

GHOSTS

Written by

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EXT. UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - DAY

Midday, students reading against trees, walking in groups to class, etc.

PRESCOTT (V.O.)
Where is she?

INT. ADMIN OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

PRESCOTT (56) sits across NICK MCAFREY (25), and Nick's father LIONEL MCAFREY (55). LIONEL is staring at a short story (8x11, white, several pages); it seems to be the focus of the room.

NICK
(side glancing his father)
...Sorry again.

LIONEL
(eyes on the paper)
...Where is she?

PRESCOTT
(beat)
Where is she, Nick?

NICK
She doesn't like being on campus,
she's probably lost. Did you use
the email address I gave you?

PRESCOTT reaches for his intercom on the desk - the scene looks like a seance, and the intercom like a Ouija board glass which the men surround.

BUZZ from the intercom

INTERCOM (V.O.)
(male/female assistant)
Mr. Prescott, your two o'clock is
here.

PRESCOTT
Cheers, thanks - send her in,
please.

After a moment, two KNOCKS at the door.

PRESCOTT (CONT'D)
Come.

MAUDE enters and walks to the desk, spotting NICK, and slowing her stride for only a moment.

MAUDE
Mr. Prescott, I'm Maude Benaglia.

PRESCOTT rises to cordially shake hands.

PRESCOTT
I appreciate you coming in. Any trouble finding us?

MAUDE
Not at all.

PRESCOTT
Very good. Please, have a seat and join us. I apologize for any misleadings, but I in fact won't be using your services as requested today - there's no text book manuscript that needs editing, I mean to say.

MAUDE
(side glancing DALE)
And...?

PRESCOTT
I apologize for not introducing these men. I trust you can understand it being out of curiosity more so than rudeness?

MAUDE
You'd like to see if I know them already.

PRESCOTT
Indeed.

NICK
Sorry, Maude-

MAUDE
We don't know each other-
(to PRESCOTT)
I don't know him.

PRESCOTT smiles.

LIONEL
(holding up the papers)
Did you write this?

MAUDE
I don't acknowledge that document-

LIONEL
(exhaling angry)
Jesus-fuck...

PRESCOTT
Maude, I don't mean to blind side
you-

MAUDE
No, just waste my time. I can't say
I was eager to clean up an academic
textbook - but not getting paid at
all today? That wasn't-

LIONEL
Getting paid is the least of y-

PRESCOTT
Nobody meant to waste your time.
I'll pay you for this meet as if it
were a consultation; alright?

LIONEL
The fuck you will!

MAUDE
Deal.

LIONEL
Honestly...

PRESCOTT
Maude, I'm helping someone right
now - a very old alumnus, and a
very important project. It involved
seeking out a certain quality of
author. It's what actually lead to
Nick being outed, I'm afraid - he
was initially approached with
enthusiastic optimism. We thought
we found our man.

MAUDE
Could just be he's experiencing
second album syndrome.

LIONEL
Maude, my son is being expelled
today.

NICK shifts uncomfortably in his seat.

MAUDE

I wouldn't know anything about that. And I don't go to this school.

LIONEL

Did you write this? Because Nick didn't. This school has a strict zero tolerance policy on plagiarism and now he's out.

MAUDE

So you've all dealt with the matter, then-

LIONEL

"Dealt" with it?

MAUDE

I don't have to follow your school rules - I'm a ghost writer who works for a living, not some kid who can't finish their homework. Any online client can source individual articles and editorials from a freelancer like me. Now, if a student were to contact me posing as an educational website or publication looking to buy my existing work, then...

PRESCOTT

Being clever about side stepping our system is just another way of breaking our rules. These submissions are a testament to higher learning. We have an honor code-

MAUDE

I don't have an honor code anywhere. At all. I'm just a girl who wrote a legally sound document. You expelled someone who broke one of your rules. It's dealt with.

NICK

(beat)
Sorry, Maude.

MAUDE

Cool it, Nick, we don't know each other.

PRESCOTT tuts a laugh - LIONEL notes this, stands, and folds the paper.

LIONEL

I thought we were exacting some justice here. You call her in and then fucking pay her to be here? She's being smug. How do we get Nick back into classes? How are we gonna repair? What are we gonna do to make sure she doesn't go around and ruin any other kids'-

MAUDE

I'm right here-

LIONEL holds a hand up to block her from his eye line.

