

## Final Encounter

by Bruno Cruz

The cabin was bombarded with rain, howling winds caused trees to bend and stretch in an unnatural way. Branches close to the cabin reached out, trying to break through the walls to get Dexter as he sat on the ground in the middle of a circle made of rock salt, it was part of the ritual. He needed to get rid of it after a lifetime of hauntings. He found a way to banish it. The howling made him nervous, the thunder and lightning broke his concentration as he tried to read the incantation. After twenty-five years of living with the poltergeist Dexter was at his wits end, he needed peace from it. Either the incantation would get rid of it for good or kill him. A shadow came into his view as he read the lines again, resembling a head moving towards him, to stop him from reciting the incantation. It wasn't a real hand, he reminded himself, it was the branches outside. The poltergeist was not going to stop him.

He was eleven years old when he first saw it. Dexter was walking home from school; unaware a van was slowly following him. At a deserted intersection the van screeched to a stop. A man jumped out to grab him, but was stopped in his tracks, his expression one of pain as his head was spun one hundred eighty degrees, killing him instantly. Dexter screamed. Police would arrive along with his mom. No one could understand how the man died but many were happy with it, he had been a wanted fugitive in three states. Ultimately it was determined he must have tripped when getting out of the van and fell hard. People didn't ask questions. Dexter had nightmares for weeks, he saw the head spin, the air going ice cold around the area. It wouldn't be the last time something like that happened.

The rain continued to bombard the cabin. Inside there was only a cot and a lamp in the corner as Dexter read the incantation over and over again. He looked out the two windows which were on both sides of the front door. Water obscured his view along with the trees casting their dark shadows, looking into the cabin. Dexter stopped reading, praying what he did was enough. The only sound accompanying his breathing was the wind. He put the book down, not sure why, stood up but remained in the circle. The air went ice cold, his breath visible. The rain stopped. It got eerily quiet, suddenly a branch crashed through the window on his left, wind blew inside breaking the circle of salt. Panic took over Dexter, he reached for the canister on the cot but as he tried to close the circle the wind scattered salt everywhere. The front door blew in, the bang sent more fear than he ever felt in his body. Dexter couldn't explain it, but the haunting was different from the others.

Dexter was eighteen, his first day of city college. He was nervous and anxiety ridden as he tried to navigate the new campus. He had a night class which meant he'd have to take the last city bus home, waiting for it at a poorly illuminated stop. He sat on the bench, looking for the bus when the air around him got ice cold, his breath visible. He stood up and saw the shadow move towards him from the street, a weak light overhead shining through the dark cloud. Dexter froze, he couldn't run, he couldn't scream. The shadow was tall yet thin. It wasn't a full humanoid figure, more abstract. It just lingered in front of him before it disappeared. The bus pulled up afterwards, Dexter was a stuttering mess as he tried to tell the driver who would kick him out before reaching his stop. He walked the rest of the way home, looking over his shoulder and running past darkened areas. He would never admit he knew the poltergeist was what killed the man from the van.

The figure was fully formed, resembling a tall, thin man, but still a shadow and transparent. It walked towards Dexter; the rain visible through it. Dexter tried to scream, tried to run but his body betrayed him, he couldn't move. His mind tried to make sense of what was in front of him. Had he finally cracked? If he did it no longer mattered, the apparition was in front of him, an arm reached up and touched his forehead. Instantly pain enveloped his body, setting every nerve on fire, stopping on his scapula bones. The pain was unbearable, he fell to his knees, letting out a scream that had been building up over a lifetime of fear from being haunted no matter where he went. Dexter passed out and collapsed on the floor.

Samael stood up in the cabin. He held up his new hands, felt a lack of strength he wasn't used to. The previous body he inhabited was stronger, he'd have to work on the current one. He saw his new reflection in the window still intact, "Huh, black hair, that's new," his new voice sounded alien to him. There was a knock at the doorframe, Azazel walked in, taking in Samael's new body.

"It's shorter than the last one."

"I know but I only had twenty years to find a new one."

"Not a lot of time was it?"

"No," Samael flexed his demon wings on the new body, "and it wasn't easy, this one accidentally saw me protecting him from a kidnapper."

"Shit. Still not bad for such a short notice."

"No, it isn't. You hungry? I'm hungry."