"In the demonic form of possession, the "demon" may speak in languages unknown to the first personality, or manifest various paranatural phenomena: telekinesis, for example: the movement of objects without application of material force . . ." It seemed impossible, yet Chris was convinced that her daughter was possessed!

The rented house was a brick colonial, gripped by ivy in the Georgetown section of Washington, D.C. Across the street was a fringe of campus belonging to Georgetown University, to the rear a sheer embankment plunging steeply to busy M Street and, beyond, the muddy Potomac. Just after midnight on April 1 the house was quiet. Chris MacNell was awake in bed, going over her lines for the next day's filming: Regan, her daughter, was sleeping down the hall; and asleep downstairs in a room off the pantry were the middle-aged Swiss housekeepers, Willie and Karl. At approximately 12:25 A.M. Chris glanced from her script with a frown. She heard rapping sounds. They were odd. Muffled. Rhythmically clustered.

She listened for a moment, then dismissed them; but when they persisted she could not concentrate. She slapped down the script on the bed, went out to the hallway and looked around. The sounds seemed to be coming from Regan's bedroom.

She padded down the hall and the rappings suddenly became much louder and faster. Then, as she pushed on the door and stepped into the room, they abruptly ceased. Her pretty eleven-year-old was asleep, cuddled tight to a large, stuffed, round-eyed panda. Chris moved softly to her bedside. "Rags? You awake?"


Chris shifted her glance around the room. Dim light from the hall fell pale and fractured on Regan's paintings and sculptures and on more stuffed animals. She flicked
a quick glance to the ceiling. There! Faint scratchings.

Rats in the attic, for Pete's sake! Rats!

She sighed, relieved. And then noticed the cold. She went to the window, closed. She touched the radiator. Hot.

Puzzled, she moved to the bedside and touched again. It was smooth as thought and lightly perspiring.

She looked at her daughter, at the turned-up nose and freckled face, and on a quick, warm impulse leaned over the bed and kissed her cheek. Then she returned to the room and her script.

For a while longer, Chris studied. The film was a musical-comedy remake of "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington." A subplot had been added dealing with campus insurrections. Chris was starring. She played a psychology teacher who sided with the rebels. The company had completed the interior scenes in Hollywood; all that remained were a few exterior scenes on the campus of Georgetown University; shooting would start tomorrow. It was Easter vacation and the students were away.

She turned to a page that was curiously ragged. She smoothed, her English director. When especially tense, he would tear a narrow strip from the edge of the handiest page and then chew it, inch by inch.

Dear Burke!

She yawned, made a mental note to have Karl set traps for the rats in the morning. Her fingers relaxed, the script slipped loose. She let it drop and slept. "Sleep tight!"

She leaped awake with her heart pounding, and answered, the assistant director.

"In makeup at six, honey."

"Right."

She put on a robe and padded quickly down to the kitchen.

"Ah, good morning, Mrs. MacNeil."

Gray, drooping Willie was squeezing oranges, blue suds beneath her eyes. She wiped her hands on a paper towel and started washing up toward the stove.

"I'll get it, Willie."

Chris, poured coffee, then moved to the breakfast nook. And smiled warmly as she looked at her plate. A blush-red rose lay on it. Regan. That angel! Many a morning when Chris was working, Regan would slip out of bed, come down to the kitchen and place a flower, then grope her way back to her sleep. Chris looked up from the coffee and lighted a cigarette, Willie brought juice and Chris remembered the rats.

"Where's Karl?" she asked.

I am here, madam.

Lithe as a cat through a door off the pantry. Commanding, Deferential, "Yes?" he breathed by the table. Glittering eyes. Hawk nose. Bald head.

"Hey, Karl, we've got rats in the attic. Better get some traps."

"There are rats?"

"Karl, I heard them last night," Chris said.

"Maybe plumbing," probed Karl; "maybe boards."

"Maybe rats! Will you buy the traps and quit arguing?"

"Yes, madam!" Bustling away, Chris sipped at her coffee. A strange man. But, like his wife, Willie, hardworking; very loyal; discreet.

In her room, Chris dressed in her costume sweater and skirt. She glanced in a mirror and solemnly stared at her short red hair that looked perpetually tousled, at the burst of freckles on the small, scrubbed face; then crossed her eyes and stuck out her tongue at herself. Then shrugged. Ah, what a life! She picked up her wallet and box and walked out to the tree-lined street.

She entered the main gates of the campus and her depression diminished, and by the day's first shot, she was almost herself: She started an argument over the script.

"Hey, Burke. Take a look at this, will ya?"

"Oh, you do have a script, I see. How nice!"

Burke Dennings, eyes gleaming with mischief, tore a narrow strip from a page of her script. "I believe I'll munch," he exclaimed.

They were standing on the esplanade in front of the administration building. Here and there a few spectators dotted the lawn, mostly Jesuit faculty. Dennings put the paper in his mouth; his breath smelled faintly of the morning's first gin. A silly, frail man in his fifties, he spoke with a British accent so clipped and precise that it lofted even his crudest obscenities to elegance.

"Now then, tell me, baby, what's wrong?"

The scene in question called for Chris to run up the steps, point to the main administration building and shout, "Let's tear it down!"

"It just doesn't make sense," said Chris. "Well, it's perfectly plain," lied Dennings.

"Why the hell should they tear down the building?"

"Shall we summon the writer? I believe he's in Paris!"

"Hiding?"

"F—ing!" said Burke, eyes glinting.

"Oh, Burke, you're impossible," Chris exploded. She was looking at a nearby Jesuit, checking to see if he'd heard Burke's obscenity. Dark, rugged face, in his forties. Something sad about the eyes; something pained; and yet warm and reassuring. He'd heard. He was smiling. He glanced at his watch and moved away.

"I say, shall we get on with it?"

She turned, disconnected. "Yeah, sure, Burke."

At four o'clock Burke dismissed the company for the day. Chris walked homeward tired. At the corner of Thirty-sixth and O, waiting to cross, she glanced diagonally across the street to a Catholic church, Holy Something-or-other. Staffed by Jesuits.

She crossed. As she walked on, a young priest rushed by from behind her, hands in the pockets of a nylon windbreaker. He took a right, turning into a courtyard behind the church.

Chris noticed him. He seemed to be heading for a white frame cottage. A screen door creaked open and still another priest emerged. It was the one who had smiled at her earlier. Only now he looked grave as he put his arm around the other priest's shoulder in a gesture that was gentle and somehow parental. He led him inside and the screen door closed with a squeak.

Chris wondered if Jesuits went to confession.

Once home, she walked into the kitchen.

"Hi, Chris, how'd it go?"

A pretty blonde in her twenties sitting at the table. Sharon Spencer. For the last three years she had been tutor to Regan and social secretary to Chris.

"Oh, the usual crock." Chris sauntered to the table and began to sift messages.

"Where's Reg?"

"Downstairs in the playroom, sculpting. She's making a bird. It's for you."

"Yeah, I need one," Chris murmured. She moved to the stove and poured a cup of hot coffee. "How'd the lesson go?"

Sharon frowned, "Had a bad time with math again.

"Oh? Gee, that's funny."

"I know; it's her favorite subject," said Sharon.

"Hi, Mom!"

Regan was bounding through the door, slim arms outstratched. Red pigtails. Soft, shining face full of freckles. Beamimg, Chris caught her in a bear hug, then kissed the girl's cheek with smacking ardor. She could not repress the full flood of her love. "Minnum-minnum!

"More kisses. Then she held Regan out. "What'dja do today? Anything exciting?"

"Oh, lemme see," Regan swayed gently back and forth against her mother. "Well, I studied."

"Uh-huh."

"And I practiced."

"What's pointy?"

"Oh, well, flowers—you know, Daisies. Only pink. And then—oh, yeah! This horse!"

She grew suddenly excited, eyes widening. "This man had a horse, you know, down by the river? Oh, Mom, you've never seen him! And the man let me sit on him! Mother, can't we get a horse? I mean, could we?"

"We'll see, baby. Where's the bird you made?"

Regan looked blank for a moment, then turned to Sharon and grinned, her mouth full of braces. "You told," she said in shy rebuke. "It was a surprise."

"Oh, Rags, that's sweet. Can I see it?"

"No, I still have to paint it. When's dinner, Mom?"

"Hungry?"

"Start cooking! Can we go to the Barque Shoppe?"

Chris smiled fondly.

"Run upstairs and get dressed and we'll go."

"Oh, I love you!" Regan said, and ran for the bathroom.

"Honey, wear the new dress!" Chris called after her.

Chris reached for her mail, began sorting through it.

"Mom, I can't find the dress!" Regan called from upstairs.

"I'll be up in a second!" Chris called back. She got up. "Got a date, Shary?"

"Yes."

Chris motioned at the mail. "You go on, then. We can catch all this stuff in the morning." She went upstairs to Regan's bedroom. Regan was standing in the middle of the room staring up at the ceiling. "What's doin'?" Chris asked her, hunting for the dress. It was a pale blue cotton. She'd bought it the week before, and remembered hanging it in the closet. But the hunt for the dress proved
fruitless.

"Soe, Mom? It's not there."

"Yeah, well, put on the navy. It's pretty."

They were back before seven. Regan made a dash for the basement playroom, eager to finish the sculpture for her mother. Chris found Willie brewing coffee in the kitchen.

"Oh, Willie, have you seen that dress that I got for Rags last week?" she asked.

"The blue cotton?"

"Yes, I see it in her closet. This morning."

"You didn't pick it up by mistake with the cleaning?"

"It is there in the closet."

"No, it isn't. I looked."

About to speak, Willie tightened her lips and scowled at the coffee. Karl had walked in.

"Good evening, madam." He went to the sink for a glass of water.

"Did you set those traps?" asked Chris.

"I set them, of course; but the attic has no rats."

When Chris went upstairs for her robe, she discovered Regan's missing dress. It lay crumpled in a heap on the floor of her closet.

Chris picked it up. What was it doing in here? She carried the dress into Regan's bedroom, put it on a hanger and slipped it on the rack. She glanced at Regan's wardrobe. Nice. Nice clothes. Yeah, Rags, look here, not there at the daddy who never writes.

As she turned from the closet, she stubbed her toe against the base of a bu-
Oh, yea, come see! Come on down, it's all finished!
The playroom was paneled and brightly
decorated. Beads, Paintings, Photographs.
Tables and games for a table for sculpture.

"Hey, that's great!" exclaimed Chris as
her daughter handed her the figure. It
was not quite dry, and it looked some-
thing like a Worry Bird. Its body was
orange, its back was black, green and
and white. A tuft of feathers was glued to
the head.

"Do you like it?" asked Regan.
"Oh, honey, I do, I really do! I'll leave it
here to dry and then I'll put it in my
room.

Chris was setting down the bird when
she noticed the Ouija board.

"You playin' with that?"
"Yep. Here, I'll show you." Regan was
moving to sit by the board.

"Well, I think you need two people,
honey." "No, you don't, Mom, I do it all
the time." Chris pulled up a chair. "Well, let's
both play.

"Hesitation, Well, O.K." Regan had her
finger tips positioned on the white plan-
chette, and as Chris reached out to posi-
tion hers the planchette made a swift,
sudden move to the word "no" at the top
of the board.

"You don't want me to play?"
"No, I don't. Captain Howdy said 'no!'"
"Honey, who's Captain Howdy?"
"Oh, you know, I make questions and
he does the answers."

Chris felt a dim and sudden concern.
The child had loved her father deeply,
yet never had reacted viscerally to her
parents' divorce. And Chris didn't like it.
Maybe Regan cried in her room; Chris
didn't know. But she was afraid Regan
was repressing emotions that might one
day erupt. A fantasy playmate. It didn't
sound healthy. Why "Howdy"? For
Howard—her father's name?

"Why do you call him "Captain Howdy"?
"Cause that's his name."
"Say who?"
"Well, him."
"And what else does he say to you?"
Regan shrugged. "I'll show you. I'll ask
him some questions.

