

*The Suicide Tales Pt. 2: The Haunted*

*Beep. Beep. Beep. Beep.* Visions of hands clutching him from every angle played as the beeping of the monitor slowed, ringing an elongated death knell, foretelling his imminent end. Melek's cackling laughter blasted around him as the air grew colder, and colder while the clawed hands dragged him deeper into the darkness.

*BANG! BANG! BANG!*

He awoke to the sound of fists pounding against the front door and the doorbell dinging frantically. The man rose from the dusty brown microfiber couch, knees creaking and cracking like the weathered beams of the house as he ran his pale fingers through the unkempt mop of long brown hair. The light of the afternoon stinging his half-shuddered eyelids as it burst through the threadbare curtains dangling above the front window. The man shambled to the door, groaning as he rubbed his bleary eyes, wiping away the cold beads of sweat.

"Quit banging on the damn door, I'm coming" he croaked.

Geoffrey gripped the knob and cracked it open to the length of the chain lock which anchored it to the jamb. Through the opening he saw a short, slender woman. Her skin the luscious color of caramel mocha, dark hair, sleek, straightened and dark as the midnight sky, with soft hues of blues and greys. Her almond shaped brown eyes pierced directly into his own.

"Sorry to bother you sir, but do you have a minute to talk?"

"Who the hell are you, and why do you want to talk to me?" Geoffrey asked.

"People call me Dodge. I wanted to ask you about a website that's registered in the name of Geoffrey D. Albright, who supposedly owns this house." she replied.

Geoffrey sighed and rubbed his face, which wore a mask of exasperation.

"It's not my website. I built it for a friend who was going through a rough time, I don't even manage it. I really don't want to be bothered, so have a nice day."

Geoffrey moved to close the door so he could return to the quiet, warm embrace of his worn couch, but a small foot dressed in a fancy black pointed loafer halted the door's momentum.

"Excuse me sir, you are Geoffrey Albright, right? Look, I know this is strange, but I really need to talk to you about this website. Please just hear me out over a cup of coffee. This is really important."

Geoffrey stopped, his face skewed into a grimace as he stepped away from the door and flung it open. He gestured toward the hallway, beckoning Ms. Dodge to enter.

"Come on then, let's get this over with." Grumbling, he guided Dodge through the dusty tomb and into the squat kitchen just beyond the living room where he slept. "Ain't fancy, but all I got these days."

Geoffrey pulled out two heavy steel folding chairs from beside the rusted single door refrigerator that rested in the back corner of the kitchen, then sauntered to the old McCoffee Coffee pot sitting on the counter and shakily set the coffee to brew.

“Look, Mr. Albright, that’s your name, right?” she asked.

Geoffrey nodded, clasped his hands together, reached them to his lower lip and began to feverishly rub his left fingers against the back of his right hand while bouncing his left knee and glancing over his shoulders, left to right, right to left, before settling his gaze on Dodge.

“Just call me Geoff,” he stammered.

“Alright Geoff, now we’re getting somewhere. Look, listen up, this story is going to be weird, but I need you to stick with me. I run a small paranormal research group.” Dodge cleared her throat and recanted the story of the Van Zyl house.

Her team showed up to the Van Zyl house to investigate what was reported as poltergeist activity. The Van Zyl’s detailed how their interior doors would randomly creep open, and then slam shut, unleashing thunderous retorts that echoed through the home. The family would walk into their kitchen to find drawers and cabinets open with their contents strewn about the floor. They had several other telltale signs of a haunting, it was so cookiecutter that it seemed unbelievable.

“We took the case. We looked for all the normal causes, and couldn’t find anything explainable. So after we checked out the property, and we interviewed the Van Zyl family, we set up our equipment and waited.” Dodge closed her eyes and shook her head, waving her long smooth black hair. “We don’t typically go for that white people shit, you know, antagonizing potential haunts, and chasing every scary noise. We use real high quality equipment to interact with the spirits instead.”

