



The Jekyll and Hyde

Author: *Elizabeth N. Harris*

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Description: Maggie has always been sweet, but life hasn't treated her so well. But a lucky win, and she and her childhood friends get a chance to live their dreams. Maggie buys the Jekyll and Hyde Inn without knowing anything about it. So imagine her surprise when the locals refuse to enter because it's haunted. But ghosts aren't real!

Lucian 'Lucifer' Norton gave his life to stop a terrible crime and never regretted it. But by stopping the wicked murderess, he trapped himself in the Jekyll and Hyde. For centuries he protected the inn from those who would innocently awake the evil and set it free. So when Lucian comes across a woman who doesn't believe in ghosts, he's rather unimpressed. Even more so when Sweet is accompanied by a big heaping of Stubborn!

War erupts in the Jekyll and Hyde and not the war Lucian worried about. He has to keep Maggie safe, make her see sense while keeping the inn locked down and protected. But sometimes life has a way of turning upside down and what you thought was true actually was false. Can two determined, creative souls find their way and stop the evil in the Jekyll and Hyde forever?

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Prologue.

Mariah, Callie, Stephanie, Cole, and Tilly sat around the café table, looking shell-shocked. An hour ago, they'd all been gainfully employed by a famous hotel chain. Now they were unemployed and wondering what on earth to do next. The conglomerate had filed for bankruptcy this morning, and the employees were informed on arrival at their offices. All five had worked duo roles, part timing in the office taking bookings, etc., and in the actual building as maids. Or, in Cole's case, a bag handler.

Their manager had looked dumbstruck when she'd given them their marching orders. Half the staff had been released from gainful employment immediately. They'd collected their belongings and silently left the building. Unlike some staff who'd retreated to crying and anger, they were shocked. There had been no warning signs the company was in trouble until this morning. A corrupt CEO had ruined it for everyone.

"Maggie doesn't know," Mariah said, finally lifting her gaze from her coffee.

"Where is she? It's not like Maggie to be late for work," Stephanie agreed.

"Do you think she was kept on?" Callie asked.

"No idea, but I can't see Maggie agreeing to stay without us," Tilly replied, stirring her tea.

"No, Maggie is notoriously loyal, even if she needs the money most out of all of us."

Cole sighed.

“Well, I hope if she has been kept on, she doesn’t up and lose her temper out of staying friends,” Stephanie added.

“That would be just like Maggie,” Cole responded, worried. As the only man amongst them, he felt it was his duty to protect them.

“What would be?” asked a beaming Maggie. To the other women’s and Cole’s surprise, Maggie was glowing in happiness.

“What happened to you? Did you meet the one?” Mariah demanded suspiciously.

“No, why are you here? I got Cole’s text message,” Maggie said, plonking herself at the table and putting her coffee down.

“We were all fired this morning,” Mariah replied morosely.

“What?” Maggie exclaimed, eyeing her mates in shock. They’d been friends since they were two years old, and their mothers met at playgroup. The six of them were tighter than most siblings.

“Yeah, went into the office, and an hour later, we walked back out.” Tilly sipped her drink. “I’ve saved enough for a couple of months, but I don’t know about everyone else. I’ll help where I can,” Tilly offered generously.

“Fiddlesticks,” Maggie exclaimed as smiles curved sad mouths at her old-fashioned language.

“Maggie, did you not receive any notification? Maybe you’ve kept your job for the short term?” Stephanie suggested, hopefully. Maggie was definitely the poorest out of

them all. College debts and her mother's ill health had run through any family money. Sadly, her mum's funeral had then taken the rest of any spare cash.

"I don't care. I won't work there without you, anyway. Plus, I've some news." Maggie bounced in her seat. She whipped her mobile out and typed on it. With a huge grin, she passed it to Stephanie, who glanced at the screen and then took a double look as she paled, and her mouth dropped open. Curious about his friend's reaction, Cole snatched the phone.

"Dear God, Maggie, what did you do?" Cole exclaimed as Mariah and Callie clutched the phone.irate at being last, Tilly grabbed it and stared.

"Who did you rob?" Callie whispered, glancing around to ensure nobody was listening.

"Nobody, except the Lottery! We won, girls, all twenty-five million! So who needs the hotel? We can buy our own. When we started college, we discussed buying six inns based in the Cotswolds. Listen up, girls and Cole, we're going to do that. Now I don't want us miles apart, but we don't want to be crowded on top of each other. We'll impact each other's business then. I think half an hour to an hour apart is fine," Maggie suggested and sat back with a huge smile.

"Are you nuts?" Stephanie asked.

"You won the jackpot?" Cole yelled.

"Open our own inns? The period ones we've dreamed of?" Callie demanded, her quick mind already working.

"Honey, we'll find other jobs. You pay your debts and go on a great holiday," Mariah said, shaking her head. Maggie crossed her arms and glared.

“I’ve booked a six-week cruise for us, touring America and Canada, and a two-week holiday in Alaska. After that, we’re coming home and searching for the old-fashioned inns we wanted. I don’t think it will be a hardship for us?” Maggie grinned widely at her friend’s shocked faces.

“Maggie, that’s your winnings. We don’t expect you to care for us,” Callie refuted.

“Callie, if you won, would you do the same?” Maggie retorted.

“Well, yes,” Callie sighed.

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“So, let’s go shopping and buy some clothes for our cruise. We want some fancy dresses, as I booked us to eat at the captain’s table several times. And won’t Cole look sexy in a tuxedo?” Maggie said, clapping her hands.

Cole groaned.

Chapter One.

Maggie

Three months later, Maggie surveyed her new pride and joy with a beaming smile. The Jekyll and Hyde, formerly known as the Three Moons, stood with whitewashed walls gleaming in the spring sunshine. It was April, and the Jekyll and Hyde had been closed for decades. Maggie hadn’t even seen the inside when she’d purchased it. She’d contacted the estate agents and bought it unseen once the surveyor had confirmed it was sturdy and had no subsidence or other difficulties.

The inn was made up of four Tudor cottages knocked into one residence. Two-faced the road, and to the left and right were two further wings attached at the rear, stretching backwards. They were set away from the street, which pleased Maggie. The thatch was two different colours, and Maggie assumed that the left-hand wing was recently redone. But she liked the two tones of it. The building had leafy green gardens, while in front of those were a few parking spaces. Maggie remembered a left-hand side entrance to a separate car park from the inn.

Maggie learned the name was changed in 1886 after the book. Strangely enough, the Three Moons sign floated above the door while the Jekyll and Hyde sign hung further

down between the windows. Maggie discovered this quaint little inn just outside a town on a popular route and knew it would be bustling once it re-opened. They'd been looking at another pub, The Crown, for Stephanie when they had driven past this, and Maggie fell head over heels.

Over the last three months, they'd eventually purchased the inns of their dreams. Callie had bought the White Witch. Mariah fell in love with the Black Cat. Tilly refused to consider any other building but a quirky inn called The Rose. And Cole chased his tail, trying to buy The Green Man before finally winning it. They'd decided to all move in simultaneously, so they could share their sob stories as they righted whatever needed doing inside their new homes.

The estate agent arrived and climbed out. She looked slightly uncomfortable as she approached Maggie, causing Maggie to frown. The agent's eyes flicked over the building before she reached her. Even more surprising, it wasn't the woman who'd handled the sale.

"Hi," she said nervously, and Maggie noted with concern she was rubbing her hands on her skirt.

"Is something wrong?"

"Yes, very much so. I'm sorry to tell you this, but Susie held some information back from you because she was so desperate to sell this."

"What?" Maggie asked, worried, afraid her sale was about to fall through.

"The Jekyll and Hyde is haunted. Seriously haunted. They say an eighteenth-century gentleman haunts the place and an evil presence descends at night. Susie should have disclosed this, and our boss is dealing with her now. He sent me out to explain to you," the woman said nervously.

“Hey, it’s okay. I do not believe in ghosts, so it doesn’t matter. It’s probably local legends because it has been empty for so long. But everything’s fine. If you give me the keys, I can get moving. I don’t want to waste the sunshine!” Maggie smiled and put her hand out. The agent dropped them in Maggie’s hands and scrambled back to her car. Maggie waved her off and turned with a content sigh. Local stories would not frighten her away.

Maggie gazed at the inn for a few happy moments. The building was extended and two storeys high, with a ground floor and first floor. The ground floor held the bar and kitchen, with seating for customers. There were twelve double suites on the first floor. The attics had been converted into eight further guest bedrooms and an apartment for herself years ago. This gave Maggie twenty rooms to rent in total.

Maggie had an architect meeting her later that afternoon to see if there was space to create ensuite bedrooms rather than have customers share a bathroom. The red roses climbed trellises and were wild, while the windowsills held flower boxes containing dead offerings. The windows were glass and lead-lined in diamond shapes. A thatched roof covered the inn, and she sighed at the chocolate box image it presented. There were two entrances, one in the middle, a heavy wooden door with iron studs, and one at the end in a similar design.

Maggie knew behind the inn set offside to the left was a beer garden and an old stable block. But for today, that wasn’t her priority; getting inside was. Maggie strode towards the door and inserted the heavy key. At first, the key didn’t want to turn, and Maggie grunted and wrenched before heading to her car for some WD-40. Spraying the lock’s interior, Maggie eventually managed to get the lock to spin and entered her new domain.

Ruefully, Maggie stepped away, coughing as she drew in a deep breath and sucked in decades of dust. Tears streamed down her cheeks as she struggled to breathe before finally calming enough to stick her head back inside. Glee rose as she stared at the

bar and its original features. Oh, this was beyond measure! Old, whitewashed plaster, now looking cream, had wooden beams in a Tudor criss-cross pattern. The counter appeared to be from the 16th century, even though it had been carefully extended. Made of heavy dark wood, Maggie knew it would gleam when she cleaned and polished it.

Sturdy chairs and tables were dotted around in nooks and crannies, with an area on the left-hand side opened up for several larger dining tables. At each end of the pub held two massive, inglenook fireplaces with old-fashioned armchairs surrounding them. Made of aged stones, they were big enough that Maggie, with her five-foot height, could have stood up inside them. Brass horse badges on leather straps were smothered in a thick coating of dust, and horseshoes decorated the beams.

Maggie gazed upwards and noticed old lanterns, no doubt original to the inn, and further decorations hanging from them. Her gaze wandered around her new home, taking in things that required fixing, such as sofas and several of the dining chairs. Rugs needed cleaning or replacing, and some stone tiles had risen. Still, nothing major demanded urgent repairing, from what Maggie could see. Her stare drifted to the far-left fireplace and saw a portrait placed above it. Inexplicably drawn to it, Maggie moved forward and stared at the painting of a handsome man.

He had eschewed the wig most of his era wore, and his blond hair gleamed almost silver; his clothing defined a gentleman of the early 18th century. Maggie judged around 1715 to 1730. A straight roman nose was perched under a set of dark brown eyes with a tint of green around the edges. His thin lips were curved slightly in a smile, and there was a hint of mischief about him. But his eyes also held a promise of danger. She saw a brass plaque attached to the bottom of the picture and stood on tiptoes to wipe it clean.

“His Lordship Lucian ‘Lucifer’ Norton, Earl of Castleton,” Maggie said aloud. “Well, Your Lordship, weren’t you a handsome chappie?” A shiver ran down Maggie’s

spine, and she sensed eyes on her. Turning swiftly, intent on startling an intruder, Maggie found nobody behind her. But her gaze was drawn to the fireplace at the opposite end. There was a portrait of a woman. Maggie walked over to her, her feet leaving marks on the dusty floor, and looked up before a violent tremble travelled through her body.

One of the most beautiful women Maggie had ever seen stared out the painting at her. Long, dark, curly hair fell freely over an elegant dress. Yet Maggie grasped the gown didn't suit her, that she wasn't born to richness. Cold amber eyes beamed at Maggie, and she felt as if they were actually watching her. Plump lips, high cheekbones, and a regal, petite nose accentuated the beauty of the lady in front of her. Maggie sensed a chill. Without a doubt, this woman had been bad to her bones. She had no idea how she knew that, but deep inside, Maggie knew she'd been evil. Timidly reaching up, Maggie cleared the small plaque underneath.

"Margery Cross," Maggie whispered and frowned. There was no other information present. "How strange." Maggie stepped back, unwilling to tear her eyes from the portrait but being practical as she was. Maggie shook off any negativity and began making a list of cleaning supplies. Yet she didn't venture upstairs once.

Lucian.

Lucian stared at the invader in his territory. She was a beautiful little creature, with all golden curls and big brown eyes. A sweetheart-shaped face, with bow-shaped lips that he'd have broken his neck to kiss in his younger years, caught his attention. This tiny darling would have brought him to his knees centuries ago. But he was immune to such beauty after many decades.

Lucian stood behind her as she studied his painting and had to reel his inner self in when she called him handsome. He had just stopped himself from appearing to her and kissing her swanlike neck and wondered at his sudden lack of self-control. But

somehow, the woman sensed him and turned around, and Lucian caught himself in those beautiful dark eyes. A frown crossed her face as she spied Margery's cursed portrait and made her way over to it. Lucian longed to drag her back but held off. It was best the girl noticed the surrounding evil before she settled in.

Lucian leaned against a wall divider and watched curiously as the stranger studied the painting. He wished he could chase her out of the inn, but he was stuck until he knew why she was here. Was this someone assessing the inn? Or a new buyer? Was she planning to put the Jekyll and Hyde up for sale? Although he could watch her hips sway all day long and never mind that plump behind when she bent over! Her presence was a mystery; until he knew what she was about, Lucian would keep his existence hidden.

Maggie.

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Most people use their phones for notes. Maggie was old-fashioned enough to still use a notepad and pen. She deftly made a list of cleaning items and checked against the internet to ensure they wouldn't damage the delicate wood and decorations. Maggie didn't want to use harsh bleach on old wood and suck the stain out of something or worse. Diligently, she researched what could be used on old leather, brass, etc. The glee she experienced when she entered the inn for the first time hadn't faded and had grown as she discovered treasure.

A vehicle arriving snapped her from her concentration, and Maggie bounced outside to meet the architect. A man was climbing from the car, shaking his head, and Maggie paused as she met him on the doorstep.

"Miss Winn?" he asked, swallowing hard.

"Hi, you must be Andy," Maggie replied, smiling.

"Yes, although I'm afraid I won't be working with you on this project," Andy stated firmly.

"What? But your receptionist said you were free!" Maggie exclaimed.

"Unfortunately, my office didn't realise it was the Jekyll and Hyde Inn. I'm sorry."

"You're kidding me, right?" Maggie gasped, unamused.

"Miss Winn, can I call you Maggie?"

She nodded, and he continued, “The Jekyll and Hyde is well known around the area for being highly haunted. No local will ever work here, Maggie,” Andy explained firmly. He turned and dashed back to the vehicle, tossing a warning over his shoulder. “I’m sorry, but please, leave before harm finds you. This building is cursed and surrounded by evil. I beg you to heed my advice and go. I’d hate to hear your body is the next one discovered here.” Andy climbed into his car and left.

“What the ever-loving hell?” Maggie wondered and gazed at the beautiful inn everyone wanted to avoid. Angrily growling under her breath, Maggie stomped back inside the Inn to finish making her lists. Fine! She’d find an out-of-town architect then! So much for helping the local economy!

Later that night, Maggie sat in the generic hotel room she’d rented for two weeks. Maggie intended to get the Jekyll and Hyde clean before moving in. Apart from a few suitcases of clothes, all her belongings were in storage, and she’d booked to stay here while making the inn habitable. Maggie opened her laptop, typed in the Jekyll and Hyde legend, and waited for results to pop up. Her eyes widened as she saw a list of sites dedicated to her inn and clicked on the first, a local site and settled in to read. She’d been so excited about finding the place; researching its history had been the last thing on her mind before buying.

An hour later, Maggie was shaking her head in disbelief. She rose from the bed and made herself a coffee before sitting back and staring at her notebook. There were several legends, but basically, they amounted to one story. In the early 1700s, the inn belonged to Lord Lucian Norton. On a visit, he had disappeared alongside a local woman, Margery. Margery had been shunned by the villages and towns for her knowledge of herb craft and had been called a witch.

There had been several tales of her evilness, including youngsters disappearing. And her skills at seducing any man, married or not, appeared legendary. Unfortunately, this led to the villagers and townspeople driving her from her home, where a dozen

bodies of young children had been discovered. They were buried in the local village nearest the inn, Hollyhock. No one knows precisely what happened, but Lord Lucian and Margery both disappeared on the same day, and then the hauntings of the Jekyll and Hyde began. People believed to have seen Lucian during the daytime. While others claimed to pass the Jekyll and Hyde at night and see an eerie green glow and Margery passing the windows.

Maggie was horrified to learn how many hands the inn had passed through, nobody holding the Jekyll and Hyde past six weeks. And it had stood empty ever since the 1750s. It had brief openings but was shortly closed as owners fled. That was why everything remained original. No one had stayed long enough to complete repairs, decorating, or cleaning. It was a miracle electricity and running water had ever been installed. However, Maggie knew that they still desperately needed updating.

Shaking her head at how superstitions could dramatise circumstances, Maggie shut the laptop. She did not believe in ghosts and thought people were jumping at shadows and their own imagination. The locals, who clearly had issues with the pretty inn, added to the paranoia. Maggie had never been a quitter and refused to learn the meaning of the word now. She still had the bulk of the lottery win left, even after treating her closest friends and buying the inns.

Generous to a fault, Maggie had given them the money to buy the inns in their own names. She had no claim on them whatsoever. And she'd set up a substantial allowance for each of her mates to repair and restore their precious purchase. This had been their dream since they'd visited the Jamaica Inn in Launceston, Cornwall. They had fallen in love with the book by Daphne De Maurier and then the inn itself. The six of them had become obsessed with owning their own period inn one day.

The original plan had been for them to all buy one together and then use the profits to invest in others over the intervening years. Instead, a sheer stroke of luck had allowed them to move forward without pausing. Maggie had looked at the Jekyll and Hyde

online listing and gone head over heels for it. Without even viewing inside, Maggie had bought it and was so excited about owning a period inn. Nothing was going to force her from her lovely inn. Not even stupid rumours.

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Maggie shoved the inn's door and wedged it open. To her surprise, on arrival today, all the shutters covering the windows had been closed, so she opened them before entering. It was already ten in the morning, but Maggie wasn't too bothered. She'd woken at seven and been at the local supermarket at eight to buy the cleaning supplies she needed. Her back seat and trunk were full of items, and Maggie wriggled in excitement. As she had packed them at the checkout, she'd boxed them according to needs. So, the first box she pulled out contained black bags, two feather dusters, cloths, and window cleaner to wash the grimy glass and let sunlight in.

Whistling and placing her phone and Bluetooth speaker on a table, Maggie got to work in the area nearest to Margery's portrait. Maggie wanted this part clean, so she didn't dread doing it. By twelve, Maggie had cleared all cobwebs, scrubbed the mantel, and carefully cleaned each diamond pane in the windows, inside and out. Tiredly stretching out her back, Maggie regarded the section with pride. Although the tables and floor were still dusty, the rest gleamed with her hard work and sweat.

Maggie walked out to her car and picked up the lunch she'd brought with her. Biting into the sandwich, Maggie stiffened as she thought she saw a face staring at her from the newly cleaned window. She blinked, and the image was gone. Quietly giggling, Maggie chided herself for allowing the stories from last night to rattle her. She ate quickly, tidied her rubbish away, strode back into the inn, and paused.

Her cleaning supplies weren't where she left them. Maggie frowned as she glanced around before checking under the tables and chairs in the section she'd just cleaned. Puzzled, Maggie scratched her chin and began searching the rest of the building,

finally finding them crammed on a shelf behind the bar. Befuddled and shaking her head, Maggie pulled them out and tutted. She must have shoved them there without realising.

Maggie continued working for a few more hours, cleaning the area to the left of the fireplace where there were discretely hidden toilets. She dreaded looking inside them and left them for another day. Then Maggie moved on to the middle section in between the doors. This took her to six in the evening, but by the time she'd finished, Maggie was more than impressed with her efforts. Maggie started putting the supplies away when she noticed eyes drilling into her. Shivers ran down her spine, and she spun quickly and just caught a glimpse of a figure fading.

I don't believe in ghosts, was the first thought that crossed Maggie's mind, followed by, had I really just seen that? Maggie peered at the spot at the far end of the bar and finally decided that shifting shadows from the overgrown foliage outside had been to blame. Packing everything neatly away, Maggie stepped outside and locked the inn up securely before getting into her car and driving off.

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The next day Maggie glared, puzzled, as once again all the windows in the inn were shuttered, including the ones upstairs. Someone was trying to scare her into believing the inn was haunted or playing pranks. With a scowl, Maggie opened the door and stormed into the inn. This was her new home. She refused point blank to be scared away. She yanked the shutters open and then unlocked the main entrance. The scent of lavender drifted towards her, and she smiled as it mixed with the fresh smell of lemons that her cleaning solutions contained.

Today, she planned to clean Lucian's end and the section behind that. That meant the entire floor was washed apart from the tables, chairs, and bar. All shelves and ornaments were cleaned as she went. She dusted around Lucian's fireplace and the

seating area before her gaze was drawn to the portrait.

“You really were a gorgeous creature, weren’t you?” Maggie whispered. A slight breeze ruffled her neck, and she jumped and glanced around. Maggie decided it must have come from the open doors before returning her stare to Lucian.

“Where are men like you nowadays? All they do is wear their jeans around their bums, leaving their boxer shorts hanging out. They are vain and rude, oafish, and stupid. They think burps and farts are hysterical and do not know how to truly treat a lady.” Maggie sighed and pulled out a chair. She sat down and drew one knee up.

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“Mind you,” she continued, “the women are just as bad. Getting fall-down drunk in the streets, throwing up everywhere, and worse, peeing in plant pots. Can you imagine the horror? They wear clothes that reveal everything; if you are not a size zero, you’re fat! They can drink a pint in one mouthful and swear like sailors. What happened to society? I bet you’d be appalled by it. Now, I am all for girl power and equality. But I wonder why we had to lose ourselves in the meantime.”

Maggie raised her eyes to the painting. She could swear it was listening to her. She knew she should feel stupid, but she didn’t. Maggie was at peace and at home.

“I suppose I’m being judgemental, aren’t I Lucian? After all, ladies are strong. We can do whatever job a guy does, and we’re just as capable. We fought for the right to be independent, and it costs lives, and they should be honoured, even revered. But I bet half those loutish women don’t know the names of those who sacrificed everything for them to be what they are now. I should shut up, eat lunch, and get cracking. Isn’t that so, Lucian!”

Maggie grinned and rose to her feet.

“It’s Lord Castleton, not Lucian,” a voice said.

Maggie screeched and jumped, spinning to see behind her and grabbing the mop. To her astonishment, there was nobody there.

“Show yourself. Whatever game you’re playing is not amusing!” Maggie yelled, looking around.

“Get out!” a voice wailed, drifting towards her on an icy wind.

Maggie narrowed her eyes in anger. This was not funny.

“I said come out. Before I call the police and have your sorry self arrested!” Maggie spat.

“Leave.” The word floated through the air.

“The hell I will. I own this inn, and you’re trespassing, not me!” Maggie retorted, peering around.

“Death,” the voice whispered, and Maggie nearly blew a gasket. She yanked her mobile phone from her pocket and stabbed in the numbers to unlock the screen.

“Last chance tosspot! I give you to the count of three to leave before I call the cops,” Maggie growled. “One... two...” Maggie’s jaw dropped open, and she stopped counting as a mist appeared. It hovered between the door and bar and slowly formed the shape of a male. Before her disbelieving eyes, it took on the features of Lucian and then he floated transparently in front of her.

“Really?” Maggie snorted as she waved her mop at the transparent figure. Eyeless sockets gazed down at her as the image flickered. “That must be the worst hologram I’ve ever seen. Christ, the power’s not even stable!”

Lucian

He stared at the tiny wench as she ranted about power or something and wondered what the hell was wrong with her. In Lucian’s broad experience, on seeing a ghost, most people do two things, have vapours or flee. No, this ninny was muttering about holograms, fake images, and unstable power lines. Lucian frowned as she stomped

forward, shoved her mop straight in his stomach, and waved it around. Ribbons of mist floated off him as she swirled it harder. Then, to his absolute disbelief, she began climbing on chairs and inspecting the beams on the ceiling.

“I’ll find it, and then I will shove it up the idiot’s ass! If you’re watching this, this is my inn. I bought it fair and square. I won’t be frightened away by some lunatic who thinks he can steal it from me!” Maggie yelled, twisting her head, and looking around.

Lucian peeked around, too, wondering what they were searching for.

Maggie’s eyes narrowed on a machine. He believed it was called a hoover, and she grinned. Lucian wondered what was going through the irritating female’s busy mind. She jumped down from the chair and grabbed the hose off the machine. Wickedly smiling, she pointed the tube at him and stepped on a pedal. Lucian cocked his head as he received a sharp pull. His eyes widened at the hoover, and then he felt a further tug.

Maggie walked forward and held the pipe closer, and Lucian shrieked as suddenly his legs began disappearing into the hose. Lucian screeched as he struggled to free himself. And was nearly physically sick when he saw his feet spinning around in the glass container. The hose sucked him even further into it, and Lucian was waist deep before he knew it. Lucian’s nails scrabbled at the floor and tried to materialise, but he was so unfocused and disturbed he couldn’t. No, no, he kept moaning as his stomach disappeared.

His eyes widened as he saw his body spinning round and round, winding itself around the central tube in the glass tank. With a cry, his shoulders faded into the hose, and before Lucian could utter one more word, he was sucked fully down the pipe. His eyeballs rattled in his head as he sped in furious circles and gagged at least three times. There was dust and dirt inside, which made him sneeze. He could see his

reflection and was flabbergasted to see his face stretched around the container!

With a monumental effort, Lucian dematerialised and transported to his room at the inn. On staggering legs, he headed for his bed. He felt as if he'd be on the rack and tortured. His limbs felt four times longer than they should. His neck was as delicate as a swans, and his head wobbled everywhere. Lucian collapsed on his mattress in relief. But when he opened his eyes, the room spun out of control.

That wicked witch! That terrible woman! Here he was, trying to innocently protect his inn and stop the evil within from escaping, and that buxom spinster had tortured him! No wonder she was unmarried! The creature was cruel and untameable. No man would wish that upon himself! And that device. Lucian had thought it was for cleaning, but no, it was a cleverly hidden torture machine, probably created by that foul, fickle frog downstairs! This was war!

Maggie

Maggie watched, bemused, as the hologram was sucked away. She was unsure how it happened but was glad it had. It was amusing watching it spin around in the hoover, but when it had disappeared, a tingle raced down her spine. Maggie ignored the obvious question of how she hovered a hologram in the first place and busied herself cleaning again. Tomorrow she would scour the inn looking for hidden equipment, but today she wished that this side of the inn would be cleaned at least.

Once she'd completed her search, Maggie would start on the wing that came off Lucian's side. She'd not explored that yet apart from a quick glimpse but realised it had been stables later converted into a part of the restaurant and inn. At Margery's end was another wing which seemed to be cut in half. The open half was a seating area. Maggie assumed the kitchen was behind the dividing wall. Or maybe near the bar. She knew she really should explore tomorrow.

Whistling cheerfully, she continued cleaning until six o'clock fell, but wriggling tired and sore shoulders, Maggie had completed her task. The front wing of the inn gleamed and shone. She packed everything away and tiredly got into her car. She didn't glance behind her, which was a shame because Lucian glared out of his window at her while he made plans for revenge.

Chapter Two.

Maggie arrived the following day, bright and early, and sighed as she saw all shutters closed and the doors barricaded. Angrily muttering under her breath, Maggie spent twenty minutes opening everything up and manhandling the large pots covering the entrances. Once she could unlock the door, Maggie stepped inside and paused. Something was different. Maggie carefully checked around but couldn't put her finger on what. The wood and windows still shone with her thorough cleaning, and her items were where she left them apart from...

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Maggie's eyes opened wide as she spied her hoover, completely dismantled and destroyed. Someone had beaten the daylights out of it, and Maggie was sure it was dead. With complete disbelief, a giggle escaped her, and she held her hand to her mouth before pulling out her phone.

"You have two seconds to show yourself, and then I'm calling the authorities," Maggie called. She waited and then dialled the emergency number. Maggie explained she might not be alone, and that someone had destroyed her hoover. As she had unlocked the doors, that meant somebody may still be inside. The operator assured Maggie the locals were responding on their way and told her to wait outside. Maggie obeyed and headed for her vehicle, where she locked herself in. The operator informed Maggie the police were five minutes out, and Maggie said thanks and hung up.

As promised, a cop car arrived within five minutes, and two men got out and gazed warily at the inn. Maggie leapt out of the motor, explained what happened, and waited for them to investigate. When the two of them remained outside for a couple of minutes, Maggie's temper kicked in.

"Are you waiting for an invitation?" Maggie demanded.

"No, Missus," Police Constable Smith replied. His gaze drifted to the open door, and he shuddered.

"It's Miss, thank you. I'm not that old! What are you waiting for?" Maggie asked.

"Ma'am, you know which inn this is?" PC James inquired.

“Yes, Mine! I bought it and have been cleaning it for the last three days. What’s the problem?” Maggie knew full well what it was! They were frightened of the ghost stories.

“Well, ma’am...” PC James said and swapped a glance with PC Smith.

“The Jekyll and Hyde is not haunted! For Pete’s sake, follow me, and you better hope I don’t get bashed over the head by a thug!” Maggie snapped, exasperated. She stomped towards the door and flung a derisive stare over her shoulder. Both officers straightened their shoulders and followed her in.

“Look! My hoover has been completely vandalised,” Maggie said, pointing. PC James wandered over and studied it.

“This is beyond repair, Miss.” He gazed warily around him.

“Shall I search the inn, and you follow me?” Maggie asked. To her surprise, the big burly policemen both nodded. Maggie rolled her eyes and walked to the wing on Lucian’s side. She noted nooks and crannies hidden behind half walls with exposed beams on top. More diamond leaded windows, and it was filthy dirty. The old stables’ architecture remained in evidence despite being converted. Horse equipment and harnesses hung from the walls in decoration, and the floor was cobblestones. The level above had been turned into bedrooms, so you couldn’t see the high arches of the stables anymore.

As Maggie checked around, she discovered three more sets of toilets at this end and frowned in puzzlement. There was a men’s, ladies, and a disabled toilet. Somebody had worked here before they were scared away. There was a door set just beyond where the counter ended, and when Maggie retraced her steps with her dogged protectors following her, she entered the kitchen. As she’d thought, it was directly behind the bar, and the space was huge, even though it badly needed modernising.

A thick layer of dust covered everything. Maggie was shocked to notice the enormous fireplace with two spits for roasting pigs. Two bread ovens were built into the brick wall and another fireplace with cradles for soup pots. Using her judgement, Maggie saw where electrical sockets had been put in, dating around the 1950s. There were two tall larders and shelves with brass pans and heavy urns, but no modern equipment.

“No one in here,” PC James said.

“Clearly,” Maggie agreed and walked across the expansive kitchen to exit out the other door. To her disappointment, it led to the back seating area of Margery’s space and not to what was behind the wall. The two officers followed her to Margery’s portrait, where they stared at it.

“That’s creepy, love,” PC Smith muttered.

“I can’t disagree,” Maggie replied with a slight shudder. “I was thinking of replacing it.”