Her fingers touched the planchette. Regan
stared at the board with eyes drawn
tight in concentration. "Captain Howdy,
don't you think my mom is pretty?"

One second . . . five . . . ten . . . twen-
ty . . .

"Honey, maybe he's sleeping."
"Do you think?"
"I think you should be sleeping."
"Already?"
"C'mon, babbie! Up to bed!" Chris stood
up and Regan followed her up the stairs.

Chris tucked her into bed, blew her a
kiss from the door and returned to the
study, where she settled down to read
the script. Halfway through, she saw
Regan coming toward her.

"Hi, honey, what's wrong?"

There's these real funny noises, Mom.

"Like how?"

"I don't know."

"Honey, sleep in my bedroom and I'll see
what it is." Chris led her to her own
bedroom and tucked her in. Then she
climbed the narrow, carpeted stairs that
led to the attic. Nothing else except the
rattan. Six of them. Batted. The room
was spotless. Even the air smelled clean
and cool.

"There is nothing." Chris jumped from her skin. "Oh, good
Lord!" she gasped. "Karl, don't do that!"

He was standing on the steps. "Very
sorry. But you see? It is clean."

"Yeah, it's clean. Thanks a lot!" She
glimped him at the open door. The street
was shaded by big old trees, and the
branches of a massive boxwood canopy
the entire front of the house. Was it
squillers after all? It must be. Or
branches. Right. Could be branches.

The house was quiet until morning.

Next day the filming went smoothly.
Sharon came by the set, and during
breaks between scenes she and Chris
handled items of business: a letter to her
agent (she would think about the script);
an acceptance to an invitation from the
White House; a wire to Howard re-
minding him to telephone on Regan's
birthday; plans for a dinner party on
April 23.

That night, in the evening Chris took
Regan to a movie, and the following day
they drove around to points of interest. The
Lincoln Memorial. The Capitol. The
terry trees around the Tidal Basin. Then
across the river to Arlington National
Cemetery and the Tomb of the Unknown
Soldier. Karl turned solemn, even a
little sad. She stayed quiet during the
drive home, and her mood persisted all
the rest of the day and through Monday.

On Tuesday, Regan's birthday, it
seemed to break. Chris took her along
to the filming and the cast and crew sang
"Happy Birthday" and brought out a
cake. Regan seemed quite gay. But after
dinner and the opening of presents the
mood seemed to fade. No word from
Howard. Chris placed a call to him in
Rome and was told by a clerk at his
hotel that he couldn't be reached. He
was somewhere on a yacht.

Chris made excuses. Regan nodded,
sobbed, and went downstairs to the
baseball playroom where she remained
until time for dinner.

The following morning when Chris
awakened she found Regan in bed with
her, half-awake. "My bed was shaking,"
she explained.

"You must!" Chris kissed her and pulled
up her covers. "Go to sleep. It's still
early."

What looked like morning was the be-
ingning of a long night.

In New York City Father Damien Karras
was attending a meeting of the American
Psychiatric Association. As principal
speaker, he delivered a paper entitled
"Psychological Aspects of Spiritual De-
velopment." At the end of the day he en-
joyed a few drinks and dinner with some
other psychologists, but left them early.
He would have to ride the train.

He walked to the crumbling brown-
stone apartment building on Manhattan's
Lower East Side. Her greeting was joy-
ful. A shout. A kiss. She rushed to make
coffee. She sat in the kitchen and listened
to her talks. Mrs. Uncle That. Still in
immigrant accents.

At a quarter to eleven he kissed her
good-bye, promised to return as soon as

by Regan's insistence that she sleep with her mother. "Well, that could be physical," the internist ventured. "No, I didn't say the bed is shaking, I said that's what it's shaking. Liz, should I take her to a shrink?"

He gave her the name of a Washington internist, Dr. Samuel Klein. "Have him look her over, and forget the psychiatrist for now."

"Are you sure?"

"Check the body. That's first. Then we'll see."

While Regan sat crossly in an examining room, Dr. Klein seated Chris in his office and took a brief case history. He then excused himself and gave Regan a complete examination. After that he sat and talked to her, observing her demeanor. He then returned to Chris and started writing a prescription.

"She appears to have a hyperkinetic behavior disorder."

"What?"

"A disorder of the nerves. We don't know yet exactly how it works, but it's often seen in early adolescence." He ripped up a sheet from the small blue pad and handed it over. "Now, this is for some medication."

She eyed the paper. "What is it? A tranquilizer?"

"A stimulant."

"Stimulant? She's higher'n a kite right now."

"Her condition isn't quite what it seems," explained Klein. "It's a form of overcompensation. An overreaction to depression."

"Depression...?" Chris murmured. She was thoughtful. "So you think it's all nerves?"

His answer puzzled her. He asked her if she'd ever known Regan to swear or use obscenities.

"Never," Chris answered. "Where'd you ever get such a notion?"

For a moment he eyed her considerably, then ventured, "Well, she let loose quite a string just now."

"You're kidding! Like what?"

"Well, specifically, Mrs. MacNeil, she advised her to try my golden fingers fingers away from her ----" Chris gasped with shock. "She used those words?"

"Look, I doubt that she even understood what she was saying," he said soothingly. "Try the stimulant and we'll see what develops. And I'd like to see her in two weeks."

By the night of her dinner party, Chris had failed to observe any noticeable improvement in Regan. There were subtle signs, in fact, of a gradual deterioration: increased forgetfulness, untidiness, and one complaint of nausea. And a new attention-getting ploy: reports of a smell in Regan's bedroom. Chris took a whiff one day and smelled nothing. "What's it smell like?"

Regan wrinkled her nose. "Well, like something burning."

Chris made up her mind that she would temporize, at least until the appointment with the doctor. She was also prepared with arrangements for the dinner party. She'd invited an interesting mixture. In addition to Burke Den-nings, she expected a senator and his wife; two actors from the movie; two Jesuits from Georgetown; her next-door neighbors; and Mary Jo Perrin, a plump, gray-haired Washington señor whom Chris had met at the White House dinner and liked immensely.

"Hey, Shari," Chris asked now. "Which priests are coming?"

"I'm not sure, yet. You invited the president and the dean of the college, and the Jesuit dean. Chris drifted to the sofa.

"Oh, come on, Mary Jo!" the dean said, smiling. He turned to Chris. "Mary Jo has been telling me there once was a Jesuit priest who was also a medium."

"And he doesn't believe me!" said Mary Jo. "The man even used to lodge! He was very, very famous in the nineteenth century. In fact, he was probably the only spiritualist of his time who wasn't ever clearly convicted of fraud. When he turned twenty-two he joined the Jesuits and convinced no woman any longer as a medium, but they threw him out of France nevertheless."

"Sny," Chris said suddenly to Father Wagner. "There's something I've been meaning to ask you. Do you know that little boutique that's back of the church over there?"

"Holy Trinity?"

"Yes, right. Well, what goes on in there?"


"Sir's kidding," said the dean. "Yes, I know," said Chris. "Who is that priest I keep seeing there? You know--sort of dark?"

"Father Karras," said the dean. "He's our psychiatric counselor." He put down his wineglass and added, "Had a pretty rough knock last night, poor guy. His mother passed away."

"I'm sorry," said Chris. "He's taking it pretty hard. She was living by herself and was dead for a couple of days before he found her."

"That's sad," Chris murmured. Then she looked up. "I've heard of Black Mass, of course. What exactly is a Black Mass?"

"Oh, basically, it's a travesty of the Catholic Mass and performed by the devil. "Devil worship Joe Dyer can tell you more about it than I can. Where's Joe?"

The young priest turned from the buffet. "You called, great dean?"

"He's the only leprechaun in the parish," said the dean with an air of fondness. He sipped at his wine. "Joe was talking about Black Mass just last week."

Father Dyer came over with his plate. Chris glanced at him. "I thought I'd get his scoop on what goes on at a Black Mass," she said. "You're supposed to be the expert."
“No, not really,” said Dyer. “In fact, most of what I know I’ve heard from Father Karras.”

“Oh. That’s the dark priest at Holy Trinity?”

“Yes. He did a paper on Black Masses once. You know, from the psychiatric side. In brief, a Black Mass is just a collection of perversions, obscenities, blasphemies. It’s an evil parody of the Mass which, instead of God, they worshipped Satan and sometimes offered human sacrifices”—Dyer’s eyes shifted suddenly to a point in the room behind Chris. “Well, now, I think we have a visitor, Mrs. MacNeil,” he cautioned, motioning with his head.

Chris turned. And gasped on seeing Regan in her nightgown, urinating onto the rug. She swept her up in her arms.

“I’m sorry!” she said to her guests. “She’s been sick, she must be walking in her sleep!”

She took Regan upstairs to her bathroom, bathed her and changed her nightgown. Regan’s eyes were vacant and clouded. Chris tucked her into bed and the girl fell asleep immediately.

Then Chris returned to the living room and gave her guests a brief account of what had happened. She mentioned the rapping and the other “attention-getting” phenomena Mrs. Perrin listened intently.

“Well, I have a six o’clock Mass tomorrow morning,” said the dean a moment later. “It triggered a general departure. The last to leave was Mary Jo Perrin. Chris asked her if she thought Regan should continue to use the Ouija board, and described her Captain Howdy fixation. “Do you think there’s any harm in letting her use it?”

Mrs. Perrin frowned and looked down at the doorstep. “I would take it away from her,” she said quietly.

Chris retired to her room, settled wearily into bed, and almost instantly fell asleep. Then awakened to hysterical screaming at the rim of her consciousness.

“Mother, come here, come here, I’m afraid!”

Chris raced down the hall to Regan’s bedroom. Whispering. Crying. Sounds of bedsprings.

Regan lay on her back, face stained with tears and contorted with terror as she gripped the sides of her narrow bed.

“Mother, why is it shaking? Make it stop! Oh, I’m scared! Mother, please make it stop!”

The mattress of the bed was quivering violently.

After his mother’s funeral in Brooklyn, Father Damien Karras arrived in Georgetown in time for dinner, but had no appetite. He paced inside his cottage.

Shortly after ten Joe Dyer appeared with a bottle of Scotch. He displayed it proudly: “Chivas Regal!”

“Where’d you get the money for it?” “I stole it.”

Karras smiled and said, “I believe you.”

“Greater faith I have never seen. Would you like to absolve me now or later?”

“Just pour,” said Karras, “and we’ll absolve each other.”

Dyer was good for him; made him laugh. Dyer drank very little, but continually replenished Karras’ glass, and when he thought Karras was numb enough for sleep he made him stretch out while he sat at the desk and continued to talk until Karras’ eyes were closed.

In the middle of the night Karras awakened in tears. He had dreamed of his mother. Standing at a window high in Manhattan, he’d seen her emerging from a subway kiosk across the street. She stood at the curb with a brown paper shopping bag, searching for Karras. He waved. She didn’t see him. He wandered the street. Buses. Trucks. Unfriendly crowds. She was becoming frightened. She returned to the subway and began to descend. Karras became frantic, ran to the street and began to weep as he called her name, picturing her helpless and bewildered in the maze of tunnels beneath the ground.

He waited for his sobbing to subside, but the tears would not cease. This was like childhood, this grief.

Regan lay on her back on Dr. Klein’s examining table. Taking her foot in both his hands, the doctor flaxed it toward her ankle, then abruptly released it. The foot relaxed into normal position. He repeated the procedure several times, with no variation in the result. He seemed satisfied. When Regan abruptly sat up and spat in his face, he instructed a nurse to remain in the room and returned to his office to talk to Chris.

When Chris had first arrived, he had reported his suspicion that the shaking of the bed had been caused by a seizure of clonus—a disorder that caused an alternating tensing and relaxing of the muscles.