LIONEL

Where's our justice? This is Nick's third school-

PRESCOTT

Mr. Mcafrey - Nick remains expelled. It's a zero tolerance policy, I'm sorry.

LIONEL is dumbfounded.

LIONEL

(beat)

Then why all the...What is this? He co-operated. He was helpful-

PRESCOTT

And I appreciate him giving me the contact info leading to-

MAUDE

Yeah, Nick, thanks for helping these guys find me.

PRESCOTT

Mr. Mcafrey, I can speak further with you ab-

LIONEL

To hell with this. I'm gonna make sure this gets known loud, Prescott.

PRESCOTT

Lionel, I-

LIONEL
Enough - Nick, come.

LIONEL storms out with NICK.

MAUDE
(beat)
Why have him here at all? I
believed you were a legit client
today.

PRESCOTT
Because I think it's important you
see the impact of your actions..

MAUDE
Thanks Mr. Miyagi, but I do a lot
of work outside this.

PRESCOTT
And still a surprising amount on my
campus. There are a lot of students
sourcing from you, I've since
learned.

MAUDE
Sounds like an internal problem I'm
on the outside of.

PRESCOTT
It doesn't bother you that we could
spend time discovering and
expelling students en masse?

MAUDE
They broke rules. I begin and end
at writing things down for other
people - where and how they submit
it, with or without my name, is on
them.

PRESCOTT
I remember you nicer than this
abrasive energy - is it the
circumstances, or the school itself
that are upsetting you?

MAUDE
Just this waste of time.

She motions to leave.

PRESCOTT

Time that I'm paying for - stay, please. This paper caught my attention because excellent, though it may be, I recognized it - rehashed, albeit, but I recognized it.

MAUDE

I don't plagiarize.

PRESCOTT

I'm not saying you do. I'm saying I recognize your work, your written voice - despite being well masked in Nick's.

(beat)

It's been a decade and a half since I was primarily teaching, but I don't forget easily.

MAUDE

Yeah, I went here. Not a secret.

PRESCOTT

You were astounding. What happened? I had thought there was at least one book in you.

MAUDE

It was published by someone else. You're gonna pretend you didn't hear about my five minutes?

PRESCOTT

I'm sorry, I don't follow drama.

MAUDE

I don't do a lot of writing for myself these days, okay?

PRESCOTT

So now you make money off vapid, less capable freshmen, and regurgitate your own work; chasing your own tail?

MAUDE

(getting up)

That's me, then. Regurgitating bullshit.

PRESCOTT

I'd like to offer you something new, is what I mean. I wanted to meet you today, not judge, I'm sorry.

MAUDE

I don't need anything from you - just pay me. Does the girl outside your office have a petty cash box? Or is that just old Hollywood?

PRESCOTT

It pays well enough; the job I have in mind.

MAUDE

I can make money just fine without doing it off your students. I can even give you today for free - bye.

She starts for the door.

PRESCOTT

You've already displayed a lack of moral fibre, you can't be bought?

MAUDE

(stops, turns, shrugs)
Happily so. I just don't like you.

PRESCOTT

Well, I like you well enough. Your writing brought you here today.

MAUDE

Glad you enjoyed.

PRESCOTT

I liked your story the first time you submitted it, too.

MAUDE

I'm ever-derivative of myself, it would seem.

PRESCOTT

I could use your help, Maude.

MAUDE

Why?

PRESCOTT

Because you captured Nick's voice and didn't lose any talent or style along the way. And because your stagnation and current path just cost a young man his scholastic career.

MAUDE

His dad seemed pretty capable of setting Nick up with a fallback.

PRESCOTT

Someone's privilege excuses what you did?

MAUDE

No, I just don't want to rub any more salt on this than I have to.

PRESCOTT

Do something new with me.

MAUDE

I'm working on something new already.

PRESCOTT

(sincere)

Oh, you're unavailable?

MAUDE

Hopefully, yeah, soon.

PRESCOTT

(beat)

Until you are, can you at least audit it? I promise the job is worth your time. This family has until now been mostly private - this is a great opportunity - and you can help them realize their hopes.

MAUDE

Cool, yeah. Upper class families are having a real tough go of it lately, I'll do what I can.

PRESCOTT

You won't be writing lukewarm vacation stories for WASPS - that's what I think you'll enjoy most of all: Who the job is.

We end on MAUDE processing this before

CUT TO: