killed."

"You should have been more persuasive or something."

"I don't like people. Whatever, it doesn't matter. I'll be back tomorrow with a talisman to separate you from your body properly."

"I guess I'll be waiting, right here, with nobody to talk to and nothing to do."

"Pafu, stay here and protect him, would you?"

"Only if you let me change into my human form and have you massage me." Pafu poofed into existence just as she always did and smiled playfully.

"Pafu..."

"Okay, okay, I'll do it. Hurry back though, I don't like this arrogant, selfish, obnoxious, prideful prick."

"What is that thing, an overgrown rat? And, I can hear you." Reid knelt down on the ground, looking at Pafu.

"Rat? I'll have you know, I'm a proud red panda from Asia and Adam's guardian spirit. And I don't much care about your feelings."

"Play nice; I'll be back tomorrow with talismans to help."

With a smile and a wave of his hand, Adam left Reid's hospital room. When he exited the room, he noticed Reid's mother was nowhere to be seen, and he headed home.