

"Wright is in a class by herself."—*Library Journal*

The
RESURRECTION
of
EVANIA
JAMES

JAIME JO WRIGHT

Author of The House on Foster Hill

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To my real-life Grandpa Don

From an orphan to a war hero.

From a dairy farm to a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart.

From a motorcyclist to a front-lines messenger.

From a pitchfork to a flamethrower.

From a small town in Wisconsin to the Asiatic war front.

To you and the three things you loved most in life:
God, family, and your country. I salute you. HOOAH!



Eloise James

Because I could not stop for Death –
He kindly stopped for me –
The Carriage held but just Ourselves –
And Immortality.

Emily Dickinson

SEPTEMBER 1879

NEW JAMESTOWN, INDIANA

She had always been led to believe that the Grim Reaper rode a horse as dark as the bottomless fathoms of hell, when in fact it was a brougham carriage rolling on four wheels, as enclosed as a prison and pulled by a dappled-gray mare. The Grim Reaper himself sought sanctuary inside its depths, and when the carriage finally jostled to a halt outside their expansive home, he dared to show himself by first giving a glimpse of his pompous silk top hat.

Eloise James hated Dr. Merriweather, and hate was no exaggeration of her feelings. Regardless of his profession's promise

of healing, he instead wielded a scythe of death, invisible to the eye but well known to the women of New Jamestown.

This was the man who had so quickly penned his signature to Lucy Addlethwaite's sentence of imprisonment at the Corinth Asylum for the Chronically Insane. All because Lucy's reverend husband claimed she had lost her senses, so visceral were her arguments against him and his theology. She was his wife, he defended, not a theologian, and the fact that she dared to lead a women's Bible study and teach things of a nature that caused wives to question their husbands' spiritual leadership was itself the epitome of lunacy. In the end, it had nothing to do with the accuracy of scriptural interpretation and everything to do with a man's threatened pride and authority.

Eloise raced through the hallway of James Mansion, her hip knocking into a side table, sending the decorative vase on it wobbling and then falling with a dramatic crash. Ignoring the chaos she left in her wake, Eloise took the staircase one horribly slow step at a time, hoisting her dress so as not to trip. Had she wings, she would have flown with fervent urgency, but as it was, all she could do was rely on her two feet, and with the excess of petticoats, skirt, and layers of underthings required to be a proper lady, her athleticism—what little she had—was therefore hampered.

Eloise careened past the master bedroom belonging to her widowed father, her own room, and on to the bedroom farthest toward the back end of the house. She was met with a closed door, its deep mahogany enhanced by a scrolled brass plate and door-knob, which she grappled for and twisted, pushing the bedroom door inward.

"Evania!" Eloise cried.

Her wan sister looked up at Eloise from her chair by the window, which overlooked the back lawn of the manor. Eloise noted that Evania's eyes seemed to have sunk further into her head, darkening the circles beneath them, and only hurting Eloise's vehement defense of her sister's faculties.

“Evania.” Eloise dropped to her knees beside her sister, reaching for her hands. Evania was younger than Eloise by a mere ten months. Many thought they were twins when growing up. But between Eloise’s tendency toward intellectual endeavors that left her on the more homely side—or so she’d been told—and Evania’s brilliant blue eyes and effervescent personality, it was made apparent that while close in age, they were very different from each other.

Now, if just meeting Evania for the first time, one wouldn’t believe the word *effervescence* had ever been used to describe sweet Evania. Her expression was blank. Lifeless. She stared down at her hands folded in her lap, and Eloise wanted nothing more in this moment than to shake life back into her sister. That impetuous old life that had led Evania to dance in the hallways when everyone was looking, to laugh so melodically it would make a music box envious, and to live with an abandonment Eloise could only be jealous of.

“Darling, you must come with me.” Eloise squeezed her sister’s hands.

In response, Evania managed only the whisper of a smile.

“Dr. Death and Doom is here.” Eloise used Evania’s old nickname for Dr. Merriweather. “Please, we must go.”

Escape. *Escape* was the word she should use. Father—for Eloise and Evania had never dared to call him anything more affectionate than that—had been the one to call for Dr. Merriweather. Eloise had known it was only a matter of time now that it was over. Now that Evania’s babe had been born, as still as death could make it, and on as grievous a night as Eloise had ever known.

