



AN  
EXCHANGE  
OF  
FORTUNES

PAISLEY P. PEINFORTE

# AN EXCHANGE OF FORTUNES

*FROM THE DIARIES OF A LADY WHO  
WALKS TWO WORLDS AND IS IRKED BY  
BOTH*

**SAMPLE CHAPTER**

*PAISLEY P. PEINFORTE*

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*This work is dedicated to everyone who has helped keep me going all these years.*

*“Life is a process of becoming, a combination of states we have to go through. Where people fail is that they wish to elect a state and remain in it. This is a kind of death.”*

*-Anais Nin*

# I: WHAT EVIL LURKS?

As always, I get the call at 3:33AM.

The witching hour.

This night, I'm roused from my dreams of a wet, glistening Fabio Lanzoni whispering sweet Italian nothings in my ear by the sound of my mobile belting out a bass-boosted version of *Turn down For What* – my go-to ringtone.

My partner-in-crime sighs and rolls over, inured to the late-night disruption after long-suffering years, reaching out to hand me the phone and mumbling something incomprehensible in his half-sleep before curling back up into a foetal ball. I envy his ability to sleep like the dead.

As always, the voice on the line is male. Low-pitched and gruff, it's laced with scratchy modulated undertones of sulphur and brimstone.

He never gives his name. He never needs to.

In the old days, I have read, a talking raven would have come to my windowsill to deliver his message, or I would have been expected to use a Ouija board or crystal ball to divine it myself, but being as it was the twenty-first century, these days he just calls direct.

*HE Who Is Not to be Named.*

His breaths are low and heavy across the line. He's not a stalker (or so he claims). After panting for an aggravatingly long time, he catches his breath suspiciously and then finally deigns to speak, delivering a terse and direct message.

*“Forty-Eight hours. A boy dies by his own hand. Stop it if you can.”*

A sinister chuckle punctuates the statement.

It’s how the Round starts. It’s how they *all* start. A taunt from the netherworld (Heaven? Hell? Who knows?) marking the start of a jousting match where demons and dark ones (angels and gods?) use human souls as nothing more than playthings in their infernal (holy?) games.

If you’re sensing some confusion here on my part, it’s less confusion and more the fact that it’s all two sides of the same infuriating coin, and it’s bloody hard to tell which is which after a time.

*Save them or fail. It matters not to us. Either way, we are entertained. Dance to our tune, mortal puppets,* is what I imagine them saying. But no one knows their true motives. Some holy people call it a divine test to overcome, others, decidedly much-less-holy like myself, call it sadistic, inscrutable torture.

*They* call it “The Great Game.” I just call it “The Game” because to me there’s nothing fucking great about it at all. Whatever it is, it’s been an unwelcome part of my life since I was sixteen years old- and apparently the life of most of my ancestors as well, going back all the way to the tenth century when it was said that in exchange for the establishment of our family’s wealth, our founding ancestor literally made a deal with the Devil. A simple financial transaction whose impact continues to resonate down through the centuries to this day.

Truly, it was family business of the worst sort.

Ever since the deal had been struck, my family had brushed against the dark forces of the universe, sometimes



flirting with and then fleeing them, other times embracing them with joyfully carnal lust, and at other times railing against their machinations with a righteous fury. But always, whether allied or opposed, we played the game, locked in a relationship that made the world before us and the souls of its inhabitants into a puzzle to be solved as the basis for a bet. A sick, disgusting bet with human lives as the stakes.

The sinister voice completes the call in the usual manner, providing a name and address meant to mark the starting point of my quest.

The call then drops and a faint smell of sulphur and jasmine permeates the air in noxious admixture.

For me, the “Game” is always chilling. There is nothing I despise more than manipulation of the innocent by otherworldly powers who quite honestly should have much better things to do with their time than fuck with humanity. But this time, moreso than usual, my blood runs cold.

Looking up the name and address on my phone, I realise I know the potential victim personally.

