

# *Someone Is Killing The Gay Boys of Verona*

Late Spring 1997

## Prologue

“You can open your eyes now, Sean,” my dad said as he pulled off the handkerchief that blocked my sight.

Dad’s hands were still on my shoulders. My parents had insisted I wear a blindfold in the car so as not to ruin the surprise. So we were getting a new house—big deal! What was wrong with our old home? I didn’t want to move. I’d felt like a complete dufus as Dad helped me out of the car and guided me into position. I hoped no one from school was watching. I sighed and opened my eyes. I inhaled sharply and the hair on the back of my neck stood on end.

“Well, aren’t you going to say something?” Mom asked.

“The Graymoor Mansion? You *bought* the Graymoor Mansion?”

It was only with supreme effort that I didn’t add “Are you out of your freaking minds?”

“Yes,” Mom said, completely oblivious to my exasperated tone of voice. “It’s a dream come true. Wait until you see inside, Sean. The entire house is *exactly* as it was in the 1870s. Nothing has been touched. It is as if no one has been inside in more than a century.”

I was tempted to remind my mother that that some teenagers had gone inside—back in the 1940s or 50s I think—and had never come back out again. They just disappeared. The story was in the local paper and I’d read it. There was no reason to mention the disappearances, however. They were common knowledge. Mom and Dad knew the story as well as anyone—and they still bought the place! Crazy.

“Can we afford this?” I asked. I hoped Mom and Dad couldn’t get a loan to buy the old monstrosity. If Graymoor was indeed just as it was more than a hundred years ago the furniture alone would be worth tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands. The only reason none of it had been stolen was because no one was brave enough to go in and get it.

“It’s a bit of a stretch on our budget,” Dad said, “but we couldn’t pass it up.”

“We’re not going to live here, though, right? You just bought it for the contents, didn’t you? I’m sure there’s enough antiques inside to keep Mom’s shop going forever.”

“Of course we’re going to live here! Nothing from this house will ever be sold,” Mom said. “Don’t you see what a unique opportunity this is, Sean? There probably isn’t another Victorian home in the country that’s intact. It is as if time has stopped here.”

I felt my face pale.

*This cannot be happening, I thought to myself. This cannot be happening.*

I closed my eyes tightly, but nothing had changed when I opened them again. Mom and Dad were still gazing adoringly at the house. My life was about to become a nightmare.

“Time sure didn’t stop on the outside,” I said, taking in the sagging porch and dilapidated condition of the home.

“Most of the damage is cosmetic. The house is amazingly sound. Even most of the interior walls are stone or brick. This place was built to last,” Dad said.

Damn, Dad sounded like he was in love.

I silently wished someone had burned it down. I did not share my parents love for old things. To me, it was just used crap. What the Graymoor Mansion really needed was a good demolition team.

“Let’s take a walk around our new domain,” Dad said. He talked a little odd like that sometime. I think it came from reading too many books about the past. Both my parents were history freaks. I knew something bad would come of it that day. You can’t spend your life obsessing about bygone days without having to pay for it eventually. I had no idea the result would be this horrible, however! Why did I have to suffer too? I’m innocent I tell you! Innocent!

We drew closer to the house. I craned my neck to look up. The house was four stories high with a mansard roof that looked as if it were large enough to contain yet another floor. There was a tower above the east wing, rising even higher into the sky. It might have had a stained glass window in it, but it was so high up I couldn’t tell in the failing light.

The house was so enormous it looked like it should’ve been a public building. The lot on which it sat took up an entire city block and the house itself covered most of it. It was surrounded by an ancient iron fence, with a towering gate that we’d walked through as we drew closer.

We slowly walked around the entire house. I counted windows until I reached nearly two hundred and then gave it up. The yard was filled with tall grass, the remnants of ruined gardens, and old statuary that looked as if it just might come to life. The iron fence that surrounded the grounds gave me the uneasy feeling that I was inside a graveyard.

Around back there were two huge rooms made entirely of glass. Each was about the size of the gymnasium at school. All was dark within, but they looked like greenhouses or something. Full-grown trees could have fit inside!

I didn’t keep track of the time, but it seemed like it took half an hour to walk around the place. It was the size of a castle! Too bad it wasn’t a castle instead of a freaky architectural monstrosity.