“Wouldn’t blame you at all. There’s no sign of an intruder, Miss...” PC James stated, heading for the exit with an intense expression of relief on his face.

“We haven’t checked upstairs yet!” Maggie exclaimed, and both police officers paused and turned to her, resigned.

“Where’re the stairs?” PC James asked. At Lucian’s end, Maggie pointed to a small alcove next to the bar. A hidden door led to an enclosed set of stone stairs. Both men exchanged wary glances, and Maggie huffed at their cowardice and took the lead again. The stairs went straight to a wide landing with an old writing table and some bookshelves. The matching chair was missing, but two armchairs nestled in the space. Maggie fell in love with it immediately. A section of the wall was removed so a guest

could view the bar, which Maggie liked. It turned the landing into a mezzanine level.

Leading from the square landing were two hallways. One went north, and the other headed west. Maggie took the north corridor and began opening the bedroom doors. The police stuck their heads in and grumbled when Maggie made them go inside and check the adjoining bathrooms. Again, someone had worked up here, but it was many decades ago. Maybe even as far back as the early 1900s. There were four extraordinary chambers down this part, full of cobwebs and dust, but no intruder. The front wings held a further eight bedrooms before they led to a flight of stairs heading to the attic rooms.

“What’s up there?” PC James asked.

“What I believe to be my apartment, we’d better check it out,” Maggie said, drawing the keys from her pocket. Ten minutes later, they cleared the residence and the attic rooms. They wandered back downstairs, the two officers looking much easier.

“Well, ma’am, it’s safe to say there’s no one here, but we’ll make a report. Someone tampered with and damaged your hoover. It might have been kids who jimmied the lock to get in and play some nasty tricks on you. This place is haunted, and maybe somebody is playing mind games,” PC Smith said.

Maggie nodded, unimpressed with their suggestion, but she saw the two officers out. She left the door open, allowing the breeze to enter the inn, and peered around before she got to cleaning again.

Lucian

Lucian had followed the three of them, meddling with their memory when they reached the end room in the east wing. He could not allow them to disturb the room and achieved his goal. This blasted woman needed to disappear, and quickly. The evil

stalked the inn every evening at three, and should Maggie move in, which appeared to be her intention, Lucian would be stretched to capacity.

He had sworn an oath to protect the innocent, no matter how infuriating they were. And Maggie was testing his boundaries. Usually, a few sightings of him, a couple of ghostly whispers, and they fled the inn, screaming. Not Maggie. He'd have to up his efforts today.

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Maggie

The rest of the day was spent busily cleaning the two wings, and, to her surprise, she succeeded in achieving her goals. The entire ground floor now gleamed, and she sat back wearily on a padded bench and gazed around her domain. Maggie felt at home here, safe, welcomed. She'd finally found the place she'd been looking for. She wished her parents could have seen this, especially her mother. Katherine would have loved the inn.

"Told you to leave," a voice spoke, and Maggie leapt to her feet.

"Where are you?" she demanded.

"Where I always am," the guy said, and Maggie yelped as a figure appeared in front of her. He wore much the same as yesterday, except his blue coat was now black and embroidered with gold, and his hair hung loosely around his shoulder. Maggie instantly reacted and struck out and punched him straight in the face.

"Damnation, woman! You're a menace to society!" the Lucian lookalike roared, stepping back and holding his nose.

"How are you doing this? Why are you doing this?" Maggie demanded, her hands on her hips. That's right, mister, this little girl has taken self-defence lessons, Maggie thought angrily.

"How? I'm a ghost, you foolish wench. Why? Because the inn belongs to me!" Lucian roared.

“I got a piece of paper saying hell no to that claim. I own this inn!” Maggie yelled, leaning forward. The Lucian lookalike’s eyes flared, and he muttered something under his breath.

“Lady, I don’t know who you are or care. I know you’re wakening the evil I’ve spent centuries locking down. Either leave under your own steam, or I shall make you,” he threatened, and Maggie stiffened.

He didn’t just say that! Maggie smiled sweetly and stepped forward.

“Go hang yourself!” Maggie hissed and slammed her foot down on his boot, then brought her knee up and punched him a second time. Lucian roared loudly and dissipated right in front of her eyes.

“Am I drugged?” Maggie wondered, eyeing her coffee flask suspiciously. A shriek echoed around the bar, and Maggie screamed as the ghost of Lucian flew straight at her. A cold chill swamped her body as he passed through her and disappeared. Maggie jumped as her phone rang and yanked it from her pocket.

“My inn’s freaking haunted,” Mariah screeched at her.

“So is mine!” Maggie yelled. “I punched him in the nose and kneed him in the privates.” Mariah fell silent.

“You did what?” she asked quietly.

“He appeared in front of me from nowhere! I thought someone was playing a trick, so I hit him on the snout. Then he threatened me, told me to get out, so I kneed him and then jabbed him again after stamping on his foot!”

“My God, only you’d punch a ghost!” Mariah replied, laughing.

“I didn’t believe in them and reacted. He mentioned something about a great evil at the Jekyll and Hyde,” Maggie recalled.

“Mine keeps yelling, but I’ve not seen him. He’s also moved things right before my eyes,” Mariah revealed.

“Is he frightening you?” Maggie asked curiously. She wasn’t sure whether to be frightened of Lucian.

“Not really, although he loves making me jump.”

“Mine dismantled the hoover after I sucked him up, and then he annihilated the parts,” Maggie admitted, sinking onto the bench.

“You what?” Mariah said slowly as if doubting what Maggie had just told her.

“Yup, thought he was a hologram and sucked that sucker straight up!”

Mariah let out a shriek of laughter and took several minutes to control herself while Maggie elaborated further.

“He kept spinning round and round, and his face was all elongated and stuff. It was hysterical,” Maggie said, finally giggling too. Her heartbeat returned to normal, and she could see the funny side.

“Maggie!” Mariah snickered.

“I can’t believe I sucked a ghost up and punched him twice! I thought ghosts were see-through! But I connected with his nose!”

“Get out!” a voice roared from Mariah’s end.

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“He’s at it again.” Mariah sighed.

“What are we going to do?” Maggie inquired.

“I’m not leaving! This is my dream!” Mariah exclaimed.

“Bloody-minded woman!” the ghost shouted at Mariah.

Maggie laughed helplessly.

“Oh my. How about meeting for a Chinese while we discuss our stubborn ghosts?” Maggie suggested.

“Good idea. Should we tell the others?” Mariah asked.

“Probably not. They’ll think we’ve lost the plot!”

“Leave!” Mariah’s ghost yelled, dragging out the word.

“Tell him to shut up, or you’ll suck him up in a hoover too!” Maggie giggled.

Mariah repeated her words, and silence fell.

“Hoover?” the curious word floated through the air.

“Okay, honey, I’ll see you about seven. Meet at your hotel?” Mariah said while her ghost was distracted.

Maggie was grinning when she disconnected the call. She was unsure whether she trusted her eyes and had seen a ghost, but there had been someone there. And had disappeared into thin air. She never had believed in ghosts, so she was a little torn about her feelings right now. But she'd seen Lucian with her own blasted eyes! So many questions!

“Hey, Mr Ghost, come out; I want to ask you some stuff!” Maggie called. Silence answered her. “Are you sulking because I hurt you? Can I injure you? Or is it a remembrance of pain?”

Maggie waited a few minutes before shrugging and tidying up. She had dinner plans for tonight.

Lucian

Lucian lay curled in his bed, his manhood screeching for relief. He didn't think he would ever experience such agony in his life. That had been a dirty move by Maggie and one Lucian firmly believed he hadn't earned. Even worse, he'd heard every part of her conversation with her friend, including the laughter. To imagine that he'd be brought low by such a female! But instead of being reasonable and leaving, Maggie had dug her heels in. So that meant the gloves came off. Lucian was going to play nasty!

Forget scaring the pants off, Maggie. He'd send her into an insane asylum before she could blink. Lucian heard Maggie call out her questions and stubbornly ignored them. Vicious woman! Maggie was as vile as what he was guarding, wicked chit. He might let Maggie see what he was shielding her from. Maggie would soon run screaming for the hills. The evil he battled daily would scare Maggie stupid within mere minutes.

The evilness hadn't noticed there was another person in the inn. As long as Maggie

stayed away at night, Lucian could keep protecting her. But should the evil notice someone was cleaning the inn, traps and temptations would be set to aid the foul one's escape. And only Lucian had resisted them, locked the evil down, and kept it trapped. Any weakening in his defences and it could flee. Misery would be unleashed, and the world wouldn't ever be safe or secure again. Because Lucian knew the big plan, the one he and his five brothers had thwarted.

And what if Maggie's heart was pure? That would give the evil one ingredient needed to complete its strategy. Maggie was in direct danger. Lucian wanted her to understand. But it never crossed his mind to talk to her, explain what was happening. All Lucian could see was he had to scare her away and get some payback for his poor, abused manhood!

Maggie

Maggie entered the inn the next day, and her jaw dropped in surprise, swiftly turning to anger. The entire downstairs was shrouded in cobwebs again. While she could see the gleaming wood underneath, the cobweb curtains hung thickly. Maggie nearly screamed when she saw several giant spiders scurrying about. Today she had an architect coming, and she didn't need this rubbish. Maggie spun on her heel and stomped to the car where she'd bought a new Hoover. Dragging it out, Maggie muttered under her breath as she frog marched it back to the inn.

"I'm warning you; this one is more powerful. Mess with me, and you'll be sucked up straight away!" Maggie shouted. An icy wind blew at her, sending cobwebs into her face. Maggie screamed, plugged the Hoover in, and began sucking them all up. When she got to Lucian's painting, Maggie dragged a chair and stood on it.

"Are you watching numbnuts?" Maggie yelled. She shoved the hose right where Lucian's groin would be and jabbed it into it.

A low cry echoed, and Maggie smiled grimly.

“Do this again, Lucian Norton and I shall suck your manhood away!” Maggie threatened. Within an hour, all the cobwebs were gone, and Maggie was drinking a coffee when there was a knock, and a middle-aged man entered.

“Hello!” he announced, smiling as he looked around.

“Mr Evans?” Maggie urged, rising to her feet.

“Yes, my dear, how are you?” he asked, walking towards her and extending a hand. Maggie took it and was smiling when a slim woman walked in.

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“Uncle Ben, I said wait for me!” she stated, grinning. “Hi, I’m Melisandre. I help design the interiors. My Aunt Bea, who’s in charge, was booked with someone else, so I offered to join Uncle Ben.” Maggie liked the girl with her long blonde hair and cheerful smile. She noted that while young, she wore a wedding ring.

“I am grateful you came, and I should be upfront. You’re the twelfth architect and builder I’ve contacted. Jekyll and Hyde has a poor reputation for being haunted. It’s scared many away, which is why I’ve asked you to come so far,” Maggie said honestly.

Melisandre cocked her head.

“And is it haunted?”

“Um... well...” Maggie wondered what answer to give that would keep these friendly people here.

“Don’t worry, lass. My team has plenty of experience with hauntings,” Mr Evans replied, exchanging a glance with Melisandre. Melisandre let out a tinkling laugh, and Maggie couldn’t help but feel she was missing something.

“Sorry?” Maggie asked.

“It’s a private joke and rather rotten of us to refer to it when you do not understand. My apologies Maggie. But we’re most definitely used to working around ghosts, even when they throw tantrums,” Melisandre said.

“I didn’t believe in them, and he disappeared suddenly after I punched him in the nose. I just don’t see how a real man can disappear,” Maggie responded.

“Cheeky bint! I am a real man!” Lucian’s voice roared, and Melisandre’s eyes opened wide.

“Told you!” Maggie exclaimed.

“Get out!” Lucian yelled at the top of his lungs, rattling bottles and glasses. Maggie sighed and crossed her arms.

“His bellow is almost as good as St John’s,” Mr Evans quipped and rose to his feet.

“Now, Miss Maggie, shall we take a walk, and you can show me what needs changing?” Mr Evans asked with a twinkle. Maggie’s eyebrows lifted in surprise at the lack of shock the people in front of her displayed. But she surged to her feet to explain to Mr Evans what she required doing.

Downstairs was relatively simple; the two sets of toilets on either side of the bar required gutting and modernising. The kitchen, Maggie explained, needed two industrial freezers and three fridges alongside a dessert fridge. She pointed out where she wanted to keep original features like the hog spits and soup hooks. Maggie and Mr Evans discussed where the microwaves and cookers were to go next to the two grills. They then agreed that the table in the centre could be cleaned and sanded down before being covered protectively to be used for food prep.

Once upstairs, Melisandre took over, and Maggie was quite happy to see they shared similar ideas. The rooms would be kept as close to the originals as possible. Melisandre examined a lot of the furnishings and commented that they could all be restored. New mattresses and fabrics were to be approved, and modern rugs and carpets, as the existing ones were threadbare. Mr Evans wrinkled his nose at the

adjoining bathrooms and sketched out plans that allowed a sink, toilet, roll top bath with a shower overhead. Maggie wholeheartedly agreed and continued to move them from room to room.

To their surprise and amusement, Lucian began slamming doors and rattling furniture. At first, Maggie had jumped, startled, but after watching Melisandre and Mr Evans swap amused glances, she settled down. Maggie realised that they'd spoken the truth. They indeed had experience with haunted houses. When they hit what would become her apartment, Mr Evans's eyebrows raised in shock. There was a fair-sized kitchen, a utility space, and a bathroom. Then a master bedroom with an adjoining bathroom, three other bedrooms, a cosy room with a large living area, and a dining room leading to a balcony.

"What on earth happened here?" Mr Evans asked, quite shocked.

"I've no idea. I didn't know it was like this when I bought it," Maggie admitted. The walls mimicked them downstairs, dark wood with white plaster in between. And that was it. Doors had been ripped off and stacked in a corner, bare wires swung from ceilings, and no light fittings could be seen. The naked wires continued around the walls, ending where plug sockets should be and weren't. Pipes hung haphazardly about. There were no bathroom fittings or flooring, it was genuinely hazardous.

Maggie winced as she spied where planks of wood had been ripped up from the floor and massive holes were left. Windows were covered in thick grime that Maggie wondered if they'd ever be clean again. It was empty of appliances or cupboards, there wasn't even a sink. Every single room looked like it belonged in a derelict house, and Maggie flinched at the amount of work required.

"Told you to leave!" Lucian bellowed the last word, and all three of them jumped.

"Do you want me to knee you in your wee willy winkie again?" Maggie shouted at

the empty room.

Mr Evans lifted an eyebrow, and Melisandre burst out laughing.

“Damnable wench!” Lucian roared.

“Keep going, and I’ll break your nose a second time!” Maggie threatened.

“I don’t have a wee willy winkie!” Lucian suddenly yelled, insulted.

Melisandre’s giggles broke into fits of laughter while Mr Evans manfully tried to control his chuckles. Maggie scowled around and glared at an empty spot.

“So says you, I put my knee in it, and I’m going with wee willy winkie!” Maggie retorted.

“Chit!” Lucian spluttered, and silence fell.

“This will be worse than Courtenay House and Oakwood Manor rolled into one!” Mr Evans grinned. “Thanks, Maggie. The last few years have been quiet. My team will love this!”

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“Mr Evans, I don’t mean this rudely, but you’re a strange man!” Maggie said honestly.

Mr Evans winked.

Chapter Three.

Melisandre

“Darling, I’m home!” Melisandre called as she flew through the doors of Waverley Hall. Waverley reached out to welcome her, and Melisandre revelled in the love Waverley projected at her. Melisandre sent a wave of affection at the Hall and then hunted down her husband and two children. Nicholas was lying on his back, wearing his Georgian clothing, with their twins crawling over him.

Three years had passed since the events that freed the Rakehell Six from a lifetime of torment. Melisandre had given birth a year after they’d married, and the twins had arrived six months ago. Nicholas and Melisandre sported a son and twin daughters. And they were as blissfully happy as when they had first met. Nicholas had worked hard to familiarise himself with modern-day technology and was now counted amongst one of the finest breeders of horseflesh in the world. Their puppies were also in high demand, and Nicholas made astute investments, growing the Mortimer fortune again.

Nicholas grinned up at her from the pile of children lying on top of him. Melisandre sighed. He was as handsome as ever and still made her heart stop with his smile.

“Welcome home, my love; how did the consult go?” Nicholas asked.

Melisandre had cut down on her work a lot. She only took projects that caught her eye now, and when Uncle Ben had dragged her from their house this morning, Melisandre had been resigned. But Nicholas noted a glow about her. Melisandre was excited about something.

“I found them!” Melisandre crowed. She reached over and rang the bell for Nanny to come and collect the kids. This needed to be discussed without little ears listening in. Bending down, Melisandre sat on the floor and played with the children until Nanny arrived to take them away. She could see the burning question on Nicholas’s tongue, but he showed remarkable self-constraint until the youngsters had gone. When Nanny shut the door, Nicholas pounced on his wife and gave her a heartfelt kiss.

“Found who, darling?” Nicholas murmured as he brushed the hair from her eyes. Melisandre smiled sweetly up at him.

“Those we’re meant to help!”

Confusion crossed Nicholas’s face as he gazed at her.

“Huh?” he replied intelligently.

“Do you remember Michael saying there will be others, and our paths will cross?” Melisandre said, bouncing on his lap. Nicholas gave a wince as a specific part of his anatomy perked up in reply. Melisandre snorted and wriggled just to tease him a little more. Nicholas’s blood rushed to his manhood as he tried to concentrate on what his beloved wife was telling him.

“Others?” he asked, giving up and nibbling on her neck.

“Other ghosts!” Melisandre cried, and Nicholas froze.

Nicholas

“Oh no, no, no Melisandre. No more ghost adventures. We regained the Rakehell Six, and we’re all perfectly happy trotting along, making money and producing children,” Nicholas chided.

“Michael told us we are meant to help the others. That together, we would bring forth light to this world. Are you going against an archangel?” Melisandre retorted.

“Is that a trick question?” Nicholas asked, carefully craning his head about. There’d been moments the last three years when he’d thought he’d sensed one of the archangels. He and Melisandre most definitely had when she’d given birth, but there had been rare occasions when he felt someone watching him and bathing him in love.

“No. Nicholas, seriously, we visited this inn. It’s called the Jekyll and Hyde and dates back to Tudor times. It is beautifully preserved for the main part, but there’s this stubborn woman, and she’s bought it. Maggie is her name, and she’s attempting to restore it, and the ghost won’t let her. He keeps trying to chase her away.”

“Okay, so how does that situation have anything to do with the Rakehell Six?” Nicholas inquired carefully.

“Because darling, he died between Emile and yourself,” Melisandre crowed. Nicholas felt a sudden sinking sensation in his stomach. No, it couldn’t be.

“What is his name?”

“Lord Lucian Norton...” Melisandre said.

“The God damned Earl of Castleton! Lucifer!” Nicholas howled in denial. Melisandre’s eyes widened so much that Nicholas thought they might pop out. She was unceremoniously dumped on her bottom as Nicholas leapt to his feet and began pacing back and forth. Every other word that left his mouth was a curse, and Melisandre’s jaw dropped open. Finally, Nicholas ran out of things to say, and Melisandre stared at her husband, ready to do battle.

“Finished?” she asked sweetly.

Nicholas collapsed in a chair and eyed her balefully.

“Not Lucifer,” he almost begged.

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“Tell me about him,” Melisandre demanded, deciding to figure out why Nicholas was so against Lord Lucian Norton.

“Those Norton bastards were roughly the same age as us. Lucian was the eldest brother, followed by the twins, who were a year younger. After them was another son and a second set of twins. Lucian would have been six and twenty if what you say is correct about his year of death. The twins, Elias and Isaac, were five and twenty, while Benedict would have been three and twenty and Kit nine and ten. Their sister CeeCee, or Cecilia, was his twin. And they were mad as hatters, worse than the Rakehell Six!” Nicholas exploded.

“How so?” Melisandre asked.

“They were crazy and untamed. Their mother died young, and their father was more interested in wenching and drinking. They were raised by a nanny who more than had her hands full with five lively boys and a girl. CeeCee ran as wild as her brothers. Hell, CeeCee makes Henrietta look tame.”

“So, in other words, Nicolas, they were as lawless and controversial as the Rakehell Six, and you were rivals?” Melisandre asked astutely.

“Yes!” Nicholas exclaimed. “No, I’m not admitting that!”

“Too late, husband mine, you just did.” Melisandre giggled.

“There were some strange rumours about them that none of them ever discouraged. It was said a paranormal creature murdered their mother. And they themselves hunted

and killed those creatures with evil in their hearts,” Nicholas mused.

“Was any truth discovered?” Melisandre asked.

“No, but understanding what we know now, Melisandre... I have to wonder. They were known as God’s Scourge. Some people thought it pretentious; others ridiculed them behind their backs. But never to their face. The power and wealth the Norton’s held were legendary.”

“Bit like the Rakehell Six,” Melisandre added, and Nicholas nodded.

“Are you sure it was Lucifer?” Nicholas asked plaintively.

“Not really, but his portrait is hanging above the fireplace there,” Melisandre said. Nicholas’s expression, which momentarily showed hope, collapsed.

“They owned a set of inns in the Cotswolds. Six of them, one each amongst many other business interests. Sounds like them. Blast it; the others won’t be amused!” Nicholas snorted.

“They despised them?” Melisandre asked.

“We were rivals, Melisandre darling; we hated each other,” Nicholas responded with a chuckle.

“Well, Maggie needs our help and help we will!”

“Fine,” Nicholas said, pouting. “But I’m not telling Tristian!”

Maggie

Maggie was prepared the next day for Lucian's tricks and wasn't disappointed. The smell of rotting meat assaulted her nose, and the rooms were thick with black smoke. Maggie gagged and rushed to open the doors and every window in the pub. The two smells mixed were enough to drive her into the toilet, where she emptied her stomach.

"I'm getting an exorcist!" Maggie swore as she returned to the bar. She screamed stupidly when a bloated, rotting, disembodied skull floated towards her. Maggie darted past and headed out to her car. She opened the boot, yanked something from it, and walked into the inn. The head seemed to grow larger and green gunk was falling from its eyes while its mouth was a raw mess. And the entrails trailing from it made Maggie heave again. But Lucian would not win!

Maggie took a hitter's stance, and as it came towards her, she yanked the tyre iron out from behind her and whacked the skull as hard as she could. Lucian shrieked as he was belted backwards and dematerialised before he hit the wall. He passed through it in his ghostly state, bewildered and seemingly in pain as to what had happened. Lucian shaped into his next creature with a determined growl and dashed back through, making Maggie scream at his sudden appearance.

Maggie yelped and darted away as a giant hellhound appeared in front of her with glowing eyes and sharp teeth. Drool dripped from its mouth as its jaws gnashed together. Hell on a stick, Maggie thought as she watched the monster creep forward. She shuffled backwards as the hellhound snarled, growled, and she stumbled over a bucket of water. Without thinking, Maggie bent, snatched it up, and threw it straight at the creature.

The bucket flew true and landed just right to cover the monster's head. Lucian stopped moving because he couldn't see and drowned in the bucket. He instantly changed into a human shape, but his head remained stuck in the metal canister. Maggie charged and whacked the bucket with her tyre iron, making the metal ring. A

loud groan sounded inside, and Maggie beat it several more times. Lucian disappeared, and the bucket fell to the floor.

Maggie collapsed to her haunches as she sighed in relief. A noise came from behind her, and Maggie spun around on her bottom and searched for the intruder. Mariah popped out, her eyes wide and covering her mouth in amusement.

“I recorded all of that!” she said, laughing finally. “That was bloody amazing, honey!”

“Oh Lord, I give up; he’s getting worse,” Maggie gasped out.

“For now, mine keeps shouting at me, but I hate to think of him starting stuff like this!” Mariah exclaimed.

Maggie sank to the floor, shaking her head. This was nuts. Was the Jekyll and Hyde worth this? Maggie ruthlessly shoved the thought aside. Yes, it was. She loved this rambling old inn, and Lucian Norton would have to get used to sharing! Or she would exorcise his damn fine ass!

Lucian

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Lucian poked at the lump on his forehead and snarled. She'd hit him with a metal pole! His rotting head made women have vapours, and she had struck him instead. And he was soaking wet from his dousing. Why on earth did that petite nightmare win every time? And now her friend had witnessed it too! The humiliation was unparalleled. Lucian plotted his revenge carefully.

Maggie

Maggie saw Mariah out an hour later and kept a wary eye around her. Today she planned to clean the upstairs. However, she wondered if it was worth it because Melisandre had spoken in detail about how to renovate the rooms and restore the furniture. No, Maggie decided to sit at her laptop instead and search for fabrics, bedframes, and mattresses. Maggie was so intent on her research that she missed the first noise but not the second. A squeak came from near her foot, and Maggie glanced down and screamed.

A huge brown rat glared up at her, joined by another and a third. Before she knew it, a crowd of them raced towards her, and Maggie scooped up the laptop and dashed for the door. She slammed it shut behind her as she paced backwards down the path, panting. Her brown eyes were wide with disgust as she watched the creatures swarm the windows. Damn it! Lucian! Maggie howled silently. Happily peering from the window, she saw the ghost with a smug smile. Oh, she'd pay him back!

The next day, Maggie hid several speakers around the bar and hit play on her phone before shoving in earplugs. This was going to get annoying. 'I know a song that will get on your nerves' blasted through the speakers as Maggie grinned. She let it loop for an hour before hitting Cotton Eye Joe, followed by Axel F by Crazy Frog. Lucian

appeared after she started looping the first again and glowered at her. Maggie poked her tongue out as Lucian's expression turned deranged, and he began hunting her speakers. He found one out of the five and dramatically blew it up.

"No more rats!" Maggie shouted, pointing her finger at him.

"Do not point at me!" Lucian roared back.

"No more rodents, or I'll get a priest in to kick your ass!" Maggie yelled.

Lucian coldly raised an eyebrow. "Try it because I love a good priest!" Lucian mocked.

"Bring it on!" Maggie taunted, wriggling her fingers.

Lucian grinned fiendishly and disappeared in an explosion of power. The speakers all exploded, and Maggie smiled. She'd call that one a draw!

???

Maggie cautiously opened the door the next day and stepped inside the inn. She peeked around, looking for the arrogant ghost, and spotted him standing in front of the fireplace, smiling like a lunatic. Maggie bravely faced him when Lucian's face wriggled. What on earth? Maggie peered closer and then screamed as his skin tore away and bugs, lots of insects, began raining down on her clean floor. Maggots, beetles, flies, worms, caterpillars, woodlice, and many more scurried across her floor towards her! Maggie shrieked again and disappeared outside. Angrily jumping in her car, she drove towards the nearest church.

The vicar spoke to her as Maggie explained everything that was going on before he admitted it was well out of his experience. But he called someone who managed

exorcisms. Father McBride met her at the chapel and listened to Maggie tell her story again. Being a local, Father McBride was quite aware of the reputation of the Jekyll and Hyde. To Maggie's surprise, Father McBride was astounded that she'd lasted so long. He praised her resilience and agreed to meet her the following day. Maggie drove away as smug as one of those damned bugs Lucian had set on her.

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Father McBride raced past Maggie and stopped by his vehicle. His face was whiter than white, and his hands were shaking. Maggie chased after him, glowering at what Lucian had done.

"I'm sorry, My Dear, he is beyond me!" Father McBride said, climbed in his car, and drove away before Maggie could say a word. Maggie turned, fists on hips, and glowered at the ghost howling with laughter at her from a window. Lucian had terrified the poor man, and it had only taken half an hour to drive Father McBride off. Maggie tapped her foot in frustration, and then a wicked grin lit her face. Lucian stopped chuckling as Maggie got in the car and sped away. Maggie had a plan!

???

Maggie returned at nearly eleven in the evening, having eaten dinner, packed an overnight bag and brought snacks. She was going to end this ridiculous situation with Lucian for good. She shuffled towards the inn and unlocked it before turning the lights on. Quietly peeking around, she saw no sign of Lucian, so she went upstairs. She dumped her stuff in the first bedroom and returned to get cleaning items. Several hours passed before she sensed Lucian. Maggie finished scrubbing the final corner of the now spotless room before facing him.

"It's nearly three am," Lucian said.

“Clever man, but it’s actually half-past two,” Maggie sneered.

“You can’t be here!” Lucian shook his head.

“Watch me. I own this inn, not you! You’ve been dead for three hundred years, and it’s time to let go!” Maggie retorted, sitting down on the freshly cleaned chair.

“You don’t understand!” Lucian gasped, looking over his shoulder. Maggie drew to her full height and peered behind him but couldn’t see anything. She sat back down with a thump and crossed her arms.

“I’m staying. This is my inn, my new home, and you won’t ruin it for me, Little Lord Lucian!” Maggie taunted. To her surprise, Lucian didn’t respond as she thought he might.

“Maggie, you need to leave,” Lucian almost begged. Maggie’s eyebrows shot into her hairline at his desperate tone.

“Why don’t you take a seat and explain?” Maggie said, motioning to another chair.

“Maggie, go now!” Lucian roared, making her jump, and her heart leapt into her throat. Lucian stormed toward her and, to her ultimate surprise, hauled her to her feet. He bent low, picked her up, and began striding across the floor with her.

“Lucian!” Maggie cried as she finally regained her voice. “Put me down!”

“Infuriating wench, spoilt brat of a child, brainless peahen!” Lucian ranted as he got to the door. Maggie snagged the frame and brought them both to a stop. Lucian wasn’t messing about this time as he dissipated, and Maggie fell straight to the floor. As she scrambled to find purchase again, Lucian solidified and picked her up. Maggie reached into her bra pocket and squirted liquid into his eyes. Lucian roared and

released Maggie, and she flew back inside the bedroom.

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“Fine! Do you wish to see why you need to leave? Come with me!” Lucian finally growled. He put a hand out, and Maggie eyed it dubiously.

“What trick is this?” Maggie demanded as she twisted her head.

“No trick, stupid girl. You demand the truth of the Two Moons; you can have it. I hope it keeps your bed warm at night when you understand I was not joking about evil!”

“You just want to get rid of me. You’ve had the inn to yourself for three hundred years and won’t go into the light!” Maggie fired back.

“Into the light? What on earth have you been reading? And I thought today’s society was better educated,” Lucian drawled, pressing Maggie’s buttons.

“I’ll educate you, you misbegotten lump! You’re dead, as in, no body, flesh and blood turned to dust! You are a ghost who’s the worse pain in my ass I’ve ever come across. Lucian, you died three hundred years ago and don’t seem to realise that! Go away, scat, flee, find the light, or travel to the bowels of hell. Haunt somewhere else! But not my damn inn!” Maggie exclaimed.

“You don’t think I’m aware I’m dead? I was six and twenty when struck down. In my prime of life! I had a title, a home, land, businesses, and a family! I had a full life and sacrificed it to stop the evil from spreading through England and our sister countries. Maggie, you stand there and mock me and appreciate nothing about this inn or its history; that makes you an immature peahen!”

“I read the reports on the supposed haunting and how it’s linked to Margery Cross. I don’t believe in witches and magic!”

“Do not believe in ghosts either, do you!” Lucian retorted.

“No, I damn well don’t!” Maggie cried.

“So, what in damnation are you conversing with Miss Maggie?” Lucian slid home with his win and waited. Maggie slumped into her chair and gazed at him. Her mouth worked silently as she tried to find an answer. Finally, Maggie leaned into her hands and shook her head.

