

“Ah, come on? You guys were really going to turn down the chance to see a real live, haunting?!” Jessy said, loud enough over the din of background music the five men gathered could hear easily. Not that anyone cared if he was a little loud, hardly the most ludicrous thing to be declared over a college campus bar. Still, it was a touch bit embarrassing for such a subject to come up, especially since none of them really believed in anything of the sort.

For the most part, that was. “Dudes, I looked into it, there’s a ton of proof online. Not just the usual ghost lights and stuff going missing or shit like that, either. People have disappeared from there, too! It’s not really a pattern or anything, there have only been a few reports of that being their location. But like, all of it happens on nights of the solstice. And that’s like *tonight*. We should totally check it out!” Jude exclaimed, seemingly more hyped than even Jesse, whose idea it had been to go out in the first place.

Of the three remaining men, Thomas had little to say on the matter, keeping his arms crossed not in a gesture of defiance but rather nervousness. He hated being in crowds like this, and it had been his shyness that had brought him out here in the first place, Jesse giving the invite and Jude insisting he come along as well. It was rare for Jude to give him the time of day under normal circumstances, and even harder for the shy man to say no when asked. Crowded pubs were hardly his go-to place to enjoy, but now that he was here, it seemed almost impossible for him to think of an excuse to leave.

“I’d be \*Buuurrrppp\* down to check it out too!” Ollie said, not caring about his outburst as he reached down and took another swig of his drink. “Can we get another round for the table first?” He called out, hoping one of the wait staff would notice and bring them a pitcher. He was already a little tipsy, but there wasn’t much reason for him to slow down since he wouldn’t be driving. It would be Jesse’s car getting them there, and he’d only partaken in sodas for the evening, more interested in the idea itself rather than getting buzzed with the crew around them.

“How far away was it again?” Sebastian asked, the last of their group. He had the air about him of superiority like such was beneath him. That sort of thing didn’t really bother Jesse, having been used to him from being roommates last year. They had gotten along well enough, given that Sebastian seemed to have a beef with everyone else he had run across. Jesse was the type that could get along with everyone, though the sassy gay facade Sebastian often put on was a little much, he had to admit. Still, the two of them remained friends, at least enough for Jesse to ask him to come out tonight. There was always something about the man that Jesse found puzzling and had made it an unspoken life objective to try and place what it was, for as long as their circles intertwined.

“Oh, it’s about an hour and a half drive from campus. Well, at night there wouldn’t be any traffic,” Jesse said, like that really mattered too much. “An old abandoned barn out in the

middle of nowhere. I have the GPS for it, don't worry. It's off a few side roads, but they shouldn't be too rough," he said, having been out there a few times to scope it out. Never alone, taking Jude with him on those trips. But given the lore Jude had dug up on it, he figured they weren't in any danger, save a night like tonight. That was unless the rumors were true.

"Why are you doing this again?" Sebastian asked a little indignant, like he didn't know a damn thing about Jesse's hobby.

"It's for the vlog! Didn't you see the preview post I made?" Jesse said, a little indignantly. He knew for certain Sebastian was aware of his hobby, hell, he had even worked the camera once or twice. It was a little childish of him, though Jesse had come not to expect much better, as much as he wanted to give the man a chance.

"It's pretty good," Jude interjected, not getting the implication.

"Yeah, I'll check it out," was the reply, obviously with no intention of doing so. Jesse let it go, figuring there was no point in pushing it.

"Have you gone to many places like that?" Thomas asked someone who legitimately had no idea what Jesse's Volg was about.

"Yeah! I've been out there a few times, well, other sights, too, but this one I've checked out beforehand. You know, when it was safe..." Jesse said an air of mystery in his tone that he hoped would be of interest to the other men at the table, the ones he hadn't quite sold on the idea. If his hunch was right, he needed the bodies out there, in order to perform the ritual to the specifications.

"Sounds kinda creepy," Ollie added, a little sarcastically. Jesse figured there was no point in pressing the issue, this sort of thing was not a draw for everyone.

"Well, then, there's no reason not to go, right?" Jesse suggested, figuring the allure would be enough to spur on any of the guys who doubted him.

"Let's do it!" Jude called out, standing up and heading for the door. With Jesse getting up to follow, the rest figured what the hell, finishing their drinks and leaving tips on the table as they made for the door, that tiny iota of peer pressure enough they couldn't think of a reason not to follow. At least, at that moment in time...