“If we go down the back stairs, we can hurry to the carriage house. Kenny will have a carriage waiting. We can leave immediately for Mrs. Shelton’s. She will give us respite there until we can board the train tomorrow morning.” At Evania’s tiny glimmer of interest, Eloise hurried to explain further. “We’ll take the train to Chicago, and from there we will board another one for Iowa to stay with our James cousins there. They haven’t approved

of Father for years, and they would give us respite until we can devise our next steps. Think of it, Evania! A new beginning. For both of us!”

But there was no more interest on Evania’s face than there was initiative to rise from the chair she’d convalesced in for four days since the birth of her stillborn child. Eloise had been reticent to make her move so quickly, but now there was no time left.

Eloise shook her sister’s hands again, and this time she was not gentle. She made no effort to hide the stern demand in her voice. “Evania, get up at once!” She pushed herself to her feet, using the arm of Evania’s chair for support. Staring down at her sister, Eloise urged her again. “Father and Dr. Merriweather will come. They will take you away. I will never see you again!”

Evania merely turned her head to look out the window. She didn’t care, so it seemed, and that stung Eloise in a way she was not prepared for. If for no one else, she’d assumed Evania would fight to be with Eloise. To stay together as sisters. They had always been inseparable. Evania, the spirited sprite, and Eloise, the sister whom no one understood, least of all herself.

Firm, manly footsteps sounded down the hallway, echoing of impending doom. There was no use in veiling the truth from Evania. Eloise bent, taking her sister’s chin in her hand and forcing Evania to look at her.

“Father is going to have you committed to an asylum. He only needs Dr. Merriweather’s signature, and you will be taken away from me. You are grieving the loss of your daughter, yes, but then you will grieve the loss of a sister, of your freedom. Of a life you’ve known. Of a life you can have again! *Please*, listen to me.”

Evania raised her eyes, empty of hope, and whispered three words that confirmed to Eloise that the war was lost before it had truly begun.

“Let them come.”



The following hour had been nothing but furious chaos. Eloise had locked herself in the bedroom with Evania, defying her father's angry knocking and Dr. Merriweather's cajoling. It wasn't until a ladder had been positioned outside beneath the window, where Evania sat immobile and unreactive, that Eloise flew into an all-out panic.

Of course, Father would have no reservations at all about ordering the use of a ladder to gain access through the bedroom window. However, it wasn't Father who appeared in the frame. No. It was Kenny who climbed the ladder. The estate's handyman. His expression was nothing short of horrified apology. While Eloise vowed never to hold him responsible for doing her father's bidding, she still slammed the window shut, locking it firmly against Kenny's halfhearted attempts to gain access. He stared at her through the glass with a beseeching expression that suggested he might lose his job over this if he failed to retrieve Evania. To Eloise, that was the least of her worries. Kenny would not be held responsible. No. *She* would be.

"Evania!" Eloise cajoled. But her sister remained unmoving, her hands curled around a lace-edged handkerchief and her eyes fixed on some distant point outside the window. Grief had stolen Evania's spirit. Shame had robbed her of her father's respect. And her absent lover had absconded with her future.

What had Evania left to hope for?

Eloise sagged onto the edge of the bed, the mattress sinking beneath her weight. She met Kenny's eyes, the window between them a thin barrier of safety against the inevitable. There was small comfort in their shared look of defeat.

Another series of commanding knocks on the door.

"Open this door immediately or I will be forced to break it down." Father's tone held no room for negotiations or patience.

Dr. Merriweather's "Come, come now, child" irritated her like a hand rubbing the fur on a cat backward.

Then Evania stood, her nightgown draping her body like a shroud.

Eloise was shocked into wordless horror as her sister padded on bare feet across the wood floor of her bedroom and twisted the lock on her door.

It flew open, and Evania stepped aside as Father and Dr. Merriweather marched into the room. Father did not spare Eloise from his dark glowering, which promised she was not out of danger from his fury. But it was Dr. Merriweather he addressed.