“Truthfully? I don’t know. None of this makes sense. The paranormal is what you watch on tv or read in a book. It’s not supposed to exist in real life! But I can’t deny you’re here or what you’ve been doing. It goes against science!” Maggie whispered.

“Science can not explain everything, Maggie. There’s something stronger than science, faith. Where science may fail, faith won’t,” Lucian said gently as the battle left Maggie.

“I know I’m not crazy. Mariah has seen you. Mr Evans and Melisandre heard you. But what makes little sense...” Maggie broke off into a sob.

“What, Maggie?” Lucian asked.

“If ghosts can exist, why didn’t my mum return?” Maggie cried. She lifted her head from her hands and gazed at Lucian like he had all the answers. Lucian must have suddenly realised why Maggie was so resistant to him being a ghost and why she battled against him so hard. His tone shifted.

“Maggie, your mother, she died recently?” Lucian asked softly.

Maggie nodded.

“Yes.”

“She must have said everything that was needed, Maggie. There is no need for her to return. She’ll be waiting for you to join her. I’m here because I have a mission. Other ghosts haunt because they have unresolved business. But I chose to be here and ensure the evil doesn’t escape from the trap I set three hundred years ago. And it is nearly three. You must come with me, and I will extract a promise from you,” Lucian replied and lifted his hand to her again. Maggie stared at it before taking it and getting up.

“Whatever happens, you can not make a sound. Do not move. This is imperative. Should she sense you are here, she will do everything to tear the living flesh from your bones. Her evil is beyond malignant, and you’ll feel emotions such as terror and numbness. I can contain her; I’ve succeeded for three hundred years. She only walks for a few minutes. But as I will be protecting you and keeping her here, you can’t attract her attention. I’ll be weakened, shielding you. Should she realise that she will challenge me, and I’ll have to sacrifice you to protect the world outside.”

“Ouch!” Maggie muttered as the bluntness of Lucian’s words sank in.

“Do not force my hand, Maggie, I beg of you. Stay still and quiet. Not even a squeak,” Lucian ordered vehemently. “You’ll not spot me, but I’ll be here, Maggie. I swear to defend you as best as I can. It is time. Curl up in that armchair and hold a pillow because you will need it. Do not leave until I come for you,” Lucian warned, and then he disappeared. An invisible hand touched Maggie’s face in reassurance, and then she sensed Lucian around her. The clock hit three and began chiming.

Chapter Four.

To Maggie's surprised eyes, a bedroom appeared at the end of the hall. Maggie pulled her head back in surprise because she had walked this twice and never noticed a hidden room. A green mist began billowing from the gaps around the entrance, not a delicate green but a green mixed with grey. It was dark and eerie, and Maggie yanked the pillow up to her face. The entire hallway was lit with a fearful dull light. She wondered if she was trapped in a nightmare. The door swung slowly open, and the fog rolled out in waves.

A woman stepped out of the room. She wore a floor-length blue dress cut in the Georgian design, but for a poorer woman. Not one of nobility, although Maggie noted as the figure turned to face her, she rivalled the beauty of the aristocrats. Long brown hair tumbled down her back in wild curls and gleamed healthily in the light. Her nose was pert and straight, and her eyes were a cold amber. Plump lips and high cheekbones were accompanied by alabaster skin. Maggie recognised the lady, Margery Cross.

The sense of evil accompanying her was unsurpassed. It bled from Margery's pores, seeping into the walls and floor of the inn. Margery stared directly in front of her, and Maggie wondered in her fear if the woman could see her. But as Margery paced closer, her eyes focused on the stairs, not Maggie cowering. Maggie made a slight noise, which the pillow hid as Margery passed and swept down the steps.

Quietly, Maggie rose to her knees and saw Margery pause to glare at Lucian's portrait before gliding to the middle of the bar. Something there caught her eye, and Margery paused. When Margery's cold voice cut across the area, Maggie wondered what she'd seen.

"Lucifer, I know you're here. Are you going to release me tonight, lover?"

"Go to hell, Margery," Lucian replied. Maggie searched for him but couldn't see him anywhere.

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“Yet another night goes past with you as my jailor. Do you not bore?” Margery called, a small smile on her lips.

“Not as long as you haunt, witch!” Lucian retorted swiftly.

“Set me free, Lucifer, come now. Time has moved on. Surely, I’ve earned some respite?”

“I’ll never allow you freedom while evil exists in your heart, Margery,” Lucian replied.

“Damn you to hell, Lucifer!” Margery snarled, and her beauty twisted as she allowed her temper to overcome her. There was no denying the sheer evilness that existed in Margery. Maggie gasped and drew back, and Margery’s gaze flew to where she hid. Maggie held her breath as she felt Margery’s eyes trying to find her.

“Do we have an intruder, lover?” Margery asked.

“Think I grow weak? Appears you suffer from wishful thinking, witch!” Lucian taunted. Margery let out a gentle sigh, at odds with the hatred on her face.

“Until tomorrow, Lucifer,” Margery called. Maggie popped her head over the armchair as she watched Margery walk to her portrait, and then she disappeared. Maggie blinked and then collapsed back, gasping for air. Minutes ticked past before Lucian appeared before her. Without a second thought, Maggie leapt up from her chair and jumped into his arms. Lucian held her tightly as Maggie shook.

“What was that? How is she alive? What is happening?” Maggie demanded in a rush.

“It is a long story, Maggie. Do you have a warm drink?” Lucian asked as she burrowed into his chest.

“In my bag, yes, I have a flask of coffee,” Maggie replied.

“Come, you need warmth after seeing Margery. Everyone who has ever seen her felt chills down to their soul.”

Maggie allowed Lucian to lead her back into the bedroom she’d cleaned, and without thinking, Maggie pulled out a dressing gown and wrapped it around her. After yanking on thick socks, she climbed into the sleeping bag, pulling it up to her shoulders. She propped herself upright against the bedframe and stared wide-eyed at Lucian.

Lucian

Damnation, she looked lovely like that. Margery had given her a shock, but to her credit, Maggie was still standing, well, sitting. Lucian worried about how much to tell her and decided everything. This stubborn girl wasn’t planning to go anywhere unless she had the whole truth. He had some money, a few necklaces, and gems. Maybe he could reimburse Maggie for her monetary losses, and she could retain ownership and help keep people away. That was a pretty good plan! The more Lucian considered it, the more the idea settled.

“Where to start?” he mused.

“The beginning?” Maggie asked with a bite in her tone.

Lucian chuckled. “As far as my story goes, it started around five hundred BC...”

Lucian spoke, and Maggie inhaled sharply.

“You’re telling me you were two thousand years old at the time of death?”

“No minx, listen and don’t interrupt,” Lucian chided. Maggie’s eyebrows came down, but she said nothing. “So, the tale starts in five hundred BC. When I say we, I mean my bloodline. My family home is built upon a cave system that can only be accessed by a secret door in our cellar. It leads into a set of caves with our ancestors’ names, dates of birth and death, and a few lines about them. Also, their kill record.”

Lucian saw Maggie’s mouth open and lifted an eyebrow as she mulishly shut it.

“Norton’s learn our records start from then and are accurate. At that time, the world was wild. Supernatural creatures could easily fit in and hide, and no one was around to stop them. My people were leaders of a small village, which was raided and ruined by a demon. The husband and two sons lived while his wife and three daughters were torn apart. We know the three men’s names were Rupert and his sons, Silas and Ajax. They hunted down the monster that destroyed their family and town.

“Legend says an Angel came across them after their kill and offered them a deal. They would become God’s Scourge and rid the world of evil creatures that found their way here. In return, Rupert, Silas, and Ajax would be given gifts to aid their endeavours. They accepted, not wanting others to suffer as they had. The Angel gave us the last name Norton. He claimed in his language it means ‘Allies of God’. And by giving us the surname Norton, he insisted we were blessed.

“The three Nortons created a small village and sought people who’d survived attacks. In time, Silas and Ajax married and had sons and daughters of their own. In those times, women weren’t considered warriors, but Rupert realised his granddaughters were precisely that. God’s gifts did not differentiate. The granddaughters were as fast, strong, and clever as their brothers. Because of their size, they were even more

nimble and had excellent fighting techniques. Over their lifetime, they hunted many demons down and passed their skills down from generation to generation.”

“Wow,” Maggie said.

“The legend is carved into the cave entrance with detailed pictograms. Every Norton reads it before we even start to fight. Learn our destiny. We also examine the family trees that descended from Silas and Ajax. We see where the women married and what happened to their bloodlines, and we could track our bloodline worldwide.”

“That’s amazing,” Maggie whispered, clearly relishing the story.

“Nortons continued being blessed by God and the angels as we learned new fighting techniques and unlocked skills. Each Norton, from about three hundred BC, grew an ability to sense when evil was near. In one-fifty BC, we saw an aura around creatures. Because not all monsters are evil. Not every vampire was a blood-thirsty monster. Not every werewolf wanted to rip someone’s throat out. We understood the auras and stopped innocent individuals from being destroyed.”

“Vampires and werewolves? Honestly!” Maggie laughed. Lucian had seen the denial before; she didn’t believe they could exist.

“They live, Maggie, whether or not you believe it. You didn’t think ghosts were real or hauntings, yet here we sit.”

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“But vampires and werewolves? Come on, Lucian, they are imagination.” Maggie shook her head in disbelief. “A children’s tale made up to scare us.”

Lucian loosened his cravat and undid a couple of buttons before craning his neck. Maggie’s gaze widened as she saw two round marks on his neck.

“Vampires are real. A master vampire gifted me these scars when I was all of eight years. Papa saved me. While he cared for me, another ravaged our mother and stole her life. Father was never the same after. So, roll your eyes peahen, but those monsters exist. It took me decades to understand only a minor percentage are evil. My mother’s death blinded me to them. The gift of the aura stopped me from killing innocents, but I can inform you, it didn’t stop me from hating their race.”

“Lucian, I am so sorry,” Maggie whispered, humbled.

“As am I. We lost a mighty warrior in my father, Richard. He died when I was eighteen, and I took over his title and estate. I had to raise my younger siblings and ensure their training was beyond adequate. But we’ll return to that later, back to the story.

“Around two hundred AD, Nortons learned to use smell to tell from afar what type of creature we hunted. We were God’s ultimate warriors with our accented speed, strength, fighting skills, and intelligence. My ancestors suffered terrible losses; family lines were wiped out before another line could aid them. Some of our bloodlines became evil, and we had to hunt and destroy them. It was a harsh existence, but we were rewarded in the service of God.”

“This is one hell of a story,” Maggie whispered. Lucian turned a stern gaze on her.

“This is my legacy, Maggie; it is no myth but the truth.”

Maggie ducked her head, clearly a little ashamed. Good, he thought.

“In thirteen hundred and forty, a war broke out. Because there was no speedy communication, we were unaware our European family lines were being hunted down and wiped out. When word finally reached those of us who survived, we banded together. But over half our numbers had been eliminated. A witch born thirty years earlier, one of the most powerful to walk the earth, had gathered allies of the darkness. Margery Cross was born of a warlock and witch. Their bloodlines ran as pure as the Norton’s.”

“Margery!” Maggie gasped. Her jaw dropped open, and she continued, “But that makes her centuries old, and she’s in her early twenties.”

“May I continue?” Lucian sighed.

“Sorry,” Maggie whispered.

“Margery made a deal with the devil. In exchange for longevity, she sold her soul. She began gathering evil to her in many shapes and forms. The vampires with her started seeking lineage and hunting us down. With half our numbers depleted, it left Margery free to continue her plan. In thirteen-forty-seven, the Black Death swept Europe. It wasn’t a disease. It was the creatures that Margery had gathered. They were feeding indiscriminately across Europe but avoided England at first.

“Between them, they butchered sixty per cent of the European population. Yes, there was a plague; it was to be expected after supernatural diseases spread amongst humans. But the disease itself only killed ten per cent. The remaining fifty were food

for the Dark Masses. They rampaged through Europe, killing mercilessly. The Norton lines rose and fought as hard as they could but were often overwhelmed, albeit at a significant loss of life to the Dark Masses. For every Norton slain, at least thirty of the enemy died with them.

Finally, Margery forced her way to England on June thirteen-forty-eight. There she made inroads into the cities and populations until we met her army. To say we were outnumbered a thousand to one was an understatement. Lord Terence Norton, the commander, had one goal. To reach Margery and stop her. Without their leader, the Dark Mass would flee. He lost both his sons and two nephews in reaching Margery, but his blade slashed through her torso, and Margery fled.

“With Margery not at the helm, the Dark Mass fell into disarray and was slaughtered by the survivors. Lord Terence also survived and remarried and had three more sons. His sword was passed from son to son, a beacon against Margery.”

“But if she died, how is haunting the Jekyll and Hyde?” Maggie asked.

“I never claimed she died, Maggie. I said Margery vanished. Margery lived and plotted even deeper revenge. In sixteen-sixty-six, her Dark Mass had invaded London; for every human left alive, there were one hundred creatures. Lord William Norton rode down and set London ablaze with his small army. Several hundred humans died, but the majority we freed. Lord William used his troop to encircle London and execute any creature attempting to escape. Margery once again fled. By now, her bitterness and hatred of the Nortons were well entrenched.”

“The Great Fire of London was a battle to wipe out evil?” Maggie gasped.

“Yes. My birth occurred in sixteen-ninety. I passed in seventeen-sixteen. I was twenty-six years old at the time of my death and had been fighting evil since I was a child. Our mother died in sixteen-ninety-eight. Father accompanied her a decade

later. Next in line to me were Elias and his twin brother Isaac, who were a full year younger than me. They were followed by Benedict, two years younger than them. Kit and his twin Cecilia were four years after Benedict.

“Margery’s plans changed because the Norton lineage had grown again, and we were more prevalent in my era. This time, the witch wished to open a portal to hell and free the demon population and the dark souls we’d sent there. To achieve this, Margery needed ley lines, and on those, she required buildings to contain the power. Margery discovered the Cotswolds had exactly what she required. And even better, her old enemies owned inns on the ley lines in the shape of a pentagram with the Jekyll and Hyde in the centre.

“Each of my siblings and I controlled one of the inns, but we rarely visited because they were running very well. A good, clean reputation, and they made money. I had estates and other businesses to control, as did my siblings. Even Ceecee, at nine and ten, managed her own holdings and cash. Villagers sent word that youngsters were disappearing and dying, and we came immediately. We sensed the darkness that had fallen over this area as we approached.

“Each of us made our way to our own inns, and here is where I discovered Margery’s plan. Margery had already killed twelve children and had the thirteenth at the inn. Ready to be sacrificed. The child’s death would harness the power of the thirteen innocents and provide energy to the spell to tear a rift in the barrier between hell and earth. It would allow the demons to escape. The Two Moons was empty of villagers when I arrived. Most had holed up, wary of the witch hiding in the hills.

“Margery and I fought. I freed the captive child while taking a mortal blow. But the girl escaped into the night. With my dying breath, I threw myself into battle, determined to take Margery down for once and for all. I desired so badly to end the blight on our lives, and then nothing. I remember nothing but waking here as a ghost. My body was gone, and there was no sign of Margery. I thought I’d failed and tried

to flee the inn, but I was trapped here. The guilt that I had flowed and allowed Margery to escape was encompassing. But that evening, Margery left that room you saw her leave tonight, and we argued and clashed once again.

“Both of us inflicted heavy mortal wounds that didn’t pain us, and we both concluded we were spirits. Margery tried to flee the inn, and I stopped her. And then I realised we were both trapped here. My duty was now to stop Margery from leaving and finding either her body or a new body she could take over. And for three hundred years, I’ve succeeded. Should Margery’s evil escape, she will seek to finish the ritual, and I do not know if there are Nortons out there to kill her!”

Maggie

Maggie sat stunned at the story. It was too detailed, and Lucian’s voice was saturated with too much pain to believe it to be anything but the distressing truth. Lucian stared at her, patiently waiting for her to speak. The question was where to start? There was a lot to unpick.

“Your siblings?” Maggie asked.

“I do not know. It has tortured me for three hundred years what happened to them. There was evil lingering in their inns. They should have been successful, but I cannot comment for sure,” Lucian replied with heartbreak.

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“No one showed to see what transpired? An earl disappears, and nobody is curious about it?”

“Villagers visited, but I couldn’t let them stay. The chap who ran the inn was the final death here. He returned with the intent of running the inn, and Margery seduced him little by little until he was her pawn and brought her an innocent child. I saved the little girl and murdered my old employee and then ensured no one would sleep here ever again.”

“Does Margery have freedom like you?” Maggie asked.

“No, Margery only wakes at three in the morning. I guess that was the moment we stopped each other. Margery usually spends an hour attempting to escape the inn while I thwart her efforts, but she must enter her portrait at four am. That is strange. Margery cannot return to her room and doesn’t occupy the bedroom during the day. She simply isn’t here. It’s as if she lives in her portrait, enters our world through her suite, and leaves through the painting.”

“Isn’t that odd?” Maggie asked.

“That is what you believe is unusual from this muddled story?” Lucian inquired, amused. Maggie shrugged and smiled.

“It sounds like a programme for a sci-fi channel on tv. But the fact is you are here, and Mariah’s inn is also haunted.”

“What is your friend Mariah’s inn called?”

“The Black Cat, it is at...”

“Stapleton and was my brother Benedict’s,” Lucian said, sending Maggie a sceptical look. Maggie blinked.

“And it’s haunted,” Maggie whispered as Lucian stared at her. “Could Benedict be there?”

“I hope not!” Lucian exclaimed as intense anguish crossed his face. Maggie decided not to mention the other four inns her mates had bought. Should they be his relatives’ former holdings, Lucian would wish to know if they were haunted. And if they were? Then he and his siblings have been trapped for three hundred years. That would be cruel knowledge to impart. Maggie made several mental notes to investigate her friends as soon as possible.

“So, where do we go from here?” Maggie demanded, and Lucian rose to his feet in shock.

“You pack your items up and leave,” Lucian said.

“Not happening. No, wait, listen, please. I’ve always wished to own a character inn and run a bed-and-breakfast. I searched for months before finding this, and it called to me. Lucian, I belong here. I’m meant to be here. So maybe we need to exorcise Margery?”

“You think I haven’t tried Maggie? Margery’s strength is too strong. We are both evenly matched, which is why we can’t beat one another.” Lucian growled.

“So, weaken her.”

“I beg your pardon...” Lucian paused, interested in what Maggie had just said.

“You stated Margery was a formidable witch, but she was killing those poor children to gain their power to open a portal.”

“Yes.”

“So where did Margery stick that energy, Lucian? Did Margery absorb it or store it somewhere?” Maggie asked simply.

“I don’t know!” Lucian exclaimed.

Why had that never crossed his mind? Maggie wondered idly. That had been the first thing she thought of.

“So, you inflicted mortal wounds on each other, and that was it? Nothing until the next day when you’re a ghost?” Maggie pushed.

“As crazy as that sounds, yes.”

“Interesting,” Maggie mused. Her gaze wandered the room and focused on the panelled-up part.

“What’s behind that?” Maggie asked.

“I’ve never been able to see. I can’t pass through it,” Lucian admitted somewhat sheepishly. Maggie’s eyes narrowed on the false wall. She craved to know what it covered up.

“I wonder if Mr Evans can knock through,” Maggie wondered out loud.

“No one has ever tried before. I’ve rarely allowed people to stay long enough.”

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“Some must have Lucian. Modern electrics and plumbing were fitted. And toilets installed,” Maggie pointed out.

“Those were the contractors who were difficult to frighten or startle. Although the electrics and plumbing, I gave permission to be put in. They let me have warm baths and lights. With the latrines, those builders were incredibly stubborn mules. But I succeeded,” Lucian replied, looking proud.

“You won’t drive me away, Lucian. I want this as my home,” Maggie said.

“And I can’t permit you to stay and be swayed by Margery’s evil.”

“Then we’re back to war tomorrow?” Maggie asked, and Lucian nodded. Maggie rose to her feet. “You’ve one problem, Lucian. Now I know you’re a good man who risked everything to stop evil. I won’t be as frightened of you as I once was!” Maggie announced and lay down in her sleeping bag and closed her eyes. Lucian missed her giggling as he cursed aloud and stomped away.

Chapter Five.

“I’m going to kill you! Strangle your stupid ghost into the netherworld. Put sage all round the inn!” Maggie roared, stumbling from a toilet. She’d been scrubbing them, although she’d no idea why. The taps startled her, turning on and spewing terrible green-brown water out. But knowing what Lucian was attempting, Maggie ignored him and continued cleaning. It had been two days since Maggie witnessed Margery, and she’d been waiting, noticing Lucian was biding his time.

She was alarmed when a gurgling noise came from the toilets and had been backing away when they exploded sludge everywhere. Maggie had been disgustingly caught in the midst of it. Luckily, from the smell, it wasn't human waste, but she smelt like pond scum. Her hair was plastered to her head, and rivets of disgusting slime ran down her face.

"I'll hang, draw, and quarter you! Catch you in a net and shove you in a washing machine; you thought the hoover was bad, you miscreant!" Maggie yelled, stumbling into the bar.

"Leave!" Lucian roared from somewhere.

"Show yourself, you damned coward!" Maggie spluttered.

"Get out!" Lucian shouted.

"Get your skinny ass here so I can kick it into hell. I'm going to place hoovers everywhere and suck you up repeatedly. I'll play annoying music all day long!" Maggie had a sudden thought and dashed for the staircase. Lucian was too busy laughing at her as she slurped across the floor. Her feet produced sucking noises as she climbed the stairs and disappeared.

When Maggie had returned to the inn the following day after the revelations, Lucian's room had appeared in her corridor. Out of respect, she'd stayed away. But now, Lucian had upped the game. Now it was her turn! She made her way there as his laugh rang throughout the inn. Maggie slung open his door and opened his wardrobe before grabbing every item of clothing she could. Slinging them into a blanket on his bed, she hauled her bundle of stolen goods downstairs. Lucian's laughter stopped as he wondered what she had planned. Maggie loosened the throw, and he saw his clothes.

“No!” Lucian yelled as Maggie launched herself forward and began rolling around on them. The slime and muck transferred from her to them, and she picked his underwear up and wiped her face and arms clean. Then she threw them back into the pile.

“You damnable wench!”

“You rotten bleeder!”

“Insolent chit!”

“Arrogant ass!”

“Aggravating hen-pecking peahen!”

“Stuck up, rude, nincompoop!”

“Dear God, they’re worse than we were,” a man commented, and they stopped shouting at each other and spun to see an invasion of strangers. Six men and six women glared at them, most looking amused apart from two men who stared dourly at them.

“What the ever-loving hell?” Lucian yelled, borrowing one of Maggie’s favourite curses.

“Yeah, not so happy to see you either, Lucifer!” The younger, dour-faced man replied.

“Maggie, am I seeing things?” Lucian asked, his anger forgotten.

“I recognise Melisandre,” Maggie waved at her, “and eleven people I don’t know.”

“Get the hell out of my inn! This is my place to haunt!” Lucian exploded.

“Oh, that sounds familiar, doesn’t it, Harcourt?” a man responded.

“Shut it, Harrington,” the guy the comment aimed at said.

“You’re all dead!” Lucian cried, pointing at them. He narrowed his eyes and approached Maggie, who began moving back.

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“Did you create them to punish me? The very bane of my living existence!” Lucian exploded and then slipped on his underwear. His arms flailed as he tried to regain his balance. But Maggie leapt forward and jabbed a finger in his chest, and he hit the disgusting pile of clothing.

“Damn, she’s ruthless,” a woman said with a grin. “I’m Henrietta Courtney, Viscountess Ravenell, and this sour-looking man is my husband, St John Courtney, Viscount Ravenell.”

“He’s dead. Some light skirt caught him down a lane.” Lucian smirked as St John bristled. Henrietta chuckled.

“Do I curtesy?” I asked, unsure, peering at the strangers in front of me.

“To the Dukes and Marquess, yes, but screw formality today,” Henrietta answered with a warm smile.

“Henrietta!” a man bellowed, and Henrietta grinned and shrugged.

“Why the hell am I being plagued in my afterlife?” Lucian roared as he struggled to get out of the dirty clothing.

“That sounds familiar too!” another man said, gazing at Harcourt.

“Maggie, this might be overwhelming, but let me introduce everyone. This is Marquess Blackwood and his wife. Daniel and Sabine Harrington,” Melisandre replied.

“He’s dead, so he can’t be married,” Lucian growled, getting to his feet.

“Oh, I did one better. I impregnated my bride while a ghost!” Daniel responded proudly. His wife sighed and rolled her eyes. Lucian’s mouth dropped open.

“Henrietta and St John have both introduced themselves. Henrietta is Daniel’s sister. Next up, we have Earl Mortimer, Nicolas Pembroke, my husband,” Melisandre continued.

“He’s dead too. I danced on his grave!” Lucian grumbled with a glower.

Nicholas narrowed his eyes, and Lucifer snickered.

“At least you didn’t piss on St Johns, I would have.” Henrietta chuckled, and St John sent her a stern look.

“Missed your sharp tongue, lass.” Lucian grinned.

“You’re a countess?” Maggie asked Melisandre, who shrugged.

“This is the Duke of Windmere, Henry Harcourt and Emile,” Melisandre said, ignoring Lucian.

“Went to his funeral, genuinely mourned his death after what those reprobates put him through,” Lucian interrupted. Harcourt sent Lucian an amused look while Emile giggled.

“We have the Black Duke, known as Duke Monmouth, Tristian Russell and Abigail,” Melisandre introduced the second dour-looking man with a stern glance at Lucian. “And finally, the Earl Torrington, Jeremy DeLacy and his wife, Lavinia.”

“What? They can bugger off. This is my inn to haunt,” Lucian said again without remorse as Maggie whacked his arm.

“Except we’re not dead, you floundering fool, we were given life again,” Nicholas sniped. Lucian stared at him for a few moments, then threw his head back and laughed.

“Did you hear that? Maggie, they were my sibling’s rivals; they’re the same age as me but expect us to believe they are living!”

“Lucian, they look pretty alive to me!” Maggie responded warily as she eyed the twelve people in front of her.

“Maggie, are there working showers upstairs? May I suggest you change? And Lucian also needs to clean up,” Melisandre suggested. “We’ll wait downstairs.”

“Not in my inn; they don’t.” Lucian glared.

“This is my inn!” Maggie shrieked, turning to face him.

“Is not!”

“Is too!”

“Anyone reminded of Oakwood Manor and Sabine?” Daniel asked idly.

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“If I want them in the Jekyll and Hyde, they stay! Melisandre said they’re ghosts who somehow returned to life!” Maggie yelled, her hands shooting to her hips.

“We can’t return!” Lucian yelled.

“And phantoms, vampires, and werewolves don’t exist!” Maggie retorted.

Lucian opened his mouth and shut it again.

“You got me there,” he responded sulkily. A sudden loud boom blasted, and echoes bounded off the walls. Everybody froze.

“Have we woken Margery?” Maggie whispered after a few moments.

“No, but something just awoke,” Lucian replied, craning his head. An icy wind swept through the inn and nearly knocked everybody off their feet. A disapproving feeling flooded everyone present as they sensed someone watching.

“What is it?” St John demanded, hauling Henrietta behind him.

“I don’t know,” Lucian answered and stiffened as a breeze whirled around his legs. A wordless cry of joy erupted, and Lucian remained rigid until a small smile broke over his face.

“Hello darling,” Lucian said, and a glow surrounded him.

“Any doubt now?” Melisandre sought the rest of her group sarcastically.

“Damn, is that his home?” Daniel asked, cocking his head as Lucian’s eyes lit with pure joy.

“No idea, but while he revels in whatever that is, Maggie run and have a shower,” Melisandre urged. Maggie looked down, sniffed, and wrinkled her nose.

“I smell awful,” she admitted and dashed for the stairs. The overnight bag she’d brought was still there and had her toiletries and spare clothes inside. Half an hour later, Maggie reappeared and found the strangers sitting around several tables they’d shoved together and chatting. Maggie listened from the bottom landing.

“If Wollscombe Hall is sentient like ours, then that proves we’re meant to help Lucian,” Sabine argued. Daniel was shaking his head.

“Lucifer and his siblings were the banes of our lives; they played tricks, and so did we. Society often ensured that if the Rakehell Six were invited somewhere, then the God’s Scourge was elsewhere,” Daniel replied.

“Yes, the Grande Dames of civilisation would plan weeks in advance so they could split us apart.” St John grinned. His entire face lit up, and Maggie saw how handsome he was.

“Where is Wollscombe Hall? I’ve never heard of it?” Abigail asked, leaning forward. Tristian opened his mouth and then shut it again.

“Let me guess, no one knows?” Lavinia laughed. Everyone swapped looks and then shrugged their shoulders or looked sheepish.

“Any further proof needed?” Melisandre demanded.

“Seems not, but is it just Lucifer? Where are his brothers and CeeCee? They all

disappeared,” Lavinia asked.

“They did?” Henrietta urged curiously.

“Yes, they were mysteriously called to the Cotswolds. They travelled via horseback, riding day and night to get here, including CeeCee. That same evening, all six of them vanished. They were seen to enter their inns, and the next day there wasn’t a single sign of them,” Tristian recalled.

“We all disappeared? All of us? None of us made it out alive, not even Cecilia?” Lucian asked hoarsely from behind them.

Maggie’s gaze sought him out immediately.

“Sorry, I did not see you there!” Emile exclaimed, rising to her feet.

“Emile, CeeCee didn’t make it?” Lucian sounded heartbroken.

“No, Lucifer, I’m sorry. The scandal and uproar were huge. All six of you just disappeared. There was no trace of any Norton. A search went on for an entire year,” Tristian answered.

“So, there are no Nortons in society?” Lucian asked, his voice husky.

“No, Lucian, the direct line died with you,” Emile replied.

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Maggie stepped out from the stairs.

“Funny how no one mentioned Wollscombe Hall disappearing either,” Emile said.

“Would somebody please explain what’s happening here? You claim to have been ghosts who returned to life. Frankly, that’s unbelievable. You say something about your homes being alive. There is far too much-unexplained stuff here, and this inn and Lucian are mine!” Maggie declared firmly.

“Yours?” Lucian asked.

“My inn, my ghost!” Maggie reiterated.

“You can keep your damn Lucifer. He always was cantankerous,” Nicholas grumbled. Lucian began squabbling with Nicholas, and the others joined in.

“You!” Maggie cried, pointing to Harcourt. “You’re not arguing, so please explain what is going on!”

“It is a long story, Miss Maggie. Why don’t you take a seat? I’ll send Jeremy and Emile for food. You’ll need substance once you hear what happened to the Rakehell Six,” Harcourt said, offering a patient smile. Lucian’s head turned towards him.

“Are you all honestly alive? Because I can appear solid, too,” Lucian asked.

“Someone brought us back to life after much sacrifice and many obstacles, Lucifer, my dear.”

Lucian

Many hours passed before Lucian felt he finally had the Rakehell Six's stories accurate and embedded in his mind. Of course, Lucian's situation was different from theirs. They had all been murdered and had to discover their killer. Lucian, however, was the barrier preventing a terrible evil from being let loose in the world. Daniel could emphasise a little, as he was slain, and the evil he'd locked up was his maniac brother. Daniel and the rest of the Rakehell Six hadn't been trying to stop a witch from opening a portal to hell.

Like Maggie, they, too, had been incredulous when confronted with witches, vampires, and werewolves. But then Emile pointed out about Zombie Emile and being chased by hellhounds. Lavinia recalled the ghouls they'd fought at DeLacy Park, and most of their doubts were squashed. To Lucian's surprise, once their stories had all been swapped, his included, the Rakehell Six and their spouses demanded to know how to help. As much as Lucian appreciated their offer, there was nothing they could do.

