

The Haunting of Reindeer Manor

Part 1 of: The Haunted Houses of Anderson

By
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SMASHWORDS EDITION

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The Haunting of Reindeer Manor
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To the wonderful volunteers of
Reindeer Manor,
The 13th Street Morgue, and
The Dungeon of Doom.

Some of the nicest people doing some of the strangest work.

To Pasty,
With you, I can only
Improve.



Deep in the tall grass, far out in the pasture, where the cattle were grazing in peace, the faint sound of a gunshot was heard. As the sound traveled across the pasture, echoing off a tree line in the distance, the cattle only lowed softly.

Moments later, the wind died as clouds blocked the sunlight. The tall grass that had been waving back and forth majestically stilled suddenly, as if stopping to notice. Only the fading echo of the gunshot could be heard, but it too went silent seconds later.

The air became stale and lifeless. The wasps in the distance calmed themselves and returned to their nests. The ants and spiders resumed their work. The cattle looked at each other, then slowly walked toward the back corner of the pasture. There, they found a hole in the fence, and left the property one by one, never to return.

Around 75 years later...

On a lonely road in northwestern Montana, a man was walking with his thumb out. The temperature was a ghastly three above zero with a wind chill of negative ten.

After several hours, a trucker pulled his rig over and offered the man a ride. "Where ya headed mister?"

"I have no destination."

The trucker tipped his hat. "Well, this load's going south. I wouldn't mind the company."

The truck was found abandoned twenty miles north of Denton, Texas, along interstate thirty-five. All identification on the truck had been destroyed, though the cargo remained. The driver was never found.



Dallas News
Friday, October 31, 2008

Ghost Confirmed!

Above you will see an actual photograph taken at the famous Reindeer Manor in Red Oak, Texas. A photographer for Dallas County, standing on Houston School Road, photographed the dilapidated road prior to reconstruction in February. One of his photographs captured a ghostly image standing just inside the property line.

Many investigators have visited the famous house and though they have recorded strange phenomena, none have produced such undeniable evidence. This may be in part because the owner of the property, who has requested we not publish his name, has never allowed anyone to stay for very long. Portions of some of the investigations can be found on the website YouTube, under the search phrase "Reindeer Manor."

The Project

All Hallow's Eve

Dr. Anderson put down the newspaper. Next to it laid his rejection. He had worked so hard and come so close that to be stopped now was almost criminal. Could this be the answer he was looking for? He thought about it all afternoon, then on the way home decided he had to go to Reindeer Manor.

Several hours later, Anderson was questioning his decision. On this October day, it had been raining all afternoon and into the evening. The traffic down Interstate thirty-five was horrid. Once he got off on Bear Creek Road, he thought things would ease up. How wrong he was. The line of cars heading to Reindeer Manor seemed endless. For forty-five agonizing minutes, he inched forward, until finally he came upon the entrance. Once he crossed under the iron arch, he thought he was home free, but to his dismay, another long line of cars was ahead of him. Thirty torturous minutes later, he was finally directed into a parking spot.

He stood outside his car, weary from the traffic. Unlike most of the patrons, who were young and able, he was an aging instructor of psychology, in his middle sixties, slightly overweight and balding. The rain falling from the sky, along with the cold temperature, made the night miserable. In the distance he saw a tractor dragging cars out of their spots. He felt lucky he was not forced to park in the mud.

In the distance, through the rain, Anderson saw a lone lantern. It glowed yellow, signaling all those around, "Over here, this way." With their heads bowed, the people resembled zombies, walking mindlessly toward the lantern.

Anderson was cold and his clothes were quickly saturating. He questioned his thought process and choice to venture out on this night. Only the prospect of completing his life's work gave him the motivation to continue.

As he reached the lantern, he was relieved to see an awning. Under the awning stood a crowd of people, waiting for something. He shook his head, thinking he would see a ticket booth. After such a long entrance, surely this would be the end of the waiting. He was mistaken.

As he walked under the awning, his subdued demeanor was shared by all. No one was talking; rather, they were huddling together for warmth.

The howl of the wind whistled through the trees as a light in the distance broke through the darkness. Everyone scooted forward as the tractor drove past them, towing a long trailer with seats of hay. Once the tractor came to rest, they boarded.

Because of his bad leg, Anderson was the last to get on. He had barely sat down when the tractor jerked and moved forward. The ride was bumpy and uncomfortable. Anderson gritted his teeth as every bump sent ripples of pain up his injured back. He thought of his prior hauntings, how those in need would come to him, but now those days had passed. He felt desperate, and in his mind he knew that desperation was often followed by bad decisions.

As the tractor pulled them along, they crossed through the old cemetery before plunging into the dark woods. The rain and wind were magnified by the speed of the tractor. It made an already miserable autumn night even worse.

As they emerged from the woods, they passed another iron gate with the name 'Reindeer Manor' on top of it. Without stopping, the tractor continued on, pulling the hay wagon along the dirt road, then around back of the 13th Street Morgue, and finally to the front entrance. As the tractor stopped, with a big whoosh, a huge fireball erupted right above their heads. Anderson looked as the ball of fire illuminated the dilapidated gas station underneath it. Only one pump remained, but the roof of the building had collapsed and a portion laid on top of the old pump. He could clearly see the price, forty-two cents a gallon. How dated it was, he thought.

As Anderson stepped off the hayride, he noticed the ground was as saturated and muddy as it had been in the parking lot. He sighed and smiled a bit, giving credit to the date; this was good weather for a haunted house, but even better for Halloween.

Finally, nearly two and half hours after he left his prestigious home in Highland Park, he saw the ticket booth. Luckily, since he was the last one on the hayride, he was the first one off. He walked up to the booth and was greeted by the friendly cashier. She happily sold him a premium ticket.

As Anderson walked away, the smell of slow burning hickory wood tickled his nose. His mouth began to salivate as he realized he had not eaten dinner. He followed the heavenly scent and found a group of people standing in line, drawn by the aroma.

Anderson joined the line, trying to block his hunger pangs until they could be satisfied. He watched as young children ran screaming from one of the attractions. They darted across the midway as ghouls chased them. He chuckled at their terror and wondered if he would be so affected by these haunts.

As the line moved forward, he had trouble staying upright. His left leg was weak from a previous car accident, and the cane provided little support on such saturated ground. As he stepped forward, his fear came true. The cane was properly stuck.

Fortunately for him, a nice young man walked over and freed his cane from the mud.

Finally, his time to order had come. He stood before a young man who had a smile that would warm even the darkest of hearts. Above him stood a sign, 'The Ole' Texas Smokehouse.' The man was wearing a black t-shirt, covered by a black apron that sported the same name as the banner. Atop his head was a hat that read, 'The nicest guy in town.' Dr. Anderson thought, *We shall see.*

The booth was made of cheap timbers and used lumber; parts of it even looked as if it had been in a fire. It was a hodgepodge of corrugated metal and wood, but perfect for the Neanderthal food of fire and meat.

As he looked down, he could see a beer cooler filled with cold drinks covered by ice. Even in such miserable conditions, a person could enjoy an ice-cold soda.

Beside the cooler was a wooden cutting board, with a large razor sharp cleaver laying on top of it. To the left of the board was a portable steam table, no doubt where the delicacies of the barbeque were held.

The man smiled and said, "How are you tonight?"

Anderson eyed him. "I'm fine."

"That's great! Now, how are you really?"

What a persistent man, Anderson thought. "Actually, I'm cold, tired, and regretting coming out here with my cane."

The barbeque man looked at his watch. "I can understand. It's Friday, it's Halloween, and it's half an hour 'til midnight. A lot of people are out here."

Anderson rolled his eyes. "So what's the deal with these houses? What's so special about them?"

"Well, since you're now the only one in my line, let me tell you a story."

Anderson motioned with his free hand. "Please do."

"In the early 1900s, a two story wooden house stood on the site of the current house. The owner of the house was James Sharp, a prominent Texas oil pioneer and banker who partnered with Howard Hughes, Sr. in the famed Sharp-Hughes Tool Company. He leased the house and property to a family of Swedish immigrants because he was often

away on business. Unfortunately, in the early hours of a morning in 1915, the silence of the farm was shattered by screams. Lightning had sparked a tragic fire, which quickly consumed the wooden house. The entire family of sharecroppers, including several small children, perished in an unspeakably horrific death. Upset by the fate of his tenants, or perhaps because of the loss of property, Mr. Sharp decided to rebuild, only on a grand scale.”

Anderson leaned against the booth. “Why would he do that?”

“Well, he decided that this time he would occupy the property and turn it into the crown jewel of all his properties. But that’s where his normal side ended. He wanted to make sure the newly built house would not succumb to something as pedestrian as fire. Even though it nearly tripled the cost of construction, he made sure the buildings on the property were as fireproof as possible. This explains the unusual construction of virtually all the structures on the property. If you visit them during the day, you will notice they are all almost entirely engineered with concrete, brick, and steel. The lack of wood in their construction is oh-so-odd.”

Anderson sighed, only slightly intrigued. “You don’t say.”

“Yes, well, it was not to be. Mr. Sharp was killed, but by whom is still unclear. Even the location of his death is a mystery. Some say he was killed in the manor, by both his mistress and his wife. Some say it was just his mistress. Additionally, there is a bit of proof that he was killed at his city house in Oak Cliff. Even the details of his affair with his secretary are unusual. Some say they were married, some say it was a general affair, and some say he was a devoted father and would never succumb to such temptation.”

Anderson felt his eye lids growing heavy. “Uh-huh.”

The barbeque man looked around, making sure he was not missing out on any customers. He leaned in to the professor. “Well, the fact is, no one really knows who killed Mr. Sharp. The details are vague because of the bare semblance of an investigation at the time. You see, the Widow Sharp didn’t want her husband’s rumored infidelity widely known. She pressured the county Sheriff to quickly close the investigation and thus end the wild speculation of the press and neighbors. However, a darker rumor still circulates, that Mrs. Sharp and his mistress, who may have been the second Mrs. Sharp, chopped him up and put him in the attic of the house. But that rumor really does not correspond with the coroner’s report, which stated that the cause of death was due to the loss of two to three ounces of brain substance.”

Anderson sighed as he considered ending this conversation, but the barbeque man continued, “Now, it gets even more interesting. In 1917, shortly after the death of his father, James Jr. moved into the newly completed manor, but the legacy of misfortune continued. He developed quite a prosperous farming and ranching operation, in addition to breeding horses for harness racing. Between 1918 and 1928, additional buildings were added to the grounds: servant’s quarters, barns, and a carriage house. It was important to Junior that the estate was well equipped with an appropriate amount of space, which a wealthy family was expected to have. Everyone thought the Sharp family had survived the untimely death of its patriarch and had even come out better for it.

“However, James Junior’s stewardship of the property was cut short with the onset of the Great Depression of 1929, which thrust the Sharp family into poverty. His wife, a prominent spiritualist at the time, was convinced that the family and the estate itself were cursed. With creditors threatening, Junior began to act strangely. The staff was not shy about spreading the rumors of Junior’s insanity to the locals. Though many did not

believe the help's stories, they began to notice how reclusive Junior and his wife had become. The rumors spoke of strange and unholy pursuits going on behind the doors of the main house.

"It was only later, after the fall of the estate, that some of the goings-on were revealed. One maid, named Bonita stated, 'Constantly tormented by the whispers of a Sharp family curse, James and his wife were obsessed with finding a solution to their woes. Strange folk were seen going in and out of the Great House, from psychics to witch doctors; Mr. & Mrs. Sharp invited anyone with access to the occult to their bedroom in the vain attempt to lift the hex. His wife held séances to contact James Senior from beyond the grave for advice and counsel. Potions were mixed and incantations were chanted to rid the home and family from the string of bad luck. No one is sure if they were instructed by a spirit or simply came upon the solution on their own, but soon the couple found a way to bring the Sharp family out of the shadows.'"

Anderson was becoming a bit more interested. "So what happened?"

The barbeque man smiled and wagged his finger. "The final chapter of the Sharp family ended with the discovery of James Junior's wife, dead by poisoning, and his lifeless body swinging from a noose in the barn. To this day it is unclear who killed whom or if it was a suicide pact. Either way the curse was lifted."

Anderson smiled. "Well I'll be. That's a tumultuous history all right."

"Well if you have a bit more time, there's more."

Anderson was beginning to sense a gold mine lay here. "Son, I've got all night."

He smiled. "Well, years after the Sharp family was no more, a man named Jonathon Maybrick leased one of the barns for his residence and funeral parlor, which was an expansion of his funeral home business in Alvarado, Texas. It is said that he intended to get the business going, then lease it out and return to his home in Alvarado. He was able to create a state of the art embalming facility, funeral chapel, and crematory. The north end of the barn was converted into a residence while the south end became storage for the horse-drawn hearse. The land to the west of the building was used to bury folks who could not afford a plot in the city cemetery. Even today, the owner still enjoys sizable tax discounts on the property for the paupers' graves.

"The Maybricks did well at their new location, but trouble began to brew when a local criminal met his end in a botched bank robbery. During the crime, a local widower's sixteen year old daughter was shot and killed. The widower, Alfred Helm, religiously kept his three children indoors for fear of losing them like he lost his wife. In a strange twist of fate, he had sent his eldest daughter, Abigail, to the bank that afternoon. The robber, Raymond Reynolds, an out-of-work railroad employee, killed the bank teller and Abigail for no apparent reason, though it was suspected that the teller resisted the robber's demands. As he tried to flee, he was shot dead by the town's only police officer.

"After the shootings, Raymond's mother came to the morgue to make final arrangements for her son. Even though Mr. Maybrick was hesitant to arrange the funeral for such a notorious villain, he finally acquiesced because he ultimately needed the money and media attention.

"As word spread of the funeral, Alfred Helm was not at all happy to hear the news that the murderer of his precious Abigail was to receive a proper funeral when he had to lay his child to rest on his own land with his own shovel. Rumors spread that Helms would show up at the funeral and cause trouble, but on the day of the event all was quiet.

“A few months later, close to Christmas, the public’s memories of the robbery and shootings were beginning to fade, but not in Mr. Helm’s mind. Early on the morning of December 13, Mr. Helm cut the phone lines and broke into the morgue. Dressed as Santa Claus to fool the children, he made his way into the building and into each of the bedrooms. After strangling the two small children, the wife, and finally Jonathon, Mr. Helm sat in the Maybricks’ living room, in Jonathan’s rocking chair, and shot himself in the chest. How long he sat there before killing himself is unknown, but the butt of a cigar was found on the floor, and Jonathon Maybrick did not smoke.

“The note Mr. Helm left read simply, ‘Please watch after my children. They are the product of an unholy mind.’

“After years of abandonment, I believe the Red Oak Fire Department used the main house as a training ground, since it would not burn. However, strange reports of floating objects and unexplained noises unnerved some of the firefighters. After years of petitioning the town for a new facility, in 1974 they received it. Shortly after, it was determined by city leaders that the strange events that occurred on the property could make a worthy fund raiser for the fire department. At that point, the haunted attraction was born and named after its mailing street, Reindeer Road. Years later, it was bought from the city and run by an unknown family who eventually sold to the current owner. When the history of the morgue was discovered, they decided to exploit that history as well; however, they have had more problems with the barn lately than the house. Some say the true evil lies there, where Junior hung himself and Alfred did his killings.”

Suddenly, Anderson saw spots before his eyes; he grabbed the cutting board to stabilize himself as his cane hit the ground. The barbeque man reached across the cutting board and grabbed him, arresting his fall.

Anderson stood up and regained his balance, “I’m sorry, I’m not sure what happened.”

The barbeque man smiled, “That’s all right. Here, just take a sandwich. It’s on me, just sit down and take it easy.”

“Thank you.” He took it and walked over to a table. As he sat there, he thought about the history and the newspaper article. It seemed too good to be true. He recalled days of wasted time spent staring at useless monitors and listening to the unexplained sounds of rickety old homes. His mind wandered to a specific haunting in his manuscript, a haunting he called ‘classic.’

Anderson finished the sandwich, then returned to the vendor. “Thank you for your kindness. May I have your name, for reference?”

The barbeque man smiled at him. “Kevin.”

“Nice to meet you, Kevin. Say, if I wanted to investigate the house, how would I do that?”

Kevin looked toward the manor. “Well, you would have to talk to Andy; he’s the owner. Unfortunately, he also runs the special effects, so he will not be available ‘til the show is over.”

Anderson raised his cane and smiled. “Thank you, sir.” He walked away, hopeful he had found what he was looking for. He wandered over to Reindeer Manor and enjoyed the rooftop show, the customers being put in the gallows, and the overall atmosphere. He stood in line and slowly inched his way ever closer to the house. Finally, after nearly two hours, he was escorted inside. Unlike the rest, though he enjoyed the acting, he was more

enamored with the house itself. He spent a good deal of time looking up at the ceiling, trying to authenticate that at one time this was a residence.

After the show, a group of actors took Anderson to Andy. As he walked along the large concrete porch of the house, he came to a special window. Inside, a thin man in his late forties was finishing up some kind of paperwork. Around him were knobs, buttons, computer screens, amplifiers, and ropes that disappeared into the ceiling.

The man looked up and saw him. "What can do for ya?"

"I'm sorry for staying behind, but I was told I would have to wait 'til the show was over to talk with you. My name is Dr. Jonathon Anderson."

"Nice to meet you. I'm Andy. Now, you waited a long time, doctor, what can I do for you?"

Anderson leaned his cane against the window, "I want to investigate the house. How might I go about that?"

Andy sighed. "Well, during the week, I will be happy to give you a private tour. We have prices for private parties."

"No, I want to stay in the manor."

Andy sat back in his chair. "No one spends the night here, ever."

"I am willing to make it worth your while. I have the backing of the psychological department at the university. The picture we saw in the paper has generated quite a bit of enthusiasm."

Andy folded his arms. "Dr. Anderson, there are places in this house that are sealed off. Not even I will go there. You have to understand, this place is like a museum. Enjoy it while you're here, but let it be. Let whatever resides here rest. You're not doing anyone any favors by stirring up further controversies. It's just a Halloween attraction. It's best if you leave it that way."

He was not deterred. "But you know it's more, much more. You're selling the history of the house; why do you deny its true form?"

Andy sighed and his smile faded. "I made the mistake of staying in the house after I bought it. I thought it would be a neat experience, but it's not. Sometimes things happen to visitors that are out of my control, but for the most part, things remain calm. I know this sounds like bad news, but it's not. Please, go back to the university. Leave this house alone."

Anderson shook his head. If only Andy knew how much this meant to him. "I cannot do that. Though you're warning me, it's only furthering my curiosity. I am offering you one hundred thousand dollars to allow myself and a staff of my choice to reside in the manor for five days. These are my conditions: return the house to its original design and open up any sealed-off areas. After five days, we will depart and make no further requests of you."

Andy shook his head. "I don't—"

"One hundred thousand dollars plus the cost to take down and rebuild. Take it or leave it." Anderson put his business card down and walked away.

After going over his finances and realizing what he could do with the money, for the first time, Andy decided to allow an extensive investigation. The next day he spoke with Anderson's secretary and approved the deal.

Obsession



Back in the peaceful setting of his Highland Park estate, Dr. Anderson's dream was anything but peaceful...

...Anderson was standing at the main entrance of Reindeer Manor, eager to enter. The fact that he was there alone did not bother him. He reached out, but as he touched the door handle, an unanticipated sense of dread came over him. He felt he was being watched, but not from afar. He felt as if he was being stared down, inches from his face. It was an unnerving sensation.

Suddenly he heard a whisper. "Open the door."

Anderson backed away. Though it was daylight, the house looked menacing, evil, and in disrepair. At night, with all the glitz and glamour of the haunted production going on, the real dilapidation of the structure was hidden. He could tell that at one time, this house had real glory, but now its faded red paint and crumbling bricks spoke of a slow death brought on by nature.

As he stood there, he heard a crunching sound. It resembled the sound of dry leaves being walked on. The sound continued to get louder, as if someone was approaching. He turned, but no one was there. The dread continued to build. Feeling he was losing control of the situation, he decided to leave.

Cautiously, Anderson began backing away. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw something. Slowly he turned as he held his breath. The three ropes in the gallows were swinging. "It's only the wind," he mumbled. Suddenly they stopped swinging, but one of the nooses was parallel to the ground and stretched, as if someone was hanging from it.

Quickly he turned and walked with his head down, refusing to look. Suddenly he heard a door swing and a piercing scream, followed by silence. *Oh God*, he thought. He wanted to look, to see if there really was a body hanging there, but he fought it. If he looked, what would he see-- himself? No, he had to go; it was not of his concern.

As he was about to round the corner of the snack bar, suddenly he stopped. *My cane*, he thought. He heard tapping coming from the house. He turned to his left to avoid looking at the gallows. In the upstairs window, there it was, leaning against the glass. He shook his head. "They want me to come inside," he said. Arguing with himself, he closed his fist. "No, I have to leave; I have to get out of here!"

Without a second thought, he turned and walked quickly. To his surprise, he did not need the cane. Faster and faster he walked, past the iron gate as it slammed shut. He stopped and turned, but no one was there. Suddenly a cold wind blew across him. The hair on the back of his neck stood up as he felt something breathing on him.

Slowly he turned, but again, no one was there. He shook his head and then with a burst of fear-fueled energy, he began running. Self preservation had taken over, and for

him it was flight. No matter how fast he ran, he could still feel the entity breathing on his neck.

Finally, off in the distance, he saw his car. He dashed for it, his leg aching intensely; now he wished he had gotten his cane. The sun disappeared behind the clouds as music began playing from the morgue. It was a dreadful dirge.

Finally, he reached his car, but to his horror, his keys were not in his pockets. *Oh God*, he thought, *where could I have dropped them?* As he turned to go back, a glimmer caught his eye. It was his keys, in the ignition.

With a sigh of relief, he quickly tried to open the passenger door, but it was locked. He ran around to the driver's side--again, locked! As he panicked, he felt three claws digging into the back of his neck. He screamed in agony and arched his back. Finally, in desperation, he smashed the driver's side window with his fist. Blood poured from his wound, but he did not care. He jumped into the car and started the engine. With the accelerator pressed to the floor, he sped down the bumpy entrance road, hitting his head on the roof multiple times.

As he rounded Dead Man's Curve, ahead he could see the barricades. They were closed. He gripped the steering wheel with all his might and kept the accelerator pressed to the floor. As the two thousand pound car slammed into the yellow barricades, they were dislodged from their post and sent flying into the air. As his car sailed onto Houston School Road, in an incredible impact, he was ejected from the car and thrown into the tall grass.

Moments later, as he lay there bleeding, he looked up and saw another vehicle on its side, smoking. After what seemed like an eternity, the sounds of sirens were music to his ears. Though he was having a hard time hearing, he heard a witness telling a police officer, "This guy came speeding out of Reindeer Manor as the other vehicle was coming down the road, and neither one could see the other."

Anderson watched as the medics attended to him, but all he could think was, "I got out."



The alarm went off as Anderson opened his eyes. He looked all around but was confused, unsure of what was going on. His emotions were in overdrive and his heart was racing. He was terrified and unable to speak. His brain raced to make sense of what was happening. "Am I dead?" he mumbled.

"No," a voice in the darkness said.

He stood from the bed. "Who's there?"

A light suddenly went on. "What are you doing, John?"

He sighed, "Apparently suffering the effects of a nightmare."

She looked at him like he had lost his mind. "Silly man."

He took a deep breath and sat back on the bed. A cold wet sensation came over him. He quickly stood as Lauren jumped up. "Oh John, you wet the bed!"

He leaned over to smell. "No, it's sweat."

She ripped off all the covers in disgust. As she walked from the room she mumbled, "You and your dreams."

He smiled as he reached over and turned on the radio. A bright cheery voice sounded through the speakers, "Good morning ladies and gentlemen, I hope you all had a spooky

weekend, but now Halloween's over and it's straight to Thanksgiving! For all of you who missed it, the Cowboys won last night over the—”

Anderson reached over and turned the radio off. “No, it's time to work!”

Lauren walked back in, “Well, are you gonna get dressed or not?”

In a burst of affection, he walked over and kissed her deeply. After the embrace, he sat her down, his hand on top of hers. “Yes, I am!”

Lauren stood and walked around him. “What's got into you?”

He followed her with his eyes. “Success, like a gift from above.”

As she opened her dresser, she looked at him. “I assume, then, that the publisher accepted your work? I have not heard a word since you submitted it.”

Anderson lowered his head. “Actually, no, they rejected it, for a number of ridiculous reasons. However, things happen for a reason, and I may have found my most interesting case to date!”

Disinterested, Lauren smirked as she dressed. “Well, you will have to do it a bit under-dressed. I hung up the pants you wore on Friday. I did not have a chance to go to the dry cleaners on Saturday, so just wear those and we will be back on track tomorrow.”

“Yes dear,” he said instinctively.

After dressing, Anderson wandered downstairs, where he found Lauren cooking. He walked over and sat at the table as she placed a plate of toast and an assortment of jams in front of him. He picked up the peach and spread it over the toast. He smirked. Why she insisted on putting out the others was beyond him; in thirty-eight years of marriage, he had never used anything but peach.

Lauren put a plate of eggs and bacon in front of him, and though he was anxious to leave, he took time to eat.

“You're cheery today,” she said.

He nodded. “I know.”

“It's good to see this side of you again. I will come by the university later. Don't forget we have dinner reservations.”

He had not the slightest clue what she was talking about. His mind was wrapped around one thing: Reindeer Manor.

As he was driving, he could not help but daydream about the success to come. He thought of the details and knew he would change his mind often, but finally after so long, a chance to investigate again was almost too good to be true.

He pulled into the parking lot and parked in his spot. He took a deep breath, wondering what the day would bring him. Quickly he gathered his things and hurried to his office. As he entered, he was grateful his secretary was already there.

“Good morning, Dr. Anderson.”

He smiled and bowed. “And good morning to you, Mary!”

“Well, my-my, what has you in such high spirits?”

He held up a file. “Reindeer Manor, my dear, Reindeer Manor!”

She was ecstatic. It had been so long since he had gone on an investigation. She had missed his eager, often boyish excitement. “Well, it's about time!”

“That it is, Miss Mary, that it is!”

She followed him with her eyes as he walked into his office and gently closed the door.

Inside, he found everything just as he had left it: his manuscript, the letter, the newspaper. He set his coffee on the desk, then picked up the phone and called Dean Shultz. With enthusiasm, he requested to go before the special projects board. To his delight, he was added to the meeting later that afternoon.

A few hours later, Anderson stood before the council. “Ladies and gentleman, my long term project, Texas Hauntings, was rejected by the publisher. However, with suggestions from the publisher, it can be edited and reworked. Specifically, publisher wants an additional investigation, to make it nine distinct hauntings. Though there are nine hauntings already, the issue with Faring High School is to be removed.”

The council looked at him with judging eyes. The rumors about that investigation had led some to question Dr. Anderson’s place at the university.

Anderson continued, “I believe I have found my final subject, Reindeer Manor. Though this is a Halloween attraction, and though it has been investigated before by my colleague, Dr. Weinstein, never in the history of the house has an investigator spent the night. The owner has refused to allow overnight guests--that is, until now.

“As most know, my department rarely uses its entire budget. In the accounts, my department has two hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars allocated for special projects. I intend to withdraw one hundred and fifty thousand. These funds will be used to rent the entire property of Reindeer Manor and to pay for the rental cars, new equipment, supplies, and three additional assistants.”

Anderson uncovered the aerial photograph of the property.



He used a laser pointer to focus the group’s attention. “On the right, you will see the main house. This is the Sharp residence. James Sharp, of the Sharp-Hughes Tool Company, began the construction of this house, but never saw it finished. He was killed, allegedly by his secretary, who was also his mistress.

“Following his death, Mrs. Sharp sold her fifty percent of the company and remained in New York. Her eldest son, James Sharp, Jr., was given the property to complete and reside in.”

Anderson pointed to some of the other buildings. “Junior completed the estate, but unfortunately when the stock market crashed in 1929, Junior’s investments were hit hard. He and his wife did not recover from this hit, and sank deeper in debt as time went on.

“As their finances continued to suffer, they took additional actions to deal with their overwhelming debt. In the end, they blamed the death of James Senior for the family losses, stating, ‘The sins of the father will revisit the son.’

“There were several employees working the property. They reported seeing less and less of Sharp and his wife as their wealth declined. From time to time, they appeared, almost magically, in the barn, five hundred feet from the house.

“Over time, the banks and lenders grew tired of waiting for the back payments. After many extensions, the lenders lost faith in the Sharps. They sent notices of foreclosure and threats of eviction, but they would go unanswered.

“Sticking only to the facts, to this day, the Red Oak police remain unsure as to how it all played out, but Junior was found in the barn, dead by hanging, and his wife was slumped over at the kitchen table, dead by poisoning.

“It was reported that there was no heir to the estate, but it would not have mattered. The property fell to the lenders, who then sold it to the county.”

Anderson looked at the council. He was pleased to see he had not lost their attention. “That in itself would make the house worth investigating, but there’s more. A man named Jonathan Maybrick leased the barn on the left and turned it into a funeral home.”

One of the council members rolled his eyes. Anderson addressed him. “Dean Shultz, you cannot make this stuff up.”

Shultz looked at him. “I know the story. The legend of Reindeer Manor and the deaths of the morgue are common knowledge. The real issue is the use of cash. You may step outside and the board will discuss your request.”

Anderson was bit disappointed at being cut short, but he nodded and left the room.

After Anderson left, the group whispered amongst themselves. The large amount of money was a sticking point for the council. After a few moments Dean Shultz stood. “We are at a crossroads with this professor. He has taken our psychology department down an unusual road. I am concerned that our students are not receiving a proper education. However, the funds are available for Dr. Anderson by right. He has generously given up parts of his budget in the past to support other departments, so I feel compelled to vote yes on his proposal, though it may be the last time I ever vote yes for one of his projects again.”

Outside, Anderson went over everything he had talked about in his head. He began preparing himself for additional questions and even an argument. He had not asked for a substantial amount of money in years, and other departments asked for funds regularly.

Half an hour later, he once again stood before the council. Dean Shultz, head of the council, addressed him. “We have approved this project and its funds. However, you will not be allowed to choose the three assistants. You may take your secretary with you since she has assisted you with other projects. For the remaining assistants, we will conduct an intensive search for the proper candidates. The council has decided your group will consist of an additional psychologist, a medium, and an observer with no skills in psychology. Those three will write independent reports for the council; you will not be allowed to view them until the council feels this project is at an end. Are we agreed?”

Anderson was more than delighted, “Yes sir, however, I would ask that the nature of this project be kept secret. I don’t want the team to have any knowledge of where they’re going. They shall go under this agreement or not at all.”

The dean had an additional requirement. "You will also keep this project out of the media and out of police station, do you understand?"

Anderson nodded. "That seems fair."

The dean continued, "Since you want the project details classified from the assistants, then you shall write the advertisement for the candidates."

"Yes sir."

The dean sighed, worried about what was to come. "This council is adjourned."

Anderson could not have asked for a more receptive group of people. As he walked back to his office, he saw Mary leaving for lunch. "When you return, cancel my afternoon classes; a new project is afoot!"

She smiled, "Yes sir." He was a giddy as a schoolgirl.

*FROM: The Office of Dr. Anderson
University Chair, Psychology Department
TO: All Students and Faculty*

The office of Dr. Anderson will be conducting a five-day study into the paranormal during the spring break of next year. This will be an off-campus investigation at a predetermined location in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

Three candidates will be chosen based upon experience, writing ability, skill set, and project needs.

The University will hire one psychologist, one demonstrated medium, and one observer.

The observer should not be enrolled in the psychology program and is only required to possess excellent writing and descriptive skills.

The pay will be substantial, following completion of the project. In addition, the persons must complete all five days.

If you believe you possess the skills and qualities needed for this project, please submit a résumé, your beliefs on the supernatural, and a ten-page essay demonstrating your writing ability to Dean Shultz's office by the Thanksgiving holiday.

Candidates who meet submission guidelines will be contacted for an interview in December.

The Investigators

During the month of December, nearly five hundred applicants were interviewed and re-interviewed until only ten remained. Those ten were subjected to background checks, polygraphs, psychological and physical examinations, and more. Of the ten, only two passed.

The third one, a Dr. Albert Lynn Fletcher, was handpicked by Dean Shultz. In a meeting between the two, the dean outlined his expectations.

The dean handed the psychologist a cup of coffee then sat behind his massive antique desk. "Dr. Fletcher, having come from out of state, you bring a refreshing point of view to this institution. I want you to accompany Dr. Anderson on his project in March. Unfortunately, we do not have a teaching position open at this time, but we do have an opening in the summer for an adjunct professor."

Fletcher nodded at him. "Can I ask why you want me to accompany Dr. Anderson?"

Schulz frowned. "Honestly, it's best if you go without knowing. If what I think is true, you will reveal that on your own." Schulz eyed him. "Do this for me and the university will guarantee you a teaching position next fall."

Fletcher raised his eyebrows. "What about my background? It seems your human resources department cannot locate me."

Shultz stood and motioned for Fletcher to leave. "I think by the end of this project, we will have a good idea of who you are. Don't discuss our arrangement with Dr. Anderson. If he asks, tell him you were chosen by the committee, as were the other candidates. Now, please wait outside and my secretary will provide you a packet that will get you on Dr. Anderson's team."

~Dr. Albert Lynn Fletcher~

As Mary typed up new guidelines for Dr. Anderson's classes, a man in his early fifties, with dark hair, a full beard, standing about five foot nine, skinny, and with stained yellow teeth, approached her.

The stench of cigarettes announced his presence before he could speak. Mary gracefully reached into her purse and retrieved a bottle of perfume. She sprayed the pleasant liquid in front of her nose. Afterwards she looked at him. "May I help you?"

He handed her a yellow envelope. She opened it and read the judgment. She then sealed the envelope and smiled at him. "Congratulations, Dr. Fletcher; it seems you're the chosen psychologist to assist Dr. Anderson."

He smiled, "Thank you, ma'am."

Mary stood, "Let me see if he's available."