“As you can see, Evania is not herself.”

Dr. Merriweather’s monocle exaggerated the size of his eye. His assessment of Evania took mere seconds. “Ah, yes. I see.”

Evania did not defend herself, nor did she say a word.

“As you can see? You see nothing!” Eloise cried in repulsion. This man called himself a doctor? How could he assess with one look that Evania was better off institutionalized?

“Silence, Eloise.” Father lifted his hand, palm forward with commanding authority.

Eloise lifted her hand to her mouth to keep from protesting more and ruining any possibility she might have to get Father to see reason.

Motion at the window told her that Kenny was descending the ladder to give the family their privacy.

Dr. Merriweather clucked his tongue. “It’s a shame whatever fractious bent in your daughter has brought us to this point, but it is very apparent that she is not in her right mind.”

Eloise launched to her feet, but a severe snap of Father’s head in her direction silenced her.

“You see where my concern lies?” Father’s low timbre was smooth and calculated.

“Oh yes, yes.” Dr. Merriweather nodded. “I fear there is no coming back from this condition. Not without medical assistance. I’ve seen behaviors in women like this before. Licentiousness is incurable, I’m afraid, and without supervision it will only

be allowed to flourish in its sinful progressions. Add to that the loss of the child . . .”

Eloise noticed Evania’s eyes grow watery with remembrance.

Dr. Merriweather continued, oblivious. “It’s apparent Miss James’s mind is in turmoil to say the least.” He sniffed, causing his handlebar mustache to twitch as he did so. “I shall sign off on the paperwork immediately. She must be committed to a place where she can receive proper treatment.”

“No, please!” Eloise rounded the bedpost. “Father, you cannot—”

“You’ve nothing to say about this, Eloise.” Father’s retort was clipped.

Dr. Merriweather ignored Eloise’s outburst. “There are experimental treatments that may help your daughter. If nothing else, the hospital will be able to temper her illicit impulses, which only prove she does not have the right mind of a proper lady.”

“I agree.” Father’s nod carried with it an air of relief. Not the kind of relief that came from a soul being unburdened, but the sort that accompanied a scheme to be rid of a troublesome problem.

Dr. Merriweather nodded. “We can transport Miss James immediately. There is an opening at the Corinth Asylum, and they were quite eager to ready a bed for your daughter.”

“Good, good.” Father shifted to Eloise, who stared at him with disgust. She debated flying at him to claw at his eyes and face, but then he might have her committed as well, and then what use would she be to her sister? “Eloise,” Father said, ending her frantic attempt to arrive at a solution, “gather your sister’s things. A small travel bag will suffice. We’ll be moving her to the hospital today.”

Eloise would go to war on her sister’s behalf. She would stand before the Grim Reaper and return his life-stealing blows, strike for strike.

If only she knew how . . .



Tilly Thompson

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.

John Donne

PRESENT DAY

NEW JAMESTOWN, INDIANA

He was going to die. But before that happened, her grandfather was going to lose any recollection of her. Her name would become an elusive whisper in the back of his mind, teasing but never revealing, until one day even that whisper would be silenced, and all Tilly would see in the eyes of Grandpa Don was emptiness. But that time was not now. And Grandpa Don was adamant that they lived today and not tomorrow, for tomorrow would take care of itself.

"I don't understand." Tilly positioned herself next to her grandfather as they stood on the cracked cement sidewalk on the historic street of New Jamestown.

Grandpa Don perched on his electric scooter, a satisfied smile on his face, his buzz-cut gray hair reflecting the afternoon sunlight off its white tips. "You've always loved this place," he observed. True to form, Grandpa Don was ignoring the fact that he had the onset of Alzheimer's. Instead, he was studying the massive structure that loomed before them. A Queen Anne, château-esque home featuring two stories and attic windows, culminating in a gabled roof with chimneys and a turret.

"James Mansion? Yes, I've always loved it." Tilly couldn't help but give a contented smile. She absently rested her hand on her grandfather's shoulder. "The limestone architecture and that lone attic window at the top? You know, I firmly believe I saw a ghost peeking out of it when I was a little girl."

"Of course you did," Grandpa Don said kindly.