“Well, the test was negative,” Dr. Klein told her now, explaining that in clonus the alternate flexing and releasing of the foot would have triggered a run of clonic contractions. As he sat at his desk he seemed worried. However, “Has she ever had a bad fall?”

“No, not that I know of.” “Sleepwalking history?” “Not until now.” “She was walking in her sleep at the party?” “Well, yes. She still doesn’t know what she did that night. And there’s other stuff, too, that she doesn’t remember.” “What?”


“I was stuck on a yacht. Talked me the minute I was back in the hotel.” “You talked to her?” “Yes. She didn’t tell you? That’s why I thought I’d better call you. What the hell’s going on with her?” “What are you getting at?” “She just called me a son of a bitch and hung up.”

When Regan had finally awakened, Chris now told Dr. Klein, she had no memory whatever of the telephone call.

“Then perhaps she wasn’t lying about the moving of the furniture,” Klein hypothesized. “Perhaps she moved it with-
Klein called and set the appointment.
He hung up the phone and began writing a prescription. "Room twenty-one on the second floor. And let's try her on a tranquilizer for a while. I'll give her one more before you go.

He ripped the prescription sheet from the pad. "I'd try to stay close to her, Mrs. MacNeil. In these walking trances, it's always possible for her to hurt herself. I'd try to keep the window closed, maybe even put a keylock on it. In a trance she might go through it.

Feeling drained and numb, Chris shepherded Regan to the radiologist, stayed at her side while the X rays were taken, took her home. Regan had been strangely mute since taking the tranquilizer, and Chris made an effort now to engage her.

"Want to play some Scrabble before dinner?"

Regan shook her head and stared at her mother with unfocused eyes that seemed to be retracted into infinite remoteness. "I'm feeling sleepy," she answered in a voice that hung dead to the ears. Then, turning, she climbed the stairs.

Chris found Sharon drinking coffee in the kitchen nook, gave her the prescription to fill, then followed Regan upstairs. She found the covers opened, and apparently already asleep. She moved to the window, tightened the latch and stared below. The window was at one end of the house and overlooked a precipitous flight of public steps that connected Prospect Street, which the house faced, and M Street far below. Boy! she thought. I'd better call a locksmith right away.

Sharon was finishing up at the living room desk. Chris reached for a book by Sharon's elbow. "What are you reading?"

"Oh, that's for you. Mrs. Perrin dropped it by."

Chris glanced at the title. *A Study of Devil Worship and Related Occult Phenomena*. She riffled through the pages.

"What's the scoop on Black Mass?"

"I don't know," answered Sharon. "I haven't read it.

Chris dropped the book on a table and went upstairs again, Regan on her mind. But Regan was still sleeping. Chris again checked the window; this time she left Regan's door wide open behind her. She went downstairs, watching the movies on television, then slept with her own doorajar.

The following morning, the book about devil worship had vanished from the table. No one noticed.

The consulting neurologist pinned up the X rays and scanned for tiny indentations in the skull. Dr. Klein stood behind him with folded arms. The consulting neurologist removed his glasses.

"There's just nothing there, Sam."


"Mrs. MacNeil on the phone. Says it's urgent."

He punched the extension button. "Dr. Klein, Mrs. MacNeil. What's the trouble?"

Her voice was distraught and on the brink of hysteria. "Oh, God, Doc. It's Regan! Can you come right away?"

Both doctors were there within minutes, and they could hear the moans and screams of terror from the doorway where Sharon greeted them. Sharon looked frightened. She led them to the door of Regan's bedroom, cracked it open and called in, "Doctors, Chris!"

Chris immediately came to the door, her face contorted with fear. "Come on in!" she quavered. "Come on in and take a look at what she's doing!"

Regan was flailing her arms and shrieking hysterically as her body shot horizontally from her bed into the air, then slammed down savagely onto the mattress. It was happening rapidly and repeatedly.

"Oh, Mother, make him stop! Stooopp!! kiitiiiiiiinnnnnnn, Motherrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr
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serious cases of split personality, Mrs. MacNeil. It's a rare condition. Now, I know the temptation is to keep a psychiatric, but any responsible psychiatrist would exhaust the somatic possibilities first. That's the safest procedure.

"O.K., so what's next?" Chris sighed.

"A lumbar tap," answered the neurologist.

"Get ahead," Chris murmured. "Do whatever you have to.

Klein called his office and instructed an assistant to deliver the necessary equipment and medication to the house. When he'd finished the call he turned to Chris and asked what had happened since last he saw Regan.

"Well, Tuesday," Chris pondered, "there was nothing at all. Last night, again, nothing. Then this morning it started.

She'd been sitting in the kitchen, Chris told the doctors, when Regan ran screaming down the stairs, shouting that Captain Howdy was chasing her, punching her, shoving her, threatening to kill her. "There he is!" she had shrieked, pointing to the kitchen door. Then suddenly Regan had stood in the middle of the kitchen with arms extended and had begun to spin rapidly like a top, continuing the movements for several minutes until she had fallen to the floor in exhaustion.

And then all of a sudden, Chris finished in distress, 'I saw this—kneeling in her eyes. This here.' She burst into sobs.

A short time later, after the arrival of the equipment, Klein anesthetized Regan's spine and removed some spinal fluid. He carefully placed the tube of fluid in his bag, wrote a prescription for soluble Thorazine and disposable syringes and gave it to Chris. "Have this filled right away.

Chris handed it to Sharon. 'Do that for me, would you? I'd like to go with Dr. Klein while he makes the tests.'

Klein ran a number of tests in his laboratory while Chris watched, but failed to find anything abnormal.

"Here we are again," Chris murmured bleakly.

For a while Klein brooded. Then he asked, "Do you keep any drugs in your house? Amphetamines? LSD?"

"No, there's nothing like that."

Klein nodded and stared at his shoes, then looked up and said, "Well—I guess it's time we consulted a psychiatrist, Mrs. MacNeil."

Chris was back home at exactly 7:21 p.m. At the door she called, "Sharon?"

There was no answer.

She went upstairs to Regan's bedroom. Regan was still heavily asleep, not a ruffle in her coverings. But the window was wide open. Sharon must've opened it, she thought. She closed it. Where was Sharon?

She returned downstairs just as Willie came in. "Hi, Willie. Where's Karli?"

Willie had a gesture of dismissal. "He lets me see a Beatles movie. By myself. He goes to something else."

At 8:01 Chris was in the study when Sharon walked in carrying several packages and slapped on a chair.

"Where've you been?" asked Chris.

"Oh? Didn't Burke tell you?"

"Burke Dennings was here?"

"I couldn't get the drugstore to deliver, so when Burke came around, I thought, Fine, he can stay here with Regan while I get the Thorazine. She shrugged. "I should have known he'd leave."

"Yeah, you should've. Let's go and eat."

"What happened with the tests?"

Sharon asked as they walked slowly to the kitchen.

"Not a thing, All negative," Chris answered dully. "I'm going to have to get her a shrink."

At 9:28 the front doorbell rang. Willie answered it. It was Burke. As he passed through the kitchen en route to his room, he nodded a good evening and remarked that he'd forgotten his key.

"I can't believe it," Chris said to Sharon. "That's the first time he's ever admitted a mistake."

They passed the evening watching television in the study.

At 11:46 Chris answered the phone. It was the young director of the second unit. He sounded grave.

"Have you heard the news yet, Chris?"

"No, what?"

"Burke's dead."

He had fallen down the steep flight of steps beside Chris's house, fallen all the way to M Street, where a horrified pedestrian had watched as he tumbled, a broken neck. This bloody, crumpled scene his last.

The telephone fell from Chris's fingers and she went silent, standing motionless. Sharon ran and caught her, supported her, led her to the sofa. Later, they talked. Reminisced about Dennings. Chris now laughed, now cried. "Poor Burke...poor Burke..."

Some time past midnight Chris was standing moodily back of the bar, her elbows propped, hand lowered, eyes sad, waiting for Sharon to return from the kitchen with a tray of ice.

"I still can't believe it," Sharon was saying as she entered the study.

Chris looked up and froze.

Gliding spider-like close beside Sharon, her body arched backwards in a bow, with her hands on the floor and her head almost touching Sharon's legs, was Regan. Her tongue flicking quizzically in and out while she hissed like a serpent.

"Sharon?" Chris said numbly, still staring at Regan.

Sharon stopped. So did Regan. Sharon turned and screamed as she felt Regan's tongue snapping out at her ankle.

Wherever Sharon moved, Regan would follow.

The next day: Friday, April 22. While Chris waited in the hall outside the bedroom, Dr. Klein and a noted neuro-psychiatrist were examining Regan. The doctors observed for half an hour. Flinching, Whirring, Tearing at the hair. Regan occasionally grimaced and pressed her hands against her ears as if blunting out sudden, deafening noise. She bellowed obscenities. Screamed in pain. Then at last she thrashed herself face down and moaned incoherently.

The psychiatrist motioned Klein away from the bed. "Let's get her tranquilized," he whispered.

The intern nodded and prepared an
injection of Thorazine. But the dosage proved inadequate. He injected another and they waited.

Regan grew tractable. Then dreamy. Then stared in sudden bewilderment.

"Where's Mom? I want my mom!" She wept.

Chris ran to the bed and hugged her. "Oh, Regan, you're back! It's really you!"

"Oh, Mom, he hurt me!" Regan sniffed. "Make him stop hurting me! Please? O.K.?"

Chris glanced to the doctors with a pleading question in her eyes. The psychiatrist turned to Regan. "Can you tell me what's wrong?"

"I don't know," she answered. "I don't know why he does it to me." Tears rolled down from her eyes. "He was always my friend before."

"Who's that?"

"Captain Howdy! And then it's like somebody else is inside me! Making me do things!"

"Well, all right, then; let's try something, Regan. A game." He reached in his pocket and brought forth a shining bangle attached to a silvery length of chain. "Have you ever seen movies where someone gets hypnotized?"

She nodded. "Yes."

"Well, I'm a hypnotist. Now, if I hypnotize you, Regan, I think it will help you get well. The person inside you will come out. Would you like to be hypnotized?"

"O.K.," she said softly. "But only a little."

"Would you close those shutters for me, Sam?" the psychiatrist asked Dr. Klein. "And pull the drapes?"

When the room was dark, the psychiatrist began to swing the bangle back and forth with an easy movement. He began to intone the hypnotic ritual. Within a very short time, the girl was in a trance.

"Are you comfortable, Regan?"

"Yes," her voice was soft and whispery. "Is there someone inside you?"

"Sometimes."

"Captain Howdy?"

"I don't know."

"If I ask him to tell me, will you let him answer?"

"No?"

"Why not?"

"I'm afraid!"

"If he talks to me, Regan, I think he will leave you. Do you want him to leave?"

"Yes."

"Let him speak, then. Will you let him speak?"

A pause. Then, "Yes."

"I am speaking to the person inside Regan now," the psychiatrist said firmly. "If you are there, you too are hypnotized and must answer all my questions."

For a moment he paused to allow the suggestion to enter her. "Come forward and answer, now. Are you there?"

Silence. Then something curious happened. Regan's breath turned suddenly foul. The psychiatrist smelled it from two feet away.

"Are you the person in Regan?" he asked.

She nodded. "Who are you?"

"No, normal," she answered gutturally.
never really known any explanation."

"Well, neither does anyone else, Mrs.
MacNeil. We use concepts like 'conscious-
ness,' 'mind,' 'personality'—but we don't
really know yet what these things are.
He was shaking his head. "Regan hasn't
any history of schizophrenia and the
EDG didn't show up the brain-wave
pattern that normally accompanies it. So
I tend to reject schizophrenia. Which
leaves us the general field of hysteria,
perhaps caused by guilt."

"But what would she have to feel
guilty about?"

"Well, a cliché answer," the psychia-
trist responded, "might be the divorce.
Children often feel that they are the
ones rejected, and assume full responsi-
bility for the departure of one of their
parents."

"Where does this new personality
come in?"

