



First Sitting
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Published: 2009

Categorie(s):

Tag(s): Horror "micro fiction" seance supernatural

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Micro-Fiction from Strange Circle: www.strangecircle.org.uk

Julia sat, trembling. Her best friend Rita was holding her left hand in a death-grip. An older lady with sweaty palms was holding her right hand. Julia couldn't remember her name even though they had been introduced only ten minutes before. A strong smell of lavender was wafting over from her, and she occasionally gave the young woman's hand a supportive squeeze. Instead of having a reassuring effect, Julia only found it creepy.

"I can't believe you talked me into this!" she hissed out of the side of her mouth to her friend.

"We must have silence in order to begin." A sonorous voice issued from the woman sat opposite Julia. This was the medium, Madame Farhiri (or so she called herself) and she sat straight-backed against the closed curtains with her eyes shut tight.

Julia watched the medium's face as the séance began. The dark licks of hair that hung down the side of her powdered face quivered as deep breaths were taken in through her nose and out through her mouth. The girl stifled a giggle at the dramatic wheezing noise that accompanied this act. She found the whole thing laughable; Rita had dragged her along just to make up the numbers, it seemed. Julia was not one to believe in all this paranormal crap, but she was willing to go along for the ride. It was an experience after all. And one she found most amusing.

"We have made this circle in order to join our energies. We ask those present from beyond the veil of life to make themselves known. Come close to us. Speak to us." Madame Farhiri's head swayed elastically to the left and right as she intoned the words.

"If there is one who would step forward, use me as your vessel. I am an instrument of your will. Speak through my mouth, and act through my body..."

Julia glanced around the circle of people. The gentleman to the medium's right was about fifty. The hair on his head was as thin as his face, and his lips were moving in some silent supplication as the medium spoke her invitation. His eyes were closed, as were Rita's. She sat next to him, his hand covering hers on the top of the tablecloth. Julia knew that her friend had been to one of these things before, but was surprised at how seriously she was taking it. She squeezed Rita's hand with her own, feeling a little uneasy and out of her depth. She expected a squeeze back but none came. Well screw her then.

The lavender lady next to her had her eyes open and seemed to be staring at something on the opposite wall. There didn't seem to be anything there when Julia looked, although she might have been staring at

Rita's neighbour, who was now rocking his head backwards and forwards as well as mumbling to himself. When she looked back at her neighbour her eyes had rolled upwards so that only a sliver of iris could be seen. It sent a shiver of disgust through the girl. Was this normal behaviour at one of these things? These people looked totally out of it.

There was a wooden bang that punctuated Julia's last thought. The final member of the circle had slammed her head down onto the table. Her netted hair lay unmoving next to the medium's left hand. There was a tiny cough, as if to gain Julia's attention. Her eyes rose from the bejewelled hand, up a silk covered arm and finally to the pallid face of Madam Fahiri.

"You should have your eyes closed!" The voice that came out of her mouth was different than before. There was a deepness about it and the words were bitten off as soon as they were made.

"What?" Julia said.

"I said, you should have your eyes closed. All of the others do..."

Julia glanced at the others in turn. They all were oblivious to what was being said to her. All eyes were closed and heads lolled about in various poses of relaxed submission. Rita was no different. She sat slightly slumped back in her chair, and the corner of her tongue was poking out from between her lips.

"Rita," Julia whispered, turning her head. "Rita wake up!"

"She can't hear you. None of them can. I took care of them as soon as I entered. It doesn't matter though. As always, it's you I want."

A slow breath escaped from between Julia's lips as she looked back at the Medium. It wasn't her anymore. Not only had her voice been replaced, but her face had also taken on a different look. The eyes had narrowed, and the cheekbones were more pronounced. The set of the jaw was distinctly mannish, and she was damned if she couldn't see stubble on the woman's chin where it hadn't been before.

"Who are you?" she managed to say.

Madame Fahiri's head tilted quizzically. "Why Julia! Don't you recognise your own father when you see him?"

Her breath seemed to freeze in her throat. In the space of a second she went from sceptic to true believer, as when she looked she could tell he was actually there. The face of the old woman had taken on the deep wrinkles that had furrowed her father's brow. The left eyelid, heavily shadowed in silvery-blue make up, drooped ever so slightly as did the corner of her mouth on the same side. Five years before his death her father had suffered from a mild stroke leaving his features just so.

“My God!” she whispered.

“No, just your Dad,” he replied. “And oh how I’ve missed our little conversations.”

Julia shuddered, her gorge rising. She knew this wasn’t really him. She knew he couldn’t really hurt her anymore.

Could he?

“I’ve been looking for you, little Jules. You never even came to my funeral. I was watching for you there.”

She gaped idiotically at the woman who was inexplicably now her father. “What do you want?” Her voice was feeble and childlike.

“I want what I’ve always wanted from you, my little girl. And now that I know the way, I don’t need this old bag any more.”

With a sudden inhale of air Madame Fahiri sat upright. She stared across the table into Julia’s eyes, a look of understanding passing over her. Julia noticed this only for a moment. There was a cool breath on her bare ankle, and then the painfully familiar touch of a hand encircling her calf, moving slowly upwards.

As her fellow sitters slowly woke up, she let out an anguished scream, and bolted from the table to the door.

Madame Fahiri watched in horror as the misty shape around the girl’s legs left with her.

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