Anderson was sitting in his office, studying the ghostly image from the Halloween edition, looking for any imperfections or signs of trickery. He was as nervous about the project as he was excited.

Mary hit the call button on the intercom. "Dr. Anderson, Dr. Fletcher is here to see you."

The sudden voice startled him and he dropped his magnifying glass. It shattered as it hit the floor. He sighed and then hit the call button, "Let him in."

Mary motioned to Fletcher as he straightened his suit.

Anderson stood as Fletcher walked through the door. "Dr. Fletcher, it is good to meet you!"

"Likewise, Dr. Anderson, I have looked forward to this moment since I first heard of it."

"Yes, well, please come in. Would you like a cup of coffee?"

Fletcher put his hand up as he sat down. "No, I am fine, thank you."

Anderson smiled at Mary. She nodded and closed the door as he picked up his manuscript. He tapped on it with his finger. "Texas Hauntings, by Dr. Jonathon Anderson. I am finishing my life's work. With one more haunting, I will have definitively proved the existence of ghosts and the afterlife."

Fletcher nodded. "That's an amazing achievement." He scooted forward in his chair, nervously eyeing the manuscript. "I hope my contributions will be fruitful. The chance to assist a colleague in a project that will define his life is an honor unto itself."

"Indeed." Anderson held the manuscript firmly in his hands as he sat down. He stared at it as he talked. "You know, sometimes it seems that they call to me, the houses, as if finding them is not a random occurrence."

Fletcher did not quite understand. "How do the residents react when you arrive?"

Anderson laughed, "They often fall over backwards for me. Many times, they are at their wits' end, having all of their finances tied to the property. In addition, they are suffering extreme embarrassment, afraid if they go public, they will be ridiculed. A haunting is not just about objects that move or unexplained electrical and environmental phenomena, it's about the people who dwell within the house. Many times, the psychic energy of the resident is exacerbating the situation, or creating it altogether."

"So do you solve their problem, or is it just documentation?"

Anderson smiled. "From my end, it's pure research. In one instance, an owners of a rather large mansion in east Dallas did not want the haunting solved. In my manuscript I refer to this house as 'A Classic Haunting.' They rather enjoyed the thrill of living in a spiritually active place. However, the norm is paranoia. After the investigation, I usually contact the Catholic Church or another group on behalf of the owners. I supply them with my research and then move on."

Fletcher was intrigued. "Have you seen many haunted houses?"

Again Anderson laughed. This discussion was a massage to his ego. "Well, yes and no. I have not actually been in contact with a spirit directly. But I have seen unexplained phenomena that baffle science." Anderson folded his hands on his desk, excited to talk to someone on his own level. "I once saw water, dripping from the floor to the ceiling. It was a most remarkable thing. Another time, I saw a pen move itself across a table, jump from that table to the floor, and roll under a couch. Now, that might seem normal, but it took the pen almost ten hours to make the full journey."

"I don't actually believe that you can be contacted in a physical way by these phenomena. It's not like the movies. I am not entirely sure that whatever is causing the events is done by an intelligent being. My research is not about solving hauntings, but documenting them in a scientific way. I believe we, as an intelligent species, are still new to this planet, and though we feel we have attained superior knowledge, we are actually in our infancy about its mechanics. "

"So this is more about busting the myth of ghosts rather than discovering them."

"It's a good method to use. By doing the research in a scientific manner, I hope that my findings can be rationalized. I believe if I go into a house looking for evidence of an unexplained intelligence, I will find it simply because I am looking for it. My mind will fill in the gaps. Therefore, for me to be convinced of paranormal activity, it has to come as I seek to disprove it."

Fletcher had chills running up and down his spine. "Do you think we will see such unexplained phenomena at the location you have chosen?"

“Oh yes, and much more. I have made sure to keep the location an absolute secret, so as not to skew the data in any way.”

Fletcher smiled. “Well, it sounds like a dream. I cannot wait to get started!”

Anderson stood and showed him to the door. “First week in March, 9 a.m. - Monday morning - outside this building. I will check with you before then, but that’s when we make history!”

As Fletcher walked out the door, Anderson grabbed his arm. “Now remember, you’re under contract not to discuss this with anyone, not even family.”

Fletcher looked at him. “My family is up north, so I guarantee you, that will not be an issue.”

~Amy~

The next day, a young brunette walked into the office. Mary recognized her. “I was curious if you were going to be chosen for this investigation. I am sure Dr. Anderson will be pleased to see you again!”

Amy walked over and handed her a yellow envelope, just as Dr. Fletcher had. Mary opened it as Amy gave her a warning. “Dr. Anderson does not remember me. After his concussion during the Bowser Street Haunting, I am once again a stranger to him. For his mental safety, you are not to tell him about my prior involvement with his life’s work. Do you understand?”

Mary knew that a warning coming from Amy was as serious as a nail in a coffin. “I understand.”

Amy looked at her with a blank expression. “I don’t think your romance is going to work out.”

Mary was stunned at Amy’s cold words, but that was exactly what she had been thinking all morning. For so long she had desired to be married to the professor. She stumbled out of her chair, “I’ll...I’ll...s...see if Dr. Anderson’s available.”

Amy stopped her. “Yes, he is. He is doing something right now that he would give anything to put aside.”

Mary watched Amy walk straight to his office, “You know you cannot just—”

Amy ignored her and entered.

Inside, Dr. Anderson was grading project papers from his advanced class. He looked up and saw the woman. “My secretary will help you, Miss, please close the door.”

She shook her head. “You don’t like doing that, do you?”

Anderson set his pen down, she was right. He detested grading papers. One of the chief complaints from his students was his turn-around time on assignments.

Mary rushed in. “I’m sorry. This is Amy; she’s the medium chosen for the project.”

Anderson smiled. “So I gathered. Well, young lady, you sure know how to make an entrance, please come in. I would ask you—”

“Coke, diet.”

He laughed. *This is going to be fun*, he thought. “Mary, if you would.”

Mary shut the door as Amy took a seat. Anderson folded his hands. “So, what do you think of this project?”

Without missing a beat, Amy replied, "We're going to Reindeer Manor."

Anderson smiled faded quickly as anger set in. "Ok, who told you that?"

"No one, I knew it before I applied. I knew I would get the job before I applied, otherwise, why waste my time?"

As Mary put her hand on the door handle, Amy turned. Before Mary could say anything, Amy said, "Bottled water will be fine."

Mary did not even get the chance to tell her the machine was out of diet. She closed the door and went to retrieve the water.

Anderson sat back in his seat. "Wow, that's quite a gift you have. If you can maintain it, you will have quite a career."

Amy looked off to the side. "It's not a gift; it's a curse, one I would give up in a heartbeat."

"Why do you say so?"

She looked at him. "Do you like presents? Christmas presents, birthday presents?"

Anderson folded his hands. "Of course, who doesn't?"

"I don't. I stopped asking for things when I was five years old. Even then, I knew what I was getting. I've never been surprised about anything, except by the people around me."

"How so?"

"I cannot maintain friendships, certainly cannot keep a boyfriend. I already know what they want and though I have seen many of my peers in good relationships, I cannot do that. I cannot let a person make natural mistakes with me, because I already know they're going to do it, so I shut them out. I once met a boy, obsessed with my body. I knew he would make a wonderful father if I allowed him into my life, and we would have several children."

"Then why did you stop him?"

Amy tilted her head. "Because I already knew how he was going to die. I cannot live that way."

Anderson sat up. "Do you sense those things in everyone?"

"No, it's usually random, but when a person gets closer to me, or the issue is about me, things become much clearer."

He looked at her grades; she was barely passing her subjects. "If this gift is so powerful, how do you explain your GPA?"

"If I got every question right, on every test, in every subject, on every grade level, do you think I would be free?"

"I suppose not."

"That's why, Dr. Anderson."

Anderson sighed. This was not the conversation he wanted to have. "Ok, back to the matter at hand--why this project?"

"Because I want to know about the afterlife; that's the one thing that eludes me. Hopefully this is one more step toward an answer I don't know, and a question I cannot ask."

He looked baffled. "Why can you not ask the question?"

"Because I don't know it, but I can sense its presence."

Anderson was beside himself with this girl. She was perfect. The committee probably had no doubt about her. He thought about her answer, then asked, "Could that be God?"

She thought about it for a moment; then answered in a slow, broken fashion. "I...don't know how to answer that; the words...don't seem...to exist in our language... that's...about the best way I can put it."

Anderson nodded. "Ok, so what can you tell me about Reindeer Manor?"

She sat up with a cold threatening stare. "It's not the same as the show, not in any way. Those who go for the wrong reason never come back the same, if they come back at all."

He smiled. "No one's ever spent the night there; we will be the first."

Amy shook her head. "I'm not talking about investigators. I'm talking about those who lived there, however briefly, decades before the house became an attraction."

He sat forward. "Is this going to be a waste of time? Should I look for something else?"

She looked off to the side. "Yes, but for a very different reason."

"And that is..."

"This will be unlike any haunting in your book. You're dancing with the devil on this one."

Anderson smiled. "Ok, so what's going to happen?"

"I cannot tell you that, because I don't know. What I do know is that your life has already changed; whatever it was before has ended. You've already been there, it's already seen you and you have no choice. Either you go for it, or it will come for you."

Anderson liked that; he liked assurances. "That will not be a problem, as we are going for it."

She looked at him in the most serious way. "It's going to attack you in a way you will not see coming, and when the final act comes, it will be a surprise. Nothing you do, nothing you say, nothing you take with you, can change that fact." She wiped a tear from her eye. "That's all I have to say about that." She stood and walked to the door. Before exiting, she turned. "Monday, 9 a.m., first week in March, downstairs." She then exited his office.

Anderson jumped up; a last minute thought hit him. He hurried out of his office and saw Amy standing by the front door. She looked at Anderson. "Because it's what you needed, to meet me."

Amy turned and left the office. Mary looked at him. "What were you going to ask?"

He was shocked. "I was going to ask if she already knew what our conversation was going to entail, then why have it?"

Mary was tempted to tell him that this was not his first encounter with Amy, but all she could muster was a whimpering, "Wow."

Anderson returned to his office and sat back in his chair. *What an amazing person*, he thought.

~Jessie~

Later in the day, a gorgeous woman with blonde hair and deep blue eyes walked into the office. Mary eyed her. She was obviously wealthy. Her clothes were designer and her purse looked as if it came from one of the high-end stores at Northpark. Mary found her

figure threatening. She looked as if she had been hand-sculpted by a master craftsman. She glanced at her chest. *Fake*, she thought and instantly hated her.

The woman walked up to her. "I'm not sure if this is where I am supposed to be."

Mary thought, *In college or in this office?* She smirked. "Well, who are you looking for?"

"Dean Schulz gave me this envelope. He instructed me to bring it, unopened, to this office."

Mary rolled her eyes. "Uh-huh, well, give it to me."

The woman handed her the yellow envelope. Mary opened it and sighed. She feared she would be spending time with this woman. In a snotty tone of voice, she said, "Congratulations Jessie; it seems you have won the position of observer."

Jessie gleefully responded, "Yes I know! So, like, what are we gonna do?"

Mary looked at her and thought, *We are not going to do anything.* "Just have a seat. Dr. Anderson is in class; he should be back shortly."

Twenty minutes later, Anderson walked in. He saw the beauty sitting, waiting for him, or at least he hoped so. He accepted the yellow envelope from Mary, then looked at the young woman. "Follow me, Miss."

Jessie stood and followed him into his office. Mary glanced at the young woman's body. *Slut*, she thought. But she also thought, *Why can't I be spoiled like her?*

Jessie stood as Anderson sat down. He laughed, "You can sit, you already have the job; this is only so I can meet you."

She sat down. "Ok, so what do you need me for?"

"Well, you read the flyer, it's an off-campus investigation into paranormal activities."

"Yes, that part I got, but as an observer, what will I need to do?"

Anderson sat back. "Well, what can you do?"

"Besides the required writing, I can cook."

"Well that's a start. What are you in college for?"

She smiled. "Elementary school education."

Anderson wanted to laugh and say, *No—you're here to find a husband.* He could tell by her behavior that becoming a teacher was not her true goal. However, he held his tongue and smiled politely. "Your goals are admirable. So let me ask you, why do you want to do this? You're a very pretty young woman, and I'm sure Spring Break is very important to you."

She nodded her head. He was right. Spring Break was important. The last two were spent at Padre Island, not all of which she remembered. "Well, like you said, I already have the job, yes?"

"That's right."

Jessie sighed, "Well, honestly it's for the money. I lost a bit a while back and I don't want to tell my father about it, so I'm here to earn it back."

Anderson eyed her, wondering if this was a joke from the dean. "You know you will not be getting paid until after the project is completed?"

"Yes, but I am ok 'til then."

He sat back. "Ok, what I expect of an observer is to keep your mind open to the possibility of unnatural events. Absorb everything around you and try to rationalize it in

your own mind. Don't worry if it does not make sense, only note that it happened. Recognize it, remember it, and confirm it without a reasonable doubt.

"Because you have no skills in psychology, it is likely that your report will be the most important of the three. Without knowledge of the intricacies of the human mind, you can provide insight that I or one of the other investigators may miss or disregard. Do you think you can handle that?"

She looked at him. "Basically keep my eyes and ears open and my mouth shut."

"That's a cruder way to put it."

"Yes, for the money, I can do that."

Anderson sighed. This was the only pick he did not care for. "Ok, well, if there's nothing else, be in the parking lot outside at 9 am, Monday morning, first week in March."

Jessie smiled and stood. As she was leaving, Anderson reminded her, "Remember, you're under contract; do not divulge anything!"

She nodded her head as she walked out. Mary glanced at her, jealous of her wealth, and Jessie could tell; she knew the look. She walked past her like she was not even there.

Later, that afternoon, Mary went into Anderson's office to pick up the graded papers. As she entered, she found him staring out the window. He turned. "What did you think of that girl?"

Mary smirked. "Little miss prissy?"

"No," Anderson laughed, "Amy."

Mary looked at him, wondering if something about her sparked a memory. "Why do you ask?"

Anderson looked at her. "She was a very odd individual, not easy to forget."

Mary thought, *But you did forget her.*

Over the next few months, Anderson visited several audio/visual suppliers to pick out the exact cameras and sensors he needed. The equipment he used in his prior investigations was not good enough for this investigation; only the newest equipment would be used. Every single detail was pored over with absolute precision. He wanted to make sure that both his equipment and his team complemented each other and the project. Though at times he was exhausted, Mary knew he was having the time of his life.

Day 1

Introducing Reindeer Manor

Finally, after months of waiting, painstaking meetings, and hours of technical study, the first week in March had arrived. Anderson had been in his office for nearly an hour. He graded papers, drank several cups of coffee, and even stared out the window. He was anxious to go. *Why aren't they here?* he thought to himself. *It's almost nine.* Though he was early, he was hoping they would be, too.

At 8:45, two white Ford Explorers pulled up in the parking lot. Dr. Anderson grabbed his cane and walked downstairs. He found the two drivers leaning up against the back, telling jokes. He walked up to them in anger. "What are you waiting for? Go up to my office, room 212, and bring down all the cases and my luggage."

The men looked at him and rolled their eyes. They knew the type of man he was, demanding and cheap. They mumbled something Spanish before heading into the building.

Anderson stood there, impatiently watching and yelling at the men to be careful but hurry up. After the men loaded the vehicles, on Anderson's command, they started the engines. "Please cool down the interior."

At 8:58 a.m., a small purple Chevrolet pulled up. Amy, the medium, stepped out of the vehicle, retrieved a bag, and then walked over.

Anderson smiled at her. "Thank you for being on time."

She did not know what to say to him. She felt as if she was going to a funeral. She managed a half-cocked smile, then got into one of the cars. Anderson did not even have to tell her which one she was riding in.

A moment later, Mary arrived. She placed her bag in the vehicle with Anderson's equipment, then stood by the professor's side and made small talk.

Two cars then drove into the parking lot simultaneously. The first one to park was a black BMW with a sorority bumper sticker. Jessie, the observer, stepped out of the car. She seemed less than pleased that this was how she was going to spend her spring break, as she sighed upon seeing the professor. The past few months had become difficult and though her family was wealthy, her father had a bit of a temper when she overspent her allowance. To her, this was a kind of self-imposed punishment.

Anderson and Mary watched as she removed her luggage from the trunk. Her suitcase was as opulent as her car. Mary stared at her; her attire was not from a low-end store. Jessie placed her bag in the same car as Amy, at the direction of Anderson. She then joined Amy. "Ugh, can you believe we have to ride in this?"

Amy just smiled at her, feeling sorry for the family life this woman endured. The facade she put on was as thin as an egg shell.

The final car, a beat-up old Dodge, parked as the tailpipe let out a final explosion. Jessie looked at Amy and curled her lip. "Don't tell me; the person in that car is joining us." Again, Amy looked at Jessie with sadness.

Mary watched as Anderson walked over to him. "Dr. Fletcher, it's good to see you again!"

"Early morning," he grunted.

Anderson was not enthused by Fletcher's demeanor. "Ok, well, you will be riding with the other assistants."

Fletcher sighed, then walked toward the vehicle with Amy and Jessie. Jessie rolled her eyes. "Oh...my...God."

After Fletcher climbed into the front passenger seat, Anderson opened the door closest to Jessie. "Ok, thank you all for coming. If I am right, you're in for a week that will change the rest of your life!" Without taking a single question, he shut the door and walked to the first car. Fletcher thought it was rude of him not to allow time for questions. Jessie thought it was rude that she had to ride with Fletcher.

* *

At Reindeer Manor, Andy watched as the last prop of the show was removed from the house. All of the walls, scenery, and most of the special effects were moved to a rented storage container in the back yard. The house looked lifeless, just as he had seen it when he bought it. The areas that were prone to the most trouble were fully exposed. He thought, *My God, what have I done?*

He was the last person out. He closed the door, hoping that he had done the right thing. Though he owned the property, he never felt he had complete ownership of the Sharps' house. As he walked past the snack bar, through the gate, across the hayride road, and into the midway, he saw the owner of the morgue, a young man dressed in a Scottish kilt, loading the final props into his hearse. The hearse was famous, almost as much as the thirty-year-old fire-truck that greeted people as they turned into the parking lot. Both were used in countless parades and civil activities.

The man closed the back door, waved goodbye, got into the hearse, and drove off. Andy got into his van, took one last look at the park, then drove to the entrance and waited for Dr. Anderson.

* *

Thirty minutes later, the two vehicles exited off I-35 and turned east onto Bear Creek Road. They entered a sparsely populated area of Red Oak, the southernmost suburb of Dallas County. Dr. Anderson rented the chauffeur-driven vehicles so no one would be tempted to leave the manor, for any reason. They were to be dropped off and then picked up at the same place five days later.

After a long and silent trip, Amy put her hand on Jessie's knee. "I can feel why you're here. I'll watch after you."

Jessie looked at her as if she was some sort of freak. "Ok." She moved her knee as Amy drew her hand back.

Fletcher turned. "I would appreciate it if you would concentrate on the here and now."

"I'm just trying to lighten the mood," Amy scowled.

Fletcher, feeling as if he was second in charge began assuming the role. "If you plan to be asset to this investigation, I would advise you to keep your attention where it belongs," he scolded.

Jessie shifted into her seat, "Where are we going?"

Fletcher lit a cigarette and slightly rolled down the window. "I don't know."

The driver grunted over the cigarette but decided to let it pass, hoping for a bigger tip.

Fletcher continued, "Wherever we are going, it has to be somewhere special. What I do know is I have been paid to do a job and I intend to see it through."

Amy sat back in her seat and admired how pretty Jessie was. She felt obsessed with the emotions and visions she was receiving. Amy looked at her costly clothing, and with her eyes, drew a line from the top of her head, down her midsection, and along her legs. Jessie caught her staring and gave her a weird "stay away from me" look. Amy raised her eyebrows and looked at Fletcher. "We're going to Reindeer Manor."

Jessie snickered, "Why do they call it Reindeer Manor?"

Fletcher was growing tired of the young girls already. He flicked the butt against the window, spraying the outside with ashes. Though he was listening, he pretended not to.

Amy looked at her. "Actually, that part is not a mystery. Reindeer Manor was named from the road, Reindeer Road. The name is for the haunted attraction only. When the house was used as a residence, as far as I know, it was unnamed. Today, the entrance to the park is off Houston School Road, which does intersect Reindeer. Though the entrance has changed, the name remains."

Jessie was intrigued. "So exactly who haunts the house?"

The driver spoke up; as long as one of the investigators knew where they were going, he no longer had to keep quiet. "The house is haunted by a number of spirits. Of them all, in my opinion, Alfred Helm is the worst. His cowardly act of lawlessness destroyed a prospering family. Sad really, but that's a part of the legacy."

In the lead car, Anderson sat back with his secretary nuzzled against him. "I hope this house is not too private," she whispered.

Anderson rolled his eyes. "No my dear, we have a full crew and a mission to attend to. Let's keep the rumor-making behavior to a minimum, shall we?"

She pouted but knew she would have her chance. After all, how many people got to live in a haunted house?

The driver of the lead car turned off Bear Creek and onto Houston School Road. The second car followed as Jessie noticed a sign. "Dangerous intersection?"

The driver glanced at her in his rear view mirror. "This part of Dallas County has seen a fair bit of tragedy. Signs like that that remind us of where we are and keep our nerves up."

As the cars made their way down the road, the sun ominously peered through the trees. The dust, kicked up by the tires, filled the air with an orange fog.

A few moments later, the cars came to a stop. The occupants of the second car watched as Dr. Anderson exited the car and walked out of sight, obscured by dust. A few moments later, he emerged from the cloud and walked toward them. As he approached the passenger's side, Fletcher and Amy rolled down their windows. "I have unlocked the barricades. This is the entrance to the property. Everything should be in place." Anderson turned as a van drove up. He looked back at Fletcher. "It's the owner; I'll only be a minute."

Andy rolled down his window as Anderson approached him. "Dr. Anderson, I'm glad you're on time."

"I'm always on time."

"Well, I've done my part. The property is ready for you, now do you have my money?"

Anderson handed him a brown envelope. Inside he found a check for one hundred thousand dollars. Andy grimaced. "Our agreement was expenses as well!"

Anderson nodded. "Yes, once you have restored the house to an attraction, contact me, and I will send out another check."

Andy did not like this arrangement, but there was little he could do about it. He rolled up the window and drove on.

Anderson turned and saw Mary standing outside of the car. He also noticed all the bags and equipment were stacked up on the side of the road. He yelled out, "Hey! What the hell are you doing?"

The driver of the second car turned, but Amy was already out of the car. He looked at Jessie. "You better help her."

Jessie looked at the driver. "Oh no, I don't help, I hire help."

Fletcher grunted, knowing he would have to take charge. He stepped out of the second car and proceeded to walk toward the first. As he did, the driver of the second car quickly got out and ran to the back, where Amy was already unloading the bags. He looked at her. "How did you know?"

She looked back at him. "I know a great deal, and while you're intending to strand us outside the gates, your wife is back home enjoying the company of your neighbor."

He looked at her as he squinted his eyes. "Mierda, ¿cómo sabes eso? Tu eres una perra mentirosa!"

She looked at him with disdain. "Go home and find out."

Fletcher walked past Anderson. "Hey! All you have to do is take us to the house, that's all!"

The driver quickly started the engine and sped off, almost immediately followed by the second driver. The women all covered their mouths as the dust filled the air. Anderson shook his head and looked at Mary, "How are we going to get all this into the house?" He pointed at the entrance of the park. "It's a mile down that dirt road."

A moment later, Andy drove back. Luckily for Anderson and his assistants, Andy was not the type of man to hold a grudge. He helped load the equipment and suitcases into his van, then drove the crew inside the park.

It was a bumpy, potholed trail. On the right side, a bank of trees separated them from a pasture. To their left was a tall grass field that seemed to go on forever.

A quarter of a mile down, the road took a sharp left turn. The trees were scarred and disfigured. Fletcher thought, *How many people have run off this road?*

After the sharp left, the road dipped into the trees and came to a three-way fork. Andy sat there a moment as he decided which way to go. The passengers looked out the window and saw a dilapidated building to their immediate right.

"That's where they used to keep the horses," Andy said.

Moments later, as Andy drove along the hayride road, he came to the iron gate. He looked at Anderson. "We're here."

The crew stepped out of the van and was face to face with the large iron gate. On top was an arch that read, "Reindeer Manor."

Andy got out and began unloading the equipment and suitcases. "I assume you don't need help from here."

Anderson shook his head. "No sir, and thank you for your help."

"One thing--someone has to ride back to the front and lock the barricades. Unfortunately, that person will have to walk back."

Fletcher looked at Andy. "I'll do it." Anderson nodded at him.

Fletcher rode back to Houston School Road with Andy. After Andy drove past the barricades, Fletcher got out. Andy looked at him. "If you sense any trouble, leave. I don't

know what the professor has promised you, but it would be better to leave alive than in a body bag.”

Fletcher was unnerved by the warning. Without saying anything, he shut the van door and Andy drove off. As Fletcher pulled the large yellow barricades, they creaked and groaned. He then wrapped the heavy-duty chain around the bars and locked it. He fiddled with the ‘closed’ sign to ensure it was properly placed.

The moment he was done, he felt a cold shiver run down his back. For a mere moment, he was frozen, as if something was standing directly behind him, breathing on him. To his relief, the sensation passed. He shrugged it off and walked back to the house without any further disturbance. When he arrived, he found the rest of the crew standing in the midway, admiring the park and the surroundings.

As Anderson saw Fletcher round the corner, he motioned for everyone to go back to the iron gate. To keep everything equal, he did not want to start this investigation with separate perspectives. Everyone would see everything together for the first time.

As Fletcher rejoined the group, Anderson smiled. “Let’s look around, shall we?” He pushed the iron gate open and entered. To their immediate left was the snack bar with a note pinned to the door. Mary retrieved it.

Dr. Anderson,

This will serve as your kitchen, as the house does not have one. Though many of the scenes and attractions have been removed, some remain. We have rebuilt the interior of the house to its original appearance, but given the short amount of time, it is not exact. On the opposite side of the park, you will find the Thirteenth Street Morgue. Just as we have done, they have returned the morgue to its prior look. I request that you refrain from going into the Dungeon of Doom, as it’s an added attraction, not associated with the history of the property.

I have instructed my crew and volunteers to stay away during your investigation. If you should need me for any reason, just call.

Andy

Fletcher rolled his eyes. “Great, a snack bar kitchen. I am sure it comes with a wide variety of healthy choices.”

Anderson motioned for the group to continue. “It will do fine for five days.”

As they turned the corner, the manor stood before them. Anderson was shocked at how much the scene resembled his dream. Aside from no glass in the windows, it was remarkably close.

“What a dump,” said Jessie, sounding almost angry. “Look at all the trash around. This whole place is trashy—broken-down cars, piles of scrap wood, old washing machines, broken-down construction equipment, busted electronics, and more. Doesn’t anyone ever clean this place?”

Fletcher rolled his eyes. “I don’t think so; besides, I have a feeling those broken items are there on purpose.”

Amy spoke up. “Yes, like a set design. Like the broken down gas station along Dead Man’s Curve, it’s made to look like that, like a ghost town.”

Anderson smiled as he too took in the ambiance. “Yes, it’s perfect. The long private dirt road, Dead Man’s Curve, the fork in the road, the old iron gates, and all the broken stuff— it’s absolutely beautiful!”

Jessie rolled her eyes. “One man’s trash, I guess.”

As they stood and observed the scene, Mary noticed, “It has no windows.”

Fletcher lit another cigarette, “Yes, it does, they’re just bricked up.”

“Why?”

He rolled his eyes and walked forward, ignoring her.

Mary glared at him. “What a jerk,” she muttered.

Anderson laughed. “We’re here, my dear; let’s not get off to a wrong start.”

The group walked onto the long concrete porch. Once they made their way to the end, Anderson pulled on the rusted steel door; however, it would not open. He pulled and pulled, but it refused to budge. He stepped back as the crew looked at him. “This is the entrance for the show; perhaps it’s not the door Andy intends for us to use.”

They walked around the house, careful to avoid holes, lumber, poles, wires, and all kinds of metal scattered about.

The smell of mold and fungus was in the air. Soon they found the reason; the backyard was filled with pools of stagnant water. Suddenly the girls were slapping their legs in a blind fury. Mosquitoes were everywhere, feeding off the living like a horde of microscopic vampires. The girls ran out of the back yard, while the professors, who were smart enough to wear pants, laughed. Their exposure to the pests was minor.

Amy, Jessie, and Mary quickly dashed back to the front porch with their legs now covered with bites that soon would itch and torment them. However, Amy was concerned for a different reason. She had not seen the attack coming. She felt as if her senses were somehow impeded. She decided to keep this minor glitch a secret as she looked over the rusty door and found something.

When the professors emerged from the back yard, they found the girls standing next to the rusty door. It was wide open. “That’s strangely convenient,” Fletcher said as he threw his cigarette butt on the ground.

Amy rolled her eyes. “Not really. I opened it. There’s a latch at the bottom.”

Jessie was standing off to the side, reading the rules for entry.

Without hesitation, Anderson insisted they enter. At his command, the group wandered in. Mary clung to Anderson as he felt along the wall for a light switch. Fletcher reached into his pocket and pulled out a small flashlight.

Jessie quickly remarked, “You’re not supposed to use a flashlight; it’s in the rules posted outside.”

Anderson mumbled to himself, “And the dean suggested you as an assistant. Wow.”

Fletcher cocked a smart-aleck smile and used the light to scan the walls for a light switch. As the light traveled along the wall, it illuminated the old, worn-out wallpaper.

Jessie kept her hands in her pockets, disgusted by the smell and look of the old house.

After a time, Anderson located an old wall switch. He flipped it, but nothing happened. “Well, that’s going to make things difficult.”

“How are we to conduct an investigation without electricity?” Fletcher balked.

“I bet this outlet is just a prop,” Anderson said nervously.

Amy and Jessie huddled together. The house was quiet, except for a creak now and then. The interior was cold and musty; the smell was pungent and difficult to get used to.

They continued on, following the wall with the flashlight. They came to an opening that led to a different room. As they entered, Jessie screamed when a cold drop of water hit her head. Fletcher quickly swung the flashlight around and rolled his eyes. She giggled when she figured out what it was.

A moment later, they found another switch, but this one did not work either.

Anderson rolled his eyes. "It's not a problem. I'll call Andy. It's just an oversight." He pulled out his cell phone, but he had no signal. "Anyone else have a signal?"

They all shook their heads. Anderson sighed, "Well, then it's by flashlight and phone-light until we find a working switch or a cell signal."

As they entered what seemed to be the living room, the air felt heavy and damp. Fletcher swung the flashlight around, its beam jumping off the shiny surfaces and dancing across the old pictures and artwork.

The flashlight illuminated a staircase, and he followed it up with the light. It stopped on the second floor, where a railing went all around the balcony. From his vantage point, he could see the second floor was also decorated with various pieces of artwork. The railing itself could be classified as art. Its long smooth handcrafted finish ended with the hand carving of a young child.

Why have they hidden this? Anderson thought. Though he toured the house as an attraction, none of this was here. How could they have restored it to this condition in mere months? That would be impossible; this must have been hidden. Suddenly he remembered the rooftop show; the staircase must be how the actors made their way up. They must use the second floor as a staging area. Anderson theorized that Andy must have exposed it for the investigation.

Fletcher looked around in disgust. "This is definitely the house of a wealthy family--Republican, no doubt."

Mary looked at him. "And I suppose you're not a Republican?"

"No my dear, my views are rather liberal. Capitalists like this deserve what they get. Their prosperity was robbery by legislation."

Anderson stopped the speech. "Political views are not a part of my investigation. Let's continue looking around."

As they walked on, Jessie had a sudden feeling. "They know we're here."

"Jessie!" Anderson snapped. He was growing tired of her quickly. Whatever respect he had for her stopped when she quoted the rule about flashlights.

"I'll keep my observations to myself," she said coldly.

"Thank you. We're here to do legitimate scientific research. How can we possibly do that if we pander to each other's fears?"

"Yes Professor, I got it, it's just—"

Amy leaned over and whispered, "Stop while you're ahead. I feel the sensation too."

They walked down the hallway to the left, with Anderson in the lead. Behind him were Mary, Amy, and Jessie, with Fletcher at the rear. The hallway twisted and turned, and eventually they came to a large door. Slowly, Anderson pushed the door and it creaked open. He looked back. "Pass me the light."

The flashlight was passed forward until Anderson had it. He then moved the flashlight back and forth. The room was ornately decorated; bookshelves ran from floor to ceiling. A large couch sat in the middle, with two chairs on either side. Under the

furniture was an old green throw rug with gold lace running along the border. In the corner of the room stood a massive grandfather clock, its hands frozen at 3:02.

Anderson walked over to the clock. "I wonder what was occurring when this clock stopped." Though it was a cheesy thought, the sight of the clock and the surroundings sent chills down his spine.

Fletcher was drawn to a large desk, which sat across the room from the clock. It was filled with legal documents, letters, and office supplies. "Do you think this is a prop?"

Anderson walked over and picked up the papers. They were yellow with age and water stained. The dates were sporadic, but all from the 1920s. "I don't think so; I don't remember it being here."

Fletcher opened the drawer on the right and found an old hand cranked flashlight. He cranked it up and it emitted a soft white light "Who said old technology is useless!"

After their brief inspection, they walked back down the twisted hallway. The light from the old flashlight flickered, causing their shadows to dance along the wall.

They returned to the living room but did not stop. They walked straight ahead and entered what appeared to be a dining room. It was void of furniture.

With a faint, almost involuntary cry, Jessie began to whimper. Amy reached forward and felt her hand. "Oh my God, you're ice cold!" She looked Anderson. "We must leave this room. It's too much!"

Anderson eyed Jessie closely, making sure it was not an act. As he touched her, he could feel a definite temperature change. His mood lightened and he nodded. "Take her into the other room."

Amy used the light from her cell phone to guide Jessie into the living room. Her temperature began to rise and she was able to breathe.

