

# The Abandoned

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The Alborn Manor had laid deserted on the outskirts of town, abandoned decades prior following the owner's strange death. Years of inclement weather had left it in disrepair, a case that was obvious to everyone in town. But to the ignorant daydreamer that was Francis Prescott, this house merely needed a good vision and some elbow grease. So with his wife by his side, renovation tools in hand, and a vivid imagination under his foot, Prescott took the first step into their new home.

Francis entered the house and promptly tossed his tools aside, looking around in awe as he strolled down the halls. Lucy, carrying the heavier tools, gently placed them down and kicked the piles against the wall before examining the house. The inside was dark and sullen, lit only by small patches of sunlight drifting in through the broken windows. *That's not too bad I suppose*, she thought to herself, *we can just get those replaced*. Then, she noticed that most of the floorboards were cracked, and how they creaked with each step she took through the house. And then finally, she had realized that a thin layer of dust had been collected over the decades, and had shrouded nearly every inch of the interior.

During their first walk through the house, Francis caught a glimpse of Lucy's disappointed stares.

"Cheer up love," he said before kissing her cheek, "with our efforts, this house will be back in its glory days in no time."

But Lucy wasn't having it.

"Francis, I'm sorry but I truly don't think we can make this place any less of an eyesore."

"How so?"

"Look around!" she cried, "This place is *far* beyond salvation, and I'm beginning to doubt that it's ever even seen better days."

He stopped and turned to her.

"Haven't you ever heard the stories?" he asked, astonished.

Lucy guiltily shook her head. So as the pair made their way towards the stairs, Francis began to tell her a story.

In the old days back when the manor was in its prime, it was one of the most sought-after properties in the country. Edward Alborn—the previous owner—had ordered it to be constructed for him and his most recent wife, Emily. Every week, Edward would throw huge and magnificent parties, to which hundreds of nobles from across all of England would flood in. Even the commoners often found themselves drifting towards the

mansion, happy to witness even a bit of the marvels that took place within the lavish walls.

"Surely they couldn't have been *that* exciting" Lucy cut in.

Francis shook his head eagerly.

"Quite the contrary," He exclaimed, "Some even say that the Queen herself became jealous upon hearing the praises."

But despite its outward charm, the manor concealed a darker truth. You see, many people believed that Alborn was a benevolent man, never thinking he could be anything less than generous. This was the outcome of Alborn's meticulous configuration of his character. He was a smart man. He had buried his corrupt heart far beneath the golden display. And it worked. No one ever suspected the true evil that masqueraded as virtue. At the time, only his wife saw him for what he really was underneath, but she held no power to do anything about it. She was never allowed to leave the manor unsupervised, and any mail she received had to first go through her husband. Alborn had effectively managed to cut off any ties she carried with the outside world. He had clipped her wings and confined her to a gilded cage for only him to admire.

Even with the great deal of attendees, Miss Emily had never felt so alone. And so eventually, she found herself a secret paramour.

One day, when Alborn returned home early from a business trip, he found Emily in bed with the man. To say he was livid was a severe understatement. Some say Alborn beat her senseless. Others say he berated her loud enough to wake the town. But one thing was for sure: no one ever saw Miss Emily again. She likely fled town with her new lover after the incident.

"Oh my..." Lucy uttered.

"Yep," Francis chuckled, "But that's all just a tall tale."



Once the Prescotts had reached the top of the stairs, they were met with a wall of yellowed and dirtied paintings. Lucy, who figured that there must have been over a hundred, was curiously examining each one as she went by. She noticed every gash in the canvases, each broken frame, and all of the dusty silhouettes of the ones that must have been stolen long before. Many of the things of value were likely ransacked after Alborn's disappearance anyway, Lucy presumed.

The two were headed for the bedroom, until suddenly, Lucy spotted something peculiar out of the corner of her eye. She glanced over to the wall

once more, and noticed that one of the paintings had been covered up by a sheet of cloth. Intrigued, she felt herself being drawn towards it. Once face to face with the strange cloth, she gently pulled it off to reveal the last portrait. Immediately, Lucy was stunned. Unlike all of the other paintings, this one appeared to be in perfect condition.

