

The Cathedral

A short story of 6,540 words for Halloween 2021. Noel accepts a working trip to Paris, in the hope of putting a little distance between her, the woman who had thrown away a twenty-year relationship, and his own feelings of despair. Life is never fair though and as Noel was soon to find out, things can always get worse.....

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~ Noel Taylor's 5th Day in Paris ~

Paris in the spring and he was sat next to a beautiful woman. Everything in his life was just about perfect, if it hadn't been for her. Five years of seeing one another, followed by fifteen years of marriage. All thrown away and he had no real idea how they'd gone from a happy marriage to a fairly acrimonious divorce. At least there were no children, as all his friends kept telling him. They were probably right; the custody battles could well have gone on for decades. It had taken two meetings with his solicitors to decide on who had custody on their cat. He had won that one and his sister was currently feeding his rather elderly feline buddy.

"It's a beautiful day." Said Michelle.

Michelle Leygonie was a French national, fluent in about six languages, one of them English. He estimated her age at somewhere in her mid-thirties, about five or six years younger than him. KDZI had given him her services for two weeks, as a mixture of interpreter, PA and general helper of the English guy who didn't even know enough French to survive.

Michelle was a qualified accountant for KDZI, a huge multinational firm of accountants. She seemed to enjoy his company, taking him to a different authentic local restaurant every day for lunch. There had even been a little mild flirtation on both sides, though she made a point of telling him she was happily married and had a small child, a girl.

"Yes, I might take advantage of the warm weather and go to the Eiffel Tower tonight." He said.

A lie, he'd intended to go out every night after work, but never had. He'd book a table in the hotel's restaurant, before watching something on cable in his room after dinner. Noel would then raid the mini-bar for nibbles and beer, before going to bed.

"Still having the dreams?" She asked.

"Yes, the same one every night since I booked into The Cathedral."

Hôtel du Rond-Point Rue de la Cathédrale, the hotel on the roundabout on cathedral street. Only there was no cathedral or a cathedral street. Michelle had told him the cathedral had burned down in about eighteen thirty and after a few other religious buildings, the hotel had been built on the site in about nineteen twenty.

"I wake up, or at least in the dream it feels like I've woken up. The hotel has lots of wooden panelling and there are carved wooden figures in all the corners. I love it, but I think it's given me an overactive imagination."

"Is the room still looking different Noel?"

"Yes, as though I'm in someone's bedroom. There's a fireplace with a roaring fire and a table with the leftovers of a meal. I become determined to explore the room, but as I stand up, the dream ends. It's becoming really frustrating."

"Are you still hearing the voice?"

“Yes, a woman’s voice still saying it twice. écouter les meubles, which you told means listen to the furniture. As I said, it’s frustrating as well as being weird. What bloody furniture ?”

Michelle pulled up as close to the hotel as she could. She drove him home and the hotel booked him a taxi every morning. Noel was the Finance Director of Pertinaxa HD Systems, a medium sized conglomerate specialising in electronics and high-speed communications.

When the books of their French operation had shown up a few discrepancies, he could easily have sent one of his team to sort it out. The financial accountant had actually begged to go. Noel had decided to come to Paris himself, in the hope of forgetting ‘her’ for a while.

“I still don’t know why you chose this hotel.” Said Michelle. “It’s very old, even if you do like the wood panelling. Most of our clients stay at the new hotels in the business district.”

“Not my choice, the travel and admin people booked it.” He said. “They were probably offered a good deal on one of the booking sites.”

“I hope you get a dream free sleep tonight.”

“So do I, see you in the morning, Michelle.”

The hotel lobby was full of happy smiling people, it always was. When he left in the morning, or returned a little after six, the hotel was always busy. If it was an old building with a weird history, it definitely wasn’t harming business. He always checked for messages at the reception desk and booked a table for dinner at about seven. He couldn’t name the woman on the desk, though he had seen her before.

“Hi, someone mentioned to me that the hotel had an interesting past.” He said. “I was wondering if you had anything about that....Maybe a leaflet ?”

“Oh, yes.....We did have a few of these in reception, but they kept vanishing. Tourists wanting a souvenir, I guess. I hope it helps.....Just leave it in the room when you leave.”

“I will, thank you.”

Noel’s heart sank when he saw the title and narrative on the back of the heavy book, were all written in French.

“The English version is the second half of the book.” She told him.

“Thank you.”