An old acquaintance from university. A soft quiet recluse named Reg who could never hurt a fly. I didn’t interact with him that much, and I’d dropped out before he graduated, but still, I knew him. He had been, for a short time, a friend. And his life was now in my hands.

I couldn’t let *them* win. Not this time.

\* \* \*

The next morning, bleary-eyed and cursing the sun, I girded myself against the cold with a nice warm coat and a massive S\_\_\_ks coffee. Thus fuelled with sugar and caffeine, I

began making my way to Reg's place. But first I had to equip myself.

It should be a crime to be made to wake up before noon, I tell you. But the Game was on, and I hadn't any time to lose. Even if I chose to do nothing—to ignore the call—my friend would still die if nothing was done. It wasn't like the wheel of karma would be stopped due to my non-participation.

*Just another pawn moving across the chessboard, I thought to myself bitterly. At the mercy of a King whom I would never truly, properly see whilst I lived.*

Life had been mercifully quiet for the last little while, so I had found myself short of supplies that were often useful when dealing with the metaphysical. The items themselves were fairly mundane things you could get almost anywhere- things like incense, chalk, cologne, cloth, etc.) but what made the ones I utilised special was that they were specially charged with energy that made them quite potent (and in some cases, antithetical) to supernatural beings.

Ah. Before I go on, let me explain how this can be, by disabusing you of some common notions right up front. The whole heaven / hell thing? The notion of going “up there” or “down there”? Oversimplifications created by religious leaders to more easily manipulate the behaviour of their flocks. I don't mean to say there isn't something *else* out there, mind. I just mean to say it doesn't take the same *shape* as traditional dogma might suggest. Merely “being good” or “being bad” doesn't automatically put you in a certain place, and the beings “above” it all aren't so neatly categorised, either.

The reality I work in is more complex than a simple Heaven / Hell dichotomy. It's a fluid, messy place, where amplified *intent*, *intensity* and *energy* combine to create

effects—for good or ill—both in the everyday world you and I understand and the plenums of reality that intersect and interweave ours.

A student of physics will tell you that what you think of as “solid” matter is nothing more than *tightly bound energy particles*. A student of *quantum* physics will tell you that (to a very, very limited degree) our thoughts can influence particle motion. Usually this influence is so scant as to be background noise, and indeed it is cancelled out by a billion billion other quantum interactions occurring every millisecond. But the implication is there that at some base level thought and energy (and hence matter) are linked, no matter how tenuously.

Now, I couldn't presume to explain the higher-order maths or physical relationships that enable “supernatural” occurrences to happen. Nor am I claiming “magic” is some disconnected, science-trumping *über*-phenomenon. Rather, I believe magic and the supernatural is as bound to the laws of physics as everything else—but we haven't advanced enough in our knowledge—being a species a mere 40,000 or so years in age—to fully understand all the pieces of the puzzle as some of the more eldritch things in Creation, who measure the duration of their eye-blinks on the scales of billions of years do, or how those pieces interact with each other.

What does this have to do with my shopping trip, you might ask? Well, as I said, the items I were looking for were otherwise mundane objects which had been *charged*.

“Charging” in this sense means using ritual and ceremony (unconsciously drawing upon those aforementioned non-understood laws of physics) to imbue otherwise mundane objects with extra properties, which while largely useless to the “real” world, are effective against the world beyond. To use an analogy, it's sort of like using ultraviolet-reactive paint in a

poster. Looking at the poster in the daylight, it looks boring and normal—but wave a blacklight over it, and all of a sudden a new world of vibrant, potent colour emerges.

Any serious player of the Game would know how to charge and prepare their own artefacts, but, as with any product, there are degrees of polish and perfection to the workmanship involved that directly affect the potency of such tools.

