



*Reluctant Press presents:*

# **Rebecca**

## **A Tale of Ghostly Possession**



**Dee Dee Perri**

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A 'NEW WOMAN' E-BOOK

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# Rebecca:

## A Tale Of Ghostly Possession

**By Dee Dee Perri**

### Chapter 1

“WHAT? WHAT?” I yelled in a voice still thick with sleep as I jerked into a sitting position. I scooted back until my shoulder slammed into the oak headboard stopping further retreat. The first wave of adrenalin was just now making its presence felt as my heart shifted from the slow, sluggish pulse of deep sleep to that of a jittery pony that threatened to break into a full, runaway gallop. My breath was already coming in shorter, more labored gulps as my hands clenched and unclenched and I shifted from a half reclined defensive

posture to one of active defense. My feet, now firmly planted on the mattress, and my thighs coiled tightly ready to spring, I crouched and raised my hands forming them into hard knotted fists and bellowed: "I KNOW YOU'RE THERE!"

My eyes searched the depths of the looming darkness and found no identifiable form. I listened but all I could hear was the accelerating beat of my heart hammering in my ears and yet I was *certain* I was not alone. That moment hung for a crystalline eternity, an eon of subjective time but only milliseconds of objective history. That sense *I was not alone* was a certainty; that I was being watched by someone or *something* sent the first *conscious* thrill of sour fear rushing through my body. I was now fully awake and terrified.

I was a city boy, born and bred and this old farmhouse sat out in the boondocks, without neighbors or streetlights. I knew that. I could yell until the pigs came home, as the locals would say, and no one would hear my cries or come to my aid. I was utterly on my own. Cell phone? Somewhere, probably downstairs. It was too late to worry whether I'd left a door unlocked or a window unlatched. Someone was *already* here in this dark bedroom with me at this very instant, and that was a fact. My position was awkward but the headboard against my back was somewhat comforting. I shifted my weight as I prepared to spring to the floor and then I saw *him*.

It is often said that an invisible threat is more frightening than the visible. This was one of those instances. The *man's movement* had allowed my eyes to resolve his form from the surrounding darkness, a silhouette that defined a mass of amorphous gray nearly identical to the background. My initial assessment was realized:

some son-of-a-bitch had broken into my house, my bedroom to be exact. Childish thoughts of monsters in the night fled and disappeared as if they had never been but an intruder, even a human intruder, in the middle of the night was no less shocking.

“SON-OF-A-BITCH,” I yelled, “I HAVE A GUN AND I’M NOT AFRAID TO USE IT!” I didn’t, of course, have a gun. Always thought it was a stupid idea, that is keeping a gun for protection, but at this moment, well, my threat would have been better backed up by actually having one, that was for sure. There was definitely someone in my room but not a hulking brute: slender. I tensed, ready to defend myself, he wasn’t that big. I could handle this, right? Unless he was armed. Damn, even if he had just a club, I could be in trouble. At five-seven and hundred-thirty pounds I wasn’t exactly King Kong nor did I know squat about fighting. I felt my palms go slick and my stomach rolled into a knot.

Should I go for the light switch? I was new to this house, it being my first night here so quickly finding the wall switch was out. I needed to keep my focus on the intruder. My warning had no apparent impact other than to cause him to move slowly now in my direction, that wasn’t good. It was clear that he knew where I was now. Should I move, jump down and... my thoughts were interrupted. This was most certainly not a male intruder as adult feminine contours became evident. The movement of well formed conical breasts that wobbled from side to side as ‘she’ walked toward me confirmed my latest observation, tiny waist and full hip, a babe, trust me on that.

While it made the situation no less weird, my sense of threat dropped noticeably. A female? Her arms outspread and her hands groping blindly in my general direction, more like a sleepwalker than not, she was

surely as blind in this dark room as I was. My mind flashed through the possibilities, there weren't many. My current girl friend was in Boston. Other than her, what woman would just appear unannounced in my bedroom and trust me, those boobs and hips of my uninvited guest didn't belong to Gloria. The stranger was utterly naked, of that there was no longer any doubt. Between and below those well-rounded hips, at the point where her thighs met, a darker patch of gray suggested pubic hair precisely where one would have expected it to be. A naked woman in my bedroom? "Hey?" I said, terror having twisted into alarm and now simply confusion or was it expectation? She stopped. Full, pouty lips quivered but a fraction of an inch away from mine. Her face was oval though half obscured by what had to be a mass of hair. If this was a gag, well it had been pretty well pulled off, it sure had had me scared shitless. As to my benefactor, I could think of none, which in its own way made the moment all the more delicious. Some scamp in the programming group had bought a prostitute and sent her here as a house warming gift? Unlikely, that wasn't their style. An unknown female admirer? That would be like the second coming of J.C. Possibly a local slut working for the village of Fernwood's Welcoming Wagon? None of these hypotheses had the slightest possibility of being correct. I had plenty of time to consider these things for my uninvited guest just stood there in the dark, so close and, need I say again, naked? Finally I open my mouth to say something entirely stupid, like: hey good looking. Our lips met.

I was engulfed, surrounded by what could have been a cloud of flies. Bits of 'her' got into my eyes and nose and a scream which had sprung unbidden from my throat was cut off as my mouth filled with a horde

of those little nasties that wiggled and walked or so it seemed at the moment. I tumbled head over heels off the bed and onto the floor with a jarring thump. By this time I was fully encased in whatever this was, like a man being eaten alive by a swarm of army ants in the jungle of the Amazon basin perhaps? This was no naked woman but some kind of scary monster from a cheap horror flick. I leaped up carrying that swarm with me, the latter was now a living robe, a frenzied second skin. I stumbled back toward the door. All the while I was trying to scream but no sound issued forth, for obvious reasons. Whatever 'it' was, was now clawing its way down my throat both blocking my airways and cutting, seemingly, effortlessly into my open body cavity as if it were going to devour me, from the inside out. There is nothing quite like the inability to draw in the next breath or feeling that one was literally being eaten alive for triggering mindless panic, either experience would do nicely. I think it was my elbow that hit the light switch on the wall, that response was certainly not a defined act on my part merely accidental contact and nothing more. And abruptly there was nothing. Nothing at all. I sucked in a lung full of air with all the delight of a nearly drowned man and staggered away from the wall.