The book was old, there were even a few coffee stains on the cover. ‘The Dark History of The Cathedral Hotel,’ had about two hundred pages in English and he was determined to read them all while raiding the mini-bar for junk food and beer.

First though, the messages began to arrive once he connected his laptop to the hotel’s WiFi. Mostly routine stuff, though there was another message from his solicitors about the divorce. Nothing bad, it just reminded him that the horror wasn’t over yet. It seemed his soon to be ex-wife hadn’t been in contact with her own solicitors for a while. Just another delaying tactic, another way to drag out the hell for longer. He decided to ask Ruth in admin about the choice of hotel, via email.

‘Ruth; Love the hotel, lots of character and history. I was wondering why I was booked in here ? No complaints, just wondering what drove the decision ?; Noel.’

There was no decent movie, or at least not one he fancied. He left the room’s flatscreen playing CNN with the volume right down. The rolling news could get boring, but at least he could understand it.

“Alright book, tell me all about this dark history.”

It was well written, the hotel had obviously commissioned someone to put the book together, though about ninety percent of it dealt with the period from nineteen twenty, when the hotel had opened. With the Nazi’s taking over the hotel for the duration of the occupation of France, there

was plenty to write about. He'd just got to the first mention of a defrocked priest, when his laptop beeped at him. It seemed that Ruth monitored her emails in the evening.

'Noel; Glad you like the hotel. It's a bit embarrassing, but I can't trace why we booked that hotel. Some sort of clerical error I think, you were supposed to be at the Crowne Plaza. I'm at a loss to explain it. If you want to move to the Crowne Plaza, let me know ?; Ruth.'

Did he want to move ? The dreams were puzzling, but a long way from being a nightmare. Curious that Ruth's people had made an error though, their efficiency was legendary.

'Ruth; Happy here, will stay put. Paris is beautiful BTW; Noel.'

Back to the book and it seemed a Gérard Blignièrès was the cause of a bad reputation for the entire area in the eighteen twenties. Known to his congregation simply as Brother Gérard, he'd been an ordinary priest with a quite small church. After claiming to receive a revelation from God, a visit by an angel no less, Brother Gérard had changed.

"Just a crazy local priest." Muttered Noel.

The good brother Gérard had begun to organise, renaming his church as The Cathedral of Rapture. He really stirred up the locals, with his talk of a new true religion and breaking away from Catholicism. The book went on about various insane acts, it appeared he'd had his congregation slaughter twenty goats on the altar. Eventually Brother Gérard had been excommunicated, a fairly nasty punishment in its day. The book then jumped forward a year or so. It seemed that an unrepentant Gérard and a large number of his followers had died when his Cathedral of Rapture had mysteriously burned to the ground in about eighteen thirty.

"Someone high up in the church got fed up with you old chum." Noel mumbled.

There was more in the book, but he was tired. After confirming his morning taxi with the front desk, Noel undressed and went to bed. It was Friday the next day, a cause of celebration for most. He wasn't looking forward to the weekend though, two entire days on his own, left to brood about 'her.' He was going to do what he'd talked to Michelle about doing. A trip out to the Eiffel tower on Saturday, with a little serendipity travel on the Paris metro to fill Sunday. He'd travel aimlessly on the metro, getting off at any station with a name that caught his attention.

"If I get lost, I'll just show the address of the hotel to a taxi driver."

He muttered, just before falling into a deep sleep.

The dream began just as the others had done, with him assuming a noise had woken him up. A mysterious noise that had him sitting on the edge of the bed, with no remembrance of the sound itself. For the first time his nakedness worried him, in case whoever the room belonged to returned. None of it was Noel's, he knew that. The roaring fire had been lit by someone else. Someone had eaten the late meal on the table, which had left wonderful odours from the leftovers. An empty bottle of wine, two glasses, none of it was his.

He was expecting the dream to end as he stood up, it had every time before. Instead, he was stood there, naked and wondering what to do next. The food enticed him, could he pick at leftovers in a dream ? As he put out his hand the table bent away from him, as if reality was warping to stay clear of his touch. Noel was a little scared that everything he tried to touch, moved away as the dream stretched and warped. He'd had worse dreams though and after all, it was just a dream.

"I know it's a dream, that's weird." He mumbled.

