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The Manor

Nothing new seemed to happen in our old rundown town. It was the same morning gossip at the salon, the same eggs and sausage at the diner, the same people who have lived here for generations. That is until old miss Gretchen had a heart attack and her home went up on the market.

Now don't get me wrong Miss Gretchen will be missed. But for the first time in a while something new was blooming. Miss Gretchen's home sold very quickly.

The estate was a 1930s pale pink Victorian manor for half the price. Our quaint town was filled with anticipation. More people seemed to walk their dogs, ride their bikes, and go for strolls just to catch a glimpse of the new residents.

It's been a month since these folk have moved in and not yet have they grabbed their mail, tended the garden out front, or drove through town. There was a lot of speculation. Some thought the new owners may have been shy, others thought they must be hoarders, But I... I knew what they were. I saw them and they... well they weren't human.

Like the nosey residents of this old town I too walked my dog, rode my bike, and took the occasional stroll. And like the others I saw nothing. So I changed up my methods. Since I work for the town's newspaper I had a few tricks up my sleeve.

When our town drunk Donnie would have a little too much to drink he had a habit of vandalizing the town's garden gnomes. Everybody was sure it was Donnie defacing the town's gnomes. There wasn't proof though. Until I lurked around the town's bar at closing time with my trusty camera and caught Donnie red handed... Or should I say yellow handed.

That photo I captured made headlines in our sleepy towns newspaper. Though this time I wasn't looking to catch the town drunk or to make headlines. I knew I needed to catch them on camera for peace of mind.

I started my investigation by talking to the realtor who sold them their home. Wasn't too hard to track down. The office building, like most businesses, was right in our town square. The man who sold the home has raven colored hair neatly styled to the side. He wore a magenta tailored suit and cuff links with his name engraved.

Lenson.

Like most of Lenson everything he said was Fabricated. When I spoke to him about the new residents he made sure to boast about practically robbing them blind. I paid no mind to that. But what he said of importance was the resident's last name. Valentine. Now that made me scratch my head. I don't think I've heard that name before. Lenson gave a smug smirk as he said well our town was built by the Valentine family.

It was getting late around the time Lenson stopped rambling so I went home and tried to unwind after a long day. I found myself unable to sleep. What Lenson said was weighing on my mind. Surely I would've learned about this in school if that were the case. With a yawn I told myself yeah and went to sleep.

The next morning I woke up and stopped by the Diner. I grabbed my usual black coffee and banana muffin to go and headed to work. I printed the same news I always print; sleepy town gossip and local admissions for the comic strip. At the end of my shift before I closed up I looked at our past prints. The past prints we have go all the way back to 1936, the year our sleepy town was built.

The town was built by an Irish man named Declan O'brien and his wife Sophie. "I knew Lenson was full of it" I thought to myself, until I saw the second page. It was the pink manor, but it states under the photo that this home was painted a ruby red to show the love of our town.

That wasn't enough information for me. So I skipped forward a few years. 1937, nothing. 1938, nothing. 1939, nothing. 1940... Well that has a story of its own.

The day was February 14, 1940 and the town was flourishing. A library was built that year and the O'briens added a new member to the family, 4 year old little Chloe and another on the way. So to celebrate it says they'll be throwing a party at their ruby red manor.

I felt happy for them even though it didn't help with my investigation. I skipped forward a day to February 15, 1940 and my heart sank. The article talked of the party and how the jazz band had everyone moving to the beat until a heart wrenching scream stopped the party in its tracks. The scream came from the left wing of the home. It was Sophie alerting everyone that a candle caught fire to the drapes.

Everyone made it out of the home that evening except for Declan and Sophie O'brien. The last surviving O'brien was Chloe.

I decided to go throughout the years to see if more was said about Chloe. From what I've found it says Chloe's aunt took guardianship over her and that her aunt moved into the ruby manor after the left wing was repaired. I went a little further just for peace of mind and in 1960 there's a photo printed with Chloe holding up a degree wearing what appears to be a nurses uniform. Underneath her photo it says how much she has overcome and wishing her luck in her future.