I blinked in the blinding light, dazzled both by it and the abrupt cessation of the attack. My breath now came in frantic gulps as I looked around still ready to fight or flee. I fully expected to see the insects, for that was now what I thought them to be, in a swarm. I flicked my eyes around the room but found nothing. I examined my body, ran an exploring tongue through my mouth and even dug my fingers into my nose and ears looking for some trace of the attackers, Nothing.

Not even one tiny body to examine. And, oh yes, no trace of a naked woman in my bed room existed, pity.

A dream? A nightmare. Tell that to my heart which continued to slam against the walls of my chest as if it were trying to escape. "Whoa," I muttered to the empty room and myself as I stumbled back to the bed on weak legs and eased down on the edge of the bed. My body was still hanging at the edge of a full blown flight reflex, it was ready to run screaming out of the room and into the night, like that was going to happen. "Hells bells," I muttered as I reached inside my jockey shorts, the only clothing I had on, and scratched absent-mindedly at my balls for a few thoughtful seconds.

I drew in yet more air and waited for my heart to slow. I withdrew my hand from my shorts and held it out in front of my face; my hand quivered like it belonged to a drug addict needing a fix. "Hell of a way to wake up," I sighed, feeling, well, silly. And me a grown man, what next, a night light? I looked at the overhead light and then at the light switch on the wall. A reasonable person would walk over and turn it off, right? That wasn't about to happen, not at this particular moment. My rational mind had already written off the attack as part of a nightmare but my rhinencephalon was of a different opinion. The latter was the same primitive "old" brain, untouched by education or rather untouchable by verbal input that my long dead caveman ancestors relied on, it, my preverbal brain, was, well, illiterate, un-modern, it still accepted the *possibility* of boogey men and other dreadful creatures that lurked in the dark. Better to be safe then... *dead*, right? I jerked my legs up and onto the bed as if by dangling them over the edge was somehow dangerous: an image of *that* ill defined but decidedly creepy nightmare poised



under my bed just waiting to grab me had triggered my latest reaction. God knows I'd always checked under the bed when I was a little kid before going to sleep. I rolled my eyes in disgust with myself. Get over it Brian, it was only a dream. Why didn't that thought comfort me?

There was a solution, of course, though it took a modern, rational brain filled with notions that there were no strange things that went bump in the night to solve the issue. I gathered my courage like a gardener might pluck a few ripe tomatoes off the vine, choosing only those that were ready and, when thus prepared, I sprung lightly to the floor and dropped down on my hands and knees and looked under the bed. God only knows what I would have done had there been *anything* but dust balls there. I wolfed, "Idiot!" And then I stood up. My rational brain was both satisfied and a bit embarrassed.

It still took me five minutes to walk over and turn off the overhead light, two seconds of activity and four minutes and fifty odd seconds of indecision. The experience had been too damn vivid to not be real. Funny, when I first woke up, I had felt mortal terror, ok? Mortal terror. It was like I was five years old again and not a grownup. I really had expected to see a monster, something *clearly* not human. I could see where I was going with this if I continued. Finally I had squared my shoulders and marched over to the light switch and, after an additional moment's hesitation, flipped the switch.



My back slammed against the wall as muscle spasms swept across my body. I lost bladder control, which was all too obvious as a bright warmth ran down my legs. The 'nightmare' attack which had ceased with the onset of the overhead light resumed as if it had been held, like a video recording, on hold. The invasion which had initially ripped into my body cavity now seemed to burst from that location to follow my blood vessels to all parts of my body, relentless, all consuming until... It ended as abruptly as it had begun. Breathless, yes, but other than the stench of urine, I seemed to be whole. Ok, now I was scared *beyond* shitless.

I fumbled for and found the switch and was rewarded with light, sweet delicious light. That light would remain on, ok? That was no damn dream unless all of this was a dream. Forget about going to bed, or sleep or even staying here in this house one second longer. I pushed away from the wall, tested my legs and then, reality warped yet again. Breasts, for that's all they could be, fought both gravity and inertia, dipping down and then up while simultaneously swaying from side to side in response to my sudden movement. My back and shoulders responded to the additional weight automatically, catching and then, seemingly, anticipating the continued disturbances to my center of gravity. Hair, of such length that its weight was appreciable, added stress to my neck muscles until they, like my back and shoulder muscles, achieved a kind of steady state balance. My hips, now cocked in a wide, fertile stance, thrust my knees together. The flight of mass from my upper body to below my waist and my sud-

den knocked-kneed stance was enough to throw me off balance.

I fell to the bedroom floor, all knees and elbows. Of course it wasn't the sudden fall that had sent me over the edge and into abject terror. The scream that issued from my throat could not have been mine, too shrill. My fully padded bottom took the worst of the fall but that heavy right breast, also suffered. I sat up and attempted to clutch that damaged organ, which continued to throb even as it bobbed and swayed. There was nothing there. NOTHING! I looked down at my chest, it was my chest, belly, crotch, legs. "What the hell," I groaned. Electric fear shot up my spine. That voice was my voice but in falsetto and that nonexistent but injured breast continued to throb even as I ran an exploring hand across my chest. That pain was localized where no flesh existed, a few inches above the surface of my chest. A phantom pain, a 'ghost' pain. "Where are you?" I said, for I could feel a vivid presence. No answer. The desire to look over my shoulder was an itch I had to scratch. I did but there was but unoccupied space behind me.

I rolled onto my knees to stand but stopped abruptly. "Um." I said to no one, not even myself. Hair that felt like it went almost all the way down my back had shifted as had those phantom breasts. On my hands and knees, those breasts pointed to the earth, the tug was all too evident. And still that right breast throbbed and that mass of hair continued to shift until it spilled slowly off my back forming a pool on the floor covering my 'phantom' shoulder, arm and hand in silky lushness. I pulled myself up and stood, brushing back hair that still clung to my face or so the tactile impressions suggested. There was no visual parallel to the tactile and proprioceptive signals my brain was re-

ceiving. Having never felt literally two bodies, two realities, at the same time was disorienting to say the least. That they existed in 'near' spatial agreement made motor control possible but not sure. Four hands, four legs, each of which seemed equally real, was almost too much for my brain to handle, which was mine, which was 'real'? As I said, fortunately the additions to my somatic tactile-proprioceptive 'map' lined up, more or less; my 'new' right hand was roughly where my old right hand was. The excessively long hair and those 'breasts' had no counterpart and could not be resolved.

