

THE CASTLE OF THE CURSED CONJUROR  
THE ANATOMY LESSON  
by Paul Watson

The castle looms out from its perch on top of the hill over the small college town, a shadowy set of dark stone towers now wreathed in generations of ivy. The sky above is foreboding, the clouds making the depths of shadow deeper, more sinister. The man who had it built, long-deceased but somehow still the legal owner, was a magician, some would say sorcerer, of macabre tastes and his manse reflected that. Gothic arches, gargoyles and grotesques leering from the walls and spires. The...

"Who are you talking to, nerd? Everyone in town knows about this place. The only reason anyone's heard of us is this place."

The narrator sighs and puts down his tablet. "I'm trying to set the scene, Becca."

"For what? Posterity? Dude, we're not going to find any great magical secrets. All we're going to find is dust and cobwebs and spiders and more dust."

"So why are you here? And why are you dressed like victim one in a slasher movie?"

Becca looks down at her outfit. Blue jean shorts cut off too show the start of her tanned and toned curves; an orange baby-t with a jack o'lantern winking out as it's stretched over her chest; both tight enough to show every detail of the underwear she isn't wearing. She flips a long tail of pumpkin orange hair off her shoulders and shrugs. "So what? In those things, if you've ever fucked, like, ever, you're dead. So I'm dead, like, what? 100 times?"

"At least."

"I've had a slow week, ok? The football team's out of state. And the reason I'm here is because you get all hot and bothered about this magic history shit, so maybe we can work on that total when we're done."

"Oh?" he licks his lips at the thought.

"You like that idea, huh? Maybe you could hypnotise me into being your adoring little fuckdoll again."

His throat goes dry. "I thought I made...I mean, I thought you forgot about that."

Becca just grins and turns towards the thick wooden doors, "Fraid not. Maybe I wasn't really under. Which means maybe I wasn't really under when you did alllllllll those kinky, depraved, disgusting..." she pauses, "...ly wonderful things to me, either. Maybe that's why I'm really here. Because if we do find something, well, I know you'll be really, really eager to try it out. On me. So let's get going...and see if we can find something to play with."

He pulls out an ornate brass key.

"Where did you even get that?"

"It just arrived in the post." he admits, "Just the key and a note saying what it was for. No explanation why me, why now, why anything."

"Must be frustrating for someone who really likes answers. And so you're here with your most sexy friend with benefits to find out why."

"Well, that's one of the reasons now."

"Oh?"

"Someone promised..."

"Hey, hey, I didn't promise nothing, Markie. I said maybe."

"Hope springs eternal." The lock clicks open stiffly.

"There you go showing off your big brain again, nerd. Like I'm supposed to just know an Alexander Pope quotation, like, right off the top of my dumb slut brain. As if."

The door hinges creak as it opens, allowing the dim light to spill over the surprisingly non-dusty interior.

"What kind of haunted house doesn't even have one cobweb?"

"One with very clean ghosts?"

"Ghost maids? I remember that Scooby-Doo episode."

“There wasn't...”

“I know! It was a joke. You know what a joke is, don't...” she stops, “Do you hear music?”

“Music?” he stops from examining the portraits looming along the hallway, “How can there be music?”

“Maybe it's the ghooohhhhhsts.” Becca replies with a grin, raising her hands spookily as Mark walks towards the source of the music.

“There's no such thing as...” he stops in the doorway. In the drawing room, a figure is seated at the piano. The tails of his black dinner jacket hang over the edge of the stool. His white gloves expertly run over the keys. His top hat rests on the sideboard, which is good as there's no head to rest it on.

“So what do you call that?!” Becca asks, pointing at the headless pianist.

“I...I...I...”

The music stops. The headless figure turns to 'face' the doorway. It looks as startled as an empty jacket can, reaching for its top hat, setting it firmly on its lack of head before rising from the seat.

“Uhm, hi? We're sorry for, like, disturbing you, but...”

He, it's very clearly a he, holds up a hand for quiet, patting himself down as if looking for something. He raises a finger in enlightenment and lifts up his hat. He shows it empty and plunges his other hand in, rummaging around before pulling up a series of cue cards. He holds them up, the first saying 'Hello' in looping cursive. He drops it back into the hat, revealing the second. 'I am Richard Cumberland, the magician. You may have heard of me.' it drops into the hat, 'And you are?' He stops, waiting.

“Uhm, I'm Becca. This is Mark. We're like really sorry to intrude but...”