They were human and had a life. Hell, they had babies at home. Lucian wasn't prepared to risk them. Even though jealousy stung a little. His family had served God their whole lives, yet he'd been left to waste. And where were his siblings? Lucian felt he'd been mistreated. But he hoped they'd return, and Lavinia told him something in private.

Lavinia had been informed by an archangel that the Rakehell destinies were heading in the direction fate had declared for them. But the archangel said that the Rakehell Six would change the world, but they wouldn't do it alone. There would be others they needed to discover. Lavinia, alongside the women, was convinced it was the Nortons they were meant to find and help rescue.

Lucian marvelled at how they'd adapted to modern-day living while keeping their

ethics, morals, and graces around them. They used what they wanted from today's era. Nicholas and Lavinia had struggled the most with adapting, and still instilled respect, loyalty, faith, and many other good qualities. Instead of worshipping greed and money, the Rakehell Six led the way in showing how to live with honour and helping your fellow man. Lucian had listened intently as Sabine explained how they had employed hundreds of new staff at Oakwood Manor with the attractions they'd opened to the public.

Lucian's estate had few interests, nor did it have a village attached to it. But it was set in beautiful landscaping and boasted a robust fishing lake. He'd purchased several farms and a few factories. He imagined the warehouses were derelict now. Lucian had also owned two bottle-making workshops alongside three breweries and a paper factory. Lucian was unaware of what had happened to his businesses or staff. He missed his home, with its rolling landscapes, valleys, rivers, and numerous small woods.

Could he, too, return to life and help society by tracking the evil residing there today? Those from his era had displayed a high distaste for the loutish behaviour surrounding them. Lucian reminded them that such manners had existed in their time and in their level of civilisation, too. But Harcourt, the most conservative of the men, informed Lucian that the behaviour was widespread and accepted nowadays.

Lucian pushed aside his thoughts as he stared at Maggie, who was asking questions to Henrietta, Emile, and Lavinia. They'd stunned her when they admitted to wearing their Georgian clothing to this day. And the Lords did, including Jeremy, who'd been born in this era. When Maggie questioned them about people making fun of them or teasing them cruelly, Henrietta grinned wickedly. Lucian knew the sharp-tongued woman had set many down.

Somehow, Henrietta had talked Lucian into agreeing to a washing machine and tumble dryer. She informed Lucian Mr Evans had worked at Oakwood Manor,

Courtenay House, Waverley Hall, and Corelle Abbey. Eléonore Castle and DeLacy Park had remained occupied and therefore cared for. Lucian had been saddened to hear how the beautiful Waverley Hall had fallen into significant disrepair and yet was gladdened to learn she'd been restored to her former glory.

With a sideways glance at St John, Henrietta had asked to view the upstairs. Lucian warily regarded her husband, who had a hair trigger and was pleasantly surprised to see his agreement.

“What do you plan to do?” Henrietta urged as they walked along the corridor, peeking into the bedrooms.

“Keep Margery locked away from the public.”

“For the rest of your existence?” Henrietta challenged.

“Henrietta, you’ve no idea of the level of evil within Margery’s heart. I cannot allow that to escape onto untold numbers of innocents.”

“But Lucian, you have Maggie,” Henrietta commented, pausing in a bedroom. Lucian stopped and stared at her, confused. “Oh, Lucifer! Always the charmer with women but never truly seeing. Maggie is your St John. Daniel’s Sabine, Nicholas’s Melisandre, I don’t need to carry on, surely. All those years alone, and now she comes into your life, and her friend is at the Black Cat. That is no coincidence, Lucifer, nor is our arrival.”

“You arrived because Melisandre instructed you to,” Lucian said.

“And who told Melisandre to come here? She rarely takes on commissions, two or three a year. She is busy with Waverley Hall and their village. Yet Melisandre ended up here and somehow knew we were meant to help you. That is your call to destiny,

Lucian, and we both know that is a word we don't bandy about freely. Maggie is the catalyst for whatever is to happen. Do you care for her, Lucian? When you look at her, I see the light in your eyes, and it's not just the enjoyment of tangling with her."

"I cherish Maggie, but she's stubborn and annoying. Maggie completely refuses to listen!"

"Lucian, you've met your match. When we sparred in our day, there was never the twinkle you own now. You thoroughly enjoy your battles with Maggie, and the fact you're so protective of her speaks volumes," Henrietta pried.

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“Henrietta, I don’t want Maggie hurt,” Lucian demurred.

“So, do not let Maggie get harmed. Allow her and Mr Evans to renovate the inn. Do as they wish with it. Meanwhile, you continue to thwart Margery her escape. And work with Maggie because I believe she will lead you to the answers, as Sabine did with Daniel. Ask Maggie to meet you halfway so she can restore the inn, but have her promise not to stay the night yet. You must have faith, Lucifer, my dearest,” Henrietta responded sweetly.

“Do you honestly think my future will be the same as the Rakehell Six’s?” Lucian asked.

“Yes, and just as glorious. You felt Wollscombe Hall today, did you not? Did you hear when we said our houses were sentient too? I believe Wollscombe was locked away from you, and earlier, something broke because you realised you had a way out. That snapped whatever was hiding Wollscombe from you and allowed your connection to flare. Do you not feel stronger with her beside you again?”

“It was strange. It was Wollscombe, but also something else. Something flared to life at the inn. Wollscombe was nurturing it, coaxing it to grow. But once it glowed, it was gone, but Wollscombe remained,” Lucian struggled to explain.

Still, Henrietta’s face lit up in understanding.

“You have Wollscombe to protect you. Maggie has the Jekyll and Hyde.” Henrietta gasped, clapping her hands together.

“That’s impossible. Life can’t just appear from anywhere and attach itself to a non-sentient subject,” Lucian denied, shaking his head.

“Who suggested it came out of nowhere? Wollscombe shared a tiny part of herself, and with the love and sacrifice in these walls, it created a sentience. We said, Lucian, that Maggie is your St John. Maybe Wollscombe and Jekyll and Hyde accepted that before you did. I bet Maggie could call upon the inn to protect her now.”

“I’ll not risk Maggie’s safety, Henrietta!” Lucian stated loudly, and Henrietta grinned.

“Lucifer, she’s already your soulmate!”

Maggie

The chat swirled around Maggie as she only half listened. Today’s events had been extraordinary and beyond her comprehension. It had been a struggle to accept ghosts existed. Vampires and werewolves stretched her even further. But Maggie’s entire belief system had been blasted wide open by the knowledge angels were real, and people could return from the dead. Somehow, Maggie knew they were telling the truth; this was no fantasy lie they were living.

Their horror when they spoke of their personal stories and the fear they’d felt was palpable. As was the love they shared. Unless all twelve were suffering from a mass delusion, they told facts. Maggie also had secretly read the gossip magazines, and they all commented on how Christian Russell had reversed his behaviours. From ignoring his wife and continuing his womanising ways, he’d locked himself away from society, changed his name to Tristian, and now doted on his wife. Yeah, a leopard doesn’t change its spots unless forced out of his body by an angry Black Duke!

No, the fact that they returned to life had got Maggie thinking about whether Lucian could. Or they could banish Margery, and Lucian would rest. Maggie wasn't as convinced as the others that Lucian was meant to return. Maybe his destiny was to stop Margery and receive the peace he'd surely earned by now.

Maggie's glance was caught as she spied Lucian and Henrietta walking on the upper level. Their heads were bowed, and their expressions were intent. Lucian held his hands behind his back, an old-fashioned gesture to prove no impropriety. In contrast, Henrietta's were placed in front of her, clasped together for everyone to see.

"It's those simple gestures of respect that make all the difference," St John said, leaning over to her.

"I would assume so," Maggie replied.

"I was reincarnated, as you know, Maggie. When my past merged with my future, it was disorientating and overwhelming. I'd been an arrogant pig. Indeed, there'd been a few women in my life. My former self was shamed by my current self's beliefs. It took a while for me to settle and accept that whatever life I lived didn't matter because, at the core, I was the same man.

Chapter Six.

Maggie

"There's going to be a murder. Can you kill a ghost?" Maggie asked Mr Evans, who chuckled. Since the visit from the Rakehell Six, Lucian had driven her insane. He'd demanded that she bring Mr Evans' back and the plans. Maggie had requested why, and Lucian replied because he wanted them. When Maggie refused, Lucian stole her phone and somehow figured out how to call Mr Evans.

When Mr Evans arrived the following day, Lucian was all grace and charm. Maggie looked quite the sour puss when Lucian explained that he had intimate knowledge of the inn and could help. After Maggie ground her teeth for a solid five minutes, she joined them as Lucian ripped apart her plans and made his own suggestions. The fact Maggie liked them didn't count as Lucian was interfering with her project! Lucian redesigned the kitchen that Maggie gave her approval to. And added insult to injury by demanding it be finished first.

He'd shown Mr Evans some hand-drawn ideas for the bathrooms, which, again, Maggie loved. Lucian had taken hold of the stables and created an entire area that could be rented out for parties and weddings. And finally, he'd discussed his memories of what was behind the wall, blocking Margery's part of the inn. Together they planned office space for Maggie, a dishwasher room, a laundry place, and a linen room. And even worse? He'd done all this humbly, checking for her reactions and ensuring that she liked the changes. How could Maggie scream at Lucian when he was being genuine?

In the week that passed since the Rakehell Six had left, Maggie noticed an enormous difference in her ghost. He was charming, polite, caring, and considerate. Maggie kept looking for traps even when Lucian said their war was finished. She'd heard that before! Meanwhile, Lucian continued sending her soft smiles and trying to be helpful.

"What has his Lordship done now?" Mr Evans asked.

Maggie rolled her eyes. "He's demanding that the kitchen be completed at the same time as the plumbing and electrics. I've explained that those two will be a huge mess, but Lucian won't listen to me. He just keeps harping on about the damned kitchen," Maggie exclaimed.

"Ah, I see," Mr Evans replied.

Mr Evans

And he did. What Maggie did not know was Lucian had torn up the plans Maggie thought she and Lucian had agreed on and handed Mr Evans his version. Mr Evans saw the benefits at once of Lucian's ideas, but Maggie was his employer. It was a quandary he didn't like. But Lucian gave him a heavily jewelled necklace to sell to pay for the new design.

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Mr Evans had been dumbfounded. He had no idea how to advertise that and had contacted Nicholas for help. Nicholas sold the jewellery for a fortune, and now Mr Evans had the cash to complete the kitchen, as per Lucian's orders. So, Mr Evans would go along with Lucian's plans. But if Maggie truly hated them, he could use her originals, of which he had a copy, and Maggie wouldn't be out of pocket. The issue was Lucian wanted to surprise Maggie, and Maggie was everywhere!

For the next few days, the kitchen was completely gutted and emptied. The old tiles and crappy flooring were torn out, the fireplaces were repaired, and the chimney sweeps cleaned them. Lucian had a fantastic idea of installing small fans inside the chimneys to suck the smoke away. Mr Evans had finally found a company which made heatproof fans built for that exact reason. He had four on order, two for each fireplace. Lucian remembered that when the hogs were roasted at the inn during a windy night, the smoke could blow back into the kitchen. He didn't want that for Maggie.

The new plumbing and electrics were hidden, and sockets discreetly placed. The wall connected to the rear of the bar would have a wall-to-wall worktop with cupboards above and below it. They would hold crockery, cutlery, and accessories, etc. At the far end, a double butler sink would be installed.

For the pot washing room, as Lucian called it, two industrial-sized dishwashers would be built in. However, Melisandre had found none that would fit in with the inn's age. Which was a crying shame, but she'd discovered some in an aged cream colour which was more complimentary than stainless steel. They wouldn't look too modern and upset the balance Maggie was aiming for. The cleaning room would serve the kitchen and the bar.

Lucian and Melisandre had also got their heads together, and Maggie would have two of each of the industrial freezers and fridges. They'd ordered a tall cake refrigerator. Those five appliances would be situated on the opposite long wall in the far left corner. In the middle of the wall would be an eight-hob range oven with six compartments for cooking. Two microwaves would be placed on a shelf near the stove.

Most of the old kitchen equipment had remained, so Melisandre had sent jelly, cake, and other moulds off to be cleaned and restored. The huge, lined brass soup urns, casserole pots, saucepans, frying pans, steamers and mixing pots were also being relined to stop any instance of food poisoning. Melisandre had been awestruck at the number of antique copper moulds and their various shapes. She'd informed him of the plan to hang them on the walls so Maggie could just reach out and use them.

The fireplaces with their bread ovens were being made functional again. Melisandre was overwhelmed at seeing the two spits to roast meats on. She explained most kitchens used one spit, but Lucian pointed out this had been an inn. While one was cooked, they'd be roasting the next, so they didn't run out. She also discovered that the fireplace where soups were warmed had some damage and could actually hold four of the large pots that were being repaired. Melisandre now had them on the list to be fixed properly.

During demolition, Mr Evans had realised that plywood had been put up to cover the original plastered walls, and it was merely a case of ripping down the cheap wood. This meant the walls could be painted a beautiful white, and the Tudor beams were once more on display. Maggie would love the kitchen, Mr Evans decided, even though she might be angry Lucian had taken it over!

"Mr Evans?" Maggie asked, interrupting his thoughts.

"Sorry, lass, what is it?"

“The crockery Melisandre said was damaged, but I think she mentioned a shop that could replace it using the same designs and patterns?” Maggie inquired.

“Indeed, she found someone local who is working on the order. I gathered that it was for plates, soups, bowls, dessert dishes, salt and pepper pots, gravy boats, and all the crockery needed.”

“Do you know if she ordered some more of those large serving platters for roast dinners?”

“Yes, Maggie, that I am certain of because she was highly insistent the design be kept. Don’t worry, Maggie, everything is going to plan. Melisandre has even bought linens for the tables in the designs used back then,” Mr Evans said indulgently. Maggie twisted her hands.

“I’m rather at a loss. There is nothing for me to do,” she admitted ruefully, and Mr Evans smiled.

“Oh, there’s plenty you could be doing, Maggie. Melisandre dropped off many folders today with plans for the upstairs rooms. She has several designs for each and wishes you to pick them out. Melisandre wanted me to remind you that each bedroom wouldn’t have been a carbon copy, mainly because of the varying wealth of the guests visiting. So, she needs you to approve plans so she can get started on materials, etc.”

“I’ll do that!” Maggie exclaimed and scurried off.

???

Lucian popped into existence next to Mr Evans, who merely raised an eyebrow.

“One day, I’ll make you jump!” Lucian chuckled.

“Lad, I survived the Rakehell Six. You’re old hat now, son!” Mr Evans teased.

Lucian peered around, pretending to be insulted.

“How goes the kitchen?” Lucian asked.

“A week left. The equipment is arriving soon, and it’s a case of getting Maggie out of the way so it can be installed. Melisandre should also have the furnishing back by then, too,” Mr Evans replied.

“Good, I’m going to find Maggie,” Lucian said, walking away.

Mr Evans rolled his eyes.

“Love is in the air,” he muttered with a smile.

Lucian

Lucian discovered Maggie working in the sun in the overgrown garden. He sighed because she was in the one place he couldn’t go. Usually, when Lucian left the inn, he would reach five steps before being transported back inside. However, today something was encouraging Lucian to go outside. With a resigned sigh, Lucian stepped outside, and Maggie lifted her head to stare at him. Before he knew it, Lucian was carefully sitting at Maggie’s table and expecting to be kicked back into the inn.

“Well, I am still here. That’s rather a big surprise,” Lucian mentioned.

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“Yes, you are. Should you be, Lucian?” Maggie asked.

“No, usually I take five steps and then end up in my room. I’m on tenterhooks waiting to see when the inn realises I’m free and shoves me inside.”

“Indeed,” Maggie said, giggling. “I imagine you dislike being kicked back in!”

“Yes, I most certainly do. I can feel the sun, Maggie, on my skin for the first time in three centuries!” Lucian leaned and tipped his face upwards, feeling the warmth of the sun’s rays. He closed his eyes in happiness and took a few moments for himself.

“Good?” Maggie asked softly, and Lucian groaned, allowing his joy to leak.

“Wonderful, and I believe you have something to do with this,” Lucian responded, looking back at Maggie. A huge smile crossed his face, and Maggie blinked at him. She had a rather dazed look herself, Lucian noted. How interesting.

“Me?” Maggie finally responded, shaking herself.

“Yes, you’ve affected the inn somehow, and now I can leave,” Lucian replied. Maggie bristled, and Lucian held in a sigh as he realised that she thought he was blaming her for something. Lucian disappeared and reappeared a few moments later, holding a red rose.

“Whatever you did, Maggie, thank you,” Lucian said sincerely.

Maggie stared at him, dazed again, as he offered the same smile and then turned her

gaze to the flower in his hand. Lucian held it out to her, and Maggie's slender fingers reached for it. Hers touched his, and a tingle ran down Lucian's spine. Maybe Henrietta was correct. Maggie was his soul mate. Now how to get Maggie to understand?

"What are you doing?" Lucian asked, realising that showing interest in what she was doing was a good start.

"I'm looking at the designs for the bedrooms. Melisandre has drawn several for each bedroom, but I'm unsure which to choose."

"Can I help?" Lucian sought, and Maggie blinked as he moved closer. Lucian suddenly grasped that Maggie was aware of his closeness and held back a grin just in time.

"Are you being serious?" Maggie urged.

"Yes, let me; I know my era better than Melisandre," Lucian said, pulling at a folder. He shifted along the bench they were sitting on until his thigh touched hers. Maggie wriggled a little, and Lucian almost crowed. She wasn't unaffected by him, after all. But Maggie was a different kettle of fish to the women he'd courted. Lucian had only two lovers during his life. One an actress he'd set up nicely and the other an opera singer. The rest of his time he spent dodging match-making mamas. Maggie would have to be pursued slowly, especially considering their history.

"Here, see this colour. It's almost accurate, but it would have been a slightly darker green," Lucian said, pointing to the first image.

"There wasn't any wallpaper untouched by the sun in that room, so Melisandre had to make a guess," Maggie responded, tipping her head to the picture.

“It is a good job my memory has not faded. The green was darker, the floors were dark stained wood, and there were matching curtains and a rug on the floor. The bed coverings were a paler green with silver thread,” Lucian replied. “Will the furniture be staying?”

“Melisandre said she believed it was original to the room, so yes. The only items I believe we need to add are a sofa or a comfortable recliner. The bedroom has a bed, chest of drawers and wardrobes, but it has space for a settee or armchair.”

“There is a writing desk missing and a chair. It was under the window, so the light fell on the table. I wonder what happened to it,” Lucian mused, digging into his memories.

“I’ll make a note,” Maggie muttered, scribbling on the picture. “Is everything else correct?”

“It appears so. What will you do with the wash bowl, jug, and bed warmer?” Lucian asked and then blushed a little. “The chamber pot?”

Maggie giggled.

“The bowl will be filled with potpourri, and the jug placed in the centre. That’ll hold some flowers. The bedwarmer we aim to hang on the walls, and the chamber pot will also have a plant. The entire room was wallpapered in your day, but we plan to wallpaper the wall the bed rests against and leave the Tudor plaster and wood uncovered.”

“That sounds wise. Is there a demand for this type of inn?” Lucian sought, truly curious.

“Yes, people prefer old-fashioned castles and inns, etc. We should be able to fill up

on bookings easily,” Maggie confirmed. Lucian cocked his head at her.

“What do you intend to do in the inn?” he asked, and Maggie frowned. Lucian wondered if he’d upset her.

“I’d love to cook, but the number of tables out there, I’d never manage on my own. I suppose I should look to hire a chef and two sous chefs at least. If we open as a restaurant, I would think that’s best. I could do paperwork, but I’m not too keen on it, and I can pull a pint. I worked behind a bar while my mother was sick. Maybe it sounds lazy, but I don’t want to be the housekeeper either,” Maggie admitted.

“So create your own role,” Lucian suggested.

“What do you mean?”

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“Hire your chef, but discuss meals two weeks in advance. My man, for example, kept the same menu but sometimes would throw an extra dish into the mix,” Lucian said, and Maggie interrupted him.

“Yes, they are called specials. I want homely, cooked food. Stuffed steak pies, sausage and mash, soups, casseroles, and food nourishing and filling. I don’t wish to turn the inn into one of those fancy pubs where you get a celery stick, and they call that a feast. Basic, simple dinners prepared well and enjoyed,” Maggie said, smiling.

“Meals that remind you of childhood?”

“Yes!”

“So set up a standard menu and then discuss two weeks in advance your specials. And hire a housekeeper and two maids; they can clean the rooms and ensure everything is perfect for your guests. Employ people to work the bar, waitresses to clear tables, and a busboy? Somebody who collects empty glasses?” Lucian asked, struggling with the strange word.

“Yeah, that’s right,” Maggie replied with a gentle smile.

“Well, after your busboy, you’d need someone to book rooms and answer the phone? Is that correct, a telephone? The communication device,” Lucian explained.

“Yes, it’s a phone, and we’d have a landline, which means it’s fixed in place. The landline doesn’t move around like our mobile phones,” Maggie replied.

“Ah, that makes sense!” Lucian chortled. There was so much to learn, and he experienced a momentary pang of terror. He ruthlessly shoved fear aside after a few moments. Lucian was intelligent; sooner or later, he’d adapt to this way of life.

“Let me create a list,” Maggie announced, grabbing her notebook. “I’d not even thought about hiring staff!”

“Well, you can’t run it on your own!” Lucian teased, and Maggie blushed. She looked adorable when she did that. “Before you make your list, what of your opening hours? I had the inn available all day and night because of coaches arriving at different times. That is rare now.”

“Yes. I think we should open at eleven and close, say at ten, during weekdays. Then from Friday to Sunday, eleven to midnight,” Maggie mused.

Lucian nodded his head in agreement, and Maggie jotted it down.

“So, those are long opening hours. How do you break them down for staff?” Lucian asked as Maggie blossomed under his encouragement. He’d not seen this side of her, slightly unsure and worried. But Maggie was capable. He knew full well she was.

“During the week, I could hire a cook to work Monday to Thursday, ten till ten at night. And then a weekend chef to perform similar hours and close the kitchen at ten each evening to finish at eleven. The bar can remain open till midnight. We’ll need two sous chefs on each shift matching the chef’s,” Maggie mused. Lucian reached over and took her notebook and pen. The item felt strange in his hand, but he quickly became used to it. He jotted down what she had said.

“The housekeeper?” Lucian asked, letting Maggie find her own way.

“I don’t think I’d require two. But she would need to be here from nine in the

morning because she'd have to organise which rooms needed cleaning, sort the bed linens, and check the cleaning standards. I believe we'd require her from Wednesday to Sunday, and she could have Monday and Tuesday off. Weekends usually see an increase in weekend travel. So, say nine to five to look after the guests who are staying. She'd need an office too!"

"Mr Evans has plenty of space. Once we rip the wall down, he can add one. How many maids?"

"Two? Or four?" Maggie asked Lucian.

"What time will you allow them to arrive and ask them to depart?"

"Oh. I never thought of that!" Maggie gasped, and Lucian saw she suddenly felt overwhelmed. He reached out and took her hands.

"This is why we're doing this now, my dear. Take a moment and think it through. What times worked best when you holidayed?"

"I never had one. But I heard customers complain when they have to wake and rush around to leave for ten. So, if we say eleven to check out and arrivals from four, that's rather generous and gives the maids time to clean!" Maggie concluded with a smile. Lucian chuckled as he wrote that down. "So, six maids in total. Three a day! And I can throw in overtime if required to."

"Quite easy to resolve, wasn't it?" Lucian said, trying to ignore the fact Maggie had never had a holiday.

"Yes, although I felt overwhelmed at first," Maggie admitted.

"Barkeepers," Lucian prodded and watched as Maggie worked that out.

“We’d open at eleven and close at ten. So, it should get busy between twelve and two and then from five to eight for dinner. I’d say two and ensure a waitress can also work the bar. But only from Monday to Thursday. And in the evenings, I think we would require three bartenders because the locals would use this as a pub still, I hope. I’m confusing myself! And we need a breakfast cook and a receptionist. Oh my God!” Maggie growled, and Lucian reached out and held her hands.

“No, it is simple. Here look, Maggie. I added a coffee server as well. Let me jot this down a moment,” Lucian said as he wrote quickly. He turned the notebook to Maggie to view, and she released a sigh of relief as she read Lucian’s handwriting.

‘Monday to Thursday 11.00–22.00:

Chef 10.00–22.00

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Two sous chefs 10.00–22.00

Three Maids 10.00–16.00

Two Barkeeps 10.30–22.00

Barkeep 17.00–22.30 (Tidy up)

2 x Waitress 11.00–22.00

Waitress /Barista/ bus boy 11.00–22.00

Waitress /bartender 11.00–22.00

Receptionist/morning cook. 7.00–11.00

Receptionist 11.00–21.00.

Wednesday to Sunday 9.00–17.00:

Housekeeper

Friday to Saturday 11.00–00.00

Chef 11.00–23.00

One sous chef 10.00–22.00

One sou-chef 11.00 – 23.00

Three Maids 10.00–16.00

Two barkeeps 10.30–22.00

Two barkeeps 17.00–00.30 (Tidy up)

Two waitresses 11.00–20.00

Two waitresses 12.00–00.00

Barista 12.00-23.00

Bus boy 12.00–00.00

Receptionist/morning cook 7.00–11.00’

Receptionist 11.00–21.00.’

“That is much easier to read than have it whirling around my brain!” Maggie exclaimed, throwing her arms around Lucian. Lucian responded immediately and hugged Maggie back. He hid a smirk when she realised what she’d done as she stiffened in horror before releasing him and muttering an apology. Lucian gently lifted her chin with his finger and smiled at her.

“No need to panic, my dear,” Lucian said calmly

“Why are you being so nice?” Maggie urged suddenly as Lucian jotted down the last few vacancies they’d agreed on.

“Pardon?” Lucian asked, playing innocent, although he knew what Maggie was referring to. He wanted to see if she’d confront him. Lucian should have known better as Maggie drew her shoulders back.

“You told me to leave. We played nasty tricks on each other. Now, you’re helping me organise the staff. So, what’s the plan, Lucian? I employ staff, and you scare them to death, and I can’t hire people because of the haunted reputation?” Maggie demanded.

“Not quite the idea, Maggie. See the Rakehell Six; Henrietta and Harcourt all returned. From the dead. That means there are forces I forgot to consider. I believe you are the catalyst for everything recently. Margery can be beaten; I’ve already trapped her once. Now I need to figure out how to banish Margery forever. And then I might return to my stolen life!”

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Maggie stared at Lucian like he was under a microscope. Lucian steeled himself not to flinch under her steady gaze.

“And then you steal my inn back from me?” Maggie hissed, and Lucian rolled his eyes.

“No, my dear, then you and I marry and run it together!” Lucian dropped the bombshell and watched Maggie turn bright red.

Chapter Seven.

Maggie

Maggie stared at Lucian in horror. What did he just say? She could have sworn he mentioned marriage and running the inn together. Had he gone crazy?

“Say something,” Lucian drawled merrily. “I can see your brain working overtime!”

“Marry you?”

“Indeed, that is acceptable, although I haven’t proposed yet!” Lucian teased.

Maggie didn’t know that her emotions were plainly written across her face.

“Are you insane?” Maggie cried, rising to her feet.

“Not the last time I checked!” Lucian retorted.

“We hate each other!” Maggie exclaimed.

“Do we?” Lucian asked.

Maggie’s temper flared to life. His cocky answers were annoying her.

“Yes, we do! We’ve done horrible things to each other, and we constantly argue. Hell, we don’t even like one another,” Maggie explained, trying to regain control. Lucian rose to his feet, and his fingers shot out and caressed her cheek.

“Maggie, I do not and could never hate you. We fight because we’re alike because it motivates us and sends sparks flying. I believe Henrietta calls it make up or angry sex. I’d like to explore that one day, and it will be explosive between us. You’re imaginative and stubborn, kind and caring, gentle but strong. Everything I ever wished for in a wife. God put you before me, and have no doubt, I will take the promise of beauty God has offered me. Now, while you try to resolve those issues and refute them, be aware. I intend to court you and wed and bed you. Those are my intentions, and now they’re out there!” Lucian said firmly.

Maggie gaped at him in both surprise and shock. She wasn’t sure which emotion to go for because Lucian’s words jumbled her inside. Lucian winked at her and then disappeared before she could say another word. A ghostly kiss landed on her cheek, and her hand raised to cup it.

“Lucian!” Maggie yelled. That infuriating man!

Lucian

Mr Evans stormed into the inn early the next day, startling Lucian from his reverie. Lucian stared in surprise as Mr Evans stomped over and slammed a newspaper in front of him. He’d never seen Mr Evans anything but mellow and firm. Anger was

beyond Lucian's understanding of the man's character.

"Good morning?" Lucian said hesitantly.

"It's going to be horrendous when the young lass sees that pile of crap!" Mr Evans thundered, glowering.

"Dare I open it?" Lucian asked as Mr Evans scowled even more deeply.

"I wouldn't, son, I'd burn it to ashes," Mr Evans snapped. Concerned, Lucian opened the paper and drew in a sharp breath.

"Haunted Inn A Danger!" Lucian announced and closed his eyes as he saw a picture of the Jekyll and Hyde.

"Oh, read the article, lad. It's a cracker!" Mr Evans sneered.

Lucian opened the paper and read aloud. He was appalled at what had been published for anyone to see.

'Dear Reader, we're all aware of the local hot spot for paranormal activity. We had the respect to stay away from what didn't concern us. For centuries, all locals have understood not to trifle with the Jekyll and Hyde Inn and to leave it alone. We understand evil resides there and, as God-fearing folk, choose not to poke the bear.

An outsider to the village and area bought the inn to renovate it and open it to the public. What's wrong with this scenario? Apart from ruffling the feathers of the demonic creatures that dwell in the inn, Maggie Jones is setting herself apart. Ms Jones was overheard saying she wanted to run the local village pub, which is lovely. But why should the residents use your premises when you refuse to employ locals for repairs, hirings, or anything else?

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Ms Jones has gone to outsiders to bring in builders, plumbers, and electricians so far. No local businesses were offered a chance at the job. An architect from a different town was hired when we have talented people here. Apparently, country living is not up to Ms Jones' high standards. So, after bringing in teams of workers from miles away, one would hope that Ms Jones would aid other ways in her chosen home.

Ms Jones has yet to be seen at any event, including church. She has not set foot in any shop, restaurant, or part of our community with the intent to be inclusive. We discovered that Ms Jones is wealthy. But all her pennies are being spent not on supporting the local businesses but on outsiders. Now we obviously cannot tell Ms Jones where to spend her money, nor would we even dare. But surely Ms Jones cannot expect our support when she fails to uphold her neighbourhood.

This is once again a prime example of someone with wealth buying our history and no doubt turning it into some ghastly gastro pub. Meanwhile, Ms Jones blithely disturbs the spirits she does not believe in. Apparently, they are a quaint countryside rumour, which is believed by yokels. She said that to a local estate agent, no less.

And now we have the Jekyll and Hyde itself. Haunted by Lord Lucian Norton and Margery Cross. Both have been witnessed at the inn many times and by multiple witnesses. The renovations to the inn must be riling up the murderous spirits inside. It is public knowledge that Margery Cross murdered twelve children and was last seen at the Jekyll and Hyde. It is also accepted that Lord Norton went to join his lover, and they both disappeared.