My brain wasn't equipped for eight limbs, or at least that seemed to be the case. In moments, my two right hands became one and the accommodation continued until a 'fuzzy' singularity emerged though the slight difference in height could not be fully resolved and those aspects of the two bodies which had no adequate counterpart, remained distinct. My 'new' breasts and long hair and my 'old' testicles and penis were uniquely highlighted for they could not be fused into one reality. I felt decidedly bottom heavy but not as extreme as before as if my brain had made an average of my male and this alien 'female' form, where averaging was possible. It took me a few seconds to appreciate that I would be able to move without collapsing into a heap.

I stumbled into the bathroom like a Frankenstein monster newly born of lightning, flipped on the lights and then leaned forward to inspect my face in the mirror all the while gripping the sink with all four hands. It was me, five o'clock shadow and all. My hair, a short, tangled mess. It was so incredibly odd for I could still feel those breasts and the weight of that long hair, as I leaned forward to inspect my face even if I couldn't

touch or see them. And *that* hair, the likes of which I had never known, a living, rambunctious entity with its own purpose, demanded attention like a spoiled child. And there was something worse or at least just as odd, the grimace I'd made to my image, *wasn't mine*. More toothy than I would have smiled, exposing both lower and upper teeth, a regular 'Rose Queen Parade' smile. And while I was thinking about that last discovery, one of my hands began to work and adjust my hair, but not my hair, *that* hair if you know what I mean.

"You're inside me, aren't you, huh? Damn it, answer me!" Nothing happened. I jerk my hand away, the one that was playing with my ghostly locks, and made it into a fist. I could control it but... so could 'she'. I realized that my first plan had been the best plan; I had to get out of here, out of this house. As I changed my underwear and pulled on clothing, as I hastily made ready for flight, I realized that my movements were being guided more by the phantom androgynous body than the one I could see. Finally ready to leave the house, car keys in hand, I hurried down stairs and across to the entranceway. The mirror behind the coat rack threw back a mocking image. Me, with knees together, hips gliding in arcs and elbows tucked in, near my waist. I stopped, straighten up, and walked, almost stiff legged, the rest of the way past that damn mirror. I made my hands into fists and held them down to my side. Fuck me, but I was in a battle for control of my very own body.

I know it's stupid, but I had been possessed, certainly by a woman and possibly by a dead woman. It wasn't much of a hypothesis but it beat the alternative, that I was freaking bonkers and ready for a straight jacket. Neither concept was the slightest bit comforting.

I looked down at my male body before getting into my car. In the brief moment that I had focused on what was happening and not on what I was doing, my arms had crossed over those phantom breasts and my hands clutched my rib cage, it was an all too familiar, feminine defensive posture like my mother would take when threatened or unsure. My right leg was straight but my left was already cocked bringing my left knee in contact with my right calf. Oh yeah, I had control over this body, if, that is, all that I focused on was my every movement.

~oOo~

Mr. Gardenworth wasn't a man to be trifled with, leastwise if one were a resident of Fernwood California. Most realtors are not, well, exactly pillars of the local community, that is to say they were usually the small fry players and not the grand movers and doers of said community but then most realtors don't own the one and only bank in town either. There was an obvious potential conflict of interest, to say the least, since Morton Gardenworth could both sell the property and provide the necessary loan to support that purchase. Not surprisingly, his was the only real-estate brokerage currently in the village. Having said that, I might also add that in a previous life he must have been either a used car salesman, dealer in medical snake oil or perhaps a carnival barker, for there was something entirely unwholesome about the man: insincere, calculating and, well, slimy. More relevant, he was as dangerous as a rattlesnake and yours truly had played the part of the helpless mouse, soon to be dinner. What he had was my money, ok? Every dime and penny I could scrape together had gone into the down payment

of my house and the three quarter of an acre upon which that house rested and he held the mortgage.

This wasn't just a house, it was my future. Like so many souls trapped in the mega-city called Los Angeles, I had longed for the quieter, more natural life of a small village, not that I knew anything about such a life. Maybe I'd read one too many articles in the LA Times about escaping the pressures of an overcrowded, often heartless and always dangerous city. A city where 'rush traffic' began at six A.M and seemed to continue unabated until the wee hours of the following morning, the freeways were anything but free, mostly long, very long prisons filled with irate and sometimes gun slinging citizens unjustly deprived of their freedom. And the village of Fernwood seemed perfect, considering most of my business could be conducted via internet now. Perfect indeed until last night which had been my first night in my new home-business.

As I sat outside of Mr. Gardenworth's office waiting for permission to see the great man, his Nubian guardian, a young woman who manned the gateway gave me another long, studied look. I must have looked terrible, I certainly felt wretched. A night almost without sleep could do that to a person but my problem was far deeper, more twisted then mere lack of sleep. I'd lived a nightmare that had shoved me to the very brink of insanity. My very understanding of reality, of fact verse nightmare, had been bent like a pretzel as if I'd gone on an LSD bender and then overdosed.

I had spent part of the night at the Denny's just off highway 101 until I had over stayed my welcome and then moved to a twenty-four hour truck stop for the rest of the night or rather that was the plan. About two-thirty in the a.m. a trucker had shown, well, totally

unwanted interest in yours truly. Doubtlessly, those feminine mannerisms had been noted. I was lucky; he might have come at me with fists rather than a smile. I guess there are gay truckers, and why not? Anyhow, I spent the rest of the night at a roadside rest stop in my car. The industrial yellow, high intensity 'security' lamps that lined the parking area made sleep nearly impossible but that light was also the source of whatever subjective safety I could achieve. Her presence hung like a Guillotine blade poised over my head. Sometime after four I'd fallen asleep and when I awoke, just after six, she was gone. Ok, it is a pretty good guess that 'it' was a 'she' and there was no doubt at all that 'she' was gone.

I reached up and touched my chin. Stubble met and resisted my finger. Yeah, I'd not shaved but making a good impression on Mr. Gardenworth was entirely irrelevant now. The Nubian gatekeeper jerked in response to some unseen signal, "Mr. Gardenworth will see you now Mr. Brian."