"I love this place," Tilly continued, because once she began talking with Grandpa Don, her words ran loose and unfettered. "The James Mansion has been a centerpiece of New Jamestown for over a century."

"Longer," Grandpa Don corrected.

"Yes." Tilly surveyed the mansion, not ignoring the little pangs of sadness as she noticed the unkempt front lawn, the flower gardens barren of any vegetation but sticks and dead leaves, and the weeds that grew through the cracks of the brick and concrete Victorian retaining wall that bordered the walkway. She couldn't ignore the sadness. This house had spoken to her soul since she was a girl. If a house could speak, Tilly was sure this one had many secrets to spill. Secrets of the family that had occupied it until fifteen years ago when the last James family member abandoned it. "I was sad to hear they sold it recently," Tilly mused.

"Hmm?" Grandpa Don hadn't taken his eyes off the great house.

“They sold James Mansion. Didn’t you hear?” Tilly informed him. “It was a private sale—that’s all I know. They didn’t even donate it to the New Jamestown Historical Society, which is what the community had hoped.”

“Mmm.” Grandpa Don nodded.

“Isn’t that just like a James?” Tilly issued a soft laugh that wasn’t unkind but also wasn’t admiring. “I don’t know how Luke James thinks he’ll ever be elected mayor this fall. The James family has never been known for playing nice. His brother has been mayor long enough, and now we need *another* James son to take office?”

“Don’t be too hard on the boy,” Grandpa Don reprimanded, giving Tilly a gentle look. “He is merely the result of a family that has long been a part of our town’s tempestuous history.”

“Mmm.” It was Tilly’s turn to mimic her grandfather’s contemplative reaction. She had reasons for not being fond of the James family—not like she was their ancestral home.

“Do you know who bought the place?” Grandpa Don led.

“No. Like I said, the paper printed it was a private sale.” Yes, she still read the local newspaper. That was one reason why Tilly loved her small-town home, population 6,000. It was quaint, old-fashioned, and it still held on to the last remnants of the past. Just like she did. Tilly didn’t even own a cellphone, much to Grandpa Don’s chagrin. As for the internet and social media, Tilly had concluded that compared to paper and ink, they were of the devil.

“You’ll want this.” Grandpa Don reached into the inside pocket of his sport jacket and tugged out a thick envelope. He lifted it toward Tilly.

“What is this?” Taking it, she turned it over in her hands, noting a professionally printed name in the top left corner. The name of a law office. “Grandpa?” She dragged out the word, scared to think what she was thinking for fear she was wrong while also worrying she was right. “What did you do?”

Grandpa Don grinned smugly, gripping the handlebars of his

scooter as if preparing to take off on an electric run if Tilly protested too vehemently. “I bought it.”

“Bought it?”

“Yes, I bought James Mansion.” He looked up at her with faded blue eyes. “It’s yours, Tilly Renee Thompson. My gift to you. Well, after I’m dead, of course. I’ve adjusted my will, and your parents and brother all know. They agreed that this place should be your inheritance from me.”

“Grandpa!” Tilly had no words. Grandpa had always been one to invest in real estate, but she had never imagined he’d pull something like this! He’d retired years ago and sold most of the properties he’d invested in as part of his retirement plan.

Tilly caressed the envelope with her palm, not bothering to doubt the legal papers that were inside. She knew they were already signed and sealed. Apparently, the manor had been sold to Donald Edward Thompson, Vietnam War veteran, her grandfather, her best friend, and the man she was loath to think of ever losing.

“There are three conditions,” he continued. “One, you don’t argue with me about it. Two, you reserve one ground-level room for my model trains and tracks. And three—and this one is more costly for you—you agree to be my caregiver.”

“I’m already your caregiver!” Tilly exclaimed with a small laugh. She had quit her job as an administrative assistant over a year ago to be Grandpa Don’s companion and caregiver. It had caused some friction between her and her parents. They were preparing to pull up roots from their retirement home in New Mexico to come care for Grandpa Don. Their other alternative was to move him there to be with them. Tilly had been adamant that being with Grandpa Don was what she wanted to do, and she would never survive if he moved halfway across the country from her.

