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The House of Fallen Wishes

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Introduction

Julia Arlen had never considered herself particularly lucky. As a struggling novelist in the cramped second-floor apartment above a bakery in Boston, luck had always felt like something afforded to other people—those with family money, unwavering confidence, or the inexplicable ability to be in the right place at the right time. So when the lawyer's letter arrived on a dreary Thursday, sealed with a forgotten family crest and offering her inheritance of the Morgan estate, she could only stare in disbelief. Had it been addressed to the wrong person? But the formal words were unmistakably hers, and the law firm had left little room for doubt. Julia Arlen was now the sole heir to a mansion she'd never heard of, nestled in the heart of a New England town she'd never visited.

The news landed heavy and strange in her chest. Julia's life had lately been defined by restless nights, overdue bills, and manuscripts that never quite captured what she meant to say. A twist of fate such as this—some distant relative, unknown and unmissed, bestowing a derelict estate—was the kind of plot she'd have written off as too convenient for fiction. Yet there it was, a summons she could not ignore, a promise (or threat) of new beginnings clanging in her mind.

From the very first glimpse, Morgan House seemed to breathe with secrets. The mansion stood shrouded by hemlocks on the edge of Crowthorne, its windows dulled with decades of dust, its once-grand porch sinking into the earth. Locals watched her arrival with sidelong glances, offering no welcome and even less conversation. The air held a chill even in June, the kind that stirred up goosebumps and slipped between the bones. Julia could feel the weight of other eyes—unseen, but certainly present—the house watching her as much as she watched it.

Julia's reasons for accepting the inheritance were simple in theory: renovate, sell, escape her own spiraling circumstances. Yet, as she stepped beyond the threshold, chance was replaced by apprehension. A thick stillness pressed in from the wood-paneled walls. Shadows seemed to ripple around every corner. It wasn't just the scent of rotting wood or mildew; the mansion exhaled a sense of watchful expectation. Everywhere, odd objects lingered—tarnished locket, letters folded and refolded, clocks forever frozen at midnight.

What she could not admit, even to herself at first, was the quiet hope kindling inside her. Perhaps in this crumbling labyrinth, Julia would find not only the means to save herself but also the story she had always longed to write. But as she uncovered the house's riddles—cryptic messages on faded wallpaper, diaries filled with heartbreak and uncanny wishes—she began to understand why nobody else wanted Morgan

House.

Each night brought new warnings: cold sighs through drafty halls, footsteps echoing in empty rooms. The past would not rest, and the wishes woven through the house's history lingered like promises demanding payment. Yet for Julia, hope flickered alongside fear. The estate offered a chance not just to reconstruct her life, but to confront the ghosts—literal and figurative—that haunted her family's legacy. In the House of Fallen Wishes, Julia's journey would become one of courage, temptation, and the perilous nature of desiring what lies just out of reach.

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CHAPTER ONE: Arrival Amid Shadows

The gravel crunched under the tires of Julia's rented sedan, a sound that felt ridiculously loud in the oppressive silence of Crowthorne. The air, thick with the scent of damp earth and something indefinably old, seemed to press in on her, a physical weight she hadn't anticipated. She'd driven three hundred miles from Boston, the city's cacophony slowly fading behind her, replaced by a stillness that was unnerving rather than peaceful. Morgan House loomed ahead, a silhouette against the bruised twilight sky, its grand, decaying facade whispering promises of both ruin and revelation.

Julia parked the car a respectable distance from the leaning, ornate gates, their wrought iron curled like dried leaves. She hesitated, her hand hovering over the door handle. It wasn't just the sheer scale of the place that gave her pause, or the pervasive sense of neglect. It was something else, a palpable coldness emanating from the very stones, a feeling of being watched by unseen eyes. The introduction had been an understatement; the house was not just derelict, it was mournful, a monument to forgotten lives.

Taking a deep breath, Julia pushed open the car door, the creak echoing in the sudden quiet. She grabbed her overnight bag and her laptop case - the essentials for a writer who was, quite frankly, a little out of her depth. The local real estate agent, a brisk woman named Brenda with a perpetual frown line between her eyebrows, had given her the keys an hour ago. "Nobody stays long at Morgan House," Brenda had said, her voice flat, "and those who do... well, they don't quite leave the same." Julia had dismissed it as small-town superstition, but standing there now, she felt a prickle of unease.

