

"Tracking Gertrude Tredwell"

by

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TRACKING GERTRUDE TREDWELL

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October 13th, 1965. The front parlor of the MERCHANT'S HOUSE, East 4th St. NYC. Voices are heard in the dark.

BURT

Hello? Is anyone there? Hello?

CURATOR

Mr. McDermott? Is that you?

BURT

Why is it so dark?

CURATOR

I'm working on it. Please stay where you are.

An odd noise.

BURT

Did you hear that?

CURATOR

Hear what?

Another noise.

BURT

SHH! There it goes again!

CURATOR

I didn't hear anything. The lighting in this house has always been a problem... don't move. I don't want anything to be disturbed.

Lights come up on BURT carrying a large, vintage-style tape recorder with microphone. THE CURATOR enters wearing mid 19th century clothing.

CURATOR

I'm sorry to have kept you waiting in darkness for so long... Mr. McDermott?

BURT

(distracted)

Hmm?

CURATOR

Is all this really necessary?

BURT

Call me Burt.

Burt offers his hand, the curator refuses.

CURATOR

I prefer to keep this professional if you don't mind.

BURT

There is definitely something here. The energy in this room is fantastic!

CURATOR

You can tell that already?

BURT

Absolutely! I haven't felt a presence like this since... well since the Campbell home back in '63. Boy was that a crackerjack!

(carefully)

I don't mean to frighten you lady, but I think we're in for one hell of a night. One hell of a night.

Burt looks the curator over.

BURT

What's with the getup?

CURATOR

I just completed a tour before you arrived. I'm afraid I haven't had time to change. I apologize for my appearance.

BURT

(leaning in)

Don't. I find it delightfully *unusual*.

Burt puts his ear to the floor and listens.

CURATOR

What exactly is it that you're looking for?

BURT

Evidence.

CURATOR

Evidence of what?

BURT
Evidence of paranormal activity.

CURATOR
I see.

Burt takes out a "tuning fork" and strikes it. A faint hum fills the room.

BURT
It can be determined by many scientific techniques. I've spent the last 8 years of my life developing my own personalized methods. They've proven to be very effective.

CURATOR
I'm sure they have.

BURT
What I'm doing now is trying to detect a frequency in which I can establish a link for communication. In general, we rely too much on our eyes. Just because you don't see something, doesn't mean that it isn't there.

He strikes the fork again.

CURATOR
Mr. McDermott?

BURT
Hmm?

CURATOR
Just out of curiosity, how does one decide to become a...

BURT
Ghost Hunter?

CURATOR
It is an odd choice for a profession.

BURT
It's not all that I do. Technically I am an inventor, a scientist if you will, by trade.

Burt begins to unpack his duffel bag and proceeds to a small table.

CURATOR
(firmly)
Mr. McDermott!

BURT
What is it?

CURATOR
That table is an antique.

BURT
(backing off)
Sorry. I didn't mean any harm. I'm guess
I'm just getting caught up in all the excitement.

CURATOR
Excitement?

BURT
You really don't feel it, do you?

CURATOR
Feel what?

Burt takes out a small device from his bag and proudly presents it to her.

BURT
It's an electromagnetic meter.

CURATOR
Interesting.

BURT
I designed it myself. It's used to gage paranormal activity. The higher the needle goes, the greater the activity. This room is off the charts. Look!

He shows her the gadget.

CURATOR
I'm afraid none of this impresses me Mr. McDermott.

BURT
I've never seen a reading this strong before.
I should turn it off for a bit, before it gets overheated.

Burt looks sadly at the curator. He appears hurt.

BURT

You think I'm a fraud, don't you?

CURATOR

I'm sure I don't know what you mean.

BURT

You think I'm a kook. A loon. A whacko.

CURATOR

Let me try to explain something to you Mr. McDermott, I am a curator...

BURT

..and I'm a scientist...

CURATOR

..and as a curator, I have a vested interest in keeping this home's contents and *integrity* intact. I have no enthusiasm for this fascination of spirits or the parasitic...

BURT

Paranormal...

