

Chapter 6: Unholy Spirit

Norma huddled on their bed, her arms around Norman's waist and her head nestled against his shoulder. Outside, the winter day was growing darker and light snow began falling. A shudder went through her as she listened to his story. This loving, wonderful young man who was her son had been having hallucinations for years, which both frightened and saddened her. His troubled mind had conjured up another version of her: Norma Bates. At first it struck her as unbelievable, but the choked anguish in his voice made her believe him by the time he was finished. Norman recounted how it'd gotten so bad to the point of him getting help from a psychiatrist, with no improvement. Now this alternate "Mother" had somehow broken loose, with a will of her own.

"I'm so sorry," Norman's voice was shaking, his eyes bright with tears that made her heart twist painfully. "I tried to make her stop, make her go away, once she showed me just how dangerous she's become. She always thought she had to protect me, and she took over after you didn't wake up, after I had to leave you at the hospital. I'd have so much lost time...black-outs, we'd always called them, where she'd take control of my mind. But I haven't had any since that night you came home,"

Norman swiped a tear from one eye, "I told her to leave us alone, while you were resting and I was in the kitchen. She told me this isn't over, that she isn't going anywhere. That must have been when it happened." He swallowed the rising lump in his throat, as he turned and lifted Norma's chin. "I won't let anything bad happen to you, I swear it. Let her come after me instead."

"Stop it, Norman!" Norma's tone was fierce even as she also tried to bite back her feelings of terror. Afraid to leave the bedroom, yet she was more afraid not to, positive that lookalike entity would again be glaring at them from a dim corner. "That *thing* isn't coming after you OR me! We'll figure something out," She clung much tighter to him, closing her eyes and trying to picture the weird images that kept

appearing in her dreams. Images of shadowy figures following her through the darkened house, or floating with her through that weightless "nothing" place with the bizarre shifting light she still sometimes visited in her dreams. Coming close to her, but never close enough to touch. Their faces were never visible, and the feeling of dread they gave Norma was extreme. She couldn't fathom what they wanted, and she had zero desire to find out. "I told you about my nightmares, what I've seen." Her tone softened; she didn't want her fear to come out as anger. "So...who's to say one of those beings can't exist here, while we're awake?" Norma wasn't having the easiest time putting this bizarreness into words, in the midst of a world that still felt as unfamiliar and strange as it was.

One thing she was certain of: Norma wanted out of this bedroom, at least for a little while. "Come on, baby." She pulled herself up to a sitting position and tugged on his hands. "Let's move to your bed. I'm so tired from all this."

Smiles played over both their lips, despite the recent scare. Norman got up and held one arm securely around her waist, supporting her as they made the short trip through the adjoining bedroom doors. He'd clean up the broken glass later. As he slowly unzipped her new dress, he brushed his fingertips along her spine and felt her give a small shiver. Norma held onto the footboard of his bed with one hand, as she reached back and managed to unhook her bra with the other. Her boy had seen her nude every day over the past two months, helping her shower and dress. They'd gotten used to it. At least they thought they had.

Since that last kiss, the air between them was full of heated tension that only grew as Norman found one of his flannel pajama tops and helped her into it, holding her in a loving embrace from behind as she fastened the buttons. His real mother, the one in his arms now, was right: Merely kisses and long embraces were no longer going to be enough for them, before long. They didn't even need to voice it out loud, nor their fears of what might happen when they took the next step in their growing physical intimacy. Norma dropped into his bed, turning onto her side and pulling the

covers over her. A few minutes later, Norman joined her, having used the bathroom and changed into another pair of his pajamas. A soft sigh escaped her lips and the tension drained from her limbs as his warm body spooned snugly against hers. She took hold of his hand as he held her protectively against him. "I love you, Norman."

"I love you too, Mother." He dropped a kiss to her neck. Both were sound asleep minutes after their eyes dropped closed.