“That you are, but . . .” Grandpa Don grew contemplative, seeming to search for the right words, until finally he composed

his thoughts. “But I would like you to promise that my care will ensure I’m not moved from this place. When I’m unable to be the man I am today.”

Don’t put me in a nursing home.

Those were the words she knew Grandpa Don was trying to speak. When he forgot who she was, when he could no longer care for himself or his hygiene, when he became a soul encased in a body that no longer served its master.

Never. Never would she have Grandpa Don moved to a nursing home facility. He had been there for her since her earliest memories. Her grandmother had passed away when she was only two, so Tilly had no recollection of her. But as a toddler, she became Grandpa Don’s reason to continue, and he had been Papa Bear to her.

She’d never been good at making friends, and in school she was the proverbial girl who wasn’t even average. She was ignored, and when that didn’t work, Tilly was tolerated. There were no sleepovers or birthday parties or best friends. There was only Grandpa Don, welcoming her in from a world that was all angles and sharpness into his embrace where she fit perfectly. He had taught Tilly to have confidence when the world around her pegged her as different. Which was also interesting to Tilly because she found her thought processes and sense of reasoning quite logical. The rest of the world seemed to be the ones who lacked common sense and organization. Regardless, Grandpa Don was the one she came home to after school and put model train sets together with and talked about history. Tilly knew all the facts about the Vietnam War. It was one of the most heart-breaking periods of American history. The war had contributed to the framework of Grandpa Don’s life story and many others like him, and so it made sense that Tilly would know as much about it as she could. But no one else seemed to grasp the importance of it. Well, no one except Grandpa Don.

And, God bless her parents, while they lived in New Mexico

now, they had always encouraged Tilly's relationship with her grandfather. And her older brother, Erik, had understood that there was no favoritism being shown by Grandpa Don toward Tilly. They had both filled a need in each other, Tilly offering purpose to a widowed man, and Grandpa Don offering purpose to a child who was always on the sidelines.

Tilly bent to wrap her arm around his shoulders, pressing her cheek to his. "You know I'll never leave you," she murmured to the man who held her heart and would always be her number one.

"I wish I could say the same, my dear. I wish I could say the same."



Two days later, Tilly could hardly believe her good fortune as she stepped inside James Mansion. It was like an American version of Downton Abbey. The front doors opened to greet her with dull but still remarkable parquet floors in intricate, multicolored geometric patterns. Her eyes widened in awe at the dizzying design. Whoever had chosen the combinations of patterns had to be a kaleidoscope of personality. The walls were covered in equally busy patterned wallpaper, and when she stood in the foyer, Tilly could look all the way through the front hall, past arched ceilings, to the back exit that opened onto a glorious veranda.

She stood there now, cardboard box in hand, angsty over the fact that it held her modern belongings like a digital clock and her collection of LP records. They didn't belong here. Instead, she should be hauling in an old phonograph, vintage photos of her ancestors, and piles of lace doilies. It was a collision of time periods that begged further planning on how to merge the two.

"Move it, pup."

Her brother's voice broke her out of her admiring stupor. She looked up at her six-foot-two older brother, craning her neck to see his mischievous grin. He'd inherited their mother's height,

while she'd inherited her father's more diminutive form. Tilly could only boast three inches over five feet. Dad had never been diminutive in personality, though, and that Tilly had not inherited. The Thompson family was made up of strong personalities, starting with Grandpa Don, her dad, and then her brother, Erik. It was the family joke that when God finally got around to creating Tilly, He'd run out of His reserves of spunk and instead turned her into the shy one. It was meant to be complimentary and was always stated with affection, but the fact that Erik had called her "pup" since she could remember was a bit annoying. Especially now that she was staring down thirty in two years and he was married with two kids.

Erik kned her backside.

She hadn't moved yet.

"You may own James Mansion, but you don't have any house staff. Your belongings aren't going to move themselves in." Erik laughed.

Tilly gave him an awkward smile and entered the 7,000 square-foot house. Maybe she *should* get house staff. She considered it, then thought of the finances, the implications of the intrusion of strangers in her home, and a conclusion was quickly drawn. Even if she had the financial wherewithal to hire staff, there was no way she would want them in her home, nosing through her life and Grandpa Don's.

