



Beware the Night

By Ralph Sarchie, Lisa Collier Cool

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In *Beware the Night*, he takes readers into the very hierarchy of a hell on earth to expose the grisly rituals of a Palo Mayombe priest; a young girl whose innocence is violated by an incubus; a home invaded by the malevolent spirit of a supposedly murdered nineteenth-century bride; the dark side of a couple who were literally, the neighbors from hell; and more. Ralph Sarchie's NYPD revelations are a powerful and disturbing documented link between the true-crime realities of life and the blood-chilling ice-grip of a supernatural terror.

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Editorial Review

From the Back Cover

DEMONIC POSSESSION. EXORCISM. HAUNTED HOUSES. SATANIC RITUALS.

For most people this is the stuff of nightmares, horror movies, folklore, and superstition. For New York City police sergeant Ralph Sarchie, it's as real -- and dangerous -- as midnight patrol...

HELL IS HIS BEAT

A sixteen-year NYPD veteran, Ralph Sarchie works out of the 46th Precinct in New York's South Bronx. But it is his other job that he calls "the Work": investigating cases of demonic possession and assisting in the exorcisms of humanity's most ancient -- and most dangerous -- foes. Now he discloses for the first time his investigations into incredible true crimes and inhuman evil that were never explained, solved, or understood except by Sarchie and his partner. Schooled in the rituals of exorcism, and an eyewitness to the reality of demonic possession, Ralph Sarchie has documented a riveting chronicle of the inexplicable that gives a new shape to the shadows in the dark.

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About the Author

RALPH SARCHIE was a Sergeant in the New York Police Department, working in the South Bronx. He patrolled some of New York City's most dangerous slums on the midnight tour, making over 300 arrests and receiving seven medals. He also moonlighted as a demonologist, investigating haunted houses and demonic possession. A devout Catholic, he assisted in 20 exorcisms. He lives in Queens, New York.

LISA COLLIER COOL is an author of four previous books and hundreds of articles. She lives in New York.

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THE HALLOWEEN HORROR

I hate Halloween. It wasn't always this way: When I was a child, I liked to dress up and collect candy from the neighbors; and when I was a little older, I was one of those guys who would go out with eggs and shaving cream, ready for a night of nasty fun. After I became a cop, patrolling dangerous public housing projects, I saw another side of this holiday: Every pervert and nutjob in New York thinks it's suddenly open season on kids. At the Forty-sixth Precinct in the South Bronx, where I work as a sergeant, the 911 calls start

pouring in. We race from one crime scene to the next, our sirens screaming, locking up the animals who prey on children as fast as we can. But awful as the crimes of man can be—and in my sixteen years on the police force, I’ve seen more blood and gore than you could ever imagine—they’re not the only evil that intensifies on October 31.

Halloween has a malevolent history: According to two-thousand-year-old legends, it’s the night when spirits of the dead roam the world, intent on playing terrifying tricks. To appease ghosts, our ancestors used to leave food offerings outside their homes and sacrifice animals. Early Europeans feared that these marauding spirits had a much darker motive: They were hunting for live bodies to inhabit. To prevent possession, it became the custom to wear a mask or disguise on the Day of the Dead, as this holiday is known in some countries. The ancient dread of this date is rooted in more than just folklore or superstition, I discovered after I entered what I now call “the Work”—investigating haunted houses and demonic possession. Almost invariably, I get a sudden surge of cases around the end of October, either on Halloween itself or the day before, which, appropriately enough, is called Devil’s or Mischief Night.

One of my most harrowing supernatural investigations began on Halloween, 1991. My partner in the Work, Joe Forrester, was putting out candy for trick-or-treaters when he got a call about a haunted house. The caller was Father Hayes, the exorcist for a Catholic diocese in a nearby state. He wanted us to investigate a report of demonic activity in Westchester County, a wealthy county just north of New York City. While this priest had discerned some signs of a diabolical presence when he spoke to the family over the phone, he didn’t give Joe any specifics about the problems they were having. Since my partner and I knew Father Hayes from other investigations, we trusted that he wouldn’t send us out on a case unless it had merit.