CURATOR

..activity you and others feel it deems. I have been asked by my superiors to entertain this little "ghost hunt" because of our upcoming Landmark ceremony, apparently all this will be good for publicity somehow, so please, can we get just on with this so we can both go home?

BURT

You're telling me you've never seen her?

CURATOR

Seen who?

BURT

Gertrude.

CURATOR

(annoyed)

I don't think that would be possible.

BURT

Why not?

CURATOR

Gertrude Tredwell died in 1933.

BURT

Other staff members here at the Merchant's House said that they've seen her.

CURATOR

Over the years I've learned to disregard the ramblings of simple minded volunteers.

BURT

Upstairs in her bedroom... standing at the top of the staircase... right here in the parlor... BOO!

Unresponsive, the curator stares at Burt.

CURATOR

I'm not amused Mr. McDermott.

BURT

Sorry.

Burt begins to wander the room. He speaks into the air.

BURT

"Don't be afraid. We don't mean any harm. We just want to connect with you."

CURATOR

(under her breath)

Good Lord.

BURT

That isn't nice.

CURATOR

Pardon me?

BURT

Please. Don't mock me.

CURATOR

I wasn't...

BURT

Look, like it or not, I was *asked* to come here tonight so I think I deserve a little respect. Don't you?

CURATOR

I apologize.

BURT

Just a little consideration. That's all that I'm asking for.

CURATOR

I'll try to restrain myself.

BURT

Thank you. It's appreciated.
(speaking to the room again)
"We come in peace."

Burt continues his antics. Touching the walls, writing things down in his pad, etc.

BURT

Tell me what you know about this... domicile.

As if giving a tour, she begins to relay information.

CURATOR

Well, as you know the Merchant's House became the home of Seabury Tredwell and his family in 1835. This red-brick row house (*built in 1832*) is the only 19th century family home in New York City to be preserved perfectly intact, both inside and out. It is a fine example of Greek revival architecture. The interior contains all the Tredwell family's original furnishings, some the work of Duncan Phyfe and Joseph Meeks. You won't find better cabinet work...

BURT

No, no, no! I don't want to hear about all that crap!

CURATOR

I beg your pardon?

BURT

The family!

Suddenly the lights flicker and go out. Quickly they return.

BURT

I want to know more about the family.

CURATOR

As you wish.

She collects herself and begins again.

CURATOR

Well, there was Seabury, along with his wife Eliza, and their eight children. There were also servants, and various other relatives at different points in time. Only three of the eight children ever married. Very unusual for that time period.

BURT

Was Gertrude one of them?

CURATOR

No, I'm afraid not. She was the youngest and died here, a spinster, which actually proves that the all these "so called" sightings of her are all fictitious.

BURT

How do you figure?

CURATOR

The staff members, the ones who have claimed to have seen her I should say, describe her as a woman much younger in age. Gertrude lived to be 93.

BURT

So? What's your point?

CURATOR

So, therein lies my skepticism Mr. McDermott. If one is going to be telling stories of wandering phantoms, they should at least get their facts straight.

BURT

Just because Gertrude died at 93 doesn't mean that an impression of her at a younger age doesn't exist in this house.

CURATOR

An impression?

BURT

Age has nothing to do with it. There could be *multiple* versions of Gertrude's spirit wandering this house at any time.

CURATOR

Multiple versions?

BURT

It's all about trapped energy.

Burt begins to laugh uncontrollably.

CURATOR

Did I say something amusing Mr. McDermott?

BURT

Sorry, it just that... I can see why, why someone like you, would assume that a spirit's *physical* appearance would match that of their time of death. It's a logical conclusion, but not always the case. You've got to stop thinking in such limited dimensions. No offense.

CURATOR

None taken.

BURT

Like in the case of the Campbell house, the one I mentioned before, the deceased was seen on multiple occasions at *different* stages of her life. Hold on, I've got pictures!

He reaches for photos from his bag and shows them to her.

BURT

Look, here is Mrs. Campbell as a young woman in her 20's... this one is of her as a toddler, see the doll she's carrying? Ah, and this is her at 73, the age she died. I call this one the "crisis apparition."