“Let’s go inside,” Dad said once we were standing around front again.

“Do we...have to?” I asked. The light was failing fast. The last thing I wanted was to step inside that creepy old mansion at dusk. I could just picture the headline in the *Verona Citizen*—“Entire Family Disappears After Entering Notorious Mansion.”

“Of course we do,” Dad said, enthusiastically. “We’re going to live here!”

Dad practically had to push me toward the house. Both my parents were completely oblivious to my rising panic. I felt as if I was trapped in a bad horror film where stupid teenagers thoughtlessly went down into a basement where an ax murderer waited. In this case, the stupid teenagers were my parents and they were making me go with them!

The porch creaked as we stepped onto it. Dad handed out flashlights. I clutched mine as if my life depended on it. Dad opened the massive front door with a huge iron key and we flicked on our flashlights. I followed my parents into what was sure to become our tomb. My only hope was that Mom and Dad would realize their mistake and we could make a dash for the car before it was

too late.

We stepped inside a vast room. It was so large the beam of my flashlight couldn't penetrate to the far walls in the growing gloom. At first it put me in mind of a high school auditorium, but I could make out sofas, love-seats, chairs, and tables. No, it was more like a theatre lobby—or the lobby of a grand old hotel—only there wasn't much grand about Graymoor. Everything was dusty and the place smelled like old wood. Mom and Dad were obviously thrilled they'd bought the place. I just wanted to get the heck out of there as fast as possible!

The hair on the back of my neck stood straight on end. It had been that way since I'd first opened my eyes, but now even more so. I trembled with fear. There was no way I could live in this place! I couldn't even stand to be here! I wanted to go home.

"Would you like to go upstairs?" Mom asked. "You can pick out any room you want for your bedroom. There are dozens!"

My parents were just not getting it.

"It's too dark," I said. *And too nightmarish*, I thought to myself. *Can we just get out of here before someone dies?*

I didn't pay much attention as my parents dragged me through some of the first floor rooms. I was too terrified. Why weren't my parents frightened? Why weren't they running screaming from the house? It was the logical thing to do.

I swore I saw something following us as we moved from room to room. I could never quite be sure, but I thought I kept catching glimpses of it. More than anything, I could feel it. It was all I could do to keep from screaming.

Finally, Mom and Dad had their fill of exploring and we exited the three-dimensional horror film. I controlled myself and didn't bolt for the car. If I ran, I feared something might chase me. One thing was for certain—there was no way I was living in Graymoor Mansion! No way! I'd run away. I'd get my parents to send me to boarding school. I'd do whatever it took to stay away from that house!

## Chapter 1: My Best Friend Marty

I glanced to my side and in that fleeting moment I could read the tension in Marty's youthful form. Every muscle in his body was strained as if he was struggling against some great weight. I knew what was bearing down upon him so. We'd spent hours discussing it the night before, and many an hour before that over the preceding weeks.

I knew the difficulty of the path he was treading. I'd trod upon it myself barely a year before. Admitting to the world you're gay is not an easy task. Walking among your friends and class-mates the day after is even harder. Just entering Verona High School was without doubt a tremendous task for Marty, as it had been for me.

I knew Marty was wondering what awaited him beyond the doors before us. Would his friends stick by him, or draw away? Would the other boys at school hurl cruel taunts at him, or let him be? These and a thousand other worries were heaped upon Marty's young shoulders, just as they'd been loaded upon mine. Even though I was there to support him, even though I'd talked him through it all, I knew Marty had never faced a greater challenge than simply walking through the front doors of our old familiar high school.

I never really thought we'd reach this moment in time. I never thought Marty would be able

to summon to courage to admit what he was to the world. We'd talked about it certainly. Marty had made the decision to come out over and over again, and yet he'd never been quite able to own up to the task. All that had changed the night before, he'd come out in no uncertain terms.

My mind raced back to the dance. It was like so many other school dances, and yet, somehow, I knew it would be different. I loved to dance and had just finished a rather wild and crazy one with Zoë Peterson. Zoë was a good friend and loved to dance as much as I. We often danced together when she was between boyfriends, sometimes even when she wasn't. Her boyfriends didn't mind. They knew she was safe with me. They knew I wouldn't steal her away. There were a few advantages to being the school homo.