* * *

Like me, Joe comes from a law enforcement background, but he works on the other side of the fence, as a polygraph examiner for the Legal Aid Society. Although he looks like a middle-aged monk, with his round, untroubled face and his fringe of brown hair around a balding head, he’s actually an extremely adept demonologist. Not only is he a walking encyclopedia of the occult—definitely the man to call for a quick rundown on Nigerian crocodile cults or Brazilian black magic rituals—but as a decorated Vietnam vet, Joe has more than enough guts to face down supernatural terror. Combine that with the built-in bullshit meter he’s developed from years of administering lie detector tests to con men and crooks of every other description and to the wrongly accused, and you have an ace investigator.

When Joe and I handle cases as demonologists in our off-duty hours, we don’t charge a cent for our services. Helping people who have spiritual problems isn’t a career for us—it’s a calling. As devout Catholics, we take Jesus Christ’s biblical injunction to “cast out demons in My name” literally.

Before going out on a case, I put aside my gun and police badge and arm myself with holy water and a relic of the True Cross.

Don’t get me wrong. I’m not a religious fanatic and I’m anything but holy, as any of the guys who work with me at the Four-Six Precinct can tell you. I am a cop, and I would rather kick down doors and arrest ten armed robbers with my bare hands than take on the demonic. Plain and simple, the Devil frightens me much more than anything I’d ever seen on street patrol—and in all my years on the force, I’ve seen just about every horror one person can inflict on another: I’ve responded to countless shootings and stabbings; I’ve put the cuffs on people who commit rape or murder as if these crimes meant nothing at all.

I’ve had to tell people that their loved ones have died in car crashes or have been the victim of every terrible crime you could imagine. I’ve seen the broken bodies of little kids hurt in senseless accidents because their parents were too busy getting high to watch them. I’ve arrested drug dealers who turn their fellow human

beings into the living dead with their poison—and a mother who sold her ten-year-old daughter for sex, all for a vial of crack. Recently I was called to a house where I found a woman stoned out her mind on drugs. That wouldn't be particularly unusual in the places I patrol, except that she was stumbling around with a newborn baby dragging between her legs—still attached to its umbilical cord—and she didn't even know she'd given birth. It turned out that this was her tenth kid: Child Protective Services had already taken all the others because of her crack addiction.

This has been my reality night after night. Dealing with the tragedy and devastation that crime causes has helped prepare me for the Work, to a certain degree. It's certainly taught me to recognize evil when I see it. When cops I work with find out that I help with exorcisms and investigate demonic activity, a lot of them ask, "What gives an aggressive and sometimes nasty guy like you the right to do this pious stuff?" I tell them, "Don't you see the beauty of God using a sinner like me to fight evil?" The truth is that I like to help people. When I joined the police force I took an oath to get bad guys off the street, and I have made over three hundred arrests to that end. As a committed Christian, I have a different mission: to bust the Devil and his demons.

I've never investigated cases officially for the Roman Catholic Church, but I have worked on official church cases for individual priests. Much of my work is with Bishop Robert McKenna, a Traditionalist Catholic priest and exorcist who has never shied away from doing battle with Satan and his forces of darkness. (Traditionalist churches use the Pre-Vatican II Latin mass.) From assisting him with nearly two dozen exorcisms over the past ten years, I've developed the utmost respect for this saintly man of God. If he ever needed me to walk into the depths of Hell with him, I'd go without a second thought.

Most major religions have ceremonies to expel evil spirits. The Roman Ritual of Exorcism dates back almost four hundred years. Years ago Catholic priests were given the minor order of Exorcist, and with the permission of their diocesan bishops were ready to undertake the tasks associated with that order. The problem today is that many priests, clergy of other faiths, and even bishops of the Catholic Church don't believe in the Devil, even though Jesus Himself performed exorcisms. When a priest friend of mine spoke of Satan during one of his sermons, he actually said to the congregation, "The Devil does exist. Sorry, folks." My wife said I looked as if I were about to jump out of my pew. If it were me, I'd make no apologies for telling people the Devil is real because I've seen his satanic fiends at work.