Dodge glanced at Geoffrey, as the air grew silent and still. He had stopped fidgeting, as if he became frozen, eyes locked over her shoulder. Slowly, she turned and looked over her shoulder, to see what Geoff was looking at. With nothing behind her, she looked back towards Geoff, her brow scrunching together so deeply that her neatly trimmed eyebrows drew close together.

“Geoff, you there? Hey, Geoff! Earth to Geoff.”

She noticed that his eyes, still locked in the point behind her, were glazed over, as if staring through time at a distant memory.

Geoff winced as the darkness wrapped itself around him. Clawed hands dug into his chest, pulling him deeper into the darkness. Screams, shrieks, the beeping of the heart rate monitor and Melek’s cackling laughter sounded all around him. He reached above him, his fingers reached and stretched desperately for the tiny sliver of light that dangled haplessly above his head. The light grew smaller as Melek’s voice sounded in his ear.

“Our time here will be short my dear Geoffy. You chose life after killing yourself, as I anticipated. I’m supposed to be disappointed, I’m sure.” Melek snarled, and the clawed hands withdrew from Geoff’s body. “You accepted my gift, now return to your body.” Melek’s clawed hand circled Geoff’s cheek as it whispered instructions into the man’s ear.

“Bye now” Melek sneered, its yellow jagged teeth breaching the pale grey thin lips, as it raised its clawed hand and flapped it in dismissal.

“Geoff!” Dodge screamed, shaking Geoff’s shoulder.

Geoff gasped, eyes blinking ferociously against the light in the kitchen. He dropped his head into his hands, rubbing the heels of his palms into his eyes. His chest heaved as if trying to suck in the air of the entire kitchen all at once while his body shook with the violence of an earthquake, matching the war-drum pounding of his heart, his whole body clinging desperately to life and consciousness. Buzzers screamed in his ears, fuzzing out a quiet voice that reached for him from the outside. The room spun as his eyes battled the clutch of the darkness that gripped them, begging for light to once again grace them with the images to dispel the dizzying darkness.

“Geoff! Shit, I think he’s having a panic attack.” She gripped Geoff’s shoulders, speaking sternly, “Geoff, I need you to listen. I know it’s hard, but I need you to focus on breathing. Slow deep breaths. Smell the roses, blow out the candles. Come on, you can do this.”

After what seemed like minutes, Geoff’s breathing slowed. His forehead glistened in a moist silvery sheen, body still quivering under the strain.

“S.. S.. Sorry” Geoff stammered. “Happens sometimes, ever since the hotel. Anyway, I don’t know what your haunted house has to do with me, or the website.” The heels of his palms continued to dig into his eyes as if trying to wipe the memory away.

“Well, when we were there investigating, the poltergeist turned the printer on, and the pages that printed, all had the website address theHaunted.org.” Dodge returned to her seat, grabbed her clutch and dug out a folded piece of paper. “Here, take a look.” She slid the paper to Geoff, beckoning him to look. Geoff gripped the paper, unfurled the edges to reveal countless lines of text repeating the same web address over and over again.

“What, what is this?” His eyes glued to the paper, as the cold sweat returned and began to bead on his forehead. “You said a ghost did this?”

“Yes. The computer was unplugged, and it’s an older printer, so no wifi or bluetooth connection. Ain’t no way any outside device could print this.”

“I still can’t help you. I don’t know anything about ghosts, or whatever did this. I don’t have much to do with the website.” Geoff shrugged, pushing the paper back to Dodge.

“Look, this family is terrified. They have a little girl who won’t even sleep in her own room. If you can’t help, and you ain’t the one running the website, then who is?” Dodge rose from her chair, voice raising in timber, “that poor girl needs help Geoff, and all this has something to do with you!”

Geoff scooted back from the table, his body still shaking, and his breathing growing ragged once more.