Two farmhands who were passing claim they witnessed Margery, and Lord Lucian struck down, and the ground opened up and swallowed them. While it was never

proved Lord Norton was involved in the murders, one tiny witness, an innocent victim, escaped the night Margery and Lord Norton disappeared. The little child spoke of how Lord Norton swept into the inn and began arguing with Margery before he freed her of her bindings. Margery screamed he couldn't stop her, and they'd burn together.

Lord Norton's attention was taken by Margery, and the child escaped and ran home as fast as she could. She informed her parents of what was happening, and they raised a group of concerned citizens who raced to the inn, only to discover the murderous culprits had fled. They were never to be seen alive in our lifetime. Will Ms Jones' renovations allow the trapped spirits to escape? Will murder come to our children because one arrogant woman from the city believes she knows better than the locals? Or is there something worse?

It is strange how Ms Jones has come and gone from the inn without harm. Is she more than she claims, a woman who doesn't believe in ghosts? Could Ms Jones be a witch herself and be dabbling in the dark arts at the Jekyll and Hyde? Are Satanic rituals happening right under our noses? This reporter took her fears to the local police, who shunned them. They claim there is no evidence, and this is gossip and rumour-mongering. Well, I wonder what they will say when the hounds of hell rise and terrorise this village.'

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Lucian stopped reading and turned to stare incredulously at Mr Evans. Mr Evans matched his gaze.

"Are they authorised to publish such trash? All of this is horrible falsehoods. Why would someone wish to harm Maggie?" Lucian asked.

"Whether they're allowed to or not, they have. Maggie has been working herself to

the bone. She'd not had a single day off that I've seen," Mr Evans responded defensively.

"This is unbelievable. Such nasty lies and vicious gossip. Maggie will be devastated."

"Maggie is freaking fuming and has set her solicitor on the reporter. Her name is Jayne Allison, and I shall have a retraction, an apology, and her job when I've finished with her," Maggie added from the doorway.

"Are you okay?" Mr Evans asked, worried.

"Fighting angry, but people like Jayne always get their comeuppance. I can prove what I say. She can't, and she can get on with it," Maggie announced furiously.

Lucian approached her and ran a hand down her arm in sympathy.

"We had women like Jayne in our time. Don't allow her to upset you," Lucian said.

"I suppose I'm lucky she didn't dig deep enough into my history," Maggie muttered before turning to Mr Evans. Lucian studied Maggie carefully. What had that meant? Was his Maggie hiding something?

"I have to make some calls later today, so I'll pop out to the car. They're private," Maggie said, and Lucian bristled. What was so intensely secret that Maggie couldn't speak in front of him? Lucian glared at the door, hating that he couldn't step outside, and then his gaze relaxed. He'd been outside yesterday. Logically, he could eavesdrop on Maggie. His demeanour brightened, and Maggie caught it.

"Actually, I need to pop into the sandwich shop. A couple of the guys have requested different fillings. And some rotation on crisps. It seems somebody is stealing all the prawn cocktail crisps," Maggie said and stared straight at Mr Evans.

Lucian was trying to stop himself from laughing when her words caught up to him. Damn it! She was going to escape, and now he'd not hear her conversation. Lucian hated Maggie was keeping secrets from him. He wanted her trust and to turn to him when she needed someone.

"Lucian?" Maggie asked.

"That's fine," he declared shortly.

"Lucian, I was asking if you'd calmed down after your announcement yesterday?" Maggie said gently.

"Oh?" Lucian quirked an eyebrow, knowing full well what Maggie was referring to.

"Are you going to make me say it?" Maggie sighed, and Lucian grinned.

"I'm afraid..."

"Lucian, damn it! I'm referring to the fact you proposed we marry!" Maggie whispered. Lucian's grin got bigger.

"No, I didn't propose that. I said we would get married. No proposal in that, just a statement of fact," Lucian drawled, enjoying Maggie's emotions.

"There you go, Lucian, like I don't have a choice. I have options, Lucian, and I don't need a man to manage me," Maggie replied, her eyes narrowing on him.

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Lucian recognised she was throwing bait down for an argument, so he decided not to give her one.

“Never stated you did, my darling. Now excuse me. I have work to do!” Lucian said with a formal bow and walked away. He longed to look over his shoulder as he guessed Maggie would be standing there flabbergasted and barely restrained the urge. If his little dove wanted to keep secrets, so be it. He’d get his satisfaction another way.

Maggie

After popping into the bakery where I ordered lunch for everyone and amending our order, I sat outside in the car park to make some calls. The owner had been horrified by the article and so apologetic. She promised to call the paper and inform them I was using local places. But I told her it wasn’t worth it. Who knew what the nasty reporter might say about the beautiful bakery?

I hit Tilly’s button, knowing this would be an uncomfortable conversation. We texted daily, but I’d never outright asked her about ghosts. Tilly answered the phone with an unwelcoming screech.

“My God, Tilly!” I exclaimed. “What on earth is happening?”

“Nothing, Maggie, love, nothing,” Tilly gasped, out of breath.

“Tilly, do you have a ghost?” I demanded, and Tilly fell quiet.

“Sorry, love?” she asked after a few moments of silence.

“Yes or no, Tilly?”

“I’d kill you if you weren’t already dead!” Tilly yelled.

“That’s a yes. Tilly, ask him if his name is Elias, Isaac, or Kit,” Maggie replied urgently.

“Maggie, will you tell me what’s going on?” Tilly said, sounding huffy.

“Just ask him,” Maggie urged.

“Hey, wombat head. Are you Isaac, Elias, or Kit?” Tilly called.

“How do you know those names?” an angry voice thundered.

“Which one is his name?” Maggie urged.

“What’s your damn name!?” Tilly demanded.

“None of your business, you busybody!”

“Hang in, Tilly, tonight, how about we meet at one of the hotels, and I’ll explain, okay?”

“Fine, but if I murder a ghost in the meantime, don’t blame me!” Tilly growled, and ghostly laughter echoed down the phone. Oh boy, whoever Tilly had sounded like a handful. Maggie dialled Cole, who answered surprisingly happy, that was until he called her Angel.

“Who the hell is Angel?” a woman’s voice cried, and Maggie heard Cole duck.

“My friend, go away. You’re annoying,” Cole replied. Maggie hoped to God that it was CeeCee and not a living woman. Otherwise, Cole deserved whatever he received.

“Strange question Cole, is your inn haunted?” Maggie asked.

“Say what, honey?” Cole responded smugly. Maggie felt an itch in her shoulders.

“Honey!” the female voice yelled.

“Ask her if she’s Cecilia,” Maggie sighed.

“How do you know she’s called Cecilia?” Cole demanded, shocked.

“Meet tonight, Cole. There’s something we all need to discuss.”

“Okay, honey!” Cole replied, and Maggie knew Cole was using the endearments to upset CeeCee.

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“Hey, put that down!” Cole ordered as he disconnected the line. Maggie chuckled at the panic in his voice.

“Ask your ghost if he is Isaac, Elias, or Kit,” Maggie declared as soon as Callie picked up the phone.

“Nope, he’s a raging ass...” Callie growled. “The twat has locked me out of the inn.”

“Callie, do you know his name?” Maggie demanded.

“Yes, twat!” Callie crowed.

“My name is not twat!” a man roared.

“Ask him which one he is,” Maggie insisted.

“Are you Isaac, Elias, or Kit?” Callie repeated.

“Elias! How do you know those names? Who are you speaking with? I demand they converse with me!” came Elias’s reply. Great, that meant poor Tilly must have either Kit or Isaac.

“Honey, family meeting tonight. I’ll text you which hotel!” Maggie babbled.

“Okay, babes, see you there!” Callie replied. “Now, you little twit, what type of namby-pamby name is Elias?”

Maggie shook her head as she hung up. Sighing and wondering how Stephanie was handling being haunted, Maggie punched in her number and waited.

“Hi honey, how’s things?” Stephanie’s voice had a smile in it.

“Which is your ghost? Isaac or Kit,” Maggie asked without preamble.

Stephanie went quiet.

“Maggie, are you okay? I thought you just mentioned a ghost!” Stephanie giggled. Maggie held her silence. Stephanie would always crack under silence. “Maggie, I don’t have a spirit, honey.”

“Nuh huh, which is he?” Maggie persisted.

“Maggie,” Stephanie said and sighed. “Ghosts don’t exist.”

“Stephanie, I want his name and I need it now!” Maggie demanded. Stephanie made the little noise she did when she felt uncomfortable at being confronted.

“Don’t tell her. Who is she? Why is she being so nosey?” a guy whispered.

Maggie rolled her eyes.

“I can hear him, Stephanie. Which one is he?” Maggie said firmly. “Count of five, Stephanie!”

“Kit! He’s Kit!” Stephanie cried, and a man groaned. Which meant Tilly had Isaac.

“You told her!”

“I had to. Maggie’s my best friend!” Stephanie muttered, guilt in her voice.

“Sheesh, woman!” Kit sounded exasperated.

“It’s okay. Listen, family meeting tonight. I’ll text you the hotel.”

“Are you mad at me?” Stephanie asked.

“Nope, I’ll explain when we meet,” Maggie replied. “Love you!”

“Love you too!” Stephanie said, sounding more cheerful. Well, at least one of them was getting along with the Nortons, Maggie thought. Lucian had clearly flipped his lid, although he was much nicer. Maybe Kit was the only sane one out of the Nortons!

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“Are you telling me we all bought a damn haunted inn, and they happen to be inhabited by siblings?” Cole said in absolute disbelief.

“That seems fated,” Stephanie murmured. Cole turned an incredulous look on her.

“Everyone here has been fighting their ghost, but not you. What’s going on between you two?” Cole demanded.

Stephanie blushed but held Cole’s gaze.

“That’s none of your business!” Stephanie retorted, and Cole’s eyes grew wide.

“Woah! Did Stephanie just snap at Cole?” Tilly whispered.

“She’s pretty damn protective of her ghost. I want to kill mine!” Mariah growled.

“Good for you. Lucian’s decided he’s going to marry me!” Maggie said and began laughing. “Can you believe the situation we’re all in?”

“Hold on, go back to marrying you,” Callie demanded, swapping shocked gazes with everyone. “Ghosts can’t marry the living!”

“Oh, let me tell you about the Rakehell Six. Because ladies and gent, keep your naughty bits locked up because a ghost can impregnate a living woman!” Maggie chortled as five wide stares gaped at her.

An hour later, everybody sat around wondering what their next step was. All six said their spirit was protecting the inn and surrounding villages from a great evil, but only Maggie knew what her evilness was.

“Do we tell them we know where their siblings are?” Cole finally asked. “It might make Cecilia sweeter if she knew.”

“No, somehow I feel that’s a bad thing. Suppose they realise their family is trapped, especially Cecilia. In that case, they will be distracted and focus their attention on escaping their prisons,” Maggie said.

“I don’t like that word,” Callie replied.

“But they are imprisoned. What if the evil escapes because they’re worried about their siblings? And then it destroys innocent lives. What happens if the evil kills one of them properly and they disappear? No, there’s a greater plan at play. Listening to the Rakehell Six, whoever gets free first will find one of their family. We must allow events to take place naturally,” Maggie commented.

“I agree. As much as I wish to throttle Benedict, I don’t want whatever he is guarding to escape. I feel that would be terrible indeed,” Mariah agreed.

“We should take an oath, together the six of us, we will not tell them until they return to life and vanquish their evil,” Maggie suggested.

“Big words,” Tilly teased.

“A blood oath,” Cole responded. He ensured no one was watching before cutting shallowly into his palm and handing the knife to Maggie. She winced but cut into it and grasped Cole’s hand. One by one, they all repeated the actions until they all had clasped hands and exchanged blood.

“We swear to hold the locations of the siblings a secret until they are brought back to life, and we’ll allow fate to lead the way,” Maggie said. They placed their cut hands on top of one another and swore the oath.

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From a dark recess, a figure watched them silently and nodded in approval. Everything was in place. It was time to free God’s Scourge and put them back on the path meant for them. The figure turned and smiled at Maggie; she was the glue that held her friends together. She’d make a fine bride indeed!

Chapter Eight.

Lucian

“Maggie, do you mind me asking, where are your parents? You never mention them,” Lucian asked gently.

“My mum was an orphan, Lucian, who was adopted by good people. She decided when she grew up that she’d do the same. She adopted me when I was three months old. I’d been abandoned in a skip in London, and a tramp found me and took me to the police station. They tried to find my birth mum but to no avail. And along came my mother, and somehow, she forced them to let her adopt me.

“She died a year ago. Mum was very ill with breast cancer; she fought it for years before it returned in vengeance. She was so brave at the end. And she forced me to promise to keep living. Mum told me to find a whole life, doing what made me happy and something I would love to do,” Maggie replied with a small smile.

“And that’s why you’ve battled me so hard over the Inn,” Lucian said, sudden awareness dawning. Damnation, that was the reason Maggie had fought. She was

keeping a promise to her dead mother. And Lucian, the cad he was, had attempted to steal that from her. If he'd known about her desire for a home, would he have done anything differently? Lucian ruefully admitted, probably not.

“Possibly. I had to sell her house to pay off medical bills, and debts ran up through her illness. There was nothing left. Then I came into a large amount of cash, which allowed me to pay for the storage of her stuff. It arrived just in time. I'd been paying for a container, but money was so tight I was going to have to auction or give away all mum's belongings. Now they're waiting for me to bring them here,” Maggie said with a sweet smile.

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“Do you have many of her items?” Lucian asked.

“Yes, her furniture, favourite ornaments, stuff like that. I gave her clothing to charity. Mariah supported me with that. And Cole helped me sort through things I wouldn’t or couldn’t take with me,” Maggie replied.

Lucian bristled. Who was this Cole? Mariah’s name he recognised, but Cole? Was he her beau? Well, tough, Lucian was going to woo the socks off Maggie. This man is insignificant!

“Cole?” Lucian asked carefully, not allowing jealousy to show in his tone. Maggie’s face lit up with happiness and love, and Lucian swallowed hard.

“There’s six of us. Mariah, Stephanie, Tilly, Callie, Cole, and myself. Our mothers met when we were two years old, and we grew up together. We’re like siblings,” Maggie explained. Lucian understood then that Maggie still had a family. She had made her close friends her version of siblings and loved them. Lucian could see it written all over her face.

“Cole is the big brother?” Lucian asked.

“Cole is the much-beleaguered brother, with five sisters, all with unique personalities. He was an only child like me, so he grabbed hold tightly to us as we did him. Poor Cole has dealt with PMS, raging hormones, boyfriends, and break-ups. It wasn’t easy on him with us to manage,” Maggie replied and laughed.

“He sounds like a great sibling.” Lucian nodded, thinking of CeeCee, and sadness

crossed him. Would she have said he's a good brother? Where was CeeCee now? Lucian hoped she'd escaped that night, but somehow, he sensed, something had gone very wrong with his siblings.

"Cole is the best," Maggie stated with a smile.

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Lucian noticed the change as Margery swept down the stairs. Margery seemed more alert. While the bar looked the same, with no work being done on it yet, the kitchen and toilets were a mess as Mr Evans' team worked hard on them. Margery spun in the bar and sniffed.

"A woman's been here, Lucian, and frequently. I smell her perfume. Who is she?" Margery cooed, and Lucian shuddered. He loathed that tone. Margery twisted her head, and before Lucian could stop her, she dashed past him and into the kitchen. An outraged screech came from there, and Lucian ducked his head. Margery stormed out, her powers swelling around her. The eerie green glow swirled with her emotions.

"Someone works here! I demand answers!" Margery shouted.

Lucian rolled his non-existent eyes. As usual, Lucian had dissipated and surrounded the building with his essence. Margery's gaze narrowed as she took in the bar's cleanliness and the gleaming windows.

"Lucian," Margery cooed, drawing out his name. "Is somebody moving in? Someone you can't control?"

Lucian bristled and regretted it instantly. Margery would notice and, like a cat with a mouse, pounce.

“A woman?” Margery kept questioning. Lucian sensed her energy swelling and prepared himself for an attack.

“Why won’t you answer me, Lucian? Who is this girl you’re protecting?” Margery taunted and let rip with a blast of power. Lucian struggled as it hit and tried to absorb it. His essence flowed, trying to stop it from breaching his protective shield. Margery grinned and released several other blasts, one after another, as she dashed for the closest exit. Lucian slammed his weight behind the door while he worked to contain the magical blasts. He sensed the magic peeling away his protection, and he steadied his resolve. Margery shrieked and began two more blasts at the door. Lucian bounced those back harmlessly.

With a calculated glance, Margery launched several random attacks around the walls, and Lucian struggled to catch them. With a cry of triumph, Margery leapt towards the second door and attempted to blast her way through it. Lucian was weakening but determined not to allow her to flee into the night.

“I can track her; I shall tear her heart out and eat it in front of you!” Margery crowed. A surge of power soared through Lucian as he sensed his barrier weaken dramatically. Lucian didn’t question it but drew on it to lock the inn down completely. A second wave slammed into Margery, who was thrown from the doors and against the bar.

“How dare you!” Margery exploded and raised her hands again. A third blast shoved her to the portrait, and the final pushed her through it. Margery’s anger was noticed keenly by Lucian as he dropped his protection and materialised in the bar. He collapsed into a heap and stared at Margery’s picture. Tonight was the strongest she’d ever been. She’d been storing up her strength. That was why she walked to the portrait so quickly on previous nights. It meant Margery used less power to be here, and she had clearly been banking it.

“Wollscombe?” Lucian urged into the silence. He’d never felt so weary. A wave of love and refreshing power washed over him as his home expressed love in her way.

“Was that you who shored me up?”

Wollscombe sent a denial.

“Then who was it?” Lucian asked, puzzled.

A tentative force touched him, unsure of her welcome. She fired waves of reassurance at Lucian while keeping her distance from him. Maggie’s image appeared in his head, standing in the bar, and Lucian watched as the inn wrapped herself around Maggie. Dear Lord, above! His gut had been right. Somehow, Jekyll and Hyde had become sentient, and it was linked to Maggie. Jekyll pushed at him a little, and Lucian wondered what she needed. Wollscombe was watching patiently as the weaker power shoved at Lucian more strongly.

Taking a chance on what Jekyll wanted, Lucian opened himself up, and Jekyll surged straight in. Wollscombe trilled an alarm, but Jekyll wound herself around Lucian, and he sensed feelings of gratitude and love settle on him. Wollscombe let out an angry sound, but Lucian grinned as the little inn made a rude noise. Jekyll weaved images of Maggie through him, and he smiled. The inn was trying to tell him she had bonded to Maggie and would protect her. Lucian sent out a wave of approval, and Jekyll retreated, overjoyed her message had been understood. In the background, Wollscombe lurked like an overbearing parent.

Maggie

“What happened?” Maggie asked as she raced into the inn no earlier than six that morning. The sun had risen, and Lucian appeared half dressed as Maggie called his name.

“Margery knows you’re here,” Lucian said as he left his cravat undone.

“How could she?” Maggie gasped. She grabbed a chair and sat down heavily.

“She smelled your perfume. It was enough to inform Margery that somebody had been visiting. Margery then discovered the kitchen and attacked me. I barely held her back. That cunning witch had been storing her power, and she let it slam me all at once. I feared she might escape,” Lucian admitted, sitting opposite Maggie. He was in rather a state of undress, his breeches were fastened, and he had his riding boots on. But his shirt was undone, his cravat untied, and his waistcoat hung freely. Maggie’s eyes kept drifting to him and shuddering. It was Mr Darcy from the lake scene, only Lucian was dry.

“What do we do?” Maggie finally asked, dragging her stare from the well-defined muscles that were not hidden by the thin linen.

“Jekyll came to my aid,” Lucian said, and Maggie’s mouth dropped open in shock.

“My inn did what?” Maggie demanded.

“I was uncertain how to tell you, Maggie. But when I reconnected with Wollscambe, I felt something else flare to life. I thought it was Jekyll’s sentience, but I’ve seen little evidence until last night. Margery threatened you, and she was about to breach my protection. Then I experienced a wave of power, and I could strengthen the barrier to stop her from escaping. Jekyll also threw Margery back three times,” Lucian said as Maggie stared at him, astonished.

“My inn’s alive?” Maggie stuttered, and Lucian nodded.

“Close your eyes, Maggie, clear your mind of thoughts and search deep within yourself. What do you sense?” Lucian asked.

“Can you guess how busy my head is at any given time?” Maggie demanded, laughing, but did as Lucian had requested. Maggie struggled for a good five minutes but finally managed to sink into the meditation Lucian had ordered. Maggie sensed something deep in her core, and when she reached out, there was a thrill of delight, and a warm, loving sensation washed over her. Jekyll was rejoicing and sending wave after wave of love, protection, respect, and honour at Maggie. Maggie could feel Jekyll dancing around inside of her as Jekyll realised Maggie had noticed her.

“Wow,” Maggie said and opened her eyelids. Lucian was fully dressed, and there was food in front of her. “How long was I out?”

“An hour,” Lucian replied. Maggie’s eyes grew wide.

“It only felt like a few minutes.”

“My apologies, but it was most definitely an hour. That was one intense bonding?” Lucian questioned.

“Yes, I have only ever received such love from my mother,” Maggie explained. “Jekyll felt just like her.”

“Could it be her? Ghosts exist, Maggie, proof right in front of your eyes. What if your mum stayed with you?” Lucian asked gently. Maggie’s eyes widened, and tears filled them. She sniffed and closed her eyelids and dived deep again. A sense of love and wonder met her this time, and then memories popped into her head.

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Katherine and a five-year-old Maggie are running down a beach. Maggie was in front because Katherine was letting her win. Then Katherine swooped and scooped Maggie up in her arms and smothered her with kisses.

Katherine rolled her eyes as the cake Maggie had made flopped in the middle, but they still ate it with ice cream, and Katherine declared it a masterpiece.

Maggie ran into Katherine's bedroom, pouncing on her when she was fifteen, yelling happy birthday. Katherine rolled Maggie around and tickled her.

Katherine was lying sick on her bed just before she died and clearly worrying about Maggie and her future. Love shone in her eyes, but it wasn't enough to keep Katherine tethered to life.

Maggie was standing with Mariah, Tilly, Callie, Stephanie, and Cole, holding Maggie up as the wooden coffin of Katherine's was lowered into the ground. Maggie cries out for Katherine not to leave her, and Katherine appears by Maggie's other side.

Katherine guides Maggie's hand to take a chance on the lottery when Maggie never played. Katherine gives the ticket a good luck kiss.

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"Jekyll is my mum! She never left me and was always by my side!" Maggie exclaimed, opening her eyes. The sheer emotion of joy took Lucian's breath away as he stared at her.

"I wondered because when she connected with me, I sensed a mother's love," Lucian said after a long pause.

"How did Mum merge with the inn?" Maggie thought.

“That is something I do not have an answer for, Maggie. I don’t even know how Wollscombe is sentient, but she is,” Lucian replied. His own happiness for Maggie swelled deep inside him. Maggie had just been given a wonderful gift, and she knew it. She had her mother back. Maggie giggled as a vase of flowers raised and wobbled about before dropping to the table.

“I think Mum is trying out her new body,” Maggie exclaimed. The vase lifted again and dropped heavily, spraying Lucian with water. He spluttered as he wiped his face while Maggie laughed.

“Yes, I see who you got it from!” Lucian said, mock grumpily. Jekyll trilled several times, a sweet sound which Lucian took to mean laughter.

“Lucian!” Maggie gasped as he rose to his feet.

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“T’is not bad enough I have Maggie to deal with; now I have her mother too!” Lucian complained and raised his hands to heaven. “Surely I deserve a reward, for I have two mischief-making women to handle!” When no answer came, Lucian excused himself with a bow and took himself off to dry his clothes.

“Mum,” Maggie muttered and began giggling. A warm sensation floated over Maggie as they shared their amusement.

???

“Hello in the inn, please put all weapons down and allow some weary travellers succour,” Henrietta yelled several hours later, entering the bar.

“Henrietta! Hey, I didn’t expect you today!” Maggie exclaimed, coming around the bar where she’d been cleaning yet again. Maggie noted Henrietta was wearing a dress from her own era and had to admit, Henrietta looked damn impressive.

“Hiya Maggie!” Henrietta called. Several of the workers had stopped and were watching, and Henrietta’s face lit in recognition.

“Fancy seeing you all here!” Henrietta teased. Two men blushed, and others chuckled and shouted out their greetings.

“Milady, where else should the ghost building team be?” a man asked. Henrietta made a noise and pointed her finger at him.

“Wonderful reply. I adore that, the ghost building team!” She smiled.

“Henrietta Courtenay,” St John exclaimed as he entered with the rest of the Rakehell Six behind him.

“Your lordships, your graces, miladys,” several of the men shouted out greetings. Daniel split from the pack and began talking to one man, a carpenter Maggie recognised.

“Welcome! I’m afraid we’re still not open, but I have lunch coming soon with drinks,” Maggie added as she pulled her phone out. She sent the sandwich shop a message asking for extras for twelve more people and received an affirmative back.

“Oh, don’t worry, we can find a restaurant later,” Melisandre said.

“Speak for yourself,” Nicolas retorted, rubbing his stomach.

“Already ordered extra!” Maggie smiled.

“So, what do we owe the pleasure of this happy visit?” Lucian complained, appearing.

“Lucifer,” St John muttered.

“Demon spawn,” Lucian replied.

“Lucian,” Harcourt and Jeremy expressed together.

“Harcourt, DeLacy,” Lucian responded.

“Morning,” Nicholas growled.

“Son of Satan,” Lucian greeted.

Maggie watched as Lucian's gaze flipped to Daniel.

"Lucifer," Daniel said with a frown.

"Devil's low hanging right ball..." Lucian grinned as multiple voices overruled his last word. Maggie had her hand across her mouth and tried not to laugh as Daniel scowled.

"That was uncalled for, Lucifer," Tristian chided. Lucian cocked his head.

"Cerberus," Lucian retorted.

"That makes little sense. I don't have three heads or wag my tail!" Tristian shot back.

"Your head is so fat it could split in two, and your tail is tiny!" Lucian flung the insult at Tristian. Tristian howled in outrage.

"My tail is not small! Abigail, tell him!"

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“Not denying your head is so huge we could separate it in half!” Lucian taunted, and the women rolled their shoulders, as now all seven men were throwing insults. Including Jeremy, who’d been pulled into it by Tristian, who was still offended Jeremy had married Lavinia, Tristian’s cousin. Daniel dragged Harcourt in by insulting the man for marrying Emile.

“Come,” Emile said with a smile. “They will throw taunts for half an hour before settling down.” Emile linked her arm through Maggie’s, and they strolled to a quieter seating area.

“Are they always like this?” Maggie urged as the men stood toe to toe, swapping insults and names.

“Yes, we’re so used to it now, we let them get on with it. Or at least until one of them throws a punch,” Sabine replied.

“It’s wonderful to see you, but I wasn’t expecting you?” Maggie asked.

“Oh, we’ve come to take you shopping. Allow the dunderheads to shout and posture while we escape.” Lavinia grinned. Listening to the rising voices, the women swapped glances and escaped.

Lucian

“How is it going?” Daniel sought when they finally stopped arguing. Lucian eyed him with suspicion before explaining the previous night’s events.

“And you’re convinced Margery intends to open a portal to hell and release demons?” Tristian asked once Lucian finished his story.

“Yes. She informed me of the plan. Margery is pure evil. She’s killed or been responsible for thousands of deaths,” Lucian answered.

“I know our stories. But to accept vampires and those sorts of creatures, it’s a bit beyond my comprehension,” St John admitted.

“I grew up with it. My family didn’t have a chance to believe or disbelieve. What is truth is fact; I’m not here to convince anybody else of it. It’s our way of life,” Lucian said.

“You know, I always thought you were an irresponsible bastard,” Tristian commented.

Lucian inclined his head.

“You were meant to. Nobody was allowed to know what we were doing. Secrecy was imperative, not just for our survival. If knowledge of the supernatural got out, we’d have Van Helsing wannabes everywhere,” Lucian said.

“Van Helsing wannabe’s? Isn’t he a bit after your time? And ‘wannabes’ is not a word I’d expect to come from your mouth.” Jeremy grinned.

“I read, and someone once left Dracula here. Wannabe is a word I am familiar with, although I don’t honestly like it. They got a lot wrong. It’s not like there aren’t honest vampires, and other supernatural’s out there. Their races shouldn’t be decimated because some idiot gets it into his head to be some sort of ridiculous hero. Thousands could die. The Nortons aren’t just Dark Mass hunters; we are protectors of the innocent.”

“So, you played the carefree lord to its maximum and walked alone in the dark at night?” Tristian mused.

“No, we had our siblings and cousins. I pray our cousin’s lines stay strong and the world is not invested with evil creatures. There are also our other family trees; I hope they have recovered from the last great war,” Lucian responded hopefully.

“Would you like us to investigate them? And how else could we aid you, Lucian?” Nicholas asked.

“I enjoy research,” Jeremy said, chipping in.

“I’m unaware of how you can help further. We weren’t friends, but we were not enemies. I appreciate the time you’ve taken to support Maggie and me. Just sharing your own stories gave us hope.”

“No, we were not allies. If there were an illegal card game, we’d find you there, Lucifer. If a race was planned, Nortons were at the starting line. But the tasks you fought needed an outlet, and I understand. We can build a friendship now. Should you regain your life, you will be a man out of time, like Nicholas and I. I would propose Jeremy, Daniel, and St John tutor you in today’s society. They grew up in it.

“Nicholas and I were apart from the world, so everything was strange and wonderful and terrifying. Daniel and Tristian kept some foot in the world. I would suggest allowing myself, Tristian, and Daniel to help rebuild the Norton fortune. We can’t find any sign of your businesses nor of Wollscombe Hall. That isn’t weird because it happened to us. We don’t understand what the Angels have planned. Nor should we assume we do, but it would be worth progressing as if what occurred with us will happen to you,” Harcourt said.

“You want to help me? The Rakehell Six? Harcourt, you forget I was around when

you courted Emile, and I witnessed what they did to you!” Lucian exclaimed and laughed. Harcourt glowered.

“They still do. But none of them has a sister you are courting; therefore, you shouldn’t suffer as much as I did!” Harcourt admitted.

“I have been alone so many years, I am unsure how to take the help offered,” Lucian declared.

“Takes a powerful man to admit he’s overwhelmed,” Tristian said.

“Oh, I’ve not got a problem admitting I’m overwhelmed. Maggie is so comfortable in this era, and I am displaced.”

“Lucian, that feeling will fade. Will you reach out and accept our hand of friendship?” St John asked.

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“Do you know what feels good? To have peers around me who remember my era. To know our values aren’t forgotten, and neither am I. I would be grateful for any help you can offer me,” Lucian said and reached out a hand to Harcourt.

“Let the games begin!” Daniel murmured, and Lucian sent him a dour look before they all laughed.

Chapter Nine.

Maggie

“It’s a surprise. Surely you can wait a few moments?” Lucian teased Maggie as he led her through the bar, blindfolded the following afternoon.

Maggie returned, happy from her shopping trip with the women, and Lucian told Melisandre to keep Maggie busy today. The kitchen was finished, and Lucian was clearly dying to show it to Maggie. He opened the door and walked her forward before removing the blindfold. Maggie gasped as she stared around.