Most of the people who call Joe and me for help don't believe in the Devil either—until they are tormented and terrorized by bizarre, otherwise inexplicable events. Since neither of us has ever sought publicity for our involvement in the Work, our cases come to us through word of mouth. We both believe that if God wants people to get help, He'll see to it that they get it, either from us or from someone else. Asking for the help of a demonologist isn't the first impulse of the families who contact us: It's usually a last resort, after they have exhausted every logical explanation for the horrifying phenomena they're experiencing and may even have begun questioning their sanity. By the time they dial my number or Joe's, they're at their wit's end and have nowhere else to go. Or they may have turned to one of the many priests we know and been referred to us that way, as happened in our Halloween case.

* * *

After the call from Father Hayes, Joe and I arranged to visit the Villanova family on November 2, All Souls' Day on the Catholic calendar, where priests recite the Office of the Dead and the faithful pray that the suffering of souls in Purgatory will be eased. Because we had no idea of what we would be up against, we made some dangerous mistakes. First, since we'd only been asked to videotape an interview for the exorcist to evaluate—and were told that the parish priest would join us afterward—Joe and I went to the house alone, without our usual team of investigators. Not expecting to perform any religious rituals ourselves, we packed

a minimal supply of holy water and other sacramentals. In retrospect, this was a lot like patrolling a high-crime area with a gun loaded with only one bullet. Fortunately, as it turned out, I also armed myself with my most potent relic, a splinter of the True Cross.

As we parked outside Dominick Villanova's modest two-family house in Yonkers, I noticed a Catholic chapel down the street. Ed Warren, a well-known demonologist I've worked with, always says that the Devil likes to operate in the shadow of a church, and I've found that he's right. It's amazing how many of my cases take place within sight of a house of worship. Don't get me wrong: Having a church close by doesn't automatically make you a target for the demonic. Lots of people live near religious centers and *never* have a problem. But if something else, like a curse or satanic rituals, happens to draw an evil power your way, having a holy place nearby can *heighten* the spirit's hatred and fury.

Although I have a firm rule against getting emotionally involved with the people I help, I nearly lost it as soon as Dominick answered the door with his five-year-old son at his side. The first thing I noticed was how frightened the little guy looked. He had that blank, bewildered stare kids get right after they scream themselves awake from a nightmare—except this child had no soothing reality to wake up to and no escape from fear could be found in his mother or father's arms. Looking at his skinny body and unexpectedly big feet, I thought, *This kid should be out kicking a soccer ball around, not feeling scared out his mind in his own home!*

His father also wore a shell-shocked expression. He was a tall, bald man of about forty-five and wore thick glasses. With his slumped shoulders and air of defeat, he reminded me of a dazed prizefighter stumbling around the ring, waiting for the next blow to land. Seeing how confused and upset he was, I immediately sympathized. As a man, I could only guess at how utterly impotent he must have felt having to stand by and watch his family being assaulted by some nameless horror.

He led us to a living room that looked like a refugee camp. Not only was it packed with sad, somber people who all appeared ill and exhausted, but along each wall were haphazard piles of clothing and rolled-up bedding. *Was the entire family sleeping in here?* I'd seen that in other cases, where people became so unnerved by supernatural events that they ceased to exist as individuals and refused to go anywhere in their house alone, even to the bathroom. A home is supposed to be a safe haven where you relax at the end of the day, a place of peace and comfort, but that clearly wasn't true in any room of this house. And as I was soon to discover, the basement held a special kind of fear.

"Sorry about the mess," Dominick said. Struggling for the right words to explain the inexplicable, he added, "There's been a lot of, uh, trouble here."