And he could talk and hear his own voice, that made it a very unusual dream. He ignored the fireplace and walked around the table, as it warped and twisted to stay out of his reach. Once and only once, he had the idea that someone was sat in a chair by the fire. A vague outline of a man dressed in robes. Like a dream within a dream, the figure vanished. There was a cabinet against the

wall, a cabinet made of dark hardwood, with intricate carvings just about visible by the flickering flames of the fire.

“Come to me Noel.”

A voice, a deep male voice, coming from the cabinet that now looked larger than it had. There were two carved faces on its door, one of an ordinary man and one of a demon, complete with horns. By the movement of the features, he assumed it was the demon who had spoken. Noel moved closer; his curiosity wouldn't allow him to do otherwise.

“Who are you ?” He asked.

“An easy question, but the answer is quite.....Complicated.”

Definitely the face talking, he'd seen the lips move. Noel moved closer, close enough to reach out his hand and touch the cabinet, maybe even open the door. He so wanted to open the cabinet, though he had no idea why.

“Dreams can be so weird.” He muttered.

“This isn't just a dream Noel.”

No good, he had to reach out and touch the cabinet, it was if his arm and hand had a will of their own.

“I wouldn't do that Noel.”

As the tip of his index finger touched the dark brown hardwood, the dream ended.

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~ Noel Taylor's 6th Day in Paris ~

He woke up on the floor of his hotel room, some distance from his bed. The carpet was comfortable, the heating system always slightly too warm. He felt alright, no after effects from sleeping on the floor, other than a little stiffness in his shoulders. His phone was giving an alarm sound, letting him know it was time for him to get up and greet Friday morning.

“Wow, that was a wild dream.” He mumbled.

Noel looked the room over and there was no fireplace, no table covered in the remnants of a meal for two. It was his hotel room at the Cathedral Hotel and there was no large cabinet in the corner of the room. By the time he was showered, dressed and in the lobby, he'd almost forgotten the weird dream.

“Good morning, Mr Taylor, your taxi is waiting outside.” Said the man on the front desk.

The taxi drive to the KDZI offices was uneventful, though Michelle was a little late in arriving. It appeared her little girl had been a little unwell, though it was nothing serious. They seemed to work in a bubble, largely ignored by the other employee of the huge accounting company. There was one room that was their holy of holies, a room with a desk, two chairs and dozens of archive boxes. Michelle took him in there, before even taking off her outdoor coat.

“I looked at the printouts yesterday, but didn't see it. Then as I got up this morning, a fresh mind....You're right Noel, someone is syphoning off cash from your French operation.”

It had always worried him that a company making decent profits never had a cash surplus. There was research and development spending and various transfers to minimise taxation, but he'd always thought the monthly bank reports were light, millions of pounds a year light. He followed her as she went down the printout, scribbling circles around certain items. It was big, a major fraud, most likely someone on the top-level board was involved.

“Your auditors were negligent, you could have a case against them, as well as a criminal case against whoever turns out to be responsible.” Said Michelle. “It might be time to inform the authorities in London and Paris.”

“Give me the second week Michelle.” He said. “I need to know who it is, Jeremy or Lynette. I want to know....I need to know before we inform the police. I trusted them both, even promoted Jeremy into his current position.”

“I will need to tell my managing partner, but I can’t see him objecting to giving us one more week.” They were almost there and despite realising Pertinaxa had been defrauded of millions over a period of several years, there was almost a celebratory atmosphere when Michelle took him to another authentic Paris restaurant.

“Very few tourists come here, you can tell that by something as simple as the bottled water.”

“Enlighten me, Michelle ? I promise not to tell.”

She held up the bottle, showing him the label.

“Badoit water.” She said. “There are limited supplies, we no longer like exporting it and you probably can’t buy it in Britain, even in Harrods. If you see it on the table, you know the restaurant is probably authentically French. Though I hate the term, authentic, we must think of a better one before you leave.”

“How about ethnic, or maybe traditional ?”

“Worse Noel, far worse.” She replied, while laughing.

The food was wonderful, the sort of meal his soon to be ex-wife would have complained was too rich, and ‘she’ would have hated the cheese sauce. If only ‘she’ had been a little more like Michelle, with her warm smile and.....

“So, did you dream again last night ?”

He told her everything about the table full of the remnants of a meal, the fire and of course the cabinet with the two carved faces. He had been noticing a tingling in the fingers of his right hand all morning. As he told her about the dream ending as he touched the cabinet, he realised what was wrong with them. His finger tips felt mildly scalded, as though he’d dipped them in water that was just a little too hot.

