

CURSE, BLESS ME NOW
by
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INT. "MARIE LARSON'S ROOM" - NIGHT

A shadowed room in an old house.

A lantern flashlight on a card table shows a container of coffee and two fold-up chairs.

The table and chairs are stenciled "Property Of Essex County Paranormal Investigation". No other furniture.

JACOB CLAWSON (60) sits uncomfortably in one of the chairs. As he stares into the darkness his shoulders sink, his bulk seems to grow heavier.

Outside the bedroom door, someone approaches, grumbling.

Jacob speaks in a lifeless voice.

JACOB
I saw Marie, poor girl.

ABNER HESTER (60), small, wiry, enters the room. He carries a knapsack across one shoulder.

Abner, eager to assume command of any situation, sets down the knapsack, glances at Jacob.

ABNER
(dismissively)
You saw her. Alright, play back your report. You recorded a report like I told you to, right?

Jacob slumps again, embarrassment added to his distress.

JACOB
I'll tell you what I saw --

ABNER
Jacob! You've got to follow protocol! Any paranormal sighting has to be followed by documentation or it's worthless! I've told you that...

Abner's nasal voice sounds more whiny with annoyance.

JACOB
I saw a ghost. And if that's death, I've been kidding myself about heaven.

ABNER
Sure, sure. What'd you see. Shadow?

JACOB

Shadow, yeah, a young girl with dark hair... and a dark, old fashioned dress. It was her, I know it.

ABNER

They'd never bury her in a dress.

JACOB

In a dress. How do I know if she was buried in it or not, that's what she had on when I saw her.

ABNER

You saw her. Where.

JACOB

Right there, right where you're standing. Not ten minutes ago.

Abner opens the knapsack, retrieves an Electronic - Magnetic Field detector which he points in different directions around the room -- he holds his hand up for silence.

ABNER

Nothing. I don't know what you saw, but it wasn't a ghost.

Jacob, sad and confused, reaches across the table, opens the lid of the coffee container, spills a few drops.

JACOB

Such a pitiable look she had...

ABNER

(exasperated)

You're spilling! The building's two hundred years old. I'd like to leave it standing!

JACOB

Sorry...

Abner cradles the EMF device, walks toward the door.

ABNER

I'll test the hall and rooms nearby.
(sternly)
You make your report.

Abner hands Jacob a sheet of paper and exits, gruffly.

Jacob regards the official looking form, takes a recorder from his shirt pocket, rubs his forehead, speaks slowly, following the form as well as he can --

JACOB

Date and time. September 1, 2011,
11:10 pm. Name of investigator.
Jacob Clawson. Name of Investigation.
Ghost Of Marie Larson. Report...

Jacob switches off the recorder, stands, walks around the room nervously, blesses himself, clears his throat.

He returns to the chair and speaks into the recorder.

JACOB (CONT'D)

I saw a young girl, maybe twenty
years old, all in black --

He stands again, reaches out a hand to guess height.

JACOB (CONT'D)

Four feet ten, I'd say, just a little
thing. And the light... went through
her, jagged, like if the light cut
right through her...

Jacob sits again, tries to steady his breathing.

JACOB (CONT'D)

And she had a look... of great
sadness. Complete... sadness.

Jacob shivers with the memory.

Abner hustles back into the room, Jacob hardly notices.

ABNER

Lights from cars on the road, that
could be what you saw.

Jacob shakes his head.

Abner takes out his own recorder, stands straight, speaks softly, like a commentator at a golf tournament.

ABNER (CONT'D)

Abner Hester reporting at the "Marie
Larson Room". EMF readings in the
normal range. 11:15 pm.

JACOB

She looked so sad...

Abner switches off his recorder, sits in the empty chair, tries to speak patiently to Jacob.

ABNER

Of course she's sad, come on, Jacob,
she's dead! What'd you expect?

JACOB

(ashamed)
Never saw anything like.

ABNER

Well, you've lived a sheltered life.

Jacob considers that notion, seems unconvinced.

ABNER (CONT'D)

(mumbles)
Oh, I know, you were in the Marines
and all. Years ago...

Jacob nods, answers in a monotone.

JACOB

Two tours in Viet Nam. I've seen
plenty of people die. Buried my
parents, my wife...

ABNER

Paranormal investigation is hard
core. Some people get upset. But
you want to keep going, don't you?

Jacob nods, determinedly.

The lantern on the table dims.

ABNER (CONT'D)

(authoritatively)
Well, now that's something. Batteries
fail in the presence of spirits.

Abner takes his EMF detector, holds it up, listens intently,
heads back out in the hallway.

Jacob, at the table, takes a sip of coffee, looks calmer.