"Umm, it's Drake, Miss, Brian Drake," I countered and then shrugged my shoulders. Not that it matters, I thought to myself as I stood and walked past her desk and then opened the door. The office wasn't at all like the man for whom a bright, plaid sports coat, red bow tie and white buck shoes went together like an olive in a martini, it was dark and formal. Heavy drapes covered the floor to ceiling window that ran the length of the long room and thick, dark carpet seemed to eat most of the light that eked from the lamp that sat upon Mr. Gardenworth's huge mahogany desk. Everything was heavy and dark and not a trace of the bright California sunlight was evident. It could have been Nome Alaska on an endless winter night and yes the air con-



ditioning was turned to the icebox setting: cold and dark, this room fit my current mood very well.

Mr. Gardenworth jerked up out of his chair like a Jack-in-the box. "Mr. Drake," he bellowed in his usual 'good-fellow-well-met' voice that dripped with warmth like barbeque sauce on hot ribs. "Please be a good fellow and close the door, mustn't let the hot air in, right?"

"Yes sir," I said as a hand soon pummeled my back and an offensive but expensive cologne assaulted my nose. He grabbed me by my right hand as I turned, still thumping me on the back with his other hand while now pumping my hand as if to draw water from an extra deep well. I was pretty sure his artificial good humor would soon fade.

"So?" He said looking me in the face, a broad smile rode like a runaway train across his lips, only his eyes said otherwise for there was a familiar calculating coldness about them like an odds maker at a gladiator contest with the participants in a fight to the death.

I broke free of his embrace and headed toward the side chair beside his desk. I was trying to collect my thoughts, which is to say, my first impulse was to immediately begin screaming at the man and that seemed hopelessly inappropriate and doomed to backfire. When I finally spoke, he'd already reclaimed his throne behind that massive block of long dead wood. "Sir?" I said, struggling for the right words. After a short pause I blurted out what had to be the least controversial statement I could make under the circumstances. "I... I can't live in that house."

"Excuse me?" He responded, one eyebrow elevated slightly. Certainly where I lived was of no concern to him.

“What I mean...” I gulped and my head spun. This wasn’t going at all well. “Could we just, you know, negate that loan, the whole deal as if it never happened?” I looked at him. His face was now totally blank and not a muscle moved. If ‘no’ was ever written on a face, it was on his at this moment. The anger inside me which I had contained up to this point only by exceptional effort finally boiled over or, to be entirely accurate, I erupted like Mount Etna. I jerked to my feet. My fists were clenched and my blood started to thunder in my ears, I was out of control, ok? The Hell with it: “DAMN IT ASSHOLE! YOU HAD TO KNOW THAT FUCKING HOUSE WAS HAUNTED!”

“Excuse me?” He said, his calm was perfect. Perhaps he was accustomed to being yelled at or referred to as an ‘asshole’ or perhaps my outburst was expected. He folded one hand over the other and looked at me like a thoughtful adult might intercede with a distraught but spoiled child.

“I SAID...” I pause and caught myself and then, in a more normal tone of voice though it was still ragged and harsh to my ears, I said, “You knew, didn’t you that there was a ghost there right? Coming over here this morning I stopped by the coffee shop...”

“Oh Lord, you must have talked to Art Hobbs, correct?” He rolled his eyes, “The man is a certifiable nut you know, bonkers and a drunk to boot. So he said that the old Sweet house had a ghost, huh, and you freaked out.”

“Yeah. One Rebecca Sweet to be exact.”

Mr. Gardenworth giggled. “Rebecca Sweet? That would be funny if it wasn’t so sad,” he rolled his eyes and then shrugged, “Not that it matters. The contract we have is legal Mr. Drake. If you chose to default to

the bank, well that would be your decision. I'm afraid getting a judge to accept the existence of a ghost as a legitimate reason to void the contract between you and the bank is extremely unlikely, especially the ghost of Rebecca Sweet." He laughed.

"And my down payment?"

"I'm sorry Mr. Drake, this is a business, not a charity."

Perhaps it was as much the smugness that grew on his face as it was the realization I'd been had but my anger threatened to transform into inappropriate but otherwise satisfying behavior. Had Mr. Gardenworth not jerked his head back like a turtle I would have landed one on his chops.

"MR. DRAKE!" He shouted even as he pushed back his chair and stood up. His eyes were indignant but they showed no fear.

Before he could say another word I added, "You'll hear from my lawyer Mr. Gardenworth." I swear to God, a small smile worked his way across his face. Damn it, he had heard this or something like this before. I didn't wait for him to reply, I turned and left but not before I slammed the door behind me. The explosive sound that door made felt good, if inadequate. What was I thinking, lawyer? Like most people I knew nothing about the workings of law but I had a pretty good notion selling a ghost tale to a judge wouldn't be a winner.

As I stumbled out into the mid-morning sunlight, I didn't know what to do. Going back to that house was clearly out. I wasn't stupid, ok? When that ghost, spirit, whatever, left me this morning, I knew I had ducked a bullet with my name on it, damned if I hadn't. It had

had her ghostly fingers wrapped around my throat in a hold I couldn't break.

I turned and looked back at Mr. Gardenworth's office. If he had done this before, there would be a record, a trail. Multiple transactions on the same house in a relatively short period of time, that would be evidence, right? County records were in Ashville, not far at all and probably digital as well. I was, after all, a convicted 'hacker'. Yeah, I could get that data, county government had security made of cellophane. People would know, locals? I went back to his receptionist, "Excuse me?" She looked up. "Do you know where I can find Mr. Hobbs, um, Art Hobbs?"

She hesitated as if she wasn't going to answer but then she looked at her watch, "The Red Room bar doesn't open until two."

"Red Room?"

She nodded, "Across the street. He's usually there Mr. Brian, except when he isn't."

I nodded thanks and headed back outside. The old man I talked to earlier this morning did have the rummy-eyes of a drunk. More important, he appeared to know something about the ghost of Sweet house. I headed back to my car, it was only nine-fifty in the morning and there were a lot of things to do before I talked to Mr. Hobbs. And one of those things was downright un-nerving.



I write code. It is what I do for a living and, to be entirely honest, it was more or less who I was. As a youthful hacker I'd spent some time on the wrong side

of the law. It was Mr. Nixon, Tom Nixon, who had saved me from jail time or worse, a 'real' job. Tom didn't know squat about programming, he was a businessman, but he knew how to make money. Who better to write security software than a semi-reformed hacker? Anyhow, it was clear that there would be no final solution, the more society became dependant on digital devices, the more the powers that be needed new security code to be written and it follows like thunder after a lightning strike, the more hackers that would be drawn in by the challenge to defeat said security, yeah an endless loop. I had 'job security' to be sure. Anyhow, old Tom didn't care where I worked as long as 'product' was created and delivered to home base. Two years ago, after we made a big sale to an IBM subcontractor, he even gave me and Toddy Thunks, my pal and fellow ex-hacker, a nice piece of the company, so in part I was working for myself now.