“Wow, are you sure you want to stay at that hotel ?” She asked.

“Funny you should say that, Ruth, who looks after us like a second mother, assured me I was booked into the Crowne Plaza. No one seems to know how I ended up at The Cathedral.”

“Then you should definitely consider moving.” Said Michelle. “Actually, it’s all sounding far too weird, you should definitely move to the Crowne Plaza.”

“You sound like you believe in all.....That sort of thing.” He said.

“More than believe Noel, I’ve seen and heard.....But you’ll just think I’m crazy.”

“No, I won’t. Please tell me ?”

“I’ve always been sensitive to, let’s call it the spirit world, since I was tiny. My grandmother died when I was eleven and I know she came to say goodbye. I was in our kitchen and felt a disturbance in the air around me. Then everything hanging on the wall began to rattle. Pots, pans, all the metal spoons and stirrers. It caused quite a bit of noise and I knew my grandmother had come to say goodbye. Don’t ask me how, but I knew. I even said goodbye to her. Later my mum came to tell me the bad news, but I knew, I knew every detail of her death. So.....Yes Noel, I believe.”

He told her about the book and the fate of Brother Gérard. It seemed only fair to tell her everything after she’d been so honest with him. Poor Michelle, she looked so upset, she even held his hand.

“You must move out of that hotel Noel, promise me.....Promise me now.”

“It’s Friday....I might move after the weekend.”

“No, now this minute....I have a very bad feeling about your hotel room.”

She'd raised her voice; they were the centre of attention. It reminded him of meals out with 'her,' but Michelle cared about him and wasn't thinking of an excuse to storm out and leave him sat in a crowded restaurant full of gawping strangers.

"Alright Michelle....I'll move hotels tonight."

"Call them from the office, tell them you're moving out."

If she hadn't been sat the other side of the table, he'd have definitely hugged her. As it was, he made do with squeezing her hand.

"I'll be alright.....I'll move hotels, I promise."

A promise was one thing, but once he was back in the hotel lobby, he was undecided again. As usual there were no messages and a woman, he knew but couldn't name, took his booking for a table in the restaurant for his evening meal. It was that cabinet, that damned cabinet. He had to know what was inside it. After showering he looked in the bathroom mirror and was surprised to see his usual self looking back. No darkness around the eyes, no glazed expression, not one sign of madness.

"I'm just curious.....It's quite normal. What does Michelle know anyway?" He muttered. "All that stuff about her grandmother. She's the crazy one."

His dinner was excellent, it always was. As he left the restaurant, he realised he had no memory of the food. Noel remembered using a knife and fork, while enjoying the food, but what the food actually was.....It was just the lack of a full night's sleep. The woman he recognised was still on the desk.

"Hi, I was just wondering." He said. "I love my room, but something keeps waking me up in the middle of the night. Have any other guests had problems sleeping in that room?"

"Oh.....You're in room 35.....No, I've never heard of anything like that. It is one of our most popular room, people actually ask for it...All those wonderful carvings. I can move you to another room, if you wish?"

"No, that's alright, it is a very beautiful room. I probably just need something to help me sleep. Could you help, does the hotel have that kind of thing?"

She looked awkward, which didn't surprise him.

"Normally I'd see a doctor, but I'm here for another week and my doctor is in London. I just need a really good sleep tonight."

"I might be able to help. I'll come to your room later." She said.

"Thank you."

There was a documentary about polar bears on cable, though he couldn't concentrate on it. His mind kept going over the cabinet, over and over again. The wonderful warmth of the dark hardwood, the polish on its surface. Even the carved face of a demon seemed harmless when he thought about.

"Nothing more than an interesting carving. No more threatening than a Halloween mask." He muttered.

The cable documentary had ended when he heard a knock on the door and a French cop show was playing. Two and a half hours had gone by, yet he had no recollection of them. He was sure he hadn't been asleep though. He went to the door.

"I got these....It has to be our secret. No drinking with these, no booze."

"Thank you, do I owe you anything?"

"No."

She was gone in an instant. The way his mind had been since returning to the hotel, he wondered if she's ever been there. The proof of her existence was in his hand though, two film coated orange

pills. Like many people, Noel thought instructions that came with medicines were for everyone else, never him. He washed the pills down with beer, before getting a decent looking bottle of white wine out of the mini-bar.