I was happy to know she found her purpose, except now this means Lenson may have been right about the current resident. I do hate when Lenson is right. This could mean she moved back into her childhood home. Or perhaps her aunt had kids at the time who moved in. Or more likely, Lenson is a liar.

I put the past prints back in their filing cabinet, locked up, and started my walk home. I figured I did as much research as I could for the day. When I got home I tossed my keys on the counter,

kicked my shoes off, poured a bag of chips into a bowl, sunk into my sofa and turned on the television in an attempt to relax. I found myself unable to pay attention to the show. My mind kept asking What's the next move, What's next, What's the nex.. and so on. Finally, I turned the television off and gave in.

Those same questions came without an answer. I placed the bowl of chips on my coffee table, shoved my feet into my still tied shoes, threw my camera straps around my neck, grabbed my keys, and decided to walk it off. Hopefully I would tire myself out and come back home to rest.

I walked in circles around town. Through the town square passing the library, diner, salon, post office, printing press and so on. The last orders from the diner still lingered through the air. At that point I decided to head back home knowing my chips were waiting for me.

On the way back home I noticed the lights were on in the pink manor. I guess they couldn't sleep much either. Or perhaps they work nights. As I was passing the pink manor to my street I saw something peek behind the curtain. I ducked down behind the shrubs near the sidewalk thinking I could possibly catch a glimpse of who lives there. The curtains moved once more.

In the window stood a woman with short ruby red hair styled in ringlets, draped rosary around her neck, wearing an emerald silk nightgown. I recognized her immediately. I've seen her before in the papers. She appeared no different than she did in the 1960s news article.

Before she shut the curtains I needed to capture her on film. I lifted my camera slightly over the shrubs and clicked, praying she didn't notice the flash. I wasn't so lucky.

I heard the door open and then slam. I rushed to get up to my feet and started to run. I looked behind me and I saw her. I was terrified. She had glowing red eyes, pale skin, and seemed almost animalistic. I couldn't focus on anything else. I knew I needed to get home.

Guttural shrieks followed behind me as I felt my feet begin to blister and my heart beat so loud I thought it would give out. I took a look behind me and she wasn't there anymore. I only had one more corner to turn and I'd make it home. I didn't stop running until I made it inside.

Once inside I shut my curtains and moved my furniture in front of my door. I sat on my living room floor and pulled my bowl of chips from the coffee table. I wiped the sweat from my brow and grabbed my camera from around my neck. I took a deep breath hoping that would steady the shake in my hand.

I clicked my camera on and went to the photos. The first photo in my gallery was of the pink manor. Everything was in the photo. The black arched window frames, the ivory lace curtains, the light from inside the window peering onto the lawn, even the shadow of her silhouette, but not her.

That night I barely got any sleep. I was up until the sun was in the sky. I knew I needed to gather my courage. I moved the furniture away from my door and I went off to work hoping to forget what I knew.

Against my better judgment I passed the pink manor once more, knowing what she is. Knowing the sun will keep me safe I walked down that path again. I looked at the prints my shoes had made behind the shrubs. I saw the window where she stood and the door that was left ajar. I walked through that door knowing it may be the last time I ever do so. I needed to know what happened to her. I needed to know how and why.

Once I walked in I noticed the house was empty. I walked through the foyer into the living room, through to the kitchen and from there up through the spiral staircase. The only thing left was light peering through the now curtainless home. I didn't know how one could so easily up and leave their home. Especially their family home. I made my way down the stairs and out the door. With one look back I felt the same hollowness that this home was.

Weeks went by and the home was put back on the market. This time it sat and sat. No one bought it. With curiosity of where she went I buried myself in my work. I wanted to forget the horrors and find some sort of normalcy again.

I went to work. I grabbed my usual black coffee and banana and I printed the same news I always do. At the end of my day I locked up and started my walk home. Before I turned the corner to my street she appeared from thin air... Clear as day in the same clothes as last time.

I froze in fear as she approached. She glided as if she were floating. Once she stood in front of me I could only hear the sound of my heart. Apparently she could too. That was the last time I saw her. The last time I saw anyone.