"Well, again, it's a guess," he replied.
"Assuming that it is conversion hysteria
stemming from guilt, then the second
personality is simply the agent who
handles the punishing."

"And that's what you think she's got?"

"As I said, I don't know," replied the
psychiatrist, still evasive. "It's extremely
unusual for a child of Regan's age to be
able to pull together and organize the
components of a new personality. But
the really striking thing," he noted, "is
the new personality's apparent precocity.
It isn't a twelve-year-old at all. It's much,
much older. And then there's the lan-
guage..."

"So what's the bottom line?" Chris
asked.

"At the moment," the psychiatrist told
her, "a blank. She needs two or three
weeks of really concentrated study in a
clinical atmosphere; say the Barringer
Clinic in Dayton."

Chris was in her bedroom that after-
noon looking for Daytona when Karl ap-
peared. There was someone to see her—
a detective. He handed her a business
card. William Kinderman, it announced.
Lieutenant of Detectives. And tucked in
the lower left-hand corner: Homicide
Division.

Kinderman was sagging in the entry
hall, the brim of his limp and crumpled
hat clutched tight with short fat fingers
freshly manicured.

Chris approached. The detective ex-
tended his hand with a weary and some-
how fatherly manner, 'I'd know that face
in any lineup, Mrs. MacNeil.'

"Am I in one?" Chris asked him as she
took his hand.

"Oh, my goodness, oh no," he said. "No,
it's strictly routine."

"What is it? Burke? Burke Dennings?
Was he killed?"

"A man so important, we just couldn't
pass it. Did he fall? Was he pushed?"

Kinderman shrugged. "Who knows?"

"Listen, come on in the study," Chris
said anxiously.

Kinderman followed her into the
study, glancing at his wristwatch as if he
were anxious to get away to some ap-
pointment.

"Since poor Mr. Dennings was film-
ing in this area, we wondered if he might
have been visiting someone on the night
of the accident. Now, other than your-
self, of course, did he have any friends
on this street?"

"He was here that night," Chris told
him.

"Oh? Near the time of the accident?"

"When did it happen?" she asked him.

"Seven-thirty-five," he told her.

"Yes, I think so."

"Well, that settles it, then." He nodded.
"Hey, was drunk, he was leaving, he fell
down the steps. Just for the sake of the
record, can you tell me approximately
what time he left the house?"

"I don't know," Chris replied. "He
came and left while I was out. I was over
at a doctor's office in Roslyn."

"How do you know he was here?"

"Oh, well, Sharon, my secretary, was
here when Burke dropped by. My
daughter was sick and Sharon left him
here while she went to pick up some
prescriptions. By the time I got home,
Burke was gone."

"And between the time your secretary
left and the time you returned, who was
here in the house with Mr. Dennings
beside your daughter?"

"No one, Willie and Karl were—"

"Who are they?"

"They're my housekeepers. They'd
taken the afternoon off, and when I got
home, they weren't back yet."

"So only your daughter would know
when Dennings left?"

"No, she wouldn't know. She was
heavily sedated."

"That's her room?" Kinderman was
thumbing toward the ceiling. "With that
great big window looking out on those
steps?"

Chris nodded.

From the pocket of his jacket Kind-
erman extracted a crumpled scrap of paper
and a toothmarked, yellow stub of pen-
cil. "Now, just a name or two. The
housekeepers? John and Willie...?"

"Karl and Willie Engstrom."

"Karl, that's right, it's Karl, Karl
Engstrom. He scribbled the names in a
dark, thick script. "Now, the times, you
said the housekeepers got home at what
time?"

"Karl, at exactly 3:28. I remember
I looked at the clock in the kitchen when
he rang the doorbell and said he'd for-
gotten his key."

"And Mrs. Engstrom? They went and
came together?"

"No, she went to see a Beatles film," Chris
answered. "She got in a few min-
utes after I did."

"Why did I ask that? It wasn't import-
ant. He folded up the paper and tucked
it away. "Well, that's that."

Later that evening, while Dr. Klein
was injecting Regan with a heavy dose of
tranquilizer in preparation for the jour-
ney to Dayton,Lt. Kinderman stood
brooding in his office. He shut his eyes
and recalled his conversation with the
district pathologist on the night of Den-
nings' death.

"It could have happened in the fall?"
he'd asked the pathologist.

"No, it's very unlikely. Of course, he
was drunk and his muscles were dou-
bleless somewhat relaxed. Perhaps if
the force of the initial impact were suffi-
ciently powerful—"

"Could another human being have
done it?"

"Yes, but he'd have to be an excep-
tionally powerful man.

Sighing, Kinderman reached for a scholarly work on witchcraft and turned to an underlined paragraph dealing with ritualistic murder. He read it slowly, and when he had finished he frowned at the page and shook his head. Then he left his office and drove to the morgue.

"Dennings," the detective said.

The morgue attendant nodded. Kinderman followed him, hat in hand, to rows of refrigerated lockers.

They halted at Locker 32. The ex-patient had lain there. Slowly and gently Kinderman pulled back the sheet to expose what he'd seen and yet could not accept.

Burke Dennings' head was turned completely around to face backwards.

On Wednesday, May 11, back from Dayton, Chris and Sharon put Regan to bed, installed a lock on the shutters, and stripped all the mirrors from her bedroom and bathroom. A gloomy Dr. Klein came by and drilled them in proper procedures for administering emergency Sustagen feedings to Regan during these periods of coma. He inserted the nasogastric tubing. "First ..."

Chris forced herself to grip at the words the doctor was saying and push away the images she heard at the Barringer Clinic: "... a type of dis- order that you rarely see anymore except among primitive cultures. We call it somnambuliform possession. In times gone by, when belief in the devil was fairly strong, the possessing entity was usually a demon. In some types of somnambuliform possession, the new personality is malevolent, hostile to the first personality. Its primary aim, in fact, is to damage, torture, and sometimes even kill it.

A set of restraining straps was delivered to the house and Chris stood watching, wan and spent, while Karl and Sharon affixed them to Regan's bed and then to her wrists, Karl straightened up and looked pityingly at the ravaged face. "Is there anything to be done?" he asked.

Chris abruptly slumped to a chair and began to sob into trembling hands. "Oh, I hope so! I hope so!"

Sharon came up beside her and knelted her neck with a comforting hand. "OK."

Chris wiped at her face with the back of a sleeve. "Yeah, I guess so."

She let Sharon take her downstairs, where she drank a cup of black coffee. Then on an impulse she went to the study. The clinic doctor's words followed her: her mother may have known about possession, believed in possession, and known about some of its symptoms, so that now her unconscious is producing the syndrome. If that can be established, you might take a stab at a form of cure that's autosuggestive. I think of it as shock treatment in cases. It's a very outside chance, but since you're opposed to your daughter's being hospitalized, I'll—"

"Name it, for God's sake! What is it?"

"Have you ever heard of exorcism, Mrs. MacNeil?"

The books in the study were part of the rented furnishings and Chris was unfamiliar with them. Now she was scanning the titles, searching, searching—

... the doctor had continued: "Exorcism is a stylized ritual, now out of date, in which rabbits and priests tried to drive out an evil spirit. The Catholics alone haven't discarded it yet, although they keep it pretty much in the closet as sort of an embarrassment. But to someone who thinks that he's really possessed, the ritual's evidently rather impressive. It used to work, in fact—although not for the reason people thought, of course; it worked purely by the force of suggestion.

"Are you telling me to take Regan to a witch doctor?"

"Well, as a desperate measure, perhaps to a priest. That's a rather bizarre little piece of advice, I know: even dangerous, in fact, unless we can definitely ascer- tain that Regan knew about possession, and particularly exorcism, before all this came on. Do you think she might have?"

"No, I don't."

Chris's eyes darted quickly to a title on the bottom shelf. The volume on witchcraft that Mary Jo Perrin had sent her. She plucked it out from the shelf and turned to the table of contents. The title of a chapter paused like a heartbeat: "States of Possession."

She opened to the chapter on possession and began to read.

"What is known is the following: that various people at various times, have undergone massive transformations so complete that those around them feel they are dealing with another person. In the demonic form of possession, the 'demon' may speak in languages unknown to the first personality, or ...

There? Regan's gibberish! An attempt at a language? She quickly read on.

... or manifest various parapsychological phenomena, telekinesis, for example, the movement of objects without application of material force.

"Chris?"

She kept reading, absorbed. "Shar, I'm busy."

"There's a homicide detective wants to see you."

"Oh, Sharon, tell him to ... She stopped. "No. Tell him to come in."

He came in, his hat brim crumpled in his hand. "So sorry, you're busy. I'm a bother. How's your daughter?"

"No change."

"Ah, I'm sorry. I'm terribly sorry."

Kinderman was hulking by the table now, his face expressing concern. "Ah, you're reading? He was glancing at the book on witchcraft. "For a film?" he inquired.

"Just reading."

"I'm sorry. You're busy, I'll finish. As I said, I wouldn't bother you, except ... He looked suddenly at Sharon, who had escorted him in. "Excuse me—you're the secretary?"

"Right," said Chris. "This is Sharon Spencer."

"A pleasure," Kinderman said. "Perhaps you could pass this on."

He added, on the night of Mr. Dennings' demise, you went out to a drugstore and left him alone in the house, correct?"

"Well, no, Regan was here," Sharon said.

Dennings came to see Mrs. MacNeil?"

"Yes, that's right."

"Very good. And you left at what time? You remember?"

"Let's see—I was watching the news, which goes on at 6:30. Then Burke came along just ten, maybe twenty minutes after that."

"A median," concluded the detective, "would have put him here at 6:45."

"And so what's all about?" asked Chris.

"Well, it raises a question, Mrs. MacNeil. Kinderman turned to eye her, "To arrive in the house at, say, quarter to seven and leave only fifteen minutes later ..."

"Oh, well, that was Burke," said Chris. "Just like him."

Was it also not his custom to travel by foot? He'd call a cab from the house when he left?"

"Yes, he would."

"Then one wonders how he came to be walking on the platform at the top of the steps. And one wonders why cab drivers don't show a record of a call to a given address at a given time."

"He also said, kinderman, "I'm so sorry. But the matter has now grown serious."

"In what way?" Chris asked.

The report of the pathologist, Mrs. MacNeil, seems to show that it is still possible he died accidentally. However, the position of Dennings' head and a certain shearing of the muscles of the neck would—"

"Oh, God!" Chris winced.

"Yes, it's painful. I'm sorry. I'm terribly sorry. But this condition never ever happens, you see, unless Mr. Den- nings had fallen some distance before he hit the steps; for example, some twenty or thirty feet before he went rolling down to the bottom. So a clear possibility, plainly speaking, is maybe... Well, first let me ask you if perhaps Mr. Den- nings was in your daughter's room that night?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Might your daughter remember?"

"No; I told you before, she was heavily sedated. Why are you asking all this?"

"Well, I'll make this point is that the deceased was so drunk that he stumbled and fell from the window of your daughter's bedroom."

Sharon shook her head. "No way. No chance. Burke used to direct when he was smashed. How could he stumble and fall out a window?"

The detective lowered his head and shook it, frowning at the crumpled paper in his hands. "Strange ... so baffling. He exhaled wearily. "The deceased occurred to visit, stayed only twenty minutes without even seeing you, and leaves all alone here a very sick girl. And speaking plainly, Mrs. MacNeil—as you say, it's not likely that he would fall from a window. Besides that, a fall wouldn't do it to his neck what we found except, maybe in thousands. He nodded at the book on witch- craft. "You've read that book about ritual murder?"

Some presence chilling her, Chris shook her head.

"May be not in that book," he said. "However—forgive me, I mention this so only maybe you'll think just a little
bit harder—but poor Mr. Dennings was discovered with his neck wrenched around in the style of ritual murder by so-called demons, Mrs. MacNeil."

Chris went white.

After Lt. Kinderman had left, Chris sat numbly alone in the library.

She dropped her glance to the book on withershelf.

