

From Before

By

James Austin McCormick

Copyright 6412502 WGA

jimbostories@hotmail.com

FADE IN:

INT. TUTORIAL ROOM - DAY

Dr SAM ADAMS (Mid 20's), intelligent, confident and charismatic sits in the middle of a small semi-circle of five undergraduate students.

The students (between 18 and 20 years old) all have the same book with them, nestled next to note pads.

Sam's enjoying a drink of something hot. He seems to be enjoying making them wait.

Finally, he lays the cup aside.

SAM

So.

He hold up his own copy of the book, Marlowe's Dr Faustus.

SAM (CONT'D)

Enough of historical contexts. What about Faustus himself?

SYLVIE, a bright girl with John Lennon specs, chews her pencil.

SYLVIE

He's a polymath.

SAM

Most certainly Sylvie, versed in all manner of learning. It is this which has allowed him to rise so high.

He looks the class over, letting his gaze linger on individuals just long enough to make them uncomfortable.

His attention rests on MICHAEL, a future academic if ever there was on.

SAM

Micheal, how does he feel about this learning, of the humble enterprises of philosophy, theology and science?

MICHAEL

He's tired of them. He wants a different type of understanding.

(CONTINUED)

SAM
Which is?

MICHAEL
Magic.

SAM
Indeed, the 'metaphysics of magicians' and 'necromantic books.' Now, for a more challenging question.

All faces seem eager except for on, BRUCE, a sporty student in a football top.

SAM (CONT'D)
Bruce.

He lets out a groan.

BRUCE
Professor Adams.

SAM
Why magic?

SAM
Er (a beat), it's cool.

Sniggers run through the group.

SAM (CONT'D)
Do you think Faustus cares about being cool?

BRUCE
Er...

Sam waits a moment before turning to another student, DAN, a geeky type.

SAM
Dan?

DAN
He's frustrated with the limits of his life. Magic can make him more than he is.

SAM
It can make him great, more than merely just another "a man condemned to die."

(CONTINUED)

He wrinkles his nose.

SAM

Does anyone smell burning?

Shrugs and shakes of the head from the students.

SAM (CONT'D)

No?

He leafs through his book.

SAM (CONT'D)

Well, let's turn to Act 5, the deal. We'll look first at the good angel and Faustus' belief that God doesn't love us.

He winces as if the smell's growing worse.

MICHAEL

He doesn't.

Sam stares at him in surprise. Micheal now has burn marks down the side of each cheek.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

At least he doesn't love us.

SAM

Michael, what's wrong with your face?

MICHAEL

You did this to me.

SAM

What do you mean?

Sam looks at the other students. All of them seem like statues, unblinking, unmoving.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I'll see you soon Sammy. I promise.

Sam wipes a hand over his face.

The students are all gazing at him expectantly.

Michael's back to being a fresh faced 20 year old.

(CONTINUED)

SYLVIE
Professor?

Sam's completely out of it.

SAM
Yes?

SYLVIE
Are you okay?

SAM
I, uh, I'm not sure.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

A small, dimly lit bar.

Sam's sat at an out of the way table.

CLAIRE (Early 30's), a sweet, intelligent and an easy going fellow academic sits opposite.

CLAIRE
Parasomnia.

SAM
Para...what?

CLAIRE
A waking nightmare. It's more common than people realize.

SAM
So glad I'd dating a doctor of psychology. Is that what you think happened to me?

CLAIRE
It ticks a lot of the boxes. Even the olfactory element, the burning smell.

SAM
So, what do I do about it?

CLAIRE
Nothing. That experience doesn't mean anything's wrong with you. It's more than likely due to stress.

She reaches out, taking his hand.

(CONTINUED)

CLAIRE(CONT'D)

Sam, you're a professor of literature at 26 and vice chairman of the committee of trustees. That's unheard of. It's a wonder something like this didn't happen before. You just need to unwind a little.

She takes a drink of her beer.

CLAIRE(CONT'D)

I'd say let's have a few beers, but you don't drink.

SAM

Maybe there's another way to relax.

He makes eyes at her.

CLAIRE

Maybe.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - DAWN

Sam lays awake in bed, staring up at the ceiling.

Claire's curled up next to him.

He turns, looks at the bedside clock, 05:30.

He notices a figure, little more than a silhouette standing in front of the window. The figure has a name, JACK, as we'll find out in a moment.

Sam sits up.

JACK

Hi Sammy.

SAM

Who are you?

JACK

It's me, Jack. I told you I'd see you soon.

The figure moves towards him.

Sam's too terrified to move.

(CONTINUED)

JACK (CONT'D)
It's been a while.

Up close, and in the soft morning light, we can just about glimpse out intruder's badly burnt features. Two yellow eyes with slits down the centers like a reptiles study him.

Jack stretches out a clawed finger and runs it down Sam's cheek.

JACK (CONT'D)
I made a deal Sammy. I got me some power. I'm coming for you.

Blood trickles down Sam's cheek.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - DAWN

Same wakes.

Claire's asleep.

He switches the bedside light on. He places a hand to the side of his cheek. There nothing there.

CUT TO:

INT. PSYCHIATRIC FACILITY - OFFICE - DAY

DR SIMON, robust 60 year old with fiercely intelligent features, and head of the facility, holds up a file.

Sam sits opposite.

DR SIMON
I really didn't know how to get in touch with you Mr Adams.