The hand held up for silence. 'Pleased to meet you Becca and Mark.'. The next card appears before they can ask how their names were already on the card. 'You are the ones who received my key?'

Becca looks at Mark. The ghost's posture does the same. “I...it was sent to me. I didn't...”

Next card. 'Good. Welcome to my home.'

Next card. 'I need your help.'

“Our help? How? What?”

Next card 'I am dead. I cannot pass on without one final show.'

Next card. 'For that, I need a beautiful assistant.” he turns back to Becca.

Next card. 'Will you help me?'

Next card. 'Pleeeeeeease?'

“Uhm, I guess. What do I need to...”

'How flexible are you?'

“I'm a cheerleader so...”

The ghost of Richard Cumberland gives a thumbs up. 'How are you at performing?' he drops that immediately before a response. 'How adventurous are you?'

Becca bites her lip, “Uhm, I guess...”

Another thumbs up. 'Are you comfortable in revealing clothing?' he looks over her and immediately drops that question as well.

Becca laughs. “In it, out of it, whatever. So, what? You're going to saw me in half or something?”

Next card: 'A little trick to break the ice, then a bigger one for the finale. Ok?'

“What trick?”

Next card: 'Pick a card. Let the magic decide.' He leaves his left glove holding the cue cards and with a flourish has a pack of cards fanning out from his hand into a spiral around his forearm. He holds his arm out to her.

“So I just pick a card?”

The ghost offers her the spiral of floating cards again.

“This what you expected, Markie?”

“I...I...”

“Guess that's a nope. Well, in for a penny...” she plucks out a card. On is it a cartoon ginger cat with needles piercing it like a feline cenobite. In one corner is a bright red 18+ inside a circle, and below the picture are the words 'Pierced Pussy'. “What does...?”

The cards wind back into his hand. He places the hat back on his head, takes Becca's hand and leads her into the room.

"Ok, ok. But what does..."

The ghost pats the chair. Becca sits down on the cushion.

"What does the trick..." metal bands spring out, closing around her arms. Another pair of metal shackles reach out to grab her ankles, pulling her legs apart as they retreat to the sides of the chair.

"Hey!"

Mark starts forward. The ghost turns to him, pulling out another cue card. He stops.

"What did he 'say'?"

"It will be alright. You're the audience. Watch. And be amazed." The empty magician's outfit preens.

"Ok. Will it hurt?"

The glove holds out its fingers a little part.

"A little, huh? Can I get out of this?"

The top hat turns back and forth in negation.

"No. Ok. You'd better watch closely for any funny business then, Markie."

The glove flexes dramatically, a long, narrow needle appearing in it.

"I guess I'm the pussy being pierced."

The glove lowers between her legs.

"Becca, I think..."

"Yeah, I got it, Markie." she turns to the ghost, "Come on, then. Get it over with."

The ghost pulls out a small cloth, covering her hips with it. A glove reaches under the cloth. Becca gives a yelp and one glove pulls her booty-shorts from under the cloth. The other approaches with the needle, sliding it through the cloth. Becca hisses.

"Are you ok?"

"I mean, for getting my cooch punctured, I'm fine. It hurts. But only, like, 'kink party' hurts. So a little, then it feels good."

The glove pulls away, the needle poking out of the cloth.

"Is that..." the hat turns, another needle appearing in its gloves, "of course it's not."

The gloves add needle after needle until one patch of the cloth is more needle than cloth and Becca is squirming as best she can in her restraints. The gloves take hold of the cloth and whisk it away, revealing Becca's shaven sex, her puffy lips pierced by nearly two dozen thin metal needles. The gloves beckon Mark forward.

"Better look...now, nerd boy." Becca pants, "Who knows what the big trick will do to meeeeeeeeeee."

The glove twiddles one of the needles. The ghost steps back, gesturing to the needles gleaming in Becca's glistening flesh. "Go ahead, nerd boy. See if you can make me..." he takes one of the needles, pulling it out a little before it slides back in. Becca whimpers a little. "Try hardaaaahhhhh!"

He turns one of the needles around as Becca jerks in the restraints. A glove taps him on the shoulder, motioning him back. "Now...what?" The glove draws back. "Oh, no, you wouldn't, you miserable bas..." the open palm of the glove slaps against her, pushing the needles through her body. Becca's head flies back, howling before she slumps in the bands. The magician gestures for Mark to examine it's handiwork. Becca's sex appears undamaged, just highly aroused. She stirs as Mark runs a finger along her lips. "Hey, nerd boy. I've got an...owie down there. Care to...kiss it better for me?" The ghost wags its finger admonishingly. "Fucking spoilsport." The manacles snap back into the chair as easily as they emerged. Becca stands shakily on her feet. The ghost gestures. She turns, seeing the needles embedded in the back of the chair rather than deep in her most intimate regions.