Coming from a ridiculously old family and having the connections I do, I could certainly whip up some devastatingly effective kit, but here's the thing—I am a 21<sup>st</sup> century girl desperately interested in *having a life*. This means I don't want to spend the time faffing about with all the grunt work involved in the process. Thus, I outsource most of it to a wonderful dealer named Mr. Hatt (who never gives his first name to anyone- a wise choice. Names confer power.)

Getting to Hatt's place was simple enough once you knew how. At a certain very specific time of day (7:06 AM) a certain street would lead right to it for all of sixty seconds. At any other time—or if you were not a customer of Mr. Hatt previously / otherwise invited—you'd find yourself walking into a completely unrelated pound shop.

(How this was arranged, I'm told, was that his shop actually exists somewhere *else* in the world – I think in a small town in Japan, actually - but at that precise time each day, some fold in space makes it possible to reach it from one exact spot in Windsor. At other times of day, the entrance shifts elsewhere, sometimes staying longer, sometimes shorter.)

Hence why I was up and about earlier than should frankly be legal, emergency aside. If I didn't get to the entrance right on time, I wouldn't be able to go again until tomorrow, and

I wanted to be prepared before going into whatever it was I would be facing.

Having fought off my natural tendency to hibernate, I continued to make my way towards the place Hatt's would be at in about fifteen minutes. I'd allowed for my innate grogginess in the morning and given myself some extra time to get there—and it was a good thing too, because I could tell there was going to be a delay.

Standing diagonally across the road from me was a tall fellow in bad shoes, standing about two metres high wearing a rather tattered long coat over a navy blue wrinkled two-piece blazer and slacks combo. His face was all teeth and angles, with narrow, squinty eyes that would make Clint Eastwood look bug-eyed and greasy black curly hair that seemed almost glued onto his scalp. Badly. Who knows, maybe it was.

This would be Harold “Harry” Remington, human agent for the minor demonic entity Xalmes-Azeman, and perpetual intercessor in my affairs for some godawful reason known only unto him and the demon. He grinned a grin filled with jagged knives and spite.

*Shit.* I braced myself for the unexpected. He knew where I was headed, and how much time I had to get there. The only reason he'd be in my path would be to stall me.

I cast my gaze around myself in quickly, eyes darting back and forth. I hated this kind of occult confrontation. There's a reason I call it a game of chess, you see, aside from the overall metaphor of being manipulated.

In a normal fight, when someone is attacking you, you can take any number of calculated responses based on what they're doing. If someone is trying to punch you, you can move

to block, move to dodge, or even try to get in an attack of your own.

*Occult* combat, on the other hand, is more like a chess game where each player makes a move out of the blue—sometimes from a great distance hundreds or thousands of miles away—and the other player is forced to be reactive, boxed in by the first player’s stratagem, which is not always clear.

You may not even know an attack is coming until it affects you, you discern its nature, and then you rally to fight back—if you’re even properly equipped to do so. Fights rarely start impromptu—the aggressor has spent time planning and getting everything arranged *just so* before attacking.

For example, Harry here. He’s “just” staring at me and grinning maliciously across the street. He’s not going to throw hands or get into a row with me. He’s not even going to get anywhere physically *near* me. Thus, even if I *know* he’s up to no good, I can’t strike first, because to anyone looking on without special insight, I’d just be attacking some random fellow for no apparent reason.

No, in this scenario I literally have to wait and see what happens next. More than likely his demonic partner clued him in I’d been tasked with a job, and so he’d spent some time last night preparing a *treat* for me.

Harry just stood there, grinning, even as a bead of sweat formed on my forehead, my hands involuntary tightening into fists as my blood pressure rose slightly. I knew time was ticking down, both to get into the shop and to resolve whatever was going to happen to Reg.

I trained all my senses on everything *but* Harry. He might be the instigator, but once his attack’s been launched, he’s

nothing more than a distraction meant to keep me from looking where I need to—that is, towards wherever the attack he launched is going to come from.