Don't look!

Yet she took a deep breath, opened it, and tried to focus on a page. ... demonic possession... ease of an eightyear-old girl for four strong men to restrain her from...

Chris turned a page, stared—and froze. She did not move, did not blink, did not breathe as if the image of an open window in Regan's bedroom the night of Dennings accident rushed headlong back in her mind back by sight that was numbingly familiar. A narrow strip had been shaved from the edge of the page. A moment later she sprang up at the sounds of a commotion in Regan's bedroom: rappings—resonant, massive, like a wedgelayhammer pounding in a tomb—and Regan screaming in anguish, imploring.

Chris raced up the stairs, toward the bedroom, heard a blow as she ran, someone crashing like a boulder to the floor and her daughter crying. "Oh, no, Oh, no, please!" and Karl bellowing ... No, No, it wasn't Karl! Someone else!

A thundering bass that was threatening, raging!

Chris burst into the bedroom, gasp ed, stood rooted in shock. The rappings bounced, reverberating through the walls. Karl lay unconscious on the floor near the bureau, Regan, on a bed that was violently bouncing and shaking, clutching a bonewhite crucifix in rawknuckled hands. She stared at the crucifix with terror, eyes bulging.

"Oh, please! Oh, no, please!" she was shrieking as her hands brought the crucifix closer.

"You'll do as I tell you, filth!"

The threatening bellow, the words, came from Regan, her voice coarse and guttural, bellowing with venom, while in an instantaneous flash her expression and features were hideously transmuted into those of the feral, demonic personality that had appeared in the course of hypnosis. And now, as Chris watched stunned, faces and voices interchanged with rapidity:

"No!"

"You'll do it or I'll kill you!"

Regan now, eyes wide and staring, mouth agape and shrieking. Then abruptly the demonic face once more possessed her, a stench choked the room, and they could smelt from the walls as Regan's piercing cry of terror turned into a guttural, yelping laugh of malevolent spite and triumphant rage.

Chris watched in horror, her hands to her cheeks, then she rushed to the bed, grasping with venom, while in an instant the stench of possession, you see, where it didn't exist before. And secondly, Mrs. MacNeil, before the Church approves an exorcism, it conducts an investigation to see if it's warranted—"

"Couldn't you do the exorcism yourself?" she pleaded.

"Every priest has the power to exorcise, but he has to have Church app-

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Walking behind Chris, he approached the house with a lingering sense of unreality. Chris opened the door, and Karras felt the chill at once. It seeped through his bloodstream like particles of ice. He heard commotion upstairs. A deep, hornless, angry voice thundering obscenities and threats. It shivered through walls.

Karras glanced at Chris. She was staring at him mutely. Then she moved on ahead. He followed her upstairs and along the hall to Regan's bedroom where Karl's, leaning against the wall outside her door, bafflement and fright in his eyes.

"Go and take a look at her," Chris said to Karras. "I'll wait here." Karras hesitated, then entered the room slowly, flushing at the pungent stench that hit him in the face. Quickly retreating back his reply, he closed the door. Then his eyes locked on the creature that was lying on its back in the bed, head propped against a pillow while eyes in wasted sockets shone with mad cunning and burning intelligence, with interest and with spite as they fixed upon him. Karras glanced at the tangled, matted hair, the wasted arms and legs, the distended stomach, then looked back into the eyes.

"Hello, Regan," said the priest in a warm, friendly tone. He took a chair by the bedside and sat down. "I'm a friend of your mother's. I'd like to help you.

The eyes gleamed feebly, unblinking. Then her lips stretched taunt into a ferocious grin. "Well, well, well," gloated Regan sardonically, and her blackened tulle on the back of Karras' neck, for the voice was an impossibly deep bass, thick with menace and power. "So it's you . . . they sent you! Well, we've nothing to fear from you at all."

"Yes, that's right. I'm your friend. I'd like to help."

"You might loosen these straps then," Regan croaked. Karras saw that her wrists were bound with a double set of restraining straps.

"Are they uncomfortable for you?" he asked.

"Extremely. They're a nuisance. An infernal nuisance." The eyes glinted slyly.

Karras saw the scratch marks on her face, the cuts on her lips. "I'm afraid you might hurt yourself, Regan."

"I'm not Regan," she rumbled.

"Well, then, maybe we should introduce ourselves. I'm Domien Karras," said the priest. "Who are you?"

"I'm the devil."

"Oh, I see," Karras nodded. "Then why don't you make the straps disappear?"

"That's much too vulgar a display of power, Regan. Moreover, if I loosen the straps myself, I deny you the opportunity of performing a charitable act."

"But a charitable act," said Karras, "is a virtue and that's what the devil would want to prevent; so in fact I'd be helping you now if I don't undo the straps."

"How very foxy of you, Karras! If only dear Herod were here to enjoy this. Undo them, undo them and I'll tell you the future."

"But how do I know that you can read the future?"

"I'm the devil."

"Yes, you say so, but you won't give me proof."

"You have no faith," Karras stiffened. "In what?"

"In me, dear Karras; in me! Something mocking and malicious danced hidden in those eyes."

"Well, now, some very simple test might do."

"For example, where is Regan? Do you know?"

"She is here."

"Let me see her."

"Why?"

"To prove that you're telling me the truth."

Suddenly he found himself staring into childish eyes filled with terror, at a mouth gaping wide in a soundless, electrifying shriek for help. There was a blurring rapid remodeling of features. "Won't you take off these straps?" asked a wheedling voice in a clipped British accent. "They're like the demonic personality returned and threw back its hair in laughter.

Karras sat stunned, felt glacial hands at the back of his neck. The Regan-thing broke off its laughter and fixed him with taunting eyes.

"Incidentally, your mother is here with us, Karras. Do you wish to leave a message? I will see that she gets it."

The priest's face was now colorless. "If that's true," he said numbly, "then you must know my mother's first name. What is it?"

The Regan-thing hissed at him, mad eyes gleaming, head gently undulating like a cobra's. Then it lowered like a steele while its eyes rolled upward in their sockets.

Karras watched as the bellowing continued; then he walked out of the room.

Chris pushed herself expectantly away from the wall. "Well?"

"She ought to be in a hospital."

"I just can't do that," said Chris with quavering anxiety, "I can't have anyone else involved. She's . . . She's not herself. "Do you think she's possessed?"

"How much do you know about possession?"

"Just a little that I've read. Some things that the doctor told me at Barringer Clinic."

"Are you a Catholic?"

"No."

"If you're looking for an exorcism as an autosuggestive shock cure, the Church won't buy it and you'll have wasted precious time." Karras tried to steady his trembling hands. "Who says it's a demon or a mental disorder, I'll do everything I possibly can to help. But I've got to have the background. It's important for Regan. Now, why don't we both go downstairs where we can talk?"

While Karl and Shane left, Regan said Karras told the story and Chris related the history of Regan's illness, although she carefully withheld the facts that related to Dennings. She admitted that at first she'd considered exorcism purely as shock treatment. "Now I don't know," she said. She looked at the penitent priest. "What do you think, Father?"

"Compulsive behavior, perhaps produced by guilt, together with split personality."

"Father, I've had all that before! How can you say that, after all you've just seen?"

"If you've seen as many patients in psychiatric wards as I have, you can say it very easily," he assured her. "Your
daughter insists she's the devil himself, and that's the same as saying she's Napoleon. You see?"

"Then explain all those rappings and things."

"You've heard of poltergeist phenomena, haven't you?"

"Yes, of course."

"Karras nodded. "It's not that uncommon, and usually happens around an emotionally disturbed adolescent. There's nothing supernatural about it. Like Regan's abnormal strength, again, in pathology that's common. It happens outside of the house."

"I'm tired of all these theories and speculations," she said wearily. "You tell me that you know for a fact there's nothing wrong with my daughter except in her head; that you know for a fact that she doesn't need an exorcism; that you know it wouldn't do her any good! Go ahead! You tell me! You tell me what to do!"

For long, troubled seconds, the priest was still. Then he answered softly, "Well, there's little in this world that I know for a fact." He sank back in his chair. "Does Regan normally have a low-pitched voice?"

"No. In fact, I'd say it's very light."

"Do you know her IQ?"

"About average.

"Any characteristic of speech right now: how different would you say it is from normal?"

"Completely. She's never used half those words."

"Would you have any letters she's written?"

"A recording of her voice would be—"

"Yes, there's a tape of her talking to her father," she interrupted. "You want it?"

"Yes, I do, and I'll also need her medical records, especially the file from the singing clinic. If I go to the Mayo Clinic to get their permission to perform an exorcism, I'd have to have substantial indication that your daughter's condition isn't a purely psychiatric problem. And just one more thing. That book that you mentioned, with the section on possession: do you think Regan ever read it prior to the onset of the illness?"

She concentrated, fingernails tapping teeth. "I can't be sure. I mean, I'm sure. Pretty sure."

"How do you see it. May I have it?"

"I'll get it." She was moving from the study. "Be back in a second."

"Karras nodded. He walked to the hall and stood motionless in the darkness, listening to the grunting of a pig from upstairs, and the hum of a vacuum for nectar, to hissing. He turned when the light flicked on. Chris came forward with the book and the tape."

"I've got to come by sometime tomorrow afternoon or evening," he said. "In the meantime, if anything urgent develops, you be sure to call me no matter what time. By the way, did your daughter know that a priest was coming?"

"No. No, nobody knew but me."

"Did you know that your mother had died just recently?"

"Yes, I'm very sorry."

"Is Regan aware of it?

"No; why do you ask?"

"Not important." He shrugged. "I just wondered." He looked at her wistfully, "Will you please go to bed?"

"Yeah, O.K."

"Good night, Father."

"He quickly left."

Half an hour later Damien Karras hurried back to his room in the Jesuit residence, with a number of books and periodicals dealing with possession taken from the shelves of the Georgetown Library. Hastily, he dumped them on his desk. Hysteria. It had to be hysteria.

At a little after 4:00 a.m., he rose from the desk and walked wearily to a window, rubbing his eyes from hours of reading. He gulped at the coolness of the moist morning air and stood in thought. Regan had the physical syndrome of possession. About that he had no doubt, for in ease after ease, irrespective of geography or the history of the symptoms, the syndrome of possession was substantially constant.

Some Regan hadn't even evidenced as yet, but others she had manifested clearly: the involuntary motor excitement, the agitation, the way the tongue to him, Karras, now will you? Eh?"

"See him? Is he here?" asked the priest.

"In the piglet? Not at all. Just a poor little family of wandering souls, my friend."

"And how long are you planning to stay?"

"The head jerked up from the pillow, contorted in rage as it reared. "Until the piglet dies!" And then suddenly Regan settled back into a thick-lipped, drooling grin. "Incidentally, what an excellent day for an exorcism, Karras. Do begin it now."

"You would like that?"

"Incidentally."

"But wouldn't that drive you out of Regan?"

"The demon put his head back, cocking manically. "It would bring us together."

"You and Regan?"

"And you, as my good friend," croaked the demon. "You and I."

"Karras stared. At the back of his neck, he felt hands, icy cold. Lightly touching. And then gone.

"Yes, you'll join our little family, Karras. You see. the trouble with signs I can't find my dear morsel, is that once having seen them, one has no excuse."

"Karras jerked around his head at a loud, sudden banging. A bureau drawer had popped open, sliding out its entire depth. He felt a quick-rising thrill as he watched it abruptly bang shut. There it stood then as suddenly, the emotion dropped away. Psychokinesis. Karras heard chuckling. He glanced back to Regan."

"Very impressive."

"Karras nodded. "You're certainly a very, very powerful demon!"

"I am."

"Yes, I'm sure."

"I'm afraid lightly touching his neck again. Fear. Was it fear?"