“Kill or cure.....Tonight I’m having a dreamless sleep.” He muttered.

Lying to himself of course, he wanted the dreams to continue, he needed to get into that cabinet. The cop show on cable seemed to change as he watched it. He was the villain, the murderer the serious looking lady detective was after. He’d done it, he’d committed the heinous murder. Noel drifted out of the show and into a personal nightmare. He woke up shaking, with some of the images still in his mind. A body on a tiled floor, a head with long dark hair.....The pool of sticky red blood growing larger, until it touched his foot....

“Crap, maybe mixing sleeping pills with booze is bad mojo.” He muttered.

Too much booze on top of an over excited imagination. He noticed it was late as he turned off the flatscreen, very late. He turned off the alarm on his phone, so that it didn’t try to wake him at some ungodly early hour. As he undressed Noel decided to leave his boxer shorts on. He doubted if they could follow him into a dream, but it was worth trying.

“Oh.....Wake me up on Monday.” He mumbled.

Noel knew it was a dream, he actually welcomed it. Despite wearing his boxer shorts to bed, he was naked again when he sat on the edge of the bed. The table was there, with what looked to be the same remnants of a meal. Once again, the only light was the yellow and red flickering from the logs burning fiercely in the fireplace.

“Welcome Noel Taylor, I knew you’d return. Like a moth to a flame.”

Perfect English, unless the dream was just that, nothing but a product of his own damaged mind. He could cope with work, in fact he seemed more productive. It was just everyday life that was giving him problems since ‘she’ had walked out of his life, destroying it on the way out.

“Who are you ?” He asked.

“You asked me that before. Some call me a demon, a defiler of women, a despoiler of everything good and holy. They excommunicated me and when that didn’t get rid of me, they burned me with over a hundred of my followers.”

“You’re bother Brother Gérard aren’t you, the defrocked priest.”

The figure sat by the fire looked more real than the last time, more solid. The simple priest’s robes were easier to make out, along with the hood that partly covered the man’s face.

“I am, as you see before you nothing but a humble priest. I am Gérard Blignières, founder of The Cathedral of Rapture, for what good it did me. In all humility I have to say that for everyone with something bad to say about me, you’ll find ten who thought of me as a good man.”

Again, Noel found it hard to focus on anything apart from the cabinet, which looked huge now, larger than the room in places. Impossible of course, apart from in a dream.

“You can enter the cabinet if you wish.” Said Brother Gérard. “Though I must warn you it would be very unwise. Whether you believe me.....That depends on whether you believe me to be a good man, or an evil one. Why did you do it Noel ? There was no need.”

His focus changed at the words and more memories of violence filled his mind. Blood too, so much blood.

“What do you mean ?” He asked.

“You know, part of you hasn’t chosen to forget. Look deep Noel Taylor and you’ll remember.”

“Ridiculous, you’re nothing but a dead priest, a defrocked one at that.”

“I hate the word defrocked....So crude.”

Noel left the priest and walked towards the cabinet, which had grown again. It was the size of a small building, though the doors were the same size they always had been.

“Not a good idea Noel.” Said Gérard.

“Fool.....Tell me then, tell me what’s inside the cabinet ?”

“Not for me to say.....It’s complicated.”

He had to know, Noel honestly thought at that moment, that his entire life was nothing but a preparation for opening the door to that cabinet. He stretched out his hand and actually touched the metal handle, without the dream ending.

“Why did you do it Noel ?”

The cabinet forgotten he turned, spinning around. He knew that voice ! It was ‘her,’ the woman who had as good as ripped out his still beating heart and stamped on his soul. It seemed that not content with torturing him during his waking hours, ‘she’ was now invading his dreams.

“Sarah !” He shouted.

The dream swirled around him, as if that part of reality was folding in on itself. The dream ended with him staring into darkness, his mind full of memories of violence and....Oh, so much blood. How could he have been so stupid ?

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~ Noel Taylor’s 7th Day in Paris ~

Waking up on the floor was less pleasant the second time. He’d fallen into an awkward position and his shoulder was really painful when he moved. Noel barely made it to the bathroom in time to empty his bladder, but it was the face in the mirror that really worried him. The bloodshot eyes and darkness under his eyes didn’t look healthy.

“No more pills and alcohol.” He muttered.

