

ParanormalReview

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Features, articles, letters, experiences, notices, reports and reviews should be sent by email to Dr Leo Ruickbie at paranormalreview@spr.ac.uk. Material can also be posted to the Editor at 1 Vernon Mews, London W14 0RL. Please mark envelopes 'Paranormal Review'. Full submission guidelines can be found on the SPR website at www.spr.ac.uk under 'publications'.

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The Society for Psychical Research

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ABUELITA, THE RITZ AND ME

The sky was the colour of pink champagne
the day I took Abuelita for tea at The Ritz,
only the third time I had seen her.
The doorman's gloved hand held hers
as he helped her out of the cab,
and we entered splendour
as if we were coming home.

The carpet was rich-patterned red,
one grand old dame greeting another,
giving way under maroon court shoes.
My grandmother had had it all –
servants, villas, high society for breakfast,
the latest couture in which to beg for mercy,
vinegar to soak bruises,
perfect make-up to keep up appearances.

We glided down the Long Gallery,
chandeliers like bijou clouds of diamond rain,
turned into Palm Court.
I had a moment of pride
when the maître d' confirmed my name
and she grinned.

My mother had drilled me
with stories of everything Abuelita had endured
to give her children
the gold-top life –
I wanted to give her opulence without the price.

We sat at a table
with ghosts of Pavlova, Coward, de Gaulle,
ensconced in a wonderland of gilded cream
and twinkling Tweedledee waiters.

We nibbled from a three-tier stand
of slim sandwiches,
fat scones,
edible fruit chocolate jewels,
accompanied by piano licks,
chiming silver teapots.
The conversation was that of two freed apostates –
politics, religion,
the appetite-suppressing qualities of cheese.

I hoped she could see,
woman to woman,
that her genes had not been wasted,
that I was a lady too.

As we were about to leave,
I asked her the only question I'd ever ask –
"Is it all worth it?"
"Mija!" she cried,
and raised her eyes under the birdcage veil,
gesturing to the surroundings,
and me,
nodding.
I wrote down her smile
to remember for the rest of my life.

We left 150 Piccadilly
under the arcane stare of the copper lions,
and I kissed her goodbye
on both her parchment cheeks,
watching her take another black cab
out of my dream,
back to the heaven she had lived in
since she had died
when I was eighteen.

Caroline Am Bergris

- 4 CHRIS ROE
The SPR's President, Prof. Chris Roe, takes an in-depth view of First Sight and PMIR.
- 6 PSI IN EVERYDAY LIFE
Dr Rupert Sheldrake challenges our perceptions of what constitutes the paranormal with an examination of the sense of being stared at, dogs who know when their owners are coming home and more.
- 12 THE REINCARNATION OF JENNIFER SCHULTZ?
Dr James Matlock presents a compelling case from his new book *Signs of Reincarnation*.
- 16 THE GALILEO COMMISSION
David Lorimer of the Galileo Commission on scientism, impossible facts and the publication of the Galileo Commission Report.
- 18 SAUNDERS ON THE CARINGTON CASE
Ashley Knibb reports on Dr David Saunders's lecture on 'The Carington Case'.
- 20 GHOSTS IN THE MACHINES
Brandon Hodge returns with another mystery from the world of spirit communication devices.
- 22 THE OLD GODS IN THE NEW WORLD
Dr Simon Bacon analyses themes and meanings in Vincent Natali's 2019 horror film *In the Tall Grass*.
- 25 THE FUTURE OF THE SPR
Dr Tom Ruffles and Randy Liebeck respond to the editorial in PR92.
- 27 CALL FOR CHAPTERS:
IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEATH?
- 28 CONTRIBUTORS

COVER PHOTOGRAPH: Street Performers in Prague by Andrew Shiva (2013).