Anderson, Fletcher, and Mary continued. In the next room, they could tell it used to be a kitchen. There was a drain in the floor and pipes sticking out of the floor along the wall. Old cabinets hung from the ceiling. Mary took Anderson's arm. "What's wrong with Jessie?"

"I don't know. However, why it's happening to her and not Amy is the real question. Amy is the one who should be sensing things. It is a bit disturbing."

As they moved on, they walked into another room. As Anderson and Fletcher played the flashlights around, it appeared to be a chapel. The carpet was red and there were pews and an altar, but it was not a place of God. The cross was upside down.

Anderson and Fletcher continued to scan the room with the flashlights. On the wall were paintings of executions and debauchery. One painting had a severed hand feeding a woman grapes. Above the altar was a pentagram with eyes, horns and a mouth. Sticking out of the mouth was a snake-like tongue completing the blasphemous display.

"Ander—" Suddenly Mary hunched over and threw up all over the carpet. The men could not blame her as the devilish chapel was very unnerving.

Fletcher quickly walked up and grabbed Anderson by the arm, "Are you going to tell me that a group of young Boy Scouts designed this room?!"

Anderson was perplexed. The letter clearly stated they returned the house to its previous condition, but this room was beyond a needed display. Something was wrong.

As they helped Mary back into the living room, they discovered Amy was missing. Anderson stepped forward. "Where is—"

"I don't know," interrupted Jessie. "She brought me back in here, but we heard noises coming from the dining room. When I looked back, she was gone."

“Damn.” Anderson had enough to worry about. He did not need a lost medium on his hands. “I’m sure she’s fine. She probably went outside for a bit; let her be.” He returned to the chapel but was shocked. The vomit was gone! Suddenly a sensation came over him. The room felt cold and confined. He no longer wanted to be there. The memory of his dream began to return. Without missing a beat, he turned and joined the others, though he kept his experience to himself.

As Anderson walked in, he noticed Fletcher was missing.

Near the entrance, Fletcher was calling out, “Amy, can you hear me?”

A few moments later, he found her, shivering in a corner by the front door. “Amy, what are you doing here all alone? You had us worried sick!”

“I’m sorry, but I had to get away from the dining room. Something is in there, something horrid.”

Fletcher theorized that the sensation she was feeling was actually coming from the chapel and not the dining room. “We have to rejoin the others.”

She nodded. “All right.”

As Fletcher helped her back into the living room, Anderson walked over to her. “Don’t you ever do that again! Never, under any circumstances leave the group, do you understand?”

“I’m sorry,” she cried.

He took a deep breath. “All right, people, let’s calm down. I think the scope of our project is beginning to overwhelm us. Let’s restart.”

Settling In

After Amy had regained her composure, Anderson stood. “It’s time to go upstairs. I’ll lead. Fletcher, take the rear.”

The group looked at one another but did not argue. Slowly they ascended the stairs. Suddenly, Anderson’s flashlight went out. He paused as the house began to creak. Their senses were in overdrive, expecting anything to happen. Fletcher quickly wound the old flashlight and passed it forward. Anderson nodded at him, then continued.

At the top of the stairs, they had four choices. There were two doors that stood opposite the railing, about twenty feet apart, and a door at each end.

Mary whispered, “It did not look this big from the outside.”

Anderson opted to skip the first door and instead open the second. Inside he found a marvelous bedroom, full of ornate furniture. Along the left wall, there was a single bed, obviously handmade, nearly twice the size of a standard king. On either side of the bed were old hand-carved bedside tables. Above the bed was a small but elegant chandelier. As Anderson held the light to the chandelier, the light bounced all over the room, softly illuminating it.

The group walked in, astonished at the intricacies of the decorations.

Anderson pointed the light at the ceiling. It was a hand painted mural of children and angels. Their faces were sad and their eyes seemed to follow the light.

On the left side of the bed was a large passageway. He wandered in as the rest of the group followed.

On the left and right were nearly identical opulent bathrooms. On the left was a white marbled bathroom with large shower. In addition, there was a bathtub built for two that more resembled a hot tub. The mirror above the sink was framed in gold and easily ten feet high. The other bathroom was decorated with black marble. The shower, tub, and sink all matched. Mary walked over and turned on the shower. The pipe wheezed and strained. At first, the water came out brown and cloudy, but quickly cleared up. It was warm and refreshing, "Well, at least something works in here."

The girls nodded their heads. They could go without electricity, but not without bathing.

Anderson continued through the passageway that led to another bedroom of equal opulence. He turned. "Amy, Jessie, and Fletcher will take the first room. Mary and I will take this one."

The two girls looked at each other. Why would the professor want his secretary with him? Moreover, Jessie wondered why she had to sleep in the same room as Fletcher. She thought it would make more sense for the girls to take one room and the guys to take the other. Fletcher was having the same thoughts, though the idea of staying in a room with such young women was quite intriguing--if only for safety reasons, of course.

After exploring the second bedroom, the group walked out the door. They were back above the living room, along the balcony. Amy looked concerned. To the left was another room. Anderson saw the fear on her face and decided it was worth a look. As he turned the doorknob, the door suddenly locked. He stared at it, intrigued. Again, he tried to open the door, but it stood fast, refusing to open. He handed the flashlight to Jessie, then rammed the door with his shoulder, but it refused to budge.

Fletcher stepped forward, and together they rammed the door. It flew open and slammed against the wall. Inside, the air was old, still, musty, and damp. Jessie relinquished the light to Anderson and he scanned the room. It was a small and empty void.

"I want to leave," Amy stated.

Anderson looked around the room. "Stand your ground."

In her head she heard, *Get out*. "Professor, we need to leave, now! It's not worth it--please!"

He ignored her. The voice continued in her head. *Get out!*

Anderson wandered into the room and found a stain on the floor. It was pinkish in color. It looked as if the wood had absorbed some sort of liquid. As he walked over, the temperature in the room began to fall. He could see his breath extend out a foot or so. "This room contains something very special. There is energy at work here, an energy we must come to understand."

He knelt down and touched the stain. The wood was dry; only the dust from the floor covered his fingers. He smelled it, but nothing came to him. As he stood, he looked at Amy. Her face was ghostly white, as if she was in a trance, "Are you all right?"

"It's too late."

"What's too late?"

"We have gone too far."

He rolled his eyes and walked out of the room. The rest followed, but Amy was last. Before she closed the door, she looked into the darkness. "I'm sorry." In her head she heard, *You will be*.

Anderson walked across the balcony to the last room, just to the right of the stairs. Unlike the other door, this one gave him little trouble. Inside were props from the attraction. "A hundred thousand dollars and they forgot to check this room--ridiculous!" He slammed the door, but something was different. He could not explain it, but he felt confined, as if he were in a closet. He stood there as the others looked at him. He fought the sensation, afraid that if he showed any weakness, it would spread through the group and skew his data. A moment later, the sensation passed.

Anderson nodded to the group and made his way down the stairs and into the living room. As Fletcher walked down, he lit a cigarette. "Well, if we're going to stay here, we should find out if we can turn on the power, or at least contact the owner."

Mary nodded her head. "Yes, and retrieve our bags; they're still sitting outside."

Anderson nodded. "Let's do it."

After the group finished bringing everything in, Fletcher smiled at Amy. "Want to go for a walk?"

Amy was once again reminded of her lost gift. Something in this house was purposely blocking her senses. However, she could not give it away. She looked at Fletcher, concerned about his intentions, but going for a walk sounded good. "Sure, why not?" The two walked out of the house and into the park.

As they left, Jessie picked up an old dusty book on paranormal activity. "Doing some light reading, Professor?"

"You might be surprised at the wisdom and knowledge old books can have."

As Fletcher walked outside, he threw down the butt and lit another cigarette. He then stood still and absorbed the warm sunlight. The house was so dark and damp, he actually felt as if his skin needed to dry off.

As Fletcher and Amy stepped off the porch, they came face to face with the gallows. Though the platform seemed intimidating, to Amy, it was just dead wood. "It's a prop," she said, "nothing more."

They continued past the snack bar and walked out of the iron gate. They crossed the hayride road and entered the midway. Most of the booths were gone, but a few permanent ones remained. The midway was overgrown with grass and weeds. Yellow jackets and mosquitoes filled the air. They were careful to note which one they were slapping at.

One booth, painted red and green, caught Amy's attention. It was slightly leaning to the left and part of it looked burned. Her senses seemed to return. "There was an explosion here, sometime ago." She closed her eyes. "Someone...did something. I cannot see it, but something was very angry. It wanted this person to leave, but they didn't. Something always goes wrong for this person; they cannot seem to take a hint."

Fletcher just listened as he enjoyed his cigarette. He could not help but think, *Could we take a hint?*

A moment later, they stood in front of the Dungeon of Doom. The door was padlocked and would not give.

Fletcher tossed his cigarette on the ground. "Sure would like to look in there!" He pulled and pulled but the door would not budge.

Amy shook her head. "The note said this was not a part of the history. We should leave it alone."

He laughed. "Who would know?" He looked to his left and noticed the exit. It was not a part of the building, but rather made up of walls of painted wood. It was lined with some sort of heavy-duty black rubber.

"Fletcher—"

He paid her no mind. He walked into the exit alone. Black sheets and pipes blocked his way, but he pushed them aside and continued.

Amy sat down on a tree stump, waiting for the scream and the disappointment. Why couldn't he just listen to her? She thought of all the people who brushed her abilities aside and walked right into stupid mistakes.

As he turned the corner, a hanging corpse flew right into his face. He screamed and then laughed as the plastic dummy swung in the air. There were many corpses. Delighted, he wondered what horrors lay ahead of him. Cautiously, he moved forward, slowly. Finally, he made it to the front door, but it was locked. Disappointed, he walked out and found an angry girl waiting for him. "You know that was stupid. You really should listen to me."

Fletcher laughed. "Do you really think we will find anything here? This is all amusing for now, but soon we will be haunted by boredom."

She looked at him. *Poor fool*, she thought.

They continued past the dungeon. Amy walked to the back of the ticket booth and opened the door. Inside she found a box of flashlights, each one working perfectly. "Looks like we have a bit more illumination."

Fletcher stepped inside and looked around. "A lot of canned goods in here."

As they closed the door, they realized they were mere feet from the Thirteenth Street Morgue. It seemed much bigger than the house, at least on the outside.

In the manor, Anderson was setting up his computer and loading software. Mary was busy setting up monitors and testing video cameras. "Do you really think you will solve a mystery here?"

Anderson looked at her. "I'm not here to solve a mystery. I am here to document an actual haunting and sell it to the world."

She thought about his answer. "So if you could stop the haunting, would you?"

He looked at her with disdain. "You know that's not what I do. Why are you suddenly asking me this?"

"Because I would. I know exactly what would end it."

"What?" he said with disinterest.

She walked over, wrapped her arms around him, and whispered in his ear, "Love, baby...sex."

Jessie rolled her eyes. "Hello, I'm in the room."

Mary smiled and returned to setting up the cameras.

Though Jessie was just a bystander, there to witness anything that happened, she was becoming bored and hungry. "So, exactly how do you plan to use all of this equipment without electricity?"

Anderson looked at her. "Everything runs on batteries."

She nodded, expecting a different answer.

Anderson began questioning the intelligence that surrounded him. "What, you thought I had come unprepared? I am prepared for anything, my dear. This is not my first rodeo."

Fletcher and Amy stood in front of the massive barn door. It was slightly cracked, just enough for them to enter one at a time. Fletcher slid in first, then assisted Amy. Once inside, he played his flashlight around and realized he was standing in a theater. "Quite an unexpected find."

They covered their mouths with their shirts, as the musty smell was quite strong. The rainy season had come early that year and this leaky building obviously had not been aired out for some time. Fletcher set his flashlight down, then grabbed the massive barn door and pushed. The door groaned and creaked, but it slowly slid, allowing the light and the fresh air to enter.

Amy played her flashlight around until she came to the center beam. She felt shivers down her back. She heard a strange sound, like a rope under pressure, straining back and forth. Without thinking, she said, "This is where he did it."

Fletcher looked at her. "Did what?"

"I can feel him; he's here. He feels lonely and isolated. In his mind, everything's ruined."

He looked up, trying to see what she was describing, but nothing was there. "What are you talking about?"

She walked forward, directly under the beam. "This is where James Junior hung himself, on that middle beam, right above me."

He could see the beam, but that was all.

Amy walked toward the stage as she did her best to block out the negative energy.

Fletcher ran his hand along the back one of the old seats. "I wonder what went on in this theater." It was not impressively big. A single aisle, with seven rows of seats, led to the stage. The walls were once painted red, but now chips of paint lay on the wooden floor. Above them were the rafters of the barn. An old 1990s projector was mounted from the ceiling. "You think this is authentic?"

Amy turned. "It's not a theater; it's a funeral parlor, or at least it was."

"Well, maybe in its heyday, but now it looks like a theater; that's what I'm calling it."

The two walked down to the stage. The movie screen used by the Boy Scouts was mounted onto OSB boards, but they could tell the stage went back quite a bit farther. Fletcher felt the makeshift wall and found a hidden door. The hinges were painted matte black and could only be seen from close up. He pushed the door open to reveal the back part of the stage. He looked around for a ladder, but could not locate one. Instead, he hoisted himself up with his arms, then assisted Amy.

As they walked in, they scanned the area with the flashlights. The backstage was actually full of life. Black jumping spiders were everywhere. They ran quickly from the light. As Fletcher and Amy trained the flashlights toward the ceiling, even more spiders were descending. Fletcher quickly batted them away, though Amy did not appear rattled by the little creatures.

As the spiders scurried off, Amy's attention was drawn to the floor. She pointed to a trapdoor. "There is more to be found down there."

Fletcher walked over and grabbed the massive handle. He pulled and it opened with relative ease.

Amy stood back as her senses went into overdrive. "That's not a happy place."

Fletcher said, "You don't have to go down there."

She shook her head. “No, I am here to do a job. I cannot let my own emotions cloud my judgment this time.”

Fletcher looked at her. “This time? You have done this before?”

Amy nodded. “A long time ago, I abandoned an investigation and several people got hurt. I will not make that mistake again.”

That bit of news did not give Fletcher much confidence. “Well, good. So, let’s see what’s down there.” He looked at her, then began the descent. Once he reached the bottom, he turned and looked at Amy. Her face was obscured by the darkness; the light coming from above made her look like a moving silhouette. Her hair seemed to glow in the light, and he tried not to stare. She was a beautiful young woman and he was the dashing young professor, or so he thought. He began to fight his impure thoughts.

Amy could feel his thoughts, but decided, as she did with most people, to let it go without comment. However, since they were going to be together both day and night, she felt a bit of caution was warranted.

Making small talk to ease his perverted mind, Fletcher asked, “Why did you choose this university?”

“It was not a choice, it was where I belonged.”

Amy stepped down and listened as the sound of her footsteps echo. As she looked up, she tried to limit her senses to the room. “This place is bad. It’s as if something unnecessary happened here...unwanted...undesired.”

They shone the flashlights around, the light illuminating odd pieces of hardware. “It looks like an embalming room,” Fletcher said.

They walked around, looking at the antique instruments. They lay on a small metal tray beside a table with a drain, ready to catch the last bit of humanity and flush it away. With her eyes, Amy followed a series of chains to the ceiling. There she could see the underside of the stage. “This must be where they brought up the bodies for viewing. Odd setup for sure.” As she further scanned the room, there were racks that contained half bottles of fluid. She could not tell what they were. On the opposite side, old sinks lined the walls, some with papers on them. Broken tiles lay around the base of the walls while other tiles held fast.

Fletcher walked around and found an old wooden door. “I wonder where this goes.”

Amy walked over to him. Together they pulled the heavy door open, revealing a long tunnel. Their flashlights could not penetrate the darkness. “I wonder how far it goes,” she said.

“Only one way to find out.”

They slowly walked down the narrow corridor. It was cool and damp. The light from their flashlights struggled to extend out more than five feet.

Fletcher reached into his pocket and pulled out a cigarette, “This place gets more interesting by the moment.”

Suddenly they heard a door slam. They turned, and the light from the morgue was gone. Quickly they ran back to the old wooden door, but it would not budge.

“We’re trapped!” Amy began to cry as she beat the door, begging to be set free. Her senses completely blocked, she had never felt so vulnerable.

Fletcher put his hand on her shoulder and Amy snapped, “Don’t touch me!”

He backed away. “Calm down. We need to get out of here. No one’s going to hear us from here, so let’s continue forward; there’s bound to be another way out.”

She looked at him, worried he was going to try something. “Walk, then, and I will follow.”

Jessie was bored and tired of watching the professor and his secretary flirt. She thought, *At least he could take his wedding ring off!* She decided to go out to the snack bar and see what she could find. As she left, she heard the conversation in the living room die down. *Perverts*, she thought.

As she exited the house, she reached around to close the door, but it seemed to close on its own. She paid it no attention, as her hunger was growing by the minute. She walked over to the snack bar and entered. It was exactly as she expected, just a basic snack bar with a microwave and small stove. However, her eyes lit up when she saw the soda fountain. She grabbed a cup and filled it with ice and soda. One cup at a time, she relished the tasty drink.

After her sugar fix was satisfied, she discovered a large assortment of pots. After some digging, she located spaghetti and sauce, as well as other grocery items. She thought, *No one’s said anything, so spaghetti it is.* She put the pot on the stove and boiled the water. As she made dinner, she continued to delight in the soda fountain.

Fletcher and Amy slowly walked down the narrow corridor. Their senses were on high alert, ready to react to anything. It seemed as if the tunnel went on forever. It was nothing but dug-out dirt, reinforced with wooden arches.

Amy’s concerns with Fletcher disappeared and she grabbed his arm tightly. If anything were to jump out, she would quickly use him as a human shield. Fletcher felt her warm body pressed against his. He was not sure who or what closed the wooden door, but this was a great benefit. Amy became so terrified due the loss of her senses that it was becoming hard for her to walk forward. Fletcher held her tight and guided her.

After a few minutes, the lack of oxygen was becoming apparent. “We have to move faster,” he said. Amy nodded her head, and though she felt as if she was moving faster, she wasn’t.

Anderson and Mary had slumped to the floor in a long kissing spell. She looked deep into his eyes. “When are you going to leave that old bag?”

He looked away. *It’s not possible*, he thought. There was no way he would give up his wife for her. The scandal alone could cost him his chair at the university. He turned back around and looked deep into her eyes. “We’re together now; let that be enough.”

Mary wanted to respond, but she decided to wait, to bide her time. “If you would, please massage my feet.”

Anderson repositioned himself and took her feet into his hands. He gazed into her eyes as he rubbed. She looked back. “Silly man, do it how I like.”

Anderson smirked, then slipped her big toe into his willing mouth.

Mary leaned back in delight, both at the feel of his lips and the thought of his wife kissing the lips that sucked her toes. A moment later she reached over and picked up her phone. As Anderson continued to suck her toes, she snapped a picture, though he remained unaware of it.

Jessie finished the spaghetti and felt a bit queasy after drinking nearly seven sodas. She grabbed the big pot and hoisted it off the stove. The weight was too much and it hit

the floor, splashing searing tomato sauce onto her face, causing her to scream violently. The sauce burned, and she quickly dashed to the sink. The cold water brought sweet relief, but the damage was done. In a small mirror on the back of the door, she could see the wounds. She sighed and hoped they wouldn't scar.

Moments later, she grabbed the pot and lugged it into the house. Though it was dark, the small amount of light coming from the electronics in the living room was enough to light her path. As she entered the living room, she rolled her eyes when she saw the professor making out with his secretary. "Ahem."

The two broke off their passion and Anderson looked quite embarrassed to be caught. "I'm sorry you had to see that." After straightening himself up, he pulled her aside. "I would not report on such things if I were you."

She looked at him. "How do I know the house is not having an adverse affect on you?"

"Because it's not," he scolded.

Jessie rolled her eyes as she lugged the spaghetti onto a hard case sitting on the floor. "Well, we have no table and no chairs, but here's dinner."

Anderson responded, "Well, actually we do. Across from the snack bar are rows of picnic tables and chairs. That's where we will dine, smartass."

After hauling the massive load of pasta in, she was not about to carry it out. "Fine, you want it out there, you can carry it!" Jessie walked out of the house and over to the snack bar to further indulge in the soda fountain.

As Anderson and Mary were leaving, they noticed the bookshelf moving. They stood fast, listening and watching it turn. Suddenly Amy and Fletcher emerged. Anderson looked at them. "And where the hell did you two come from?"

"Hell," Amy said sarcastically.

Fletcher nodded his head. "There is a passageway that leads from the morgue to this house. It runs under the midway."

Anderson's mood instantly improved. He walked over to inspect the bookshelf. "What a perfect thing to have! It's so classic!" He searched up and down for a trigger to open it, but there appeared to be no locking mechanism. He pushed the shelf back and felt something engage. He tried to open it, but it would not budge. "How did you get it open from the other side?"

Fletcher looked at him. "There was a door a handle."

"Then the locking mechanism is either at the top or bottom." He began pulling on the books until one gave resistance. He smiled, pulled, and the door swung open. "Amazing. It has to be a counterweight system."

Amy was less impressed with the door and more concerned with the spaghetti. "I guess that's dinner."

Anderson turned. "Yes, why don't you take it outside to the picnic table?"

Fletcher rolled his eyes and stepped forward. "I'll take it." He watched as Anderson and Mary left the room. He shook his head, then grabbed the pot and followed them. Amy stayed and looked around the room. She felt disconnected and worried. A moment later, she joined the rest.

Jessie was outside; she had set up paper plates and utensils. Fletcher heaved the pot onto the table and together they dished up the supper. At each setting, Jessie had provided soda.

Anderson sat at the head of the table, the rest on either side. "I want to begin a watch."

Fletcher looked up at him. "Fine, who goes first?"

"I will, along with Mary."

Figures, Jessie thought.

"Though there are five of us, no one is to monitor the equipment alone. One of us will have to pull double shifts. Since it is my project, I volunteer for the first night."

How noble of you, Fletcher thought.

Jessie glanced at the house. "When was it built?"

Anderson looked at her. "Sometime in 1915. It's the second house to occupy this land. The first one burned down after a lighting strike. The family never made it out of the house."

"Weird—"

"But not just that, Reindeer Manor is built strangely. The house is made of materials that will not burn. The interior is loaded with flammable materials today, but in its time, Mr. Sharp wanted to be sure that the tragedy of the past would not revisit the future."

Jessie was quite interested. "What do you know of Mr. Sharp?"

"Well, from the stories and research done, he was a prominent businessman. He was an oil pioneer and part founder of the Sharp-Hughes Tool Company in 1908. Howard Hughes had patented a roller-cutter bit that dramatically improved the rotary drilling process for oil rigs. After Sharp's death, Howard Hughes went on to own a motion picture company. There is no telling what would have happened to Sharp, had he lived longer."

Jessie could not let him stop there. "So what did happen to his estate?"

"His widow, Estelle Sharp, sold her fifty percent in the company, and it was renamed the Hughes Tool Company. Estelle decided not to take up residence in the house and instead gave it to her eldest son, James Junior, who turned the majestic house into a prosperous farming and ranching venture. He even bred horses for harness racing."

"Go on," Jessie prompted.

"Well, by 1929, James Junior had turned the property into a wealthy estate. He added several buildings and employed quite a few workers. However, when the stock market crashed, his investments were wiped out. Soon after, he was unable to pay his bills. Subsequently he and his wife lost faith in God, feeling they were being punished—"

"Not much faith there," said Amy.

Anderson smirked. "Yes, well, in a revolt, they turned to the occult, believing only they had the power to change their fortunes. They invited strange guests to stay at the house, particularly in their bedroom. They held séances to lift the Sharp family curse, which they became obsessed with. In any case, that's all you need to know."

Jessie prodded on. "Why? Why will not you tell us the rest?"

Anderson put down his fork. "Because if I did, I could endanger this investigation. Ask no more questions of me on this subject."

Fletcher looked at Anderson. "Well, Amy sensed that James Junior hung himself in the barn."

Anderson looked at him with disdain. "Told you that, did she? Well, so much for an honest investigation."

"Lipstick on a pig," Fletcher said.

Anderson eyed him. "What do you mean?"

“The house is exactly as it is; the decorations, the show; the attraction, and your deception--that’s the lipstick. The pig is what you’re looking for.”

Amy stared into the ground. “You’re not going to have to look far.”

Anderson looked at the group, “No more questions. We are doing this my way, understand? Your ignorance on what happened out here is a part of my strategy, now eat and shut up!”

After dinner, the group cleaned up in silence. There was a bit of tension after Anderson’s rude behavior. Before returning to the manor, they retrieved the box of flashlights from the ticket booth. Each took a flashlight. The daylight was fading fast and Anderson was eager to get his first watch going.

Amy, dusty and dirty from exploration of the morgue, decided to take a shower. Using the flashlight, she walked up the stairs. She avoided looking at the door at the end, worried that the voice in her head was more than her imagination.

She walked into her room and closed the door. Though there was no power and the flashlight was her only means of light, she felt safe. It might be a false sense of security, but she would take it as long as she could get it.

As she entered the room, the light from the flashlight illuminated the walls as she played it around. The dust in the air seemed almost motionless, as if frozen in a photograph. She moved her hand through the light and the dust fluidly moved out of the way, but came to rest shortly after.

She set the flashlight on the dresser and trained it over to the bed. As she walked away from the light, her shadow got bigger and bigger. She looked about the room, opening herself up to the spirits, only to make sure she was truly alone.

Once she was comfortable, she slipped the tight-fitting shirt off and her hair flopped over her face. As she laid the shirt on the bed, her senses became even more attuned to the surroundings. She thought, *The last thing I want to do is run out of here half-naked.* She carefully walked to the door and placed her ear upon it.

Down below, Mary and Jessie were setting up the electronics as Anderson and Fletcher watched the monitors and displays. Anderson logged the time and location as each device came online.

The last room to be serviced on the first floor was the chapel. As they entered, they did their best to avoid looking at the horrid displays. Jessie kept repeating a Bible verse in her head. *‘Though I walk through the shadow of death.’* She sighed, “This is the shadow of death.”

Though her instincts were to look up, she fought them, but the chapel was not just horrid at eye level. As she set up the camera, in the last pew she saw a book. Though her mind told her no, she had to see what was in it. She picked it up and blew off the dust: Lady Chatterley’s Lover by D.H. Lawrence. *What an odd find*, she thought, *a work of classic literature in such a foul place.* She opened the book and turned a few pages. “Published in 1928.”

Mary walked over. “What did you find?”

Jessie held the book up. “Seems a bit out of place.” She continued to flip the pages until she came to a bookmark. A small arrow was drawn next a particular passage:

Her tormented modern-woman’s brain still had no rest. Was it real? And she knew, if she gave herself to the man, it was real. But if she kept herself for herself it was nothing.

She was old; millions of years old, she felt. And at last, she could bear the burden of herself no more. She was to be had for the taking. To be had for the taking.

As Jessie flipped further in the book, she found images drawn in the margins. They were pornographic and repulsive, but she felt compelled to look. They captivated her mind as she felt butterflies within her stomach. As she turned the pages, she found detailed notes, instructions to the reader, on how to act and what to say. She turned to Mary. "They acted this book out, like a play."

Upstairs, Amy removed her ear from the door. She slowly walked back to the bed, removing her bra and setting it on top of her shirt. Her senses were so tuned in, she could almost hear the hum of the flashlight as it displayed her silhouette on the wall. However, her extrasensory perception was still being blocked.

As she finished undressing, she became less concerned with the spirits and more concerned about Fletcher. Something about that man was not right. She sensed his presence. He would be here soon, almost on purpose, to claim an innocent look at her naked body.

She walked over and placed a chair in front of the door. Almost on cue, the door handle turned and the door jammed against the chair. Amy held the chair firm as she could almost anticipate his words. "Are you o—"

She rolled her eyes. "Yes Dr. Fletcher, I'm fine. Please go downstairs. I am not dressed!"

He walked away smiling. He was less interested in seeing her naked than in testing her abilities. If she were the genuine article, then she would only allow such a view on purpose. He was satisfied with her reaction. As he walked downstairs, he saw Anderson flustered.

Amy, however, was not using her abilities. A girl's instinct was what caught the near-peep.

Downstairs, out of frustration, Anderson screamed, "Chapel!"

"It's on!" Mary screamed back.

Anderson checked the monitor; it was on, but not showing video. He checked the antenna; it was on as well. "Turn it off and back on!"

"Done!"

The monitor did not flicker. Frustrated, he walked into the chapel. "Girls, go watch the monitors, please."

They rolled their eyes and returned to the living room. Fletcher was leaning against the wall, smiling at them. "Amy is the genuine article."

Jessie snarled at him. "You peeked at her, didn't you? You're such a perv."

"No, I was checking on her safety, but she blocked the door and I saw nothing. She knew I was coming, and I was sure to walk quietly to ensure it was a surprise."

Jessie did not believe him.

Anderson removed the camera from its mount and walked into the kitchen.

"Got it!" yelled Mary.

Finally, he thought. He walked the camera back into the chapel.

"Nope!"

Anderson scratched his head and yelled, "Fletcher! Get a cable; something is blocking the signal."

Fletcher looked at the girls. "Are you playing tricks on him?"

Jessie glanced at him. "Of course not."

His heart beat fast in his chest as she spoke. If he were going to peek at anyone, it would be her. Suddenly he thought, *What am I doing? I have not thought of students in this manner before; why now?* The immorality of it made him sick. He rolled his eyes and sighed.

From the chapel he heard, "I don't have all day!" He quickly retrieved a long cable and connected it directly to one of the monitors. He then fed it through the dining room, kitchen, and into chapel.

Upstairs, Amy decided she was alone and would remain undisturbed. She walked into the bathroom and stopped. Four towels lay on a small seat in the passageway between each side of the bathroom. She did not put them there, nor did she remember them being there when they walked through before.

She walked over and inspected them. After a moment, she decided to continue. She walked to the large shower on the left and proceeded to turn on the water. She was delighted that it got hot instantly. She walked over to the passageway and opened herself up one more time to the environment. The air was still and her nerves eased. She sighed, then returned to the shower.

As Fletcher entered the chapel, he found Anderson staring at the pentagram. "Marvelous, isn't it? How symmetric the lines are, perfect in form and symmetry. Look at how the lines of each cross over the next, as to draw your mind in. Within its lines lies a well of souls, and within that well are the worthy and the damned."

"Professor—"

Anderson turned, dazed and confused. "What?" He shook off the feeling and walked back to the camera. Fletcher handed him the cable and he attached it. He yelled out, "Ok!"

Mary looked at the screen. The snowy picture remained. "Nope!"

Frustrated he grabbed the camera and walked into the kitchen.

"Ok!"

He paid her no mind. He walked into the living room and swapped out the camera for another. He looked onto the screen and validated the picture. "Fletcher!"

Fletcher walked into the living room and retrieved the new camera. As he carried it into the chapel, the signal was lost.

"Damn," Anderson said. He walked back into the chapel and removed the setup. As he took the camera back into the kitchen, he heard, "Ok!"

"Thank you, Captain Obvious," he mumbled. He pointed the camera at the door of the chapel. "This will get ya."

He and Fletcher returned to the living room. When they looked on the monitor, the door to the chapel was closed, obstructing the camera's view. "Fletcher, go open the door."

As he went into the kitchen, the room felt cold. "There's a temperature drop in here!"

Anderson watched the monitors closely, but there was no activity. "Just open the door!"

Fletcher walked over and grabbed the door handle. As he opened it, the screen returned to its snowy picture.

“Damn!” Anderson was frustrated and curious at the same time. “Close the door!”

Fletcher closed the door and the picture returned.

There has to be some sort of electrical interference in that room, he thought. “Open it quickly!”

Fletcher grabbed the door handle and flung it open. For a brief instant, there was an orb on the screen. Anderson smiled from ear to ear.

The door handle flew out of Fletcher’s hand and slammed shut so hard it cracked. He dashed into the living room, where the three were huddled around the monitors.

Anderson was searching the recording, but all that recorded was the door slamming. He filtered everything but the audio. A barely audible *No* came out of the speakers. He looked at Fletcher and smiled. “We got it!”

Fletcher was less enthusiastic, being so close to the entity. “What was it?”

“A ghost!”

“What do we do about it?”

“Do? Nothing! We wait, we record, we learn all we can and we hope for more!”

Mary and Jessie were less enthusiastic. They were each questioning what they had gotten themselves into. Sure, they were being paid, but what if this entity turned violent-- what then?

Anderson nodded to Fletcher. “Open the door.”

Fletcher shook his head nervously.

Anderson shoved him. “I said, go open the door!”

He walked back into the kitchen. Slowly he stretched out his sweaty hand. As he touched the door, the ice-cold metal sent shivers down his spine. He turned the door handle, and the door opened willingly. As he did, the screen continued to broadcast.

Anderson nodded. “Move the camera into the chapel.”

Fletcher swallowed nervously. He walked over and picked up the camera with its tripod. He walked it into the chapel and set it down. Afterwards, he returned to the living room, thankful the chore was done.

The camera was still broadcasting. Anderson flipped a remote switch and the camera went into infrared mode. Nothing happened. He flipped the switch again and it went into night vision mode. The picture became grainy, but the pentagram was visible, along with the upside down cross and the tops of the pews. The pentagram appeared to be wet.

Upstairs, the hot water sprayed all over Amy’s neck and chest. It flowed gracefully between her breasts, down her torso, through her thighs, and out the drain. Her head was tilted back as she breathed in the heavy steam, unaware of the incident downstairs. Her thoughts dwelled on the room just down the hall. Was it really her imagination that told her to get out? Could it be that simple, or was something evil present?

She reached over and turned off the water, then stepped out of the shower and wrapped a towel around her head. As she used another one to dry off, the air got cold. She felt goosebumps all over her body. As she stood there, the small amount of light coming from the flashlight in the bedroom dimmed until she was in complete darkness.

She stood there, terrified and motionless. She opened her mind to the spirits. “I will not harm you.”

Suddenly something blew into her ear, and she screamed.

Downstairs, Fletcher and Anderson heard her and raced up the stairs. As they burst into the room, the light returned from the flashlight. They found Amy slumped on the floor, crying. Jessie ran to her. “What’s wrong?”