A car drives by, outside.

A shadowed figure of a woman in a dark dress appears in the
room -- just out of Jacob's line of sight.

Jacob stirs, turns, beholds the ghost of MARIE LARSON.

JACOB

I know it's you. Marie Larson.

His voice is calm, strong.

She's startled, fumbles to smooth her dress, slightly.

Piercing silence.

MARIE

I... I been dead a long time.

The silence intensifies, buzzes and whines.

JACOB

Sit? Would you sit?

Jacob stands, indicates one of the chairs, Marie approaches the table but doesn't sit down.

MARIE

(surprised)

It was coffee I could smell.

JACOB

How 'bout that, how 'bout that, I could, I could pour you --

Another car passes by, outside, the lights disturb the darkness, Marie's image is less distinct.

JACOB (CONT'D)

Stay, please...

MARIE

(faintly)

Where else am I to go...

The outline of her body fades, suddenly she's gone.

Abner returns to the room.

ABNER

Something's going on. All of my equipment's dead and all the batteries are drained. Dry. What...

Jacob stands straight and tall, the lantern on the table lights up, again.

ABNER (CONT'D)

What...

JACOB

What do you know about Marie Larson?

ABNER

Well, she's... she's supposed to haunt this area because she was cursed. I mean, by the town folk.

JACOB

Why?

ABNER

Oh, she was, I guess, a witch or a, you know, the town prostitute or something, it was the 1800's...

JACOB

Coffee. You get more coffee?

Jacob sniffs the air, Abner sniffs the air, too.

ABNER

What? No, I... that's fresh coffee...

The lantern dims, flickers, relights, shows Marie in the room with them, near the table.

MARIE

You see what they put on my tombstone?

Abner, startled, reaches for a chair for support, knocks the chair flat, keeps reaching for it, finally shrieks --

ABNER

"May she find no peace for all eternity." Who are, who are, who --

Jacob starts to approach Marie, the lantern dims, darkness almost erases Marie from view.

Jacob hunches down, tries to appear less imposing.

Marie softly approaches the table, she stares at nothing.

JACOB

Those people in the town, some of them would have been kin of mine --

MARIE

(suddenly)

I never did bring that flood. One day I say it smells like rain, then the rains come, the river swells up and those boys drown.

ABNER

What flood, what rain, who drowned?

MARIE

People died and they blamed me.

JACOB

They thought you were a witch.

MARIE
 (disgustedly)
 They thought... they thought wrong.

Light stirs in the room, Marie's form is translucent. Her face is revealed, fully -- terrible sadness.

Jacob kneels on one knee, reaches for Marie's hand.

MARIE (CONT'D)
 Oh! I'm sorry I'm so cold.

Jacob trembles, fights back a wave of fear.

JACOB
 (calmly)
 Since I am, I must be, kin to those,
 those town people, the ones that...

ABNER
 Cursed you!

MARIE
 That they did...

JACOB
 I... I apologize, on their behalf.

The room brightens, lightens a bit.

JACOB (CONT'D)
 Maybe I, can I, can we guide you?
 Would you like that, Marie?

MARIE
 Not for me.

JACOB
 Sure, for you, sure, sure! Heaven
 and angels and light, for you.

MARIE
 No such.

JACOB
 I know there's God and there's heaven.
 I know it. Jesus, mercy...

Marie continues to stare into space.

JACOB (CONT'D)
 Now, now, you can't tell me there's
 no heaven. I know what's true --

MARIE

No such...

JACOB

(desperately)

I'm telling you, as kin to those
town people, by the power of, by the
power vested in me --

Light fills the room, centers on Marie. Marie makes eye
contact with Jacob for the first time, she smiles.

Jacob stands, Abner trembles, stutters, yells out --

ABNER

Peace... be with you!

Abner shakes the collapsed chair back upright.

The light in the room brightens, unnaturally, Marie is gone.

Jacob and Abner stare where she was, then at each other.

ABNER (CONT'D)

Well, sir! Well... I guess I said
the right thing!

Both men seem to relax, suddenly, breathe deeply.

JACOB

Forgot to ask her about her dress.
(incredulously)
Was going to ask about her dress!

ABNER

Later on we'll play, we can play the
recording, it's on, see? Smell that?
Holy cow, is that coffee?

Abner and Jacob sniff the air, hungrily.

JACOB

Sure smells like fresh coffee!

ABNER

I could... I could sure use a cup!
What a report this is going to be...

They both laugh, giddy, joyful.

JACOB

We'll get coffee. And donuts.

As they leave the room, their feet hardly touch the ground.

ABNER
God, I'm so hungry!

JACOB
Isn't that the truth!

FADE OUT