I took my usual place beside Marty and sipped on some punch. Marty wasn't much on dancing. He mainly went to dances to just hang out and talk. I was doubly surprised when he took my hand and pulled me out onto the dance floor. I didn't resist, just followed in amazement. I knew exactly what he was doing, but I still couldn't believe he had the balls to do it. Dancing with me was his way of letting everyone know he was gay.

*Phantom's* "Deep In The Darkness" echoed from the speakers at the side of the cafeteria. The voice of Jordan, the lead singer, helped calm me. Marty wrapped his arms around me and gently swayed to the slow song. I must admit I was more than a bit nervous myself. Everyone knew I was gay, but I'd never dared to dance with another boy in front of my classmates before. I could feel dozens and dozens eyes upon us—peering at us in amazement. My discomfort was eased by the knowledge they were looking at Marty more than me. I don't think anyone had ever guessed he was queer.

Despite the awkwardness of the situation, something felt right about it. I smiled at Marty, trying to put him more at ease. Marty was pale with fear, his eyes darted around nervously, and I could feel him trembling as he held me. He needed me. He needed someone who had already withstood the battering that came with being openly gay.

"Just look at me," I said. "Just focus on me. It's going to be okay."

Marty nodded and locked his eyes on mine. I smiled again.

No one taunted us, but we drew plenty of stares. There were quite a few glares from the boys in the gym too. I heard more than one of them quietly mutter "faggots" under his breath. I'm sure Marty heard it too and that made it all the more difficult. We'd discussed that before, however, and so were prepared for it. The world was not known for making things easy on gay boys or anyone who was different.

My head spun with amazement—after so long Marty had done it. He'd come out to all his friends. Little did I realize he wasn't finished. Marty intended to leave no doubts.

Marty stopped and peered deeply into my eyes. He leaned forward and pressed his lips to mine. He kissed me—right there in the middle of the dance! I was astounded as his lips met mine, even more so as he slipped his tongue into my mouth. Our dancing together had drawn stares, but nothing compared to our kiss. The whole dance practically stopped as Marty gave me the most passionate kiss of my life.

Our lips parted and Marty took me by the hand once more and led me from the dance floor. Eyes followed us and I heard "fucking faggots" issue from the lips of more than one of the boys around us. We stood to the side for a few minutes more, and then departed. Marty had done what he'd come to do.

My mind snapped back to the present. We walked inside V.H.S. and I could feel eyes upon us. Oliver peered wide-eyed at us while pretending to search through his locker. Tony Paulik kept

stealing glances of us as if he could not believe there were two real, live gay boys in his school. Others were far more bold. Jimmy Kerstadd glared at us. I swallowed hard. Jimmy was blond, built, beautiful, and a bad ass. He'd caught me checking him out once and I was still waiting for him to kick my ass. I silently prayed he'd let Marty and I pass in peace. We'd barely made it past Jimmy when Skye Mackenzie blocked our path. Skye was a darker version of Jimmy—just as built, just as beautiful, just as much of a bad ass, but with dark brown hair and eyes instead of Jimmy's blond and blue. Skye had never caught me checking him out, but if anything I was even more frightened of him. Skye was the type of guy who might do *anything*.

Skye gazed at us as if pondering whether or not to beat us both senseless. I trembled as I looked back at him. I couldn't meet his gaze for more than a few moments. How could someone so gorgeous be so terrifying at the same time? Skye shouldered past us without a word. Both Marty and I breathed a sigh of relief. I wondered if we'd make it through the day without getting our asses kicked.

The familiar sounds of chattering students and banging locker doors helped set me at ease a bit. Not everyone was as intimidating as Jimmy and Skye. Ha! No one was as intimidating as those two! No one dared cross either of them. Some of our classmates shot Marty and me hateful glares, but most seemed more curious than belligerent. I was happy to note that Marty's friends greeted him as they did every day. I could tell some were a bit uncomfortable, but even those seemed to go out of their way to say "hi" and thereby let Marty know that they were still friends. I knew Marty had a rough road ahead of him, but at least he wasn't an outcast.