When Norma awoke hours later, it was fully dark outside and the snow had turned into cold, sleeting rain. A flicker of lightening illuminated the room for a second or two. What was that she'd recently read about thunder? Oh yes, if you started counting after the lightening and before the thunderclap: that's how many miles away the thunder and lightening were from you. Somehow, this piece of trivia seemed important now. Norman, still mostly asleep, gave a soft grumble and snuggled closer against her. Norma moved back, her hips against his pelvis as she lifted his hand and kissed it. At the same time, she counted silently. Six seconds and six miles until the first thunder strike.

The next lightening flash was brighter, and with it came the Mother entity. Standing at the foot of the bed, her skin appearing icy-white and her blue eyes even colder with obvious hatred. The doppelgänger appeared more solid this time, letting Norma see the striking similarities. This not-real version of herself had shorter hair done up in a lot more curls, she was wearing blood-red lipstick, and she was inexplicably dressed in a blue-and-white strappy sundress in the winter. Norma's throat constricted, a scream rising in her chest and threatening to choke her. But she wasn't going to scream, wasn't going to give this fake self the satisfaction. Glaring back at her, Norma hissed "What the hell do you want?!" softly, also not wanting to wake up Norman.

"I'm a part of Norman, and I don't want *you* to ever forget that!" Mother-entity snapped. "If it weren't for you, he never would've gone crazy and created me in the first place!"

Norma tried to sit up without disturbing her sweet boy too much, "What's that supposed to mean?!" she demanded, "I love Norman! I'd never do anything to hurt him, ever!"

The doppelgänger gave a dry, cruel laugh, "How would you know? You can't remember anything!" She started backing up, growing a bit more transparent. "I love him too, and I'm going to keep him safe from anything. I mean anything. Both you and me here: it's not gonna work."

No longer caring about waking him, Norma shouted "My son is not crazy, you bitch! How dare you?!"

Another mocking smirk, "Ask him about everything he's been keeping secret from you!" With that, she faded from sight again. But not before Norman jolted awake and blanched at the sight of his real mother and his once-alter shouting at each other. Indeed, he turned nearly as white as the latter, and he blinked rapidly a lot, his mind struggling to accept what he was seeing.

Once she was gone from the room, so was the creepy feeling of her still lingering around unseen and watching them, much to their relief. The only remaining sounds were Norman and Norma's terrified breathing and the pounding of the rain outside. Another lightening flash, and she murmured "One...two...thr-" *Crash*.

Shaking uncontrollably, they lay clinging to each other for how long neither could say. "I never wanted you to have to deal with this, Mother."

"We're in this together, Norman. For always. No matter what we have to deal with." She drew a deep, somewhat steadier breath, "She's right, you know. This entity, or whatever it is, has to go. I want you to stop blaming yourself."

Although it was evident the Mother-entity could show up wherever she wanted in the house, Norma and Norman still moved their nest of pillows and comforter downstairs to the living room sofa. At the very least, it was warmer and more inviting there. Neither figured they'd be hungry, but the recent adrenaline rush proved otherwise. Once she got the leftover pot roast with potatoes and carrots warming in the oven, both their mouths watered. It had been her first attempt at cooking one of Norman's favorites herself, and it sent a surge of pride through her when it came out perfect. Relearning cooking had proven one of the easiest parts.

Much too tired and hungry to complain about it, Norma parked herself in the wheelchair once she closed the oven door and set the timer. Pulling her warm robe tighter around herself and wheeling herself up to the table, she squeezed Norman's hand as he scooted his kitchen chair up close to her. "You're so much stronger now, Mother." he remarked, "And I don't just mean how fast you can get around in that thing now."

"Soon I won't need it at all. I didn't feel that strong, just now upstairs. I was so scared, thought for sure I'd lost what's left of my mind," she lamented.

Norma met his eyes and leaned closer to him, "Did you really see her, for years before I went in the coma? And I didn't believe you?"

"Yes, Mother. It started not long after we moved here."

Tears rolled down her cheeks, "I'm so sorry, honey. Anymore I'm not totally able to rule anything out, about this crazy world."