It was perfect. Everywhere she looked was amazing. Lucian most definitely put his heart and soul into making her dream come true. The massive table in the middle of the kitchen had been beautifully repaired. Maggie trailed her hands down the worktops and opened cupboards. Tears trickled from her eyes when she saw the brass cookware all restored.

“I’m lost for words, Lucian, because this is a vision,” Maggie said and spun and threw her arms around him. Lucian didn’t hesitate in dragging her close and dropping

a kiss on her lips. Maggie blinked in surprise before reaching up and drawing his head down for a second. Lucian was reluctant to release her, but Maggie dashed from his grip to continue investigating. He watched indulgently as she opened drawers and peeked into cupboards.

“This is beyond my wildest dreams. I’m lost for words,” Maggie cried, spinning in a circle.

“Come, Maggie, the fireplace was repaired, and you can hang four pots over it now. Soup or gravies, or sauces. And the roasting pit. We strengthened the spits so you could get a full hog on there. Today’s pigs are apparently much bigger than in my time! And the spit behind means you can cook another while serving one or have two different meats. And they even rotate themselves! Mr Evans added something, and you press a few buttons, and off they go!” Lucian said, dragging her to the fireplace.

Maggie laughed.

“I want to try this out. Oh, I can’t wait to test some recipes in here,” Maggie called to Lucian.

“So why don’t you? That lapbox, you can buy things on there, can’t you?” Lucian asked.

“Laptop, and yes, I can. I’m so excited!” Maggie said and hugged Lucian.

Once again, Lucian took advantage and dropped a kiss on her lips. Maggie smiled, wanting more of Lucian’s kisses.

“Come, let’s order now,” Maggie murmured.

“I’ve got one more surprise,” Lucian said, although he appeared doubtful.

Maggie cocked her head and followed him out of the opposite door to where the barricaded wall was. Behind her were some dust sheets that were sealed to the walls.

“Lucian, what is happening?” Maggie asked.

“Mr Evans is going to remove the panelling today and then smash through into what’s blocking us from this wing,” Lucian said.

“But no one could break through?” Maggie questioned.

“That was until Katherine. I think your mum will make sure we can tear this down,” Lucian murmured. There was an answering trill, and the wall shook. “Katherine wishes to know what is hidden behind it.”

“Mum, will this harm you?” Maggie asked, reaching out and touching the walls. In return, a resounding raspberry was blown at her, and Maggie laughed and then turned serious.

“What if yours and Margery’s bodies lie there?”

“Then I finally get a funeral, Maggie,” Lucian answered patiently.

“I don’t want to lose you,” Maggie admitted after a struggle.

“You won’t. Just like you didn’t lose Katherine. I’m here to stay,” Lucian promised. Maggie tried shaking off lingering doubts, but there was that one niggle in the back of her mind.

“I do not think we can vanquish Margery until this wall is down anyway.” Maggie sighed.

“Hey, look at that!” Lucian exclaimed as a nail wriggled free from a panel and landed on the floor.

“Wow, okay, mum! We’ll let the builders in!” Maggie said with a laugh as a second screw fell.

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“Might not need the contractors.” Lucian chuckled as a third was flung at him. Maggie grabbed his hand before her mother got any other ideas and dragged him into the kitchen.

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By the end of the day, the panelling had been carefully removed, but Lucian was reluctant to tear the wall completely down. It was too close to night, and while they had hours before Margery walked, Lucian didn’t want to tempt fate. Instead, they all agreed to arrive early the next day and watch the barrier be brought down.

Lucian sat with Maggie outside on a bench as the sun fell. Maggie had bought food for tomorrow to be delivered first thing in the morning and then ordered fish and chips to be delivered to them tonight. While Lucian didn’t need to eat, Maggie discovered, he enjoyed different tastes. They’d laughed at the delivery boy, who refused to cross the boundaries of the inn, and Maggie collected their meal and gave him a generous tip.

Maggie now sat curled on the bench, snuggled between Lucian’s legs, and enjoying the feel of his body against hers. It was a beautiful night and one she didn’t want to end. Lucian’s fingers played with her hair as they relaxed in silence and watched the stars arrive.

“It is lovely here,” Maggie murmured.

“Yes, I remember seeing this same sky from Wollscombe, which means she must be around here somewhere,” Lucian said.

“I’d like to visit Wollscombe one day,” Maggie replied. Lucian smiled against her head, and Maggie felt it.

“Wollscombe would love you very much,” Lucian muttered. His arm clenched around her, and she snuggled deeper into his chest.

“Tell me stories of your childhood,” Maggie whispered as her eyes closed. Slowly, she drifted off to sleep at the sound of his voice.

Lucian

Lucian awoke with a jolt. Something was wrong. He’d dozed off with Maggie in his arms and damnation. She was still here. Lucian gently laid Maggie down and slid out from under her as he dashed inside the inn. His eyes grew round with horror as he saw he only had fifteen minutes until Margery walked. He grabbed Maggie’s bag and ran back outside.

“Maggie!” he roared, startling her awake. Maggie sat bolt upright and rubbed her eyelids.

“Oh no!” she exclaimed as she checked her watch.

“You have to leave, should Margery find you here...” Lucian cried, alarmed. Maggie was already on her feet and running around the side of the inn to her vehicle. Lucian joined her as he held her steady while she clicked the keys in her hand as she approached her car, but nothing happened. Maggie skidded to a halt and tried opening the doors again. Lucian didn’t understand what was happening.

“Strange!” she muttered, shoved her keys into the lock, and manually opened the door. Maggie’s heart sank as the lights did not come on. She leapt inside as Lucian paced back and forth and struggled to start the engine. It didn’t even tick over.

“No! No!” Maggie cried and thumped the dashboard. She tried several more times before exiting and facing Lucian.

“Why is it not starting?” Lucian demanded.

“The engine’s completely dead,” Maggie gasped out.

Lucian drew away and glanced at the window that held Margery’s room.

“The power that makes it move has gone?” Lucian asked.

“Yes!”

“Hurry, we’ve mere minutes,” Lucian said, dragging Maggie beside him. They entered the inn, and Lucian locked the door before pulling Maggie upstairs. He flung her into the bedroom she’d stayed in the night she saw Margery.

“Whatever happens, stay in here. Please do not leave,” Lucian demanded.

“Lucian...”

“Promise me, Maggie,” Lucian ordered.

Maggie reluctantly promised, and Lucian dragged her into his arms before sinking a kiss on her lips.

“I’ll be back, my dove,” Lucian whispered and then dissipated.

Maggie

Maggie stepped away from the doorway.

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“Mum?” she whispered and felt a surge of love sweep over her.

The clocks chimed three, and Maggie tensed. Maggie sensed the cold drifting down the hallway and knew Margery was moving. Evil floated through the air, and a cackle of laughter joined in. The sound sent shivers down Maggie’s spine.

Margery realised Maggie was here.

She backed away into a corner and hoped the shadows would hide her. She could hear footsteps pacing deliberately and slowly down the corridor and bit her lip to stop herself from screaming.

“Hello, little intruder,” Margery’s voice whispered.

Maggie’s eyes were firmly focused on the doorway where she knew Margery would appear.

“You smell... delicious, fear, worry, and what’s that? Love?” Margery asked as she filled the opening. She licked her lips as she stared at Maggie. “Delectable.”

“Go away,” Maggie croaked.

“Now, why would I do that? Lucian is being very selfish, not sharing with me the woman he’s spent so many years with,” Margery said as she dragged her nails down the wood.

“You mean the witch he trapped to save innocents,” Maggie retorted, and Margery’s

face changed instantly. There she was, the wicked witch who'd murdered and destroyed countless lives for centuries.

"Child, you are nothing to me. Please don't seek to speak above your station. You're nowt but an annoying insect. However, you're a gnat Lucian cares for greatly."

"Yeah, I won't let you use me against him. Think again!" Maggie replied angrily.

Margery sighed, and then her brows descended, and she stepped forward.

"I warned you once; that's more than I give anyone else," Margery snarled.

"You mean nothing to me," Maggie responded, swallowing hard.

Margery flew towards Maggie and bounced off an invisible barrier.

"Lucian!" Margery howled. "I'll tear her apart. Suck her heart out and feast on her eyes if you don't release me." A prickle of power shot through the inn at Margery's words. Margery lifted her head and smiled.

"Just as I guessed, you won't allow me to harm her," Margery sneered. She raised her hands and struck the boundary with magic. Sickening green bolts of lightning slammed into the barrier before fading away.

A howl grew from the depths of the inn, and Margery looked surprised. That was not Lucian. Maggie smiled as she realised Katherine was in full protective mother mode.

"Bye bitch!" Maggie said with a wave. Margery lifted her hands again, but before releasing her magic, she was thrown over the balcony. A louder howl raced through the inn, and Margery leapt to the side to seek her attacker. Shrieking in anger, Margery let loose bolts of power as Katherine picked her up and body slammed her to

the floor before grabbing her ankle. She spun Margery in a circle, launched her through the air, and flung her into the portrait.

“Dear God! Never upset a mama!” Lucian’s voice echoed as he formed in front of the doorway. Maggie giggled uncontrollably as Lucian was shunted to one side. A force raced at Maggie and swept her into a warm, loving embrace. As Lucian approached, a snarl left Katherine, and Lucian stopped.

“Friendly?” Lucian offered to placate Katherine.

“Mum, stop; it’s Lucian,” Maggie stated, suddenly realising her mother viewed Lucian as a threat. Katherine snarled, and the Jekyll and Hyde shook.

“Mum, enough!” Maggie said firmly and tried to reach for Lucian. Katherine was having none of it. “If you don’t behave, I won’t return. I love him!”

Lucian rocked on his heels as Maggie made her announcement. Katherine sent a blast of warning straight through him and then released her daughter.

“I love you too!” Lucian gasped as he swept Maggie up in his arms.

His mouth descended on hers, and they kissed. Katherine created little stars and glitter to rain down on them. An expression of all her tension being released in a shower of love and protection.

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“My mum’s a badass,” Maggie said an hour later in Lucian’s bedroom.

“Katherine certainly wasn’t messing around.” Lucian began laughing uncontrollably.

“Lucian?”

“Did you see the look on Margery’s face when Katherine picked her up and swung her before launching her? I’m sorry, it’s not funny, but that was the best thing I’ve ever seen,” Lucian spluttered between bouts of laughter.

“We shouldn’t laugh; that could have got serious,” Maggie said sternly before her chuckle broke out. “Do not mess with my mum!”

“No, I think I have already learned that lesson!” Lucian chuckled, wiping tears from his eyes.

Lucian

“We’re ready,” he said with a nod to Mr Evans. Maggie stood by his side, peering as Mr Evans lifted a sledgehammer and slammed through the brick barrier. It splintered easily, and some of his men rushed in with crowbars. Once they were clear, Mr Evans repeated his actions a few more times before making a big enough hole that they could stick their head and shoulders through.

“I’ll do it; I can’t be harmed,” Lucian said, stepping up. He peered through the gap for several minutes before whistling.

“What is it?” Maggie asked.

“Take a look, Darling,” Lucian replied. Maggie blushed at his endearment but stepped up and peeked inside.

“I don’t understand,” Maggie said, staring at bundles of cloth.

“Me either, Mr Evans, please proceed,” Lucian spoke as he moved Maggie to a safe distance. What was in those piles, and why brick them up?

Lucian watched as Mr Evans and his men broke through and removed enough stone that he could step through. Dust coated the air so thickly that Mr Evans made everyone wear facemasks. Stepping forward, Lucian entered the room and peered around. He moved to the first bundle, untied it, and frowned. It contained jars of herbs and liquids that most definitely did not look right. Lucian tipped one jar upside down and reeled back when he saw an adult’s human heart inside.

“Lucian?” Maggie called.

“I think these were Margery’s spell components,” Lucian said as he opened another pile and found a giant cauldron. A third and fourth bundle revealed more jars with unsavoury substances before he opened the last bundle and gagged before recoiling.

“Maggie, stay back,” Lucian croaked as he gazed at the contents. Twelve tiny hearts lay in a jar preserved with liquid.

“What is it?” Maggie whispered, and Lucian heard her anxiety.

“If you wish to sleep at night, leave this bundle alone. Please, for me, see if your orders have arrived yet,” Lucian begged. His sweet Maggie didn’t need to witness this.

“Lucian, if you don’t tell me...”

“It’s to do with the children, Maggie. Leave it at that!” Lucian shouted, and quiet fell.

“I’ll check if the food has come, shall I?” Maggie asked.

“Please, my dear,” Lucian murmured, staring at the jar.

“What is it, my lord?” Mr Evans said, stepping forward and covering Lucian from prying eyes.

“Margery murdered twelve children and took their hearts for a spell. These are their hearts,” Lucian responded with an ache in his voice. His eyes welled with tears. A large, calloused hand covered Lucian’s and the final bundle.

“Here, you don’t need to see this,” Mr Evans said kindly.

“They have to be buried in consecrated ground. I can’t leave the inn far enough to bury them,” Lucian spoke, choked.

“No, lad, but I know a couple of lords who will aid you. Come now, my lord, let’s gather up the rest of this unholy crap, and we’ll burn the daylights out of it. Keep them there covered until someone comes for them,” Mr Evans said.

“There’s another partition. Rip it down, don’t worry about removing the panels,” Lucian said as he rose to his feet. He turned and faced Mr Evans. “You will make sure they get buried in consecrated ground with due honour?”

“Yes, my lord,” Mr Evans answered sincerely and reached out to squeeze Lucian’s shoulders. “Go, lad. We’ll move them somewhere safe until one of the Rakehells arrive, and then I’ll give them orders on what’s to be done for those poor little mites. Meanwhile, we’ll rip this down and see what it’s hiding.”

“Thank you,” Lucian muttered as he strode off to find his peace of mind, which lie in the form of a shapely, loving woman. Wollscombe wrapped herself around his heart,

trying to ease his distress while Jekyll soothed his frayed nerves.

The delivery had come, but the men refused to bring it inside. They left the trays on the step, and she told them she'd have someone return them. Maggie was shaking her head and muttering when Lucian found her. He caught the tail end of a grumble.

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“-what with the inn’s reputation and the newspaper article, I’ll never gain customers.” Lucian stopped her as she was lifting a tray.

“What’s this?” he asked, puzzled.

“They left it here, wouldn’t bring it inside.” Maggie sighed.

Some workmen were already carrying the crates of food to the kitchen. Lucian scowled and picked one up. People were as rude as anything he’d noticed. Maggie was only little. Leaving her to lift such heavy trays was appalling manners. With so many helping, the shopping was soon loaded into the kitchen, and Lucian perched on a chair as Maggie began unpacking items. Her excitement was dimmed from earlier, and he knew the news of what had been behind the wall haunted her.

“Maggie, what are you planning to cook?” Lucian asked, hoping to divert her thoughts. Maggie looked up and beamed, and Lucian felt a warm glow in his stomach. This was his future wife.

“Maybe a chicken soup and a beef stew. I’m going to cheat today, use some ready-made bread mix, and try those bread ovens out. If someone can get my fire started, I also wanted to roast that huge turkey and cook a roast dinner for everyone tonight before they go home. And I plan to make some individual pot pies with new potatoes and veg. And I thought I’d bake a couple of pies, cherry and apple and bake a cake,” Maggie said glowingly.

Lucian shrugged off his coat and rolled his sleeves up.

“Where shall I get started?” he asked, and Maggie eyed him in askance.

“Have you ever cooked before?”

“No, but I can peel vegetables and taste test.” Lucian winked, and Maggie giggled.

“Fine, we’ll see how well you obey orders,” Maggie teased, and Lucian pouted.

???

“Damn lad, you picked yourself one hell of a cook!” Mr Evans chortled from a table.

Lucian didn’t disagree as he shovelled a spoonful of stew into his mouth. He tore off a chunk of the crusty bread, dipped it into the stew, and moaned happily.

“Who fancies new potatoes, veg and pot pies? I made chicken, beef in ale and lamb,” Maggie asked, appearing from the kitchen. Lucian’s hand shot up and waved as his mouth was full. Not even under the threat of war was Lucian missing out on the first meal Maggie cooked.

“Yes, Lucian, I’m aware of what you want,” Maggie said with a roll of her eyes.

All around her, men were stuffing their faces and enjoying her cooking. Lucian decided he liked this look on her. She was happy. Maybe they could see about the chef starting late a couple of days while Maggie got to cover lunch. What Maggie hadn’t realised was she wouldn’t be living here. They had a home if he could find it, in Wollscombe. However, Maggie could be present every day running the inn. He doubted that she’d need her apartment now and was wondering whether to split it into extra bedrooms.

He watched as Maggie pulled a pad from her apron and began writing who wanted

what. Lucian would cheerfully eat all three and had made Maggie put a chicken and lamb pie aside for him to enjoy tonight. He was having his beef and ale right after his stew.

“You’ll need to work out, or you will lose that muscled frame of yours,” Mr Evans teased him. Lucian scowled over a spoonful of stew and deliberately shoved it into his mouth. Everyone laughed as Maggie sighed.

“Did she really cook this from scratch?” a guy asked, and Lucian, still in heaven, nodded.

“Maggie got a sister?” the man urged, and Lucian grinned and nodded.

“Wonderful,” the fellow replied and returned to his soup.

“We’ve nearly broken down the second wall for you to check after lunch.” Mr Evans commented as Maggie began collecting empty bowls and carrying them out.

“We need to get that plate cleaner installed,” Lucian said, looking at the amount of washing up Maggie was facing.

“Dishwasher, lad, and they’re arriving on schedule tomorrow. Once we’ve cleared the area and assessed the damage, then we can hopefully have them in by next week.”

“Lot of cleaning for Maggie to do,” Lucian complained. As Maggie had cooked and used equipment, she washed it up the moment she finished with it. But all those bowls, plates, spoons, etc. were going to add up.

“I could ask for volunteers,” Mr Evans offered.

“Best check with Maggie first. I have a feeling she’s going to be propriety over that

kitchen.” Lucian smiled as Maggie began bringing out full plates.

“Oh boy!” Mr Evans exclaimed, sniffing the air. “I’ll have trouble getting the boys to work after this!”

“Can’t say I blame anyone. Hell, I just want to roll around and sleep. Maggie has some very desirable skills in the cooking department,” Lucian agreed. He wondered how Maggie would cope with a full complement of servants Wollscombe needed to run smoothly. With grace and dignity, Lucian decided. If she had the inn to keep her busy, she wouldn’t run around trying to clean or cook at Wollscombe. Then again, Lucian frowned. Maggie was sure to interfere with something, as was her way!

Chapter Ten.

Lucian

Maggie appeared distracted by the portrait of Margery. She kept looking at it while Mr Evans and his team knocked down the last of the second wall so they could peer inside. Lucian watched as she cocked her head one way and then another.

“What’s wrong?” Lucian asked quietly.

Maggie frowned.

“The painting is off. See how Margery’s hands are clasped? It’s almost as if she’s holding something, but there’s nothing but her dress.” Maggie squinted at the picture even further and then dragged a chair over. She stood on it as Lucian grabbed it to keep it steady and rubbed at Margery’s fists. To Lucian’s astonishment, some of the paint flaked off, and he spotted a milky white colour.

“Could you get me a cloth, please?” Maggie asked, and Lucian whisked one to his hand and grinned as Maggie rolled her eyes. Maggie took it from him and began scrubbing gently at the painting. To their surprise, large pieces rubbed off, revealing an egg-shaped opal in Margery’s palms. It was around the size of a teacup, Lucian noted, and it glowed. But Lucian couldn’t ever remember seeing it before today.

“Strange,” he muttered.

“Are you ready, lad?” Mr Evans asked, interrupting. “We’ve broken down the brick,

but in front of that is a heavy linen curtain, and we have not cut it. Didn't seem right to."

"I guess I am," Lucian said. But his eyes didn't leave the jewel in Margery's hands. What did it mean? Finally, he tore his gaze away when Maggie jumped lightly down from the chair and took his hand. Lucian dipped his head and smiled warmly before leading her behind the protective barrier and through the room.

A good part of the wall had been knocked down, and Lucian could clearly understand what Mr Evans referred to. Taking a sharp blade offered to him, Lucian slit the linen down the middle and opened it up. What met his eyes made him choke.

The first thing his gaze lit on was a withered corpse. It lay on the floor and was dressed in rags. Rags the same colour as Margery's dress in the portrait. He looked away, and he feared seeing his own body. But it wasn't there. Lucian spotted an altar with various dust-covered items, a bowl, jug, chalice, and the opal Maggie had just uncovered on a stand. Lucian felt a prod at his back and shifted to allow Maggie to see. There would be no stopping her.

He stepped over the torn linen and entered the room, avoiding the mummified corpse. Maggie walked in after him, and her soft gasp filled the area. Lucian noted the pentagram on the floor on which Margery's body resided and the candles that had burned halfway down. Margery had been interrupted in the middle of the spell, Lucian surmised.

"You stabbed her," Maggie said softly from the other side, and Lucian strode around to see what Maggie saw. A dagger, not his, was sunk deep into Margery's heart. By the markings on it, Lucian guessed it had belonged to Margery. His gaze swept the room and stopped on a chair that had ropes surrounding it that had been cut. A small carving of a cow lay next to it, a child's toy, and Lucian knew this was where the last child had been held captive.

“This looks awfully like congealed blood,” Maggie stated from the altar, and Lucian hurried to join her.

“We need to burn all this,” Lucian replied, taking in even more spell components.

“We have to destroy the bundles, too. Clear the evil from everything Margery touched,” Maggie said, sidling closer to the opal stone.

“Please don’t touch that,” Lucian ordered.

Maggie cocked her head.

“What do you suppose it is?” Maggie asked.

“Something Margery was using for her dark spell. I can sense the power in it but not understand what its purpose was,” Lucian admitted. Before he could stop her, Maggie reached out and took the opal.

“Maggie!” Lucian cursed and rushed across to her. He lifted her head and was relieved when she stared back at him.

“There’s grief and pain here,” Maggie whispered and handed over the orb to Lucian. A whispering noise made them both jump, and they spun around. Lucian instinctively shoved Maggie behind him as he looked for the danger. To his astonished eyes, Margery’s body had begun to collapse, flakes drifting away into a beam of light.

“What is that?” Maggie cried, sticking her head out. Lucian sighed. Damn his future bride’s nosiness. Lucian allowed Maggie to come out but kept a hand locked on her in case he needed to defend her. Together, they watched in silence as Margery’s body vanished into dust.

“Well, at least we don’t have to bury her; I’ll get the hoover,” Maggie said saucily. Lucian’s eyebrows disappeared under his hair. Trust Maggie to think of that!

Maggie

Lucian was concerned about Maggie taking the opal to the hotel with her. But Maggie thought leaving it at the Jekyll would give Margery a power boost. They’d argued all afternoon while they traipsed back and forth to collect the items Margery had left behind before sticking them into an empty skip and burning them. To Lucian’s resignation, the jug, chalice, bowl, dagger, and stand did not melt. Lucian swept them up before Maggie could reach them and swore he’d have them buried in consecrated ground when one of the Rakehell men arrived. They were stored in a locked drawer with the hearts Lucian had previously found.

When Maggie left that night, she had mixed emotions. Maggie was heartened and overjoyed her food had been eaten and praised. She loved making people happy with cooking, and today seemed like she’d achieved something.

Maggie was also sad. Those hearts had belonged to innocent children and had been torn away from them by a wicked woman. Those poor babies hadn’t grown up, discovered life and love, and grew old. They’d barely started out before Margery ripped out any hopes and dreams they might have had.

And in addition, Maggie was curious and angry. She was interested in the spell and the opal. Furious that Margery had been killing innocent people and getting away with it. And on top of everything else was Maggie’s feelings for Lucian. She wanted what the Rakehell Six had. A man to love and adore her. Nobody could deny that the Rakehell Six doted on their partners, and the men were very lucky in their lives!

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Maggie had argued with Lucian about removing the opal from the inn. Maggie thought it was a danger, but Lucian had sensed power coming off it, and Maggie was worried Margery might use the energy to escape. Lucian demanded it remained at the inn, where he could be assured no harm could attach to Maggie. Their argument had raged back and forth all afternoon and only ended when Maggie snatched the stone and carried it out with her.

After such a long day, Maggie ran a hot bath and relaxed with the opal next to her.

Lucian

He was prepared for Margery tonight, more than he'd ever been. He knew her body was dust, and Lucian couldn't help but be relieved. It was one less thing to worry about. Lucian paced back and forth, watching the minutes tick past, and waiting for Margery. He hoped that now her corpse was gone, maybe she'd be weaker. He could hope.

On time, Margery exited her room, but this was different as she stopped after three steps and turned her nose up to sniff the air. Lucian watched as she raced down the stairs, tore through the protective sheets, and into the outer area. A soft howl left her lips as she saw her belongings were gone, and then she stormed into the second, glee written across her face.

“You fool! The opal was protected from me by a curse that you laid upon it. And whoever removed the orb broke it. As it is of my power, I can go where it goes! And I know exactly who it was, Lucian! You cursed the opal to only be touched by somebody pure of heart, and your little dove is the culprit.” Margery cackled as

Lucian felt fear rush through him. Margery turned with a wicked grin on her lips and dashed straight at him. Lucian tensed, ready to push her back, and Jekyll strengthened him, but Margery passed through the walls.

“No!” Lucian screamed and, gathering his molecules, lunged for Margery, but she was gone.

“Tell her goodbye in your dreams!” Margery’s voice drifted on the wind. Lucian howled fruitlessly as he could only follow a few paces to the edge of the property before he was stopped.

“Katherine! Warn Maggie that Margery comes!” Lucian bellowed; his fists clenched at his side as he stared helplessly at the road.

Maggie

Maggie awoke with a sense of danger. Something was warning her that evil was heading her way. Maggie didn’t hesitate as she leapt out of bed and dressed quickly. Just as she slipped her trainers on and grabbed her car keys, she felt overwhelming dread and then she saw it. The green, eerie grey mist that belonged to Margery. Somehow, the witch was in her hotel. Maggie did not dare to consider what might have happened to Lucian for Margery to escape. As it stood, Maggie was one floor up and trapped.

“Girl...” Margery’s sickening sweet tones drifted through the door. Maggie rushed to the bedside table and grabbed the opal before heading to her window. There was only one way out. If Maggie stayed here, Margery would rip her to shreds. Maggie shoved the orb into a pocket and wriggled out onto the windowsill. Carefully lowering herself, Maggie gulped as she dangled from the first-floor window.

With a deep breath and silent prayer, Maggie let go and hit the ground hard. She

rolled as she landed, taking the pressure off her ankles, and ended up lying face down in the grass. Maggie didn't pause as she scrambled to her feet, feeling her right ankle twinge, and raced for her car. The limp barely slowed her because sheer terror was behind her speed. Maggie clicked her key, and the motor flashed, and she wrenched the door open before flinging herself in.

As Maggie glanced up, she saw the eerie glow of Margery's aura in her room, and then Maggie started the engine and peeled out of the car park. She didn't turn the lights on until she hit the main road, hoping the other cars would prove a distraction to Margery should she follow. Maggie's hopes were in vain as the green light turned into a ball and flew after her. The chase was on. Maggie's breathing sped up in panic as she swerved to pass a slow driver in front of her and shot back into her lane.

Margery's figure appeared in her rear window, and Maggie let out a frightened cry. She overtook another car, narrowly missing an oncoming vehicle. Margery was about eight cars behind her, and while she didn't seem to gain momentum, neither was she slowing down. Margery shrieked, and Maggie's back window cracked. As she glanced in her mirror, Maggie noticed three vehicles swerving with shattered windows. Maggie hissed as Margery flew through a lorry, and the heavy vehicle swerved across the road. She was sure she could hear the driver cursing. Maggie saw the turnoff for the street that led to the inn and took it at speed, her rear tyres slipping as Maggie kept her foot on the accelerator.

Swiftly changing gears, Maggie floored her little car as the back tyres gripped and then held onto the road. Maggie raced down the lane, thanking God there were no speed cameras on this stretch, and finally saw the chimneys of the Jekyll and Hyde in the treetops. Maggie hit the horn, hoping her mother or Lucian was still present at the inn, and swerved into the car park. She pulled out a parking manoeuvre that the Dukes of Hazard would have been proud of and leapt from the vehicle. Maggie's damaged ankle slowed her as she limped towards the inn's entrance, and Margery flew shrieking around the corner.

Spotting her quarry, Margery headed to Maggie as the inn door opened, and Maggie fell headfirst over the step. Swiftly rolling onto her back, Maggie stared wide-eyed as she scrambled backwards at the crazed image of the witch heading for her. Maggie hit the bar as Margery came straight after her. No sooner than she did, Margery slammed up against a brick wall that rippled across the inn. Lucian appeared in front of Maggie, who let out a relieved cry. Margery darted for them, and Lucian grabbed her around the throat.

He dragged Margery, kicking and screaming, towards her portrait and slung her at it.

“Now, Katherine!” Lucian yelled, and a sheer ball of fury punched Margery in the stomach and flung her at the painting. Margery’s nails scrabbled at the edge as rage bled off her. But she was sucked inside, and everything fell quiet.

“Well, not every day someone’s in a high-speed chase with a ghost after them!” Maggie giggled and then happily passed out.

Lucian

He paced back and forth as he waited outside his room. As soon as Maggie collapsed, Lucian scooped her up and transported her to his sanctuary. He’d used Maggie’s phone to phone Melisandre, who assured him she and Nicholas were on the way, and they’d arrange for a physician to attend Maggie. The doctor had arrived thirty minutes after the call, during which Maggie had not awoken. He introduced himself as Dr Smythe before taking Lucian’s name. Katherine was figuratively climbing the walls, as was Lucian, when the doctor showed up.

Dr Smythe glanced around before being hurried upstairs to where Maggie lay. Lucian hadn’t enjoyed being pushed out of the room while the specialist completed his examination, but he knew Katherine was keeping a sharp eye on her daughter. The first sign of a threat, the doctor would be thrown through a window; Katherine didn’t

care. The door finally opened, and Lucian glimpsed Maggie lying in bed before Dr Smythe blocked his view.

“Maggie has a sprained ankle and a bruised back. Her shoulders will be sore, and she has a headache, which is natural. Maggie claims she fell. Can you confirm this?” the expert asked, peering suspiciously at Lucian before dragging his eyes up and down Lucian’s body. Lucian glanced down and recognised the difference in their clothing.

“What would you like me to say? Maggie was chased by a vindictive ghost who wanted to unleash hell on earth, and Maggie had a component of the spell? That Maggie risked her very life in stopping the witch from completing her goal? Or that she fell down the stairs. Wait, how do you know Maggie says that? Is she awake?” Lucian began moving forward and was stopped by a firm hand on his chest. The doctor’s head tilted as he searched for something, and then resignation settled over his face.

“You’re the ghost or one of them.”

“What makes you say that?” Lucian demanded, craning his neck to see through the slightly ajar door.

“There’s no heartbeat,” the specialist replied abruptly. “I’m a man of science. This mystical stuff is beyond my comprehension. But this made interesting viewing. It’s one of many,” the doctor announced and pulled out a phone. He tapped the screens a few times, and Lucian drew in a sharp breath as Maggie was seen hanging from her hotel window. Luckily, it was dark enough not to see her features, but her limping run was clear. Then Margery’s ghost appeared in the window and flew after Maggie’s speeding vehicle.