Trust me, I was as happy as a kitten working a ball of twine. Oh yeah, I assumed that eventually I would find the right gal and, with her help, start turning out a string of kids. This house in Fernwood would have been perfect for that, or so I had thought.

Finding the right gal had never seemed to me exactly the easiest task in the world. She'd have to accept that I would spend most of my waking hours in front of a workstation, not many go for that. What I did wasn't a nine to five thing, ok? Solving a really complex problem might take months of serious concentration, sometimes sleep and time to chow down on junk food were the only gaps in an otherwise 24-7 operation. So yeah, even dating was a sometimes thing for me. My mother had no hope of ever seeing grandchildren though I had some, well, I had *one* candidate in mind for an eventual wife though Gloria would have freaked

out if I said that to her now. And now *this*, a ghost? This house, this *haunted* house had ended whatever immediate dreams I might have had of living and working here and, may I say, marriage? The money I had invested, short of legal magic, was surely gone.

So why was I now sitting in the driveway beside my haunted house? This wasn't one of those stupid horror movies, you know the ones in which say: a sweet young thing decides to take a walk in her see-through P.J.s, at midnight, oh yeah, lets checkout the local cemetery she says and then... It was about ten a.m., all the world was in bright California sunshine and I was no sweet young thing in a nightgown. In the dining room sat an almost new Sun workstation, I mean that sweetheart wasn't going to sit here abandoned by me, ghost or no ghost. We're talking bread and butter and true love. Add to my workstation, two laptops, a notebook and an assortment of other 'necessary' toys were also captives. And yet, in spite of the shining sun, I wasn't entirely sure if I was going to be able to enter 'her' domain. Did she even care whether it was day or night?

I don't think I was any more or less brave than the next man, nor any less stupid, it would seem. The whole idea of ghosts or any other supernatural thing would have sounded utterly foolish had you asked me say twenty-four hours earlier. Last night changed all of that, forever. Sharing your body with a dead person? Ok, I didn't know zip about the supernatural and I planned on changing that but I figured I was probably lucky that she finally let go of me and I sure didn't want to give her another shot. But I damn well wasn't about to give up my workstation, not a fifteen thousand dollar machine, after having been snookered by Mr. Gardenworth for forty-K and change.

It was like diving into cold water, get in quick or don't go at all. I wasn't going upstairs to that bedroom where she 'lurked', right? I know I was rationalizing the heck out of things but damn it, I just had to save my workstation.

Twenty minutes later I had the Sun in the trunk of the car and my favorite laptop on the seat beside me. I was intact, unaltered and, well, relieved. As to all the rest of my worldly possessions, someone else would move them eventually, ok, but not me. As I backed out of the driveway I looked up toward those windows in the master bedroom, they were empty and looked entirely innocent. A shiver worked its way up my spine until it rested just below my neck. I softly dammed Mr. Gardenworth and the LA Times, the latter for suggesting Fernwood as an ideal place to live.



I was sitting at the local Starbuck's and had been since retrieving my 'essentials'. I had already sent a text to Mr. Nixon telling him I would probably be back in LA, tomorrow. I didn't tell him why I had changed my plans. I sure didn't tell him about the ghost. I might, eventually, but probably not. Believers in ghosts and UFOs tended to lose some credibility in the 'real' world. Of course, if I did find a lawyer willing to take this case, well, I guess I would have to deal with that, if, or when a legal action had a real chance of succeeding.

I spent a couple hours on the Internet trying to get up to speed. Oh yeah, try "ghost" and see what you get. It was hard to believe just how much worldwide bandwidth was being used up by persons interested in

the supernatural. Like most broad searches, there was a lot more pure crap than gold even by Internet standards; my crap indicator was way over the top on this one. If I said I found anything useful, I would have been lying. Well there were at least some interesting things. There was an article in "Physics Letters" written by a Super-String theorist, for example, that argued that consciousness was a physical fact, probably an organized and coherent 'cloud' of sub-atomics and in that same article he suggested such clouds provided a potential basis for none other than ghosts if coherence could be maintained after death. OK, all I saw was an abstract of the article so I can't quote line and verse nor make the necessary mathematical arguments.

People that studied ghosts, and there were a slew of them, had developed statistics that suggested that "personal haunting" were actually more common than "fixed site haunting". Apparently the signals emitted from a warm, living body, like yours truly, could act like a spirit magnet. Well maybe those 'ghost hunters' weren't entirely full of shit after all. That first image of Miss Sweet moving toward me fit the pattern, I mean she didn't really appear to have 'seen' me in the literal sense of the word but she had moved relentlessly in more or less the right direction. There was even a debate on as to whether or not a ghost could, well 'manifest' itself fully in the material world. I had spent almost nine hours in what most certainly felt like a woman's body and trust me, those ghostly tits responded to both gravity and inertia. But yeah, she hadn't materialized except in my mind.

Being actually possessed was considered to be truly rare (read impossible) and, kick-me-in-the-face, but the Catholic church no longer formally recognized spirit possessions as such, so forget about the Catholic priest



with the Irish accent and rosy cheeks riding to my rescue, not that Fernwood even had a Catholic church let alone an Irish priest. It might have been hard to get an exorcism; thank God, she'd taken a hike on her own. Normally I would have found all of this absolutely funny but my funny bone was numb at the moment.

Oh yeah, more questionable internet data: the odds of me surviving an extended possession intact weren't good, not good at all, according to one Dr. Balvin Lewis. I might add, what kind of doctor this Lewis was wasn't clarified on that web site, the degree could have come off a matchbook cover. "There is the principle of homeostasis to be reckoned with", he had written. I think he swiped *that* idea from basic Bio 101 but in a nut shell, we (that is me and Miss Sweet) would have eventually average out our essential 'natures', a little me, a little her and then, go to hell, we would be... well you got the picture. My experience last night definitely felt like an 'averaging' mechanism had been at work. Maybe Dr. Lewis wasn't completely off his nut.

