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Episode Two: The Godwalkers

THE SOUTH FLORIDA wind was sallow and gentle, as though it were treading respectfully across the manicured lawns of Grace's service. The sun hung low in a crimson sky. The funeral was a diminutive one and was concluded with little flourish. The focus was Grace's mother, Florence. After the service, family and friends, dressed in a sea of black and white, gathered around her to comfort and console as everyone headed for their cars. They were all to come together at the wake at the Tiffin homestead in north Naples just five miles up the road. Abigail, who had flown from Louisiana with her trusted aid and financial advisor, Gloria Devon, finished her condolences and headed back to the car in silence.

The wheels of her chair cracked and clicked on the gravel pathway leading down to the procession. "Gloria," Abigail said. "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine. I really liked Grace. She was so quiet. You'd never thought she was a lawyer."

"Grace is powerful," Abigail said. "She shares her mother's gifts. I'm not worried about her."

"You're speaking about her in the present tense."

"Dear child, when you've seen what I have seen you come to realize death is neither the end nor beginning. It's simply a change of residence."

"I'm sorry," Gloria whispered. "Can we talk about something else?"

"How are your parents?" Abigail asked.

"Oh. Fine."

"They still bothering you about marrying Frank?"

Gloria laughed. "When I said talk about something else I didn't mean that. Frank and I broke up."

"Oh I'm sorry. I liked him."

"Yeah well. He wasn't ready to get married apparently."

"I told you."

"Try not to rub it in. I have enough grief knowing I'll probably be lonely for the rest of my life."

Abigail smiled. “Don’t let it bother you, child. You’re an attractive young woman with lots to offer. It doesn’t go as unnoticed as you think it does. God works in mysterious ways. When it’s time for you to find a husband and bear children, you will.”

“Well, He’d better hurry up. My thirty-fifth birthday is coming up next week.”

“Which reminds me, child, what do you want for your birthday?”

“How about a date?”

Abigail looked up and said jokingly, “Are you asking me?”

Gloria laughed, “You’ve got some cheek.”

Abigail nodded. “As I said, God works in puzzling ways.”

“Don’t you mean mysterious ways?”

Abigail smiled. “I’m not one to follow well-traveled paths.”

“Can’t you use your hocus pocus and have my future husband bump into me in the supermarket or something?”

“No, I’m afraid not.”

“Doesn’t work that way, huh?”

“I don’t want to persuade the one who is destined for you. Besides, if you got married, who would keep me company? I need your full attention. A husband would just take away from that.”

Gloria smirked. She knew how Abigail’s twisted sense of humor worked. “Oh. Thank you. Um, changing the subject: How are you feeling?”

Abigail turned her attention toward the procession. “I’m concerned about Florence. That poor woman has no one to turn to. First her husband, now her daughter. I should make the effort to visit more.”

Gloria lowered her head. “Well, if you were, we would have to work that into the budget.”

“You and your budgets. What happened to enjoying life?”

“The finances right now are not the most stable. If I don’t organize your books, Abby, who will?”

“Nobody will. That’s your job. And you’re good at it.”

“On that note, I think you should reconsider selling.”

Abigail’s demeanor shifted. “I’m not selling. That house has been in my family for seven generations. It’s history that I’m not going to abandon. Our history. I don’t care what the bank says. I’m not leaving. And neither are you.”

“I understand. I’m just thinking of the future. Your future.”

“Let’s see if we can get through this funeral before we start worrying about our future, shall we?”

Gloria wheeled Abigail down the path and a tall man approached from across the lawn, assiduously trying to reach them before they arrived at the car. He was one of only a few Caucasians in the crowd dressed in black; an Armani suit with a crisp white

shirt and a white orchid perched on his lapel. He traveled with a similar man even taller and considerably more muscular.

“Ms. Moon?”

Gloria turned first, then Abigail. Gloria slowed the wheelchair as the two men approached.

“Yes,” Abigail said.