As I said before, the supernatural usually can't just boldly show up in the "real" world—it has to work through things *already in it*, and so wherever Harry's attack was going to come from, it was going to be from someone or something in my environment... or even my own body if I wasn't already girded against such things as a matter of course.

*Something* around me was bound to be out of place.

Down the street a bit, a ball bounces into the road, followed by a small child.

*There it is.*

It's too far away for me to rush to in time, but that's fine—the child's safety isn't the problem here. It's the lorry that's just swerved to dodge the child, which has just slammed into a parked motorcycle that has pitched sideways and is now hurtling towards me, transformed into a deadly steel projectile aimed right at my head.

I swear loudly, ducking and rolling to the side, slamming into a postbox hard as the bike flies right above where I'd been a moment ago, loudly crashing into a tree. There's an immediate flare of pain in my side.

Groaning, I roll in the opposite direction, trying to force myself back to my feet.

That's when I hear the tree above me groaning as well. I jerk my head sideways to look at it—it's starting to lean towards my direction. Bloody thing must have been rotten inside.

It's tall enough to flatten me with its branches if it hits. The only direction I can run to avoid it is directly into the road.

This is how Xalmes-Azeman operates—attacks utilising directed chaos. A simple action taken that starts a domino effect chain reaction that achieves its purpose. And, to the outside observer, nothing at all that can be directly traced to his partner, Harry, whom I was dashing towards as I tried to dart across the road to evade the tree.

Barely avoiding a car, my adrenalin causing me to shake, I made my way to the pavement on the other side, only for Harry to “accidentally” slam into my injured side, causing me to let out a yelp of pain and crumple to the ground.

“All right, miss?” he asked, pretending to not know who I bloody was, leaning down and feigning the utmost concern.

I growled under my breath and discreetly gave him the finger, hand angled so only he could see it.

“You’ll be fine,” he said, laughing under his breath as he roughly grabbed me by the arm and hauled me to my feet, all the while making it look like he was a good Samaritan performing a charitable act.

“We should get you to hospital,” he said with such *concern* I half-believed him for a moment. He began pulling me to walk alongside him, in a direction completely opposite to Hatt’s shop.

“I’m all right,” I grunted through gritted teeth, whispering “arsehole” as he shot me a devilish grin. I brusquely wrenched my arm from his grip and quickly tried to make my way back to the store. It hurt to move and I was probably quite the sight as I struggled to stay upright in the face of my pain.



You'll notice I didn't mention anything about fighting back. There were a few reasons for that. First was the fact that I had to get somewhere right away, and he could wait. Second, while there is such a thing as direct combat with supernatural forces, it generally takes place in conducive settings where one can force out the demonic half of the equation, and when one has sufficiently prepared oneself for the task. Trying out haphazard approaches in the middle of the street in broad daylight was not the way to go. Also, even if I did try something, I'd be on the back foot trying to improvise whilst he was probably already several steps ahead. That's why I hated occult combat. It was indirect and infuriating.

Mind you, I was firmly determined to get revenge. I don't suffer slights or attempts on my life gladly. But not here, not now. Priorities. The door had appeared!

I hobble-dashed towards the store, but the pain in my side flared up and I had to slow down. Just as I did so, I could feel a chill in my bones, and in the blink of an eye, the entrance to the store was one, replaced by the bloody pound shop.

"Need something, love?" The elderly manager of the store asked as she opened the store for the morning.

*Yeah*, I thought to myself as I heard Harry laughing in the distance, swanning off with nary a care in the world. *I need to kick the shit out of that man*, I thought to myself.

I forced a cheerful smile and chirped to the proprietor "oh yeah, just a bag of crisps, thanks! Got a bit of a walk today!"

I quickly went up and down the aisles, looking for any mundane items I could purchase to use later. Even unprepared or unsanctified items could still be handy in a pinch, plus carbs were a definite necessity if one got stuck in a situation requiring

intense concentration or worse, physically channelling something.