Stepping back, she was able to make out the figure more clearly. In the painting stood a young, fair woman with pale blue eyes. Her skin was shockingly pallid, as if the sunlight had never graced her skin. Looking closer, Lucy noticed that the woman's eyes seemed quite sad, soon registering the frown on the mysterious lips.

"Francis?" Lucy called out, never losing sight of the painting.

"What is it?" replied Francis, who was wandering through the corridor.

"Who is the lovely lady in the portrait?"

Francis approached behind her, his gaze finally making its way towards the portrait. Then, he stood silent.

"Oh wow," he muttered after a moment.

"What?" said Lucy, "who is it?"

"If I'm not mistaken, I think that's a portrait of Miss Emily Alborn."

The pair watched the painting for a minute more, before backing away to continue their exploration of the house. To Lucy, there was something strange about that painting. She had a strange feeling that it was watching her somehow, but she couldn't put her finger on it. So as she was walking off, right as she lost sight of the painting, she decided to brush it off.



Now the Prescotts had reached the master bedroom. Together, they slowly opened the door to reveal a room that was completely barren, with the exception of an old sagging bed. Then, Francis went to crack open the window in an attempt to clear some of the dust that had been accumulating presumably for decades. Lucy sat on the bed, almost immediately sinking into the worn-out mattress. Her eyes quickly took to the walls, tracing the wallpaper and dancing on all the delicate patterns that had, amazingly, been left untouched by the rest of the world.

Until suddenly, her eyes stopped at an unusual-looking area where the wallpaper had been torn, revealing the bricks underneath. Lucy stood up, her curiosity quickly drawing her towards them. Looking at the bricks from her angle, she could tell right away that something was off with a few of the bricks. And strangely enough, she was right. Not only were some of them a lighter color, but after running her hands along the wall, she realized that

they were also uneven. They jutted out from the wall in a way unlike the others, but just subtly enough that a person could easily skim over them.

Eventually Francis found his way over, after the window refused to budge. He stood behind Lucy as she was carefully analyzing the bricks. Quickly, he was baffled.

"Love, what on earth are you doing?"

She spun around to meet him.

"Don't you notice anything different with these bricks?" she asked.

He was dumbfounded.

"I'm serious," she grumbled, "There's something wrong with them."

Deeply confused, and a little worried, Francis was struggling to find the right words.

"I think you're just tired, dear. Why don't we get some rest?" he said, slowly leading her to bed.

It became obvious to her that Francis would need more convincing in order to believe her. Though, even she found it a little hard to believe herself. So she sulkily trudged over to the bed, and resigned herself to sleep.

Early the next morning, while Francis had left to fetch some materials, Lucy was stretched out on one of the old divans to read. That was when she first began to hear it: the faint whispers. At first, she thought it was likely the wind brushing against the house, so she ignored it and continued reading. But the noise persisted, and she could no longer focus on her book.

So she listened.

And soon, she came to the sickening realization that the noise was coming from inside the house. So she hesitantly put her book down and rose to investigate. While following the dull scratching, Lucy was led down the hallway, up the stairway, and directly to the bedroom door. Confused, and more than a little frightened, Lucy carefully and quietly cracked open the door. And to her slight relief, the room was still empty. Entering the bedroom, she crept closer and closer towards the sound. When she had finally reached the source, she became frozen. A sudden chill ran up her spine, and she staggered backwards.

The scratching noises were coming from inside the exposed brick wall.

"It, it must be rats," her voice shook, "Yes, this house is so old it must be *infested* with them."

And although she managed to convince herself of this, something still remained in the back corner of her mind. Whatever it was that murmured through the wall sounded very different from the rats she'd ever heard

before. It almost sounded bigger—more distinct. But if she ever admitted this to Francis, he would certainly call her insane. And so, after disregarding her crazed imaginations, she drifted slowly back to the parlor.