Various memories from the dream still hung about in his mind, like patches of mist on a summer morning. He remembered the long dead priest and getting so close to opening that cabinet. He remembered ‘her’ being there too. Sarah, his soon to be ex-wife, ex-tormentor, ex-problem. His waking mind was certain that ‘her’ being in his dream meant it was no more than a sign of his deeply troubled mind.

“I keep saying I’ll go to the Eiffel Tower, so today I’ll do it.”

He had a map of the streets, with the shortest route marked in green ink. It was walkable, though it would take him an hour and a half to walk there, plus the same to get back. The walk would do him good and he’d do what he’d done before about lunch, even in Britain. He’d find a decent looking café and point at the picture of what he fancied.

“Cheeseburger and fries, you can’t go wrong with that.”

Noel was proud of himself for venturing out into a city where he didn’t know the language. He even got a buzz out of telling the front desk his plans for the day, and no, he didn’t need them to call a taxi for him. He took his phone with him, despite it being nothing but a paperweight since he’d been in France, left on the bedside table. The tech guys at work had assured him that most British cell phones still worked well in Europe, but Noel was cautious. He’d told just about everyone to contact him by email. Anyway, mainly it was ‘her’ who had called him during the day, and that part of his life was now gone.

“Treat it as an adventure.” He mumbled to himself.

It was a long walk, though he had kept himself fit. Noel walked around the park below the tower, smiling and greeting anyone who smiled at him. It was a pleasant day; he’d even found somewhere for lunch with an English-speaking waitress. His anticipated cheeseburger and fries, became a

delicious lasagne and green salad. He never did go inside the tower or go up in the elevator, but he'd enjoyed the day. Noel Taylor returned to The Cathedral Hotel, feeling good, one of his personal goals for the two weeks in Paris had been achieved. He had been to the Eiffel Tower and had lots of pictures on his phone to prove it. His phone rang when his foot was on the front steps of his hotel, a number he didn't recognise.

"Hello."

"Noel, this is Michelle, I'm worried about you. I called the Crowne Plaza and found out you never checked in. Are you still at The Cathedral?"

"It wasn't convenient Michelle, I had so much planned. I finally went to the Eiffel Tower today. I'll think about changing hotels next week." He said.

He heard her gasp.

"No.....Listen to me....Are you really listening?"

"Yes, of course I am."

"You mustn't stay at that hotel Noel. I have a bad feeling, the kind of feeling I had before my grandmother died. I sense things.....You are in danger. Please trust me....I'm scared you will die if you don't leave that dreadful place."

He could hear the tension in her voice and he did believe her. There was something about the defrocked priest telling him the cabinet wasn't a good thing to open. Whether Brother Gérard was good or evil was still unclear. He seemed sincere about that cabinet though.

"I'm so tired Michelle, it's been a long day. I will pack my things and leave here in the morning though, I promise."

"Tell them you'll be checking out after breakfast, it's important."

"I will, I will."

"I will come in the morning and take you to the Crowne Plaza. If they don't have a room, we'll try somewhere else. But.....You have to leave there."

"I will tell reception to have my bill ready in the morning." He said.

"Good, I'll be there at around nine thirty. Be careful tonight."

"I will.....Thank you."

He might still have ignored his promises to her, if he hadn't felt the darkness as he entered the hotel lobby. Difficult to define, as if something dreadful had left an invisible mist, a sense of dread. Noel booked a table for dinner and he also told them he would be checking out after breakfast.

"Of course, Mr Taylor, your bill will be ready. I hope you've enjoyed your stay?"

"Yes, very much so....A beautiful hotel."

A man behind the counter, one he didn't recognise, it had made it easier. There, he'd done it, he was leaving the damned dreams behind, and that cabinet. Brother Gérard could have the place to himself for eternity. There was a small bottle waiting on the table in his room, more of the sleeping pills, with a note telling him to take no more than two per night.

"I can't even recall her name." He muttered. "So kind, so very kind."

A shower first, before changing for dinner. By the time he came back to his room, Noel was ready to leave the hotel in the morning. The aura of darkness was everywhere, he hadn't enjoyed his meal. None of the staff he knew were on duty. He knew it was crazy, but it was as if the hotel knew he intended to leave, as if the building was....Like 'her.' The damned building hated him now.

"A movie and an early night." He muttered.