Knowing how important it is to establish rapport and get people to confide in us when we go into their homes as complete strangers, Joe took control of the interview in a friendly but businesslike manner instead of letting the father ramble on. From his long experience as a polygraph examiner, he's become very skillful at reading people, defusing volatile emotions, and getting to the truth. "Mr. Villanova, I'm Joe Forrester and this is my partner, Ralph Sarchie. As you know, we're here at Father Hayes's request to investigate the problems you're having. You have agreed to have us here, and know we don't charge anything for our services."

"Call me Dominick," the father replied, sounding steadier, then introduced us to his wife, Gabby, a striking woman in her early forties. She had thick black hair with streaks of pure white on each side of her face and such strongly defined features that she resembled a figurehead engraved on a coin. Although overweight, she had a flamboyant style: Her dress was a vivid red, printed with colorful birds, and several large, silver bracelets jangled on each of her wrists. In younger, happier days, she was probably the life of the party, but

right now, despite the exuberance of her clothing, she seemed very nervous, lighting cigarette after cigarette with trembling hands. Before asking this couple, their four children, and three friends who were gathered here to relate their stories, we gave each of them a St. Benedict medal to wear around their neck. This saint performed many miracles and had great power against demons.

After I put a medal on DJ (Dominick Junior), the little boy, something very peculiar happened. Just seconds later, the medal tumbled to the ground, even though the string it was on hadn't broken. I carefully checked the string and replaced the medal—only to find it on the floor a second time, and then a third. *This was one bold demon to fling around a saint's medal that had been personally blessed by the Bishop right in front of our eyes!* Most evil spirits are cowardly and hide from holy water, religious medals, and relics. Only the most powerful satanic forces, the true devils, can manipulate sacred objects.

During the interview, we gradually discovered just how dangerous this devil really was. Initially, it attacked with stealth, appearing in Gabby and Dominick's bedroom one autumn evening in its own hellishly inspired Halloween disguise. "My room got very cold, but it wasn't a cold night," Gabby said, gesturing so emphatically that her bracelets clanked. "In the corner of the room I saw white smoke, and out of this smoke came a woman. I could see her from the waist up. I was staring and screamed for my friend, who came running in with my husband. 'Do you see her?' I asked, and they said no, they didn't. She said her name was Virginia Taylor. That's all I remember."

Dominick, however, remembered a little more. "For about three minutes, my wife was in a trance and Virginia spoke through her. 'No harm, no fear,' she said—in other words, we shouldn't be scared. 'I just want your help,' she said, but she didn't say *why* she wanted help. I shook my wife awake, and the last thing she said before she came to herself was 'help, parents.'"

Despite "Virginia's" reassuring remark, Joe and I already recognized her for what she was—a demon operating under an alias. But there was one mistake in this masquerade that revealed the supposed human spirit was literally blowing smoke: It took the form of a woman only from the waist up. That's typical of the demonic; they always give themselves away with some abnormality of appearance when they try to manifest themselves as human beings.

Also characteristic of an infernal force was the demon's divide-and-conquer strategy. By showing itself to only one person, it sowed the seeds of panic, confusion, and self-doubt. *Is this really happening—or am I just imagining it?* victims in such cases will ask themselves. Often they are reluctant to tell their friends or family what's happening to them, fearing that people will think they've lost their mind. Instead, they withdraw into themselves, feeling more and more alone in their bizarre ordeal. This, of course, is the goal of the demonic, since self-doubt and emotional turmoil eat away at their prey's will, paving the way for possession.

So far, this is all standard operating procedure for the demonic—but there was an unusual twist in this case. Rather than wear at Gabby's nerves with the unsettling ploys of *infestation*—the first stage of diabolical activity in most cases, marked by such unnerving events as midnight knockings, peculiar phone calls, or tormented animal cries—the satanic spirit was hell-bent on full-blown oppression from the start. *Oppression* is the second stage of diabolical activity, and involves terrifying mental and physical attacks on the victim. The way it behaved in Gabby's bedroom reminded me a little of police calls I've responded to where people are actually held prisoner in their own home, because they invited someone to stay with them for a short time, then had their guest take over their house.