"No, not fear," said the demon. It was
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“Yes, Who is it?”
“I don’t know.”
“Have you sent for the medical records?”
“They’ll be here this afternoon. They’re being flown down.” She took a sip of coffee. “Now, what about the exorcism, Father?”
“Well, I’m not very hopeful I can sell it to the news. The Church has criteria that have to be met. Here are the signs that the Church might accept; one is speaking in a language that the subject has never known before, never studied. I’m working on that one with the tapes. Then there’s clairvoyance, although nowadays that ESP might nullify that one. And the last one is powers beyond her ability and age.”
“Well, what about those things on her skin.”
“What things?”
“Oh, it happened at the clinic,” Chris explained. “There were . . . well . . . She traced a finger on her chest. “You know, like writing? Just letters. They’d show up on her chest, then disappear.”
Karras frowned. “You said letters. Not words?”
“No, no words, just an ‘M’ once or twice. Then an ‘L’.”
Karras shook his head. “Well, I’ve come across cases like that in the journals. There was one, I remember, a prisoner psychiatrist reporting that a patient of his—an inmate—could grow into a self-induced state of trance and make the signs of the zodiac appear on his skin.”
“Boy, miracles sure don’t come easy with you, do they?”
The priest rose from his chair. “Let me wait and check the records from the clinic,” he said. “Meanwhile, I’ll edit the tapes that we made today and take them to the Institute of Languages and Linguistics. It could be that this gibberish is some kind of language, I doubt it, but maybe. And I’ll ask them to compare patterns of speech. See if they’re the same as those on the tape of Regan talking to her father.”
Karras threaded tape into an audio reel in the office of the rotunda, silver-haired director of the Institute of Languages and Linguistics. Together they listened to the tape of the fevered voice croaking its gibberish. Then he turned to the director. “What is that, Frank?”
The director was frowning in puzzlement. “Pretty weird. It isn’t any language I’ve ever heard. However, it does have the cadence of speech. Why not leave it with me, Father? I’ll check it.”
“Fine. In the meantime, what if I gave you fragments of ordinary speech by someone who’s apparently quite different? Could you tell if the same person might have been capable of both tapes?”
“Oh, I think so. You’ve got two different people on those, is that it?”
“No; the words and the voice seem totally different to me, but both are from the same person or person.”
“You’d like me to test them out? I’d be glad to.”

When Karras returned to the Jesuit residence hall he found a message saying that the records from the clinic had arrived. He hurried to Reception and signed for the package. Back in his room he began to read immediately, and was soon convinced that his trip to the Institute had been wasted, his hope of proving possession was vain.

... indications of guilt-obsession with ensuing hysterical-somnambulistic.

But Regan’s amnesia? The skin scabulation that Chris described was indeed reported in Regan’s file. But the report also noted that Regan had hyper expressive skin and could herself have produced the mysterious letters merely by tracing them on her flesh with a finger.

He walked back to the McNill house. Chris was in the study, forehead in her hand. “You O.K.?” he asked softly.
“Yeah, I’m fine.”
“Well, I’ve looked at the records from the clinic. I believe—” He paused. “Well, my honest opinion right now is that Regan can best be helped by intensive psychiatric care. There’s a strong probability that her disorder is rooted in a guilt over the divorce.

“She’s guilty because she killed Burke. I think so!” Chris shrieked at him, hands pressed against her temples. “She killed him! She killed him and they’ll put her away; they’re going to put her away! Oh, my God!”

Karras caught her up as she crumpled, sobbing, and guided her toward the sofa. “Do you want to tell me more?”

“Chris nodded. She wiped her eyes and mentioned Lti. Kinderman’s visit. Karras had met the detective once at a funeral of a police officer. Chris went on haltingly, speaking of Kinderman’s suspicion of her certainty that Regan had been up in Regan’s bedroom; of Regan’s great strength; of the Dennings personality and the fact that she had seen in Regan when Regan had turned her head around and faced backwards,

Karras said softly, “You don’t know that she did it.”

Chris shook her head. “I think she did it, and I think she could kill someone else. I don’t know…”

Karras walked out into the street in a simmering turmoil. Just outside the house he heard the sound of a car was packed a little way down the street. Karras peered inside and recognized Kinderman. Was the detective watching the house? Was it possible he suspected someone in it? And could Regan so horribly have murdered Burke Dennings?

Karras hastened on. He had to build a case for the chancery.

In his room at the residence hall he found the tapes and a message to call the director of the Institute of Languages and Linguistics.

He picked up the telephone; his hands shook with desperate hope.

“Father Karras here, Frank. What have you found?”

“Well, I didn’t have enough of a sample to be certain. Damian, but the voices on the two tapes, I would say, belong to two different people.”

“And what about the gibberish?”

Frank chuckled. “Was this really some sneaky psychological testing, Father?”

“I don’t know; you mean.”

“Okay, I said it was a language, all right. In fact, it is English.”

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ARE YOU KIDDING?
Look, put the tape on your machine and play it backwards.

WHAT?
"You've got gremlins," Frank said, laughing. "Let's go and talk to you tomorrow, good night, father.

KARRAS hung up. First he ran the tape forward. Gibberish. Then he played it in reverse. He heard his own voice speaking backwards. Then Regan— or someone— in English!

... marlin marlin karras be us let us...

English. Sanscrite, but English. How on earth could she do that?

He stopped the tape and rewound it. Then he sat down at the desk with paper and pencil and played the tape from the beginning, transcribing the words. When he had finished, he had his head back and read it:

"... danger. Not yet. [Indecipherable] will die. Little time... to dwell. Think of the [Indecipherable]. Let it die. No, no! Sweet! It is sweet in the body! I feel! There is [Indecipherable]. Better [Indecipherable] than the void. I fear the priest... Give us time. Fear the priest! He is [Indecipherable]. No, not this one: the [Indecipherable], the one who... [Indecipherable]. He is ill. Ah, the blood... feel the blood. How strong it is in me!"

Karras had asked, "Who are you?"

"I am no one. I am not one.

"Is that your name?"

"I have no name. I am no one. Many. Let us be. Let us wear the body. Do not [Indecipherable] from the body into void, into [Indecipherable]. Leave us. Let us be. Karras, Marlin [?]..."

Karras sat down on the table and rubbed it. He was at the edge of his thoughts, not an unknown language. And writing backwards with facility was hardly paranoic or even unusual. But speaking backwards! Wasn't such performance beyond the reach of even a hyperstimulated intellect?"

"I am no one, many." Erino, where did it come from? "Marlin... Marlin... Ah, the blood... He is ill..." What did that mean? Who was Marlin?

The ringing of a telephone awakened him. Gregory, he fumbled toward the light. What time was it? A few minutes after three. He reached blindly for the telephone. Answered, Sharon. Would he come to the house right away?

She met him at the door. Fr actured. "Sorry, Father," she whispered as he entered the house, "but I thought you might want to see this. Let's be quiet, now. I don't want to wake up Chris. She shouldn't see this."

He followed her, tiptoeing quietly up the stairs to Regan's bed chamber. Inside, the room was dimly lit. Roger seemed to be in a coma. Heavy breathing. Motionless. The nasogastric tube was in place. The Stutzman seemed to be slowly losing his grip on the body.

Karras moved to the bed, still staggered by the cold. Yet he saw beads of perspiration on Regan's forehead. Sharon gently pulled the top of Regan's pajamas apart, and an overwhelming pity hit Karras at the sight of the wasted chest, the protruding ribs where..."
one might count the remaining weeks or
days of her life. A faint redness was
forming on the skin, but in sharp defin-
tion, like handwriting. He peered more
closely.

"There, it's coming back," whispered
Sharon.

Alertly, the gooseflesh on Karras'
arms was not from the icy cold in the
room; it was from the sight on Regan's
chest: bas-relief script rising in clear
blood-red letters. Two words: "Help me."

"That's her handwriting," whispered
Sharon.

At nine o'clock that morning Damien
Karras went to the president of George-
town University and asked for permis-
sion to seek an exorcism. He received it,
and then, whiskily afterward went to the
bishop of the diocese, who listened with
great attention to all that Karras had to
say.

"You're convinced that it's genuine?"
the bishop asked finally.

"I've made a prudent judgment that it
meets the conditions set forth in the
Roman Rituels," answered Karras eva-
nively. He still did not dare believe.

"You want to do the exorcism yourself?" asked thebishop.

It felt a moment of elation; saw the
doors swing open for his escape from
doubt, from his meeting each twilight
with the ghost of his faith. "Yes, of
course," he answered.

"Well, you see, it might be best to
have a man of experience. There aren't
too many, of course, but perhaps some-
one from the foreign missions. I'll call you as soon as we know."

When Karras had left him, the bishop
called the president of Georgetown
University.

"Well, Karras does know the back-
ground," said the president, "I doubt
there would be any danger in just hav-
ing him assist."

"And what about the exorcist?"

"Lancaster Merrin."

"In Iraq?"

"In Iraq."

"Oh, maybe ten or twelve years ago, I
think. In Africa. The exorcism is sup-
posed to have lasted for months. I heard
it damn near killed him."

"In that case I doubt that he'd want to
do it now."

"We do what we're told here."

"Well, I'll leave it up to you and the
provincial."

Early that evening, a young priest
searched the grounds of Woodstock
Seminary in Maryland for a slender,
gray-haired old Jesuit. He found him on
a pathway, strolling through a grove.
He handed him a telegram. The old man
thanked him solemnly and continued his
walk through a nature that he loved. He
did not open and read the telegram. He
knew what it said. He had read it in the
dust of the temples of Nineveh. He was
ready.

LT. Kinderman adjusted the desk-lamp
boim a fraction. Below him were trans-
scripts, exhibits, crime-lab reports,
scribbled notes. As if to help make sense
of them, he carefully fashioned them
into a collage in the shape of a rose. Yet
they did not make sense. One piece of
evidence was missing.

He washed his eyes. Then he opened his eyes and stared at the center of the paper rose: a faded old copy of a national news magazine. On the cover were Chris and Regan. He studied the
detail: the sweet, freckled face and the
ribbons, ponytails, the missing front tooth in the grin. He looked out a window into darkness. A drizzling rain
had begun to fall.

Karras was exhausted. After his visit to
the Chancery Office he had returned to his
telephone. The telephone woke him up. The exorcist, the Chancery
Office told him, would be Lancaster Merrin. Karras would assist.

The news had stunned Karras. Merrin!
The philosopher-paleontologist! The
scaring, staggering intellect! Not himself,
but Merrin!

When Karras had telephoned Chris to
convey the news, he found that he'd
heard from the bishop directly. Merrin
would arrive the next day. "I told the
bishop he could stay at the house," Chris
said.

When Karras hung up the phone, he'd
felt heavy, tormented. He himself had
been the natural choice for exorcist, yet
the bishop had passed him over for Mer-
in. Why? Because Merrin had done this
before?

As he closed his eyes, he recalled that
Christ, when asked by his disciples why
they had failed at exorcism, had an-
swered, "... because of your little faith."
The provincial had known about his re-
ligious doubts, Karras reflected. Had he
told the bishop? He felt unworthy, in-
competent, rejected, It stung. Unreason-
ably, it stung. Then, finally, sleep came
pouring into emptiness, filling in the
niches and cracks of his heart.

But in the middle of the night the ring of
the phone woke him, Chris calling to inform
him that Regan was in a new frenzy.
Back at the house, he checked Regan's
pulse. It was strong. He gave Librum,
then gave it again. And again. Finally he
made his way to the kitchen, joined
Chris at the table for coffee.

Upstairs, the raging of the demon grew
louder. "Bastard! Scum! Pious hypo-
crite!"

Karras sipped bleakly at his coffee.

Then he looked up and saw Chris staring
at the ceiling. And he noticed it too; the
shouts above had finally ceased.

"I guess the Librum took hold," he said
gratefully.

"Chimney of a doorbell," he glared at
Chris, "do not lose your sense with a
questioning eyebrow.

Chris went to the door and opened it
slightly, squinting out into darkness as a
fine mist of rain brushed her eyes. A tall
man in a threadbare raincoat. "I'm Father
Merrin."