He even set the alarm on his phone to wake him nice and early, to give plenty of time to pack his things. The movie was an old horror film he'd seen a dozen times, but didn't mind watching yet

again. He took two of the pills and despite knowing he'd feel ill in the morning, he raided the mini-bar for a bottle of wine. In his experience old classic movies were better after a glass of wine, or two. "Everything will feel better in the morning." He muttered.

At some point in the evening, he took two more pills, knocking the bottle over in the process. He remembered little about watching the film, the flatscreen was showing French infomercials when he decided to turn it off. Undressing was difficult, he felt so uncoordinated. In the end he left his socks on, because bending to take them off caused the room to spin around.

"Oh....Crap !"

His head hit the pillow and he was out cold, more passed out than natural asleep. The strange thing was that he felt alert when the dream began, though he was naked once again. Sat on the bed, looking at the same table and the roaring log fire. Next to the table Brother Gérard was still there, sat watching him.

"None of your games tonight." Said Noel. "I'm staying here until the dream ends, or I wake up."

"I have no problem with that, my duty is merely to warn you about opening the cabinet." Said Gérard.

"That's it.....No other agenda ?"

"None at all, though I will ask you again....Why did you do it ?"

"Do what ? I've no idea what you mean."

"Really.....Think Noel, think.....Try hard to remember."

"I can't....."

"Try harder.....Remember."

"I just see blood on a tiled floor.....So much blood."

"Why did you kill me ?"

It was her voice, his wife's voice, Sarah's voice. Noel screamed as all the memories filled his head. Full colour, high definition, he could even hear the dreadful sound as he'd banged her head against the kitchen floor.

"I just wanted you to go away....." He yelled.

Anger had turned to hate, which had become a single wish, to make it all stop. He had to make Sarah go away, completely out of his life, forever. He'd still loved her, that was the terrible thing, he still loved her, even though she was dead. No, the tragic thing wasn't loving her, the tragedy was ending her life.

His mind had found the event too terrible to tolerate, hiding the memories away. Now he remembered everything, including wrapping her body up in an old rug, before burying it in the woods near her house. Now he couldn't get the images out of his head. He'd banged her head into the tiled floor until she was barely recognisable.

"I am so sorry." He shouted.

"Ahh, you're sorry, so that's alright then." Said Gérard. "Do what you like, no matter how evil. Then say you're sorry and God will forgive you. A splendid idea invented by unscrupulous clergy to separate evil men from their fortunes. It's one of the reasons I decided to break away and form my own church."

"I am truly sorry.....I still love her."

"Reality is different to the accepted theology Noel, you're damned, accept it. You really have no option, though strangely enough your ultimate fate still relies on free will, to a certain extent."

"I don't care, do with me as you will." Said Noel.

“Oh, it has nothing to do with me.” Said Gérard. “You may enter the cabinet now, nothing will stop you, not now. Or you may remain sat where you are, until.....You’ll see.”

Noel stood and for the first time he saw her, Sarah sat on the opposite side of the table from Gérard. She merely nodded at him and he nodded back. There just didn’t seem to be anything else to say, or do. He loved her still, despite killing her. Noel approached the cabinet, which now looked larger than the entire hotel. No warning as he held the handle and opened the door.

“Goodbye Noel.” Said Gérard.

As he stepped inside, it was as if he’d dissolved and ceased to be anything solid, even as solid as a dream. Briefly he was aware he wasn’t alone, there were many other people in the cabinet, perhaps millions of them. He drifted for a while in darkness, before seeing the hotel room again, from inside the cabinet. He was unable to speak or move, but he was looking through one of the carved faces, at his hotel room, the real room, not the dream. Now he knew, now he understood.

His lifeless body was on the floor, an empty bottle of pills not far from his hand. He didn’t remember intending to take too many, or drink the two bottles of wine. He had though and in a weird way, it must have been an unconscious try for absolution, the ultimate ‘I’m sorry.’

Only reality wasn’t really like that according to Gérard and Noel believed him. He was in hell, or the form of hell chosen for him, maybe by his own guilt. He’d be stuck in the cabinet forever, unable to talk or move, his unblinking eyes watching the room, or whatever replaced the room, forever. He could hear a little though, he heard Michelle scream as someone opened the room door.

“I told you.....I knew.....Someone should have opened his door sooner.....” She yelled.

Poor Michelle, one of the hotel staff was trying to stop her hugging his dead body. She was crying, crying for him.....

~ ~

~ The End ~

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As with all my short stories, any similarity to real people is entirely unintended.