“I’m so sorry to hear of your family’s loss,” the man with the white orchid said. He spoke with a distinct British accent and came across as very aristocratic in temperament. Gloria studied his face. Hard, rectangular spectacles framed penetrating, bright green eyes. His face was gaunt and pallid, with high cheekbones, and his skin was strangely artificial in texture. If she didn’t know any better, she’d have sworn this man was wearing a subtle kind of makeup. With black, slicked-back hair receding in a widow’s peak he was very odd looking. Gloria guessed he must’ve been in his forties. Clearly, the muscular man behind him was some kind of associate or bodyguard.

Abigail’s response was gracious. “Thank you. Are you a friend?”

“My name is Jonathan Sand. I’m a librarian.” He indicated the larger man behind him. “This is Robert Wall, my personal assistant.”

Wall said nothing. He didn’t even nod. From Gloria’s perspective, both men emanated an underlying menace despite their politeness and respectful distance. But Abigail sensed much more. These men were strangers in the utmost definition of the word. They didn’t belong here: the duplicitous tone and strained inflections of Sand’s voice, the heaviness of their presence and burning silence of Wall suggested complex and shrewd thought processes. This was not the reverential condolence of a gracious friend or associate: this was a purposeful, calculating assault.

“How can I help you?” Abigail said, her tone becoming brisk and business-like.

“I think it’s more accurate to say, how I can help you.”

Abigail stared directly at Sand with her piercing, unseeing eyes. She was relaxed even as Gloria tensed.

“Really? What is the nature of this help?” asked Abigail.

Sand lowered his head to her. “Would you mind if we walked? What I have to say won’t take long. And I have pressing engagements that must be attended to by the end of the day.”

“Not at all,” Abigail said. Gloria started pushing the wheelchair and the four of them headed down the pathway toward the cars.

“Thank you,” Sand said. “I’m in the business of collecting. Books specifically: very old and rare books. My resources allow me to scour the globe to satisfy my passion and recently I have come across the location, or possible location, of my life’s aspiration.”

Abigail was interested. “Oh? Your life’s aspiration?”

“Yes. The *Alyntraphia*. It’s a very old text that details the nature of the afterlife.”

“A work of fiction?” Abigail asked.

Sand chuckled. “No. Quite real. We all go somewhere when we die, do we not? Just as scientific journals depict life here on earth, isn’t it logical to assume a text exists that details life after death?”

“Not really,” Abigail said matter-of-factly. “Such a book would have to be written by someone who has died and stayed dead long enough to report more than just a big bright tunnel full of joy.”

“Indeed,” Sand said. “But what if the same apostles who had educated humankind about the acts of God in the Bible, continued their work and authored a text on the afterlife based on what they themselves were told *by* God?”

Abigail chortled. “I would say you need to re-read the New Testament my friend.”

“I have dedicated over thirty years and almost an entire family fortune to the search for this book. I have detailed research and evidence, collected from the far corners of the globe, which indicates that not only does the *Alyntraphia* exist, but it was once owned by one *Tauten Moon*.”

Abigail looked up and raised her hand to Gloria, indicating for her to stop.

Sand smiled. “Yes, that’s right. Your great grandmother. Tell me, your plantation, it boasts an extensive library does it not?”

“It does,” Abigail said.

“Are you familiar with all the books your family collected?”

Abigail didn’t answer immediately. Her mind raced across the hundreds of shelves of books she remembered her mother reading to her as a child.

“It would be worth it for you to check your library, Ms. Moon,” Sand said, reaching into his jacket pocket to withdraw a small paper and pen. He began scratching something on it. “As you have no immediate knowledge of the book, it clearly is of no importance to you. It does, however, have tremendous importance to me, which I am prepared to pay for.” Sand offered Gloria the small paper. She glanced at it and gasped.

“My number is also on the paper. Please check your library as soon as you can. Call me if you have the book. If you do have it and it’s verifiable, the money is yours if you’re willing to let it go. Cash, bearer bonds, certified check, whatever you prefer. Thank you for your time.” Sand nodded. He and Wall proceeded down the path to a waiting Rolls Royce limousine. Gloria was still staring at the small note.

“How much?” Abigail asked.

“You’re not gonna believe this. Five... five million dollars.”

Abigail observed Sand and Wall entering their black limousine as if she could see them as plain as day. “Five million? It must very important to him.”