Silence.

CURATOR

(reluctantly)

I know I'm going to regret asking this but what's a crisis apparition?

BURT

I'm glad you asked. A crisis apparition is the appearance of a spirit that has been trapped at the time of a tragic death. Because the death is so horrible and appalling, the energy of that moment is captured and lives on.

The curator looks at them more closely.

CURATOR

Mr. McDermott?

BURT

Hmm?

CURATOR

These photos are nothing more than but a bunch of vague spots, sketchy shadows, and blurs. They're meaningless.

BURT

(highly defensive)

They're physical, scientific proof that there is a spiritual after world!

CURATOR

Let's move on shall we?

She begins to walk away.

BURT

NO! I want to stay here. There's definitely something here in the parlor. I can feel it! Tell me more about Gertrude.

CURATOR

Surely there must be other things that would interest you. Perhaps the "merchant" himself, Seabury Tredwell? This painting of him over the mantle was commissioned in...

BURT

I'm not interested in Seabury! *Fuck* Seabury! There are no reports of Seabury haunting this dwelling, just Gertrude!

CURATOR

There is no need for that type of language...

BURT

AHH!

Suddenly Burt begins to shake uncontrollably then collapses to the floor in agony. Unsympathetically, the curator looks down upon him.

CURATOR

You can spare me the dramatics Mr. McDermott.
Halloween isn't for a few more weeks.

BURT

My head! It's like someone stabbed it with an
ice pick.

CURATOR

(sarcastic)

I know the feeling.

BURT

I looked directly at that portrait of Seabury and
I got this incredible rush of pain through my
entire body.

CURATOR

(re portrait)

It isn't a flattering depiction, I'll give you
that.

BURT

It was like a thousand needles went through my
spine and this wave of heat scorched the back of
my neck.

CURATOR

Surely you don't think that the painting had
anything to do with it?

BURT

I'm not sure...

He begins to pace the room like a detective.

BURT

(abruptly)

Did Seabury have a good relationship with his
children?

CURATOR

How do you mean?

BURT

Did he frown upon Gertrude's marital status?

CURATOR

Quite the opposite. Mr. Tredwell didn't want
Gertrude to marry at all, I mean at least not to
the man she loved... never mind.

BURT
No, go on. Tell me.

CURATOR
I'm sure it means nothing...

BURT
I want to know.

CURATOR
According to family history, Gertrude was madly in love with a doctor named Lewis Wilson. Since the family was Episcopalian and Wilson was Catholic, Seabury forbade her to marry him and...

BURT
..and her heart never mended! Tragically she remained single, and in this house, until she died at the age of 93. It all makes sense now!

CURATOR
What does?

BURT
The readings on my meter, the rush of pain through my body... the portrait!

Burt searches his bag and reveals a bottle with a crucifix on it. He walks away from the curator across the room towards the painting.

CURATOR
Please tell me that isn't what I think it is.

BURT
Holy Water!

CURATOR
Of course.

BURT
We are among entities here! Supernatural beings with powers beyond our imagination. We must be cautious.

CURATOR
I will not have you saturating our furnishings and fabrics with your foolish potions. Put that away immediately!

BURT

There's definitely something going on here, right in this very room. The painting. It has something it wants to say to us... to Gertrude. Maybe you're on to something with Seabury...

CURATOR

If you don't put that away, I'm afraid I'm going to ask you to leave.

BURT

Seabury didn't approve of Gertrude's love, so she lived out the rest of her days bitter and alone. Since she felt so betrayed by her father, her spirit still remains here, in this house, today. Unsettled. Tortured! Don't you see? She's punishing Seabury by not crossing over to the other side! It's the ultimate act of defiance!

CURATOR

Mr. McDermott!

Burt advances towards the curator with the Holy water. She becomes enraged.

CURATOR

NO!!!

Burt immediately backs away. Silence.

CURATOR

(calmer)

This dress. It's an antique. I didn't want you to ruin it. Please, put that away.

BURT

(suspicious)

Sure... whatever you say.