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WHAT

They had trespassed.

WALKS

And a voice whispered to her that

THESE

there would be a price to pay.

HALLS

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For my parents – for everything

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PROLOGUE

SHADOWS IN THE HYACINTH ESTATE often seemed to move on even the stillest of nights, so a casual observer could be forgiven for thinking the dark figure moving stealthily across the lawn was another part of the house's long and eerie history. A closer inspection, if one were brave enough (or foolish enough, depending on who you asked) to do so, would have revealed a young man, twenty or so years of age, moving across the grounds towards the house. The observer could also be forgiven for thinking that he was talking to himself, until the light of the torch he clicked on revealed he was holding his phone in front of him and whispering enthusiastically to it.

'Hyacinth House might sound sweet, but this is one of the most haunted places in Ireland – a place so terrifying it's not even listed in the most-haunted guides, because it's not somewhere they want people to go.' He paused, clicking the screen to turn the phone's camera to face the house looming over him as he made his way towards it. 'It's only forty minutes' drive away from Dublin, near Kilcarrig in the Wicklow Mountains, but no one ever talks about it. All we know is it's said to be cursed, haunted by a spirit known only as "The Lady". Locals won't pass by after dark, and five years ago someone even *died* investigating the legends around it. And I'm going to spend the night here, on my own, tonight. This is going to be my scariest video yet!'

He stopped, the light of his screen just illuminating his frowning face as he lowered the camera. He raised it back up and clicked a button on the screen.

'This is going to be the most intense investigation I've ever done – so make sure to like, subscribe and check out my channel tomorrow evening to find out how I get on … and if I make it out!' He grinned, replaying the footage before taking his phone and tapping a few buttons. He raised it to his ear.

'Hey, yeah, I've just uploaded the teaser now.'

He paced across the grass, then let out a delighted hoot. 'That many? Already? That's class! Yeah, I'm going in now. I'll check in with you in two hours. I still think you're being ridiculous about this …' He cocked his head, listening to the voice on the other end of the line.

'Yeah, OK, OK. This place really is creepy, in fairness. I'll talk to you soon.'

He hung up and walked to the front of the house. The large oak doors were padlocked, and the windows, covered by thick boards nailed firmly into place, seemed to stare down disapprovingly at the trespasser. The argument could – and had – been made that perhaps the intention was not just to keep people out, but to keep someone, *something*, in. That the barricade was not a fortress, but a cage. If he had done as so many others before him had, arriving buoyed up by confidence and bravado only to feel the creeping dread that accompanied the house's gaze, the looming malice that seemed to ooze from the bricks, and decide, actually, he suddenly had somewhere else he really needed to be that evening, the night might have ended a lot differently for him.

But he did not.

Instead, he stepped up to a window on the left-hand side of the doorway that hadn't quite been boarded up tightly enough. He jimmied a thick plank off and shoved his backpack in through the gap before heaving himself up onto the window ledge and squeezing through the opening, disappearing into the oily darkness that almost seemed to reach out of the house towards him.

Had the casual observer lingered until now, they would not have detected any movement through the gap he'd created in the window once the house had swallowed him.

There was only silence.