Piling into Jesse's car, Jesse had Ollie play with the radio as they set out from campus and out toward the countryside. Ollie was the largest of the group by far, a footballer through and

through, and here on scholarship. He had come from the same hometown as Jesse, and the two had met in their senior year. It was an odd friendship of sorts, but Jesse didn't mind the company. There was something about Jesse's own charisma that drew in a variety of personality types, whether or not the friendships were likely. Ollie could be a little obnoxious, especially with his constant boasting about his sexual conquests. Jesse paid it no mind, for the most part, figuring it to be a facet of college life and something he would outgrow someday.

The other three of them sat in the back rather comfortably, save for Thomas, the next largest man of the group. He seemed a little embarrassed about it but made no move to leave. Jude seemed not to look his way, in that callous way that Jesse couldn't help but notice. Sure, they were in the same frat, but that didn't mean they were necessarily friends or even knew each other well. Still, from the way Thomas seemed to be around Jude, it was more likely his lack of attention toward Thomas was one-sided, something the other man was oblivious to. Oh well. They were all in their early twenties, and coming into themselves, Jesse wise beyond his years and more observant of such things.

Sebastian, for his part, was rather thin and made up for the lack of space in the back seat. He, like Thomas, didn't really seem to want to be there, though he wasn't afraid of letting that be known. Jesse didn't allow himself to say anything outright, though he couldn't deny it was a little annoying. Sebastian could be fun, at times, but more often than not, he was a pain in the ass, as was the case tonight. That, and while Jesse couldn't quite put a pin in it, there was something about the man's demeanor that seemed a little fake. Like he was trying too hard to be the stereotypical 'sassy gay' trope, though Jesse didn't really have any proof of that, and let the man act as he would.

Over the next hour or so, the five of them made small talk, mostly about school and the upcoming break. Rather, it was Jesse, Jude, and Ollie that made up most of the conversation, Sebastian interjecting occasionally to complain and Thomas mostly keeping quiet, only speaking with something was directed at him. Still, it was fun enough, the mood relatively high, as though they weren't heading into something potentially dangerous. Not that any of them, perhaps Jesse or Jude, believed in the presence of ghosts. Then again,

"Almost there," Jesse said, recognizing the signs around the country road. "Not really sure what happened out here, but 5 people went missing 30 years ago, at least. Lots of haunting signs and such from people who passed through. Stuff moving, disappearing, that sort of thing. A few other signs of stuff just left there over the years, so there might be more people missing than that. But it's all been around one of the solstices, at least as much as I can tell," he continued, as though some sort of expert on the subject.

“So, what, it’s just an old barn?” Sebastian said, recalling something Jesse had said at the pub.

“Yeah, I couldn’t find when it had been built, but it’s at least over a hundred years old. Not sure why it was built out there though. No other barns or houses out there for miles. Unless they went missing too” Jesse said, a little mysteriously.

“How’d you dig that up?” Jude asked, rather impressed.

“I have my sources. It’s a secret,” Jesse said, with a little bit of a giggle. In truth, all he had to do was some research in the college library, a few afternoons to gather all the pieces he could, and another to put them into some semblance of a picture. But, it was fun to make it a bigger deal than it was, something he loved to do on his Vlog.

Eventually, they got there, Jesse parking the car on what seemed to the rest like the side of the road. It wasn't until Jesse pulled out his flashlight and beamed it toward the other side that the sight of a massive, decrepit barn came into view. Expecting a rather smaller building, the size of the thing likely could have housed dozens, if not hundreds of animals, in rather comfortable conditions. However, with the myriad of holes and the torn roof, it was obvious the place hadn't been used for such in many years.

“We don't need to go in there, do we?” Sebastian asked, obviously not wanting to get dirty. It was rather cold out, and the smaller man was shivering, though taking out a smoke, he used his lighter to warm up, puffing rings of smoke as some of the others got out of the way, not a fan of the smell.

“No, no, outside will be fine for filming,” Jesse said, figuring his friend was worried about filth on his pristine outfit. Still, there was no need to go into the barn, especially in the dark, and when there was every chance the roof might cave in on them. Not when the most interesting parts were in the fields around, from what he had observed in the light of day.

“Here it is, folks. This old barn is the only structure still standing for miles, the only trace of human settlement. Who built it, and what was it doing out here in the middle of nowhere? Maybe there is a more...abnormal reason why this barn was abandoned. Let’s see if we can find out tonight,” Jesse said, as though he was talking to an unseen audience.