"I always said you had Grandpa Don wrapped around your finger, but this is a bit much. I mean, a whole house? He bought you a whole house!" Erik's jesting echoed through the foyer. He waited to the right of Tilly, holding a stack of boxes. "I don't know where you want these."

She hesitated. Erik was planted at the foot of the four stairs that led to a short landing, then turned at a ninety-degree angle to climb to the second floor. The entrance space where he stood was square and, amazingly, still had an original table at its center, waiting for a potted fern to adorn the room. To her left was the

sitting room, where, Tilly imagined, guests of old would have been seated as they anticipated the host or hostess to join them. There was the bay window, a fireplace with checkerboard tiling of gold and maroon, and a massive mahogany surround with a square mirror in near-perfect condition.

From the foyer, Tilly could look past the fireplace through a large doorway with mahogany molding and a bridge of stained glass at the crest. The dining room was beyond it. That, too, had Victorian-era furniture, no doubt original to the house, and the high-backed chairs were covered in red velvet brocade. Matching red velvet curtains had been pushed to each side of the doorway but could be pulled shut for privacy's sake. So many dinner parties must have occurred in that room over the decades. The walls would have soaked in the conversations, the gossip, the old town—"Earth to Tilly Thompson."

Tilly jerked her head back toward Erik. "Sorry. I'm—"

"In la-la land. Got it. But that doesn't help me at the moment."

He shifted the boxes in his arms.

"Sorry. Those are books."

"I figured as much—they're heavy."

"They go in the library."

"Which is where exactly?"

"Upstairs." Tilly gave him a perplexed expression. Erik had already toured the house, so he should remember where the library was. She pointed to the stairs. It wasn't that difficult to recall the layout of a house, was it? She could envision the blueprints in her mind. But then maybe that was why she and Erik could tolerate each other so well—her with her reasoning skills and her brother with his feelings and impulses. They were different enough to appreciate that they would never be similar. Tilly didn't always understand Erik's teasing, but she never doubted his affection for her. So while she didn't know how to tease him back very well, she accepted his sense of humor like one might accept a warm embrace.

Erik eyed the stairs and then turned his attention to the boxes of books in his arms. “Of course the library is upstairs.”

“Sorry,” Tilly mumbled. She felt as though she should apologize even though she wasn’t the one who had put the library on the second floor.

She took the lead and began to hike up the staircase. Four steps up, turn sharply, go up nine scuffed wooden stairs and another landing, then another right, nine more stairs, and they were on the second floor. Tilly glanced behind her at Erik, wishing she could stand in awed silence at the arched stained-glass window that cast light onto the stairs in a vibrant array of colored petal patterns.

She hiked down the hallway, her soft-soled shoes quiet on the wood floor, and then turned into the library. Floor-to-ceiling bookshelves. Every bookworm’s dream.

“Here?” Erik said, nudging Tilly.

“Yes. You can put them over there in the corner.”

Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately—she hadn’t determined which yet—the house hadn’t included the original library of books. The shelves were empty, dusty, and home only to spiderwebs and some mouse droppings. While Tilly bemoaned the fact that old Victorian books would be delightful to have here, she was also intrigued by the idea of building her own library of classics: Dickens, Shelley, Austen, Eliot, Frost, Poe, Tennyson . . .

“Look, I love ya, pup, but you really need to focus.”

Tilly lowered her box to the floor. She *was* focused. There was more to life than just surface tasks that needed doing. Books. Books required attention, appreciation, and exploration. But she acquiesced anyway because, again, she knew she was expected to. “I’m enamored by this place. It’s as if it’s *alive* and just waking up.”

Erik blinked. “Sure.” It was his only response. “Okay. The rest of the books go here then?”

Tilly nodded.

Erik left, the sound of his boots clapping against the floor growing distant as he bounded down the stairs.

How many feet had done that over the decades? The James family's time here had spanned from the mid-1800s through two world wars, the Civil Rights era, Vietnam, and into the 1980s. The house had been closed up since 2011 following the deaths of Rodney and Trisha James in a car accident.