This "guest" was quite charming at first. The next day, according to Gabby, the spirit returned in broad daylight, while she was down in the basement. "My attention was directed to a large mirror we have hanging

there, and in it I saw Virginia,” she reported. “Again she said, ‘Parents, help,’ then told me she’d been in finishing school abroad and had followed her parents here. In quaint, old-fashioned speech, she said, ‘What manner of place is this?’ Upon looking around the room and at me, she asked, ‘What manner of dress is this?’ I answered that this is how we dress in the 1990s, but she insisted that the year was 1901. I felt no fear of her, and we had a lengthy conversation.”

Joe and I were impressed by how cleverly the spirit slowly unfolded its intricate tale, like a spider spinning a web to catch unwary prey. Ever so smoothly it was drawing Gabby in, plying this suburban housewife with girl talk about fashions and finishing school—a sly tactic to suggest that this was a ghost of great refinement. I also noticed the subtle bid for a mother’s sympathy: The so-called ghost had somehow lost her parents and wanted to be reunited with them.

Gabby was enthralled and couldn’t wait to hear the next installment of the spirit’s intriguing soap opera. Yet her intuition was already warning her about Virginia’s true nature. “The third time she came to me was also in the basement. I felt her presence and said, ‘If you wish to speak, do *not* enter me. I’ll relate whatever you say.’ She paid no attention and immediately entered me. When she came into me, her voice was stuttering, and she kept saying ‘Parents, help.’”

Although Gabby didn’t fully grasp what was happening to her—and her suspicions were blunted by the spirit’s lies about “no harm, no fear”—on some level she knew her mind and body were under siege. Instinctively she resisted having the spirit invade her body—but not forcefully enough. A demon has no respect for human pleas, requests, or even orders for it to depart unless the command is made in the name of Jesus Christ.

Despite her misgivings about the bullying spirit that had forced itself on her against her wishes, she found its voice so seductive that she couldn’t stop listening. Apparently sensing that it was time to turn up the drama, the alleged ghost returned with theatrical flair when Gabby was talking to another resident of the house, Ruth. This middle-aged woman and her twenty-five-year-old son, Carl, had recently moved in, after Carl became engaged to the Villanovas’ oldest daughter, Luciana. As the two women sat in the future bride’s bedroom, chatting about the upcoming marriage, the spirit offered a tearjerking tale of woe.

This time she didn’t bother with smoke or mirrors or any physical manifestation. Instead, the spirit seized control of the housewife’s mind and communicated telepathically, while Gabby answered out loud. “Virginia was crying hysterically, and I kept asking what was the matter. She told me she’d been murdered on her wedding day! Her fiancé was falsely accused of the murder—and was so grief-stricken that he committed suicide in prison. Only after his death did they find out that they had the wrong man. I asked who *had* murdered her. Her reply was ‘Must not say.’”

The human con artists I’ve arrested weren’t half as good bullshitters as that, which is probably why they’re in jail now. I remember one guy who had the gall to impersonate a police officer in an effort to swindle a woman out of thousands of dollars, only to have the scam go sour when the woman suddenly changed her mind just as she was about to hand over the cash. Then this perp’s luck got even worse when he decided to punch her in the mouth and grab the loot—just as I was driving by on my way to work. After a little persuasion from my 9-millimeter semi-automatic, he stopped the assault, surrendered the cash, and let me snap the cuffs on his wrists. I only wish busting the demonic was that simple.

Incredibly, however, Gabby didn’t question the astonishing coincidences between the spirit’s story and her own life. I often marvel at how adept evil powers are at exploiting people’s good natures. You’d think people would be a lot more skeptical about the claims of a supernatural being that shows up in a puff of smoke as they’re planning their daughter’s wedding and announces that, lo and behold, it just so happens to be the

ghost of a murdered bride-to-be! But the demonic have an uncanny knowledge of human psychology—as well as of real events—and therefore know exactly which emotional buttons to press to win people’s hearts and minds.