“It touched me.”

Fletcher blurted, “Where?”

Amy clenched her chest. “In my soul. For one moment, my body was not alone.”

Anderson looked at Fletcher. “We need a camera up here!”

Jessie scolded him, “Absolutely not! Put them anywhere you want, but not in rooms! I refuse to be recorded up here, is that clear?”

Fletcher tilted his head to Anderson. This was one battle they would not win. The girls assisted Amy into the bedroom as the men left.

Fletcher stood on the balcony as Anderson hurried down the stairs, then right back up again. He returned with a handful of equipment and quickly hurried to the next door over. “We can position these cameras and sensors to peer into the assistants’ room, but we must be quiet!”

Fletcher rolled his eyes, but assisted the professor. As they positioned several cameras to monitor the room and to peer across the opening, Mary and Jessie continued to comfort Amy.

Anderson was pleased. “I have pointed the directional microphone and laser sensors to only detect what’s coming from that room. Let’s leave before we’re discovered.”

After they were back on the balcony, Fletcher was quite concerned. “If we get caught filming students, the dean will do more than just fire us.”

Anderson put his finger over his lips and whispered, “I’ve done this kind of slippery-slope filming before. Don’t worry, it will work out.”

Fletcher nodded. “Ok, but what about your secretary? Perhaps the students can be fooled, but she knows your ways. Besides, the cameras in her room are out in the open.”

Anderson smirked. “Let me tell you a bit about Mary. I got her right where I want her. She will not be any problem, at least for us—”

As Anderson continued, Fletcher was detecting a change in the professor’s demeanor. He was becoming a bit more arrogant. He wondered if that was who he really was, or if the house was getting to him.

Inside the room, oblivious to the electronics now monitoring her, Amy put on her favorite nightgown. She sat down on the bed as Jessie held out her hand. “I know the pain of feeling you’re all alone in a situation. Would you like me to remain with you?”

Amy smiled at her. “No, I’m all right now. I just need to rest. Stay if you wish, but I am rather tired.”

Jessie looked at her with sympathy. “All right then, I shall return in awhile.”

Mary and Jessie were about to leave the room, when Mary overheard a conversation through the door. “—She’s been after me to leave my wife, but that’s not going to happen.”

Outside, the men were in a deep conversation. Fletcher was shaking his head. “Dr. Anderson, this will not end happily; take it from a man who knows family drama.”

“I knew that after the first time. However, as soon as I feel the right time has come, I’ll get rid of her. She’s a good person and knows her way around the bedroom, but honestly, if she thinks I’m going to give up my lifestyle for her, she’s crazy. Secretaries like her are a dime a dozen; when one wears out, you replace it with a newer, younger model. Besides, her distractions led my manuscript to wane in the later investigations. That alone is reason to cut ties.”

Fletcher shook his head. “That’s cold, a man of your stature engaging in such poor judgment.”

“Hey, I’m not her keeper. She knew what she was doing; she’s no angel here. Besides, if this house is as bad as its reputation, perhaps it will take care of her for me.”

Fletcher looked at him with disgust. “When this project is over, I’m informing the dean of your affair.”

“Fine, it’s your career. Do what you will, but don’t put me down as a reference. You screw me and I’ll make sure your name is stripped from any documentation!” Anderson stormed down the stairway in anger.

Fletcher followed, lighting a cigarette on his way down. He was not concerned with Anderson’s threat. His good name and background were not dependent on his approval.

Inside the room, Mary held her tears back. She could not allow the others to know what she had heard. She had to be strong for herself, because that’s all she had.

A few moments later, Mary and Jessie made their way downstairs. They found Anderson glued to his monitors and Fletcher standing off to the side, smoking. He watched the women descend the staircase; the light from the flashlights illuminated their eyes.

Upstairs, Amy crawled into bed and then turned the flashlight off. Instantly, she knew she was not alone. Near the foot of her bed, right next to her feet, she could hear breathing. It was so faint that she had to strain to hear it. “I know you’re there.”

The sound of slow, steady breathing continued.

She lay there, listening for any response. There was none. “Are you the one from the room at the end?”

No response.

A few moments later, she asked, “Is there something you want from me?”

No response.

She reached over and gently turned on the flashlight. The room appeared empty, but she knew better. “If you are seeking help, show me what you need and I shall provide it.”

The breathing became heavier, more labored. Now it seemed to move, crawling across the bed. She could feel the covers around her legs tighten. She sat up and felt she was nose to nose with the entity, as if it was staring her down.

“Can you give me a sign?”

She felt the room temperature drop; the room became as cold as ice. Goosebumps ran up and down her body. Suddenly she felt a cold hand touch her leg. She jerked it away instinctively. “Be nice, please. I mean you no harm. I’m going to turn out the light and go to sleep. Please respect my wishes.” As she reached for the flashlight, it was thrown across the room. The lamp shattered, plunging the room into darkness. Her heart raced, fearing the anger that surrounded her. “You don’t want to be seen. I understand, but can you tell me why you’re with me?”

In her head a voice said, *You have come to me.*

“Yes, but I am not like the others. I seek to help. I want you to find peace.”

The breathing grew rapid, like a wild beast. She felt hands pushing down on her shoulders, forcing her against the mattress. She was so tempted to scream, but at that very moment, the bedroom door opened and light penetrated the room. Instantly the sensation was gone.

Fletcher and Jessie walked in the room. Jessie whispered to him, “As impolite as it might sound, you were not planning on sleeping in the bed with us?”

Great, he thought. *A bed made for seven and I am the one on the floor.* “Well, I suppose not.”

“Good.” Jessie was not heartless. She took several layers of blankets and made a bed for Fletcher. Though she was not about to share a bed with him, she was not going to force him into discomfort. Amy lay there, listening to them. She watched as the two readied themselves for bed.

Moments later, the lights were out, and they were asleep. Amy knew the entity was still in the room. She wondered when it would make its presence known again.

Day 2



Downstairs, Anderson was more than pleased with the data he was receiving. Because of his success in secretly placing the monitoring equipment, everything had been recorded between Amy and the entity. He worked for hours to analyze the data, even after the house had calmed.

As the night wore on, Anderson was growing sleepy and had to continually slap himself to stay awake. The monitors were hypnotic and led to daydreaming.

Out of the shadows, Mary stared at him. Her anger grew over the confession of his plans. Though she wanted to stab him in the heart, she decided to continue her seduction. If she could not have him, she would break him.

Slowly, methodically, she walked up behind him and began stroking his hair. He leaned into her, enjoying the softness of her skin. She leaned down and whispered, “The others are asleep. I have not bathed today; let us partake of the wonderful accommodations upstairs.”

Anderson felt weak. Her soothing voice, the breath on the back of his neck, and her seductive invitation was more than any man could stand. He checked all of the equipment, assured it was recording, and then accompanied her to the stairs. There, as she walked ahead of him, he used the flashlight to focus in on the aging youth of her body.

He remembered the day he hired her. She walked in, nervous and dressed in yellow. From that moment on, everything else was a formality. She had the job; all she had to do was play the part.

As they entered the massive bedroom, she undressed slowly and made her way into the bathroom. Anderson watched her undress before removing his clothing.

A few moments later, without a care that his naked body would be visible to Fletcher or the students, he walked into the passageway, then into the bathroom on the left. The steam coming from the massive shower was inviting. He slowly walked over and, using the wall as a crutch, he pulled the shower door open and found his lovely secretary basking in the hot water. She turned and motioned for him to come in. As he did, he closed the large door.

Mary traded places with him and sat down on the long bench. Her flashlight sat across the shower, near the door, where it would be safe from the water. As she sat there, she noticed the shadow of Anderson cast by the light seemed to move. She watched it, but his movements made it difficult to tell if the shadow was moving independently.

He looked over at her. "It's at times like this that I forget all my troubles, don't you?" She looked at him. He was her trouble. "Not quite."

He looked off. "My triumphs are nothing in a place like this--the shower, I mean. When it comes right down to it, we're nothing but vessels, flesh and blood to carry the soul. Everything else is superficial."

She shook her head, silently disagreeing. As she continued to watch, Anderson's shadow seemed to move independently again. She watched the tiles closely, counting them. There were so many, it was hard to keep track.

Anderson continued, "If I could have it my way, all of my troubles would be put in a drawer and left for somebody else to clean up. What's life without fulfillment, and why must troubles interfere with that goal?"

The shadow continued to move. She was sure it was not Anderson. She wanted to yell out and to run, but she was almost entranced by it. She wanted to see what it would do next.

Anderson stepped out of the water. The shadow moved fluidly with him. He sat down on the bench across from her. The light reflected off the water, sparkling and illuminating the room. The water flowed unimpeded down the drain. They both sat there, motionless, and said nothing. The soothing environment was so wonderful; the most minor of interruptions could ruin the moment.

Jessie yawned and stretched. She reached out for her flashlight as a sudden sense of pressure sent her running to the bathroom. As she sat there, she noticed the steam coming from the shower. "Hello?"

No response.

After finishing, she slowly walked across the floor, across the passage, to the massive shower. She reached out and touched the handle; it was scalding hot. She shook off her hand and grabbed a towel. "Damn," she whispered. She placed the towel over the handle and opened the door. Inside she found Anderson and Mary asleep. Their skin looked as if they had aged twenty years. Quickly she turned off the water and called for help.

Hearing the cry, Fletcher and Amy grabbed their flashlights, jumped up, and ran into the bathroom. Anderson and Mary were suffering from dehydration. The three helped them into their bedroom. Jessie ran downstairs, out of the house, and into the snack bar.

She filled two cups with water and hurried back. Fletcher administered aid to them, assessing their condition and ability to continue with the investigation.

After a few minutes, both were feeling much better. Anderson looked at Fletcher. "How long was I in there?"

Fletcher looked at his watch. "I don't know. It's eight a.m. now."

He looked at him strangely. "Good God, man, I was in there nearly eight hours!"

After resting for a bit, they both dressed and prepared themselves for the day. As they did, Amy walked in and looked at the shower. It seemed quite odd that it could run for such a long time and not deplete its supply of hot water. Another thought crossed her mind: if the house did not have electricity, how did they have hot water?

Downstairs, Jessie had discovered a treat in the snack bar--real plates and silverware! She enlisted Amy's help, and together they moved one of the outside tables into the dining room. Amy did not even notice where she was. Her senses were being blocked so well that she was unaware of the change. Together, they set the table for breakfast. Afterwards, Jessie returned to the snack bar to prepare the meal. She thought it was odd that she kept discovering groceries that were not there before.

After a short time, Anderson came downstairs, eager to check his equipment. However, his eagerness turned to disappointment as he found his monitors had all gone black. Nothing was working, everything was dead. He checked his batteries and discovered the problem. His disappointment quickly turned to anger. "Damn it, I have had it! Either I get electricity or I want a refund!"

Fletcher walked downstairs, followed by Mary. Amy heard the commotion and walked into the living room. Anderson stood there, looking at them. "Where's Jessie?"

"She's outside cooking breakfast," Amy said.

Anderson smiled as he put it together. "How did we have spaghetti and soda last night?"

The group looked at each other, perplexed.

Anderson looked frustrated. "Come on, people! What runs a soda machine?"

Amy looked at him. "Carbonation?"

Fletcher got it. "Electricity."

Anderson nodded. "Right--the snack bar has electricity." He quickly walked out of the house as everyone else followed.

In the snack bar, Jessie was singing as she cooked. Anderson opened the door and noticed the equipment running. "You didn't think to tell us the stove was electric?"

She thought a minute, then bit her bottom lip. "Sorry."

He walked behind the small building and found the incoming power line. It connected to a telephone pole that ran down the hayride road, then cut west along the northern part of the midway. The group, minus Jessie, followed the line. They tracked it to a small barn next to the morgue. Anderson pulled the barn door open and found the massive electrical panel for the park. Foolishly, he walked over and threw it open, and yellow jackets exploded out of the box.

The group ran as fast as they could toward the first shelter, the open barn door of the morgue. But suddenly, as they watched in horror, the barn door slid closed on its own, locking them outside with the wasps. Amy, the youngest and fittest of the group, passed the men. Anderson did his best to keep up, but he was too slow; his leg ached immensely. His cane dug into the ground and he fought to keep it free. The wasps stung him

mercilessly, but he had to keep moving. Every sting was like being splashed with boiling water.

Amy ran to the side of the morgue and around the building, there she found an open door. She dashed in quickly, with Fletcher, Mary, and then Anderson following. As Anderson entered, he slammed the door shut, plunging the group into darkness. The group sighed and caught their breath, but then with a solid click, the door locked itself. Anderson grabbed the door, but it would not budge. He looked at them. “Looks like we’re taking the tour.”

Amy could feel they were not alone. The farther away from Reindeer Manor she got, the more her abilities returned. She closed her eyes and let her senses take over.

The air was still and heavy. Though it was a warm morning, it was cold in the morgue, almost freezing. Fletcher flipped on his flashlight and saw two beds before them. They were small, only five feet long at most. A single plain white sheet covered each, along with a pillow at the top. The beds had indentions in them that moved slowly.

The rest of the group turned on their flashlights. As the beds creaked softly, Amy knelt beside them. “The children sleep.” She reached out to each, as if to put her hand on their heads. The air just above the bed was even colder. She did not feel threatened, but at peace. “They are spared the horrors of this place. They sleep ‘til the final judgment.”

As she stood, Anderson took the lead, his flashlight trained a few feet before him as he entered the next room. Amy wrapped her arms around herself as she followed. This room was even colder. The presence in here was dark--not evil, but troubled. She wanted to leave, to run, to escape, but they had to move forward. They had to find another exit. She held on to Mary, and crept forward. She scanned the walls, noting the antique pictures; one in particular was calling to her.



Amy could not hold back. “We must leave this room. There is a hateful, vengeful entity in here. It’s watching us and wants us to die. Every moment we stay, its hatred grows.”

The group looked at her and decided to heed her advice. They moved into the next room, and Amy’s demeanor changed. She suddenly cried uncontrollably. Anderson walked to her. “What do you feel?”

“Absolute sadness and loss,” she said as she dabbed her eyes with her shirt. “Something in here lost the will to live and it allowed itself to be killed.” She slipped into a trance; she could see the horror before her eyes. As the group listened, she recounted the events.

“He woke just before his wife died, and he saw the look in her eyes, the look of hopelessness. She reached for him, but her hand fell to the bed as her soul slipped from her body. He was shocked, but even before he could react, someone grabbed and choked him. It was over before he knew it, but in death, he is trapped in this moment, unable to escape.”

Anderson put his hand on her shoulder. “What else do you see?”

“Someone is walking back into the living room, a man— wait— now he’s walking into the kitchen. He has found the liquor. Without hesitation, he drinks. Blood is all over his hands and face; everything he touches gets smeared with it. He finishes the bottle, then wanders back into the living room. In the corner, there is a desk with writing paper. He is writing something— he then pauses. Afterwards, he stumbles to the rocking chair, which is sitting in the middle of the room. He collapses into it, sulking.

“He sits there for hours, crying over what he has done. That’s all there is--wait, no. Later he is looking outside. He sees the cows graze in the pasture and the birds fly gracefully through the air, diving, picking off the first worms of the day, but he is not happy. He sits back down, tears running down his face— now he has a gun and points it into his chest. He shot himself.” Amy looked at Anderson. “I think that’s when everything changed. His energy unlocked the house. The animals left the property for adjoining pastures of different owners. The lowest creatures--wasps, ants, spiders, and the like--remained. They took up residence in the house, along with the unlocked spirits.”

Mary put her arm around Amy to comfort her. She wiped the tears from her eyes. “It’s ok.”

Anderson turned and exited the room. The next room he found was the kitchen. For a moment, he imagined he could see the blood on the cabinets, smeared by hand. He smiled and knew he had to get equipment into this house.

As the group made their way into the entrance hall, they could hear a rocking chair going back and forth. Amy turned and peeked around the corner, compelled to look. She played her flashlight in the room, coming to a stop on the rocking chair. It was moving on its own. She froze for a moment then lowered the light. The glowing embers from a cigar suddenly appeared. She backed away slowly and rejoined the group.

As they exited, they noticed the wasps had calmed themselves. To his right, Anderson noticed a large tarp. Though the prospect of dealing with the wasps was unpleasant he, more than anyone else, wanted the electricity on. He tossed the tarp over himself and entered the small barn. The grommet holes provided very little viewing, but it was enough.

With care, he lifted the cover to the breakers. A yellow jacket nest of immense size, bigger than he had ever seen, hung before him. The wasps were shaking their wings, their attack mode on a hair trigger.

The panel was poorly labeled. Without knowing what was what, he switched all the breakers on, mumbling, "Well, we can clear this problem up."

As the group waited, suddenly there was a voice from afar. "Where's my daddy?"

The group hurried out of the building and into the midway. Again, the voice of a child called out, "Where's my daddy?"

Amy could not sense anything.

They walked toward the sound. Suddenly the organ from the morgue blasted the area with a dirge. Amy screamed at Fletcher, "It's just the special effects! Anderson must have turned them on!"

Anderson looked at the panel. The wasps were agitated by the noise. Some had taken flight; others danced around the nest, eager to attack. Anderson slowly began flipping the breakers off and on until the air was silent again. Slowly he lowered the cover and carefully exited the building. As he walked out, he looked at the morgue. Suddenly he was interested to see what was on the other side. He looked at the group. "Let's continue."

Fletcher took the lead. "Let me show you what we already found." He walked over and slid open the barn door, revealing the theater. With the power on, the old lights lit the room. As the group walked down the single aisle to the stage, he explained the embalming room. Anderson opted not to visit it at this time; his leg was bothering him too much.

The group left the theater and walked to the south side of the building. There they saw the entrance used by customers. Anderson pointed. "Let's try that."

He walked over, careful not to get his cane stuck in the mud. The small door creaked as it was opened. He walked in, observing the tall ceiling and large space. "This must be where they kept the hearse."

Fletcher prodded, "Let's walk forward and see where it takes us."

The group walked forward, thankful the utility lights were on. As they passed through another door, it opened to the outside and revealed the paupers' graves. They followed the pathway, careful to avoid the ant mounds that were everywhere. In addition, the bushes were overgrown and the fence surrounding the small area was in disrepair.

As they made their way around the vegetation, they came to a large metal door. Amy could feel the energy. "That's the utility door."

Anderson grabbed rusty old handle and the door slid open. Before them was an old metal stairway. Without hesitation, Anderson handed his cane to Mary, grabbed the rail and began the ascent.

As the group entered the top floor, it was a single room with a few open closets. The room was sterile, like an operating room. Fletcher motioned to Anderson. "It's similar to the embalming room under the stage."

Anderson put his hand up. "It is the embalming room. I don't know what's under the stage, but this room was used with the morgue. It fits the history."

Amy walked around, touching the old fixtures and medical equipment. "This is not a room of despair, but of kindness. This facility was used for good purposes. There is no ill intent here."

As they explored the top floor, they came across a secret door that opened into the theater. From here, a person could view the ceremony below. Fletcher pointed his flashlight upward and found an old pulley system. "I bet that was first used to load bales of hay."

Anderson scanned it. "Yes, but Mr. Maybrick used it to bring the caskets in and out of the embalming room."

There was no direct exit from the upper floor to the theater. They had to go back the way they came. As they walked down the stairs, Amy felt as if she was being watched. She held on to Mary, thankful they were leaving.

The group found their way out of the morgue and started back to the manor, but Anderson had to see the Dungeon. He thought to himself, *So what if this was not a part of the original property. As much as I paid, would the owner really mind?*

He grabbed a crowbar out of the ticket booth and pried the door open. He scanned the walls until he found a light switch. It was unusually high on the wall. He turned to Fletcher. "Guess that's so the customers don't ruin the show." Fletcher just looked at him. He was concerned that Anderson was overstepping his bounds.

Inside, all they found was an empty building with stacked props, wood, and design notes. Anderson walked amongst the building supplies until he came across a cooler. He opened it and to his delight, it was filled with beer. Mary stepped forward and shut the lid. "It's not ours, let it be!"

He rolled his eyes as they walked out of the building. Fletcher did his best to secure the door, then caught up with them. As they approached the iron gate outside the manor, Jessie was standing there with her hands on her hips. "Where have y'all been? Breakfast has been on the table for fifteen minutes!"

Anderson opened the door to the house and was amazed. Where he had felt his way in before, the entrance now made sense. In the dark, it felt as if he was going from room to room, but instead he was only going from the entrance through an archway and into the main living room. The darkness was quite deceiving.

The group walked into the living room, and Jessie took the lead. "Well, while y'all were off exploring the property, I got to see the beauty of the house firsthand."

Amy thought, *There is nothing beautiful about this place.* The manor looked more like a museum than a house. The staircase, intricately carved, stood out in the full light. The wood floor was beautifully preserved. All around them were details they had missed. Jessie urged them to go into the dining room.

As they entered, they were amazed at her service. The table was filled with eggs, bacon, sausage, biscuits, jelly, doughnuts, fruit, and juices. The flatware was shiny, as if it was brand new. The plates, a brilliant white, were spotless. She had found two candles, lit them in the center of the table, and surrounded them by flowers. Underneath it all lay a beautiful tablecloth with gold and red trim.

The group was not only mesmerized by the elaborate breakfast and display, the room itself was magnificent. The walls of the dining room were covered in a red and white floral pattern that ran halfway down the wall, where oak wood took over and ran to the base. The paintings, two on each wall, framed the room and gave it character. Each of the paintings was different, from a scene of the Roman coliseum to the hills of Tennessee. It was a dining room fit for the wealthy.

The mood at breakfast was somber. The only one truly enjoying himself was Anderson. So far, he was pleased with his investment. As he looked about the table, he lifted his glass of orange juice. "To Reindeer Manor: may she be as good as we hoped!"

The group raised their glasses and half-heartedly joined the toast.

Amy glanced down at Anderson. "You don't seem to be heeding my warning."

He bit off a piece of apple. "And what warning would that be?"

"That this house is dangerous. You seem to be taking the situation a bit lightly."

He squinted his eyes. "Well, how do you propose I proceed?"

"Cautiously. Don't just barrel into a situation without thinking it through. We are not here as guests of this place, but as exploiters. You're doing this for fame and fortune, ignoring the dangers."

Anderson shook his head. "I have seen no dangers."

Amy looked at the group. Everyone was staring at her. "Look at this room: it's intricately decorated. Even in a year, with proper planning, you could not achieve such a look. This room is a warning that this place is to be respected and appreciated for what it is. The ghosts that haunt this house are not here for your amusement, and if you ignore what they're telling you, you'll pay a hefty price for your arrogance."

Anderson set his fork down and sighed, "Well, let's hope you're wrong, because I'm here to finish a lifetime of work, and I expect your best at all times."

"I'm giving you my best right now, whether you like it or not!"

Fletcher enjoyed the little exchange. After finishing his breakfast, he sat back and lit a cigarette. "So Professor, tell us about the morgue. What exactly was Amy describing?"

Anderson pushed his plate away. "Really, do we have to go through that again? I'm not telling the history on purpose. I need your ignorance, for only then can your deductions have value."

Fletcher sighed. He was growing tired of this game. "When will you tell us?"

Anderson smirked, raised his glass, and said, "Soon, Junior!" The glass exploded in his hand. Jessie gasped. Anderson stood in shock. The table began to shake violently. Everyone scooted back. Suddenly every glass on the table exploded. One plate after another flew across the room. The candles went up in a massive fireball as the wax poured all over the table. Amy dodged a fork as it flung itself from Fletcher's set.

Anderson stood there, still in shock. Mary yelled, "For God's sake, duck!"

He looked at her, then fainted. The rest were dumped out of their chairs and to the floor. The chairs hit the ceiling and stayed there. Forks, spoons, and knives imbedded themselves into the walls. The remaining food spilled all over the table. The fruit rotted instantly. The orange juice boiled until the glass shattered, sending the hot liquid in all directions. The tablecloth shot off the table and into the corner.

Everyone except Anderson, who lay passed out on the floor, covered their heads and then huddled against the wall. The wind in the room was furious. Noises of growling, snarling, and panting were so loud they could hardly hear themselves. Finally, the camera exploded into a thousand pieces as the tripod fell over and struck Anderson in the chest.

There was a long pause. Though the growling was gone, the air was heavy. The table began to jump and in one smooth motion, flipped upside down and planted itself on the ceiling.

A moment later, Fletcher was the first to look. He crawled against the corner in absolute terror. The others also looked up as they scampered along the wall.

The table, tablecloth, plates, silverware, glasses, food, fruit, candles, flowers, and chairs were completely upside down and on the ceiling. They watched, and at the end of the table, they could see the fork moving. Something was eating, something invisible.

As Anderson woke up, he panicked. Seeing the table above him caused him to lose his equilibrium. A moment later, he realized it was the furniture on the ceiling, not him. As he watched, a glass lifted itself to him, as if to propose a toast. He smiled at it and said, "James Junior." As soon as he said it, the table, chairs, and everything suddenly crashed to the floor.

The group remained still for several minutes, fearful the attack was not over. They sat there, motionless for what seemed to be hours, but it was only a few minutes.

Finally, Fletcher looked at Anderson, "Shall we check the data?"

He nodded and slowly everyone returned to the living room. The recording showed everyone at the table until Anderson toasted Junior. At that moment, the recording stopped. However, the first camera to go out was the one in the chapel. It went out when Anderson toasted the property.

Fletcher lit a cigarette as he leaned against a wall in the living room. "Let's not do that again."

Outreach

After the eventful breakfast, Mary, who had slept the least, was spent. She turned to Anderson. "I'm going to take a nap."

He looked at her. "Screw off!" He was angry that his equipment had failed to capture the poltergeist activity. In his seething rage, had she pushed him any further with her intrusion, his attack would have made breakfast seem mild.

She accepted his anger and decided it was best to disappear for awhile. She slowly made her way up the stairs. As she did, she glanced down at Anderson and mentally noted his behavior.

As Mary reached the top of the stairs, she glided over to her bedroom. Upon entering, she closed the door. For the first time she got a truly detailed look at her bedroom. She had not noticed the beautiful décor of the wooden dresser. She walked over and rubbed her hands along its finished surface. It was smooth as glass, as if it was made the day before. The intricate carvings of Indians along its side were impressive. The handles on the drawers looked like real gold, with white pearls on the end. It was obviously handmade; the craftsmanship was far beyond store-bought quality.

She stepped back and marveled at the maroon walls. The straight color was broken by a forest green border that curved into the ceiling. Her mouth was wide open as she marveled at the bronze-pressed ceiling. As her eyes trailed back down, she noticed within the border was a lighter green vine with sporadic leaves. Like the dining room, the maroon came down most of the way, until it met an oak panel that extended to the floor and ran the length of the room. The floor was like that of the rest of the house, a deep colored hardwood, cherry perhaps.

She yawned, ready for a long nap, perhaps a hibernation filled with dreams of fancy, unreal possibilities, and a replenishment of the body.

Mary slowly undressed, making as little effort as possible. Though she noticed the cameras and the sensors, in her giddy mood, she did not care. Her urges began to surface and she danced seductively for the camera, hoping someone--anyone--was watching. Unlike Amy, she was hoping for an interruption. However, to her disappointment, there was none. She became completely relaxed as she slipped into her nightgown.

She spread her hands over the bed, feeling the softest material she had ever felt. No longer did she fear the dark; instead, she welcomed it. She was grateful the room was without windows. The daylight would impede a restful slumber, but now, a person could sleep anytime, and for much greater periods.

She climbed into the massive bed and stretched her feet as far as she could. Such a lovely feeling to know she could not reach the end of the bed. She lay in the middle and stretched all of her limbs out, none of which came close to the edge. *What a wonderful feeling*, she thought, *to sleep without the fear of an alarm clock*. She curled up the pillow beneath her head and gave her mind away to dreams.

Downstairs, Jessie and Amy busied themselves cleaning up the dining room. Fletcher stood off to the side smoking, appearing to be in deep thought and worry.

Afterwards, Amy and Jessie moved into the study. It seemed to be the least affected of all the rooms. Its wood paneled walls, ornate furniture, and aristocratic smell were somewhat inviting. It reminded them of some of their favorite college professors. Sometimes, within the halls of the university, it seemed if the outside world did not matter. It was a club for the better segment of society. The room seemed to capture and enhance that fantasy.

Amy pondered. Was it Sharp's room or his sons? She nosily went about the business of inspecting the desk and its contents. "Such beautiful handwriting," she said.

Jessie curled up on one of the couches. "Handwriting is a lost art."

Amy handed a stack to her. Together they read the documents, none having any meaning to them.

As Jessie was reading, she came across an order of burial. "The Maybrick funeral home."

Amy turned to her. "That's the name of the man killed in the morgue."

Jessie handed the order to her. "Look, compare the handwriting. Perhaps he used this room to escape the children. Their living area was quite small and it couldn't have been easy running a business while constantly being bothered."

Amy read over the order. Why it was on the desk was a mystery, but the handwriting for the other documents did seem to match. "I suppose it's not such a stretch to think he made his way over here from time to time. If the house was sitting empty, it makes sense he might have created a use for it."

In the living room, Anderson was poring over his data. He found it difficult to believe that all of his equipment failed at the exact time they were being attacked. At other hauntings, spirits often showed a curiosity about the equipment left in the room, though none disrupted the signal. He thought, *Perhaps the wireless signal could show some degradation, but the wired one? How could that be?* His frustration grew as he realized he had no evidence to prove what happened.

Fletcher was leaning against the wall, continuing to smoke. He seemed to find peace in his surroundings. Something was on his mind and though he found this to be a wretched place, he would rather be in here than in the real world.

The credit he was promised for this project was not quite as important to him as the money. He was extremely low on funds, having only a few days of cash reserves remaining. He found comfort as he recalled his deal with Dean Schulz. Knowing this bonus, along with the job offer, was his, even in this place, he could find peace within himself.



Mary had drifted into dreamland. She found herself in the back of a church, dressed in white, feeling giddy. She looked at the people around her, none of whom she knew.

As she walked down the aisle, people on both sides looked upon her with admiration. As she approached the front, the groom was like someone off a wedding cake. His clear olive complexion, thick dark hair, beautiful brown eyes, and smile would have melted any girl's heart. His charm and magnetism were powers only God could give.

He was a gentleman to a tee. His strong stance, large soft hands, and demeanor gave him the title of a man's man. Men admired him, women adored him, but they were all set aside. On this day, he was hers, not to share or to adore, but to join as one, forever.

Mary continued down the aisle, her eyes glued to the groom. Even from a distance, she could sense such love, as if it was enveloping her, pulling her in, but there was no need; she would go willingly.

Her mind filled with memories, and though not her own, she was willing to own them nonetheless. She envisioned a beach, perhaps at a lake, or the ocean. The sun was just cresting over the horizon, resting from a long and arduous day. Her groom lay beside her as she lay on her back, staring into the ever-deepening blue sky. He twirled her hair, saying things of fancy and teasing her with outlandish romantic adventures.

She sat up. "But what of children?"

"I shall fill your house with a variety of both sexes, a haunting of the most splendid variety. A house so filled with love that it intoxicates the entire town!"

She lay back and out of the corner of her eye, she saw a sparkle, as if a new star had been born. Her eyes focused as her heart raced. Before her, within the grasp of his fingers, was the most beautiful ring she had ever seen. She sat up in an instant.

"My darling, such a pleasure it has been during our courtship, but let us end that; let us take a new step and embrace each other as one in God's house. Let us be wed."

She accepted the ring on her finger. She thought, *A wedding is but a formality. I have been wed to you since the first day I saw your beautiful eyes.* She kissed him intensely, marveling at the fleshy feel of his perfect lips. She drew back, tears streaming down her cheeks. "Yes, my darling, I shall marry you!"

Instantly she was back in the church. She looked upon her groom's face as she took his hand. The pastor said something, but she was too involved in the moment. Time seemed to stand still; no power on the earth was greater than this feeling.

From behind her she heard, "Her mother and I do."

The pastor began to speak, but she couldn't hear the words. It was as if she was in a trance. She said nothing, reacted to nothing, but the pastor looked at her as if she was speaking and responded accordingly.

Moments later, she turned, almost robotically, as if she was programmed. The groom leaned in and kissed her, his soft lips like silk pillows upon hers. Such an embrace, a

moment in time so great it could align the planets. She held fast to him, kissing him, ignoring all that surrounded her.

To her dismay he drew back, smiling as if it was the first time he had seen her. She turned and found the congregation on their feet, applauding. Strange, she thought, she could not hear them.

As they walked down the aisle, she felt as if she was floating, as if her movements were scripted. All around her, the lights began to fade, the scenery was changing, the chapel--*Wait*, she thought, *the chapel...*



Downstairs, as Mary slept, the group sat in the living room. A lull had fallen upon them. No longer were there any questions or curiosities. The events of the morning had taken hold; whatever was there was all around them.

As the group sat silent, a loud shudder rocked the house. The group quickly rushed outside. Anderson, as usual, brought up the rear, unable to move as quickly. As he joined the rest near the hayride road, there in the distance he saw a large mass of black smoke billowing into the atmosphere.

“Someone’s bound to be hurt,” Fletcher said, impressed by the growing cloud.

Anderson knew they had to help. This far in the country, there was no guarantee anyone else had heard the explosion. “Look back in the yard; see if there is a four wheeler or something.”

Fletcher walked into the side gate off the hayride road. It led back to the staging and prop construction area. All around him were tools, scattered wood, port-a-potties, a maze of paths, and overgrown bushes and trees. He slowly wound his way through until he came to a small shed. It did not look like the other houses; obviously, it was not a part of the attraction. He looked inside and was relieved to see a golf cart.

Luckily, the door was not locked. As he opened it, the dull hum of the charger was a welcome sound. He thought back to his days on the golf course, a lovely fantasy that temporarily allowed him to escape the horror surrounding him. He disconnected the dusty charger from the vehicle and backed it out. Slowly and carefully, he guided it around the broken pieces of wood and scattered nails.



As the rest were concerned about what was happening outside the manor, Mary’s dream continued...