For a moment she looked blank as she
stared at the lean, ascetic face, as the
sculptured cheekbones polished like
soapstone; then she flung wide the door.
"Oh, please come in! Oh, come in!"
He entered and stood with his head at
an angle, glancing upward as if he were
listening—no, more like feeling, Chris
thought—for some presence that was out
of sight, some distant vibration that was
况 was known and familiar. Puzzled, she
watched him. His skin seemed weathered
by alien winds, by a sun that shone else-
where, remote from her time and her
place.

"Is Father Karras here?"

"Yes, he is. Would you like to say
hello to him?"

"I should like to see your daughter first."

Chris flinched at a sudden sound from
above—the voice of the demon, booming
and yet muffled, croaking, like an ampli-
ified voice from a tomb.

"Merrilllllllll..."

Then the massive, hollow jolt of a sin-
gle blow against the bedroom wall.

Chris pressed a hand against her chest.
The priest still stared upward, intense
yet serene, and in his eyes there was
not even a hint of surprise. It was more,
Chris thought, like recognition.

Another blow shook the walls.

"Merrilllllllll..."

The Jesuit moved slowly forward. He
went calmly up the staircase, slender
hand sliding along the banister.

Karras came up beside Chris, and to-
gathered the mirror as Merrin entered
Regan's bedroom and closed the door
behind him. For a time there was si-

dence. Then abruptly the demon laughed
hazardously and Merrin came out. He
closed the door, rapidly descended the
stairs, and put his hand to the waiting
Karras.

"Father Karras." He clasped Karras'
hand in his, searched Karras' face with
a look of gravity and concern, while
upstairs the laughter turned to vicious
obscenities. "You look terribly tired," he
said. "Are you tired?"

"Not at all," Karras responded.

"Then I should like you to go to the
residence, Damien, and gather up a cas-
sock for myself, two surplices, a purple
robe, some holy water and your copy of
the Roman Ritual."

He handed his own raincoat to the puzzled Karras, "I believe
we should begin."

"Right," Karras said. "I'll go get the
things."

As Karras stepped out into the rainy
night, Chris said to the older man,
"You must be tired, Father. I'll take you
to the study."

He thanked her and followed her.

Chris found Sharon in the kitchen.

"What happened in Regan's room, Sharon?" She asked. "Were you there?"

Sharon shifted her faraway gaze to a
point in space between disbelief and
seen fact. "It was strange. They only
stared at each other for a while, and
then Regan... that thing... it said..."

"What did it say?"

"It said, 'This time, you're going to lose!'"

Chris stared at her, waiting. "And then?"

But Sharon had angled her head, list-
ening. Chris glanced upward and heard
it too: the silence, the sudden cessation
of the raging of the demon—yet some-
thing more. Something growing. A
tension, a pulsing, like energies slowing,
building up.

Karras came back carrying a card-
board laundry box. He moved quickly to the study, tapped lightly at the door, and then stopped short. Merrin was kneeling in prayer, his forehead bent low to his tight-clasped hands. With his gaze averted, Karras moved to the sofa and soundlessly laid out the contents of the box. He took off Father Merrin's robes, appeared calm and draped it carefully over a chair. Then he put on a white surplice above his cassock. He heard Merrin rising, crying, "Thank you, Damien."

Karras picked up Merrin's cassock from the sofa, and only now, very suddenly, did he feel the impact of the man: of the moment; of a stillness in the house, crushing down on him, choking off breath. He came back to awareness with the feeling of the cassock being tugged from his hands. Merrin was slipping it on. "You're familiar with the rules concerning exorcism, Damien?"

"Yes, I am," answered Karras.

Merrin began buttoning the cassock. "Especially important is the warning to avoid conversations with the demon."

"The demon?" He'd said it so matter-of-factly, thought Karras. It jarred him.

"We may ask what is relevant," said Merrin as he buttoned the collar of the cassock. "But anything beyond that is dangerous. Extremely. Especially, never listen to anything he says. He will lie to confuse us but he will also mix lies with the truth to attack us. The attack is powerful. Do not listen. Remember that, Do not listen." As Karras handed him the stole, the exorcist added, "Is there anything at all you would like to ask now, Damien?"

Karras shook his head. "No. But I think it might be helpful if I gave you some background on the different personalities that Ragon has manifested. So far, there seem to be three."

"There is only one," said Merrin softly, slipping the stole around his shoulders. For a moment he gripped it and stood unmoving as a haun ted expression came into his eyes. Then he reached for the copies of the Vatican Ritual and gave one to Karras. He nodded solemnly toward the door. "If you will lead, please, Damien."

Upstairs, Sharon and Chris stood tense and waiting. Karras frowned at Chris. "Please don't come in," he urged her. "Don't Sharon can stay, but you'd be making a huge mistake."

Chris turned questioningly to Merrin. "Father Karras knows best," said the exorcist quietly.

Karras opened the door and almost recoiled back from the blast of stench and icy cold. He looked at the demon in the bed. Its gleaming eyes were fixed on Merrin. Karras moved forward to the foot of the bed while Merrin walked slowly, tall and erect, to the side. There he stopped and looked down into her iris. He licked a blackened tongue across her cracked and swollen lips. "Well, proud slut!" croaked the demon. "At last you've come!"

The old priest lifted his hand and traced the sign of the cross above the bed, then repeated the gesture toward all in the room. Turning back, he plucked the cap from a vial of holy water. "Ah, yes—the semen of the saints!"

+++

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The face of the demon grew livid. "Ah, will you, bastard?"

Merrin started sprinkling, and the demon jerked its head up, the mouth and neck muscles trembling with rage. "You, sprinkle, sprinkle, Merrin! Drench us in your sweat! Bend and show the holy rump that we may worship and adore it! Kiss it!"

"Be silent!"

The words flung forth like bolts. Karraa jerked its head around in wonder at Merrin, who stared commandingly at Regan. And the demon was silent. The eyes were now hesitant. Warily.

Merrin lopped the holy water vial round on the block and approached it to Karraa. Then he knelt beside the bed and closed his eyes in murmured prayer: "Our Father . . .

Regan sat up and prayed reverently: "God, Creator and defender of the human race, look down in pity on this your servant, Regan Teresa MacNeil, now trapped in the coils of man's ancient enemy, sworn foe of our race . . ." Karraa glanced up as he heard Regan hissing. Her tongue was flicking in and out rapidly, her hand waving slowly back and forth like a cobra.

"Save your servant," prayed Merrin, reading from the Ritual.

And now the front of the bed was rising off the floor. While Karraa stared at it incredulously, it rose four inches. Half a foot. Then the back legs began to come up. It's not happening! Karraa thought as he watched transfixed.

The bed drifted upward another foot and then hovered there, bobbing and listing gently as it were floating.

"Father Karraa?"

Karras turned. The exorcist was eyeing him serenely, and now motioned his head toward the copy of the Ritual in Karraa's hands. "The response, please, Damien.

Karras looked blank and uncomprehending.

"Let the enemy have no power over him. Amen."

Hastily Karraa glanced back at the text and with a pounding heart breathed out the response: "And the son of iniquity be powerless to harm her."

Merrin embarked upon a lengthy prayer and Karraa again returned his gaze to the bed, to his hopes of faith in his God and the supernatural. An elation thrilled through his being. It's there! he thought. There it is! Right in front of me! There!

"Amen!" Merrin exclaimed, over-loud, over-loud.

The hissing ceased, and from the stretched-out 'O' of Regan's mouth came the nerve-shredding Howl of a steed.

snatch from ruination and from the clutches of the noontide devil this human being made in your image . . ."
flesh and shivering through bone.

"God and Lord of all creation..."

Merrin casually reached up to the floating bed and pressed a portion of the stole to Regan's mouth. Dr. Regan's hand clutched at the rope that held the bed to the ceiling, and he cried out to the space, "by whom might Satan was made to fall from heaven like lightning, to strike terror into the breast now laying waste in your vineyard..."

The bellowing ceased. A ringing silence. Then a thick and putrid greenish white oil spurted from Regan's mouth and flowed in waves onto Merrin's hand. But he did not move it. "Let your mighty hand cast out this cruel demon from Regan Teresa McNeil, who..."

Karras watched macerated as the bed drifted off lazily, slowly to the floor and settled on the rug with a cushioned thud.

"Lord, hear my prayer," said the exorcist gently.

Slowly Karras turned to the bed. "And let my cries come unto Thee..."

Merrin lifted off the stole, took a slight step backward, and then joined the room with the lash of his voice as he commanded, "I cast you out, unclean spirit, along with every Satanic power of the enemy, every savage compulsion..."

Regan screamed. The whites of her eyes gleamed balefully at Merrin. From the foot of the bed, Karras watched her intently. He reached down to grasp Regan's wrist. And found what he feared. The pulse was racing at an unbelievable speed.

"It is He who commands you. He who flings you headlong from the heights of heaven..."

Merrin's powerful adjuration pounded at the rim of Karras's consciousness as the pulse of the factor now. And faster. The hands on his arms began to prickle, with nightmare slowness, a fraction at a time, Regan's head was now turning, swirling like a manikin's, creaking with the sound of some rusted mechanism until the dread and glaring whites of her right eyes were fixed on his. "And, therefore, tremble in fear, now, Satan...!

The head turned slowly toward Merrin.

You corruptor of justice! You bogdette of death, you betrayer of the nation! You robber of life! You...!"

A muffled pounding jolted the room. Then another. Then it came steadily, shuddering through the walls, through the floor, through the ceiling—splitting and thrashing at a ponderous rate, like the dies, to a heart that was pounding and diseased.

Sharon cried out, pressing fists against her ears as the pounding grew deafening, then accelerated and leaped to a terrifying tempo.

...and the light went out. Merrin! Scum! You will lose! She will die! The demonic entity had returned and raged hatefully at Merrin. "Ancient heretic! I adjure you, turn and look on me! Now look on me, you scum!" The demon jolted forward and spat in Merrin's face, and then croaked at him, "Thou does thy master curse the blind!"

"And Lord of all creation..."

Prayed Merrin, reaching placidly for his handkerchief. "Deliver this servant..."

"Hypocrite! You care nothing at all for the piglet. You care nothing! You have made her a contestant between us!"

"I humbly..."

"Liar! Lying, scum! Tell me, where is your husband, Merrin? Is in the desert? In the ruins? In the tombs where you fled to escape your fellow man?"

Abruptly the demon broke off and fixed its eyes on Karras. He again checked the pulse and found it strong, which meant that he had to give Regan more Librium now. He moved to Sharon to instruct her to prepare another injection.

"Do you want that woman?" beared the demon. "She is yours! Yes, the whore is yours! You may ride her as you wish! Why, she fantasizes nightly concerning you! Karras! Slut!"

Sharon crimsoned and kept her eyes averted as she bolted from the room. Merrin continued the adjurations.

"Now the sow comes! The mother of the piglets/"

Karras turned and saw Chris coming toward him with a swab and disposable syringe. She kept her head down as the demon hurled abuse.

"Are you pleased, sow-mother? Is it you have done it? Yes. you are your career before anything, your career before your husband, before her, before..."

Karras glanced around. Chris stood paralyzed. "Go ahead!" he ordered. "Don't listen! Go ahead!"

"And you're going to use. Go to priests, will you? Priests will not help. Bitch!"

Chris's hand began to shake. "I can't!"

Karras plucked the syringe from her fingers. "All right, I'll do it. Now get out!"

"Yes, we have of your kindness to mothers, dear Karras!" croaked the demon as Chris fled. The Jesuit blanched, and for a moment did not move. Then he slowly drew the needle out and looked into eyes that had rolled upward in their sockets. Out of Regan's mouth came a slow, lilting singing, almost chantlike, in a sweet, clear voice like a choirboy's.

"Teuntum ergo sacramentum veneratur erat..."