Clearly, a cover story that revolved around a wedding gone wrong was the right strategy here: As the mothers of a future bride and groom, Gabby and Ruth actually wept over this tragic tale. Ruth was particularly touched by the supposed suicide of the wrongfully accused fiancé. One of her relatives had also been arrested and briefly jailed for a crime he didn’t commit. Soon almost everyone in the house was completely captivated by the fascinating ghost story and dying to know more. Only Dominick saw a sinister side to these events. A pragmatic man who worked in an accounting firm, he felt that a lot of what he was hearing simply didn’t add up to the truth. “Even though my wife didn’t seem scared, I was. I didn’t like what was going on at all! Virginia was coming to my wife more and more, and I felt the ghost was starting to, well, *possess* her, if that’s the right word.”

He looked at us with the timid expression of a schoolboy who suspects that he has just given a ridiculously wrong answer and is about to be laughed at by the whole class.

“Tell us what you mean by ‘possessed,’” Joe replied in a deliberately neutral tone. Since both of us have a law enforcement background, we’ve been trained not to lead witnesses or suggest explanations during the fact-finding stage of our investigation.

“Well, this spirit would actually go *into* my wife and try to talk through her lips,” he explained. “Often she’d stammer—which *isn’t* the way Gabby normally talks—or we couldn’t understand her words at all. During these trances, or whatever you want to call them, she’d get stiff as a board. She’d be completely out of it, but when I’d put the light on or shout her name, Virginia would usually leave. Sometimes I had to shake her or even smack her to wake her up. The ghost said ‘no harm, no fear,’ but when I saw my wife like that—stiff, stuttering, and not knowing what was going on—I felt it *was* doing harm, and there was plenty to fear.”

Here was further proof of oppression, an intense terror campaign by the demonic that paves the way for their ultimate goal: possession. Although transient possession was already taking place, Gabby’s will wasn’t broken down enough for full possession. Not suspecting what terrible danger she was in, Gabby and her large, extended family ignored Dominick’s doubts. Predictably, that provoked arguments and hostility between husband and wife, just as the demon intended. Night after night, the bookkeeper would come home from work to find the house a mess, or no dinner on the table because his wife and Ruth were off at the library trying to solve intriguing mysteries the ghost had described. Joe and I could also feel the tension between the couple during our visit and noticed that they’d often interrupt each other or dispute petty details about how certain events unfolded.

The two mothers, however, relished the opportunity to escape the humdrum world of housework and play detective. Virginia eagerly egged them on, claiming that her parents, Nathaniel and Sarah Taylor, had mysteriously disappeared shortly after her fiancé’s suicide. “I fear they may have been murdered,” she tearfully lamented. “If only I knew their fate, perhaps I could rest easy, at last.” Almost every day the ghost offered new clues to help the women trace her purported parents: They came to the United States around the turn of the century, from an unspecified European country, and moved in with their cousins, the Clarkes, while Virginia stayed behind to graduate from finishing school.

To pique their curiosity and heighten the sympathy factor, Virginia tearfully volunteered new details that any mother could relate to. It seemed that the Clarkes were also touched by family tragedy: Their only son was stillborn. Unable to have any more children, they adopted a son, Oliver, who later fell in love with Virginia and asked her to marry him.

A bit impatient with this intricate satanic scam, Joe cut to the chase. “So, did this story check out?”

Not exactly, Gabby replied. “We went through old newspapers, phone books, and public records. There was nothing about Virginia or her parents, just some stuff about the family she lived with. Apparently, the Clarkes were landowners around here at one time, but we didn’t see anything about them having a son named Oliver.”

Although diabolic forces have knowledge of the past and can view the lives of departed humans as if they were watching a videotape, these lying spirits will mix just enough fact with their disingenuous fictions to keep their victims hooked. All Gabby and Ruth had proven was that someone with the very common name of Clarke had once lived in Westchester. No doubt if they’d spent even more time at the library, they would have found some Taylors too.