I settled on a few things, paid my bill and quickly made my way out to Reg's place.

In the back of my mind, I wondered why Harry Remington had gotten in my way just then. Yes, his family had once had a long-running grudge against mine, but any *lethality* in that had been sapped generations ago. His harassment of me were generally in the context of one-upping me or stealing my clients. I could see him doing something petty to keep me from getting to the store, but almost having me *killed* smelled more of his demon buddy Xalmes-Azeman's instruction—and that meant someone had tasked the demon with a contract.

Splendid.

I had to wonder if this Reg situation wasn't just the tip of some sinister iceberg.

*Well, I thought to myself as I made my way to the council estate where Reg lived, I'll find out soon enough, I'm sure.*

It was quiet this early in the morning, with a few people out walking their dogs, and joggers doing their best to make their daily rankings on whatever social media app was pitting them against each other this time. As such, everyone was pretty much preoccupied and ignoring me as I followed the directions on my phone to Reg's place. I had also made sure to have my headphones on and was affecting my usual dour self-absorbed expression so as to discourage any unnecessary human contact, not just because of the mission, but because I despised engaging in small talk, being utterly shit at it as I was.

Thankfully, finding the place wasn't too hard. It was a modest little place, well-kept on the outside but clearly showing its age. As I slipped my headphones off and put on a pleasant expression, I was greeted at the slightly weatherbeaten door by an elderly woman of about sixty, whom I recognised as Reg's mother from a photograph he'd shown me once.

She was short, stout, and a bundle of good cheer weighed down by obvious worry for the state of her son.

"Oh, thank god you've come, luv. 'E 'asn't been talkin', r' eatin', and 'e just sits there, staring at th' screen all day. An' those *knives* of his. I think 'e means t'do'imself a harm. I daren't get near enough t' check."

She sighed. "I'm a bit worried, no word of a lie. E' asn't been back t'work in weeks, an' Ai'm not sure 'ow long 'is boss is gonna keep 'is position open for 'im. An' if 'e loses that job, we'll lose 'is place, sure 'nough."

His mum was open and earnest, chatting to me as if we were best mates, which, truth be told, would be suspicious under normal circumstances. You see, until this moment, we'd never met, and I'd not called ahead to say I was coming. Also, I doubt Reg had mentioned me to her. I just never made that kind of impact on people.

Still, I was here and she had let me in without hesitation, acting as if everything had already been arranged.

Such was the twisted nature of the Game. I was almost always implicitly trusted when on these sort of "quests"—I couldn't tell you why, though. People *rarely* questioned my presence or demanded explanations, and many times never even challenged me when I proffered what sounded like the most dubious supernatural explanations for what I was doing.

It wasn't any kind of personal magnetism, I assure you. Other than what I *know* and some of the things I've learnt to *do*, I'm as mundane an ordinary a human being as they come with all the social skills of a potted plant—but it seemed to be one of the rules of the Game that I could get where I needed to go and do what I needed to do without being challenged, at least insofar as it kept things interesting for whatever Higher (lower?) powers were manipulating things. If it made it more fun for them to have me be challenged or questioned at every step, that could certainly happen. So I could never become complacent or reliant on the notion that I could just go around like I owned the place.

I could almost predict the rhythm of these things now. If it was easy for me to get to someone, the challenge I'd face when dealing with them would be rough. If it was tough to get to someone, most times the actual solution to their problem would be simple. In this case, the situation felt like the former scenario.

I quickly took in my surroundings, trying to discern any clues. For someone who had made it through one of the top two universities in England, Reg's family's flat was decidedly lower-middle class.

It was clear by looking at the well-worn furnishings, scarce possessions and wholly unremarkable decor contrasted with proud photographs of Reg in full academic regalia given pride of place on the mantelpiece that his family had sacrificed a great deal to get him his education, and they were proud of it.