Norman held her as she buried her face against his shoulder, his hand rubbing her back. "I forgave you a long time ago, Mother."

During their quiet dinner, Norma had to struggle to keep another burning question out of her mind: Was he keeping secrets from her, as the entity had accused? Norma was starting more and more to think of her that way; that hateful lookalike was in no way a part of her. Anyway, this was something Norma didn't want to consider. Norman wouldn't do that; why would he? He was devoted to her, loved her as much as any other person could ever love anyone. His days were filled with taking care of her, making sure she was always comfortable and content, holding her through her bad moments, while he couldn't seem happier through all of it.

Beside, didn't evil entities lie? If some stories she'd read or movies she'd watched had any grains of truth, they sure did. Yes, that was it. That thing was trying to drive a wedge between them, and it was not going to happen.

Sleep only came to them after two of their favorite classic movies, and the rest of the night was blissfully quiet save for the steady rain.

The next morning on the way home from the physical therapist, Norma announced "I want to start helping you run the motel again. I'm ready."

"If you wish, Mother. There's not much to do lately, since it's our slowest time of the year." He gave her that irresistible, still-boyish grin. "I'll show you the ropes, and I'll sure love the company."

"Me too, sweetheart." That smile of his made the terror of last night a distant memory.

Indeed, they had only a few straggling guests each week. Mostly road-trippers on their way to or from Portland or Newport. The occasional business traveler in White

Pine Bay, usually looking to invest in a dispensary. The marijuana buyers themselves stuck closer to home at this time of year, preferring not to brave the rain and the winding old highway. Despite the legality now, Norman had a prominent sign posted in the motel office window, asking guests to please not smoke inside the rooms unless they wanted to be charged a \$20 cleaning fee. He indicated it with a chuckle as they walked up to the office and unlocked the doors. "That's tougher to enforce during the summer when it's busy, but I learned from you how to take a firm hand with them."

A sense of warm familiarity came over Norma, as she took a seat behind the front desk. The more she looked at the blue Bates Motel logo, the more it grew. "I was so happy when we first bought this place. Hopeful. I can feel it." She looked at him, "Blue's our favorite color, isn't it Norman? You have so many blue shirts, and they look wonderful on you. The same with my old dresses." She slipped her arm around him and pressed the side of her face to his torso, feeling the softness of the navy sweater he had on.

"You remember?" he asked softly, leaning over and hugging her close, his cheek resting gently on top of her head. The urge to kiss her was overwhelming, but anyone could drive up at any moment and see them.

"I only wish I could remember more," Norma reached for the switch under the desk that turned on the motel sign. Dark clouds covered the sun, so the neon letters threw plenty of bright blue illumination across the gravel parking lot. Norman made his usual rounds, making sure all the vacant rooms were locked up and everything else was in order. They had only one guest, in Room 10, who was slated to check out at three that afternoon. Norma spent the rest of the morning looking through the motel's website and getting familiar once again with the office of this little business that had once been her dream. It was, once again.

Uneventful days passed without "Mother" appearing again. Then that Saturday morning, they opened the office to find Norman's treasured taxidermied owl had been ripped off the wall and thrown to the floor, one of its wings torn off and one side of it dented. He couldn't stop himself before punching his fist through the wall next to the coffee maker. "Fuck! That's IT!! She's gone too far!" The place had been locked up tight with no sign of a break-in. It couldn't have been anyone else.

"Sweetie, calm down!" Norma took him in her arms, kissing the side of his face. "She's not gonna do any more of this crap. Just breathe. Settle down."

No black-out came, as much as Norman was seeing red in front of his closed eyes. It had now been over 60 days since he'd had one. He managed to take enough deep breaths to calm himself. He carefully picked up his broken owl, "I'll be back soon, Mother." For the next couple of hours, he sat at his old work table in the basement, painstakingly reattaching the broken wing and repairing the rest as much as he could. Meanwhile, Norma stayed in the office and searched for answers of her own. She saved a copy of the lovely photo of her and Norman from the Bates Motel site, then sent it to a local shop that would enlarge it, print it, frame it, and deliver it. It would look perfect on the wall and cover up that hole.