“I, I am sorry, there isn’t much I can do.” Geoff buried his face back into his hands as he tried to steady his breathing. “Maybe I can reach out to the person who handles the website. I can’t promise

anything, but if you leave the information for the house, and your number, I can forward it and see if they're willing or able to help."

Dodge's shoulders dropped. This wasn't the answer she wanted, but she didn't expect much anyway. She really just wanted to collect information to see if she could get rid of the poltergeist herself, but if this wreck of a man couldn't help her, it wasn't the end of the world.

"Yeah, sure, you do that. Well, sorry for wasting your time." She got up from the table and sharply gathered her clutch and jacket.

Geoffrey escorted Dodge out of the house, offering apologies at every turn but she walked out the door brusquely, without another word. Geoffrey closed the door and locked it, shoulders slumped as exhaustion threatened to take him where he stood.

"Well, that went swimmingly, my pet." A deep, gravelly, yet soft voice called from the kitchen.

"Shut up Melek," Geoff called back to the voice.

As Geoff made his way back to his old brown couch, a tall shadowy figure began taking shape beside him. Geoff laid down on the couch as features began to form on the shadow. Long brown straggly, stringy hair began to unveil, yellowish green eyes peered at him and disturbed the swirling darkness. The shadows parted where the mouth should be, revealing sharp, jagged yellow teeth.

"Oh Geoffy boy, you know you have to do it right? I let you live just for this. Just close your eyes, once you've gathered your strength, make the call," Melek called to Geoff in his raspy singsong voice.

Geoffrey nodded as he closed his eyes and fell into the warm embrace of darkness.

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The moon hung high in the sky over the square single story home. The red front door illuminated by the dull yellow beams of an ancient porchlight, caged in a rusty cast iron lantern style casing. The small group huddled by the door, hoping for the promised knock. The lights around them flickered on and off, as if a toddler were incessantly playing with the switch. The tall husky man beside Dodge grumbled gruffly as he paced back and forth behind the group.

"Just fucking stop. Goddamn, what the hell do you want with us? Leave us the fuck alone damnit!" He growled through the sunburst whiskers that covered his face. His stein sized hands balled into massive fists as his face flushed to a dark crimson.

"Calm down John, screaming won't help nothing." A small ruby nailed hand reached up and pressed against John's chest. Behind her strawberry-blonde bangs, her crystalline blue eyes peeked at John's. Her pale pink lips furled to a frown, as her pale hand trembled. "I don't think we can stay here baby."

"Yeah, well where the fuck are we supposed to go? Our life savings are sunk into this pisshole. Fuck!" John dropped his back against the entryway wall and slumped to the ground. After 2 months of increased activity and sleepless nights, his weary wrinkled eyes struggled to dam the flood that threatened to surge forth. His thick jowls, somewhat sunken, dark bags hung around his greenish brown eyes.

“Hey guys, don’t fret! Dodge said she got a call, we might get this sorted tonight! We have to keep our spirits up. Trust Dodge,” a bubbly voice called from the doorway. The man ran his hands over his shining bald head as he strutted over to the Van Zyl couple.

“Brody, really? This is not the time for your stupid puns,” Dodge called over glumly. “The activity is picking up. I hope this ‘friend’ Geoff was talking about can actually help.”

“Nyahh haha. There is never not a good time for puns, especially punny one---” Brody ducked as a pate struck the wall above his head. “Woah! What a ghost! I’ve never seen a flying disc in a haunting” he taunted.

Dodge’s lips drew tight thin lines as she tried to bite back her retort, her head cocked to the side, right eye squinting, and her hand extended towards vertically, flat, in what other military personnel refer to as a knife or command hand.

“You betta--” she started, but a single sharp rap on the door captured her attention. She quickly opened the door and stepped back as a veiled figure entered the home in thick baggy black robes that obscured their body, open black gloved palm extended in front of them. They seemed to glide into the room, the black hooded veil trailing behind them obscuring any features. A wispy voice called from beyond the veil.

“Merry meet my travelers, my ghouls and haunts. I, the Medium have arrived.”