SAM
Professor.

DR SIMON
I'm sorry.

SAM
It's professor Adams.

(CONTINUED)

DR SIMON

I see, excuse me. Your brother only died yesterday morning. Might I ask how you found out about this?

SAM

I just had a feeling. I can't explain it. Could I see where it happened?

DR SIMON

I'm afraid that isn't possible. But as his only surviving relative, I presume it's okay for you to see these.

He slides a file across the desk.

Sam opens it.

A photograph shows a small cell with esoteric markings on the floor. A noose above them.

SAM

Suicide.

DR SIMON

He'd been in a coma for three years. We had no indication he might regain consciousness. His injuries were extremely severe, 3rd degree burns over eighty percent of his body. I can't imagine how he had the strength to do what he did.

SAM

I should have visited. I just couldn't stand seeing him like that.

DR SIMON

People react to these things in different ways. I believe you were there when it happened?

SAM

I was. He was always into magic and the occult. He was a nut about that stuff. He had this crazy idea to perform something called the ceremony of the ascendant flame. It was supposed to bring success. He wanted us to take DPT beforehand. I

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SAM (cont'd)
said no, but he went ahead anyway.
He was so out of it ...

He shakes his head.

SAM (CONT'D)
He set himself on fire.

DR SIMON
Deliberately?

SAM
He stumbled into the fire pit we
built. I tried to help him. He was
screaming so bad. If the police
hadn't come when they did, he would
have died.

DR SIMON
A tragic story. Let me give you the
contact details for the local
authority. I imagine you would like
to take care of the official
arrangements?

SAM
Of course, yes.

The doctor scribbles on a note pad, tears the top leaf free
and hands it to Sam.

SAM (CONT'D)
Thank you.

INT. OUTSIDE DR SIMON'S DOOR - DAY

Sam balls up the paper and tosses it aside.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sam's crouched on the hardwood floor, surrounded by a myriad
of symbols and markings. There's a half drawn pentagram in
the very center. He's chalking in the rest of it.

An arm wraps around his neck, choking him.

JACK (O.S)
Parlor tricks won't help you. I
told you, I have power now.

Sam struggles to free himself but then his brother's gone.

(CONTINUED)

He looks around at his preparations.

SAM
It's not enough.

He's lost in his own thoughts for a moment, then he takes out his mobile.

SAM (CONT'D)
Claire. I know, I'm sorry, I should have called. I've been home all day. Listen, I need you.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE SAM'S APARTMENT - DAY

Claire stops outside Sam's door.

It has large complicated symbol drawn on it.

She hammers on the door.

CLAIRE
Sam, open up.

A series of locks being undone.

The door flies open.

A frantic looking Sam appears. He now has markings on his face as well.

He pulls her inside.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Claire sits beside Sam.

CLAIRE
I don't know what to say.

SAM
You think I'm crazy.

She looks around at the pentacle and red color paraffin lamps at each corner, the symbols carved into the walls.

CLAIRE
I think you're not well.

Sam glances at his watch.

(CONTINUED)

SAM

It's almost sunset. He'll be here soon.

The electric lights flickers, then go off.

SAM

We need to get inside the circle.

CLAIRE

Sam, please stop this.

Footsteps sound down the hallway outside.

SAM

No time.

The footsteps stop.

Sam hurries Claire into the pentacle.

There's a thud on the door.

Then, one by one the locks slide open.

The door flies open.

Jack walks in.

With the lights off and the lamps on, the whole room is now bathed in crimson.

For the first time we see Jack clearly. The charred features are twisted. The nose is little more than a couple of slits in the center of his face. He smiles, revealing dagger-like teeth.

He comes forward and reaches out a clawed hand. The closer it gets to Sam the more it shakes.

JACK(CONT'D)

Clever, red light. So you guessed.

SAM

You've joined your soul to a servitor.

JACK

Hovering between hell and earth, it was the only way.

(CONTINUED)

CLAIRE

Please, leave him alone. He told me everything.

The intruder seems to notice her for her for the first time.

JACK

He told you I was the sacrifice?
That he got me high then threw
gasoline over me? All to get that
big career of his.

Claire turns to Sam with a look of horror on her face.

JACK (CONT'D)

All that's over Sammy. I'm damned.
You saw to that. All I care about
now is bringing you with me.

Sam turns to Claire.

SAM (CONT'D)

Nothing personal, you were just
insurance.

He pushes her out of the pentacle and the protection of red light.

SAM (CONT'D)

I know the rules. You have to take
a soul. There she is.

The figure steps towards Claire. He places a hand to either side of her face, holding her head.

JACK

I do. But I have all night.

SAM

So do I, and you can't touch me in
here.

JACK

No. But she can.

He turns her head so that she's looking at Sam.

CLAIRE

Damn right, I can.

Jack releases her.

SAM
Hey, now wait Claire.

CLAIRE
Insurance, huh?

She charges at him.

He's strong enough to stop her, but she kicks and punches like a wildcat. As he tries to defend himself, Sam inadvertently steps outside of the protective circle.

Jack grabs him.

Sam struggles but it's impossible.

JACK
(To Claire) Go.

Sam throws pleading eyes at her.

SAM
Help me, please.

For a moment she seems almost sorry for him.

CLAIRE
Sorry Sam.

She moves towards the door, stopping at the threshold.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
You can go to hell.

FADE OUT