“The camera isn’t even on yet!” Sebastian said, to which Jude just gave a laugh as he went to the trunk of the car.

“I’m just getting into character!” Jesse said with a laugh as he unlocked the trunk, and Jude reached in to grab his camera and stand. It seemed he was eager to be a cameraman, at least a small part of the process, and enough to give him a nod in the credits.

Thomas, for his part, had wandered off to the side, kicking the grass as though looking for something. He didn't say anything and seemed more comfortable not to be in the direct line of sight of the others. Sebastian stayed close to the car, shivering and smoking, muttering something about being out in the middle of nowhere in his best clothes. He always was a little prudish, but he could be excused to a degree for having not really been told what they were doing.

Ollie, for his part, walked closer to the barn, his thick profile something Jesse saw as a perfect backdrop. “Mind if we get that on film?” Jesse called, out, training the camera on him before Ollie had a chance to respond.

“Umm, sure?” Ollie said, turning back around so as not to get his face on film. He wasn’t sure why, having been used to being in the spotlight as far as his games went. There was something a little unnerving about showing up on someone’s Vlog on the internet with his face in full view. Not that he figured it drew a wide audience or even anyone that might recognize him. But, still, thinking the whole thing was rather silly, he felt no need to put his name on it, so to speak.

Jesse started to narrate again, saying basically the same thing as he had practiced before. “Here it is, folks. This old barn, in the middle of nowhere, has been the site of many strange occurrences, not the least of which is a series of disappearances, each one documented on the night of the solstice. Without any sign of human habitation for miles around, what was this barn built for? Is there another reason why it was built here, a more supernatural purpose? We’re here on the night of the solstice, to see if the rumors are true. Signs of things moving, cameras not working, and above all, those disappearances? All this and more on this episode of...”

Jesse went on after that, reciting the details he’d gleaned about the people going missing, possessions left there, and a variety of facts he was able to recall without so much as a script in his hand. “Impressive,” Thomas muttered, still staying within earshot as much as he wanted to be out of the way. He even went so far as to keep his back to the field beyond, making it impossible for his face to wind up on camera. Surely, if he knew he was being filmed, he would freeze up entirely and be left the most embarrassed in his life.

“No less than thirty people have gone missing over the last hundred years,” Jesse carried on, reciting his research. “Though most of them can’t be linked directly to this barn, most of them happened on the night of the solstice, which, in my opinion, can’t be a coincidence. And

there's the abandoned car from ten years ago, found out here with all the occupant's possessions intact, but no sign of where the people went. Was it some sort of ritual sacrifice? A serial killer? Or perhaps there is something more supernatural-"

"The murder would be long dead, dumbass!" Sebastian chided, and Jesse stared daggers at him, being interrupted while recording one of his very few petty peeves. Still, he was able to come down from it enough to say to Jude, "Can you cut that, please?" to which Sebastian turned around and muttered, "Sorry, sorry."

"Sure, I'm an editing Whiz!" Jude said fiddling with the camera before giving Jesse the go-ahead to start taking again.

"Others suspect it's part of a ritual practice, something given up many years ago and lost to time. It's theorized that several such spaces exist in the country, though no one has ever gone to map them all," he continued, the others listening on with interest now.

Having paused for a moment, Thomas, having not said much all night, decided to ask "For what?" curious and a little nervous about what such rituals would entail.

"I don't know. Like, good harvests and such?" Jesse said, thinking he hadn't really thought on it before now and that it would make a good sound bite for the episode.

"Yeah, I guess that makes sense," Thomas said, scuffing the ground a little before backing off, still within earshot.

"Such rituals generally required five people to stand in the shape of a pentagram-"

"Wait, *five*?!" Sebastian called out, making the rest of them pause. "Is that why you brought the rest of us out here?"

"No no! Well, I mean, there weren't any groups of five that went missing, as much as I could find," Jesse said, as though it was the first time it had occurred to him. However something about the way it was said led Sebastian to doubt.

"Fuck this, I'm out," Sebastian said, moving toward the car to get in. Not that there was any place for him to go, not in the middle of nowhere. But he was determined to be stubborn, Jesse supposed, and there was little he could do to dissuade him.

"Oh come on. You don't really believe any of this, do you?" Ollie asked, seeming interested in the skeptical thought, though not taking any credence in the story.