The path to the front door was choked with weeds, the once-manicured hedges overgrown into tangled thickets that clawed at the air. A chipped stone birdbath stood empty, a testament to long-gone life. Julia pushed through a spiderweb, shuddering, and finally reached the massive oak door. It was dark, scarred, and bore a tarnished brass knocker shaped like a grimacing gargoyle. With a shiver, she inserted the large, heavy key Brenda had given her. It turned with a groan that seemed to resonate through the entire house.

The door swung inward with a protesting shriek, revealing a cavernous entrance hall cloaked in perpetual twilight. Dust motes danced in the slivers of weak sunlight filtering through the grimy fanlight above the door. The air inside was colder than outside, stale and heavy with the scent of decay, mildew, and something else—something faint, like old potpourri mixed with ash. Julia flicked on her phone's

flashlight. The beam cut through the gloom, illuminating a grand staircase that spiraled upwards into darkness, its banister thick with dust.

To her left, a large, formal living room was visible through an open archway. Draped sheets covered what Julia assumed were furniture pieces, creating ghostly shapes in the shadows. To her right, a dining room, equally shrouded, awaited. The scale of the place was overwhelming. It wasn't just a house; it was a mausoleum of forgotten domesticity. Brenda had mentioned "unique artifacts" left by previous owners. Julia hadn't quite grasped the implications of that until now.

She walked slowly, her footsteps muffled by the thick layer of dust on the parquet floor. Every creak of the floorboards, every rustle of the ancient draperies, seemed magnified. It felt like the house was exhaling around her, a slow, deliberate breath. Julia tried to rationalize it - old houses always had drafts, always made unsettling noises. But a cold shiver traced its way up her spine regardless.

She found the kitchen first, a large, outdated space with a hulking cast-iron stove and a pantry that looked like it hadn't been opened in decades. A lone, cobweb-laden teacup sat on a dusty counter, as if someone had just set it down and walked away, never to return. Julia reached out to touch it, then hesitated, a strange reluctance holding her back. It felt almost sacrilegious to disturb anything.

Back in the main hall, she looked up the imposing staircase. The introduction had spoken of "unsettling events" and "spectral visions." Julia, ever the pragmatist, had filed that under "literary flourish." Now, standing at the base of those stairs, the line between reality and the gothic seemed to blur. She decided to postpone exploring the upper floors until morning, when the sun might dispel some of the gloom.

She chose a small room off the living area, which looked like a study, to set up her temporary base. It had a single, grimy window overlooking a tangle of overgrown rose bushes. There was a small, dusty desk and a surprisingly comfortable-looking armchair, both draped in sheets. Julia pulled the sheet off the armchair, releasing a cloud of dust that made her cough. She set down her bag and laptop.

As she began to unpack, her eyes caught on something on the wall. Peeking out from beneath a framed, faded landscape painting, was a small, intricately carved wooden bird. It looked out of place, almost deliberately hidden. Julia reached for it, her fingers brushing against the cool, smooth wood. It was exquisitely detailed, a tiny, vibrant splash of life in a room suffocated by shadows.

She pulled the painting slightly askew. Behind it, not quite hidden, was a narrow, almost invisible slit in the wallpaper. Curiosity tugged at her. Julia's fingers traced the outline, discovering a small, almost imperceptible latch. With a gentle push, a section of the wall swung inward, revealing a shallow alcove. Inside, nestled on a dusty velvet

cloth, was a small, leather-bound journal.

Julia pulled it out, her heart quickening. The leather was supple, worn smooth by countless touches. No title graced its cover, but etched into the leather was a single, stylized wishbone. She opened it carefully. The first page, written in elegant, looping script, read: *"May my deepest desire bloom in this house, no matter the cost."*

A chill, deeper than any she'd felt so far, snaked through her. This wasn't just an old house; it was a repository of dreams, or perhaps, nightmares. The journal felt heavy in her hands, its pages whispering promises of secrets and tragedies. The mansion, Julia realized, wasn't just derelict; it was waiting. And she, the unwitting heir, had just opened the first door. The renovation, she instinctively knew, was going to be far more than just painting walls and fixing leaky pipes. It was going to be an excavation of souls.

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