"Yeah, yeah, very...impressive, ghost. Now, where are my shorts?"

The ghost extends his hand, the spiral of cards reappearing.

"No shorts? Damn. Even the ghosts around here are perverts."

The ghost pushes his hand at her.

"Yeah, yeah, I'll pick your card." she pulls out a card. She looks at the 18+ in the corner. "Don't you have any tricks that aren't R-rated, you perverted ghost?"

The ghost shrugs unabashed.

"Fine. 'Anatomy Lesson.' Never heard of that one." she holds up the card, a naked woman standing with her torso cut open like a medieval anatomist's diagram, "What about you, nerd?"

Mark shakes his head, "I haven't..."

The floor under Becca opens up and she tumbles into the blackness below, the floor closing up behind her. As Mark opens his mouth to protest to the ghost, his own footing vanishes away, followed shortly by Mark himself. The ghost looks around his now empty lounge, sends the cards swirling back into his hat and vanishes.

Becca plunges down through the darkness on a roller-coaster ride without sight or end, just speed. The direction of her fall changes without warning, but the only change in speed is faster and faster. The darkness swallows her screams. At least until she comes to a sudden stop. It takes her a moment to get reoriented, finding her body in a weird cross frame of wood and metal. Her arms are thrown out to the sides, parallel with her shoulders. Her legs are pulled into a set of splits that she'd usually find on the edge of her fitness to hold for more than a few seconds. There's a collar around her neck that keeps her still, but isn't quite closed, a gap in the front. And, least surprising of all, somewhere in the darkness she lost her top, meaning she's naked. The lights are all around her, seats spreading up like she's at the centre of a lecture hall, although she can't see anyone until Mark plunges into the auditorium with flailing arms and an audible crash into the seats.

Behind her are chalkboards with 'Anatomy 101' written in big letters across the top and 'A magician needs to know where every part of his assistant belongs. Especially if he intends to put it some place else.' below it to explain the point of the lesson.

The ghost appears on the floor beside her, his tails replaced by a mid-thigh white lab coat, blue latex gloves and a surgical cap and mask. She tries to turn her head, getting glimpses of chalkboards on the wall behind her and a long metal pointing stick telescoping in his hand, but not able to turn her head much. "So, this is the anatomy lesson, huh? I don't suppose you'll just be poking me a bit with that and then we're done, right?"

The masked figure shakes his head.

"Yeah, I didn't think so. So, what are you gonna do to me while I'm trussed up like this?"

He points to the ceiling. Becca looks up, the lights gleaming off the three wide blades positioned above her.

"Well, that explains the hole in the collar. We going to do this?" she turns to face the puny audience, keeping her face straight, waving with her fingers.

The ghost makes a chopping motion with his fingers. There's a whoosh of displaced air, a thud as the blade hits and an orgasmic scream as the middle blade splits Becca from crown to coccyx.

"Fuuuuuuuuuck!" she moans as the two halves of her move apart, "Figured you'd leave...that one...as the climax...pun kinda intended." she pants.

The ghost walks around behind her, appearing on her left side with a scalpel.

"Kinda small, don't you think? Or are you a 'it's what you do with it' kinda guy like Markie?"

The ghost doesn't reply, the sharp tip of the scalpel pressing into her shoulder. Becca winces.

"How come that hurts worse than being literally cut in fucking half? I..." she stops as the ghost's gloved fingers reach into the incision and pull. Becca screams as half her skin flays off her body, exposing her muscles, bones and ancillary organs in ways they are decidedly not supposed to be. The ghost takes her skin, walking over to tack it up on the wall like a parent's favoured drawing.

"That was freaky!" she says, sounding less worried now that she's survived, the audience able to watch her muscles moving to make the sounds. The ghost holds up a thumb questioningly. Becca's left hand raises a skinless thumb with visible contraction of her muscles. The ghost nods, gives a finger chopping motion and the remaining two blades drop from above. Becca manages to look surprised as the blades sever her arms and legs which is tricky when you only have one eyebrow and set of eyelids to work with. The ghost wheels Becca's right half to the other side of the table, placing the severed arm and leg on in and then returns to her skinned portion.