The utter lack of any newspaper coverage of a dramatic story that definitely would have made headlines—a bride murdered on her wedding day and the arrest of the groom—didn’t lessen the family’s faith in Virginia, who soon asked them to tackle another mystery. “She wanted us to find the grave of her fiancé,” Gabby said. “After his suicide, there was a big cover-up and no one knew where he was buried. Virginia—”

Dominick broke in. “She had my wife in tears. Gabby felt very bad that she’d failed to find out anything about the parents, and now the ghost was weeping and carrying on about her dead boyfriend’s unknown grave.”

Once again the spirit supplied a clue: The body was probably buried in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery. Since the next day was a school holiday, Gabby, Ruth, and their five kids drove over to the beautiful old graveyard in North Tarrytown that holds the final resting place of Washington Irving and the friends he used as characters in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. After trudging through the modern and historic tombstones for several hours without finding the grave, the two exhausted families decided to give up and go home.

Just before they reached the church by the graveyard, Gabby suddenly went into a trance. “Something was pulling me up the walkway and back into the graveyard. I was yanked over to one of the headstones, which said ‘Catherine Clarke, 1859–1926.’ Virginia got very excited and said we’d found Oliver’s mother. There was a smaller stone next to it, but it was so worn that I couldn’t make out the name. Was it Oliver’s grave? Virginia didn’t say.”

I was getting pretty curious about this devil myself. The trip to the cemetery was a stroke of genius: Because the spirit had dragged their mother over to a tomb near a church, they made a leap of logic and concluded that this was a nice Christian ghost. They were totally unaware that they’d ventured into the Devil’s favorite hunting ground!

Gabby stopped resisting the spirit and actually gave it permission to enter her, so it could reveal more. “My oldest daughter went to the historic society and got old maps of Westchester. I spread them out on the table, got a pen, and asked Virginia to show me where she’d lived. My hand began to shake from side to side and was pushed to a certain area. It drew a letter we thought was either an ‘M’ or a ‘W.’”

It all fit the demonic M.O. Not only do they do everything that’s opposite of holy, but at times they’ll write backward, so you have to read the words with a mirror, or upside down. Their writing is often crooked, as if a right-handed person were using her left hand. Strange writings, sometimes using obscenities, profanities about God, or phrases from obscure languages are also a hallmark of oppression. In this case, the demon’s deliberately ambiguous scrawl was a symbolic way of blowing more smoke and increasing Gabby’s confusion.

The housewife, who clearly was *still* enthralled with Virginia, eagerly offered to show Joe the marked-up map so he could try to divine whatever hidden meaning it held. My partner shook his head: He wasn't there to decode demonic messages or give the evil power in this house *any* unnecessary recognition.

It was time to clue these people in. "Gabby, let's get one thing straight. We're not going to call this spirit 'Virginia' anymore, because it doesn't *deserve* a human name. This isn't a human spirit or ghost—it's a demon." After Joe explained the nature of these spirits, he began to debunk the demon's tale. "This wedding story is a lot of crap to snare you through empathy and make a psychic connection with your lives. From now on, when we talk about anything this spirit provoked, we'll say 'The demon did it.'"

Dominick's meek, bewildered expression changed to a sly, triumphant look that shouted "See, I told you so!"

Gabby didn't need much convincing either. Instead, she described what the demon did on Halloween, right after Dominick called a priest, Father Williams, for help. "Virginia—I mean the demon—told me she wasn't evil." Once the parish priest was brought in, the demon knew it was only a matter of time before it was exposed for what it truly was. Therefore, it accelerated its plans for possession.

On that same day the spirit tried to lure Gabby to its lair, the basement. She added, "She said she wouldn't hurt me. I didn't want to go there, then she said, 'I've dealt with Father Hayes before—and this time *I'll* win the battle!'" Even Gabby had to admit that it was more than a little strange for the spirit to claim it didn't want to hurt anyone—and had only the most benign intentions—then announce that it was all set to kick ass against a man of God. But what was odder still was *which* priest the spirit named—not the one Dominick had contacted, but an out-of-state exorcist the family didn't even know had been called.