Time passed, and Mary was standing at the manor. She marveled at how new it looked. Nothing from the attraction was there. The air, the trees, even the sounds of nature were soothing. As she looked to the east, she could see rolling hills of farm and pasture. Cows grazed on the horizon, and all manner of vegetables grew in a field close to the house.

As she looked upon the house, she could tell it was not yet finished. She could see the construction of it, but it was odd. There were no timbers, no wood of any kind. The base of the house was a thick block of concrete. Iron girders and support beams spanned the area; it was one of the most unusual constructions she had ever seen.

She stepped onto the porch and noticed the newly formed concrete was white, almost as bright as marble. The red brick was vibrant and gorgeous, and though there were no windows yet, she could tell by the construction they were far more elegant than she had envisioned.

She walked into the footprint of the house, only having to step through the steel support columns. The roof had yet to be constructed, but she could see the lines by the girders and imagined how it would all come together. *Beautiful*, she thought.

As she continued, she noticed all the piping for the kitchen. The house was built with the latest technology of its time. It had what most Americans could only dream of.

She came to the chapel area. It was different. On the concrete, she saw it was divided. She looked, and could see the outline of the study. From inside the study area, a door was marked that led to that most horrible of places. She put her finger on the dividing line and thought, *The chapel was originally two large walk in closets, a pantry for the kitchen and a closet for the study.*

She walked back into the center of the structure. She looked at the area where the basement stairs would have been, but nothing was there. She remembered seeing Fletcher and Amy come from the secret passage, but there was no marking for it. She rationalized, *It must have been someone else who made the evil modifications.*

As she stepped out of the house, onto the newly laid dirt, the mailman came up to her. "Mrs. Sharp?"

Mary balked. "Who? No, I'm not Mrs. Sharp." But she stuck out her hand, almost involuntarily. In addition, she was not smiling, but the mailman was laughing with her. He waved and walked off. Without thinking or control, her hand opened the letter and her eyes read it.

James,

The children and I have decided to remain in New York until our new estate is finished. Though your son desires to escape the aristocratic life, I do not wish to perish under the Texas sun.

I request of you to make the house grand, even more so than the photograph sent to me. I see barns and stables, wild horses, rabbits, dogs, and children about. I want to see long flowing meadows of green from my bedroom window.

I need a suitable dining room and living room for parties and family. The kitchen must be large, modern, and easily accommodate up to thirty people.

We need to entertain the right people, from the right societies. We must show that we are old money and that the Sharp-Hughes Tool Company is a proud and stable company, worthy of large investments.

Love Eternal,

Estelle

Something inside Mary began to boil. Though she was not angry, something inside her was. She found herself walking back to a carriage. The carriage took her north, away from the house. It was not the way Anderson had led them in. Instead, it went to Reindeer

Road. To her shock, she was also crying. She moved her hands to wipe away her tears. Whatever was inside her was devastated.

The carriage took her to a large red brick home with a circular driveway. She got out and ran inside as she lost control of her emotions. There was a person there, perhaps a friend, who looked concerned, then outraged. She was given paper and a pen. She dipped the pen in the ink and wrote:

Dear Mrs. Sharp,

I regret to inform you of a most trying situation. Either it is that we are both married to the same man, or there is another James Sharp, of whom I am not aware.

I have been his secretary and mistress for many months, and we were married not a month ago.

I am sorry this letter is fraught with bad news. I swear to you on my father's grave that I was unaware my husband was already married. Though I find myself desirous to leave, I still love him and must stay.

Mrs. Sharp

† † †

Anderson and the girls stood outside the gate, watching the cloud of smoke. It rose then suddenly turned to the east in the shearing winds of the atmosphere. There were no sounds of any kind. The silence worried the group, and they each independently prayed to hear a fire truck, ambulance, or police car. As they prayed, Fletcher emerged with the cart.

Anderson climbed into the passenger's side and the girls loaded up in the back. Once they were secure, Fletcher hit the accelerator. The cart was not used to so much weight, but it slowly gained speed. Fletcher kept the pedal floored, any let-up and the electric motor could not pull the weight.

The cart bounced down the pot-holed dirt road. The girls looked at the Morgue as they passed it. They held on tight as they were jostled back and forth. The cart turned onto the lead-in road and the bumps smoothed out as the cart picked up speed. In the distance, they could see cows grazing, just beyond the tree line. They had not noticed them when they came in yesterday. After everything they had experienced, seeing the cows was a comforting sight.

Finally, after what seemed an eternity, they reached the outer barricades. Fletcher hopped off and opened them as Anderson scooted into the driver's side. He pushed the pedal and drove the cart through; Fletcher then closed the barricades and bounded into the passenger side.

As they drove north on Houston School Road, they could see the smoke ahead. The ride seemed to take forever; the small cart could not manage more than ten miles per hour, though it was doing much better on the smoother surface.



Mary closed her eyes. “Please don’t let me be in the chapel, please,” she begged. As she opened her eyes, she was outside, though time had moved forward. She turned and the house was complete! Not only that, but it was surrounded by a wonderful landscape of shrubs and flowers. In addition, the yard was well groomed and maintained.

As she looked at the front door, she was surprised to see that it was not the heavy industrial door she knew. Instead, it was a beautifully hand-carved double door with ornate bronze handles.

As she entered the house, she noticed it was not yet complete, but the staircase and the upstairs were present. She could tell the carpenters were still carving out some of the detailing on the railing. Just as before, she had never seen a construction site like this. In her time, there were architectural plans and permits, but this house and all its décor were built directly on the lot and designed as they went.

The amazing handcrafted architecture was stunning. She felt so fortunate to be able to see the house as it was in the beginning. Unfortunately, her tour ended in the dining room.

“Good afternoon Mrs. Sharp.”

Mary gazed at a woman of extreme wealth. She sat at an ornate dining room table, sipping tea. She poured another glass and pushed it toward her. “Please, sit down, Mrs. Sharp, we have much to discuss.”

Just as before, against her will, her body walked over and involuntarily sat down, partaking of the tea.

“I received your letter and decided it was best for me to view the circumstances on my own.”

Mary said something, but it was inaudible. Only her thoughts remained under her control.

“Yes, I too am sorry of the events that have taken place.”

Inaudible speaking.

“As you can understand, those from my society would not look kindly on this development. It is about our stature and place within the proper society. I can see you’re also a woman of culture and should understand the predicament we both have been deceived into.”

Inaudible speaking.

“It should be done here. They should find him here. No one knows of my travels. I can protect you, but you must do as I say, for now.”

Inaudible speaking.

“Yes, I can and shall, until then.”

Mary watched as the woman left the house. Again, the scenery changed. She found herself outside, picking flowers. She was careful to select only those of high quality and full bloom. She placed the flowers in a basket. Once she was done, she walked into the house and began laying them on the floor. Involuntarily, she made a trail of flowers from the entrance, into the living room, on each of the stairs, across the balcony, and into the far room. There she waited, but only for a moment. The sound of a man was heard. He was walking up the stairs slowly, suspecting nothing. She saw his shadow approach the

door and she became nervous. He walked in, smiling. "My darling, what a wonderful romantic you are!"

Out of the shadows came the woman. "Is she, now?"

He looked at her in shock. How could she know? How could this have happened?

He froze as she walked behind him and closed the door. "Is this what you want, two wives? Why not just ask me? I would have given you one of our maids. Why have you done this?"

"I—"

As he began to speak, she revealed the axe she had hidden behind her back. With purpose, she swung it violently and struck him in the back. He screamed and fell to the floor, face first. Mary involuntarily grabbed another axe and swung, severing his left arm.

The woman walked around him. "How dare you do this to me, James! How could you put our lifestyle at such risk?"

He put his hand up, tears streaming down his face, "Please..."

She swung, chopping off his hand. The limb rolled into the corner as blood spattered all over the wall.

Mary swung and dug the axe deep into his side.

Back and forth they went until he was reduced to a pile of chopped-up flesh.

† † †

The golf cart came to a halt in the intersection of Reindeer Road and Houston School. Two trucks, smoking and burned, lay on their sides in the ditch, both on the west side of the road. The group rushed down and was instantly sickened by the sight.

Blood dripped from both cabs. The windshields were shattered and covered in blood. The vehicles had obviously met in the intersection at a high rate of speed. It was unclear who was at fault, but it no longer mattered.

All they could do was watch as the fire spread into the interiors of both cabs. The heat was too intense to attempt a rescue. A moment later, a voice from inside the fire screamed in agonizing pain, but then fell silent.

Only the sound of the crackling fire remained. The stunned investigators could only watch from a distance. As the fires grew hotter, they had to back up. Suddenly one of the gas tanks exploded.

There was so much going on that it took the group a moment to gather their thoughts. Finally, Jessie finally reached into her back pocket, retrieved her phone, and called 911.

"Red Oak 911, what's the emergency?"

"Two trucks have collided in the intersection of Houston School and Reindeer Road."

"Thank you ma'am; is anyone injured?"

"Yes ma'am, the occupants are deceased."

"Ok, I am sending fire and rescue immediately. Can I get your name?"

"Jessie McDougal."

"Thank you, Jessie, can I record your number for a call back if necessary?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Thank you, would you like me to stay on the line 'til help arrives?"

"No ma'am, that will not be necessary."

"Thank you, have a good day."

She hung up the phone as Anderson walked across the intersection. The stop sign was missing from Reindeer Road. It was in the ditch, the pole still standing. He carefully walked into the ditch, trying not to get his cane stuck. The bolts on the sign were missing. He scanned the area and found them. They had been sheared in two, as if a saw had cut them.

Moments later, the unmistakable sounds of police cars, ambulances, and fire trucks were heard. The group stood in the road and watched as the emergency vehicles sped toward them.

As the vehicles arrived, the emergency personnel quickly swarmed the trucks, and doused the fire. However, their pace slowed once they realized the victims were deceased. They switched into recovery mode and quickly loaded the burned corpses into the ambulance. Their speed in cleaning up the sight was phenomenal. Anderson thought, *If only they could clean up accidents on Interstate seventy-five like this.*

In a span of ten minutes, the trucks were loaded onto flat beds and hauled away. Only the police remained to interview the group. Anderson explained that they were guests of Andy's and had heard the impact. They rushed over to give aid, but it was too late. He explained about the stop sign and the sheared bolts.



Mary screamed as she woke in a cold sweat. She found herself laying face down on the cold floor. Though she felt it was only a dream, the associated guilt was overwhelming. She cried for Mr. Sharp, sorry for what she had done. Suddenly she felt that even in the deepest part of her mind, she was not safe.

She stood and quickly turned on the light. At the foot of her bed was the luggage. Her clothes were strewn everywhere about the room. The luggage had been completely emptied! As she looked about the room, everything was a mess. All of the dresser drawers were flung about the room; even the bedding lay on the floor.

As she moved into the bathroom, she was shocked at the sight in the mirror! She was completely naked! Scratches and teeth marks ran from the top of her head to the bottom of her feet. She put her hands over her mouth as she cried, but she was too terrified to scream. She had to leave.

As she stepped into the hallway, she had the uncontrollable urge to go to the stairs. Though she was still naked, her terror overwhelmed her sense of modesty.

Just as she was compelled to act in her dream, she was also compelled to descend the staircase. Her thoughts seemed to abandon her as her mind tried to make sense of it all. As she walked down, it felt more like gliding, as if something was assisting her descent. Once she got to the bottom, she glanced at the snowy monitors but continued toward the dining room.

She walked through the dining room, and into the kitchen, then into the chapel. As she entered, the candles lit themselves and soft music from an absent organ began to play. She sat in the pew and picked up the novel. She ignored the text, focusing only on the margins, the pictures of debauchery, incantations, spells, and potions.

One by one she scanned them, committing them to memory. When she had seen every page, she stood. Whatever was controlling her movements released her and she suddenly she knew where she was. The candles blew out and she stood in total darkness.

Remembering where the light switch was, she dashed over, and turned on the light. A dark figure stood before the pentagram. It was the shape of a man, looking up at the horrid object. Slowly its head turned and looked at her. It was transparent, as if it was made of a light grey smoke.

Terror over took her and she screamed, but there was no one to hear her.

The entity moved toward her and she backed into the kitchen. “Stay away!” She screamed. Her hopes of safety were dashed as the figure emerged into the kitchen, staring at her. She turned and ran, through the dining room, the living room, and to the front door, but it was locked. She banged and banged, but no one answered and the door would not budge.

Slowly, she entered the living room and saw the figure waiting for her. She quickly ran up the stairs, turning to see the figure was in pursuit. She ran to the first bedroom door, but it slammed shut in her face. She ran to her bedroom, but that door slammed shut.

The figure kept coming, finally reaching the top of the stairs. Mary backed away. “What do you want?”

No response.

She continued to back away until she backed into the last door. She reached for the door handle and it opened. Quickly, she dashed into the dark room and slammed the door shut.

† † †

As the police were talking, Anderson suddenly came to the horrific realization they had left Mary alone. He wrapped up his conversation and hurried the group back onto the cart. They took off for the manor in silence. This had easily been the most disturbing week of their lives.

This time when Fletcher stepped out to open the barricades, they would not budge. The chains had wrapped themselves so tightly around the bars he could not free them. At the same time, the golf cart went dead, its battery was exhausted from the excessive weight it was forced to haul. Anderson stepped out and walked to the barricades. He stepped over and began walking toward the manor. Jessie called out, “What about the cart?”

“Leave it!” he yelled.

† † †

The room was dark and well below freezing. Mary knew where she was: this was where James Sharp died; this was where she killed him. The house creaked and strained, as if it was bending in a heavy wind.

With an expression of horror, Mary watched the door handle slowly turn. The entity was taking its time, torturing her, making her wait.

She backed as far into the room as she could. She cowered there, like a frightened animal, crying, pleading for mercy, invoking the name of God, but it did no good. The door handle stopped turning. For a moment, she felt relief that she had escaped. But her hopes were dashed when the grey figure emerged through the door.

“Please, don’t hurt me,” she begged.

No response.

It floated directly to her, then entered her body. She screamed as her vitals were mashed and twisted. Violently and repeatedly, she slammed her head against the wall. She screamed for help, pleaded for anything, but nothing was there to save her. Dizziness overtook her; the room appeared to be spinning. A pounding headache sent pain rippling through her body. It felt as if she was being sliced from the back of her neck to her eyeballs, from the inside.

She fell to her knees, gnawing on her wrist, trying to bite through. She flew back and her head slammed against the floor. She scratched at her arms, neck, and chest. She looked at herself and saw insects crawling all over her, stinging, biting, and entering her body.

“Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!” she screamed.

The entity would not let her go.

† † †

Amy, Jessie, and Fletcher beat Anderson back to the manor, but to no avail. The front door refused to open. They pulled and pulled but it would not budge.

Amy put her ear to the door. She could hear Mary screaming. A moment later, Anderson walked up. He saw the three struggling to open the door. He scanned the area for any tool that could be used. He saw the gallows and the pulleys above it. He pointed and screamed, “Quick, there!”

Fletcher dashed over and climbed the gallows. He grabbed a long rope and ran it through the pulleys. Amy darted over and grabbed the rope as he tossed it down. She threw it to Jessie and she tied it to the door handle.

Fletcher began to pull, the pulleys magnifying his strength. The girls climbed the platform and grabbed the rope. Together, they exerted nearly a thousand pounds of magnified force. The steel door peeled back just enough that they could enter. They jumped down and dashed into the house.

“Mary! Mary!” Fletcher screamed as he darted up the stairs. They searched everywhere, and finally found her, asleep in her bed, unharmed.

They decided to allow her to rest. They were unsure what they had heard before, but if she was safe, there was no reason to wake her.

Amy had a different feeling, but decided to keep it to herself. She sensed something very dangerous about Mary.

Seeds

Fletcher could not help but go over everything that had happened. First, though the note said the power was on, it wasn't. Then the front door refused to open, then subsequently Jessie's inability to go into the chapel. Afterwards, the voice from the chapel and loss of video feed, followed by the incident with Anderson and Mary in the shower, then the door from the morgue closing and trapping him and Amy

underground— of course, the whole morgue incident, then finally the stop sign, the crash, and the screams from Mary as they tried to pry the front door open, only to find her fast asleep. He thought, *There has to be a logical explanation.*

The front door was old and subject to swelling, the power could have easily been an oversight by the owner, the morgue door slamming--both times--could have been a pressure differential, the stop sign could have been old bolts, and the crash could have simply been an accident.

Still, he could not rationalize breakfast or in the issues with the chapel. He lit a cigarette and looked at Anderson. "I wonder if this place is truly haunted." He paused and exhaled. "Perhaps we've been subjected to a series of events that only implies a haunting."

Anderson was pissed at the comment. He glanced over the monitors. "Would you care to clarify your observations?"

Fletcher stood. "Let us examine this, shall we? This house is over a hundred years old. True, it is used as a haunted house attraction, but how much upkeep do these Boy Scouts really do? Have they replaced the framework of the house, even inspected it? What if we destroyed the dishes at breakfast? Deception is a powerful thing; we only assumed that we did not and some other force did."

Anderson looked at him. "You sound like a politician trying to cast doubt on the very facts he witnessed."

"Honestly I'm not sure what I saw. It happened so fast; I am not so close-minded that I take everything at face value. True, what happened seemed to be supernatural, but we are in a commercialized haunted house."

Anderson stood. "Go on."

"Those plates--how much metal could have been in them? How do we know we're not dealing with a complex set of magnets, strategically placed to cause such a scene?" He paced back and forth, stroking his beard. "Perhaps a simpler explanation, such as a pellet gun. We admired the paintings, but did we inspect them for trickery? In addition, how did the table and chairs get on the ceiling? I don't recall anybody checking for wires. If you remember, the table was set quite elegantly. A good illusionist will draw your attention to one object while they manipulate the other. It is not out of the question to assume such tricks would be implemented in an attraction made for revenue."

Anderson thought for a moment. Magnetic interference would explain the signal loss from the chapel, even in the wired camera.

Fletcher continued, "And though we have investigated every room in this house, how do we know we have seen every inch?"

Anderson was getting onboard with his theories. "We haven't." He looked upstairs. "We need to investigate the prop room."

Together they ventured to the second floor. As they approached the room, their heartbeats quickened, ready for anything.

Slowly Fletcher opened the door. The dust slightly moved as the air was disturbed. He reached in and flipped the light switch. "This is going to take some time," he said as he looked at the props that filled the room.

Anderson nodded. "Get the students."

Fletcher was excited at the prospect of busting the haunting. He hurried down the stairs to fulfill Anderson's request.

While he was up there, Anderson decided to check on Mary. He opened the door slowly and the light pierced the darkness. Her sleeping body was still, except for the rhythm of her breathing. He noticed the cold temperature of the room and that the atmosphere felt otherworldly. There was a faint sound of breathing, but not coming from Mary. He could not find the location of the sound, and it sent shivers down his spine. Slowly and carefully, he closed the door. He paused for a moment, concerned that somehow Mary was in danger.

His concentration was broken when Fletcher and the girls came up the stairs. He stood by as they cleared out the prop room. Afterwards, Anderson entered and noticed the floor, walls, and ceiling were void of decorations. He walked through, methodically examining the room for any evidence of tampering or trickery. The existence of the secret entrance downstairs indicated the house was more than it appeared. As far as he could tell, the room was sound. "Put it all back," he said as he made his way down the stairs.

Fletcher and girls did their best to place the props in the same spots they found them. Downstairs, Anderson walked into the dining room and pulled down the paintings. He then used his cane to poke holes into each of the walls. He peeked in the holes, looking for any explanation to the breakfast incident.

As the others came downstairs, he called them in. "Take it down."

Fletcher looked at him. "Take what down?"

"The walls and the ceiling. Leave nothing but the frame."

Fletcher stepped closer to him. "This house is almost a museum. We cannot just tear it apart."

Anderson looked at him. "I have bought the rights to investigate, and I intend to leave no stone unturned in the midst of a mystery."

Jessie walked past them. "I saw tools in the snack bar."

Once she returned, Fletcher and the girls began the demolition. The old drywall crumbled easily and gave no resistance. They actually derived a bit of pleasure from the destruction.

Once it was done, Anderson was both frustrated and elated. There was nothing but steel framing behind the walls. If something had been there, he would have instantly called off the investigation and called in the lawyers, but now the evidence pointed to a supernatural event. "Well, I think we've taken this to the extreme."

He walked off and returned to his monitors. As the group went to resume their activities, he eyed them. "You cannot just go off and leave that mess."

In unison, the group rolled their eyes and returned to the dining room. From the living room they heard, "There's a dumpster just on the other side of the fence, off the hayride road."

It took an hour, but the mess was cleaned up. Anderson was even more convinced this was the genuine article. The group resumed entertaining themselves and the house remained quiet, boringly unimaginative.

Hours later, Anderson was busy with his equipment. He had fully dismissed Fletcher's theory, but he took no joy in it. The equipment that he had spent months painstakingly testing and purchasing was failing him. It was one malfunction after another, no recordings since the orb and the voice from the chapel. Without further proof, witnesses would be dismissed without merit and he would stand no chance of getting his book published. He thought to himself, *Why is this so hard? Why am I made to suffer like*

this? All he could think about was his work and how it had to be completed. He felt as if his mind was cracking.

Jessie looked at the men, each deep in thought and deep in their own problems. She was the outcast of the group and felt so. Everyone else had a legitimate reason for being there, but not her. Anderson had his project, Fletcher was Anderson's second opinion, Amy was a medium, and Mary was the assistant. Everyone had something to do except her. She had to get out of there before the boredom drove her mad. She looked at them. "I'll go start dinner."

Amy watched as she left the room. The house was quiet, not just void of sound, but void of spiritual activity. It seemed plain, ordinary, and extremely boring. Suddenly she decided to have a look in the chapel. Being a profoundly religious person, she was curious about what was in there. No one had told her; in fact, they said nothing of it.

The men were so deep in their thoughts that they failed to see her walk from the living room. Fletcher lit another cigarette and began pondering his past. He worried about where the future might lead him. Anderson was reviewing data, looking for anything useful. He was tired of watching monitors that did not change.

Amy stood just outside the chapel. Nervously, she placed her hand on the door handle and turned. The door opened freely. *What is inside?* she wondered. She pictured Jesus above the altar, ornate paintings of religious figures on the wall. Beautifully hand built pews, perhaps even an antique organ, still in working order.

The room was dark, but she sensed nothing. It was empty of spiritual activity. She felt along the wall and found the light switch. As she flipped it, her expression went from delighted to sickened. "What foulness would build such a place?" This was not a chapel, but a room of the damned. There was nothing redeeming in the room, but she did not leave. She approached the altar and stared into the pentagram. "God of Heaven and Earth, even in this place of blasphemy your presence is needed, perhaps in even greater abundance. Cleanse this room of evil; cleanse this house, I pray to you. Save the souls that have been faithful and destroy the ones who have rejected you."

She walked from the room and turned out the light. From this point on, it was not a chapel to her, it was nothing. It was to be forgotten, ignored, and destroyed.

As she walked into the living room again, the men did not notice her. Though they seemed lost in thought, she wondered if something was afoot. She scanned them closely, but they seemed unchanged. Fletcher looked at her and smiled seductively. Though it was annoying not to sense what he was thinking, she found that the loss of her abilities led to other senses being heightened. She still did not fully realize how blind she had become to the house. Not only did the house block her senses, it blocked her ability to recognize that she had lost them, which was the true trick.

Where had the spirits gone, she wondered. In any case, she could not sit in the living room, staring at nothing. She walked through the entranceway and out the door.

Upstairs, in Mary's bedroom, unbeknownst to everyone else, Mary was awake. She stared into the darkness. "A foul place, destroy those who reject you--you have gone too far."

Amy stood outside the house. The calm air was interrupted by sounds of distant thunder. She quickly walked to the back yard. Remembering her earlier encounter with mosquitoes, she now wore jeans. Though the little pests attacked her, they could not

penetrate her clothing. She walked all the way to the back fence. To her delight, she saw flashes of lightning. As the spring storm approached, she could feel the change in the air. The wind picked up, circulating the dust from the entry road.

Birds flew across the sky opposite the storm, as to flee for their lives. Suddenly, from her back pocket she felt a vibration. She reached around and pulled out her cell phone. She had a fascination with weather and had recently purchased a weather application for her iPhone. As she read the update, she smiled.

Severe Thunderstorm Warning: Southern Dallas and Northern Ellis County

Perfect, she thought. She gleefully scanned the troubled skies as she made her way to the snack bar. Inside, Jessie was preparing dinner. Amy popped her head in the door. “I think you need some fresh air!”

She walked around to the front and pulled the wooden doors open, exposing the snack bar to the wind. Jessie smiled; the wind blew her hair into her face. It was a welcome relief. The temperature inside the snack bar was well into the nineties. The cool breeze made cooking enjoyable, rather than a chore.

Amy smiled, then walked over to the large pavilion. Though it was made out of metal, she did not fear the storm. She sat there, relaxed, more relaxed than she had been in months. Somehow being there, as horrible a place as it was, was in itself a vacation. None of her schoolwork, family troubles, boy troubles, or financial troubles followed her. In that brief moment, she even enjoyed the loss of her abilities. It allowed her mind to be free.

Amy followed the clouds with her eyes. As the sun was setting, it illuminated their ever-changing design. *Why do people question if there is a God?* she thought. *How can one look at a marvel, such as a storm, or even a cloud for that matter and doubt?* Nothing, in all of human history, even comes close to the size and scale of one small storm cell. The power and might of a basic run-of-the-mill thunderstorm is greater than all of the power plants combined. Humans are blind and arrogant when it comes to the world. They feel mighty and powerful, that they have conquered the world, that they alone can decide its destiny. *Such arrogance*, she thought.

The storm seemed to be gaining strength. Deafening sounds of thunder came rolling in as lightning danced across the sky. At first Amy liked the wind, but its intensity was magnified under the large pavilion.

A few moments later, she stood and walked back to the snack bar. “Mind if I get a soda?”

Jessie was busy cutting up fresh vegetables, making some sort of pasta dish. She looked up and pointed to the prices listed just above her. “Sure, what size?”

“Hmmm, I’ll take a small Coke.”

Jessie put down the knife, turned, and retrieved a small Styrofoam cup. She filled it with ice and soda, and then placed it on the counter. “One dollar please.”

Amy reached into her pockets and turned them inside out. “Looks like I am a bit short.”

Jessie looked at her and said playfully, “Well, I have already prepared your product. I cannot take it back now; it appears you will have to do some work to pay off your debt.”

Amy bit her lip. “Yes ma’am; what must I do?”

Jessie motioned for her to come behind the counter. “Come on now.”

Amy felt a sense of excitement, not knowing what Jessie was alluding to. She liked not knowing what was going to happen.

Jessie stepped back and leaned against the wall, smiling, and pointing at the bell peppers and onions. "Go on, get to work!"

Inside the house, Fletcher had made his way upstairs to check on Mary. The light from the outside separated the darkness as the door was slowly opened. The invading light illuminated the paintings, furniture, walls, ceiling, floor, and trinkets. The floor creaked as he walked across it. The room was cold enough to be a refrigerator. He was unsure if it was the air conditioning or something else. Come to think of it, he did not remember seeing an air conditioner. The house was far cooler than the outside, but this room was different; it was like ice. He remembered his footsteps being louder before. Now room seemed to be absorbing the sound. He felt as if he was walking into a queen's chamber.

Eerie, he thought to himself. He walked over, slowly, cautiously, careful to make as little sound as possible. As he approached her, she lay on her stomach, her hands buried under the pillow, which was folded into a triangle for neck support.

From her backside, he reached down and placed his hand in front of her nose. Her breathing was slow, but her breath was warm. He carefully felt her wrist. Though her pulse was slow, it was not a reason for concern yet. After pausing a moment to take in the surroundings, Fletcher decided to feel her forehead. "Ah yes," he said quietly. She was running a fever, a rather nasty one. Something had happened while they were away. So it was not their imagination, he thought.

He nodded in pity. Whatever she had gone through had exhausted her body. She neither twitched nor snored. At this point he could make all the noise he wanted to; she was not going to wake.

As he walked to the door, he looked back. "You should not be here. It was wrong of Anderson to have brought you."

He exited the room and closed the door. Had he been able to see her face, he would have seen her eyes were wide open. Though she wanted to scream for help, she could not; she was a prisoner in her own body.

Amy had never cut up vegetables before. In her family, if it did not come from a box or can, it was not on the menu. Even at Christmas and Thanksgiving the menu held. The buffet was full of boxed mashed potatoes, boxed dressing, canned green beans, canned yams, canned corn, salad by the bag; deserts premade by the bakery, and prebaked rolls. The turkey and ham were bought hot from a local barbeque restaurant; even the eggnog and deviled eggs were purchased at the store.

Laughing, she picked up the knife and carefully began cutting the vegetables. Her speed and styled lacked any kind of culinary knowledge.

"Pick it up, wench!" Jessie playfully yelled.

Amy turned. The sight of Jessie relaxing and drinking her soda made her playfully angry. "And what if I refuse?"

"Then you get no Coke!"

She turned back. "Yes sir."

"Do I look like a boy to you?"

She turned. "Yes ma'am, I meant."

Jessie smiled wide, “Keep up the sarcasm and you will be doing dishes, too, and believe me, I am not kind to my pots!”

Amy’s eyes began to water; the sulfur in the onions was strong. However, after a few painful minutes, she was done. She turned back. “I have finished your task. Now, may I now have my soda?”

Jessie pushed off the wall and reviewed her subject’s work. “Why, I do believe you will make a fine wife one day!” She walked over, filled a new cup with ice and soda, and then placed it on the counter. Amy reached for it, but Jessie smacked her hand. “Only employees can drink in the snack bar!”

Amy smiled, walked out of the kitchen and around to the front. There, Jessie handed her the soda. “You have earned it, but next time bring cash!”

Amy bowed to her. “Maybe I will and maybe I will not!” Just then, her cell phone went off again. She pulled it out to review the message:

Tornado Warning: Southern Dallas County

Her face lit up with excitement; the worse the weather, the happier she was. Without wasting a single second, she ran into the clearing just past the snack bar, near the hayride road. The clouds, not quite on top of her, were dark with a greenish tint.

She scanned the sky, looking for anything that might give her the location of the twister, but it was no use; Southern Dallas County was too big an area for her to be so lucky. She walked back to the pavilion to rest and enjoy the storm.

As she sat back, something to her right caught her eye: a dust cloud. She ran to the fence, the eastern most part of the property, fully opposite the morgue. She climbed it and there, to her delight, was the funnel cloud! It was dancing in a field, not bothering a soul. She smiled at the sight: how majestic in its form and how destructive its power. She watched it, as if it was dancing just for her.

It seemed to go on for hours, whipping back and forth, turning unpredictably. The awesome sight was mesmerizing. Weather was the only event her senses could not predict. It was the only surprise she ever got. She held up her iPhone and recorded the wondrous spectacle. She closed her eyes and thought, *A memory to last a lifetime.*

As fast as it came, it was gone. Suddenly, the sky opened and rain poured down. The air temperature plummeted as she dashed for the pavilion. Jessie watched her, laughing, unaware of the magnificent destruction that spared their lives.

Amy walked over to her, but Jessie got the first word. “Do you really believe this place is haunted?”

Amy knew something was causing her disruptions, but decided to continue with Anderson’s strategy. “At times I can sense powerful memories and strange energies throughout the house.”

That was not what Jessie wanted to hear. She wanted it to be a hoax, to get paid and get out early. “Do you think it’s safe for us to stay?”

Amy wanted to comfort Jessie, but it was not her place to skew Anderson’s data. Because of her screw-up in the past, she felt a sense of loyalty to him. “I don’t know. These types of events can impact the mind in strange ways. Sometimes it all depends on the person.”

The conversation stalled as the rain intensified. The thunder and lightning were so frequent it seemed they were fighting each other for control. Jessie listened to the sounds of the storm. She bit her lip. *Better to be here than at home*, she thought.

Amy listened to the storm for an entirely different reason. In her mind, she encouraged the storm to act up. She wanted the weather to be violent. To her, when the sky was at its darkest, it was at its most interesting.

A moment later, she looked at Jessie. "There's no way we can eat out here; want to try the dining room again?"

Jessie was not quite on board with that suggestion. "I don't know. I would like to eat in peace this time."

Amy smiled. "For some reason the house is very quiet, so I think it will be ok."

Jessie continued preparing dinner as Amy brought the chairs into the house. As she passed Anderson, he was pleased. "Good idea, we may be able to catch something on film this time. I think I have worked everything out!"

She rolled her eyes and moved on. Only he would want another poltergeist incident.

Jessie brought in the dinner. She had made chicken pasta with a variety of vegetables. "Sorry for making pasta again, but it's what's been provided."

Fletcher walked over and smelled the pot. The aroma was intoxicating. He had been starved for hours. "No need for an apology; this will do wonders for me!"

She smiled at him. Amy had finished setting up the table and chairs. There were no decorations, just the basics.

Anderson walked in, grabbed his plate, filled it with the pasta and sat down. He began eating, ignoring everyone else.

How rude, Amy thought. The rest sat down and passed their plates to Jessie, who portioned out the remainder.

Fletcher looked at Anderson. "Shall we wake Mary?"

"No, let her sleep. She deserves the rest."

He raised his eyebrows but did not press the matter. What the rest of the group did not know was that Anderson had been in the bedroom. He had felt how cold it was. He was hoping something would happen to Mary.

As the group finished, Anderson could not help himself. He raised his glass. "To James Sharp!"

Nothing happened.

He did it again.

Nothing.

"To James Junior!"

Nothing.

"To Alfred Helm!"

Nothing.

"To the Maybricks!"

Again, nothing happened. The group watched him. There was extreme disappointment in his eyes as his attempts failed.

Jessie looked at Amy. Her expression said it all: *What an idiot*.

Directly above them, Mary had heard the comments. She rolled on her back as her breathing became labored. In a man's voice she said, "How dare you tempt me. I will give you more than you're asking for, I guarantee it."

After the group was done eating, Jessie cleaned the dishes and kitchen, with Amy's help. Afterwards, the girls decided to turn in early for bed. Fletcher took his turn at monitoring the equipment with Anderson. As second in command, he also thought he needed to be more hands-on with the technical side of the investigation. He was wrong; Anderson neither asked for his help nor wanted it. He seemed to be showing signs of stress. Fletcher continued to wonder if the house was having an effect on him.