On a less positive note, if one could get less positive, it was generally accepted that 'possession' by a ghost, only occurred if the living individual was exceptionally 'weak minded' or of extremely modest 'will power', duh! That is to say, if I had been possessed, and I had been based on the descriptions I had read, I was either stupid or wimpy, fuck me and the horse I rode in on. I looked up at the clock, just enough time to grab a burger before heading over to Mr. Hobbs favorite watering hole. I muttered as I left the coffee shop: "Weak minded?" I was a damn good programmer and that was pretty heavy brain labor, I must lack will power, I concluded, or maybe I was just really unlucky.



## Chapter 2

I was expecting to find a broken down drunk setting, already half stewed, in a bar that had seen better

days. Contrary to the outside of the building, the Red Room was a rather fancy bar and steak house restaurant with opulent red leather seating, heavy red drapes and red, of course, silk wall paper. Thick red carpet ran through the bar section but ended as old oak hardwood floors replaced the carpet where the room opened up into a substantial dining area. I now wished that I hadn't had that burger.

The bar itself was dimly lit, the recessed lights giving the room a golden-red glow that complimented the extensive brass work and the small lamps in the booths, candles inside red glass chimneys, continued the theme. I approached the bartender, a young man in a short, red velvet jacket, "I'm looking for Mr. Hobbs?"

"Boss?" The young man said, looking into the darkest corner of the bar. "Someone here to see you."

I turned and there was Mr. Hobbs, still rummy-eyed but freshly shaven and wearing a conservative sports coat and tie. He wasn't the broken down drunk I had been expecting and the papers scattered across the table in the booth looked like receipts. The Boss? So much for premature assumptions. "Mr. Hobbs? We talked this morning?"

He motioned for me to approach and as I got closer I think he finally recognized me, "Ah- Mr. Drake. What can I do for you?"

"I need to know more about this Miss Sweet, ah, the ghost you mentioned this morning?"

"Jerry, set the man up with whatever he needs, on me."

"Um, that's not necessary Mr. Hobbs."

“Oh but you’re wrong, Mr. Drake, a good stiff drink is precisely what you need. Jerry, my usual and whatever Mr. Drake prefers, perhaps a good single malt?”



“I guess it is pretty simple, Mr. Gardenworth is running a scam. Sells that house and then scares off the buyer after the deal is closed, or rather the ghost scares off the buyer. Then the house goes into foreclosure and...”

“I think you are sniffing on the wrong trail, Mr. Drake. That house has sat there empty for over five years before you bought it. Mr. Gardenworth was probably only too happy to have that mortgage in place of an empty old house.”

“Seriously?”

“Gardenworth is no crook, just motivated by avarice. He bought the old Sweet homestead for little more than back taxes and what was left on the mortgage from the previous owner and sold off over five hundred acres of prime farm land for a handsome profit. He should have just had that old house torn down and sold the land it sat on with the rest but he couldn’t. No Mr. Drake, it was just greed.”

“And the ghost of Miss Sweet?”

“A long story. Anyhow, none of the locals would touch that property, needless to say, and outsiders, well they usually wanted either a house in or near the village or a ‘real’ farm. The Sweet house was neither. Out in the middle of nowhere with no land? And then you came along.” He shrugged as if to say there was one born every minute. “You want to take

Gardenworth to court? Easy enough to prove that he and everybody in Lee country 'knew' about the ghost of Rebecca Sweet but to be honest, nobody has ever seen her, the ghost that is. She is just local myth. No judge is going to rule that Gardenworth should have informed you about the local culture."

"I.. I saw her, last night."

"Saw?"

"Felt, ok, I really, really felt her." I gulped down the last of my Scotch, chewed on my lip and then said, "More than that, but you'd think I'm crazy..."

"You already lost me Mr. Drake."

"Call me Brian, Ok?"

"OK, Brian, I think I *will* call you crazy." He didn't laugh but he did stare at me for a good three seconds. "That wasn't Rebecca Sweet."

"Huh?"

"You said she?"

"Yeah. Sure." God knows I remembered the body, those heavy breasts, the whole nine yards.

"Rebecca Sweet, was a man."

I just stared at him and finally he went on, "I told you it was a long story. Jerry, another round, please and, make it a double for Mr. Drake, he'll need it. Now where were we, oh yes, I knew Miss Sweet when I was just a boy. She was already old then, really old especially if one is a child. She died, oh, about nineteen-fifty-nine or, no, early sixties, anyhow she had to be nearly a hundred by then. There was nothing remarkable about her death until the Medical Examiner was notified by her mortician that Miss Rebecca Sweet

was a male. Well, small town and all, one can't keep a secret like that. So that's how the story began."

"She was a he? Gay?"

"Weren't no gays then, just homosexuals. Living the life of an old maid, who knows why. Anyhow, that was the beginning of the Rebecca Sweet myth. About eight-ten months later a man from back East bought what was left of the Sweet homestead, about six hundred acres and the house and out-buildings, his name was Mark Bormann. Ordinary fellow, hardworking farmer, married with three kids, World War II vet. Now this is where it gets interesting Brian. Within a few weeks, Mr. Bormann's wife and children, left him, just flat out took off. The man himself disappeared from view, mostly, only coming to town when he had to and cutting off all other social ties. People started talking, things they'd seen, lots of strangers in and out of the old Sweet homestead, you know 'odd' people, hippies and such. And then Mark Bormann appeared one fine morning at the old coffee shop we used to have. I wasn't there, I was in the Army by then, drafted, you know, Vietnam," he paused, "sorry, that's irrelevant. I was told that Mr. Bormann was wearing women's clothing, makeup, the works and moving like he had a corn cob up his ass, if you follow me? Of course he got thrown in the clink quicker than you could say Jack Robinson, it was the sixties but it was also Fernwood."

"Women's clothes?"

"That ain't the half of it. Anyhow, he gave his name as Rebecca Sweet."

I raised my eyebrows, "No shit."

“Yeah, stood by that name like it was the only one he ever had. Eventually he spent some time down at that mental facility in Oxnard. After ‘she’ returned, she lived at the farm, but didn’t work it. Tenant farmers did that. Spent more and more time away and finally moved to San Francisco full time in the late eighties. The people in the village were only too happy to see her leave. Apparently the new Miss Sweet had been using that house as little more than a weekend party place for out-of-towners for most of that time.

“Hell of a story,” I said, a little breathless.