“Please tell me you have the book?”

“Take me home, Gloria.”

Abigail found the flight home to Louisiana a peaceful one. As always, Abigail made the trip in almost total silence. Gloria was used to such idiosyncrasies and sat contently, lost in an airport novel until they reached the plantation by taxi. Once the taxi driver dropped them both off, Gloria saw to Abigail's immediate needs and left for the night. Abigail didn't like anyone staying with her overnight, despite the plantation's seventeen rooms. Since her husband's death, Abigail preferred the peaceful nature of seclusion. Her mind was too active to tolerate idle chatter from anyone sharing the room for any longer than a spot of tea.

Within the confines of Abigail's mind, worlds were created and destroyed, works of art visualized and appreciated, and psychic turbulence sensed from the many rooms in the house. Hers was now a solitary existence and that's how she liked it.

She wheeled herself along the length of the longest bookshelf in the library, stopping occasionally to run her bony finger along the aged book spines. It was nightfall and a soft rain fell in rhythmic throbs on the eaves. As she had no use for lights at night she kept them off. But her senses were well honed. She easily perceived the pale, sinuous skeins of moonlight enlivening the room through cracks in the curtains. The moonlight felt as warm as the blazing sun on an August afternoon. Her thoughts drifted and she tried to remember the books she had been read as a child. Charles Dickens, H.G. Wells, Edgar Allan Poe, all of them were here. She continued along the shelf, the long nail of her index finger clicking against the hard leather and cloth bindings. She suddenly pulled her hand back when it struck something cold and sharp. Abigail turned her fingers and rubbed them together. A warm liquid slicked her fingertips. Blood. She had cut herself. She slowly reached out to the protrusion. It was cold, like glass.

The mirror.

Abigail remembered how Desmond's mirror had shot across the table to crash against the far wall. This is where some of those splinters had embedded themselves—in the spine of a book. She wasn't sure how she missed this particular sliver when she cleaned up a few nights ago. Regardless, she carefully pulled out the jagged shard and placed it on a small outcropping under her wheelchair for later disposal. Running her finger over the hole, she tugged the book out from its slot and cradled it in her hands. Its texture was rough. It smelled bad, like wet soil. She placed her palm flat on the cover and moved her hand across the surface slowly.

Then something happened.

The book began to get warm. At first, Abigail thought it was the heat from her own hands warming the leather. But when she lifted her hand, the cover stuck to her fingertips and stretched slightly, as though for a short moment the material became something else. She lowered her hand again and swept her fingers across its surface. The material tugged at the pads of her fingers. It was now clammy. She knew this texture but couldn't place it.

Warm, pleasantly soft.

Abigail became aware of a deathly breeze entering the library from the pitch black hallway beyond. It was icy cold. She sensed a bristling *otherness* as if the house itself was breathing and Abigail was caught in the gullet. She'd never felt anything like it before. Her psychic senses were suddenly deadened and it unnerved her. Something was approaching from down the hallway. Like the coils of an immense reptile, the walls seemed as if they were strangling the air from the house with methodical precision.

"Hello?" Abigail called into the darkness.

No answer.

The room immediately felt wrong. Like it wasn't supposed to exist.

She pressed down on the book cover and the material slid over a secondary surface underneath just like...

Just like human flesh does when you press upon the muscle...

Repulsed, Abigail threw the book across the room. It crashed against a far wall and fell to the ground with a thud. Her breathing quickened. She focused her mental energies on her heartbeat, and quieted its racing momentum. She was disciplined enough to control her metabolism with the power of her mind.

The rain beat against the windowsill and a soft rumble of thunder moved across the bayou. She took in a deep breath and exhaled slowly. The next sound she heard did not come from the growing storm outside. It was from inside the library—a soft scraping sound. It came from the far wall.

Abigail was alone. No rats or vermin were, or had ever been, present in the house. She was very meticulous about that.

The scraping continued, growing closer with every second. She tried to control her fear, but it was difficult. Twisting, contorting forms slipped in and out of her conscious mind. Something remarkable was happening. She felt a foreboding presence.

"Who's there?"