Anderson thought, *Tomorrow is the halfway point, and I have yet to gather any significant evidence of the haunting. I must stay awake until I am successful.*

Day 3

Invasion

It was midnight and the house was still. Though Mary had now been asleep well over twelve hours, no one thought to wake her. From time to time, Fletcher and Anderson had looked in on her, but she seemed fine.

Anderson continued to use her as bait and watched the monitors intently. In the beginning he wanted the team to stay together, but his new strategy was to keep them separate. His concern for their safety was no longer as important as his data.

Finally, Fletcher was spent. The girls had gone to bed nearly two hours ago, but being the first assistant to Dr. Anderson, he felt an obligation to remain awake. It seemed that Anderson had abandoned his plan of rotating shifts. He put all of his faith and trust into himself only. Fletcher nodded to him. "Good night, Professor."

Anderson only grunted.

As Fletcher ascended the stairs, he watched Anderson. He was becoming reclusive and easily agitated. Once he reached the top, he stood on the balcony and watched the aging professor fidget with his equipment.

A moment later he turned and entered the bedroom. On the bed, Amy and Jessie seemed to be sleeping peacefully. He carefully walked into the bathroom, so as not to disturb them.

As he brushed his teeth, he swore he heard laughter. He peeked around the corner just as the laughing ceased, but the girls were asleep. He resumed, but the faint laughter returned. He walked across the passageway and peeked in Mary's room. She, too, was asleep. He dismissed the sound as his own nerves.

As he continued in the bathroom, Mary's eyes were wide open as she giggled. Fletcher ignored the sound.

He quietly walked into his room, careful not to disturb the girls. Looking at Jessie, he admired her ability to sleep in such a place. She was beautiful, far more than most. He stared at her and watched her face twitch as she dreamed.

Oh, who might be so lucky as to wind up in her dreams, he thought. His eyes followed the contour of her body. If he were to lay an hourglass on its side, her form would mirror it.

Butterflies began dancing in his stomach. His pulse raced, his breath quickened, and his mind began to ponder impure fantasies. Her vulnerable state, her beautiful body-- *would she ever know that I touched her? I can do it softly, only touch her clothing. No!* he thought. *I cannot do that! I refuse!*

Something in his head was talking to him. *Yes you can, she'll never know.*

"No, I will not do that. I refuse to hurt her."

If she doesn't know, how will it harm her?

"I'll know—and one touch would never be enough. It's the gateway. I refuse go down that path!"

The covers lifted off her body as she shivered in the cold. He could see the protrusions in her nightgown, a symptom of the cold weather.

Do it, the voice said.

He stood there, tempted and tormented.

The voice continued, *I'll show it to you.*

She levitated off the bed as her nightgown began creeping up her leg, exposing more of the youthful flesh to his aging eyes.

"No!" he shouted. He covered his eyes and quickly hurried to his bed. He lay down, praising God for giving him the strength to resist.

Downstairs, Anderson was watching the monitors closely, as well as taking electromagnetic and temperature readings. The rooms were static. The spiritual activity in the house seemed to have dried up. Perhaps this was a dry well, he thought. No! He remembered breakfast. Something was definitely here. Time, that's what he needed, only time.



Soon Fletcher was asleep, but even in his dreams; he could not escape his impure thoughts...

Fletcher lay there on the floor, focusing his eyes. Something was in front of him--feet. He looked up and gasped as Jessie stood there, naked, in full view of him.

He lay there, silent and unsure of what she was doing. Her body was stunning, perfect down to the last detail. But did she know he was there? Was she unaware he had gone to bed?

He thought, *Why are you doing this? Why are you tempting me? I don't want this from you; leave me alone!*

As he watched, she did nothing, her arms to her side, her mouth closed, her eyes looking straight ahead. In his mind he heard, *A gift.*

No, he thought. *This cannot be right. I will not.*

He stood slowly while trying to keep his eyes fixed on hers. "Now, I'm going to put you back in bed, and I want you to stay there."

As he got to eye level with her, she reached out and grabbed his head. She kissed him passionately, her tongue swirling inside his mouth. He put his hands on her head and pushed her back. Her expression was of stone, as if her soul was gone. He reached out and forcefully grabbed her arms. "Don't do that again!"

With a firm grip, he walked her back to the bed. "Now please, get in." He loosened his grip and she stepped back into him as his hands curved around her breasts. Her back pressed against his front. He jerked his hands back instantly and put them around his face. "I'm not playing with you! You're going way too far with this." He turned his head, only for a brief moment, then looked. He was relieved to see she was back in bed. But he was unnerved when he saw she was dressed. He stepped over to see her. At the same time, he felt a female body press against his back. He turned and she was there, naked. She was standing naked and asleep in bed!

Again, the voice in his head: *She'll never know. Now you can have her.*

Fletcher swallowed. Such strong temptation he thought. "God, save me from this, please!"

She moved forward as he backed up. He reached out to stop her, but she continued forward. She grabbed his head, and her grip was incredible. He was unable to fight it. She pulled his lips to her own and kissed him deeply.

I cannot do this, he thought.

Yes you will. She then shoved his head down and forced his lips upon her right breast. *Suck it for me,* the voice said.

Fletcher trembled, but locked his jaw and refused to comply.

Her hands tightened around his head like a vise. The pain became too intense and he sucked, licking the nipple as he sucked. *Good...good,* the voice said.

As she let go, he pulled back, but she grabbed his hand and pulled it toward her vagina. With all his might, he tore from her grip. Quickly he returned to his bed, climbing in and covering his head. "It's not real, I'm dreaming, that's all!"

The covers began to lift. He grabbed them and refused to let go. She ripped them out of his hand and launched them into the air. He lay there as she stood over him.

Without any expression, she began to kneel. He stood and ran from the room. As he looked back, she was walking toward him, her face still without expression. He hurried down the stairs, "Anderson, Anderson!" But he was nowhere to be found.

As he looked up, Jessie was walking down the stairs, staring straight ahead.

Fletcher grabbed the chair next to the monitors. As Jessie walked up, he held the chair to her, like a lion tamer. She reached out and tore it from his hands. She launched it into the air, and it slammed against the ceiling. It fell back to the ground and splintered into twenty pieces. Fletcher let out several short breaths then ran to the front door, but it was locked! He sank down in the corner of the entryway, whimpering, as she walked up to him. She got down on her knees and reached out for him.

"Please don't!" he cried.

It's what you want; don't fight it, the voice said.

He moved, but she grabbed him. There was no getting away; she had the strength of ten men...

As everyone slept, Anderson continued to watch the monitors. Finally he stood up, as thirst had taken hold. He walked into the entranceway and was stunned. The air was ice cold. It seemed to be coming from the corner. He walked over and put his hand out. "Dammit!" He jerked his hand back instantly. There were teeth marks on his fingers. He reached over and turned on the light but nothing was there.

He returned to his equipment, but the temperature sensor readout from the entranceway was normal. He frowned, then reached into a bag and pulled out a meat thermometer. He returned to the entranceway, which was still frigid. He put the thermometer near the corner and the needle rocketed to zero. It exerted so much pressure on the stop-bar that it broke. The needle then spun wildly for a moment and came to rest on seventy-two degrees. Anderson looked up and the room felt normal. He bravely put his hand near the corner, but nothing happened.

A moment later he returned to his equipment, his hand was throbbing with pain. A semicircle of teeth marks lay across his fingers, as if he had stuck them in someone's mouth.

Something had bit him so hard that he was moved to tears. He looked at the wound carefully and decided it needed ice. He stood and walked out to the snack bar. After he put ice on his hand, he then indulged in the soda fountain. His only hope was that something about the attack got recorded.

Fletcher woke in a cold sweat. He sat up and scanned the bed, thankful the girls were sleeping. *What a nightmare*, he thought to himself. Slowly, he stood and walked into the bathroom. The frigid floor sent shivers up his spine.

He turned on the water and splashed it on his face, wincing at the cold. He looked at himself in the mirror. "How can I sleep now? I have to change rooms; I cannot be in the same room as her."

He shook his head and walked back into the room. As he did, he noticed the covers lifted off her.

She'll never know, the voice said.

"Not again! Why must you torment me?" With tears flowing down his face, he backed into the corner and noticed a figure standing in the opposite corner, near the bed. It was gray, like smoke, but with form. It began to move toward him.

Fletcher squinted, unsure of what he was seeing. He closed his eyes, then opened them. "No!" he screamed. "You're not real!" Again, he closed his eyes, then opened them. The grayish figure was still there, still advancing. Slowly he backed into Mary's room.

"Mary! Mary!" he shouted, but she did not move.

The figure floated through the passageway and into Mary's room. Fletcher panicked and ran to the bedroom door, but it would not open.

He jumped on the bed, but Mary did not move. He couldn't care less if he woke her. The figure floated around the bed, stalking him. He jumped off and dashed through the passageway and back into his room. He grabbed Jessie. "Wake up! Wake up!" Her limp body did not react. He let go of her as the figure gained ground. He dashed for the door, but it was locked too. He banged and screamed for Anderson.

Outside, Anderson's hand was finally feeling better. He had downed three sodas and was eager to get back inside. He was about to go, but the soda fountain seemed to call to him; he had to have one more.

Fletcher stood against the bedroom door. He had nowhere to run. The figure suddenly advanced on him, and though he lunged for the bed, it entered his body, and he crashed to the floor. He lay there, writhing in pain as it twisted his organs and gnawed on him from the inside.

Anderson came back into the house, having filled himself with soda. *That should keep me awake*, he thought. He reviewed the data but only found frustration. There was nothing there.

† † †

Jessie tossed and turned, just like Mary and Fletcher; even in sleep she was not safe. However, her fear was not of the present, but of the past...

A voice called to her, "Jessie, come here please."

She stood up, realizing she was in her own room. "Coming Dad," she said. She looked around the room, but it did not feel right. Her mind was blank and she did not remember going to bed.

"Now, Jessie!"

She hurried from the room and down a long hallway. Her house was immaculate; a pristine showpiece of Highland Park. Her father worked in downtown Dallas as the vice president for major bank. He was well respected and in turn expected his family to reflect well upon him.

She rarely visited him at work because he believed the presence of his family was inappropriate. She remembered one time when her mother took her to the office, she remained seated by his secretary's desk, but when her mother entered, she screamed. That night at dinner, no one talked. Her father seemed more menacing than ever before.

As she hurried down the staircase, she heard, "I don't have all day!"

Faster and faster she ran, through the entranceway, across the living room, then through the kitchen, dining room, sitting room, and into his office, where he sat behind a large antique desk. She came to a stop. "You called me?"

He slammed the newspaper on the desk. "Did you think I would not find out?!"

She was baffled. What could she have done? Nothing came to mind. "I don't understand what you mean."

He stood and walked from behind the massive desk. As he came to the front, he reached over and picked up a statement and shook it at her. "Credit cards! I just got this in the mail. Would you like to explain the twelve thousand dollar charge at Northpark?"

She searched her mind. As she thought, he walked closer. Slowly she backed away, but he quickly walked up and grabbed her in a fury. "You better speak, young lady. Whatever it is, you're taking it back!"

"I—"

He slapped her across the face. "You think my accounts are your piggy bank?!"

Her face stung as tears flowed down her face.

“That’s why I left your mother! Her greedy ways are now yours and I will not have it!” He slapped her again, knocking her to the ground.

She put her hands in front of her face. “It...it...it... it had...to have been Angela,” she mumbled.

Her father backed away. “You little snot, taking the easy way--blame the step-mother!”

“But Dad—”

He kicked her in her side and her lungs automatically exhaled. She put up her hand to stop him. “I swear—”

He descended on her, beating her, repeating, “You will learn! You will learn!”

She covered her face as best she could. As she looked at him, his face changed to Fletcher’s, then her father’s, then to Fletcher’s. She rolled on the ground as he continued his assault. She knew it was her stepmother, she knew it! He would not listen; he never would.

Moments later, he stopped. She was bloody and bruised. “Get your ass upstairs. You’re grounded ‘til you heal. Leave your credit cards outside your door; you’re cut off!”

She staggered away, embarrassed and humiliated. She had to get back to her room, to safety. The moment she was back in her room, she heard, “Jessie, come here, please.”

She looked at the door, fearful to go back, but compelled to do so. She tried to fight it, but her movements were not her own. She was trapped, just like Mary, a prisoner of her own body.

Jessie woke in tears. Her memories haunted her thoughts and she could not escape them. As hard as she tried, she could think of nothing else. It was as if she was being forced to remember.

She saw horrid visions of her father, coming home drunk, accusing her mother of cheating on him, sleeping with black people, lying down like a dog. She remembered when her mother had finally had enough. She went to the police and confessed the abuse she was enduring. She also remembered the day she dropped the charges.

Jessie was sitting in her room when her mother walked in. “Honey, your father’s not a bad man; he’s just under stress. We have to understand that. He does not mean to hurt us, but sometimes we ask too much of him.” She looked at her cowardly mother as she continued, “He has provided this lavish lifestyle for us and only asks that we respect him. That’s why I have decided to drop the charges.”

She stared at her; she wanted to say, “No Mother, you dropped the charges because he paid you to do so, just like at the office. You caught him with that woman, but he paid you to forget it, and you did.”

A week later, her mother disappeared, but the police investigation was inconclusive.

Soon after, her father remarried. The woman was half his age, closer to her age. She was a cold, heartless gold-digger who demanded attention and undeserved respect. Angela was her name, but the devil was her persona.

More than once, Angela stole her debit cards. Unfortunately, Jessie paid the price for her stepmother’s spending sprees. Her father was close-minded on the subject. He worshiped Angela and did her bidding. Jessie hated her, but had to play nice when she was around. Once, she was even made to apologize to her for ruining a social gathering at the house, when it was clearly Angela’s fault.

Jessie remembered the times when her father was out of town, Angela often forced her to do humiliating chores, such as cleaning her shoes, ironing her panties, and worst of all, serving Angela's friends tea and cakes as they made fun of her.

Soon, Jessie passed out again, but she would find no relief. She relived the nightmare several times and each time it seemed as if it were new, with the exception that her father's face was consistently replaced by Fletcher's more and more. In the final nightmare, her father was replaced by him entirely.

He had just picked up the credit card statement, but his words were different. He looked down on her with hateful vengeance. "You're worthless! I hate you; why do you live here?"

Confused, she looked at him as he leaned against the desk, shaking the credit card statement. "This isn't about the credit cards?"

Fletcher threw the statement at her. "How dare you! You're just like your mother!"

Angela walked in, wearing Jessie's favorite skirt and laughing. "Nobody's going to help you, nobody! You're nothing to anyone. Your father doesn't love you; your mother didn't love you; no one does. You're a toy to be used, right, Fletcher?"

Jessie looked at him. "Father, please..."

Angela walked past her, blowing kisses at her. She sat down on the couch and spread her legs wide.

Fletcher smiled. "You've upset your step-mother, now go make her feel good. Give her a long hug and a kiss."

Jessie's body crawled to her step-mother, but inside, Jessie was screaming. Fletcher just laughed. "Good girl."

Angela looked down at her as she grabbed a fistful of her hair. "Don't fight it; this is all you're good for!"



Downstairs, as Anderson grew weary of watching the stagnant monitors, his head fell backward. His eyes temporarily closed as he was daydreaming of grandeur. Though he wasn't asleep, he failed to notice the bedroom cameras had ceased broadcasting.

Jessie woke and lay in bed, horrified at her dream. It was a nightmare she had relived multiple times, but here, in the house, it seemed more real and magnified. The pain felt so real, and Fletcher--why had she dreamed of him? What was the connection? She sat up and looked at him, though he was sleeping peacefully on the floor. She wondered, was this because she didn't want him in the bed? Surely not; perhaps it was only a dream.

The room was dark and cold—so cold she could see her breath in the air. As she lay there, she felt utterly helpless. Again she fell back asleep.

Moments later, Amy sat up, shivering. She could feel the entity. She allowed her thoughts to roam, trying to discover what was with her, but she could only feel the energy.

She swallowed as she stood and observed the others. Fletcher and Jessie were calm and asleep. However, as she looked to her side of the bed, she realized she too was

asleep. Her body lay there, shivering in the cold. It had been a long time since her last out of body experience, but it was still a bit shocking.

Amy looked about the room. Something wanted her to leave. Her heart sank as her fear took over. The sensation was overwhelming and she quickly hurried from the room, shutting the door without a second thought.

Once on the balcony, she felt better. She wondered, *Am I truly having an out of body experience or am I just dreaming, and why am I thinking so rationally? Have I always had this much control of my dreams? Is this something I ask myself every night?*

As she questioned herself, she felt the presence of an entity moving downstairs. She turned, but could see nothing. She scanned the living room, but nothing seemed out of place. She felt the uncontrollable desire to go downstairs, as if something was calling to her.

Slowly and cautiously she descended the stairs, looking all around. She suddenly feared being pushed. Goosebumps ran up and down her body as she grabbed the handrail, closed her eyes, and held on tight. She waited for the sensation to pass.

A few moments later, she opened her eyes and continued down the stairs. As she walked from the staircase, a sensation pulled her to the front door; it wanted her to go outside. She was compelled to ask, "What do you want?"

No response.

As she walked past Anderson, she paused and looked down on him. "Are you ok?"

He ignored her and continued with his work.

As she walked by, she snarled, "What a creep."

The entity continued its pull.

As she came to the front door, she began to question her choice. Following the pull in the house was one thing, but going outside was another. She thought, *What if I get hurt?* The pull intensified and she had to go.

The front door opened on its own, revealing the outside world to her. She took a deep breath and walked onto the porch. The air was warm and inviting, so much better than the sickly feeling of the house. The night was calm, as the storms had ended. There was a fresh grass smell in the air, as if a nearby farmer was baling hay.

As she walked along the porch, the force seemed to call from the snack bar. As she stepped off the porch and onto the ground, it seemed to pull harder and harder. She was compelled to walk faster. She was about to enter the snack bar when she felt the entity coming from behind the small building.

She followed the sensation, and it led her to the fence. She could hear music and noises from the other side. As she peeked through the slots, she could see a festival-like atmosphere. She followed along the fence to the gate, then emerged onto the hayride road. A loud horn blew and startled her as the tractor rolled by. She smiled at the people and they waved to her. She laughed and waved back. Suddenly fire erupted out of the gothic statues by the iron gate, startling her again. Then across the way, a flame shot out of the morgue; then a huge ball of fire exploded into the sky from the old gas station. It was an amazing sight, perfectly choreographed.

Again she felt the pull of the entity and crossed the road and entered the midway. There were dozens of people playing games, laughing, and running around. Intermixed in the crowd were actors in Halloween costumes performing all kinds of entertainment.

A person walked past her. "Good evening, Amy!"

"Good evening."

They laughed as they walked away. She continued forward, looking at all the booths. The first was a tent with purple and yellow lights emanating from it. She had to go in.

An old woman was sitting behind a table with a crystal ball on it. She was old, easily in her nineties, dressed in a blue robe with a yellow shawl. A red bandana covered her hair and thick glasses sat on her nose. "Sit down; let me tell of your future," she said in a crackly voice.

Amy walked in and had a seat. She placed her hands on the table as the woman began to rub the ball. Black and white smoke was churning inside it, with small flashes of lighting hitting the side. "Why, you're very special. Your energy is a blessing upon this place! You are needed here and wanted, even desired!"

"Well, it's nice to be desired," she said playfully.

The old woman looked at her. "Yes, you have been expected here. Great pains have been taken to bring you in, and now that you're here, even more pains are being taken to ensure you stay."

Amy smiled as the woman retracted her hands. "I do like it here."

The woman looked over her glasses. "Your future is great! You shall have a very long and interesting life. Thank you for stopping by; you have truly brightened my evening!"

She stood and nodded at the old woman. As she walked from the tent, she could smell something wonderful. It was a grill in the next booth down, cooking hamburgers. As she passed by, a large friendly gentleman handed her one. "You look starved, try this!"

She looked off to the side. "I don't have any money."

"Silly girl, for you I would make a thousand hamburgers! Now you take this and enjoy it!"

She graciously took the burger and bit into it. The juices ran down her chin as its wonderful goodness lay in her mouth. The flavor was heavenly. She stopped in her tracks so she could finish it. The man looked on, pleased that his efforts were causing so much satisfaction.

After finishing the burger, she turned. "Thank you, you are a marvelous cook!"

"Thank you, ma'am. Coming from you, that means a great deal."

She wondered what he meant. Why was her compliment of such value? She nodded to him and moved on to the next booth, the 'Pimple Popper.'

What a disgusting game, she thought. The balloons were filled with some sort of white cream or powder and attached to a large picture of a teenage face. The goal was to throw the darts and pop them, spraying everyone with the white substance. *Ghastly*, she thought.

She did not try the game, instead moved on. The next game was more civilized, a life-size game of Operation. Several were playing and laughing as they touched the side, causing the lights and noisemakers to go off. It was rather amusing to watch. Their surprised faces made others laugh.

Across the way she saw a giant blowup maze. She wandered over to it, but felt something sinister inside. Something did not want her to enter. She could hear growls from its interior. Quickly she turned away, and came face to face with a beautiful massage therapist. "Would you like to treat yourself?"

Are you kidding? she thought. She gleefully smiled. "Of course!" After a week like this, who wouldn't need a massage!

The woman took her hand and guided her onto the table. Amy looked at the masseuse. "Do I need to be naked?"

The woman laughed. "Of course not, this is a public place. Your nightgown will do fine."

"Nightgown?"

"Well yes, that is what you're wearing, unless it's a part of a costume."

She thought, *Why am I in a nightgown?* She couldn't remember; it was all a blur. She could not even remember getting there. Her confused thoughts faded as the massage began. She lowered her head into the doughnut-shaped pillow and allowed the masseuse to do her task.

Hours seemed to pass like minutes under the pleasure of the woman's touch. In perfect proportion, all of her muscles were twisted, kneaded, stretched, and caressed with perfection. She felt like a queen, tended to by the peasant, but with such skills, the roles could easily be reversed.

When it was done, she looked at the masseuse. "I wish I had something to give you."

The masseuse reached forward and caressed her hand. "No ma'am, serving you will always be my honor." She smiled, then retreated into her booth and closed the curtain.

Amy turned and continued, coming across a rather large screen showing acts of comedy. A man was playing with a puppet and argued with it about traffic reports and how only white people could enjoy NASCAR. She laughed until the act changed.

As she moved on, she came across another food vendor. This one smiled at her and handed her a chopped beef sandwich, but she handed it back. "Thank you sir, but I am already full. The vendor across the way already fed me."

The man looked angry. He grabbed a cleaver and walked out of his booth. "That filthy dog, stealing my customers!"

Amy grabbed the man's arm. "Please, I'll eat your sandwich. I'm sorry."

The man instantly cheered up. "Well now, that's different!"

She watched as he returned to his booth, and with great care, prepared another sandwich for her. She accepted and ate it. It was just as heavenly as the burger. The barbeque sauce was thick and sweet, with just a mild bite. The man stood there, gleefully watching her eat.

When she was done, she paid him a compliment as well. "It's a very good sandwich. Everything is good out here!"

"Thank you ma'am, we have worked hard to please you!"

She smiled and walked on, coming to a rather exciting booth, the hatchet throw.

Delighted, she ran up to the booth. A long line of people waited to test their skill with the deadly weapon. She watched as a young boy hurled it with phenomenal speed and accuracy. The hatchet buried itself into a painted tree stump suspended from the back wall.

A man dressed in a police uniform approached her. "Would you like to try?"

She motioned with her hands toward the line. "It would not be fair to those who have waited for so long."

The policeman turned to the people and shrugged. Taunts of, "Try it! Go ahead! Don't let a boy show you up," billowed from the line.

She nodded her head, nervously. "Well, if they don't mind."

The policeman took her into the booth. "Now, don't try to throw it at the bull's eye. Instead, aim just above the target. Let the hatchet fling from your hand. You don't have to throw it hard."

She took her stance, eyes just above the target, stretched back and flung the hatchet at the target. It slammed into the tree stump with a mighty clang and fell to the ground. A roar of laughter erupted at her girly throw.

She eyed them and thought, *I'll show you what a girl can do!* She retrieved the weapon, took her stance, then launched the hatchet, striking the bull's eye and lodging the blade deep into the stump.

"Hey, we have a winner!" yelled the policeman. The crowd cheered as she stepped out of the booth. As she passed by the line, they all patted her on the back and congratulated her on her marksman-like accuracy.

She smiled and moved on, coming to the head-toss game. She curled her bottom lip, unsure how to take this sport. Apparently you threw shrunken heads into a basketball goal for prizes. A young group of boys giggled as they participated, but she passed it up. It was not as bad as the pimple popping game, but still repulsive.

As she moved on, she came to a gift shop of sorts. She watched people buying hats, t-shirts, and all types of trinkets with Reindeer Manor written on them. A woman behind the counter looked at her. "Dear, you need a ticket. Run along, get in line; you don't want to get left out!"

Amy nodded her head and saw a group of people standing in line at the ticket booth. She walked over and joined them. Standing still gave her an even better view of the events at hand. Toward the morgue, young lovers sat by the bonfire, kissing and snuggling, while others exchanged texts. Old men sat, waiting for their grandkids to finish up, while others walked around, seemingly aimlessly.

She looked beyond the bonfire and saw people winding through a maze of barricades. Monsters and other foul creatures walked alongside them, teasing and taunting the guests. It was easy to tell the sex of the actor. Young cute girls were the most frequent to gain the attention of the beasts. Amy watched one particular actor and his methods. What a silly game they were playing: a ritual of courting, it could be called, especially with this very handsome and very affectionate vampire. The girls were all too eager to have his lips upon their neck. Amy thought, *Come bite me, you bad boy!*

Instantly the vampire came to her, as if she had called to him. "Why miss, what brings you out here on such an evening, do you not fear danger?"

She decided to play along. "I have come in search of love and happiness. Be my count and I shall be your Mina."

He thrust his body to hers, taking her into his arms and softly biting her neck. She grasped him. "Yes, take me from all this death."

As he pulled back, she could see the blood on his lips, but she did not care. He bowed. "I shall return to you on the next full moon; rest 'til then, my love." He wandered off, back to the line, in search of more young victims.

Moments later, the romantic beast was run off by a concerned mother. As he disappeared into the darkness, a light caught her eye. A searchlight danced in the sky, alerting people to the happy times that were afoot. As she watched the spotlight, it dropped, illuminating her. She laughed as she saw two drunken idiots fighting about where to put the light. However, the light illuminated her nightgown, making it mostly see-through. Catcalls and whistles erupted as she folded her arms over her chest. Her face became flustered and red, and she had a hard time hiding her embarrassment.

Finally, to her relief, the search light was restored to its proper place amongst the clouds. The line continued to move forward until she was face to face with the ticket lady. "Oh my, what a bit of royalty we have here!"

Amy eyed her. "I am not royalty."

"Oh but you are to us; you're the customer!"

Amy stepped back and looked around. "There are many customers here. Why am I so special?"

The woman laughed. "Because, dear, they're just customers. You're THE customer!"

She was confused but accepted it. "Well, I guess I need a ticket."

"Yes, you do. That will be thirty-five dollars!"

Amy looked at her. "I'm sorry, but I don't seem to have any money."

The woman slammed the window shut as she screamed, "No money, no ticket!"

Amy walked away, but one of the actors from the Dungeon of Doom saw what happened. He ran into the ticket booth and dragged the woman out by her hair. "Do you know who that is? Why would you put your soul at such risk?"

The woman scowled. "All of us were like that once; now we're brushed aside, used in the Master's game."

The man dragged her by her hair as he called out, "Amy, Amy!"

Hearing the voice, she turned. The man walked up to her and threw the ticket lady to ground. "Apologize, wench!"

The woman cowered and held a ticket up. "Please forgive me and accept this ticket!"

Amy felt an unearned sense of righteousness. Though she had never acted this way before, the emotion was overwhelming. She looked at the woman and scowled. "The next time I ask for a ticket, you better have one for me!" She turned, but the man stopped her. "No, she is not finished!"

Amy nodded. "You're correct." She felt a sense of power over this woman. Humiliating her would make her more powerful. She raised an eyebrow to the kneeling woman, "I have walked out here in my bare feet; will you clean them for me?"

The woman began to take off her shirt. She was an aging woman of considerable girth. The man protested, "Good God, woman don't do that! We need not such a filthy display!"

Amy laughed at the woman. "With your tongue, you filthy whore, lick my feet!"

The woman crawled to Amy, who made no effort to raise her foot. The woman picked up the foot and held it up with her own strength, as not to impose on Her Majesty.

Amy jutted out her chin; the woman's tongue felt good between her toes. A crowd gathered and laughed at the woman, but they also praised Amy for her justice. The woman cried but licked every drop of mud from Amy's feet, until they looked freshly bathed.

When it was over, Amy turned around. "You may thank me."

The woman puckered her lips and placed them upon Amy's backside. She then turned. "Take her away."

One of the men snatched the ticket lady by the hair. "She will pay for her dishonor, Your Majesty!" She watched him drag her to the Dungeon of Doom. As Amy stood there with her head held high, she relished the sudden horrific screams of agony and pain.

A moment later, she felt the entity pulling her back to the manor. She turned and crossed over the hayride road and passed the snack bar. Instead of going into the line, she walked past it and directly to the front entrance where a man in a long striped suit and a

yellow tie greeted her. His face was painted white, with dark circles around his eyes. "Good evening Amy, I am the host. Care to tour the manor?"

What a strange question, she thought. *I live in the manor*. However, for his amusement, she decided to play along. "Sure." She walked forward, but he stopped her.

"Ticket, please."

She handed him the ticket, then he opened the door for her. She walked into the darkness. The host closed the door and then another one opened. As she entered, she was shocked. Instead of being inside the manor, she was in her mother's trailer. Her mother was sitting on the couch as usual, a cigarette in one hand, a beer in the other, and Jerry Springer on the television.

Confused, Amy sat down next to her mother. "What's going on?"

Her mother looked at her. "Shhh, my favorite commercial is coming on."

Confused, she sat back and looked at the screen. It flashed; then showed a picture of Reindeer Manor. Afterwards, the host who had taken her ticket was speaking. "Bring your family! Bring your friends! Come on down to Reindeer Manor; you'll be here forever!"

Amy stood, feeling quite uneasy. She walked through the small kitchen and down the hallway to the end, to her old room. She walked in and closed the door, but when she turned around, she was back in the house, in the chapel!

She saw a man and a woman standing on either side of the altar. "Good evening Amy, thank you for joining us."

Suddenly she felt the same dread as she felt from the room at the end of the balcony. The air was cold and the atmosphere was heavy.

The man smiled at her, "My wife and I welcome you to our humble home. Please join us; we are about to take communion in worship of our lord."

Amy scowled. "Your lord is no lord. He's an abomination to nature. His rule is only temporary."

"No my dear, he is forever, as we are, and if you join us now, so shall you be!"

Amy shook her head as she backed away. Slowly, making sure to keep her eyes focused on them, she backed out of the room. The feeling under her feet was strange. She looked down and was standing on a dirt floor. She looked up, and she was in the theater.

Instantaneously sparklers went off. Loud carnival music began to play, giant spinning wheels, each of multiple colors, spun all around, and the audience stood, cheering wildly! Amy walked forward as an usher, dressed in a black suit with a red bow tie, grabbed her by the arm, Oddly enough; he spoke with a British accent. "Come on miss, you were almost late!" He rushed her to her seat, then hurried back to the entrance. Amy smiled as the wondrous show began. Her memory seemed to be continually refreshing itself, blocking out what she didn't want to know, rendering her in a state of bliss.

The theater was nothing like before. She envisioned it as the parlor for funerals, a part of the morgue, but perhaps history had forgotten this part. She looked at the long red velvet curtains that lined the newly built and polished stage. Out of the wings came a man with extremely long legs, dressed in a red and white suit, yellow bow tie, and a red top hat. He was kicking his legs skyward and flinging his arms as he spun around. The crowd cheered wildly for him.

Back and forth he went, in the most comical way, until he settled in the center of the stage. With a loud and jovial voice, he announced, "Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the other side of the mirror!"

Actors of all kinds emerged, spinning, tumbling, and cartwheeling from the wings. They were dressed in rabbit costumes, bear costumes, even two-person horse costumes. A magician dressed in a classic tuxedo ran across the stage, pulling one rabbit after another from his hat. Fire jugglers came from both sides, juggling independently, then together. A man on a giant bike rolled by, a woman with two heads came out blowing kisses to the audience, the fattest man on earth was rolled out on his side by midgets, and the bearded lady followed, playing the tambourine. Finally, dancers dressed in white silk ran out, spinning black and white umbrellas, as rain, thunder and lightning erupted from the top of the stage.

The audience gave a standing ovation. For the last act, an illusionist dressed in all black, with a long black beard, earrings, and jet-black hair, stepped to center stage.

Women of all nationalities pushed a massive table behind him.

The illusionist looked out upon the audience. "I need a volunteer."

Amy looked around, but everyone else was gone. She was the audience.

The illusionist looked down at her and frowned. "Did you not hear me? I need a volunteer!"

The usher ran over. "Oh please miss, you must! It would crush them if you refused! Please, we're all cheering for you!"

Amy stood, reluctantly. She was not one to volunteer at such public events. Slowly, she walked around to the stairs. As she stepped on stage, everyone bowed to her. The feeling of self-righteousness returned. She held out her arms as the women walked over and gently picked her up, then set her on the massive table. She looked over at a young woman, who admired her hand. "You may," she said with a sadistic smile.

The woman looked grateful, then kissed her hand. "Thank you, Your Majesty."

Amy looked away, as if the kiss of affection meant nothing to her.

The illusionist walked over. "Have we been treating you well?"

Amy smiled. "Yes, it's been wonderful! These people are so submissive--what a wonderful environment you have!" Slowly, without her knowledge, the illusionist strapped each of her limbs down as Amy continued, "These people are great servants; oh, how I wish I could take some of them home with me. How I would use them."