Over the next week, Norma spent her afternoons in charge of the motel office. She had Norman buy her a pair of five-pound hand weights to go with the PT exercise equipment she was already using. Idly doing bicep curls, she searched through the endless recesses of information on spirits, thought-forms, and tulpas. Some of what she read was too far-fetched to be taken seriously, but she also kept running across the same advice: get a bundle of sage and burn it, waving the smoke into every corner of every room. Shops selling that kind of New Age stuff were plentiful in the village, so what did they have to lose?

In spite of the distressing situation, Norman found this plan amusing when she told him. "Really, Mother?" he teased her, "Okay, but if you start dressing up in floaty black clothes and twirling around the house, then we're gonna have to have a talk."

Norma picked up a throw pillow from the couch and swatted him gently with it. "Hilarious. Do you have any better ideas? I'd almost suggest you and me going to see Dr. Edwards, but he'd probably have both of us committed!"

Point taken. "Whatever you say, Mother. We'll give it a try." They closed up the office an hour early and drove to the shop that Norma had bookmarked. She selected a thick bundle of white sage, reportedly one of the best kinds for clearing out negative emotional energy and spirits. When they got home, she unfolded the included instructions and lit the sage on one end, blowing it out and letting one end smoke. She started in the mud room by the back door, holding it in each corner and repeating a simple incantation to release anything negative from this space. Moving to the kitchen, she had to stop and sit to rest her legs. Once she repeated the same thing in the kitchen, she poured herself a glass of Chardonnay. She'd become partial to it, though two glasses were her maximum. It was barely four o'clock, but so what? Plus who could say if this sage ritual might really work?

Norman had been relaxing on the sofa, watching her in adoration. He let her sage two corners of the living room before he pressed "play" on the song he'd pulled up on his phone: "Witchy Woman" by the Eagles.

"Norman!" she spun on him, once she heard a few verses. "I'm glad you're getting such a kick out of this! I'm trying to do something that might help; is it really that much of a joke to you?!" Norma seized her wine glass from where she'd set it on the end table, took another hearty swallow, her blazing eyes never leaving his. He couldn't help letting his gaze roam over her. That morning, she'd insisted on wearing the blue-and-white flowered dress she'd worn the day they'd first arrived. It was still too loose in the waist and a bit too loose in the chest; Norma was still about 10

pounds underweight, but she didn't care. Putting on that dress gave her even more of a sense of being home, somehow.

He stood up and gently took her by one wrist, removed the wine from her hand and put it back on the table. Then he took the burning sage from her other hand and ground it out on an old plate she'd set out for that purpose. "It's not that much of a joke, Mother. I was just having a little fun with you, that's all. I couldn't help it." He pulled her against him, lacing his fingers into hers while his other arm circled her waist. Norma's cheeks flushed as she couldn't take her eyes from his sweet, earnest face. All she could do was nod when he asked, "Will you dance with me?"

Norma couldn't think about how she didn't remember how; she just let him guide her. Moments later, they were moving around the living room in a steady rhythm, grooving to blues-rock from decades ago. Before the song was over, she'd wrapped both arms around his neck and was swaying her hips with his. The next song that came on was an even older classic: "It's Too Late to Turn Back Now" by Eban Brown. The lyrics made both their heartbeats speed up, their bodies pressing fully together. Norma pressed slow, lingering kisses along his neck. "I love you," she whispered in his ear. She could feel the hard bulge between his thighs, pressing against her. She pressed her and ground her hips even more against his. Nothing mattered any longer, not that entity or anything else. Before the song ended, Norma gently stopped his movement. And before he could say a word, they were kissing deeply. A low moan released from her throat into his. Their arms tightened around each other, neither wanted to ever let each other go.

Finally, she broke the kiss and still held him to her. "Baby...it looks like it won't rain for a little while today. Why don't we go for a short walk in the woods?"

"I'd love nothing more, Mother. There are a couple of things I want to tell you."