“That farm sat there idle for a couple of years. Miss Sweet kept up on her taxes but nothing else, finally she rented out the farm to a local boy, Sammy Yates.”

“And?”

“And? Oh I see what you are getting at. Ah no. Sammy and his wife had a bunch of kids while living there and ah- nothing unusual happened that I’m aware of. Sammy’s got his own place now and he and his wife and his kids that still live at home are doing just fine as best as I can tell.

“He didn’t become another Miss Sweet.”

“No and Sammy’s family lived there until Miss Sweet returned in ah- ‘o5. After Miss Sweet died, a couple years later, no heirs, the bank, Mr. Gardenworth in other words, took over the property and we are, five years later, setting here still talking about Miss Sweet.”

“So nothing happened to this Yates guy.”

“Nor any of his family to the best of my knowledge.”

I wrinkled my nose, “It kind’a weakens this whole “Miss Sweet” myth, doesn’t it?”

Mr. Hobbs shrugged, "Depends on what you're thinking, remember while Sammy was living at the farm, Mr. Bormann was still being haunted by that ghost. If there was only one ghost Brian, it was already busy with the former Mr. Bormann."

"Oh."

"Anyhow, it goes to figure. It came back to Fernwood with the second Miss Sweet and when he or she died..."

"Yeah, I get the picture. Its plausible, one ghost, one possession at a time. If I had any doubts about running away from that house before, they're put to rest now."

"Running away?"

I looked at my watch, "I can be back to LA by five, even with rush traffic." I looked at him, "Mr. Hobbs, I can't thank you enough."

"And the lawsuit?"

"Ah- pretty much dead on arrival." I shrugged, it was only money after all. "And I think you're wrong about one thing. This ghost is definitely female, trust me, I know." He looked at me strangely. "I was literally possessed by her last night, she was inside me. Thank God she split, maybe I wasn't her type, anyhow, the old woman you knew, the first Miss Sweet, was probably just another victim."

"Interesting notion Mr. Drake."

"I sure would like to know more about that house and your Miss Sweet, the 'real' Miss Sweet. I love a good puzzle you know, as long as it doesn't get too personal, but there must have been a 'real' Miss Rebecca Sweet at some point." I laughed and rolled my eyes, "Whatever. I really need to get on with my life," I



stood up and shook the hand he offered, "and again thanks for the drinks and your time Mr. Hobbs."

"You have me thinking now Brian. I'll start sniffing around, hmm."

"If you find out anything, let me know." I gave him my cell phone number and an e-mail account which he wrote down. Who knows if that thing could be destroyed perhaps I might save my investment. Neither possibility seemed likely however, I was no Ghost Buster, programming was my game.



I watched Fernwood California retreat from my rear view mirror as I headed toward highway 101 and LA. The sting of losing forty thousand and change seemed small potatoes now. My future was good, lots of money would follow, now that we were 'profit-sharing'. Mr. Nixon had been right, writing security software wasn't where the money was to be made. He all but gave away our basic software packages to our clients. It was the updates, the endless updates, that were necessary, in which a fortune could be made. No security package could be created that would work forever. The better the program, the more interest hackers took in breaking it. Different hackers were attracted to different institutions depending upon their motives: money, power, politics or just plain orneriness. Mr. Nixon sold 'insurance' much as did Prudential or the Mafia, *we* sold protection.

Last night, however, had changed my life forever. There was no doubt, not the slightest doubt, in my mind that some supernatural force had interacted with me. The very term 'supernatural' was probably the

hardest pill to swallow. I would be far more comfortable with a scientific explanation, like the one suggested by that Super String theorist. Supernatural 'thingies' didn't need to behave lawfully and along with that was a shit load of corn, you know ghosts, get angels, god(s) or God. I wasn't about to go that way unless led by a ring in my nose by a very strong force. Supernatural was a synonym for irrational and irrational programmers produced shit, trust me. If anyone in the universe seeks order, it is the code rat, the hacker, computers are filled with one and zeros, there are no fractions, no uncertainty and no fuzzy 'soul'.

I spent most of my trip back to LA on the phone. None of the people I knew or worked with could exist without remaining in continuous accessibility. Multi-tasking was the norm, not the exception. Before I got down to Santa Barbra, I was fully up to speed on the ongoing projects and anything else one might want to know. Matt Drew offered me the use of his apartment tonight. Matt didn't expect to spend much time there for the next week or so. I knew Matt well, he actually preferred 'living' in the 'Cave', which was the primary geek site at our facility. The junk food was free and cots were scattered around like so many playing cards after a game of fifty-two pickup. Of all the people I talked to that afternoon, I did not mention the real reason I was returning to LA. It was one thing to experience a ghost and quite another to convince others of that possibility. I had flown in a flying saucer but I wasn't about to start waving my UFO banner. Still, I had to share this with someone.

It would be about nine in the P.M. in Boston and almost a certainty that my gal was still at her lab at M.I.T.  
"Gloria, hey."



I was at Matt's apartment after stopping at his landlady's for a key. Prior to that I had picked up some emergency supplies, like a pair of blue jeans, a couple of button down white shirts, jockey shorts, four pair, an electric shaver and toothbrush, you know stuff. When I left Fernwood, I'd abandoned almost everything I owned, down to the most basics. It was only just stuff though and frankly, except for that new bed and mattress, now sitting in the monster's lair, not worth piss. A shave and shower, was God's sent, as was yet another burger, this one from Burger King. I was about as much at peace as a man could be considering the events of the last twenty-four hours.

Matt's place was clean, spotless, due in no small part to the fact that he had maid service and the obvious, he was seldom here. He was a true minimalist, other than a couch, coffee table and a flat screen TV, the living room was empty. The kitchen looked as if it had never been used except for the sodas that literally filled the refrigerator. Not a pot or pan in sight, nor anything to eat. Burger in hand, I took a coke and headed for the bedroom. I wouldn't be long for this world having had probably less than an hour of sleep last night and probably not two hours the night before I moved. I pulled back the drapes letting in the last of the sun light, the bright orb was just poised above the horizon. Lights from the towers downtown hadn't begun to take effect as yet and the sky was livid with reds and purples. I sat the coke on the floor beside the bed, eased down and began to have dinner as I watched the light show.