To Tilly, this house had always been a place of mystery, even before the James family had closed its doors for good. Its gables and corners promised stories, with windows that were like openings to the mansion's soul, and voices that had been silenced long before an automobile ever drove up the drive. Those were the tantalizing unknowns and the unremembered that had always fed Tilly's curiosity. History was like that. Not only did she appreciate dates and facts, but the story behind the walls, or underneath the soil, or infused in the essence of a place like this. And now? Now it was *hers*—well, hers and Grandpa Don's.

They would make the parlor downstairs into his model train room, and the study next to it they would make his bedroom. Which meant the second floor was all hers. And the attic. And the turret. And—

A door slammed down the hall.

Tilly spun around. She'd thought she was alone up here.

"Hello?" Tilly peered down the hallway, taking tentative steps in the direction of the sound.

She passed two doorways, both to bedrooms, both with furnishings that had come with the place, each covered with protective sheets. They were ghostly mounds of antique memories. Yet they were inanimate pieces that would never speak of who had slept in them, sat in them, or stared into their mirrors.

Tilly remained in the corridor as she calculated the logic behind the door shutting. It was the door at the far end of the hall and to the right. That room had likely once belonged to a lady's maid, who might have attended the woman of the house in the adjoining and much larger bedroom. The little hairs stood at attention at the back of Tilly's neck, and bumps raised on her arms as if in

anticipation of something—something unseen—that was drifting down the hall toward her. She could dodge out of its way, if only Tilly could see the ghostly memory of what had once been. A memory that had slammed a door shut in order to be heard?

No. Tilly blinked to clear her focus and bring her mind back to the present reality. Memories did not have voices. Walls did not talk. Spirits did not inhabit old rooms and shut doors.

Doors slammed in old houses all the time, and there was no anomaly in it at all. There were drafts, uneven floors, and even hinges that just gave in to the need to move after being stationary for a time.

Still . . . Tilly bit her bottom lip to hold back a tenuous smile that no one was there to see anyway. There was something intoxicating about it. Something that gripped at the places inside her that no one besides Grandpa Don seemed to understand. It was difficult to explain, so Tilly never really tried. That intrigue of uncovering secrets and details and a story. She could spend hours, intensely focused, just to learn every nuance and crevice and crook and cranny of a place. She would sometimes sit with her eyes closed, trying to hear the silent voices of the past. Tilly never really did, not audibly anyway. But she liked to believe that in the stillness, she could. That time could be bridged between the past and the present. She believed it could. But not through mechanisms or science. Instead, through memories. Through the clues left behind by those who had gone before.

James Mansion was one of those places that had beckoned to Tilly for years. This place breathed the stories of the ones who had passed through it. Those people who had left invisible marks, like unseen fingerprints that tempted Tilly to rediscover them.

The slam of the door might be explained by the shifting of a house or a draft that came and went. But Tilly believed that memories shouldn't be forgotten. They should be resurrected. To remind the living of good to be repeated and, more so, to warn them of the bad that should be forever forsaken.



IF WALLS COULD TALK



I am watching.

Each moment ticks by. Seconds on the hands of a clock.

One.

Two.

Three.

Four.

Five.

Each second has slipped into the past, and it will never be touched again. It will likely be forgotten. It will become a lost moment embedded in the walls, breathed in by the air, felt so briefly that it has neither emotion nor event to anchor it.

Instead, the seconds come to live within me, and I store them away somewhere deep and shadowed. In a place where no one will likely find them. I hide the seconds in the walls, beneath the floorboards, under the beds, and behind closed doors. I slip them into drawers and pockets, I attach them to mementos and photographs, and I stuff them away into corners that are covered in the webs that collect.

Time.

Time collects itself as memories.

There are times when a jolt occurs, and I return against my

will. There are moments when tears dampen my visit, yet there is a sweetness in their salt.

But more often, I am the walls that cannot speak. I have hidden myself there.

Yes.

I am there.

I am watching.

I am watching her now as she travels down the hallway, looking for the door that I closed. I am watching her now as she questions if she even heard me, let alone if she will see me.

I am watching her.

Because that is what memories do.

We watch, and we wait. And sometimes we come back to life.