The illusionist stepped away. "Good, I am glad you have enjoyed yourself. We worked very hard to get you."

Amy tried to sit up, but the straps held. "Get me? What do you want with me?"

Suddenly she was shoved down. As her head hit the table, she saw the woman from the chapel standing over her. "Did you enjoy me?"

Amy realized that foul, self-righteous spirit was not her own, but that of the woman. She kicked but could not get free. As she turned her head, to her horror, she realized she was back in the chapel.

At her feet stood the man, smiling in an evil manner. "Did we forget to introduce ourselves? I'm James Junior, and this is my beloved wife." He bowed to her. "And now to your question...yes, my dear, we have worked very hard to get you!"

He slowly walked forward as Amy kicked and screamed, but she could not free herself. Junior's arms came from his back, revealing a long knife, intricately decorated. He looked up at the pentagram. "A sacrifice for you, oh lord!"

Amy screamed as he stabbed her in the stomach. Mrs. Sharp laughed, then leaned over, kissing her forehead. "You shall be my slave now and I shall use you like no other!"

Junior smiled and retracted the knife. He laid it upon her throat. "And now we are complete."

The knife slid across her throat...

Amy woke in a cold sweat, breathing rapidly. Quickly she felt her throat and her stomach for any wounds, but there were none. She sighed and looked at her companions. Fletcher and Jessie were still asleep.

The room was cold, dark, and quiet. She stood up, scanning the room, rubbing her shoulders. Suddenly, a gray figure was in front of her. Though it had no face, she could tell it was Junior. The figure did not give chase; instead, it lunged for her and entered her body. She fell back onto the bed, writhing in pain. Her eyes felt as if they were being pushed out from the inside. Though she screamed and threw her body to and fro, Jessie and Fletcher lay undisturbed, deep in their own nightmares.

A moment later, Amy stood and walked from the room.

† † †

Anderson turned as Amy came down the stairs. Her face was blank, showing no emotion of any kind. He looked at her. "Are you all right?"

She gazed upon him. "Creep."

He watched as she walked into the entryway and out of the house. Quickly he grabbed his cane and went after her. "Amy! Come back!"

He walked out of the house just in time to see her going behind the snack bar. He rushed after her, having trouble with his cane. The saturated ground provided little support.

As he emerged from the fence, by the hayride road, he scanned the area. Finally, he saw her in the distance, walking toward the Morgue. "Amy, get back here!"

Struggling on the soft ground, he went after her. The midway was full of potholes, standing water, and mud. Slowly he made his way across, having to wrestle his cane from the ground several times.

He came up to the morgue. The barn door was slightly ajar. As he entered, he flipped on the lights. There on the stage, under the screen, lay Amy, fast asleep. Gently he woke her, and escorted her back to the manor, where she returned to her room and to bed.

Afterwards, he returned to his chair and resumed his work. *Silly child*, he thought, *sleepwalking in such a place*.

All the assistants were asleep and at peace, from Anderson's point of view. He, however, was unable to rest.

The Insides

The temperature in the room slowly rose to seventy-two degrees. Downstairs, Anderson continued to stare at his monitors, hypnotized by them.

Jessie felt a heavy weight upon her as drool ran down her cheek. The smell of cigarettes was overwhelming and she screamed, "Get off me!" However, the body would not move.

She screamed over and over, “Get off me! Get off me! Get off me!”

Amy woke and saw Fletcher lying on top of Jessie. She reached over and shoved him off the bed and his body slammed to the ground like a sack of potatoes. He moaned at the pain and slowly stood.

Jessie stepped out of bed. “Who the hell do you think you are?”

“I’m sorry! I did not mean to, I mean, I did not—” His words fell on deaf ears.

Amy stood out of the bed, walked around, and pushed him. “So you think you can take advantage of us while we sleep? You think that we’re weak, that we’ll just take it, that we’re some sort of pawns in your sick fantasy?”

Fletcher was disoriented. “No, I did not get in the bed, I swear! I was lying on the floor, all night!”

Jessie reached into her purse and pulled out a stun gun. “You come within ten feet of either of us and I will shock you until your heart stops!”

He backed out of the room as she pointed the gun at him. Once he was gone, Amy lifted Jessie’s nightgown to inspect her body. There was no sign of assault.

Jessie sighed. “I’m sorry. I had a horrible nightmare and I may have overreacted.”

Amy shook her head. “No, you didn’t; something’s not right about that man.”

An hour later, Jessie brought breakfast into the house. Amy sat across from Fletcher, staring him down. She wanted him to know his place, or she would put him in it.

To everyone’s shock, Mary entered the dining room. Amy looked at her. “Good morning.”

Mary smiled and giggled softly.

Amy looked at Jessie. Something was wrong. Mary’s face was yellow and sickly. Her teeth were filthy, as if bloodstained. She sat down next to Anderson and began to eat, acknowledging no one.

Fletcher stared at Anderson. His eyes were bloodshot and he had a strange bruise on his hand. The house seemed to affect him in an entirely different way. While the others were cursed with nightmares, he was cursed with insomnia. The color in his skin had faded from a healthy glow to a sickly white. His lack of sleep and over-obsession had drained him; only his ego gave him the strength to go on. Though he was there, like Mary, he hardly acknowledged anyone; instead, he grunted when he was addressed.

Anderson knew Fletcher was judging him and did not care. He had proven to be as worthless as the rest of the group. All he did was complain and observe. How he achieved a doctorate was beyond him.

Anderson looked at the group as he ate. Did they know how much he despised them? All week he had worked tirelessly on this project, but did they? *Hell no*, he thought. They were there for the money, nothing else. Well, that was not going to happen. If he failed, they failed. If he succeeded, they still failed. They could take their complaints to court. What sorry bunch of losers.

He stared at Amy. *There’s no way she’s a medium*. Somehow she had tricked him before. Her skills had proven useless in this investigation. He vowed to expose Amy for the fraud she was.

Anderson next trained his eyes on Jessie. *Daddy’s going to kill you*, he thought. *You’re worthless. Why you’re in college is beyond imagination. Daddy’s little pride and joy failed; what a shock. I wonder how many backroom abortions you’ve had.*

Afterwards, there was one person left, the whore of the psychology department, Mary. This was as close as she would get to a higher education. In this society, her place was to carry the piss bucket. If she was not willing to do that, her presence was only an intrusion.

Mary stared at him as the entity read his mind. She looked at the other group members. “Did you know that Professor Anderson uses Viagra?”

Anderson’s blood pressure hit the ceiling and his face boiled with anger.

She continued, “Yes, it’s true. We’ve been having a longstanding affair, and it’s my intention to tell everyone, especially his wife. Yes, I will enjoy seeing the disappointment on her face.”

Anderson slammed his fist on the table. “Enough!”

She ignored him, “He was a crackpot professor when I met him. He gained his rise in power with the Democratic elites during Clinton’s re-election campaign. They liked his style and political beliefs, so they promoted him rapidly. He became one of the ruling class, a member of the aristocratic society. The funny thing is, no one really respects him. He wants to get this book published--he calls it ‘Texas Hauntings,’ but the publisher all but told him it was trash!”

Anderson was through. He looked at her. “You say one more thing about me and you’re walking home!”

She sarcastically responded, “Oh my God, is that the best you can do?” She turned back to the group as they nervously moved in their chairs. “I mean, come on, how about some creativity? He acts all big and tough, but in reality, he’s holding on to his seat by the narrowest of margins. He has the most underperforming department of the entire university. If he’s there another year, I’ll be shocked!” As she spoke, the entity inside her backed away, allowing her personality to surface.

Anderson looked at her with absolute disgust. “I only hired you because I knew you were easy. A monkey could do your job--seriously, a monkey!”

A look of absolute horror came over her.

He continued, “That’s right, group, I hired her because she put out and I’ve been keeping her down for my own benefit. Do you know how many times she’s applied to the university? Here’s the kicker: she keeps putting me down as a reference and I’m the one who’s held her back! I don’t want her to improve; I like her as the failure she is! If she did not get on her knees, then she’d be out of a job!”

Mary stood, “Why—” Unable to finish her statement, she ran from the room in tears. Anderson laughed until he heard the bedroom door slam.

The rest of the group was in shock at the barbaric display by both. Who were these people? Jessie had no intention of remaining quiet. “You should be ashamed of yourself.”

Anderson continued to eat. She was not worth responding to.

His silence only enraged her further. “I will make sure my father knows every detail. He has been donating money to the university for decades, but after I get done with him, the school will not see another dime until you’re terminated!”

He looked up at her, “Oh really? What the hell do you know, Miss Priss? You’re just here for the money. When it’s all done you can run back to Daddy and show him how responsible you are. You can go back to your high class living and low class abortions!”

She stood. “I’ve never had an abortion, you freak, but I’m sorry your mother didn’t have one!”

He smiled. "What is this garbage I'm eating, anyway? I've held my tongue, but no more. I gagged down your overcooked spaghetti, choked down your bland chicken pasta, and speaking for the group, the ghosts did us a favor when they destroyed your rubbery eggs. Just too bad they didn't kill you in process!"

Tears flowed down her face. "How dare—"

He stood quickly and walked over to her. Without warning, he slapped her so hard she fell to the ground. "Now you can say, how dare you!"

Fletcher stood, but Anderson pointed. "Sit down!"

Fletcher sank back in seat in shock.

Amy looked at him. *What a coward*, she thought. She stood and walked around the table. Anderson looked at her. "Back off!"

She refused. "I'm not like—" He swung as she ducked, then she punched him in the face. He fell to the ground, bleeding from the nose. She pointed at him. "Like I was saying, I'm not like your little mistress; I will beat you to death!"

He looked up at her with disdain. "You're fired; you can leave at anytime."

"You think firing me is going to shut me up? Just wait 'til the dean gets my report!" She walked over and helped Jessie up. She had quite a handprint on the side of her face. Amy knew it was going to be a good bruise to show the dean.

As they walked out of the dining room, Anderson sat back in his chair. He stared at the ceiling, wishing he could set fire to it. Mary was going to pay for what she had done. Firing Amy was one thing, but firing her was not enough. He had to destroy her. *When I get done, no one will hire her*, he thought.

Outside, Amy and Jessie hurried through the rain to the snack bar. Once inside, Amy made an ice pack and handed it to Jessie. "You should leave and go to the police!"

Jessie cried as she held the bag of ice to her face. "I cannot, I need the money! I lost my entire semester allowance when my step-mom stole my debit card. I've been borrowing money from friends, and I cannot tell my Dad; he'll freak out! If I blame my step-mom again, there is no telling what he will make me do."

Amy shook her head. "So what? It's better than taking Anderson's abuse!"

Jessie looked down. "No it's not."

Amy sensed that her father had abused her. Even without her abilities, she could envision that her lifestyle was only a facade. "I'm sorry," she said as she stroked her hair.

Jessie leaned into her shoulder and cried. Every relationship she had ended in violence. She was attracted to men like her father.

Amy cradled her and prayed for her. The sound of the rain on the roof was soothing. Though lightning and thunder cracked and crashed up all around, the worst storm was in Jessie's head, but this one would take more than wind to push it past.

In the dining room, Anderson continued to stare at the ceiling. "She'll pay, she'll pay," he kept repeating.

Fletcher lit a cigarette but offered no conversation. *This house is tearing everyone apart*, he thought. He concentrated on his own problems, but two things kept looming in his mind, the desire and the dream.

Anderson could stand it no more. He stood and made his way into the living room to monitor the equipment. On the screen he saw Mary, crying like a little girl on her bed.

“That’s where the little child belongs, in her room, waiting for Daddy to come punish her.”

He decided to wait a bit, let the little child sit in her room and think about her actions. He was happy he hurt her, but this was only the start. If he could manage it, he would drive her to commit suicide.

Outside, Amy had regained a portion of her senses. The entity inside her temporarily released its hold. She could read Jessie. She was a shell of a person. Just as the skin is thin, so was her outward appearance. She had developed the ability to look happy, act happy, and stay that way, even though she was raging inside. Amy could tell something big was coming; at some point she was going to release all that anger, and someone was going to get hurt.

Anderson grew tired of watching Mary on the monitor. He stood and walked up the stairs, holding on to the rail as he pulled himself up. Never in all his days had a woman acted so maliciously toward him.

Mary could hear him coming. The entity still hid inside her, waiting.

As the door opened, she ran over to him. “Oh, please don’t be angry. I love you! All I want to do is be by your side. I can love you more than your wife!”

He scowled at her. “You’re the best of a bad situation. You think I love my wife? You think I love you? No, I’m in it for me, just me!”

She shook her head. “That’s not true! I have seen your romantic side! I’ve seen your heart! It’s this house; it has consumed you! Let’s leave this place and never return!”

He stepped forward, aggressively. “You think after the stunt you pulled that I would possibly want to leave with you? You’re a tool to me, useful at times, but worthless the rest.”

“You’re a monster!” she screamed.

“Maybe, but I’m not leaving my wife and I’m not leaving the university, but you are!”

Mary shook her head. “I will see to it you lose your chair over this!”

Anderson grabbed her. “No, you will not!” He slapped her across the face. “You will keep your mouth shut!” He slapped her again, and again, and again, finally, throwing her to the ground. “I don’t love you; I don’t know anyone who could.”

She stood up, dazed and heartbroken. All she wanted to do was ask why, but her lips could not form the words. She wanted to fix this, to make him happy again, but the will was no longer there. Instead, she ran from the room in tears.

Downstairs, Fletcher was waiting to comfort her and was pleased to see her coming. *Why would she want that old man anyway?* he thought.

As she made her way down, the entity took hold again. Her tears dried up and her face became emotionless.

Fletcher stretched out his arms. “I’m here for you.”

She snarled and slapped him across the face. “Who the hell you are?”

The slap stung, producing a perfect imprint of her hand. For a moment he was dazed, unprepared for the sudden attack. He watched as she stormed out of the house. *Bound for home*, he thought.

Though the attack was unwarranted, he knew who it was aimed at: Anderson. He could hold no malice toward Mary; how could anyone? She might be a failed home wrecker, but she still had needs. Anderson played her and used her for his own benefit, then tossed her out like garbage. His cold, calculating ways were revealed. The man behind the chair was not some god of psychology, just a politician who bluffed and positioned himself up the ladder. His suit was empty.

Amy and Jessie calmed themselves with the aid of the soda fountain. Amy had fully opened up the snack bar to let in the cool wind. The relaxing environment helped to soothe Jessie.

As the girls talked, they saw Mary walk toward them. Amy stepped forward. "Are you ok?"

Mary turned and looked at her, but said nothing. She continued forward, out of their sight.

Amy was furious; Mary had bruises all over her face. It was clear that Anderson had beaten her. She turned to Jessie. "This has got to stop!"

Jessie nodded her head as Amy grabbed a crowbar from under the counter. "When I come back, we're leaving."

Jessie nodded at her and watched her storm off.

Inside the house, Anderson came downstairs as Amy stood in the entranceway. He looked at her face. Her eyes were squinted, her lips curled, and her chest heaved as she took fast, deep breaths. "Now you hold it one minute, missy!"

She stepped forward, holding the crowbar like a bat. "You think you can abuse us and nothing's going to happen?"

He grabbed his cane. "You got what you deserved. Take it and get over it."

She lunged at him, but his grip on the rail was solid. He swung his cane, knocking the crowbar from her hands, then smashing her in the face with the tip.

Fletcher watched from the other side of the room, but something prevented him from helping. He felt frozen: though physically able to move, he had no will to do so.

As Amy stumbled to her feet, she felt a long gash across her cheek. She stumbled backward and passed out. Anderson walked over and quickly grabbed her by the hair. He dragged her to the bookcase, pulled back on the book, and the passage opened. He dragged her inside, then slammed the bookcase shut. He ripped the book out, damaging the locking mechanism and sealing her in.

A moment later, Amy woke and got on her feet. She realized where she was and violently banged on the door. "Let me out!"

Anderson listened on the other side. "When you calm down and realize your error, then I'll consider it!"

Suddenly the lights went out and she was plunged into darkness. She banged over and over again, but Anderson ignored her.

Fetcher continued to stare into space, the entity robbing him of his will to move. Inside he was screaming.

After awhile, Amy grew tired of banging on the door. She decided to use the tunnel to escape. Though there was no light to guide her, she knew exactly where it went.

Anderson went upstairs to the bathroom. His nose had stopped bleeding, though the dried blood ran all the way down his neck and into his clothing. He took a deep breath as he tried to calm down. He had never felt such anger and hostility. He believed in warmth, love, and compassion. Though he was a womanizer, he had never struck a woman in his life, until today. *What if it is the house?* he thought. *Ridiculous!*

Amy slowly made her way through the tunnel. Though she was in absolute darkness, she kept telling herself, *Every step is one more closer to the door.*

Anderson removed his clothes and turned on the shower. The water was warm and inviting. As he stepped in, he decided not to close the door. The last shower incident was still fresh in his mind.

How can I make all this right? he wondered. He smiled and thought, *Money! I will double everyone's pay. Money can cure anything!* He smiled and felt confident in his decision.

Amy finally made it to the wooden door and walked in. She felt alone and vulnerable. Something inside suddenly told her to run as a feeling of dread overtook her. She looked around; something was ghastly wrong. The air was heavy and breathing was difficult. She now realized the house had felt so empty because this is where they had gone. Suddenly she thought something was hiding and tricking her. With the adrenalin still pulsing through her veins from the fight with Anderson, she was not about to allow the entity to scare her. She wanted to fight; she felt the need to exact revenge. She scanned the room, but could not get a fix on it. "Come out! I'm not afraid of you!"

She walked around the room, scanning for anything out of place. She thought, *Out of place? Everything is out of place!* "I feel you!" she screamed. "It was you in my dream, wasn't it? You wanted me to feel calm, to enjoy myself, so you could cause absolute horror for me. I know it!"

There was no response.

"You're the one doing this; you turned us on each other! Now I know the truth, I can feel it! It was not Anderson; it was you, always you! Face me!"

The silence continued.

"You hide now, like a coward! You attack people in their sleep when they're not paying attention, but I'm paying attention to you now! Fight me! Are you afraid? I am tired of you, tired of this house! Tired of everything! I will play your games no more!"

She turned and walked back to the wooden door, but it slammed shut and locked. Suddenly a hand came over her mouth. Another hand grabbed her arm and bent it backwards. She arched her back and screamed as her arm was pulled farther and farther back. Black spots filled her eyes from the lack of oxygen as she lost consciousness.

Anderson stepped out of the shower, and the cold made him shiver. He grabbed the towel and thought, *I was not wrong in what I did. They had it coming. No one helped me; I did it on my own. I alone deserve the credit. No, I shall not pay them. They have no proof of anything!*

As Amy opened her eyes, she tried to move her arms and legs, but they were immobilized. She realized she was lying down. A moment later, a figure walked out of

the shadows. It was Mary. Amy looked at her with horror. She was dressed in surgical garb. “Bet you didn’t see this coming, you little fraud!”

Amy listened to the words, but it was not Mary’s voice, but that of the man in her dream—Junior!

Mary walked around, the hellish voice spewing out, “You always knew where we were; you wouldn’t leave us alone! I took away your little senses, but still you would not relent! If I feel like it, I will render you blind for the rest of your life! We asked you to leave, but you did not listen. Now you’re going to be here forever!”

Amy sweated profusely, and all she felt was terror. Her breathing became labored as Mary approached her with a scalpel. “The first thing we must do, my dear, is free you of that awful wardrobe!”

She slowly used the scalpel to cut away her clothes. “My, my, my, how youthful you are! Not a blemish on you!”

She placed the scalpel just under her ribcage and sliced her from side to side. Amy screamed and writhed in pain. The restraints popped and clicked as she pulled on them, but they did not break. Blood tricked from her mouth as she chewed on her own tongue.

Mary smiled and pulled the skin back. Blood poured from the gaping wound. Mary looked disappointed. “Don’t worry, I’m not going to kill you right away. That would take all the fun out of it.”

She grabbed a needle and thread and quickly closed the wound. Afterwards, she stood there, gazing at the naked young body before her. “You are so beautiful, such a perfectly sculpted body.” She leaned down and whispered, “You must work out.”

Amy shook as blood ran down her cheeks.

Mary reached over and grabbed the saw and held it up for Amy to see. “The sternum is a hard bone to cut. I want to take a look at your heart!”

Amy screamed as the saw roared to life. The smell of the bone burning against the blade was mind-numbing, but the actual cut was minimal. Tears flowed from her eyes as she vomited all over herself. Snot intermingled with the vomit and ran into her hair. Though she flailed her arms and legs, the restraints held and she was powerless to stop Mary.

Before the cut was too deep, Mary stopped. Again, she grabbed the needle and thread and closed the wound. “I was careful to avoid your breasts; you should be grateful for that!”

Mary stood back and looked at Amy’s body. “My, my, your body is so perfect; I just cannot seem to be done with it. It’s just so frustrating. I mean, I’m trying to be nice, but your little group keeps pissing me off.”

Amy was writing in pain, to Mary’s delight. “Well, this has been a complete misfire, but I cannot let this perfect body go to waste.” She admired her grotesque work. “Even in this state, your body is too perfect to let it rot in the ground. Tell ya what, I’m gonna let everybody see you!”

Amy lost consciousness for a mere moment. As she woke, the restraints were removed, but she was still on the table. The trap door above her head opened and the table lifted skyward. Mary walked from the room and up the stairs. Amy was too terrified to scream; she only worried about what was next.

As she ascended into the theater, the bright lights temporarily blinded her. She felt the table come to a stop as her eyes adjusted to the light. She looked up and Mary was

addressing the audience. As she turned her head, she saw all manner of horror. Creatures with one eye, disfigured souls, stretched bodies that were ten feet high, and more.

Mary continued smiling and spoke slowly, in an assertive tone. "Well my friends, we have a guest, a lovely person." Mary looked down at her. "Don't you just love what Andy has made here? He uses this place to scare people! They come on their own and he hurts them--isn't it wonderful? The best part is that some never leave! They grow up, but still they come back. My favorite is John. He had a troubled childhood. He found his way here when he was twelve. Now he's married, in his late thirties, with children, but still he comes back every year to hurt people. What a blessed person he is!" Mary's face changed to hate and anger, "But you, your soul is ugly. You don't like being right all the time and blah blah blah, woe is me. However, I think you would make a good addition to my family."

Mary turned to the crowd and said cheerfully, "I'm gonna go get her ready!"

Suddenly Amy leapt from the table and off the stage. She ran with all her might for the door and slid it open. As she got outside, the wasps were waiting and stung her mercilessly as she ran.

In her head she heard, *Run you little bitch! This is not over; I'll find you!* She put her hands over her ears as Junior laughed at her.

Amy ran, naked, tears streaming down her face, into the field. The sound of Junior's laughter faded the farther out she got. She ran all the way across the field, through the cattle of the adjoining ranch and to the first house she could see. Without pause, she ran to the door and banged on it, screaming, "Please, help me!"

Fletcher decided enough was enough. The entity temporarily allowed his personality to surface. He was furious. Amy was right; this was going to end, and end now. He stormed up the stairs and straight to Anderson's bedroom. He found him sitting on the bed, dressing himself.

Anderson looked at him. "What the hell do you want?"

Fletcher looked at him. "I'm taking charge and ending this investigation!"

Anderson walked past him and out of the room. "I doubt that very seriously, Dr. Fletcher."

He followed him. "You cannot use women at your discretion then toss them aside!"

Anderson entered the living room and walked over to his chair, next to the monitors. "I'd be careful. I know how much this job means to you."

"You're full of yourself. You're an arrogant, egotistical, lying old fart, and I will see that you pay for it!"

Anderson stared at him. He was sick of this man and it was time to let the cat out of the bag. "I know all about you, Mr. Fletcher. You think I have been out of contact with the university? The security guards found your car leaking oil, so they ran the tag to see who it belonged to. Seems it's not in your name, but I vouched that it was yours. I found it quite interesting that it had been reported stolen a few months ago.

"In addition, your name cannot be found with your alma mater, but a picture of you was identified as Larry Guild. Funny, a man known as Dr. Larry Guild is wanted in Montana for sexually abusing his young patients. So the moment you think you have the upper hand, remember, I know who you are!"

Fletcher was shocked. How could he know all this? "Sure of yourself aren't you?"

Anderson stood and backed him in a corner. "I may be a perverted old psychology teacher, but I've been around. Your real name has come up on multiple occasions, along with your failed views on psychology! Did you think I or the university would not figure it out? You've been on America's Most Wanted twice!"

Fletcher was stunned. "What are you going to do?"

"Nothing. I used you."

Fletcher balked. "Trust me, I would know if you were using me."

"Oh yeah? You think you're getting paid for this? You think your name is going alongside mine? You're cannon fodder, and I brought you out here hoping you would die! I need the publicity! You're nothing to me, just another child abuser who's stayed in the free world too long!" Anderson walked back to his chair.

"You're wrong."

Anderson laughed. "You think so? You think Dean Schulz is just going to let anyone into the university? You think that human resources did not figure out who you were? No, Dr. Guild, you were set up in my experiment. It was my idea to have Dean Schulz offer you the job!"

Fletcher reached down and grabbed a video cable. He walked behind Anderson and slipped it around his neck. With all his might, he tightened it. Anderson lunged from the chair, fighting him, but Fletcher was too strong.

Anderson kicked and flailed his arms, desperate to free himself from the stranglehold, but Fletcher held tight. The scowl on his face said everything. It was time for this old man to die.

As Anderson stopped struggling, Fletcher heard a voice. *Yes, do it. Kill him like you killed Sarah.*

Fletcher let go. "That was an accident."

No it wasn't. You cannot lie to me. I know what you did. You can lie to everyone else, but you're incapable of lying to me!

Anderson gasped for air. He collapsed on the floor, exhausted from the fight.

Fletcher looked down at him, terrified of what the entity made remember. He grabbed one of the monitors and hit Anderson in the head with it. He laughed as Anderson fell to the floor, bleeding from his scalp. Slowly, he backed out of the house, as the entity continued to torture him.

He walked out of the house and looked at the ropes in the gallows. They were swinging. *No*, he thought, *that's not a solution*. He heard a voice in his head. *Yes, it is.*

"I cannot, I will not!"

Yes, you will. You're pathetic, you're a loser. You couldn't even take Jessie.

He put his hands over his eyes and refused to look. He walked blindly forward, crashing into the fence, crying and trying not to look at the gallows.

Finally he looked up, and somehow he had stumbled to the other side of the snack bar, near the iron gate. The voice in his head continued, *I let you have that girl, but you refused. She was there, vulnerable, for the taking. Just like you took Sarah--yes, those were good times, weren't they?*

He shook his head. "No! I couldn't, not again, not Jessie!" He grabbed his head and ripped out a fistful of hair. In a strained voice he screamed, "Leave me alone!"

The voice continued, *I would have left you alone if you had taken Jessie, but not now. I'll never leave you alone. I'm with you forever. Only one way out--take it!*

He stumbled into the midway, crying out, "Save me, God! Save me from myself!"

The barn door to the theater creaked open. He cried out, "No, I cannot."

Yes, you can.

"I don't want to."

Do it or it's prison for the rest of your life. They'll never let you out, but I'll be with you, always and forever.

He continued forward, stumbling and crying. His head felt as if it was in a vise. The world was closing in on him, and he had nowhere left to go. He reached the morgue and entered the theater, but everything was gone. It was nothing more than a barn. In the center stood a large pail turned upside down. Above it was a rope tied into a noose. He shook his head as he stared at it. "I cannot."

Do it, set yourself free. Do it, and I shall let you go!

Tears streamed down his face. His headache increased as his sanity wavered. He felt his soul was lost. Nothing made sense anymore. He had done so much wrong in his life that there was no way to fix it. Some sins were beyond apologies. He stepped onto the pail and slid the noose around his neck. He stood there, tempted to jump—tempted to leave. Back and forth, he wrestled with himself. Could God forgive such a person? He looked to his right and then to his left...

BOO!

He stumbled and fell and the rope caught his neck as he slowly began to strangle. His feet desperately searched for the pail, but he could not find it. The grayish figure floated in front of him.

The rope dug into his skin as his lungs began to fill with fluid. The ghost laughed at him. *Yes, struggle for me. Let your life go.*

With his last gasp of air, he said, "I'll do it."

The rope instantly broke and he fell to the ground, writhing in pain. He passed out after a short time, but he did not dream. Mary, who had watched it all, now watched him sleep, with great anticipation.

Back in the manor, Anderson struggled to his feet. He stumbled to the front door and locked it, fearing Fletcher--or rather, Larry--would return.

Day 4

Fulfillment

Just after midnight, Anderson sat behind his monitors. Since Fletcher left, there had been no further activity. He wondered from time to time if he was outside or if he had left, but it made no difference, there was still a job to be done.

In all the excitement, no one had noticed that Jessie had returned to her room. She was emotionally exhausted and slept peacefully in the bed.

Downstairs, Anderson's eyes were glazed over; he shut them from time to time, to no avail. He ceased drinking sodas and did everything he could to sleep, but it was no use. He rationalized that his will to succeed was greater than his mind's need for rest.

The house was quiet and seemed empty. As he looked around at the antique décor, he wondered if it was real or fake. Though he had proved the breakfast incident was real, the thought of being tricked had never left his mind. A part of him was already gearing up for a lawsuit. If this week was nothing more than a production, it would be the last production this house would ever see.

Though he missed the company of the young girls, it was best that they were gone. He would ensure that any report they filed with the council would be discredited and destroyed. How the council chose them out of the five hundred candidates was amazing.

Anderson shook his head as he thought, *They set me up. They wanted me to fail. Dean Schulz has been trying to oust me for years. That mongrel! Well, I'm the tenured one and you are just the sniveling weasel who got in good with the President. I'm the one who makes you look good, and this is how you repay me, by ruining my life's work!*

As he ranted to himself, he glanced at the equipment and noticed the tiny needle on the voltmeter moved. Though that was not uncommon, it piqued his curiosity nonetheless. He smiled as it danced back and forth, almost rhythmically. Amazingly, it continued to move, hitting different levels as he watched. He thought, *If it was an audio wave, I could dance to the beat.*

As he watched with fascination, he noticed the bedroom camera in Mary's room. The blankets were moving! Quickly, he checked the computer and made sure he was still transmitting. Wonderful, he thought, everything was working!

He watched the monitor with fascination as the bed stripped itself. Once that was done, he noticed the pillow cases were coming off. He glanced at the temperature sensors. The room had dropped thirty degrees in a matter of minutes.

"Lovely, absolutely lovely," he said.

Something in the room seemed to be searching for something. Slowly and methodically, everything in the room was disturbed. Each of the suitcases was opened and the contents tossed about the room in a violent fury. Faster and faster, the clothes were thrown about the room. Whatever it was, it seemed to be in a hurry. Anderson sat there, mesmerized by the video. This was success! This was the golden calf he had searched for. Every instrument was working and transmitting. He could hear the little beeps and clicks as the instruments worked in overdrive.

As the last of the clothes floated to the ground, Anderson noticed the room temperature rising. *No*, he thought, *don't quit now, I need more!* He picked up a microphone and began the verbal documentation. "It's 12:32 a.m., Thursday, March 5, 2009, day four. I have watched an invisible entity methodically remove the bedding from a bed and search my suitcases. It has shown particular malice toward my own possessions, tossing them all over the room. However, I do not believe this to be a personal attack. Instead, seems to be more an exploration of foreign objects than anything else. Though I cannot see it, its methods show intelligence. Right now, in the second upstairs room, the temperature is forty-two degrees Fahrenheit, thirty degrees cooler than the rest of the house."

He paused a moment as he scanned the girls' room and found that it was occupied. He resumed his recording. "Strangely, Jessie has returned to her bed but seems unaffected by the environment. Electrical energy in the room has increased, starting at

less than one millivolt and climbing to near one hundred millivolts. All data is being recorded on university laptop number 11402-1. In addition, all data is being transmitted via a wireless router to the University Computer Science Lab; file-Anderson; personal data; special project.”

As he watched, the temperature in the room began to climb. For a moment, the house returned to normal. He stopped the recording and remained perfectly still, allowing all of his senses to take in the surroundings.

As he glanced down at his equipment, the voltmeter continued dancing all over the place. The temperature began falling in the kitchen and in the chapel. As Anderson watched the monitors, he saw a flickering light on the altar. He remotely operated the camera, turning it and focusing in on the light. It was the candles on the altar; they were lit. As he watched, orbs of light emerged from the candles and floated about the room.

Quickly he grabbed his microphone. “It’s 12:45 am, Thursday, March 5, 2009, day 4. After witnessing a paranormal search of my bedroom, a visible entity has emerged into the chapel. Without assistance, the candles on the altar were lit and now orbs of light are emerging from those candles. The orbs are perfect balls of white light, glowing and radiating outward. There does not seem to be any source of light in the room beyond the candles and the orbs. It is my estimation that this house is more than just a haunting, but a spiritual gateway, and that gateway lies within the chapel, perhaps within the candles themselves. It is also possible that this house is a well of souls. As I am watching on the monitor, the orbs are floating about the room in a disorganized pattern, almost like microbes in a fish bowl. They don’t seem to be reacting to the camera or anything else in the room, including each other.”

Anderson was completely amazed. He watched in awe as the orbs left the chapel and entered the kitchen. He continued his recording. “Now the temperature of the chapel has fallen forty degrees. The orbs are moving into the kitchen, where the temperature is falling. Volts are off the scale. Visual recording is unimpeded, both wired and wireless cameras are performing flawlessly. Data is being uploaded to the university at maximum speed.”

His eyes were wide. He completely forgot about his project, his rejection, his team, and everything else. He was like a kid entering a toy store for the very first time. He wondered how long this would last.

His eyes were glued to the monitors, and he failed to notice the orbs passing through the walls and into the living room. Only when the light reflected off the glass did he look up. Less than three feet from his face was an orb. He marveled at its beauty. The outward light was a brilliant white, but inside he could detect faint color shifts. He stared closely, but he could not detect a source. The radiating light from the inner core to the outer horizon was perfect.

He mumbled, “From what world shall you come into mine, with such splendor and beauty that all I am is for you?”