One thing I noticed was that Kyle made a bee-line for Marty. Kyle's family had only moved to Verona a few weeks before from Colorado. Neither Marty nor I knew him well, but we'd both taken note of him. Kyle was a real cutie. He wasn't a hunk like Jimmy or Skye, but he looked like he'd stepped straight from the pages of *XY Magazine* (one of my favorites because of all its photos of cute boys). Kyle had short dark hair and dreamy brown eyes. His lips were definitely kissable. He was so sexy my heart beat a little faster near him. He wasn't paying much attention to me, however. His eyes were on Marty.

I couldn't quite read what was on Kyle's mind, but I had the feeling he was more than casually interested in my friend. I must admit I was a little jealous. It didn't bother me that another boy showed interest in Marty—we were friends after all and nothing more. That kiss on the dance floor was the sum total of our sexual contact. We were more like brothers than boyfriends. I was jealous because Kyle had eyes for Marty and not me.

I knew I was reading too much into the situation. True, Marty had just come out, and true, Kyle had never paid much attention to him before, but all Kyle did was ask to borrow Marty's calculus homework. That wasn't exactly what I'd call putting the moves on someone. No doubt my overactive imagination was once again causing me to read more into the situation than was there. Then again, there was something in Kyle's eyes... I tried to just be happy for Marty, but I couldn't quite force the jealousy from my heart.

Kyle wasn't the only one giving Marty the eye. I noticed Ken looking him over, too. I knew what was on Ken's mind without a doubt. Ken was one of the handful of openly gay boys at our school and he was a lot more vocal than most. He didn't take crap from anybody and he wasn't afraid to make a scene. If someone called him a fairy or something he just got right up in their face and asked them what their problem was. I had quite a bit of respect for him, but sometimes he took things too far. He was kind of militant and acted as if all the straight boys in school were the enemy. He didn't seem to realize that non-gay guys could be cool too.

I wasn't exactly happy about Ken taking an interest in my best friend. Marty was a bit naïve and innocent. Ken was not. He was a nice enough boy, but he'd definitely been around. I knew he wouldn't hesitate to pounce on Marty if he got the chance. I knew he wouldn't do anything to hurt him, but he'd do his best to get into Marty's pants. He'd have a good chance of succeeding too. Ken could just about charm the pants off a straight boy if he was in the mood (and according to Ken he'd done it). Ken wasn't exactly cute, but his reddish blond hair, blue eyes, and slim, tight body were hard to resist. My face reddened as I remembered what'd happened between us.

I made a mental note to speak Ken about Marty. I knew that if I explained the situation to him he'd back off. He'd even help Marty as he'd helped me. Ken had kind of been my mentor and just talking to him about things had made things a lot easier for me. Now, I was playing the mentor for Marty. We gay boys had to stick together!

I walked Marty to his first period class. I felt like his bodyguard or something. When some boy glared at him, or made an unkind remark, I was there to support him. I was like a shield protecting him.

I knew Marty would be especially vulnerable in his first few days as an out gay boy. During that time he'd be an attractive target for the anti-gay crowd. He'd also be inexperienced at protecting himself. I'd already gone through all that. I'd fought with words and fists. I still had to do so now and then, but nowhere near as often as I had to in the beginning. Until Marty got his bearings and grew a little stronger, I'd take care of him.

That task was upon me, even as I was thinking about it. I saw Alex coming down the hall toward us. I knew he'd have something to say. I wasn't wrong.

"Faggots," he said in greeting, as if it were his version of "good morning."

"Bite me, Alex" was my reply. I knew immediately I'd chosen my words poorly.

"You'd like that wouldn't you, Sean?"

"Fuck you, Alex."

"Yeah, you're just dying to aren't you, faggot? I bet you'd even be willing to pay for the privilege. Dream on, homo, this ass is staying virgin."

"Just like your dick," I shot back.

I shouldered past Alex. There was no reason to continue. Alex was a total ass. Neither Marty nor I put much value on his words; Alex did little more than cut down everyone he met. He was one of those guys who thought it was funny to greet girls with "bitch." Everyone thought he was a total creep. Everyone was right.

Before going in to class, Marty stopped and put his hand on my shoulder.

"Thanks for helping me through this, Sean."

"No problem," I said.

He smiled and turned away. I knew Marty was going to be just fine.