Looking back I can say that I was totally unaware of what was happening as that orb of brilliant light slipped from view. Had I been more knowledgeable, more tuned to myself rather than the view, I would have felt her, slowly gathering power even as sunlight still sprang off the clouds. It wasn't darkness at all but the direct light from the sun that had so corrupted her existence that I had remained unaware of her continued presence in my body all day. She hadn't fled at sunrise but merely hid, drawn back like a flower that only bloomed at night. As I balled up the wrapping the burger had come in and twisted around to reach the soda can on the floor, I felt the loose roll of unfettered breasts drawn by gravity, phantom hair followed in the same direction, crossing what was now our more rounded cheek. I didn't scream but my gut seemed to turn to water. "Fuck me," I said in that now familiar androgynous voice through what felt like lips that were too fat. I rolled back and looked at the ceiling. I was tired, too damn tired to deal with this shit again.

And then it struck me like a fist in my stomach; her dead grip on me was truly relentless. It was I and not that house in Fernwood that was haunted. I could have stayed there or at a motel 6 for all the good that would have done me. Images of the 'original' Miss Sweet, that ancient old man-woman and Mr. Bormann, soon to be, the second coming of Rebecca Sweet, flashed in my mind. Of course I had no actual images only those constructed by Mr. Hobbs description and my imagination but they were no less vivid for all that. I was fucked, truly fucked, unless I could discover and defeat this thing. It wasn't a battle I would have sought but it was one from which I couldn't run.

I rolled over on my side, squishing a breast between the mattress and me. "Fuck you," I muttered softly as

sleep found and threatened to overcome me. Tomorrow she would be gone or at least out of sight again. Fresh I might find a loose thread here, something I could pull and unravel this thing, this curse. I wonder how much time I have until, well, until I was the next Rebecca Sweet. I don't think Gloria was going to be very happy with me if that happened, that last thought brought a weird smile to 'our' lips and then I was gone.

~oOo~

"Good morning Mr. Hobbs."

He looked up at me from his morning coffee. It was yesterday morning all over again. He was wearing a rumpled white shirt and sporting a forest of second growth underbrush as he had been at our first meeting. His rummy eyes widened in surprise, "And good morning to you, Brian. Ah- I have to admit I'm surprised to see you so, ah- soon. Nothing bad, I hope?"

I sat down across from him uninvited. All things considered I probably looked better than I had the morning before. Nine hours of sleep and two showers can do that. My shirt was new as were my jeans. As soon as the waitress took my order I turned my full attention to him. "She's got me Mr. Hobbs, by my short hairs."

"Rebecca?" I nodded. "How?"

"She had never left me. I guess she hides during the daylight. I was in LA last night, LA, right? And then at sunset, boom."

"Boom?"

"Trust me, it's like two bodies occupying the same space. Her, me, all mixed up and it gets pretty crowded

inside one skin." I looked at him, "I came back to fight her, if I can." Truth I had no idea of what to do. I had already spent half the trip up from LA taking to Gloria. By the time I was done, she must have concluded I was bonkers but, more importantly; she was coming here to help me as soon as she could catch a flight and drive up from LA. "I need information from you Mr. Hobbs."

"I really haven't had time to learn anything more than what I already told you last night."

"No, it about stuff you *might* know."

"Like?"

"The old woman you knew as Miss Sweet, she never, ever hinted that she was possessed?"

"I didn't know her well, as you can imagine, we were of entirely different generations. She traveled a lot or had another home somewhere else, so I don't think anyone in the village knew her all that well either. She liked to spend the summers in Fernwood and not much more."

"I understand. But it did come as a shock to the town that she wasn't a she." He nodded. "So it follows that she probably had kept mum about his-her situation. And Mr. Bormann? Not a word either?"

"I wasn't here, as you remember, so it would be all hear-say. But as far as I know, it was when he came to town all dressed up that his condition became apparent. Your point?"

"Me. I'm still talking, to you at least. She hasn't stopped me yet."

"Stopped you?"

"Hells-bells Mr. Hobbs..."

“Call me Art, Uncle Art, all my friends do.”

“Uncle Art?” I shook my head, “Ok, *Uncle Art*, she might want to ride this pony until it drops but she sure doesn’t want half of M.I.T. checking her out with all its gadgets. She’s definitely a low profile kind’a ghost is my guess.”

“M.I.T.?”

“Yeah, the marines are coming all the way from Boston, if I know my girl friend. What I’m trying to say is, hell, if I suddenly stop talking about this ghost, then she’s found a way to shut me up.” I was ringing my hands now in obvious frustration, “Last night, I had dreams but they weren’t dreams as much as brain-washing. If anything happens to me, I want you to remember, to know that she found a way to zip up my mouth. Burn the fucking house down if that happens, can you promise me? Uncle Art?”

“You’re serious.”

“Couldn’t be more so.” He raised an eyebrow but said nothing. If anyone believed me, it was him. And if he didn’t?

“What did the first Miss Sweet look like?”

“She was a very old woman, what can I say?”

“Pictures of her when she was younger?”

“I can check around.”

“And the second Miss Sweet?”

“Again, I can check around, what’s your point?”

“Did they look alike? Have features in common? If she was replicating herself, they would, most certainly look alike.” Hobbs shrugged, he didn’t know. “The woman that takes over my body is a full figured

woman, hour glass figure, substantial hips and ass and big tits." I must have been speaking too loud because the other patrons in the coffee shop had turned and were listening. I looked at them, probably locals all, "We're talking about Rebecca Sweet, ok? Any help here?" Heads snapped away.

"You're beginning to make a scene, Brian."

I looked at him, "It's about time someone did, don't you think?" This last statement was spoken loud enough for all to hear. I was losing Mr. Hobbs' good support and I didn't know why.

"I'll do what I can, but," he looked around, "no need to cause a public disturbance."

I nodded in agreement but a worm was sliding around in my gut. There was something wrong, entirely wrong. It was like he just wanted me and the whole Rebecca Sweet thing to go away. Myths are fine as a source of stories but a poor substitute for rational normality. Or perhaps, the monster inside me could influence more than just me. Chameleons change themselves to blend into the background, why not change the background instead. That was too wrong to even consider. "You are right, of course, Art. I guess I'll head back home, I'm still unpacking."



Gloria Steinberger wasn't likely to ever appear in a Playboy fold out, indeed she was pretty safe, most nights, hanging out at pickup bars, not that she was inclined to do such a thing. Rattail thin and a chest like a table top, the only feature that stood out on her body was her nose. The latter was quite impressive indeed.