

HEATHER: A CASE OF ANCESTRAL EVIL

“There is a demon in the room,” Canon Lendrum announced calmly.

The calmness was a mask. Inwardly, he was dismayed. He had not expected this. The canon had come to rid the house of an earthbound spirit, and to his mind, all had gone according to plan. He had already removed his surplice and was busy stowing the Communion vessels in his case. That was when he heard the low, menacing growl coming from the couch behind him.

He turned. Minutes before, the demure young woman had partaken of the Eucharist. Now she was hideously transformed. Her neck had become impossibly elongated, the facial skin had tightened, and the lips were drawn back into a mocking smirk. The eyes that fixed him with blazing hatred were no longer those of Heather Mitchelson.

It was 1992. Canon William H. Lendrum, then age sixty-eight, had been battling the preternatural for more than two decades. Now, fifteen years later, he remembers that incident with trepidation, for it differed greatly from the work his ministry usually requires. That day, the canon tells us, he came face-to-face with great evil; it was a case of demonic possession that would require a major exorcism.

The Anglican Church—much like the Catholic Church—has a strict protocol governing exorcism. A minister is obliged to alert his bishop before proceeding. This is largely a matter of courtesy, but in the case of a major exorcism, it is the minister’s bounden duty.

That day, however, there was neither time nor opportunity to notify the

bishop. For Canon Lendrum, the danger was clear and present in Heather Mitchelson. He would have to act at once.

“There is a demon in the room,” he said again.

His two assistants did not share his calm. They occupied chairs to the left and right of Heather. They had followed closely every stage of the Eucharist. Both were experienced participants in the sacred rite of exorcism; both were schooled in the ways of extraphysical entities. For all that, they were shocked, taken unawares. They, too, had imagined it was all over.

Now Heather was lunging at her partner, Joe. He looked terrified. With two quick, curt gestures, Canon Lendrum motioned to him to remove himself from harm’s way. Joe retreated to the back of the room.

There was no time for the canon to retrieve his sacred instruments, but he did not truly need them; prayer would be enough. He advanced on Heather.

“You foul and evil spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ—”

“You’ll never get rid of me!” The woman slithered off the couch, cackling and taunting. “She’s mine, *mine, mine, mine.*”

The voice was that of a very old woman. It seemed to issue, by turns, from the young woman’s mouth and from various points in the room. She was writhing on the floor, her body coiling and uncoiling itself, her tongue lolling obscenely.

The exorcist was left in no doubt: these were the words and actions of the demoniac, the possessed. Not too long before this, he had confronted a young man who had likewise hissed and wriggled in much the same manner when he prayed over him. On that occasion, he had been unsuccessful. The demon had won the battle. The canon recalls the chilling words that

issued from the young man's mouth, the voice greatly distorted.

"He belongs to *me*. I am *not* going." And with that the young man fled from the house.

This time, the canon was determined not to be thwarted. He mustered the words of power, which unclean entities go in dread of.

"In accordance with the authority that he has given to his Church," he intoned, "I bind you, and I forbid you to speak or interfere with this woman."

He placed a hand on Heather Mitchelson's head. She recoiled from his touch. Within moments, she was on her feet, snarling. He backed away. He was no longer calm.

He could not believe that she could summon such energy. She was barely five feet tall and weighed perhaps ninety pounds, but her arms and fists seemed to belong to a strongly built man. She caught him in a body lock. His two assistants sprang to the canon's defense and tried to pull her off, but she shrugged the men away with the ease of a freestyle wrestler, knocking them to the floor.

The exorcist was faltering. Another blow to the jaw nearly felled him. He struggled to retain his balance as the assistants tried again to restrain her.

"In the name of Jesus—stop!" the canon shouted.

His words had an astonishing effect. Heather fell to the floor as if struck by a heavy object. She lay still as a stone, eyes wide and staring, all strength seemingly drained from her. The canon, recovered somewhat but still a little groggy from the blows he had sustained, bent over her.

"In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to release your name!"

On hearing the words "Jesus Christ," Heather went into a violent spasm. The canon's assistants grasped her arms and legs. At that moment, she was as much a danger to herself as to others; she was flailing about, out of control. But

by and by the fit subsided. The assistants relaxed their grip and allowed Heather to sit up, very slowly. The canon retrieved his cross and prayer book.

Heather seemed to slump down into herself; her posture became that of an old, decrepit being. The shoulders grew hunched; her chin sank low onto her chest. She began cackling. Joe, still in his position of safety, was aghast. He was recalling other cackling, other incidents. That which he feared was returning.

“She’s *mine*. She’s always been *mine*.” It was the voice of the old woman again. “You can’t have her. Never, *never, never!*”

“I command you, in the name of Jesus, give me your name.”

“Damn you!” came the curse from Heather’s lips.

“I command you, in the name of Jesus Christ, give me your name.”

He noted that the holy name was finding its mark, wearing the demon down.

“Damn you, damn you, damn you.” She spat into the canon’s face. “She never belonged to *him*. She’s ours. We serve the Master. Before the sperm met the egg she was ours.”

The voice began to jabber, the words pouring out in a demented meter of their own, like a travesty of a children’s play song.