## **Chapter 2: Graymoor Mansion**

I was pissed. Marty stood me up. It was the night after he outed himself. I was supposed to meet him at our usual haunt, Ofarim's, a little burger and ice cream place not far from the school. He said he'd be there about eight. I was still waiting on him at eight-thirty. I couldn't stand waiting. Marty, and all my friends, knew I got all bent out of shape if they were late. It was something that really set me off. Sandy, the owner, let me use the phone and I called Marty's house. No answer. I sat in a booth for another twenty minutes, getting up a couple of times to feed the juke box a quarter so I could listen to *Hanson* and *Phantom* while I waited. The place was empty, which increased my

boredom and irritation. I looked at the clock when *MMMBOP* finished—it was nearly nine. I gave up and walked home.

It was a nasty night for a walk. Dark churning clouds blotted out the light of the moon. The wind got up and it started to rain. As if that wasn't bad enough, lightning streaked across the sky, creating a distant rumble that grew ever closer. I had depended on Marty to drive me home; he was the one with a car after all. He'd left me sitting. He'd abandoned me to the night. Had coming out changed Marty? Was he too busy making out with Kyle to be bothered with me? Was he getting friendly with Ken in the back of his car? I didn't know, but I was not happy about being stood up. *Marty had better have one good excuse or I'm going to kick his butt*, I thought to myself.

Actually, I was rather fond of storms, but not when I was caught out in them. I liked to watch them all comfortable and cozy from inside, or take long walks in the rain carrying a great umbrella. My walk home wasn't like that at all. I was without protection as the rain fell down with ever greater intensity, soaking my shirt and jeans. Already my shirt adhered to my chest and back as if it'd been stuck there with glue. It was distinctly uncomfortable. I shivered in the chill air.

The lightning created odd shadows as did the wind blown branches of the trees. I kept thinking I saw something moving off to one side or another. The creaking limbs, tumbling leaves, and other weird noises kind of creeped me out—walking alone, in the dark, in the rain, spooked me more than I care to admit.

My night went from bad to worse as the lightning fell closer and the rain pounded down harder. I began to run like a scared bunny. The lightening flashes were blinding—far too close for comfort and most definitely close enough for death. The thunder rent the air with a deafening roar, causing me to race forward ever faster in fear until finally I made it home.

When I looked up at the great house before me, a part of me wanted to just stay outside. No one was home and all the windows were dark. The whole place gave me the creeps. Despite my best efforts to avoid the freaky old house, we'd moved into the Graymoor Mansion two days before. I was uncomfortable there in the day-time and at night it could be downright terrifying. In the raging storm it looked like something right out of a horror movie.

I was dwarfed by the house. It was enormous. I looked up at the roof-line, four stories above, and saw the gargoyles staring down at me. They looked about the size of dogs from where I stood, but I knew they had to be huge. They looked almost alive as the rain and wind whipped around them. I almost felt as if they'd swoop down upon me and carry me off to the depths of Hell. I could swear their eyes glowed red.

The lightening rent the air so close by I was temporarily blinded by the intense, white light. The loud clap of thunder that followed made me jump straight into the air. That made up my mind for me and I rushed inside. I grabbed a flashlight I'd left for myself near the door and walked through the vast parlor toward the staircase.

Parlor didn't seem the right name for the room. Like everything at Graymoor, it was of colossal dimensions. It simply swallowed up all the ancient, dust covered sofas, chairs, and marble top tables that furnished it. It had enough sofas and loveseats for ten living rooms and still there was more than enough open floor space for a dance club or maybe a basketball court. It was like something you'd find in a fancy hotel and not a private home. My flashlight didn't even begin to penetrate the gloom and I hurried on, trying to ignore the musty scent of decay in the air, mingled with that of roses and lavender. It freaked me out for there were no roses or lavender in the room and likely hadn't been in a hundred years. I'd come to think of it as just another of Graymoor's little mind games. It was one more thing to try and forget when I closed my eyes at night. It was a part

of the feeling of foreboding that forever plagued me inside the old house.

Every shadow seemed like some unspeakable phantom just ready to reach out and grab me. My parents had to be out of their minds buying that old place. It was literally falling apart and no one had lived there for more than a hundred years. It would take another century to make it a decent place to live.

