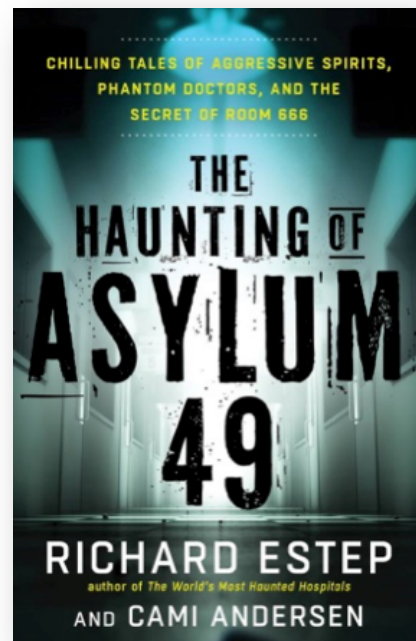


EXCERPT FROM

The Haunting of Asylum 49

By Richard Estep and Cami Andersen

Chapter 8: Chapel of the Damned (1125 words)



Asylum 49 stalwarts Cathy Blank and Cami Andersen took time out of their hectic schedules to accompany Richard and Sean for an EVP session inside the chapel. It had been a busy and stressful week for all concerned, and both men had been staying awake for long hours during their stay at the haunt: however, the atmosphere was very casual and relaxed, and what started out as a serious and somber evening of paranormal investigation soon loosened up into an informal round of storytelling and a bevy of bad jokes.

Pretty soon, laughter and lightheartedness were the order of the day, which seemed a little out of place inside the haunted chapel, where the four investigators sat amongst the ghostly figures in white that occupied every row of pews. Their EMF meters barely flickered, with each K2 offering up at most a single desultory light every now and then, but nothing more.

The air inside the chapel was growing warm, bordering upon hot, and getting uncomfortably so, to such an extent that everybody was starting to sweat.

Discussion soon turned to the spirits of Jessica and Christian, and then to the tall, stick-thin figure which has been glimpsed standing inside the chapel doorway. Although nobody realized it at the time, Sean had stopped laughing and joking along with the others several minutes back, and fell into an uncharacteristically brooding, sullen silence. As somebody who is usually an absolute chatterbox and the first person to either crack a joke or laugh at somebody else's, this was a bizarre turn of events.

Finally noticing that something was wrong, Richard turned to Sean and asked him if he was doing OK. The response was a noncommittal grunt.

“Are you sure?”

“No.” Sean’s reply was clipped and terse.

“What’s wrong?” Richard asked, the hackles suddenly rising on the back of his neck.

“I feel angry. Don’t know why.”

“Do something for me,” Cathy asked, obviously concerned at Sean’s out-of-character mood swing. “Stand up and come over here.” Sean obeyed without question. “Now take three or four deep breaths.”

Sean was instructed to sit down in a different seat, on the opposite side of the room. Once he did, he told everyone that he was starting to feel a little better. Slowly, with just a little help from Richard, the two girls began to turn Sean’s mood around, cracking jokes and coaxing what were first smiles and then a few genuine laughs out of him.

Privately, Richard was worried about his friend. It simply wasn’t like him to get angry. In fact, over all the years that he had known Sean, Richard had never seen him either get angry or lose his temper...before coming to Asylum 49.

“It’s that pew,” Cami explained, pointing at Sean’s original seat, which was sandwiched in between two white-garbed dummies. She went on to relate how many visitors to the chapel had felt negative emotions ranging from irritation to full-blown anger and rage when sitting in that particular spot – feelings which always dissipated and then vanished entirely whenever they moved to sit elsewhere.

“I felt fine when we were walking around today,” Sean explained afterward, “but when I sat down in here...it started as irritation, agitation, maybe, but then I got this feeling of something not being quite right.”

Richard, Cami, and Cathy were supportive, nodding at Sean to continue. He looked each of them in the eye and seemed a little embarrassed to admit that just a few minutes before he had been asked to stand up, he had developed an almost overwhelming urge to scream at them all. “I wanted to yell at you all, tell you to just shut the f—up!” Sean admitted bashfully. “I don’t know where it came from, exactly, but I was this close to doing it, just for a second.”

“I have never felt as irritated, frustrated, or angry as I have sitting here,” he went on, getting more and more puzzled as he examined his feelings from every possible angle, “and I just don’t get it. It’s not the heat or the conversation. I feel so much better now I’ve moved.” He looked over at the empty pew suspiciously.

“So why don’t you try it?” Cami suggested, looking over at Richard. She had a point. As anybody who knows them both will attest, Richard is much more likely to get angry or frustrated than Sean, being much more of a ‘type A’ personality by nature than his placid friend.

Somewhat nervously, Richard stood up and moved across the chapel to sit in what was fast turning into the hot seat. The good-natured humor continued, with everybody keeping a watchful eye on Richard, but the Englishman had to admit that he wasn't feeling anything out of the ordinary.

"You're not irritated?" Sean asked skeptically, wiping sweat from his brow with the back of one hand. He sounded just the slightest bit disappointed.

"Nope," Richard admitted, before amending it with "well, maybe just a little..."

"Oh yeah, really?" The big investigator sounded more optimistic now. "Why?"

"I'm annoyed that I'm not getting angry, mate." Richard flashed him an apologetic smile. "But I'm guessing that isn't what you were going for, is it?"

Beneath all of the joking around, Richard was secretly concerned about the effect that the Asylum was having on Sean. The pair had investigated countless haunted (and not-so-haunted) locations together, and not once had Richard witnessed his friend having any kind of emotional meltdown. Now, Sean had experienced two in the space of as many days.

Perhaps Sean's having recently lost his grandfather might be a contributing factor, Richard mused, not to mention the fact that the entire team was working long days and very late nights investigating the former hospital. They were running on a decidedly less-than-healthy diet of energy drinks and junk food, which was hardly optimal when it came to keeping their nerves calm and their minds relaxed.

Yes, Richard attempted to convince himself, maybe that was it: a combination of fatigue, lack of sleep, and a high caffeine intake might be behind Sean's two highly uncharacteristic mood swings. He recalled that Autumn had also been reduced to tears for no apparent reason, so perhaps the stress was beginning to show on all of them, and cracks were starting to appear in the emotional well-being of his team.

Or maybe the explanation was something even more concerning. After all, the rest of the team had kept their emotions under control without too much effort, and so had the Andersen's.

Richard resolved to keep a closer eye on his team-mates from here on out, just in case there was something more to this than met the eye...

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