No answer, except for the incessant scraping. Finally, Abigail recognized the sound. Leather, scraping against the hard wood of the library floor.

She reached down and felt around. Her probing fingers made contact with something lying on the floor by her left footrest. She wrapped her fingers around the object and picked it up. It was the book she had thrown across the room a few moments earlier. She picked it up and cradled it once again in her hands.

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me..."

She then opened the book on her lap and ran her fingers over the papyrus.

A sound rose from the walls surrounding Abigail.

Dim at first but enough to make her eyes wide as saucers.

Then more clearly. Whispering. Many voices. Slowly rising in crescendo. She couldn't make out what they were saying. Had she not known better, she might have thought they were rising from the hundreds of books gracing the walls.

Abigail closed her eyes and concentrated on the feel of the paper, the texture of its grain.

"Oh, you're very powerful, indeed," she uttered. "Your darkness is all too apparent. I can sense you pushing me away. You don't want me to see, do you? You don't want my mind probing your secrets." She opened her eyes and the voices stopped. Abigail smiled, shook her head and tapped the armrest of her wheelchair softly with her index finger and looked up toward the ceiling. "This wasn't written by the Apostles. Mother, where did you find this? Why didn't you tell me?"

Abigail looked down at the open text. "What do you want with this, Mr. Sand?"

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Maru sat against a far wall opposite Grace, Deacon was by her side. The crackling fire not far away.

"Welcome back," Maru said, smiling.

Grace felt groggy, her eyes heavy. "What happened?" she asked. Unconsciously, she brought her hand up and felt a hard protrusion jutting out of the middle of her chest. The blade Maru had thrust into her remained. She screamed and rocked back in shock.

Deacon steadied her. "Hold it. Breathe. It's okay. You're fine."

"We had to wait until you woke up," Maru said. "It's much more meaningful if you remove it yourself."

She tried to grip the tang again.

"No, no, no," Deacon said pushing her hand down gently. "First things first. How do you feel?"

It took her a moment to answer. She was as confused as ever. "Tired."

"Any pain?" Maru asked.

Her answer surprised her. "No."

"Of course not," Maru said, indicating the blade in her chest. "The best way is to grab with both hands and pull slowly outward in a straight line. Be careful not to wiggle the blade."

Smiling, Maru reached toward his jacket seam. He ripped open the pelt exposing his bare chest—and a nasty scar right between his pectoral muscles. The straight line of lumpy flesh aligned with his sternum. "It takes a while to heal because our bodies aren't like they were when we were alive. But it does heal." He nodded toward the weapon. "Go ahead. You can't stay like that forever."

Maru was right. She felt no pain, just an odd discomfort, like mild heartburn or indigestion. She looked at the handle of the blade sticking out of her chest. So odd. The grogginess was lifting. If not for the blade, she might've gone on about her

business as if nothing was wrong. She took in a deep breath. The handle rose and lowered with her chest. She gripped it with both hands.

Deacon gestured for her to go slow. “Now, take it easy. Nice and even.”

As she pulled, a sickening wet sound came from the wound, but there was no blood. None at all.

Grace held the weapon in her hands and examined it. No blood streaked its surface. She looked at the wound, a slender, bloodless hole in her flesh. The injury looked otherworldly. She shuddered and began to waver.

“Whoa, you’re okay,” Deacon said, holding her up. “It’ll close. Just keep it covered.”

She handed him the blade. “But there’s no blood. It was in my chest. Not even on the knife, look.”

Deacon regarded the blade. “Yes,” he said, and then tossed it to Maru who caught it. “It’s complicated.”

“I’m listening,” Grace said.

Deacon looked away as he speculated. “I believe these bodies are representations of our former selves. Vessels to carry our spirits in the afterlife. We’re not energy beings like so many believe. We’re flesh... but no blood. No blood or internal mechanisms are needed anymore. We’re the same spiritual beings... just locked inside a different kind of matter container.”

Grace scowled. “I... I don’t understand: *a different kind of container?*”

“Theoretically it is possible,” he said, “if we’re dealing with antimatter. The opposite of regular matter.”

Grace just shook her head. “English, please?”