It was a hymn sung at Catholic benediction. Eerie and chilling, the singing was a vacuum into which Karras fell at the evening rush with a horrible clarity.

...et antiquum documentum..."

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A silence Karras spoke again, "What is the purpose of possession?"

"Who can know?" answered Merrin. He thought for a moment. "I think the demon's target is not the possessed; it is us—the observers, every person in this house. And I think—I think the point is to make us despair, to reject our own humanity, Damien; to see ourselves as ultimately beastial, as ultimately vile, ugly, unworthy. And there lies the heart of it, perhaps: in unworthiness. For I think belief in God is not a matter of reason at all, I think it is, finally, a matter of love; of accepting the possibility that God could love us."

Merrin paused. "He knows where to strike?" He was nodding. "Long ago I despair of ever loving my neighbor. Certain people—repelled me. I thought, How could I love them? It tormented me, Damien; it led me to despise of myself. And from that, very soon, to despair of my God. My faith was shattered."

Karras looked up at Merrin with interest. "And what happened?" he asked.

"Ah, well... at last I realized that God would never ask of me that which I know to be psychologically impossible. He was asking that I act with love; that I do unto others that I should do unto those who repelled me; that I believe, a greater act of love than any other." He shook his head. "There it lies, I think, Damien. That is possession. The little things, Damien—the senseless, petty spites, the misunderstandings, the cruel and cutting words that leaps unbidden to the tongue."

The singing lingered could still be heard in the bedroom. Merrin looked at the door and listened for a moment. "And yet even from this, from evil, will come good." He paused. "Perhaps evil is the cruelties of goodness. And perhaps even Satan—Satan, in spite of himself—somehow serves to work out the will of God."

The singing stopped. Karras took a deep breath and returned alone to the bedroom. He reached down and gripped Regan's thin wrist, looking at the sweep second hand of his watch.

"Why you do this to me, Dimmy?"

His heart froze. He could not move, could not breathe, did not dare look at the source of that sorrowful voice, see those accusing eyes. His mother. His mother.

"You leave me to be priest, Dimmy."

"You're not my mother!" Karras vehemently whispered.

"Oh, for Christ's sake! It simply isn't fair to drive us out of here! Little bitches! She took my body and I think it only right that I ought to be allowed to stay in here!"

Karras opened up his eyes and saw the Dannings personality.

"Look, she killed me. I was minding my business at the bar, you see, when I thought I heard her moaning. Upstairs. Well, now, I had to see what killed her, after all, so up I went, and don't you know she bloody well took me by the throat, the little slut!" The voice was whiny, now; pathetic. "I tell you, she pushed me out the bloody window!"

Karras swallowed. "How was the head turned around?" he asked hoarsely.

"That was an accident. A freak. I hit the steps, you know... it was freaky."

"Dimmy, please! Don't make me be alone!" His mother, "If instead of priest, you was doctor, I live in nice house. Dimmy, not wit' da cockroach; not all by myself..."

"Wan't you face the truth, stinking scum?!" Now it was the demon. "You believe what Merrin tells you? You believe him to be holy and good? Well, he is proud and unworthy! I will prove it to you. Karras! I will prove it by killing the pig!"

The eyes were shining with triumph and piercing spite. "Feel her pulse!" grinned the demon. "Go ahead, Karras! Feel it!"

He gripped Regan's wrist. The pulse was rapid and "Feedle!" croaked the demon. "I will not let her sleep!"

As Karras stared numbly, the demon put her head back in gloating laughter. Karras did not hear Merrin come back into the room. The exorcist stood by him at the side of the bed and studied his face. "What is it?" he asked.

Karras answered dully. "The demon—said he wouldn't let her sleep."

He turned haunted eyes on Merrin. "Her heart's begun to work inefficiently. Father. If she doesn't quit pretty soon, she'll die of cardiac exhaustion."

Merrin looked grave. "Can you give her drugs? Some medicine to make her sleep?"

Karras shook his head. No. That's dangerous. She might go into a coma. If her blood pressure drops anymore..."

Merrin knelt on the bed. "Our Father... he began.

Regan croaked. "You will lose! She will die! She will die!"

In Karras' heart there was a desperate torment. Go to sleep! Go to sleep! He commended in silent frenzy.

Regan did not sleep. Not by dawn. Not by noon. Not by nightfall. Not by Sunday, when the pulse rate was one hundred and forty and ever thresher, while the fits continued unremitting, while Karras and Merrin kept repeating the prayer, sleeping themselves. Then. And again, and again, Karras agonized. Ah, God, don't let her die! He cried reportedly to himself. Don't let her die! Let her sleep!

At seven o'clock that Sunday evening, Karras sat mutely next to Merrin in the bedroom, exhausted and racked by demonic attacks; his lack of faith, his incompetence, his flight from his mother. And Regan's condition, His fault. Karras worried also about Merrin. The lack of sleep. At his age.

Karras checked Regan's pulse and then began to take a blood pressure reading. As he wrapped the black and white mercurymomanometer cloth around the arm, he blinked repeatedly to clear the blurring of his vision.

"Today Moldey Day, Dimmy."

For a moment he could not move. Then he looked into those narrow eyes that were no longer Regan's, but his mother's.

"Why you leave me to die alone, Dimmy?"

Merrin clutched tightly at his arm. "Please go and rest for a little now, Damien."

With a jump rising dry to his throat, Karras left the bedroom. He walked down the stairs and stood indiscernibly. Colleph. He craved it. But a shower even more, a change of clothing, a shave.

He left the house and crossed the street to the Jesuit residence hall. As he entered, he saw Kinderman at the telephone switchboard counter.

"Ah, well, Father," said Kinderman, smiling expression changed to concern at the exhaustion in the Jesuit's face. "You look awful! What's the matter? You've got a minute?"

"Barely," murmured Karras. "What is it?"

"A little talk. I need advice, nothing more. We'll walk." He linked his arm through the Jesuit's and guided him diagonally across Prospect Street. "Ah, now, look at that! Beautiful! Gougeous!"

He was pointing to the sun sinking low on the Potomac.

They had come to a wall. Karras rested a forearm upon it and faced Kinderman. "Why's an onewalled Vista?"

"Ah, well, Father," said Kinderman, sighing. "I'm afraid I've got a problem."

"Professional?"

"Ethical, you could say. Suppose I'm working on a case, Father Karras. A However, the trial."

"Dannings?"

"No, no, purely hypothetical. Like a ritual witchcraft murder, this looks. And let us say that in this hypothetical house, there living five people—and that one must be the killer. All the evidence points to a child, Father Karras; a little girl maybe ten, twelve years old.
Just a baby," he fixed his eyes on the sidewalk. "Yes, I know, sounds fantastic, ridiculous. Now also there is—Satanism involved in this illness, it happens; plus strength, incredible strength. And this—hypothetical girl, let us say, then, could—twist a man's head around, you see." He was nothing now. "But the girl is not responsible, Father. She's demented." He shrugged. "And yet the illness that she has—it could be dangerous. She could kill someone else." He squinted out across the river.

"It's a problem. What to do? Hypothetically, I mean. Forget it? Forget it and hope she gets well?" Kindermann paused. "What do you believe would be the right thing to do?"

Karras throbbed with a dull, weary anger at the piling on of weight. Then he met Kindermann's eyes and answered softly, "I would put it in the hands of a higher authority."

"I believe it is there at this moment."

"Yes. And I would leave it there."

Their gazes locked. Kindermann nodded. He glanced at the sunset. "So beautiful. A sight." He tugged back his sleeve for a look at his wristwatch. "Ah, well, I have to go. Thank you, Father. I feel better."

Chris was looking at an album of snapshots. Karras walked over and looked down. Here was Regan being carried away in a horse-drawn carriage, in a cream-colored dress; there was Regan sitting on a chair in a brown suit and a hat, gazing at a camera. On the opposite page a ruled sheet of paper bore the script of a child:

"If instead of just clay
I could take all the prettiest things
Like a rainbow
Or clouds or the way a bird sings,
Maybe then. Mother dearest,

If I put them all together,
I could really make a sculpture of you."

Below the poem: "I love you! Happy Mother's Day!" The signature, in pencil, was "Ragas."

Karras shut his eyes. Compassion swelled suddenly and blindly into rage at disease and at pain, at the suffering of children and the frailty of the body, at the monstrous and outrageous corruption of death.

He entered the bedroom and looked at Regan. Her head was turned away from him as the demon directed his rage to the other side of the bed. "You seem, Merrin! Come back!"

But where was Merrin? Karras went slowly around the bed and nearly stumbled over him. Merrin lay sprawled face down on the floor beside the bed. Karras knelt, felt for his pulse. And in an anguish instant realized that Merrin was dead.

"Die, will you? Die? Karras, hell him!" raged the demon. "I was winning! Bring him back and let us finish!"

"Ah, God!" Karras groaned in a whisper. "God, no!" He sagged back and took a deep breath. Then he saw the tiny pills scattered loose on the floor. He picked one up and with aching recognition saw that Merrin had known. Nitroglycerin. Heart failure. Coronary artery. His eyes red and brimming, Karras looked at Merrin's face.

"Even worms will not eat your corruption, you—homosexual!"

Karras heard the words of the demon and began to tremble with a murderous fury. He could not hear above the roaring of his blood. He looked up with a face that was not a purpling snarl. "You son of a bitch!" he said in a whisper that hissed into air like molten steel.

The demon eyed him malevolently.

"You were losing!" cried Karras. "You're a loser! You've always been a loser! Yes, you're very good with little girls! Well, come on! Let's see you try something bigger! Come on!" He had his hands out, was beckoning. "Come on! Come on, loser! Try me! Leave the girl and take me!"

In the study barely a minute later, Chris and Sharon heard the sounds from above. Stumblings. Sharp bumps against furniture. The walls. Then the voice of . . . the demon? The demon. Obscenities. But another voice alternating. Karras? Yes, Karras. Yet stronger—Deeper.

"No! I won't let you hurt them! You're not going to hurt them! You're coming with me!"

Chris flinched at a violent splintering, at the breaking of glass, and in an instant she and Sharon were racing up the stairs, bursting into Regan's bedroom. They saw the shutters of the window on the floor, ripped off their hinges, and the shards of glass. Alarmed, they rushed toward the shattered window, and as they did, Chris saw Merrin's body. She ran to him, "Sharon! Quick, come—I!"

Sharon screamed from the window, "Father Karras!"

Chris ran trembling to the window. She looked below and felt her heart drop. At the bottom of the steps, on the busy sidewalk of M Street, Karras lay crumpled amid a gathering crowd. She stared horrified.

"Mother!"

It was a small, wan voice calling tearfully behind her. Chris gulped. Did not dare to believe.

"What's happening, Mother? Oh, please! Please come here! Mother, please! I'm afraid!"

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while Dyer stared down into his cup. Chris read his thought. "She still can't remember," she said gently.

Dyer nodded. "What do you think really happened? As a nonbeliever. Do you think she was really possessed?"

She pondered. "Well, I do. The sadness and shock of Karras' death settled down on her like a melancholy haze. "You said Father Karras had a problem with his faith?"

Dyer nodded. "I can't believe that," she said. "I've never seen such faith in my life."

"Taxi here, madam."

Chris came out of her reverie. "Thanks. Karl. O.K." She and Dyer stood up. "No, you stay, Father. I'll be right back. I'm just going upstairs to get bags."

Dyer nodded and watched her leave. He was thinking of Karras' puzzling last words to the devil, the shouts heard from below him before his death. "You're coming with me!" He thought once again of that mysterious look of joy in Karras' eyes. And something else—a deep and fiercely shining glint of—triumph?

He watched as Karl helped stow luggage in the cab. Then he saw Chris and Dyer come down hand in hand down the stairs. Chris kissed her cheek.

Impulsively Dyer reached up her arms to him. He leaned over and she kissed him.

The taxi pulled away. Dyer walked over to the curb. The cab turned a corner and was gone.

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