I jumped as the grandfather clock on the stair loudly chimed the hour. That old house was full of stuff that startled me. I wasn't exactly a coward, but I wondered if I've ever grow accustomed to that place. I doubted it. I just hoped my parents would come to their senses and sell it before some kind of Amityville horror thing went down and we all ended up as bloody corpses lying somewhere in the house.

When I reached my room on the third floor, I closed the door behind me and lit the oil lamp that sat on a stand by my bed. There was no electricity yet and wouldn't be for some time. The whole house had to be wired from the basement up. I'd never heard of a house that didn't have electricity, but Graymoor didn't. There were candle chandeliers and gas lights everywhere.

I was soaked to the skin and my breath came in gasps. I wasn't exactly a runner and having to dash so far in the lightning and rain was less than fun. I stripped. It was hard getting my clothes off, my shirt and boxers clung to my clammy skin. I hung them on the back of a chair to dry.

I caught sight of my reflection in the full-length mirror of the wardrobe and gazed upon my own body. I wasn't all that happy with the way I looked naked. I looked pretty good in clothes, but out of them was a different story entirely. I needed to drop a few pounds, maybe more than a few, and I definitely needed to put on some muscle. I'd been making some progress in both those areas, but I had a long way to go. I guess not everyone could look like those guys in fitness magazines. I wasn't even close.

Actually, I wasn't much interested in looking like those over-muscled guys in some magazines. They had too much of a good thing. They almost didn't look human. My goal was a firm, well-muscled body with flat abs and no fat. That's the kind of guy that got me excited, just an ordinary, in shape boy. That was my goal and I was slowly working my way toward it. I sometimes wondered if I'd ever get there, however. It was a long, hard road.

I slipped into some dry clothes. The flannel shirt felt good against my naked skin. The room was a little chilly—Graymoor was always chilly. I guess that was to be expected from a house heated by fireplaces. I hoped my parents would get a good furnace system installed by winter. I could just imagine how unbearable the house would be if they didn't.

I sat on the edge of my bed and looked around the room. The whole place creeped me out.

Everything there, except for myself and my few belongings, was just like it had been for more than a century. Even the furniture was older than the hills. The bed I slept in, the dresser I kept my clothes in, everything was from another age. I felt like I was living in a place where time had stopped.

My dresser especially creeped me out—there were little sphinxes on the handles that reminded me of evil little faces. I could swear their eyes followed me as I moved about my room. At night, I felt like they were staring at me, watching me, waiting their chance to do something to me.

The whole house had a very strange feel to it. Not exactly a bad feeling, just odd, although there was a sense of foreboding, too. When I say that everything there was exactly as it had been for

more than a hundred years, I'm not exaggerating. The day we moved in I opened the drawers of an antique cylinder desk downstairs and found letters and post cards from the 1860 and 70s. There were all kinds of receipts, one was for a year's subscription to the local paper and it was dated June 23, 1871. Throughout the house, it looked like the Graymoor family had just left and could be back at any second. I felt like I was sneaking around in someone else's house, instead of my own.

Even my own room felt like it belonged to someone else. The day I moved in, I had to take a bunch of clothes out of the wardrobe and dresser. There were shirts and pants just hanging there the way one would expect, except that they'd been hanging there for more than a century. The clothes were about my size. I had a feeling a boy my own age had lived in that room. I wondered what he was like and what he'd thought of the wallpaper decorated with hundreds of tiny roses. It was too girly for me. I made the room my own by tacking up *Phantom* and *Hanson* posters on the walls.

Even my bed had been untouched for a hundred years and more. Except for the layer of dust, it looked like someone had just made it and walked out of the room. I knew, however, that the last person to sleep in that bed had done so in the nineteenth century!

I didn't know what my parents were thinking when they bought Graymoor. Well, that wasn't quite true; I knew why they wanted it. They were obsessed with old things—Dad with truly ancient artifacts and Mom with things a hundred or so years old. They were always dragging home some old antique that they displayed with great pride. They spent most of every weekend looking for their little bits of junk—when Dad was home that is. My dad was an archaeologist and often as not he was gone, raising funds for his digs, or excavating somewhere like Williamsburg, Virginia or even York or Lincoln in the U.K. Sometimes, I didn't see him for weeks. Mom owned a little antique store in town and she was forever running around to auctions and yard sales looking for merchandise. I knew they had to love that scary old house; it was stuffed from top to bottom with just the kind of dusty old crap they loved. My parent's obsession with the past seemed a harmless enough pass-time until they went off the deep end and bought Graymoor Mansion. Everyone knew it was haunted and no one dared to go inside. It had been up for sale for more than twenty years and not one person had bothered to even look at it. Anyone with any sense at all stayed far away. And what did my parents do? They bought it!