"This is fucking weird."

The ghost reaches inside her body, her guts falling out with a wet splat on the floor.

“Hey!”

He ignores her, reaching in to pull all thirty metres of coiled intestines out into the light. And then keeps pulling.

“What are you...” a pair of lacy panties appears tied to the intestines, followed by black and orange bunting. He stops pulling at that, reaching under her rib cage to tug on her oesophagus until it slides free, dragging a tiny black bra with it. “Hey, that's not mine! Mine are skimpier.” more black and orange bunting emerges until the scalpel slashes at both ends. The ghost drags her guts across the stage, floating up to hang the bunting up, forming several loops of slippery guts, spelling out 'Happy' one the bunting at one end, and 'Halloween' at the other.

“Ugh. That does not feel good. I'm going to...” the stomach hanging on the wall shudders as the ghost floats back down. “What's...next?”

The ghost reaches into her chest, the scalpel severing her windpipe. He pulls her lungs out, floating back up to tack them in place. Becca whimpers as she feels the scalpel slicing through her left lung, the gloves unfolding it to cover half the wall in dimples of alveoli, while the other lung stays fully wrapped up.

“You're going to take every part of me...out, aren't you?”

The ghost looks at her quizzically and then nods, He reaches in, and Becca feels his gloved hands around her heart. The ghost sinks down, apparently kneeling, as he holds her heart up to her.

“Very romantic, I'm sure.”

The ghost then rises up and pulls and keeps pulling as the network of veins and arteries unravels. He carries them over to a tank, submerging them in the clear liquid.

Becca manages to choke out half a question before the liquid solidifies, trapping her still beating heart inside a clear plastic display. “That's cold!”

The ghost shrugs, returning to her reduced body. He reaches down into her pelvis, the scalpel severing the remaining connective tissue and lifts her womb out.

“That's my...fuck! That is hot.” she bites her lip, at least on the half of her that has lips left as the ghost drops her reproductive organ into a labelled bell jar of formaldehyde,

“You must be done by now. I can't feel anything inside...” The ghost pulls out a small bone saw, its circular blade of teeth already spinning in a high whine. “...oh.” He places the saw on Becca's temple and presses it against the bone. Bone dust flies as it slowly cuts through and he lifts that half of her skull away to reveal her brain. He reaches in and pulls her whole brain out through that half. Becca's eyes open and close, pupils dilating and contracting at random as the ghostly fingers press into her grey matter. Her tongue lolls. Her muscles jerk. The ghost walks over to another tank, dragging miles of nerves behind it until they enter the tank, brain, eyes and nerves suspended in the hardening plastic.

“Hah!” Becca shouts, “Take that, Mrs Worthington. I do so have a brain in my head. Well, not in my head any more, but when you said I didn't in third grade, I definitely did!”

The ghost floats in front of her.

“So, that's it, right? I've done your tricks. Now you put me back together, right?”

The ghost pulls out a cue card with one word on it. 'No'

“But...you said you needed me to do this for you to move on!”

Another card: 'I lied.'

“Mark! Mark!”

Mark clammers over the chairs, making it to the stage.

“This creep is going back on his...”

“Will this one do, Grandfather?” he asks, ignoring her.

The ghost nods.

“Grandfather? Wait? What?! You knew about all of this!”

“Of course. Why do you think I had the key to this place?”

“But why...”

“Because Grandfather needs to catch thirteen sluts like you, not just one. And once we've done that, then he'll get to move on, while I get to inherit this place.” he runs a hand over Becca's right side,

“And all it's contents.”

“Contents? Contents like what? Me?! You utter shit!”

“Don't feel bad, Becca. The key makes you want to come here and take part. You can't help yourself.” he turns away, walking out with the ghost.

“Just so you know, you bastard!” she screams after him, “I faked it! Every time!”

The door closes, leaving her spread around the auditorium.

Upstairs, Mark pauses at the door, “You are going to give me all this, aren't you?”

A cue card: 'Of course. Why the sudden concern?'

“You lied to her about...”

Another card. 'Of course I did. But I only lie to the marks.'

Next card: 'I'd never lie to you, Mark. You're my grandson. You're family.'

“Right. Well, eight down...” he walks back out, the door locking behind him.

The ghost of Richard Cumberland sighs at the foolishness of the marks, a constant throughout the years it seems, even among his own family. Still, he hopes young Mark will enjoy being master of this place at least as much as he has.