My instinct told me that he was most likely the first in his family to make it this far, given the general austerity of the surroundings and the way his mother carried herself.

Accepting a cup of Darjeeling tea, I prepared to enter Reg's room, which was behind a plain white door, the paint near the knob coated with years of dirt and oils.

At my side, I carried a clever case shaped like an oversized hardcover book, to which a shoulder strap had been attached. Within it, I had carefully stashed and organised all manner of arcane tools and objects designed to aid in the detection and dispersion of supernatural influences. This toolkit was the product of over a thousand years of family research into the unknown, much of it, I dryly noted, probably supplied by the very beings I usually ending up being pitted against in the unceasing battles and contests of wills which made up much of my life. It was annoying that, having missed the chance to stock up at Mister Hatt's, many of these items were currently of limited utility.

Opening the kit, I found a small bottle of expensive fragrance and sprayed it into the air, walking through the mist.

I didn't do it to increase my allure. In situations like this, where it's possible that dark influences are afoot, the presence of pleasant scents can act as a reasonably moderate repellent to the weaker of those influences, much as how the stink of rot would prove noxious to a regular human being. It was a sort of personal shield, meant to prevent one from getting (easily) affected by the very things they were seeking to expel-at least at the start of things.

Steeling myself, I rapped on the door with my knuckles.

"Reg?" I called out.

No reply. Not good. Well, maybe he was a night owl and sleeping. There was that possibility. I'd be lying if I said I didn't want to be sleeping right now. Curled up in bed, warm and safe, preferably in the arms of my love. Not having to deal with whatever *this* would end up being.

Still, there was work to do. I narrowed my eyes and focussed on the task at hand.

“I’m coming in,” I said a bit bravely, firmly grasping the doorknob and twisting, hopefully giving Reg the chance to cover his immodesty if he wasn’t prepared to receive visitors. And if he didn’t, well. I was a child of the Internet. I’ve seen everything anyway. It’d be his fault for being too slow.

The door swung open with a bit of a creak, revealing an oddly spartan space beyond it. The windows of the room had been blocked by thick curtains and the place was somewhat poorly lit by an incandescent bulb which cast the whole space in a sickly amber hue.

The walls were covered in aged cream wallpaper, darkened with age save for a great number of bright, rectangular patches which betrayed the fact that a great many posters and pictures had been recently taken down.

There was a single bed against one wall that was neatly made and hardly looked slept in. Slight ruffles on the coverlet told me Reg most likely spent most of his time sleeping atop it with most likely another sheet for cover at night. I surmised this because it was the same thing I used to do on my own during a low period when I didn’t want to be bothered with the fussy details of having to make up a bed. The cover sheet would just go in a box or something somewhere for the day until I needed it and the bed itself would always look nearly immaculate.

There was an almost leaden *stillness* in the room, punctuated only by the clacking of keys on a computer keyboard, the sound of which drew my gaze to the other side of the room, where Reg was. He was sat at a well-worn desk, typing at a very-nearly outdated computer, largely immobile save for the movement of his fingers.

He didn't really acknowledge me, instead seeming to stare at his computer screen intently. I say "seeming" because I could tell he was giving me the side-eye.

The corner of his mouth twisted downward in disapproval. While there was no kind of psychic emanation from him, his posture and expression caused me to feel a sort of generalised hostility directed at me nonetheless. It was palpable enough to make me feel distinctly uncomfortable.

That feeling aside, this whole scene was not making sense to me. It was not typical for the usual work I did. Most times, I'd be walking into a location where it was immediately clear some sinister power was at play. There would usually be some kind of environmental "tell."

Assuming I'd just missed it, I maintained my position just past the door to his room and took another look at things, closing my eyes, centring my mind and exhaling, trying to get a clearer picture of my surroundings from a purely occult perspective.

*Odd.* I felt none of the usual markers of supernatural incursion. There was no oppressive weight of spiritual pressure that so often accompanied the presence of spirits, astral projectors or demigods. I had no gooseflesh; there was no chill in my bones.

