

## FROM “YOU WON’T FORGET ME”

“THE QUESTION IS: DO you believe in evil?”

That’s not how the conversation started. In fact, it started differently.

“I never understood how an actor like Peter Cushing got into horror films.”

That was Annie, a British transport to America. Beautiful, dark shoulder-length hair, with sharp facial features and soft wide eyes. She was effortlessly sexy, the way she tossed her hair, and leaned forward in her seat holding her cocktail and exposing her cleavage, the way she smiled oh, so devilishly. Her sultry voice and clipped English accent.

“Cushing was great actor. He could do anything,” said Mike. He was seated two chairs away. A burly, bearded bear of a guy. He owned a comic book and gaming shop lodged between the Castro and the South of Market.

“That’s the point,” Annie said, leaning to her right over redheaded Andy to speak to Mike. “He was a dignified actor.”

“So was Vincent Price,” Mike said, smiling. He sucked in his gut a little now that Annie was looking directly at him. His face reddened a bit, embarrassed to be chugging at his third beer. New Year’s Eve champagne and cocktails was not his thing. “So was...who was the dude who played Lord Summerisle in *The Wicker Man*? The original movie, not the Nick Cage one.”

Tipp the lawyer snapped his fingers and frowned. He was seated across from Annie in this circle of plush chairs in the corner of a spectacularly decorated living room. His back was to a wall of glass. On the other side, the beautiful skyline of San Francisco, the TransAmerica building tall and lit against the night.

“Christopher Lee,” Tipp said.

“Christopher Lee,” Mike repeated.

“I just don’t understand why actors of that caliber would do horror flicks. One perhaps, but not a whole lot of them.”

“They transcend horror,” Mike said. “Those actors raised it to a new level, not just schlock. In fact, they breathed new life into the genre when horror was just about stalled in the 1960s. If it wasn’t for those guys and Hammer films...*Rosemary’s Baby*...”

“*The Exorcist*,” Tipp chimed in.

“*The Exorcist*,” Mike repeated. “And *Dark Shadows*. Horror may have withered on the vine of cheap Grindhouse films. I mean, look at *The Omen*. Gregory Peck and Lee Remick gave a horror movie class. The same with *Damien: Omen II* with Bill Holden and Lee Grant.”

There was a sigh, impatient and rude, and nearly all seven of the heads in the group turned to Marissa, blonde, bored, her legs crossed, her third Appletini nearly finished.

“What’s up, babe?” her husband Rick asked. He was a cop, but mild mannered, deflated a little still with the death of his first wife. A drowning accident in Catalina. Marissa was his second wife, who looked like Janine, his first, same bottle blonde hair, outrageous boobs, curvy ass, small town beginnings and the education that matched.

Marissa uncrossed her legs and stood. She huffed and Rick touched her fingertips lightly.

“I don’t understand why you’re all sitting around talking about horror movies on New Year’s Eve.”

Annie looked up to Marissa. “It’s just conversation, love.”

Marissa gave Annie a steely look. “Well...love...I don’t like it.”

Annie made a face and looked over to Mike. His eyes got wide and he stifled a smile, then looked down into his beer.

"Haven't you heard the old saying that whatever you're doing at midnight on New Year's Eve you'll be doing the whole year? I don't want to be thinking about horror all year long."

Rick sighed softly and kissed Marissa's hand.

"There are worse things to be doing," Tipp said. He raised his rum and coke with a smile. "But then again, there's also better things."

Annie crossed her legs and leaned forward.

"You filthy dog," she said, with a growing grin. "But I agree."

Many in the group laughed. Annie clinked her glass with Tipp's, then turned to Mike to clink her glass with his bottle of beer.

"What's a matter?" Tipp said, turning to Marissa. He was a little tipsy. "You don't like horror?"

Marissa was still standing and she shook her head indignantly. "No, I don't like horror. It's all Satan. It's all the Devil. There's enough evil in this world. I don't know why people even like things like that."

"I have to agree with Marissa on that one," Annie said. "I don't know how people get into horror films. And yes, there's enough evil in the world without horror. Just look at 9/11."

"People like horror because it's a safe thrill. Everyone knows there's no such things as werewolves or vampires or aliens running around," Tipp said.

"Yes, but what about axe murderers? There's enough of those running around," Annie said.

Marissa sighed and sat back down, finding refuge in Annie supporting her argument.

"The best horror," Tipp said, "is always about more than the horror you see. Rosemary Woodhouse was betrayed by her husband in order to further his acting career. He literally served up his wife to The Devil so she could have his baby. If that's not marital betrayal, I don't know what is."

"*Alien* taught us not to trust corporations," Mike said. "*Dracula* was about sexuality. Werewolves are about the beast in all of us. *The Exorcist* was about a girl coming of age and rejecting authority, medicine, religion, her mother, and hardly remembering a thing when it was all over. Typical teen."

"And what do axe murderer films tell us?" Marissa spat. Everyone looked at her, surprised at the fire behind her words.

Mike took a moment. "They tell us...they tell us that The Devil looks just like you and me. That the worst monsters on the planet are right beside you and you don't even know it. Think about it: you're on a train. A train full of people. Out of all those people, it is likely that more than one person is a murderer. And they may be standing right next to you. Maybe more than one person. That's enough to make you piss your pants."

Marissa made a face and rolled her eyes. "Well, I don't believe in The Devil."

"Do you believe in God?" Mike challenged.

"Yes...of course."

"And have you seen Him?"

Rick squeezed Marissa's thigh. "Ya damn right! Just last night!"

Everyone laughed except Marissa.

She was sassy in her response. "No, I haven't seen Him. You can't see God...but he's there."

"But you don't believe in The Devil?" Mike asked.

"No."

Mike rolled his eyes up to the ceiling and thought a moment. He looked back at Marissa, and his eyes, which were usually so jovial and good natured and even insecure at times, pierced through her.

"The question is: do you believe in evil?"

Marissa drank in the question. She rocked back and forth quickly in her chair, and then stood up suddenly. She looked down to Rick. "I'm getting another drink. It's almost midnight."

Marissa walked away and there was silence among the group, despite the penthouse condo filled with people

and noise, laughter and talking, music and chatter from the television tuned to a New Year's Eve celebration.

"I'm quite sure it's midnight somewhere," Mike said half smiling. He downed the rest of his beer, and the group dispersed to prep for the coming year, readying kisses and hugs and well wishes and the singing of *Auld Lang Syne*, where old acquaintances would be forgot.

That night would be the last time any of them would see Marissa Hager alive. She would disappear that spring, only to be found dead from a fall off a cliff. Her husband Rick would be arrested and accused of her murder. This young woman from Ottumwa, Iowa who came out west to live in a big city, find a husband, and make money would have her story end by falling on a pile of jagged rocks in a canyon.

The same could not be said of her husband Rick. His story would just be starting with what horror fanatics have long called The Good Part.