He looked around as more orbs entered the room. He stood as they flew around randomly. Some circled around him, even passing right through him. “It’s wonderful!” he screamed. “Simply wonderful!”

The instrument cluster was off the scale. Suddenly the temperature sensors failed and sparks flew from the voltmeter as it shorted out, but the computer and the monitors continued working perfectly. Data was transmitting even as Anderson forgot all about it. He walked from behind the monitors and danced around, as if music was playing.

As he was dancing, he noticed shadows cast by the orbs. The shadows were not of objects in the room, but of people. They moved and walked as the orbs moved. He stopped and looked at them, then looked at the orbs. *Souls*, he thought. *That's what the orbs are: souls! That explains the intelligence; that's all they are, the energy intelligence of the person who died!* His project came rushing back into his mind. He walked over to his equipment and was elated. Though the temperature sensors and voltmeter had stopped working, everything else was functioning normally.

He sat behind the monitors as the orbs continued their random paths. He suddenly felt tired, not just exhaustion, but the release of the insomnia. His body and mind were at peace as his project was complete. Now all that was left was the easy part, documentation.

Within a matter of moments, the orbs vanished, along with the shadows. The house returned to normal. Without thinking, Anderson stood and walked up the stairs. He crossed the balcony and entered his room. Slowly, with a drunken smile, he took the sheets and blankets from the floor and made the bed.

Though he had vowed to stay awake until the project was complete, with such success, his will and his mind were in sync. Finally, after three sleepless nights, he could rest. As soon as his head hit the pillow, he was out. He slept all night, as peacefully as a baby.

The next morning, Anderson yawned and smiled with satisfaction. He woke with such energy that he felt as if he was twenty years old. As he began to dress himself, the plight of his team returned to him. Under his breath he cursed them, vowing they would never see a dime of his money. He was enraged that Amy, Mary, and Fletcher had abandoned him. He did not, however, miss Mary. He was glad she was gone. *Just as well*, he thought. *If she shows up Monday, she's fired; if not, she quit. Either way, it's for the best. Secretaries are easy to replace, just find the dumbest head with the biggest boobs on the youngest body and pay her just enough so she'll keep her mouth shut.*

Anderson continued his thought process out loud, "Oh sure, I will interview the right candidates, with the appropriate ethnicity and background, then hire based on my own judgment." Yes, that was as good a word as any; after all, only white men are the majority. Everyone else is the minority, including hot young white women.

Unbeknownst to Anderson as he praised himself, Fletcher had not left, and in fact he was awake. He stood from the dirt floor and dusted himself off. He had worked so hard to fool himself and everyone else. He had lied for so long about his identity that even he was unsure how many memories were real.

As he stood and looked at the morning sun peering in through holes, the theater setting was back. He braced himself on one of the seats and thought, *I cannot deny what I am*. He smiled sadistically as he left the morgue and walked toward the manor. Mary quietly followed him, careful to stay out of sight as well as hide what was in her hands.

Anderson marveled at his brilliance. After all, he was the chair of the department. His actions didn't matter, only his public message. Actions are purely gestures. He knew his time had come. He was about to be one of the richest men on the planet, with a discovery that would rival electricity.

He walked into in the bathroom, rationalizing that his behavior was just. Though he felt bad for slapping Jessie, she deserved it. Yes, his demeanor was unchanged—it was everyone else who had changed. He just reacted to them poorly, but he was not unjustified. He stood in the bathroom, picturing himself dressed in a black tuxedo, receiving an award for his ground-breaking discovery.

Once his grooming was complete, he walked to the end of the bed and sat down. He convinced himself that today, on his own, as it always should have been, he would start processing the data. Once this venture was over, his name would be placed next to the greats of psychology. He could see it now, listed in a textbook:

Dr. Jonathan Bartholomew Anderson- Provided undeniable proof of the existence of ghosts, demons, and the afterlife. His work, over a forty year period, is hailed as one of the greatest discoveries of man.

Downstairs, as Fletcher and Mary drew closer to the manor, all of the monitors were displaying snow. The lights in the house dimmed over and over again. The computers were smoking. The house creaked, but remained still, as if it was watching.

Anderson decided to pack. There was no reason to stay here; this part of the project was done. The faster he returned to the university, the better. He had to get his findings documented and scrutinized. There was no time to waste. He picked up his cell phone and was delighted he had a signal. He immediately called his house.

“The Andersons’ residence.”

Anderson smiled. “Bernard, is my wife around?”

“No sir, she left early this morning on another social call.”

“Fine, I need you to come pick me up. On my desk you will find the directions to Reindeer Manor. Please bring the Yukon.”

“Very good sir, I shall leave at once.”

Anderson exited his room and walked right past the girls’ room. He had no intention of taking Jessie with him. He braced himself on the rail as he descended with his suitcase.

Fletcher walked to the front door and pulled, but it was locked. He pulled and pulled, but the door would not give. He stepped back and smiled. “You want this as badly as I do, so how about a little help?” Fletcher watched as the lock was retracted and the door opened for him.

Anderson walked over to the monitors, but became extremely concerned when he saw the computers smoking. He quickly checked all the data, but everything seemed to be fine. “Keep uploading--just a little longer, then you can go out.”

Fletcher smiled as he entered the manor. As he rounded the corner into the living room, the voice in his head said, *Don’t kill him*. Fletcher noticed Anderson’s cane leaning on the wall. He quietly picked it up, then with great force, struck Anderson over the head with it, breaking the cane in two. Anderson collapsed into the monitors, then fell onto the floor.

Fletcher looked up at the girls' door as he ascended the stairs. He walked slowly and methodically, savoring every moment. Once he reached the door, he turned the knob slowly.

Inside, Jessie woke to the sound of the door opening. As she sat up, she noticed the cold. She shivered and felt terrified. She watched as the handle slowly turned until it would turn no more. The door creaked open and to her horror, there stood Fletcher. She looked at him. "What do you want?"

He smiled. "Daddy's home."

Mary quietly slipped through the front door and walked carefully into the living room. She walked over to the computers and sat down, carefully placing her items on the floor. As Anderson's secretary, she knew all of his passwords. She followed the history on the browser and logged in under his name. She pulled up the files on the project and without remorse, hit delete. She then told the computer to reformat all drives.

Jessie dashed off the bed and into the passageway. Fletcher, oblivious to Mary's presence below, turned and walked to the next door. Jessie burst from the door and he grabbed her. She screamed and fought, but his grip was too strong. He wrestled her into the room at the end. She kicked and screamed as he slapped her over and over again, but he did not stop. He grabbed her shirt and ripped it off her body. Tears were pouring down her face as she continued to beg him to stop.

Mary smiled and picked up her items. As she stepped over Anderson's body, she gritted her teeth at him. "Soon." She kept her hands behind her back, continuing to conceal something. She listened to the struggle from the second floor as she walked up the staircase.

Jessie continued to fight and beg, "Dr. Fletcher, please stop!"

He laughed, "My name is Larry, you slut!" He ripped her bra off her body. "I remember those!" He shoved her into the corner and unzipped his pants. "You're going to make Daddy feel real good."

He walked closer. "Come give Daddy a kiss, or I'll tear your throat out!"

Jessie closed her bloodshot eyes, and just as she pleaded to her real daddy, she begged, "Please don't, I love you."

Mary entered the room and walked straight for him.

Fletcher looked down at Jessie. "Bitch, put your mouth on my—"

Mary brought her hands from behind her back and revealed two axes. She tossed one down, then swung the other, striking Fletcher in his right forearm and slicing it from his body. He fell to the floor, writhing in pain. He rolled about the room and screamed in agony. Jessie's anger boiled over as she stood and grabbed the other axe. Without a second thought, she swung the axe and buried it into his right leg, just above the kneecap.

The house erupted into violence. Every camera flew from its tripod and into the living room, smashing against the wall. The monitors exploded, one by one, sending shards of glass in all directions. With great flashes of light, all of the electronics were destroyed.

Wind blew through the house, knocking down the paintings. Papers from the study flew in every direction. Books launched themselves from the shelves and the old grandfather clock's hand spun wildly. All the doors in the house opened and slammed shut repeatedly. The glass in the grandfather clock exploded. The pillows, blankets, bedspreads, clothes, and mattresses flew around the room as the bed frames were ripped apart. In the chapel, the pews fell forward as the altar collapsed in on itself, the paint of the pentagram ran down the wall like blood, and the novel spat its pages out.

Lights flickered throughout the property. The organ began playing and a child's voice echoed over the loud speakers in the midway, the voice of Jessie. "Where's my daddy?"

Flames erupted from the statues, the morgue, and the old gas station. The nooses at the gallows danced wildly.

Inside the morgue, the children's beds tore themselves apart. The rocking chair went back and forth wildly. The projector crashed down in the theater.

Every electrical outlet in the midway sparked. In the small barn, every breaker flipped back and forth wildly until the electrical system was overloaded. Finally, in one grand flash, every light bulb, in every building, including every flashlight, exploded.

The winds died and the property was calm, except in one room.

Mary swung and hit the mark after Jessie, severing the right leg from his body. Fletcher screamed, his voice carrying deep into the pasture, but not far enough to be heard.

Jessie swung and severed his left hand. Mary swung and got her blade stuck in his left shoulder. She stepped on his head for leverage and pulled it out as Jessie swung and planted the axe in his stomach. He screamed and writhed in agony as Mary swung and buried the axe in his side. Jessie swung and chopped into his left lung. Mary swung and nailed him in the crotch. Jessie laughed; then buried her axe in his crotch. Mary swung and struck him in the side.

Jessie winked at Mary, then looked at Fletcher, his dismembered body pooling in blood. Barely alive, he heard her say, "I'm sorry!"

Jessie swung her axe and severed his head from his body. Then quickly, Mary swung her axe and chopped off Jessie's head. It rolled a good ten feet, until it stopped in the corner of the room. Her headless body collapsed backwards, twitching as blood poured from her neck.

A great sigh came from the house. The entities were almost at rest.

Mary stood back and gazed at the dead bodies. Every ounce of individualism, sanity, rationalization, and morality were gone. The entity had won, and she knew not what she had done.

She dropped the axe, her face showing no expression. She walked from the room, and though the house was plunged into absolute darkness, it did not affect her. She walked into her bedroom and changed clothes.

A moment later, there was a knock at the front door. Suddenly, the lights came back on, as Mary walked out of the room. She stood at the railing and looked down. Anderson was no longer lying on the floor. As she descended the stairs, she heard him talking outside. She walked to the front door and found Anderson outside, talking with his butler. He turned and looked at her. "My cane is broken. If you will help Bernard, I will take you home."

She looked at him and nodded.

Once the vehicle was loaded with the broken equipment, Anderson looked at Mary. “Have you seen the others?”

She looked at him with no expression. “Their souls have departed this land.”

He sighed and watched her get into the passenger side of the vehicle. “At least I got my data.”

As the vehicle came to a stop just outside the property, Bernard, on Anderson’s command, got out of the vehicle and secured the barricades. Once he was back in the vehicle he looked at Anderson. “What about that golf cart sitting over to the side?”

“Leave it.”

As Bernard started the vehicle, Anderson whispered, “Reindeer Manor is closed once again.”

Mary looked at the back of his head and whispered, “No, it’s not.”

Day 5

The alarm went off as Anderson opened his eyes. He looked all around but was surrounded by darkness, pure sweet darkness. It had been four days since he slept in his own bed, and he thought, *How wonderful it is!* However, there was work to be done, and it was time to rise. He stood and pulled back the heavy curtains to let the morning sunshine in. He turned and looked, but his wife was not there. *Odd*, he thought, so he checked the time.

To his horror, it was 11:00 a.m. He quickly checked his email and was delighted to already have a confirmation with the council, but it was in three hours. He had to get to the university quickly and begin compiling a preliminary report.

He dressed hurriedly and ran out the door. As he was driving, he thought, *What an odd sensation. I know I’m driving, but it feels as if I am also a passenger.* After a few moments, his brain began to catch up with his body. He began thinking more clearly, but all the same, something just did not feel right.

He pulled into the parking lot and parked in his spot. He took a deep breath, wondering what the day would bring him. The more time passed, the more anxious he became. He shook off the feeling as best he could, trying to maintain his composure. Though he felt like a giddy school girl, it was not appropriate to display it.

As he walked into the building, a sudden sense of dread came over him, but he rationalized that it was his nerves. He shook his head, then proceeded to his office.

As he entered, Mary smiled at him. “Good morning Dr. Anderson.”

He wanted to yank her out of that seat and throw her out of his office. He felt his mouth beginning to form the words, “Screw off, whore,” but he fought them intensely. He felt anger building in him, but could not rationalize why. He had to fight his own jaw to say, “Good morning Mary.”

As he passed by, she followed him with her eyes. A sadistic smile came across her face as Anderson walked into his office.

Inside, he found everything just as he had left it. His book, the letter, the newspaper-- there was nothing out of place. He quickly sat down and pulled up the files to the haunting, but nothing was there. A sinking feeling came over him and he dashed out of

the office. As he walked down the hallway, he felt his blood pressure going up. His left eye began to tick as thoughts of failure filled his mind.

He burst through the doors of the computer science lab. As he entered, he ran past row after row of students, all hogging the computers. Finally, he found an open terminal. He sat down, typed in his password, and logged in. There before him were his files. He swallowed nervously as he opened them, one by one, until he came to 'Projects'. He clicked on it, but the screen came up empty.

Sweat began pouring down his brow as his anger grew. He began to shake as he searched and searched, but he only found classroom records. The rest of his files were gone. Suddenly he vomited all over the floor.

A young student with a full beard and a gold tooth, covered in tattoos, ran up. "Professor, are you all right?"

Anderson sat back. He felt his head was in a vise. "Um...maybe, um...I can't find my files. Can you look?"

The young man checked the data, but there was no data to be found. Anderson was sweating profusely. "Um...there was some equipment brought in last night. Could you hook it up for me?"

The young man shook his head. "That equipment was trashed. I hate to say it, but it left with the recycler over an hour ago."

Anderson closed his eyes and nodded. He then stood and walked from the lab in a daze. The young man called for janitor to clean up the mess.

As he walked back to his office, Anderson couldn't believe there was no data. He began going over every little detail in his head, even as his headache grew in intensity.

Mary watched as Anderson slowly walked back into the office. "Oh God, you're a mess! How can I help?"

Anderson looked at her. "You have to tell them the truth. You have to tell them the haunting was real."

She looked at him, "Of course I will. You just need to relax."

She watched him slowly walk into his office. He looked so broken. As the door closed, she laughed, "Oh, I'll tell them all right!" She called down to the dean and asked to make a taped confession. He agreed and invited her down.

Anderson sat in his chair and stared at the wall. His mind was slowly breaking; the realization of failure was too much to bear.

At 2:05 p.m., Anderson's phone rang. He reached over and picked it up. "Hello?"

"Dr. Anderson, you asked to present your preliminary findings to the board this afternoon and we're waiting for you. Will you please come to the general conference room?"

He hung up the phone and walked out of his office. He looked at Mary. "It's time to go."

She looked at him and smiled. "I've already had my turn, but they're waiting on you."

Anderson walked out of the office like a corpse. Mary could not help laughing after he was gone.

As Anderson sat down, the council stared at him with great disappointment. Anderson sighed, "There has been a glitch. My data is temporarily unavailable."

Dean Shultz shook his head. "I don't think your data will be necessary. We want you to listen to this."

The dean turned on a tape recorder.

“Will you state your name for the record?”

“Mary Renee Simms.”

“Thank you, Miss Simms, and for the record, what is your position with the university?”

“I’m the secretary for Dr. Jonathon Anderson.”

“Again, thank you. What was your role in this investigation?”

“I was a general assistant to Dr. Anderson.”

“Very good, now getting right down to it, please tell the council your view of the investigation.”

“Well, it started off with a long car ride to Reindeer Manor. Once we got there, we discovered the property had no power. However, instead of searching for the breakers, Dr. Anderson insisted that we begin the investigation. He led us through Reindeer Manor, using one flashlight and our cell phones as light.

“The house was quite spooky, but given that we were walking around a strange building in the dark, that’s not unusual. So we toured the house and found it was quite old with some very nice artwork, but that’s all.

“On the second day, after Dr. Anderson’s equipment ran out of battery power, he finally went and found the breakers. At the same time, we started our tour of the morgue, but it too was uneventful.

“With the house now having power, there was no need for the flashlights. The house was much more intricately decorated than we thought, but that fascination soon gave way to boredom. However, at breakfast, Dr. Anderson, seemingly out of frustration, kept kicking the legs of the table, causing glasses to spill and claiming it was something else. We asked him to stop, but he would not. He continued until everyone’s breakfast was ruined.

“On the third day, Amy, the purported medium, left. I think she had a fight with Dr. Anderson because she felt he was a fraud. That was also the day we found out that Dr. Fletcher was actually Dr. Guild. He left as well, possibly fearing the law would catch up with him.

“On the last day, Anderson offered a substantial bribe to Jessie and me. I think Jessie took the money, so I would be careful about what she might tell you. In addition, he rented the property for five days, but since no one was willing to stay, he called it off.

“Now I assume Jessie took the bribe, because Anderson destroyed all the equipment. I think he wanted it to look like there was a haunting, when really it’s just a Halloween attraction.

“Finally, to my own detriment, I have been having an ongoing affair with Dr. Anderson since I was hired. It’s not an affair I wanted, but I felt powerless in my situation. I believe the only reason he hired me was because I would sleep with him. I am sick and tired of this and I intend to file a lawsuit against this university. I am sure you can guess why.”

The dean stopped the tape and looked at Anderson. “Do you care to explain yourself, Professor?”

Anderson had a burning sensation in his head. He covered his face with both hands. “She’s lying. Reindeer Manor *is* haunted.” Without another word, he stood and walked to the door.

The dean warned him, "If you're thinking of firing her, you'd better think twice. However, if these allegations of sexual misconduct are true, I won't just terminate you, I will spare no expense to discredit your entire life."

Anderson left the room without saying anything else.

One of the council members looked at the dean. "That is not the Dr. Anderson we know. Something is wrong with that man. I think you better get Dr. Weinstein to speak with him before he does something drastic!"

Anderson did not even acknowledge Mary as he walked back into the office. He simply sat behind his desk and stared at the wall.

A few moments later, Dr. Weinstein walked in. "Professor, the dean wanted me to speak with you. Are you all right?"

Anderson looked at him with tears streaming down his face. "I went to that haunted house. It's real, Albert! I saw it all; it is haunted!"

Weinstein knew of the project and how much time Anderson had put into it over the past five months. "I think you may need to take a sabbatical. Your stress level seems to be off the charts."

Anderson looked at him. "What can say? I was there!" Suddenly he remembered that Weinstein had investigated Reindeer Manor years ago. "Didn't you investigate that place?"

"Yes, but not in a serious way. It was a novelty thing."

"I don't care. What did you find?"

"We used very crude devices, just stuff lying around the electronics lab and such. We detected magnetic disturbances and temperature variations, but nothing substantial."

"How long did you stay?"

"We were only there for the afternoon. We made a small donation to the Boy Scout troop that ran it at the time and they gave us a tour."

Anderson sat back. "So you saw the chapel."

Weinstein thought about it. "I don't remember there being a chapel. I remember being shown where the dining room was and where the original entrance was, but we were told that some parts of the house were sealed off."

"What about the second floor?"

"No, we weren't allowed to go up there."

Anderson grew tired of thinking and his vision was becoming blurred. "Can we talk about something else?"

Weinstein chuckled. "Of course, what would you like to discuss?"

"Tell me about the project you're on now."

Weinstein shifted in his seat. *This won't go well*, he thought. "Well, to be honest, I've been investigating a haunting of my own; I'm not sure you want to discuss it, though."

A seed of jealousy began growing inside Anderson. He felt cheated, as if he had been led astray. "Yes, I would like to discuss it, please. Tell me about it."

Weinstein sat up. "Well, the name of the property is the Davis House—" He waited for a response, but got none, so he continued. "From the research done, the house and land were bought just before the suburb of Mesquite was founded. The owner leased the property to a family that moved from South Carolina. Unfortunately, during a horrid ice storm, that family perished in a fire, except for the husband, who was—" Weinstein paused again.

Anderson just looked at him. “Was what?”

Weinstein shook his head. “Don’t you remember the Davis House? It was the first house you investigated.”

Anderson shook his head.

“The Davis House, also known as Foxwood, number one in your book, *Texas Hauntings*.”

Anderson shook his head.

Weinstein sat back in his seat, deeply concerned. It would have been one thing if he forgot one of his hauntings, but the first— the one that ignited his passion for the paranormal?

Anderson looked off into space. “I saw orbs.”

Weinstein smiled. “You actually saw orbs?”

“Saw them, touched them, danced with them. It was so real, so perfect. I saw the inner light and how its color shifted, ever so slightly.”

Weinstein was growing more concerned by the moment. Whatever was bothering his colleague was powerful. “I recommend you check into the hospital.”

Anderson looked at him. “I went down to the computer science lab today, and it was as if the project never existed.” He closed his eyes and sighed, “You know, Amy sat right there and told me I would be dancing with the devil on this one, and in the end, that’s what I did: I danced with the orbs as the shadows watched.”

Weinstein sighed. “I want to take you to Parkland. Would that be ok?”

Anderson looked away. “I can’t leave.”

“Why not?”

Anderson could not rationalize why he could not leave; he just knew that he had to stay. “I’m going to be ok; I just need to stay here.”

Weinstein looked at his watch. “I’ll check in on you later. Get something to eat.”

Anderson nodded as the man left. For hours he sat in his chair, pondering what he should do now. Several hours later, Anderson was still staring at the wall as he heard the tumblers in the door click.

The door slowly creaked open.

He looked up and saw Mary pointing a gun at him. “Tell me one more time, are you going to leave your wife for me now?”

He looked at her with no expression. “No.”

He saw a tiny little flash, and then he saw no more.

Far out past the parking lot, where the football team conducted practices, a faint pop was heard. As the sound traveled across the parking lot, echoing off a tree line in the distance, the players stopped to take notice.

The air became stale and lifeless. The wasps in the distance calmed themselves and returned to their nests. The ants and spiders resumed their work. The players looked at each other and then as the second pop was heard, there was no denying that it was gunfire.

Campus police found the bodies moments later.

On Monday, Andy returned to the manor. His face and arms were tanned to a golden brown from his vacation. He was dressed in a Hawaiian shirt, white shorts, and sandals. He parked his van just outside the iron gate of Reindeer Manor. As he walked up, he peeked inside the snack bar. Everything had been cleaned up and put away. He was quite impressed.

As he entered the manor, nothing had changed since he had left. The house looked to be in good condition, at least until he stepped into the dining room. "Damn," he said as he looked at the framing, "why did they take down the drywall?!"

He toured the rest of the first floor and then nailed the door to the chapel shut once more. Afterwards, he ascended the stairs and walked through the rooms. Everything seemed to be order until he opened the door to the last room...

On Tuesday, Dean Shulz read about the murders at Reindeer Manor. Now, he did not know what to believe.



And the haunting continues...



Teaser for Part 2 of
“The Haunted Houses of Anderson”

The Chronicles of Foxwood

Forward from Dr. Weinstein

On Tuesday March 3rd, 2009, I was contacted by a Rev. Donald Jacobs about a haunted house in Mesquite, Texas. I invited him to my office for an interview and was intrigued about what he told me. His visit launched the biggest investigation of my life and the biggest coincidence as well.

As many of you know, my name is Dr. Weinstein. I aided and counseled my friend and colleague, Dr. Jonathon Anderson just before his murder on March 6th, 2009.

On Halloween night 2008, Dr. Anderson followed up on a newspaper article that validated the existence of ghosts at the infamous Reindeer Manor in Red Oak, Texas. What happened to him during his visit is a mystery, but what is clear, is his experience led to his insanity. However, his murder has been ruled a separate incident, as his affair with Mary Simms has tarnished his legend.

It is true that I investigated Reindeer Manor several years ago, but found nothing significant. All I can tell you about the death of Dr. Anderson is that it is shrouded in the same mystery as the original owner of the property, James Sharp.

After Dr. Anderson’s murder, his wife sold their Highland Park estate and moved away. She has never been heard from since, though she is not suspected of any wrongdoing. Instead, I believe shame is what caused her to leave.

In any case, during my final moments with Dr. Anderson, I spoke of my newest project, The Davis House, actually called Foxwood. What’s interesting is that Foxwood is the first investigation in Anderson’s life work. It is only by mere coincidence that I was

contacted by the current owner of the house in seeking help from the haunting. However, I must quote Dr. Anderson in this context. We were discussing a separate haunting and he looked me dead in the eyes and said, "It was as if the house called to me." Now I know he has said that too many people, but it is still a very interesting statement.

I have surmised that due to Dr. Anderson's failing mental condition, he failed to recognize the story I told him about Foxwood, otherwise he would have sat up in his chair and boasted about his investigation.

As a final tribute to my colleague, I have absorbed his unpublished work and added it to my investigation. To give him all the credit he deserves, I have joined with him postmortem and added my name to his manuscript, "Texas Hauntings," as a coauthor.

Before I update you on my investigation, let me tell you what Dr. Anderson found...

Anderson's Report

The Davis Family

Mesquite, Texas was founded May 22, 1873 along the Texas & Pacific railroad that ran from Dallas, TX, to Shreveport, LA. The railroad began to stop in the small town once it was established as a prospering farming and ranching community.

In 1878, The Davis family, a poor family from South Carolina that had relocated to Dallas after the Civil War, worked for the Texas & Pacific Railroad. Because of their prudent savings, the family was able to rent a house and land on the outskirts of Mesquite. The house was owned by A.C. Jameson, a wealthy businessman in Dallas who owned several cattle ranches. The house was located about a quarter mile from the train station. The family farmed the land and raised livestock.

On an unusually cold October night, the wind howled as storm clouds raged overhead. Two weather systems were passing each other, forcing the warmer storm clouds on top. This made the rain fall from through a cold arctic air mass. This unusual set of circumstances created a treacherous blanket of ice as the super cooled rain instantly froze to anything it touched. The trees that whipped in the wind now cracked under the weight of the ice. One by one, the trees gave way to the weight and crashed to the ground.

The horses, safe in the stables, were spooked by the lightning and thunder, but the howling wind made it impossible for them to be heard. The cattle did their best to huddle together for warmth, but the freezing rain lowered their body temperatures and many succumbed to the elements. As the night wore on, the storm got worse. The rain turned to snow as the wind picked up speed.

Inside a lone house, which stood apart from the town, lay a sleeping family. All cuddled in their beds, warm and safe from the misery outside. That was until a loud burst of thunder shook the children awake. Through the darkness they slowly made their way to the parent's bedroom. The house creaked and strained under the weight of the ice that lay on the roof. A full blizzard roared outside the thin walls of the wooden structure.

The outside world was in chaos. As the children were welcomed into their parent's bed, a huge bolt of lightning struck near the house as thunder vibrated the floor.

Their father stood and looked out the window, concerned about his animals. He quickly dressed and made his way downstairs. His wife pleaded for him not to go outside, but he insisted to get the cattle into the barn.

She accompanied him downstairs and lit a few candles. As he opened the front door, the snow that built up crashed down at his feet. The wind whipped through the warm house, cooling it instantly. The wind extinguished the candles and plunged the house into darkness.

He threw on his coat and hat, then grabbed his kerosene lamp and made his way into the storm. He was surprised by the frozen ground and had a hard time maintaining his balance. His wife called to him, but the howling winds captured her voice and prevented any communication. He slipped and his lamp shattered on the frozen ground, leaving him without any light. He looked back to the house, but even though he was only a few feet away, he could not see it. The blizzard was so intense he could barely see beyond his own nose. He fell multiple times as he made his way down to the cattle.

The storm continued to intensify. The wife retreated to her bedroom and huddled with the children for warmth. The house creaked and strained around them. Suddenly the window shattered and the cold air raced through the house. The warmth from the heavy blankets was not enough to keep out the cold.

The wife left the children in an effort to find a cover for the exposed window. The children huddled together. As they looked up, lightning flashed and they dashed back under the covers.

Moments later the wife returned with wood, nails, and a hammer. She quickly boarded up the window and returned to the bed.

Outside, her husband continued to make his way down to the cattle. When he found them, he was horrified at his losses. The lightning illuminated the pasture and cattle lay dead everywhere. As he walked around the dead, another lightning flash gave him a glimmer of hope. He saw cattle still huddled together. Slowly he made his way to them. He screamed and yelled, but the cattle would not move. He did all he could, but the cattle remained huddled together. Foolishly, he walked into the huddle and began to yell. The cattle bumped against each other to preserve the warmth. He was battered back and forth, unable to free himself from the beasts. One of the cows stepped on his foot and he screamed in agony as the bones were crushed under the massive weight.

Suddenly, a lightning bolt struck a nearby tree and the cattle formed a stampede, trampling the husband. The bones in his legs and left arm were shattered. He screamed each time one of the cows stepped on him, the crack of the bones was an indescribable pain. The cattle ran off into the distance as he lay there with multiple fractures and internal bleeding. Slowly he crawled back toward the house.

Inside the house, the situation was getting worse. Other windows shattered due to the pressure of the wind. The cold air raced through the house, but there was nothing the wife could do. She already used her only spare piece of wood to cover the bedroom window. The children huddled against their mother for warmth, but there was little to give.

Suddenly, a loud crash was heard as a tree succumb to the ice and crashed into the side of the house, tearing a portion of the south wall down with it. The kitchen was located in this part of the house. Coals, still hot from dinner, were thrown from the stove onto the floor. The fresh oxygen from the wind reignited the coals and the floor caught on fire.

The dry wood made a good fuel and the fire spread rapidly. Unfortunately, the storm had grown so intense that the blaze from the house went unnoticed by the neighbors to the south or to the north. Even the night watchman at the train depot could not see the massive inferno blazing into the sky.

The wife and the children cried as the smoke penetrated the bedroom. Quickly she tried to pry the wood from the window, but she was unsuccessful. The air became difficult to breathe as the fire burned. She laid the children onto the floor to keep them out of the smoke, but the floor was hot and burned from underneath. They were trapped with nowhere to go.

The husband slowly crawled toward the house and the fire became visible. He screamed for his wife and children, but there was no answer. The cold numbed his hands and he had difficulty grasping the ground. Unable to go on and exhausted from the weather and his injuries, he passed out.

The mother and her children prayed as the fire surrounded them. The unmistakable sounds of the staircase collapsing and the chimney falling in on itself spread hopelessness within their minds. Suddenly, a portion of the floor gave way and her youngest daughter fell into the inferno below. She screamed and reached for her, but the fire was too hot and she dashed away. Unable to help, she was forced to listen to the sound of her daughter screaming as she was burned alive.

Crying and sobbing, she prayed for assistance but none would come. The gaping hole in the floor separated her from her other daughter. She watched as that floor collapsed, taking her other daughter with it. She cried uncontrollably as she watched her two children perish in the fire. She became enraged that her husband had left her. She screamed for him, but he lay passed out in the field. Her emotions overwhelmed her and she fell into a hopeless pit of despair. Unable to deal with her children's death, she leaped into the fire. The moment her body touched the burning embers, she regretted her decision. She tried to climb out, but her muscles failed as they were burned away.

The house began to move, swaying back and forth. The roof was now only supported by the remaining three walls and the fire soon began to burn away at them. However, the storm changed direction and the heavy snow laden wind blew directly into the house, suffocating the fire.

The next morning, the husband woke from his sleep, barely clinging to life. Around him was a majestic winter scene. The snow was beautiful and blanketed everything. However, what it did not cover was the destruction of the house.

Most of his bones shattered, he crawled toward the house, screaming for his wife and daughters. He finally made it and crawled into the broken structure. What he found devastated him. The charred remains of his wife and children lay amongst the smoldering wood on the first floor. He screamed in sorrow and cried for hours until his body succumbed to its wounds...

[Click here to buy, "The Chronicles of Foxwood!"](#)

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About the Author



Kevin M. Guest was born July 15, 1977. His passion for story telling often led him to day dreaming during school. In his off time he would spend hours writing short stories. In October you can find him working the barbeque booth at Reindeer Manor. He resides in Arlington, TX, with his lovely wife Tammi and their son, Chris.

Other Works by Kevin Michael Guest

Zoo'd

Charles Andrew Hartford is a child molester, of that there can be no doubt.
Charles Andrew Hartford is a loving husband and father.
Something's gone wrong in the justice of Charles Andrew Hartford.
Who is Charles Andrew Hartford?

Jim Tanner's Private War

On December 24th, a plane roared in from Mexican airspace determined to land at the San Antonio International Airport. The plane was listed as a terrorist threat by the Homeland Security Administration.

The pilot of that plane, retired Major Jim Tanner was wanted for multiple murders in the U.S. and Mexico. His cargo was of the most precious.

When Major Tanner, a decorated war veteran and former prisoner of war, returned home, little did he know what he was walking into.

His actions would change the lives of his loved ones and the country, forever.

Women Are Better Than Men:
Written as Punishment by the Male Chauvinist Pig

Punishment: The theme of this book! How do we best punish people? Ok, better yet, how to we best punish men? The key is to find out what the man really loves; then deny him that thing. Now, as women, we know what men want, but do we know what they love? Well I do and my husband is writing this book for punishment. Enjoy...

The Confession of Captain Hyde

Captain Hyde has gotten his boat stuck in the ice. Now fearing death he discusses his life with his crew. Sit with them and decide did he attempt to kill his boss? Did he really embezzle the company's money? Could there be a larger conspiracy taking place? Sit on the jury in this true-crime mystery and decide for yourself!



Reindeer Manor is located at 401 South Houston School Road, Red Oak, Texas. It is open from the last weekend in September 'til the first weekend in November. You can visit the website at:

www.rmabusementpark.com or www.reindeermanor.com

Directions:

From Interstate 20 and Interstate 35: Exit Interstate 35E South, through Desoto to the Bear Creek Rd Exit. Turn Left (east) on Bear Creek Rd. and proceed to Houston School Rd. Turn right (south) onto Houston School Rd. and go just past Reindeer Rd. to 410 Houston School Rd.