Another video was pulled up, and this was from a passenger in a vehicle who was filming Maggie’s car zooming in and out, with Margery flying behind her. Lucian

groaned and studied it to see if there was anything identifying Maggie. And was relieved when there wasn't.

“Oh, there's more, but none that could lead the police or nosey-parkers to Maggie. I guessed correctly because of her injuries. I don't believe in the mystical, but the evidence in front of me says there is a world I don't understand. And the pacing and irritation coming off you shows you're not the evil entity. If the tales are true and you've kept something vile locked inside the inn, a word of advice. End it now,” Dr Smythe said calmly and stepped to one side.

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“I’m trying to do that,” Lucian muttered. The doctor glanced at him for a few moments.

“I sense a good heart and the best of intentions. Here is my card. Should you need me in the future, please be assured of my confidentiality, and I shall come. There is much evil in the world, and it grows daily. We need some peace and dignity brought back.” He handed Lucian the card. “Maggie is awake.”

“Thank you. Charge the inn for your fees,” Lucian replied, impatient to get to Maggie.

“When a man does the best he can against an enemy, nobody can see... there shouldn’t be a price. He should be aided freely and honestly. It is my pleasure,” Dr Smythe said before walking to the stairs. Lucian watched him leave before shoving open the doors, finding Maggie awake in bed and giggling.

Katherine was clearly in her element, looking after her daughter. The quilt was being tucked around Maggie’s legs. Her pillows were being fluffed before Maggie was pushed gently back. A cup of tea appeared on the bedside table, and a wet cloth was placed over Maggie’s head. Lucian allowed himself one small smile of amusement before striding across the floor and seating himself next to Maggie.

“She didn’t get it,” Maggie said and pointed to the opal. Lucian promptly glowered at the stone.

“Damn the blasted thing!” Lucian growled before taking Maggie’s hand. He noted she was still pale but had a faint colour on her cheeks.

“How did she escape?” Maggie asked, and Lucian noticed there was no blame in her voice, just curiosity.

“That opal! Somehow, it allowed Margery to flee and find you. It called to her, and Margery could use it to break my boundaries,” Lucian said unamused.

“So, there is power in it,” Maggie mused.

“Yes, and now it will stay here. I’ll not allow Margery to come after you again,” Lucian swore. He felt a pat on his shoulder, and then a gentle kiss brushed his cheek. Katherine, giving her approval.

“Margery needs that opal. Is it safe to leave here?” Maggie asked. Lucian didn’t want to answer her. He suspected the orb made Margery more powerful and if, as Margery claimed, there’d been a spell on it which stopped her from using the power.

“Well, I’m not letting Margery chase you all over the country,” Lucian said firmly. Maggie shook her head and winced.

“Can you hold me? I am tired and don’t want to argue with you tonight. Please, Lucian, let me rest,” Maggie begged. Katherine slapped him around the back of his head as Lucian opened his mouth and then shut it again. He rose to his feet and collapsed in his bed next to Maggie. She curled into his side as he put an arm around her and pulled her in close. Maggie’s eyes closed, and slowly she fell to sleep.

Lucian sensed Nicholas and Melisandre entering the inn an hour later and reluctantly slid out from under Maggie. She murmured something in her sleep and hugged the pillow Lucian’s head had rested on. Lucian felt a smug smile cross his lips as he dissipated and appeared in front of Nicholas, who jumped. Lucian held back a second happy grin as he muttered an insincere apology.

“Is everything okay?” Melisandre asked, immediately reaching out to offer a brief hug to Lucian.

“Maggie’s bruised and battered, but she’ll be fine. Margery tracked her to the hotel and then chased Maggie’s car all the way here,” Lucian explained briefly as he beckoned them into the kitchen and put a kettle on. “I can’t work that machine Maggie has up front. Hope this will be acceptable.” Lucian spoke with a nod.

“Here, let me,” Melisandre said. “Nicholas still can’t make coffee.”

“That’s true,” Nicholas agreed. “I called Tristian. He’s staying home until we talk. The Rakehell Six’s powers lie in our houses, Lucian. I don’t honestly think we can help you against Margery. But I sense something different with the Jekyll and Hyde.”

Lucian sat down to explain everything while Melisandre busied herself with making coffee and a light breakfast. It was close to five in the morning, and while Nicolas and Melisandre looked tired, Lucian grasped they would rather be nowhere else. He appreciated the support they silently offered him and Maggie. They listened intently as Lucian explained Katherine and the events they’d missed since the last time they met.

“That’s a surprise. So, the Jekyll and Hyde is now sentient because Maggie’s mother has taken it over?” Nicholas asked, making sure he understood.

“Yes, and Katherine adores Maggie. It’s pretty obvious. Both times Margery attacked Maggie, Katherine blasted her into the netherworld.”

“That’s some power. I wonder what other defences Katherine can devise,” Melisandre mused as she placed three plates on the table. “I’m no Maggie, but I could make crumpets and toast.” Melisandre shrugged.

“I’ll update Tristian and see if he has any ideas,” Nicholas said, taking a bite of crumpet.

“He’s still your leader,” Lucian asked.

Melisandre tipped her head, clearly interested in the answer.

“Apart from Harcourt, Nicholas is the eldest. But Tristian had more responsibility. I think we still turn to him because he watched out for us when we were younger. It’s not Tristian being a duke; it’s his personality. Tristian Russell is a leader and somebody to respect. We don’t follow him blindly, but I would say Tristian leads us,” Nicholas answered honestly.

“Tristian always had my appreciation, but damn, the man was a sourpuss,” Lucian said with a grin.

“Amongst anyone but family, he remains so; it’s only with relatives that Tristian truly relaxes,” Nicholas concurred. “Tristian isn’t helping you because you’re known to us or a link to our history. He’s supporting you because he cares. Don’t abuse that kindness.”

“I would never dream of it, Nicholas. We were rivals but not enemies,” Lucian replied. His eyes flew to the door where Maggie stood listening.

“Hey,” she announced, rubbing her eyelids.

“Should you be awake?” Lucian asked, moving swiftly towards her.

“The bed was cold, and Mum kept tugging the quilt off me. I guess she wanted me to be part of this,” Maggie replied as Lucian wrapped her up in his arms. He summoned a blanket and tucked Maggie up in it.

“Let’s start a fire,” Lucian suggested, leading them from the kitchen. Melisandre said she’d refresh everyone’s coffees. Lucian sat Maggie in front of his fireplace and clicked his fingers. A roaring blaze appeared, and they crowded around it.

“For summer, the day is sure chilly,” Nicholas commented.

“No, I think the evil is affecting the temperature,” Maggie whispered.

“Do you need to rest?” Nicholas urged, exchanging worried glances with Lucian at how pale Maggie was.

“No, but I figured something out that’s making me feel physically sick,” Maggie replied and bit her lip.

“What, dove?” Lucian pried gently.

“Where did Margery store the energy she stole from the children?” Maggie asked, and Lucian sat back, surprised.

“I don’t know,” he finally responded.

“I do,” Maggie said firmly. Lucian waited until Maggie spoke. “Their souls or power are stored in that opal, but it’s not glowing like the picture. I think there’s a part missing. The piece that activates it. I can sense the energy coming from it, but it’s muted. Margery must have split it when you attacked her.”

“Maggie, I don’t remember,” Lucian said.

“You may never, but I know. I can feel there is another piece. We need to find it before Margery because if she reunites the two pieces, then she only needs to capture one child to complete the spell. Margery mustn’t be allowed to win,” Maggie responded, gazing at Lucian wide-eyed.

“No,” he murmured as he turned over Maggie’s words in his mind. There was no doubting that he believed Maggie was correct.

Chapter Eleven.

Lucian

“You’re not going!” both Nicholas and Lucian exclaimed.

Maggie and Melisandre crossed their arms and regarded the men with a raised eyebrow. Nicholas and Lucian exchanged concerned glances. They both knew what that meant.

“We may be married, but you are aware you don’t control me. I’m not a submissive woman from your era!” Melisandre snapped.

“You can’t stop me!” Maggie agreed, giving Lucian a ‘try it’ stare. Lucian opened his

mouth and then shut it; Nicholas wasn't so wise.

“So, you two plan to go off and rummage around the ruins of a witch's home? Are you stupid?” Nicholas exploded at Melisandre. Lucian's mouth dropped open as he shook his head. Maggie's gaze widened, and then she quickly hid a grin as Melisandre's eyes narrowed.

“Daft? Did you call me that when I solved your riddle and brought you back to life?”

“And then you fell under a spell!” Nicholas roared.

“Because, husband, I knew you'd figure it out. I had complete faith in you. However, that seems not to be reciprocated. Was it not me who led everyone to Emile? And then helped solve those puzzles? Let alone the rest of the riddles we faced. But yes, I am daft. And on that note, this idiot is going to take her sweet butt to the car and go investigate a witch's house with Maggie. You may stay here and measure your dick against Lucians!” Lucian's mouth dropped open at Melisandre's crude words. “And while comparing sizes, you'll be facing the spare room for a fortnight.”

“Melisandre...”

“No, Nicholas. You sit here and think about your behaviour!” Melisandre replied firmly. “Maggie, are you ready?”

Maggie glanced at Lucian, who was keeping his mouth shut.

“We'll see you later,” Maggie said, dropping a kiss on Lucian's mouth as a reward for staying quiet. Lucian beamed with happiness as the two women left the inn.

“You treacherous bastard! You didn't back me up!” Nicholas roared.

“Are you married?” Lucian asked.

“Yes, how’s that related to anything?”

“Your woman will return to you. What will ensure Maggie comes home to me? There’s no ring on her finger!”

“Fool!” Nicholas exclaimed. “You got played. Maggie loves you. She’s doing this for you! Maggie would have returned if you put your foot down.”

“Yeah, but doing so would make her remember that and, therefore, might force her to refuse my offer of marriage. Not risking that chance. When we’re married, then I’ll lay down the law,” Lucian said. Both Nicholas and Lucian jumped as Katherine slapped them around the back of their heads. “Or maybe not,” Lucian amended ruefully.

Maggie

“Do you have any idea where this house is?” Melisandre asked, looking at the thick forest of trees in front of them.

“Not a clue, but I’m hoping this will lead us to it!” Maggie added, holding up the opal. Lucian would have put his foot down if he’d known she’d smuggled it out.

“I don’t like that thing,” Melisandre said with a baleful gaze.

“Me either, but it’s all we got.” Maggie moved it around, and a faint glow lit a

passage. “Did you bring chalk, Melisandre?”

“Yes, but why?”

“We’re not going to be following a path, although I think one existed many years ago. We need to mark the trees so we don’t get lost.”

“Good idea Maggie, let’s go!” Melisandre said and chased after Maggie as they picked their way through the undergrowth. Maggie felt like they must have walked for an hour before she spotted something in the forest.

“There, is that a chimney?”

“Yes, I think it is,” Melisandre commented as the opal glowed brighter.

“I feel like we’re being watched,” Maggie admitted as they moved closer. They broke through the trees and discovered a small clearing. A stone cottage sat in the middle with a broken wooden fence. The slats were missing in some places and sagging in others. Remains of paths could be seen through the overgrown gardens. Maggie sniffed and looked at Melisandre.

“She was growing herbs. I can smell mint and sage,” Maggie said.

“They’ve gone crazy,” Melisandre agreed, her keen eyes picking out the details of the beds. Maggie turned her attention to the cottage. The roof was thatched and sagged in the middle. It was a two-storey building with small windows and a chimney at one end. Moss and ivy grew wild around it, and Maggie barely held back a shudder.

To their surprise, the frames still had glass, although they couldn’t see through them. The door leant to one side but remained attached. There was an aura of profound neglect and dampness mixed with feelings of danger, evil, and pure terror.

“We need to go inside,” Maggie whispered as she grasped the opal, and it glowed brighter.

“The walls are sturdy, but I do not want to enter,” Melisandre murmured. Both women exchanged glances before Maggie pushed through the gate and leapt back as it fell over.

“You getting the horror movie feeling?” Melisandre asked, eyeing the cottage.

“Definitely, but I will not admit Lucian was correct, and we shouldn’t have come. The opal is glowing brighter, so there is something here,” Maggie replied, jutting her jaw out. She put one foot on the path, and the sense of foreboding got worse. If she didn’t do this, Margery couldn’t be stopped. With that thought in mind, Maggie stormed down the trail and shoved hard on the door. It fell backwards with a clatter, and Maggie shrieked.

“Did we bring a torch?” Maggie asked, feeling stupid. Melisandre tapped her shoulder and passed one over.

“You were in the girl guides,” Maggie muttered, and Melisandre laughed nervously. Maggie entered the cottage and shone the light around. There wasn’t much left. Two chairs, one of which was damaged, and a broken table collapsed onto two legs. A pot hung over the fireplace, and the left-hand side held creaky stairs. The back wall had three cupboards, one with a door open showing a couple of plates and cups. Wooden flooring was covered in dust and filth.

The opal remained weak, and Maggie pointed it to the stairs, where the glow deepened. Maggie and Melisandre swapped glances before heading to the crumbling staircase.

“Be careful. Test each step before putting your weight on them,” Melisandre warned.

Maggie went first, gingerly testing each step as Melisandre had told her to before finding herself at the upper level. The smell of rotting dampness was worse up here as they were close to the thatch. There was a bed and a small closet containing rags of clothing, a broken dresser and nothing else. Maggie and Melisandre carefully checked the collapsing furniture but discovered zilch.

“Move the opal, Maggie; play hot or cold,” Melisandre suggested. Five minutes later, Maggie was regarding a section of the mouldering thatch in disgust. The opal’s light peeked every time it came near. Swapping a resigned look with Melisandre, Maggie reached up, her face screwed up in distaste, and rummaged around. Her fingers caught on something, and Maggie pulled it out.

“What’s that?” Melisandre inquired, peering at the item. It was a thinly carved hexagon with a sharpened end.

“No idea, but let’s leave Melisandre. This place is giving me the creeps. And I need to wash!” Maggie led the way back downstairs, and Melisandre pointed to a rusty pump. It took a few minutes, but they finally got clear running water, and Maggie washed her arm and then the item she’d discovered.

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“I think it’s a key,” Melisandre indicated after taking it from Maggie. Maggie turned the opal in her hands and shook her head.

“There’s no hole here,” she denied.

“Maggie, touch the key to the orb,” Melisandre suggested. Maggie did as told, and her jaw dropped open as green lines ran through the pearlescent colours of the orb, and then it split in half. The glow from it stopped immediately.

“What on earth?” Maggie exclaimed, examining the two halves. The inside had been carved out, with the bottom holding six little apartments and the top half having six centred around a seventh.

“Oh no, I know exactly what this is,” Maggie cried and nearly threw the three parts of the orb away from her. Melisandre’s hand shot out and stopped her.

“What?” she asked.

“Look at the bottom piece closely, Melisandre; what do you see?” Maggie demanded, distaste and fear written across her face. Melisandre leaned in and stole a closer glance.

“Maggie, it looks like a silvery mist floating around in each segment,” Melisandre replied after a few moments.

“That’s the souls of the children Margery killed. In the top part, the middle circle is empty. Twelve sections are filled, and Margery murdered twelve kids,” Maggie

replied softly. Melisandre stepped back in horror.

“Get rid of it, Maggie!” she exclaimed.

“And leave it for Margery to find? She’s able to travel to wherever the opal is.”

“It’s stopped glowing now, though!” Melisandre argued.

“Yes, it has, hasn’t it?” Maggie said thoughtfully. She frowned as she tried to figure out why. As soon as Maggie pushed the two halves together, the opal began glowing again. But when she touched the small wand to it, it stopped and broke apart.

“Damn, this is akey,” Maggie breathed.

“Huh?” Melisandre urged.

“The key to Margery’s power. I’ve figured this out. Let’s return to the Jekyll and Hyde, and I’ll tell you everything,” Maggie said with a grin. They could stop Margery, and she held the key in her hand.

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“You think this can beat her?” Lucian asked, studying the three pieces of Margery’s opal.

“No, I know it can. Even though this was hidden or protected by a spell, Margery could still pull on the captured power. She has carried this for centuries, and Melisandre, look deep inside. You can see the twelve trapped souls. Lucian, we could free them!” Maggie cried. Lucian shook his head as his sad eyes took in the tortured children.

“Maggie, how do you think we can beat her?” Nicholas asked, leaning forward. Disgust crossed his handsome features before he leaned far away from the corrupt gem.

“Because Margery is drawing her strength from the orb. And the children’s souls are powering it. What’s the betting most of Margery’s power comes from this? Did you not see the green when we cracked it open? I think that is Margery’s blood tie to it. She has that eerie green mist, and the colour of the lines in the opal match that fog. If we free the spirits, then we weaken her greatly. And you can chase her into the darkness.”

“How? I don’t have my sword, and our powers are matched,” Lucian asked. Maggie turned to face him.

“Lucian, you’ll know how when the time comes because I believe in you,” Maggie breathed, and Lucian sighed.

“Fine, but you’re not staying!”

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“I swear in the name of God, if you move, I shall issue the spanking your mother should have,” Lucian threatened as he paced nervously. Placidly sitting in an armchair, Maggie ignored him and concentrated on the opal. Katherine ruffled her hair, and Maggie batted her away.

“Mum! Yes, I agree with Lucian. I won’t leave this little area. I can see the chalk marks, and Mum will protect me. You concentrate on sending that witch to hell!” Maggie said fiercely. They’d argued all afternoon before Maggie just point blank refused to go. Something deep inside her told her she needed to be here, and nothing would make her budge.

The clock chimed the last stroke of three, and Lucian prepared himself as Margery flew from her room and raced down the stairs. Her hands reached for the opal, a look of pure lust on her face. Lucian yanked her away and pushed her back as Maggie patted the key to the brightly glowing opal. She'd never seen it gleaming so brilliantly; it stung her eyes. The orb fell apart, and Maggie prayed her gut was right as she touched the pointed end of the key to a partition.

A wail left Margery's lips as she bent over in sudden pain. Her gaze narrowed in on Maggie, who was gaping at the spirit of a little boy in front of her. He was about eight, his clothing was centuries old, and his frame thin. He twisted his head to Maggie, and she looked into innocent, gentle eyes.

"Free my friends," he asked softly.

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Maggie nodded dumbly and stabbed the key into the second cell. A girl streamed out from it, no older than five, as she sucked her thumb, and the boy reached out his hand. She grasped it as they turned to face Margery.

“Stop!” the witch screeched and flew towards Maggie. Lucian caught her around the waist and flung her back. Margery raised her hands and blasted Lucian, making him stagger backwards. Seizing the moment, Margery raced across the bar to Maggie and slammed into an invisible barrier. Katherine pulsed as she pushed Margery away from her daughter.

Green lightning lit the room as Margery threw bolts at Katherine. Lucian grabbed her again and yanked her arms behind her back as Maggie released two more little boys. They joined the other freed children and watched the battle between the battling ghosts. Margery dissipated and attempted to materialise within Maggie’s protective circle.

Katherine strengthened her barrier and slung Margery into a chair. The sound of breaking wood cracked through the inn, and Margery leapt to her feet and stabbed Lucian with a chair leg into his belly as he approached her. Maggie had freed child five, a girl, when Lucian’s pained gasp echoed.

“Give me my opal, you insolent chit,” Margery hissed as Lucian bent over, holding the stake in his stomach. Maggie froze, the key just above the sixth prison, as she stared wide-eyed at the scene.

“Go to hell,” Maggie yelled and jabbed the cell and discharged a little girl hostage inside.

Lucian dematerialised, freed himself from the stake in his abdomen, and crashed into Margery. They began trading blows, Lucian a blinding blur of movement, using a silver dagger he'd hidden in his waist. Margery used her powers as Maggie freed two more, a boy and a girl, and Margery let out an enraged scream. She applied her power, picked Lucian up, and threw him at the barrier. Katherine reached out, and Margery grabbed the chance. Maggie flinched as Margery's hand passed through the boundary, and then Katherine kicked Margery back out.

Around Maggie floated eight ghosts, four boys and four girls. There were four more to free. The next boy was the eldest released so far. He looked to be ten, and he smiled sadly at Maggie before moving aside. A table smashed as Lucian lifted Margery and slammed her down hard. Margery applied her powers to throw shattered pieces of wood at Lucian like missiles. Her lightning smashed into panels as Lucian used his super speed to avoid her strikes. The war continued as Maggie freed another boy. A cry escaped her lips as she saw how tiny he was, no older than two or three.

The eldest boy bent and picked the toddler up as he sucked a thumb and watched the fight rampaging out of control. Lucian's dagger stabbed at Margery, and her own powers retaliated. Maggie released a girl and finally a boy. Silence fell as a howl left the opal. A wind swept through the inn as the youngsters lined up. Lucian rose to his feet and lashed out at Margery, and she turned and sent a pike of solid green power through him.

The energy spear held Lucian in place as his eyes met Maggie's resignation in them. They'd freed the children, but Margery was still powerful. Margery sneered, her face a mess of blood and sweat. Katherine pulsed around Maggie, rubbing Margery's face in it that she couldn't reach her daughter. Margery slowly yanked the spear a little and shoved it back into Lucian, making him groan.

"Dematerialise!" Maggie screamed at Lucian.

“He can’t, you bitch!” Margery hissed. “My magic’s holding him hostage. Now give me my opal, and I’ll let him go.”

“No, I won’t allow you to imprison those children again,” Maggie cried.

“They’re no good to me. They’ve been freed. I’d need new souls,” Margery said ruthlessly. Maggie turned her head away in disgust, and a twinkle caught her eye. She rose to her feet and stood on the chair.

“And if I smash this?” Maggie demanded.

“Protected, stupid child.” Margery twisted the spear and forced a gasp from Lucian. She held his hair in her hand, holding his head up so Maggie could stare directly into his face.

“Forgive me, Lucian,” Maggie whispered.

“Maggie, no!” Lucian cried. Maggie reached up and grabbed something. Margery’s eyes widened as Maggie barrelled through the barrier and protection salt and slammed a blade straight through her heart.

“No!” Margery screamed, releasing Lucian. He fell to his knees as Katherine dragged him away. Margery stepped backwards and Maggie, shoving with all her might, drove Lucian’s sword through Margery and out her back.

“Now you wicked, wicked bitch of a witch, you die!” Maggie hissed and turned the pommel, twisting it in Margery’s withered heart. Margery screamed as the children appeared in a circle around her. Instinctively lifting her hands above her head, Maggie slammed the opal to the flagstones, and it shattered. Pieces flew everywhere as Margery let out a scream that forced Maggie to cover her ears. Maggie staggered back and slid down next to Lucian, who was bleeding.

“How are you bleeding?” Maggie cried as she tried to staunch the blood flow.

“Because I’d materialised. And Maggie, darling, stop, please stop. There is nothing to be done. It’s my time,” Lucian said. His hand fell upon his sword, lying next to Maggie gleaming in the moonlight.

“How?” Lucian asked.

“I don’t know. It just appeared,” Maggie gasped. “I saw it on the mantle next to the painting.”

Lucian gasped as blood bubbled in his lungs. He knew the moment the spear entered his body; it was the killing blow. Margery wailed as the children stopped her fleeing as dark shadows began writhing from the corners of the inn.

“No!” Margery screamed even as she dropped to her knees. Blood trickled from her mouth as she fell to her hands. Maggie had struck the killing blow too. Margery was going to where she belonged. Flashes of green light lit the bar as Margery tried to defend herself from the children pinning her in while distorted shadows leapt across the floor and latched onto her. A hole opened under her body, and Maggie dashed forward and dragged Lucian’s weapon back.

“Come here!” Maggie beckoned urgently at the kids as the shadows paused at looked at them. “Leave them alone! They’re innocents!” Maggie cried, climbing to her knees and waving the sword. A large black figure stared at Maggie before it spoke in a click, and the shadows faded away. The hole closed around Margery’s screams as she was sucked down into hell. A shocked silence fell as Maggie dropped towards Lucian, laid her head on his shoulder, and held him tightly.

“You can not leave me; you can’t! Fight Lucian, please, please don’t go,” Maggie begged, sobbing. Katherine let out a wail of sorrow as Lucian closed his eyelids. A

small palm touched Maggie's back, and she looked up into the eyes of the first boy she'd freed. He smiled gently at her and then placed a hand on Lucian's heart and the other on Lucian's wound. A shimmer of golden dust dropped from him, and the child appeared fainter than before.

Maggie gazed in amazement as a bright white light fell from the ceiling, and the boy headed towards it. One by one, the other children repeated his actions, and by the time the fifth laid hands on Lucian, he'd been healed. But they kept coming, and Maggie saw Lucian's form firm and solidify before her eyes. Maggie whispered thanks to each child before they passed. Finally, the eldest replayed their movements and turned to Maggie.

"We've given his lordship what we could of us. He is alive once more," the boy said before touching his forehead in respect and heading into the light. As he disappeared, three bright figures stepped out.

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“Gabriel, Michael, Raphael, and Barachiel?” Maggie gasped.

Lucian lifted his head and struggled to sit up. Maggie helped him as they both gazed at the angels.

“Not quite. You named four, and we are three. Your maths is off.” A female voice tinkled with laughter.

“Hana, do not tease,” a male responded.

Maggie wracked her brain.

“Haniel, the archangel of joy?” she asked. A sound of a whack and a grunt followed her question.

“Well done, Luc. Give it away, why don’t you?” Haniel complained.

“The only angel I can think of with Luc is Lucifer,” Maggie replied slowly.

“That would be fitting,” Lucian grunted from his position.

Lucifer laughed.

“Indeed. And don’t believe all the stories you read about me, I beg of you,” Lucifer teased.

“If you stand with archangels, there are clearly things we don’t understand. It is not

our place to judge,” Maggie stated.

“Are we going to do this?” another grumpy male said.

“Metatron, you are so impatient!” Haniel scowled.

“He’s the archangel of life, ascension, or God’s Voice. No one can decide which,” Maggie whispered.

“Cats out of the bag now, brother,” Lucifer teased.

“I hate being the eldest,” Metatron moaned.

“I can sympathise with that,” Lucian interjected.

Metatron chuckled.

“Well, we haven’t done a good job of being sneaky like Gabriel, Raphael, Michael, and Barachiel did,” Haniel retorted. Maggie could almost sense an eye roll from Metatron.

“They already knew to expect angels. The Rakehell Six aren’t shy about sharing their story,” Luc said drolly.

“And because we aren’t scaredy cats like our younger kin. Haniel, give your gift,” Metatron demanded.

“Lucian, I grant you the ability to know genuine joy. The happiness that comes from being loved and accepted. If you hold on to it, the pain will be brief and passing. But joy will last,” Haniel said.

“I bestow on your line the reward of swift healing. There are dark times ahead, and it will be needed. And as you move forward with the tasks set for you, know I walk by your side. When you doubt yourself, I shall hold you up out of the darkness, seek the light, Lucian, because that is where I shall be,” Metatron said kindly.

“I offer you life again. To ensure what the children offered is honoured and respected, I seal their gift deep within you. Do not disrespect the presents given, and you shall live a long, healthy, happy life. But you have a task ahead of you. Find Benedict next. He is imperative for you to understand what the others face. Benedict has answers you don’t. And please give your friend my deepest sympathies, as Benedict is Henrietta Courtenay reborn!” Lucifer sounded more amused than angry as he directed his last words at Maggie.

“Isn’t he the devil?” Lucian asked quietly. Maggie and he both felt the scowl shoot their way.

“Gifts can be taken back, but no. I am not the devil; he is a separate entity from me and one I am sent to imprison. Do not believe everything you read!” Lucifer chided.

Lucian blushed in embarrassment as Maggie squirmed.

“Henrietta?” Maggie asked.

“That woman is a legend.” Lucifer chuckled. The light faded, as did they.

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“Lucian, remember I walk beside you,” Lucifer called before they disappeared.

“Well, what do you say to that?” Lucian inquired as he patted himself and discovered himself healed.

“You have a heartbeat!” Maggie squealed as she listened to his chest.

“I’m alive!” Lucian roared, swept Maggie into his arms, and kissed her soundly. Katherine twittered and moved away to give them privacy.

Chapter Twelve.

Maggie—a week later.

Maggie stood at the rear of the community hall, her hand held firmly by Lucian. She’d made sure she’d attend this and confront Jane Allison face to face. She had righteousness on her side and was about to use it. Maggie let the villagers wind themselves up for an hour while Jane marched back and forth in front of the council officers, demanding Maggie be closed down and chased away.

“Are you ready?” Lucian murmured in her ear, and Maggie giggled.

“I think it’s a good job I made you write those letters,” Maggie whispered.

“Yes, you were right, we will need them,” Lucian replied and straightened as a counsellor finally snapped.

“Enough!” he yelled, banging a gravel on a table. Silence fell. “Does anyone else have anything to say?”

Lucian squeezed Maggie’s hand as she stepped forward and strode to the small stage where the counsellors and Jane were. Whispers broke out as Maggie marched up the two steps and sent Jane a stern glare before facing the crowds in front of her. It was a daunting task, but Maggie saw the pride in Lucian’s face.

“Yes, I do,” Maggie stated clearly.

“You have no right to talk here!” Jane hissed.

“That is where you’re completely incorrect. Now shut up. The adults are talking,” Maggie said calmly as people gasped.

“Mr Whitley, are you here? Ah yes, there you are. Please stand up,” Maggie called, spotting her first target. “We’re about to address some of this prurient rubbish that Jane published. Am I correct in saying you’re an architect?”

“Yes,” replied Mr Whitley, looking like he wanted to be somewhere else.

“Do you deny I hired you to draw plans up for the Jekyll and Hyde?” Mr Whitley looked around before swallowing hard.

“Yes, I reject that,” Mr Whitley answered.

Maggie pulled out some papers from a file and handed them to the counsellors. She then passed some down to the audience before handing Mr Whitley one.

“Is that not an agreement between you and me for you to work at my inn? I hired you, and you signed a contract, which I kindly let you out of. And is that your reply stating

you won't work at the Jekyll and Hyde?"

Mr Whitley exhaled and gave up.

"Yes, that is my signature," Mr Whitley confirmed.

"So you lied to everyone here by saying I didn't hire you. And then you tried to make me appear bad to the community. Is Mr Rogers here, also an architect? And Mr Jenson, Miss Briggs, Mrs Thomas, please. There you are. Do we need to suffer the same rigmarole as Mr Whitley?" Maggie asked sweetly. One by one, looking guilty and ashamed, they admitted Maggie had tried to retain them and that they'd refused her.

"So I believe that deals with the false claim that I didn't try to enlist a local architect unless there is someone here I missed? No, okay, on to the following allegation. I did not hire builders, plumbers, or electricians from the village. First, is the Inn considered a Grade II listed building? Good, no one disagrees.

"Therefore, only five businesses in the area are equipped to deal with such buildings. Tate and Sons, Everlasting Builds, For the Future, Levers and Daughter, and Renovations Specialist. Before we repeat the architect's embarrassment, do any of you representing those companies wish to say something?" Maggie rummaged in the folder and pulled out another stack of papers. One by one, someone stood up and admitted Maggie had tried to hire them, and they'd lied about it.

"Mr Label, I have receipts here belonging to your company for purchased materials, all amounting to several tens of thousands of pounds. Do you deny this?" Maggie demanded. Mr Label groused and complained, but when Maggie began handing out the receipts, he admitted she'd bought all the materials for the inn from him.

"How dare you try to bully these people!" Jane screeched from the side of the

platform.