In its stuttering voice, the spirit delivered one final ultimatum: "H-h-holy ones must *not* come!"

I should have been warned, but I wasn't. Seeing that Joe didn't need my help in conducting the interview, I decided to do the same thing I do in every case: Walk around the house and form my impression of the place. I can tell a lot about a family just by looking around. I check for signs of the occult, what religious articles are present, how the home is kept, what kind of books the people read, evidence of drug use, and any signs that might indicate there's something wrong with their lifestyle. If I see anything that bothers me, I ask them about it later in the interview.

With my tour of the house, I can sometimes pick up vibrations about the situation. I'm not psychic, so I can't rely on my intuitions 100 percent, but every human is born with some degree of a sixth sense, as a gift from God. My big mistake, in this case, was walking through the house alone. I started with the upstairs, where there was a recently vacated apartment the family had been renting out. As I walked into the apartment, a doorknob in one of the rooms started rattling. I've run across this kind of low-level bullshit from the demonic in other homes, so I noted the location for further investigation.

The rooms inside were unnaturally dark. When I found the light switch, I saw why: Everything was painted a deep, vivid black. Even the windows were so thickly coated that no light from the outside could penetrate. I searched the place, but the former occupant had left absolutely nothing behind. I would have loved to get a look at *his* possessions, because I was ready to bet my next paycheck that this guy, whoever he was, sure as hell didn't spend his spare time praying the rosary! I made a mental note to ask the family about their ex-tenant.

In the first-floor apartment, where the family lived, I didn't find anything out of the ordinary in Gabby and Dominick's bedroom, or those of the three younger children. In the future bride's room, I saw an extremely bright ball of light whiz past me and vanish down the hall. I'd seen a blazing sphere like this once before, in an earlier case, so wasn't particularly alarmed. I returned to the living room to ask the Villanovas if any of

them had ever experienced this strange phenomenon.

My question created a family uproar. “Yes, I’ve seen that light,” Luciana exclaimed.

“So have I,” added Gabby. “It’s scary.” One by one the other members of the household described various occasions where the ball of light had appeared to them.

Only Dominick was silent. He looked disappointed. Finally he interrupted the discussion of the light with a grumpy outburst. “*I’ve* never seen it! How come *you* can see these things, Mr. Sarchie, and I can’t?” He actually sounded insulted that the evil spirit hadn’t manifested itself to him.

“Don’t feel bad,” I said. “Just be thankful that you don’t.”

He gave a grudging nod of agreement, and I resumed checking the house. The remaining rooms were normal enough, though the kitchen was rather messy and the sink was piled with dirty dishes, I headed downstairs. I didn’t have any sense of evil when I first entered the basement, but when I got to a storage room with double doors, I could feel menace from eight feet away. The feeling was so overpowering that I stopped dead in my tracks, so afraid that I couldn’t move. I’ve been a cop for a long time and have been scared plenty of times before, but I always have reacted aggressively—that’s how I’ve trained myself. This was different: I couldn’t take my eyes off those doors, my heart started racing one hundred miles a minute, and I couldn’t catch my breath. Then the pain started in my head—it wasn’t like a headache, but a piercing pain in my right temple that I’ve sometimes experienced on other cases or during exorcisms.

As the pain in my head got stronger, my stomach churned and I felt like I was going to vomit. There was no outward sign of anything that I could see—just a feeling of hellish terror and absolute evil. I was too frozen to move my lips or speak, so in my mind I commanded the demon to leave in the name of Jesus Christ. It released its hold on me just enough so I could reach the bottle of holy water in my pocket. I threw holy water at the doors and was able to back away to the stairs—not daring to take my eyes off those dreadful doors.

Once I reached the living room, where the family was waiting, the pain and the sick feeling disappeared. I took Joe aside and told him what had happened.

“Ralph, I think you should take a look at this,” he said, handing a note the “ghost” had dictated to Gabby the night before.

One sentence immediately leapt out: “Harm will come to those below. Beware the night!”

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