“Before the filth met the filth she was ours! In the darkness of the womb she was ours. In the depths of the garden she was ours. Always ours, always ours ... *ours!*” The final word was drawn out in a harsh, rasping hiss.

The demon was playing for time. The canon recognized the gibberish for the desperate delaying tactic it was. Soon, the pleading would start.

“In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you, give me your name.”

Heather’s body was contorting again. She curled herself into the fetal position and lay back down.

“Sal . . . Sala . . . Salac . . . Salaci . . . Salacia!” She drummed out the name in a childlike, staccato rhythm.

At a signal from Canon Lendrum, his assistants went to lift her back onto the couch. It should have been simple. It was not: they found her to be as immovable as granite. They could not budge her; it was as if an unseen force was pinning her to the floor. It was yet another sign—as if further evidence were needed—that Heather was demonically possessed. The canon strode to her and raised a hand.

“I command you, vile spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ, leave this woman now!”

Heather’s body seemed to relax. She uncurled herself and lay flat on her back, eyes staring at the ceiling. The assistants held her arms and legs as the canon continued to pray over her.

“You vile spirit, I am speaking to you now in the name and with the authority of Jesus Christ. At my command, you will depart from this woman whom you have tormented for many days and nights, and you will go to your own place—”

Suddenly Heather shot upright. It was as if an invisible hand had yanked her by the hair. The sardonic expression was back. She began moving her head from side to side in a weaving motion, smiling and drooling.

Another demon was making its presence felt; the canon was certain of it. There was a marked difference in Heather’s features. This time, her face seemed to flatten; the mouth drooped.

“In the name of Jesus Christ I command you—”

“We will *never* leave her.” The deafening roar cut across the canon’s words. The new voice was quite unlike that of the old woman; it seemed to emerge from

the floor itself. “We’ll *kill* her first!”

Then the voice took on the cadence of a schoolyard bully’s—malicious, sing-song, mocking.

“We tried her before with her blades and pills, blades and pills, blades-and-pills—”

“I *command* you in the name of *Jesus Christ*, release your name!”

The face took on a haughty look. The sneer was back again, but there was another personality, another consciousness, behind it.

“I am Uncle Seth,” a masculine voice announced. “Lover of the little ones. Robber of the little souls. Killer of the Innocents.”

The words had a robotic timbre, slowed and slurred, like an old gramophone winding down. On the last syllable, the young woman’s hands flew to her throat. They began to squeeze. She was choking; her face was turning blue. The canon’s assistants rushed to break the grip of those hands—and found they could not.

Heather Mitchelson was throttling herself to death.

“Please,” Joe cried, “can’t somebody *do* something?”

But the canon stilled him with a gesture. He had cautioned Joe not to speak unless spoken to. In the meantime, the assistants were winning. It was not the first time they had had to contend with a display of unnatural strength by the possessed. After a struggle, they pried Heather’s hands away and pinioned her arms behind her back. She would do no more mischief—not to herself, not to anybody.

“I *command* you in the name of Jesus to depart from this woman!” the canon urged in a mighty voice. It surprised Joe with its volume and intensity. “I have bound you and stripped you of your power to resist—”

Heather’s head began to weave from side to side again.

“We take them in the dark . . . always in the dark . . . in the depths of the dark. We walk for the Master in the dark.”

The voice was faltering under the authority of the canon’s. The demoniac’s neck slackened and her head fell to one side. As was the case from the beginning, the eyes remained wide open and unblinking.

“You will go quietly, and you will hurt no one as you leave!” the canon ordered.

“No! Please, don’t send us to him.” The voice was that of a pleading child. “We cannot go to him. . . . Please, not to the cold place. We need the warm . . . the bodies of the warm . . . to live in the blood of the bodies of the warm.”

The voice began to chant with a breathless urgency: “. . . of the warm, of the warm . . . to do for the Master in the bodies of the blood of the warm—”

“Go now to that place that the Lord Jesus Christ has appointed for you!”

“. . . to kill with the hands of the bodies of the warm . . . to rage in the sweat in the blood in the warm—”

“There you will remain until he releases you!” the canon thundered.

“. . . to see through the eyes of the bodies of the warm . . . to live in the dark in the blood of bodies . . . warm . . .”

The voice was becoming weak and hesitant. The canon was certain that the final expulsion was near. He spoke with renewed vigor and authority.

“In the name of Jesus Christ, go *now* to that place that the Lord has appointed for you. In the name of Jesus Christ I command you!”

“Warm . . . please, we need the warm. Please!”

The assistants relaxed their grip. Heather fell back onto the floor with closed eyes. She had fainted.

The canon’s voice continued to rise in volume as the demon’s grip weakened.

“Go *now* to that place that the *Lord Jesus Christ* has appointed for you and there *you will remain* until *he* releases you!”

Something extraordinary happened at that moment. A dramatic change occurred, but it was invisible to all in that room. Joe reports a “lifting.” A presence had departed.

The young woman opened her eyes and looked about her, plainly disoriented.

“What am I doing on the floor?” she asked, in all innocence. She turned to the young man near the window. “Joe? What’s going on?”

In common with most victims of possession, Heather had no recollection of what had just taken place. For the best part of two hours, her entire being had been invaded by an alien force. Now there was only Heather Mitchelson.

The ordeal was at an end. The ghosts of family evil had been laid to rest.

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