“Browbeat? I am not bullying Jane. I am merely defending myself against the lies you spread about me and publicly so! Now hush and allow the truth to be known. Mrs Cambers? Hello! You are the receptionist in the evening at the hotel I was staying at. Please explain my routine,” Maggie said, smiling.

Mrs Cambers shot Jane a malicious smile.

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“Of course, dear, you’d generally come back to the hotel between six and seven at night. Every night, including weekends. On your return, you’d go and wash before heading to the restaurant for a meal. Although several times we had meals sent to your bedroom because you were so tired. If you were downstairs, you repeatedly worked late into the evening on your laptop in the hotel’s lounge.”

“Did I have much free time?” Maggie asked innocently.

“Not that I saw, my dear,” Mrs Cambers replied.

“Did the hotel receive any invitations for me to join people’s parties or events?” Maggie inquired.

“No, Maggie, we aren’t in the habit of losing items like that,” Mrs Cambers snorted and stared at Jane.

“Thank you, Mrs Cambers, for your support of the truth. Marie Chipping, please step up. You claimed I suggested you were all country yokels, and I was going to turn the Jekyll and Hyde into a gastro pub,” Maggie said.

“Sorry, but I never mentioned that. Jane asked what I thought you would do with it, and I replied I didn’t know, but it might be a gastro pub. Those were my words, not yours, and Jane twisted them. And I never once said you thought we were country bumpkins. Jane was sternly spoken to by me for these lies,” Marie announced, glowering at Jane.

Maggie deflated but then perked up with a smile.

“So, are we all in accordance that Jane made up multiple falsehoods about me? Because several of you sitting here presently have contracts with me. So this rubbish of not supporting the community ended? No more pitchforks and burning effigies?” Maggie asked as Lucian snorted.

“Now, let’s talk about the Jekyll and Hyde itself. In her article, Jane states that Margery Cross and Lord Norton were murderers. Only one of those is true,” Maggie replied.

“Prove it!” Jane spat.

“Easily, Lord Lucian Norton, Earl of Castleton, please join us with your own proof,” Maggie called. Lucian sent her a grin as he straightened from the wall he’d been leaning against. Whispers abounded as he made his way to the stage. This was where the letters he had recently written on paper and with ink taken from his writing desk at the inn. Therefore, they were as genuinely old as he and Maggie were about to claim.

“I have here a letter from my namesake. It has fully been authenticated by several scholars and is a tragic accounting of that night. Lord Norton heard about the murders and came racing to stop the culprit. He was astonished when it revealed it was the local witch Margery Cross behind them. Lord Norton followed Margery to this inn, where they struggled, and Lord Norton freed Margery’s final victim. Margery was killed after, and Lord Norton buried her away from consecrated ground,” Lucian said as he handed out copies of the letters.

“Then why didn’t he show his face around here again!” Jane cried triumphantly.

“Because of his shame. In his era, killing a female was a grievous sin. It tormented Lord Norton that it had come to that. But it was either the child or Margery, and to allow a child to die was even worse. As you can read for yourselves, Lord Norton

tortured himself that he'd been too late to save the other children. He couldn't absolve himself that he'd killed a woman, and he believed himself unworthy," Lucian said sadly.

"But he saved that youngster," someone from the crowd called out.

"Yes, and I believe he did a brave, heroic thing, but in those days, he would have been announced a murderer. May even have faced the hangman himself. So Lord Norton married quietly and spent the rest of his years in his country home. He was full of shame and doubt until the day he died. Margery Cross haunted him because there'd not been another way to end her murderous streak. They were certainly not lovers, as Jane convinced everyone," Lucian explained. People were reading the letters, and Maggie saw several wiping their eyes. Oh, Lucian was good. There was deep emotion in that letter.

"These are lies!" Jane screamed.

"And now you, Jane, why do you hide behind the name Allison when your real name is Cross? You are the descendent of Margery Cross's bastard daughter," Maggie dropped the bomb and waited. Slowly, heads turned towards Jane as people understood what she'd done. Victimised an innocent person, lied, printed slander, bullied people, twisted their words and for what? To bury her own dubious roots?

"How dare you pry into my life?" Jane seethed.

"Ah, I see. You can attempt to destroy mine with lies and falsehoods, but God forbid that someone speaks the truth about your own bloodline. What makes little sense is why withhold it? It's not exactly your fault who your ancestors are," Maggie shot back. The audience's heads were snapping back and forth like a tennis match.

"You weren't meant to buy it. I was! That was my ancestor haunting it; she'd have

made sure I got it cheap!” Jane yelled, and silence totally fell.

“And there it is. You wanted to buy the inn and probably made a poor offer. Whereas I came in at the full asking price. So you slandered me so I’d flee, and you could purchase the Jekyll and Hyde cheap,” Maggie said, sighing.

“He murdered Margery. She was a Wiccan and innocent. It was all Norton’s fault the children died. She never killed them,” Jane spat.

“And now you’re delusional!” Lucian exclaimed.

“You can keep laughing, but when Margery returns, the truth will come out. And I’ll stand by her side and share her power!” Jane roared.

Maggie and Lucian swapped glances.

“You need to see a professional,” Lucian said calmly.

Jane shrieked and darted across the stage at them, and Lucian stepped in front of Maggie and held her at arm’s length. Police officers jumped up, cuffed Jane, and carted her away, screaming and shouting. Maggie and Lucian exchanged glances, and Lucian offered a discreet nod for Maggie to carry on with their plan.

“I’m quite unsure how to finish apart from this,” Maggie said demurely to the crowd. Wide eyes met her gaze. “Addressing the rumours of the Jekyll and Hyde supposedly being haunted. Yes, it is, but not my Lord Norton or Margery Cross. The inn is haunted by a woman, Katherine, who was killed there in an accident centuries ago. We’ve found documents describing how a maid fell down the stairs and broke her neck sometime in the sixteenth century.

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“We’ve had several mediums in the inn, and they tell a similar story. She was a chambermaid called Katherine. She’s very gentle and wishes to mother people. Katherine has moved glasses and filled empties, and she’s even been observed moving dirty plates,” Maggie said.

“From what we’ve experienced, Katherine hates bad manners and is quick to correct with a slap to the back of the head,” Lucian added, rubbing the back of his head.

A few chuckles came from the audience.

“So yes, the Jekyll and Hyde is haunted, but not by Lucian Norton or Margery Cross,” Maggie finished.

“So you be callin’ those of us who’ve seen them liars, then?” a belligerent man said.

“Oh no. You saw them. Katherine conceived them to keep you away. For someone reason, she’s deathly frightened of the locals. A medium picked up on the inn, nearly catching fire and people trying to break in. Katherine grew afraid as rumours began after the disappearance of Lucian Norton and Margery Cross. The innkeeper at the time went stark raving crazy, and Katherine was terrified. So, she created their images to keep everyone away so she could haunt in peace,” Maggie said, letting sadness enter her face.

“Such a lonely existence, wanting someone to look after but not being able to trust the guests won’t hurt you. I guess even ghosts can be afraid,” Lucian added.

“And the light show the other night? Half the village saw that, Miss,” the belligerent

man yelled.

“That was our fault. We had brought in a medium who frightened Katherine, so she started her usual tricks, only upped them greatly,” Lucian said.

A woman climbed to her feet.

“Know what I think? This is a load of codswallop,” she declared bluntly. Maggie felt her heart sink. “I believe we all witnessed the battle between him and Margery Cross. We saw her there,” she pointed at Maggie, “free those poor trapped children. And then we witnessed God come for those kiddies. And somehow, Lord Norton returned to life. Now it ain’t for me to cross God’s Will.

“I reckon a good man spent centuries keeping this area safe and sound, got his just rewards. That’s between him and his God. I can’t prove diddly squat, Miss Maggie. But a chap walking around in seventeenth-century clothing is making a statement. I’m thinking the staff possibly need costumes the same, if you get my meaning.

“You mayhap have a ghost lady, but she wasn’t behind the evil in that inn. But Margery Cross is gone, and no thanks to her dunderheaded descendent. I’ll be coming for a lookie-loo when you open in two weeks,” Mrs Crane stated.

“Mrs Crane!” someone exclaimed.

“Ah, shut up, you superstitious fools. Anyone can see Lord Norton is alive. We can’t prove anything. But we can suspect. And watch. First sign of evil returning, we’ve got people in place to warn us. You idiots thinking of going on witch hunts, be warned, I’ll be keeping a sharp eye on you, and so will the knitting circle!” Mrs Crane threatened.

Men across the hall blanched.

“Knitting circle?” Maggie asked Lucian.

“It’s made of the women who really run the village. Maybe a good idea if you join, dearest one. Then again, I think you have too much power already!” Lucian chuckled.

“Sounds like fun to me,” Maggie laughed as Lucian dropped a kiss on her head. Several old ladies in the crowd melted at the look of adoration Lucian presented Maggie with.

“Now, lassie, I hope you’re not going to be serving fancy foo-foo food. Good old-fashioned cooking is what the Jekyll and Hyde needs,” Mrs Crane said.

“We may be late opening. No one has applied for the jobs we put out,” Maggie replied.

“Got a list, girl? Here, give it to me. We’ll drum up people for you. My grandson, for one, just finished four years at college for cookery skills. Knows how to cook the old-fashioned way too, lots of good rib-sticking food. Mrs Lake, chase those two granddaughters of yours down. There are waitress jobs going. Mrs Henderson, speak to Duffy, that lad can busboy. Now he’s a little slow, but he works hard and cares about his standards. Be patient with him, and that boy will be a star for you,” Mrs Crane declared, reaching up and grasping the list.

“Here, I’ll photocopy that, Nan. Do you have application forms?” a young woman asked.

“At the inn, yes,” Lucian said, bemused.

“I’ll come by and collect them. We have some decent local people around who can fill these jobs. And what about suppliers? Are you sticking local?” the woman inquired.

Mrs Crane sat back with a smug look.

“We were trying to place local orders, but we’ve had to shop in supermarkets for now,” Maggie admitted.

“I can speak to the locals and kick some asses into gear,” the woman replied, frowning at the list.

“My granddaughter, Natalie, she’s just finished college for hospitality and catering and how to run a business,” Mrs Crane prodded.

Maggie began laughing.

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“Then please fill out the manager application form,” Maggie suggested when she stopped laughing.

“Start preparing for interviews in a day or two, girlie. Trust me, we’ll get the inn open in two weeks,” Mrs Crane said with a stern look around the room. No one argued.

???

“Are you happy, Lucian?” Maggie asked later that night as they curled in bed. It had become their thing to sleep together and possibly experiment a little. But they wished to wait until they were married. The day after the angels had appeared, a package arrived in the post signed ‘Luc’. It was the paperwork Lucian required to be a part of this world.

“Yes, I just wish I knew where Wollscombe Hall is. I can sense her anew, and she’s quite happy to be linked to me again. But I don’t know where Wollscombe Hall is. A part of me is missing, but at the same time, she’s not. Very hard to explain, Maggie,” Lucian said softly.

“I wonder why she didn’t appear like the Rakehell Six’s homes did.”

“Maybe we have to wait for an explanation for that,” Lucian mused.

“When are we going to help Mariah with Benedict?” Maggie asked.

“As much as I wish to race to my brother’s aid, I don’t think I’m meant to solve their problems. Benedict is clearly around for a reason. I feel as soon as Mariah learns

what has kept him here, that's when I visit," Lucian said. Intuition told him he was correct.

"Whatever you feel is best," Maggie whispered, wincing as she remembered the oath she and her friends had taken. Lucian hadn't realised that all her friends were with his siblings. She rather dreaded him finding out she'd hidden something so big from him, but she agreed with Lucian's sentiments. It wasn't time for Lucian to charge in as his brother's rescuer. Maggie rolled onto her side and burrowed into Lucian, offering love and silent support. Lucian's arm banded around her and held her tight.

"My family would have adored you," Lucian murmured.

"I'd hope so. It worries me. Benedict might wonder who this commoner is with his brother!" Maggie teased and yawned.

"I will soundly beat him should he say anything of the sort," Lucian growled.

"We'll free him, Lucian. The Rakehell Six are on our side and their spouses. We have three angels and each other. Whatever trapped him here like you, we'll crush them together," Maggie promised, meaning every word.

"My concern is we came because of the murders. Margery was present at the Jekyll and Hyde. This was the final sacrifice. So what on earth could trap him in his inn?" Lucian asked.

Maggie decided that was a fundamental question, and she was grateful he wasn't asking the other one; could his other siblings all be trapped in their own inns alongside her siblings too?

Lucian

Mrs Crane was the first eager customer through the door on opening day. The old woman was beaming as she stamped into the bar and began exploring the new layout. Behind Mrs Crane came the knitting circle, all offering compliments and praise for the high level of restoration. Maggie escorted them to a table and seated them all before bringing them a complimentary free drink.

“See you got rid of that witch!” Mrs Crane said, nodding at the fireplace where Margery had once stood.

“Yes, I think that is a far nicer picture,” Maggie agreed. The day after Margery had been vanquished, Lucian and Maggie had been astounded to discover Margery’s portrait had been distorted and damaged. The paint had run in smears while Margery’s beauty had faded, and liver spots and lines had shown on her face and hands. Her long locks were gone, and wisps of grey hair remained. Margery looked the very epitome of a wicked hag of a witch.

Maggie had freaked out, and Lucian had immediately set himself to removing the horrific thing. Lucian hid it in the cellar, wrapped up and safe from prying eyes. They’d replaced with a painting of an old sea galleon that had been in Maggie’s apartment upstairs. They’d discovered it hidden behind a panel in the bedroom, and Lucian had cleaned it up and hung it above the fireplace. Maggie had loved the way the ship seemed to head directly for them.

“Yes, far better than that witch lording it over everyone,” Mrs Lake said. A tinkle raced through the bar, and the women sat up straight.

“Katherine, she agrees with you,” Maggie said with an indulgent smile.

“I did actually think that you made Katherine up to cover for Lucian,” Mrs Crane admitted, peering around.

“Katherine, if you wouldn’t mind, menus please for the lovely ladies,” Maggie said, and the women’s jaws dropped open as they stared as menus floated through the air to them. Katherine put each one in front of the ladies and patted their shoulders as she did so.

“My word,” Mrs Button exclaimed, looking around. The menu moved in front of her, and the line saying stew lit up.

“Katherine’s recommending the stew.” Maggie laughed.

“Then who am I to disagree?” Mrs Button chortled.

Katherine let out a happy trill, and Maggie relaxed as she saw the women all ask Katherine what they should have. Lucian monitored Maggie as he welcomed some men to the inn. A smile crossed his lips as he saw how radiant Maggie was. He was going to marry that girl. It was their destiny.

Mariah

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“I’m going to kill you, Mariah. Run,” he snarled, struggling not to approach her.

“Benedict, fight,” Mariah urged as she cowered near the door.

Benedict was fighting against his nature and was losing.

“Mariah, I am a mere second from ripping your throat out. Flee now. Before it’s too late,” Benedict warned even as he took a step towards her.

“Go on, chase her, tear her heart out. Feast on her boy, become mine!” a voice urged.

“Go to hell!” Benedict cried, stepping away.

Mariah’s eyes filled with tears.

“I’ll be back with help. Lucian will come!” Mariah said.

Her words were enough to shock Benedict from his bloodlust.

“Lucian is dead, Mariah,” Benedict responded, confused.

“No, he’s alive. He’s with my friend Maggie at the Jekyll and Hyde. Maggie said they beat his evil, and he returned to life as a reward. I’ll fetch him, Benedict, and he’ll help!” Mariah cried and cringed as Benedict’s eyes turned bloodshot. His hands reached for her, turning into claws, and his lips peeled back and bared his teeth.

“You knew my brother was alive and hid it from me?” Benedict roared and lunged

for Mariah. Mariah screamed and leapt out the door, and Benedict hit the barrier that kept him prisoner alongside his nemesis. Mariah landed on all fours and stared over her shoulder at the raging man, flinging himself against the invisible restraint.

Benedict was lost in bloodlust, and Mariah knew she couldn't bring him back. That vile creature, Klaus Anderson, had triggered him tonight, and Benedict was lost. Mariah pulled out her phone as she bit back a sob and dialled a number. Tears ran down her face as she waited for it to connect.

"Mariah?" Maggie asked sleepily.

"I need you and Lucian. I've failed Benedict. He threatened to kill me," Mariah cried as she wiped her cheeks.

"Are you harmed?" Lucian demanded down the phone.

"No, I got out in time, but Benedict's lost control. I don't know what to do," Mariah whispered.

"Get in your car and drive to us, Mariah; I'll make you a room up and run a bath. Come straight here. Do you have your keys, honey?" Maggie asked.

"Yes, Benedict insisted I keep them on me," Mariah replied.

"Then come here, now, Mariah. I'll kick my brother's ghostly arse when I see him," Lucian said firmly.

"Okay," Mariah whispered. She hung up the call and watched as Benedict threw himself over and over at the barrier, trying to break free.

The only problem was, Mariah thought as she hauled herself upright. Benedict wasn't

a damn ghost!

Epilogue.

“You lied, brother,” Metatron said as he appeared in Lucifer’s home in heaven.

“About what, Metatron?” Lucifer asked, relaxing back in a chair.

Michael had kindly offered to monitor old horny, so Lucifer had two days to himself. Lucifer didn’t intend to spend the time arguing with his siblings.

“Luc, you told Lucian you gave him life. Brother, you did not inform him that life had a short-term lease,” Haniel accused.

“So I am the bad guy? What if I tell you, like Barachiel, I can view the future and understand that there are events to play out? I gave Lucian enough time to ensure he does what is needed,” Lucifer replied.

“Lucifer, you gifted Lucian temporary life!” Metatron thundered. Lucifer rose to his feet.

“Do you to judge me, Metatron? There are schemes and plans beyond your comprehension. Gabriel, Barachiel, Michael, and Raphael dealt with ghosts. We are dealing with something different. Perhaps I see more because of my connection to hell and the devil, and I know what plots the old horny has for God’s Scourge.

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“Do you view the images I do? No? Then don’t come and judge me. Metatron, I gave Lucian enough time to complete the tasks he needs, and I’ll grant the same to everyone else. But should you interfere in this, things will turn dark, and we’ll lose the God’s Scourge,” Lucifer snapped.

“Could you tell us a little?” Haniel asked.

“No, because your actions can change the outcome. You must do as planned. Now, if you have nothing conducive to add, leave. Because yet again, because of father, I am the bad guy,” Lucifer snarled and shoved them out of his home and slammed every entrance shut against intrusions.

Lucifer was so tired of being misjudged. And yet that was his lot in life. Even his brothers and sisters forgot he wasn’t what those religious idiots called him. Maybe it was time to hang up his halo and take the step into his own peace and freedom.

Characters.

The Nortons.

Lord Lucian ‘Lucifer’ Norton. Earl of Castleton. He was born in 1690 and died in 1716. His family estate is Wollscombe Hall. When Lucian was eight, he was attacked by a Master Vampire. His father saved him, but they lost his mother to another vampire. Lucian raced to the Jekyll and Hyde to stop Margery from killing another child and casting a wicked spell. He and Margery were never seen again after that night.

He is described as having blond hair that was almost silver, a straight roman nose with dark brown eyes with a tint of green around the edges. Lucian has thin lips and a hint of mischief, but his eyes hold a warning of danger. Maggie describes Lucian's body as tall and leanly muscled. He is the leader of God's Scourge, a band of hunters who hunt down evil. His entire bloodline has been committed to this for centuries.

Lord Richard Norton. He was the father of Lucian and his siblings. It is unknown how he died or when he died. He lost his wife when he saved Lucian from a Master Vampire.

Lord Elias Norton. The second child of Richard Norton. He was twenty-five when he died. He is a Lord while his brothers are 'Honourable' because he is Lucian's heir. When Lucian has a son, Elias will become 'The Hon Elias Norton.'

The Hon. Isaac Norton. The third child of Richard Norton and twin of Elias. He was twenty-five when he died.

The Hon. Benedict Norton. He was the fourth son of Richard Norton and was twenty-three when he died.

The Hon. Kit Norton. He was the fifth son of Richard Norton and was nineteen when he died.

Lady Cecilia Norton. She was the sixth child of Richard Norton and the only girl. She was nineteen when she died and was fondly called CeeCee.

Rupert Norton. He was the first hunter in the Norton line, protecting his village in 500 bc. He lost his wife and three daughters in a supernatural attack. Rupert then began a village for survivors of the attacks. An angel gifted him and his sons with powers and the surname Norton, meaning in angelic language, 'allies of God.' God's Scourge was created by Rupert.

Silas Norton. He was the eldest son of Rupert and, with his father, started the hunter lineage of Norton.

Ajax Norton. He was the younger son of Rupert and with his brother and father began the hunter lineage of Norton.

Lord Terence Norton. Margery created an army which he stopped, and that caused the Black Death. He lost both his sons and two nephews, stopping Margery in England. He survived and went on to marry and have three more sons. His sword drew first blood against Margery and is supposedly the only weapon that can stop her. Terence's sword is passed from father to eldest son.

Lord William Norton. He stopped Margery from claiming London. He and his army rode to stop thousands of the Dark Mass. Margery fled Lord William. He was behind the Great Fire of London.

The Owners of the Inns.

Maggie Winn. Maggie was adopted after being left in a skip as a baby. Katherine forced an adoption through and doted on Maggie. Maggie is poor. All her family money, her mother's insurance and the sale of the family home went on paying Katherine's bills when Katherine died. Her friends worry about her as they know how broke she is. She wins twenty-five million on the lottery, and her immediate thought is to share it with her friends.

Maggie makes them go on a cruise, and then they each buy an old inn as it was their dream. Maggie is described as beautiful, with golden curls and big brown eyes. Lucian says she has a heart-shaped face, bow-shaped lips and a swanlike neck. He thinks she has excellent hips and a plump behind. Maggie has old-fashioned morals and ethics.

Mariah. Mariah bought the Black Cat Inn and is the first to tell Maggie it's haunted by Benedict.

Cole. He is an only child like Maggie and is very close to his friends. He bought the Green Man Inn, and it is haunted by CeeCee.

Stephanie. She bought the Crown Inn and is haunted by Kit.

Tilly. Tilly bought the Rose Inn and is at war with Isaac. When Maggie calls her, they are arguing violently.

Callie. She bought the White Witch Inn and is haunted by Elias.

Family

Katherine Winn. She was an orphan, like Maggie, and fell in love with Maggie as a baby and insisted on adopting her. She died of breast cancer a year before Maggie bought the inn. We discover Katherine refused to leave Maggie's side and has watched over her. Katherine is highly protective of her daughter. She merges with the Jekyll and Hyde to protect Maggie from Margery.

A story is created by Maggie and Lucian that Katherine was a chambermaid who fell down the stairs and died. They claim her ghost was so scared she created the images of Margery and Lucian.

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Rakehell Six and their spouses.

Lord Daniel Augustus Harrington. Marquess Blackwood. Daniel died when he was twenty-seven. He has brown hair and ice-blue eyes. He's six foot three and lean-hipped and broad-shouldered and wide-chested. Daniel forgives his murderers and, in doing so, saves Sabine and sacrifices himself to achieve that goal. He's stubborn and fierce and loves Sabine with everything he has. Daniel is sent back to finish his destiny, which was ripped from him. He is a member of the Rakehell Six.

Lady Sabine Harrington. Sabine was down on her luck and broke when she was given a chance to inherit Oakwood Manor. She's as stubborn as Daniel and refuses to leave. After Daniel's sacrifice, Sabine learns she is pregnant and swears that her child will be raised in Oakwood. Sabine is shocked to learn that she holds the feudal rights to Blackwood Village. Her first child is Henry and Daniel's heir. Sabine marries Daniel when he returns.

St John Courtenay, Viscount Ravenell. He was part of the Rakehell Six. St John was Daniel's best friend. He married Henrietta a year after her mourning period ended. He was murdered. St John was reincarnated but remembers nothing, and his current persona owns Courtenay House and is estranged from his father. He is the current 23rd Viscount Ravenell, but when first born, he was the 17th Viscount Ravenell. St John is arrogant and autocratic but a good-hearted man. He is loyal to the Rakehell Six and wants to unravel the plot around them.

Henrietta Josephine Courtenay nee Harrington. Henrietta was the youngest of the siblings and Daniel's favourite sister. She fled Oakwood Manor on the night of Daniel's murder after Isabelle attacked her, too. Henrietta stayed at the Manor before

being forced to run away with St John Courtenay, who married her at Gretna Green. Henrietta's memories were wiped, and she can't remember her death or St John's. She has brown hair and ice-blue eyes, and a curvy figure. She's five foot five. Henrietta was murdered in 1716; she was pushed down the stairs.

Nicholas Pembroke, Earl Mortimer. Nicholas is the third member of the Rakehell Six. He was three years older than Daniel and St John. Nicholas has dark brown eyes and is six foot three. He was the next one to die after Daniel. Nicholas was trapped in a prison, and Henrietta freed him. Nicholas in Waverley Hall has to use the title Viscount Weybridge.

Nicholas is appalled to realise that Lucian is haunting the Jekyll and Hyde as they were rivals. Still, he understands Lucian's role in keeping the world safe.

Melisandre Pembroke, Countess Mortimer. She has long waist-length silver blond hair and grey eyes and is twenty-four years old. She has a degree in interior design. Melisandre was orphaned at an early age and raised by her aunt Bea. She also looks upon Mr Evans as her uncle. Melisandre has a green and gold macaw, Captain Jack, who's ten years old and a white cockatoo, Blackbeard, the same age. She's had them since she was thirteen.

When Melisandre sets eyes on Maggie, she knows instantly that she's found the next set of ghosts they are meant to help. Nicholas is resistant to the idea, but she forces him to aid Maggie and Lucian.

Lady Emile Harcourt, Dowager Duchess of Windmere. Emile was the first woman of the Rakehell Six. She grew up next to Nicholas's family. Emile was also the first to marry. She married Duke Henry Harcourt in a love match. She was widowed nine months later. Emile was chased from her home by Henry's cousin Cecil who wanted to marry her as she inherited all the money.

Henry Harcourt, Duke of Windmere. Henry died of a broken neck when his horse threw him. Emile insisted he'd been murdered. He left Emile her own house and all his money. Henry returned to Corelle Abbey of his own accord and hoped to find Emile there. Instead, she was gone, and he was trapped in Corelle Abbey.

Lady Lavinia De'Lacy, Countess Torrington Lavinia, was the second woman of the Rakehell Six. She was Tristian's cousin. Lavinia has had all her memories concerning the Rakehell Six wiped out. She has haunted DeLacy Park since her death, and her brother, and his future descendants, all promised to defend her. Lavinia was prophesied to save the Rakehell Six and gives her life force to save Jeremy and Daniel. She is favoured by the archangel Barachiel.

Jeremy describes Lavinia as a tiny porcelain doll with delicate skin, a hint of blush on her cheeks, and lips as red as roses. Lavinia had long, curling black hair and grey eyes with green tints. She was outrageously beautiful but had the temper of a harpy.

Jeremy DeLacy, Earl Torrington. Jeremy has been in love with Lavinia for a long time. He is protective of Lavinia and lies to Rakehell Six to protect her. He becomes infected by ghouls and is dying. Jeremy is heartbroken when Lavinia gives her life force to save him and Daniel.

Tristian Russell, Duke Monmouth. Tristian was the last member of the Rakehell Six. He was a year younger than Daniel and St John. Tristian was known as the Black Duke because he was so dour. He died in 1718. Tristian was the fifth of the Rakehell Six to die. He came back immediately and knew who his murderer was.

He kept the staff on at Eléonore Castle, who grew with him as the years went past. Tristian can roam his estate but not leave its borders. He has kept his village going and interacts with them. He refuses all entry to Eléonore Castle, and she is hidden from people who weren't born in the village. Only villagers can see her.

Abigail Russell, Duchess of Monmouth. Abigail is naïve and innocent and marries Christian, believing him to love her. Instead, he doesn't and beats her down and cheats on her constantly. When she finds Tristian, she thinks it's Christian, and he's playing games with her. Abigail regains her confidence, and Tristian helps her hide her money from Christian.

She falls in love with Tristian and loves Eléonore Castle and the village. Abigail takes an active role in the village life and starts planning a divorce when Christian finds her. She refuses to believe that Tristian is inside Christian's body until the archangels give him his proper body back. Abigail has blue eyes and a heart-shaped face. She has long chestnut hair.

Other Characters.

Margery Cross. Margery was born in 1310 and made a deal with dark forces to become immortal. She tried to destroy the world twice and was on her third attempt when Lucian stopped her. Margery had murdered 12 children, tore their hearts out, and was about to kill the 13th when Lucian freed the child and killed her. She wasn't born to wealth but was an incredibly powerful witch.

Margery has cold amber eyes, plump lips, high cheekbones and a regal, petite nose. She was incredibly beautiful with long, dark, curly hair. She has an aura of evilness about her. Margery is killed by Maggie wielding Lucian's sword, and the opal in which she stored the children's souls is destroyed.

Mr Ben Evans. A specialist builder with experience restoring old homes. He takes charge of restoring Oakwood Manor. Mr Evans is a kind man and protective of women. He has greying hair and a twinkle in his eyes. He's described as a well-built man. Maggie is astounded at how well he handles Lucian's haunting and even takes delight in it.

PC Smith and PC James. They were called to investigate a break-in and the Jekyll and Hyde by Maggie and were clearly scared of the inn.

Dr Smythe. He was called when Maggie was hurt by Margery. He says he doesn't believe in ghosts but believes in Lucian. Dr Smythe refuses payment for looking after Maggie.

Father McBride. He claimed to be able to exorcise Lucian but only lasted half an hour in the inn before fleeing.

Jane Allison. She wrote a horrible newspaper article about Maggie making up lies and vicious claims. She was proved vindictive and was the descendant of Margery's illegitimate daughter. Jane had wanted to buy the inn cheap for herself and free Margery for her power.

Andy Whitley. He lied and claimed Maggie had never hired him. He was proved a liar when Maggie produced receipts.

Mr Rogers, Mr Jenson, Miss Briggs, Mrs Thomas. They were all architects that Maggie tried to hire and refused her. She had proof of this, so they admitted they'd lied to make Maggie look bad.

Tate and Sons, Everlasting Builds, For the Future, Levers and Daughter, Renovations Specialist. They were building contractors called out for Maggie, and they admitted she'd contacted them.

Mr Label. He supplied the inn with materials but had told no one until Maggie confronted him.

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Mrs Cambers. She was the hotel receptionist who described how hard Maggie worked.

Marie Chipping. She was the estate agent that Jane claimed Maggie had called everyone country yokels, and Maggie planned to turn the inn into a gastro pub. Marie stands up and says Jane out and out lied, and she confronted Jane about this.

Mrs Crane. She is the leader of the knitting circle, and they run the village. The men fear them.

Natalie Crane. Mrs Crane's granddaughter who's just finished college for hospitality and catering and how to run a business.

Mrs Button. Part of the knitting circle.

The Angels.

Metatron. He is the eldest angel, known as the archangel of life, ascension, or God's Voice. No one knows quite for sure which role he takes. He is impatient and quick to confront his siblings.

Haniel. She is the archangel of Joy. She is sweet and curious.

Lucifer. He prefers to go by Luc but is feeling very depressed. Humans have forgotten that he and the devil are two separate entities and that he is the archangel in charge of keeping the devil imprisoned. Luc hates that it's his name taken in vain against the devil and that he feels it's time to quit being an angel, as he is so depressed. He feels

even his brothers and sisters sometimes forget about who he really is.