“An antimatter body powered by the electrical energy of our soul instead of organs.”

Grace frowned. “What’s antimatter?”

Deacon leaned toward her. “Basically, the building blocks of our universe are made up of electrons, protons and neutrons. Now, when nature creates these, it’s thought to create opposites as well: positrons, antiprotons and antineutrons. They’re *antimatter*. These opposite particles aren’t present in our universe in any great abundance. Some believe they’re somewhere else. Possibly making up some kind of antiuniverse. And ultimately, an antiworld. Far away from earth.”

“You mean this don’t you? Where we are.”

“I think so.”

“Like... another planet?” Grace asked bluntly.

“No,” Deacon replied.

“How do you know?”

“Because I don’t think bodies like these are possible in our universe. *Anywhere in our universe*. And besides, there are things here that don’t make any sense. Chemical reactions that don’t apply to the universe, as we know it. Take the fire for instance.”

“The fire?” Grace asked.

Deacon got up and approached the burning fire. “Here, now watch carefully.” He first waved his hand through the flame, then left it there. The flames licked his hand as Grace gasped.

“You see?” Deacon said. “How can a fire be warm but not burn?” He removed his hand and examined it. “Nothing. No blistering, no pain. Just warmth.”

Grace applied some logic. “Well, don’t you think that if our bodies are different... the fire is probably different too? But then, your animal skins seem to burn.”

“Exactly. Those skins and our new flesh are very close in texture and density. Why would a flame burn one but not the other?”

“Maybe our skin has some kind of natural flame retardant?” she concluded.

Maru looked over at a teenage man with red hair and a crooked nose, sitting to his left and smiled. “Show her, Billy.”

Maru tossed his blade. Billy caught the weapon and grinned at Grace. He said, “Okay ma’am. Ready?”

Billy rested his right hand on a nearby rock and splayed his fingers. Positioning the tip of the blade near his extended pinky. Leaning his weight on the handle, it was clear what he was about to do. Grace looked away.

“Watch!” Maru said. “Don’t worry. He’s done this before.”

Grace kept her head down and eyes shut. She heard an abrupt crunch a moment later.

Billy didn’t even flinch. He tossed Maru the severed finger. “Don’t feel sad for Billy,” Maru said, studying the digit. “It’ll grow back. They always do, right Billy?”

Billy sat grinning proudly.

Maru pushed himself up, walked over to the fire and threw the digit into the flame. Instantly it lit up and started burning.

Deacon made eye contact with Grace. “You see, when we’re whole, we’re invincible. When we’re not...” He nodded toward the blackening finger.

Grace turned to Billy and softened her expression in sympathy. “You didn’t have to mutilate yourself to prove a point.”

Billy raised his fingerless hand. “No, it’s okay, it doesn’t hurt that much. I barely feel it. And look! I got four more. We’re good!”

“You see,” Maru said, “We can’t die. We don’t need to eat. We can’t bleed. But we can still feel pain. We can still suffer. That’s why the only thing we have of any value is shelter. It protects us from the elements. From the cruelty that is this place. It’s the only thing that matters anymore. Shelter. I found this cave after years of suffering out there on the ice. I nurtured it. Collected the people you see about you. My disciples. This place is worth more than any one life. It is everything. We lose this shelter... and all is lost.”

“It’s best you learn what we are, Grace,” Deacon said. “What *you* are. Everything suggests nature here is different.”

“Okay,” Grace said. “What do we do now?”

“We talk to God,” Maru said, getting up.

She glanced at him. “We pray?”

“No.” He moved toward his tent and went inside. “We go across the ice. To the mountains. With the others. We hide the cave entrance and mark our trail so we can make it back.”

“Why? What’s in the mountains?”

“Grace,” Deacon said, tilting his head at her. “God is here.”

She faltered. “He is?”

“In corporeal form. In the flesh. Like us.”

“What do you mean?”

“Listen to me,” he whispered. “Have you ever wanted to know the true identity of God?”

“Of course.”

“Come with us. You can ask Him yourself.”

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**Coming Soon:
EPISODE THREE:
TEMPLE OF SOULS**