My parents were totally obsessed with restoring the old mansion to just the way it was in the 1870s. Even though Mom ran an antique store and Graymoor could keep it supplied with merchandise forever, not a single item was going to be removed from the house. Mom had already made that quite clear. I wasn't even allowed to take the clothes out of my wardrobe and dresser until Dad photographed everything. He was treating our house like it was one of his excavations. Everything had to be recorded in its exact location. My parents were planning the restoration of Graymoor and everything had to be exactly like it was before, even the wallpaper and color of the paint. Like I said—they were obsessed.

I would much rather have stayed in our old home. It wasn't nearly as big, but it was from the right century, and it had cool things like electricity and television! Our old house was only four blocks away, but it might as well have been a million. I wasn't even allowed to bring the furniture from my old room. My parents said it wasn't right for Graymoor. Just about everything from the old house was sold at an auction. I was lucky I got to keep my stereo. My parents were forcing me to live in the past. I wasn't one bit happy about being exiled to that old mansion.

Graymoor freaked me out. I'd already been hearing weird noises at night, sounds like footsteps and distant voices. I even thought I'd seen someone walking down the hall, but it was

probably only a trick of the light. One thing that really creeped me out was the cat I saw running down the hall. I didn't think much about it until I remembered we didn't have a cat. When I looked back at it, it was gone. I ran down the hall looking for it, but there was no sign of it at all. I had the feeling I'd seen a ghost cat, although Graymoor was so huge I bet a wild one could've been living in there. I didn't even want to think about what else might be wandering the halls.

Who knew what horrors lay waiting in that old house? Everyone knew it was a murder house. Even if it had happened more than a hundred years before it didn't alter the fact that old man Graymoor had went nuts and hacked his entire family to bits with an ax. That's why the house had sat empty all those years. Then there were those teenagers who disappeared a few decades before. I didn't even want to think about what happened to them. No one dared to live in the Graymoor Mansion after the murders—not until my family took up residence. I didn't exactly feel honored to be the first. The thought of those ax murders scared the shit out of me. If I ever found out old man Graymoor had murdered someone in my bed I was going to be sick.

I don't think Graymoor would have been quite so scary if it wasn't so damned huge. I'd been doing a lot of exploring, but I hadn't even been in most of the rooms. Some of the halls had some really weird turns in them and it was easy to get lost. Whoever built that place was one bizarre guy. There were doors where there didn't look like there were doors, and there were doors that didn't go anywhere at all. I found one room filled with really cool old toys—board games, teddy bears, little horses and wagons, and more. There was a train and even a miniature carousel that still worked. I didn't have time to even begin to explore that room. I intended to get back to it, but when I looked for it again, I couldn't find it. It was like it was just gone. I knew it was there somewhere, but I just couldn't figure out where. I guessed I'd just have to wait until I stumbled upon it once more, but I had no idea how long that would take. Sometimes, I swear the hallways changed. I'd go down one I thought was familiar and it didn't go where it'd gone before. Probably I just wasn't in the hallway I thought I was, but I wasn't so sure. Something told me the house itself was alive.

I wouldn't have been surprised one bit if there were secret rooms and passages in that old house. It was so big that it just wasn't possible to figure out where everything was. I don't think anyone would have had any trouble at all hiding entire rooms in there. Who knew what was in that old mansion?

Where were my parents? They knew that old house freaked me out and they'd promised to stick around as much as they could. I knew I'd be abandoned, however. I had pretty good parents, but they were both way too busy for their own, or my, good. Sometimes I felt like an orphan. I could actually go for days without seeing them. That could be pretty cool sometimes, but I didn't like it so much now.

I looked out the window and watched the storm rage through the streets. The rain came down in sheets and the wind blew it along the distant pavement like waves on the sea. I still had a chill from being soaked to the bone. I didn't appreciate being abandoned to the storm one bit. When I saw Marty the next day there would be hell to pay.