“Yeah, don't worry about it!” Jesse said, trying to convince his friend. “It's not like I know the ritual anyway, and having five people looks good for the camera, you know?”

“How did you know it was five, again?” Thomas asked, walking over more, scuffing the ground.

“Well, like I said, I was here a few times before now...” Jesse said, looking down at the ground where Thomas was kicking. “Actually, it's right about there, if you look down.”

Thomas did as instructed, looking down with some nervousness as his eyes widened. There, in the dirt, was the perfect rendition of a pentagram, pattered by the lack of grass around it. It was a simplistic shape, but there was no denying how it was now a part of the earth, no life able to grow around it. With that, Thomas jumped away, as though he had stepped on a poisonous snake. Looking around frantically, he scanned the ground for more such patches, though shining his flashlight around him revealed nothing.

“Why did you want five of us out here in the first place?” Ollie asked, more curious than irritated over the whole thing. He was still somewhat buzzed, though was sobering up to the point he could process what was going on without freaking out.

“Well, honestly, it will look great on camera!” Jesse said, confessing with a giggle. “I mean, there are five marks in the ground, in the shape of a pentagram, and with five of us to look at them...well, I don't need your faces on film or anything. Besides, if you 'going missing' it will look great for the Vlog!” He said, Jude, turning the camera light on the patch of grass with the

“And you'll get called out as a fake,” Sebastian mused, after coming back from the car, lighting another cigarette.

“Hey, you don't know that for sure, OK? Let's leave that part till later,” Jesse said, Jude, gave him a thumbs up as his mind played over ideas of what he could edit into the footage.

“I don't really want to be on film,” Thomas said, backing away a little further from the pentagram mark in the ground, as though it was cursed.

“Look, you don't have to say anything, and Jude can blur your face out, besides. I think we'll probably do that regardless, right?” Jesse said, Jude, giving him a thumbs up once more.

“Yeah, man, do it for the likes!” Jude said in that commanding way he tended to act toward other members of the frat, something that Thomas admired and loathed in equal measure.

“Fine, fine...” Jude eventually gave in, and walked closer to the mark, though a healthy distance away.

“OK, so, there are five marks on the ground, all scattered. Let’s get the camera on one of them, and pan it to the rest of them. They’re all marked in a pentagram, not too far from each other, your flashlights should find them no problem!” Jesse said, helping Jude with the camera set up as they moved toward the closest of the marks on the ground. Keeping it just outside it, Jude stood behind, filming the profiles of the other three men as they took their places, before pulling back and panning it around to make sure it was obvious as to the shape and scope of the pentagram.

“What made these...?” Ollie eventually asked, standing in front of his and tracing the borders of it with his finger.

“No idea, but it’s sure convenient for filming!” Jesse said, standing in front of his own and looking down. As far as he’d been able to tell, they were all identical, though he hadn’t taken marks of them or anything of the sort.

With everyone in place, Jesse waited for Jude to give the signal, and started speaking, loud enough that it would pick up from over the field.

“Alright, so as you can see, even after all these years, the marks in the ground still make a perfect pentagram. Was this some sort of ritual? And what significance did it have to the disappearances around this barn over the years? I have a few theories, of course, but maybe if we stick around, we’ll find out tonight-”

“Just sec,” Jude called out, moving in front of the camera to fiddle with something. With everyone in position, as they were, they were either standing on or inside the pentagram. At the moment Jude stayed within its unmarked boards, a shadow crossed the clear moon above them, as an electrical tingle burned through all five men at once.

“Fuck, I don’t feel so good...” Sebastian moaned, trying hard not to drop to his knees and dropping his still-lit cigarette.

“Me neither...did I drink too much...?” Ollie said, holding his stomach as he tried not to hurl.



“Shit, let’s get out of here...”

“Oh fuck, I can’t move...”

“Damnit, I can’t...”

“Shit, dudes...”

“What’s happening to-”

With that, only the sounds of the camera equipment clattering to the ground could be heard. While the ground was still lit with phone lights and cameras, there was nothing around to see, and no one to see with it, the air quiet and still. Not even the crickets could be heard over the deafening silence. Even if someone was to stumble upon the camera equipment, there would be nothing on film for them to watch, save static. Efforts to retrieve any footage would be for naught, and save for the car and the license within, there would be no way to tell who had le

Much like those who had come before them, no trace remained, and the five missing men would never be seen in this world again.

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