The air temperature felt normal (usually it would be unnaturally colder). There were no strange scents. Sometimes you might smell something like cigarette smoke for dark entities or flowers for light ones. There were no out of place sounds. Even the rhythm of Reg's breathing seemed normal.

Opening my eyes again, I reached into my bag and pulled out a compass and some dowsing rods. Performing a

quick check, I determined that the local magnetic fields and ley lines were just fine too.

Reg, for his part, ignored all this and tapped upon his keyboard, remaining sullen and uncommunicative. There, was, however, a growing cloud over his features forming even as he ostensibly focused on whatever it was he was doing online.

So fixated was I on my environmental checks that I had failed to register him stopping his typing. After a moment, though, the deafening quiet hit me.

It felt suffocating.

Reg was just staring at his computer screen, and I at him.

All I could hear was the blood rushing past my ears.

“Tea, dears?”

I nearly jumped out of my skin as Reg’s mum, who had apparently snuck in with the stealth of a thousand ninja, cheerfully uttered her question.

I shuddered and hastily forced myself to regain my composure.

“Thanks, Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_”, I replied, taking a cuppa. She smiled at me in a matronly fashion and left a tray with another cup in arms’ reach for Reg, who was still studiously ignoring everyone. She began exiting the room whispering “E don’t like it be left open,” as she left, closing the door.

I was keenly aware of time passing. Of the forty-eight hours I had been given to stop whatever Reg was going to do to himself, almost six had elapsed. I needed to start getting a handle on things, and quickly at that. But Reg was more interested in his computing than conversing. It was almost like going on a date



with someone who only ever stared at their mobile the whole time you were there. I hated that sort of behaviour. If you wanted to be alone, be alone on your own time.

I sipped some of the tea from my cup and produced a small phial from my pocket, slipping the contents into Reg's drink. It was a mild hypnogogic, designed to harmlessly but effectively loosen lips and get people to speak what was truly on their minds. The effect was generally temporary, but highly potent.

I felt terrible invading his privacy in this manner, but as I quite firmly believed his life was on the line, I frankly had no qualms about being a touch amorally pragmatic in doing what was needed to save him.

*The more one played the Game, the shittier one tended to become*, I'd realised. It was constant struggle to stay on the right side of the line, and honestly, it wasn't always a struggle I won.

I proceeded to look around the room a bit, making random comments about the weather and waiting for him to sip the tea, which he eventually did.

It took a few minutes for the substance to take effect, and Reg eventually half-fell asleep at his keyboard, slouching downwards and forwards. In this mind-state, the barriers between his subconscious and conscious mind would weaken, and he would be more open to answering whatever was asked of him.

This was where things tended to get interesting. If he was possessed by some entity, this was the time they'd usually start talking, generally to brag about how hard they were and

how clever they were for corrupting the soul of an otherwise good lad.

Indeed, Reg's expression slowly morphed into a deep sneer as he sat upright again and turned his head to lock gazes with me, his body still mostly facing the computer.

*Here it comes, I thought. This is where they reveal themselves.* I braced myself for whatever revelation lay ahead.

**And that's it for this sample! If you like what you've read so far, you can purchase a full copy for your Kindle on Amazon here!**

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**LADY PAISLEY PRISCILLA PEINFORTE** is a registered noble of Sealand who leads a strange and decadent lifestyle best left to the imagination, spending her time faffing about with Photoshop and writing about things that interest her, both fiction and non-fiction. She splits her time on both sides of the pond and very much enjoys the company of her friends, lover, and cat.

Her blog (yes, those still exist!) can be found at <https://paisleypeinforte.co.uk> and you can follow her on Twitter at [@Rule34Rocks](#), on [Goodreads](#), or her increasingly-neglected Instagram [@paisley\\_p\\_peinforte](#).

Her books can all be found on Amazon [here](#).

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