The next evening, it happened again. Lucy and Francis were replacing the broken windows together when she began to hear it. Except this time, it sounded much louder—like it was trying to call out to her, Lucy thought. She stepped down from the window and began moving towards the sound.

“Lucy?” Francis called.

But she could not hear him, for she was being drawn towards the sound. Then, Francis jumped down and took hold of her arm.

“Lucy, stop this at once!” he demanded.

He grabbed hold of her shoulders and spun her to face him. He shook her desperately, trying to wake her up from whatever daze she’d gotten herself into.

“Lucy!”

Her face remained locked on the stairway. Her ears were twitching ever so slightly from sounds he wasn’t worthy of hearing, and her mouth was muttering a hushed whisper he wasn’t allowed to know. This is how Lucy perceived it. Then, running out of ideas, Francis did the only thing he could think of and slapped her hard across the face.

The room fell silent.

Lucy turned to look at him, terrified. Her mouth was agape, and her eyes began to fill with tears. Francis, after realizing what he’d done, pulled her into a tight hug.

“Lucy...” he soothed, “I didn’t mean to. You know I didn’t mean to.”

She remained silent. Francis kissed her on the forehead.

“Love?”

She didn’t look at him either. She turned her face away, trying to keep herself from crying.

“Lucy, why don’t you run into town for a bit and get some bread? It’ll give you some time to calm yourself down.”

She went out the door and towards the town, without ever uttering a single word.



While the sun resigned itself to the cool embrace of dusk, Lucy made her way through the town. She dragged angrily down the sidewalk, looking

for a bakery. After a while she found a small baker that was squished between two larger buildings, something she likely would have missed had she not been looking. She opened the door to enter. Instantly, she was hit by a beautiful wave of aromas that made her even hungrier. Looking around, she noticed she was the only shopper.

"Oh, finally! A customer!"

Lucy turned towards the sound, at which stood the shopkeeper. She was a plump, jolly little old woman, whose smiling face barely reached over the counter. Her glasses were huge, and they formed her eyes into miniscule dots. Her wrinkled skin stirred joyfully about her round face when she smiled.

"Well don't just stand there!" she said eagerly, "Come in! Come in!"

Lucy walked over to the counter to order.

"I'd just like a loaf of bread, please." Lucy told the old woman.

"Sure thing, sweets."

The little old lady waddled over to the shelves. She pulled out a loaf of brioche and placed it on the counter.

"Will this do?"

"Yes, thank you ma'am."

"Please, call me Verity." The lady said charmingly.

"Very well Miss Verity. I am Lucy Prescott."

"Prescott?" The old woman blurted out, "Aren't you the folks that moved into that old mansion?"

Lucy nodded.

Miss Verity quickly leaned closer to whisper, "Don't you people know the history of that old thing?"

"Yes, about Miss Emily running away with another man" Lucy replied.

Miss Verity was silent for a minute. Then, she began to laugh. She started cackling as she walked over to the door, flipping the sign over to 'closed'.

"Oh honey," she smiled, wiping a tear from her eye, "You really don't know a thing, do you?"

Miss Verity sat down at a little table in the corner, motioning for Lucy to do the same. Lucy hurriedly pulled over a chair and joined her.

"Oh my, where do I begin?" Verity muttered to herself. Shortly, she determined where to start, and cleared her throat.

"You know that the two had a fight before Emily's disappearance?" asked Miss Verity.

"Yes, my husband told me about that." Lucy replied.

Miss Verity leaned in.

"But did he ever tell you about what happened to Alborn afterwards?"

Lucy then said no, so Miss Verity began recounting the full story.

After the fight broke out between the Alborns, Emily was never heard from, or even seen, ever again. Many of the residents assumed she skipped town with that young lover of hers. But to the youthful Miss Verity—the lover of all things gossip—that just didn't cut it. She had been asking around town, and no one ever once saw Emily again after the incident. Alborn became a complete recluse. He never stepped foot outside the manor, and he had ordered that all the doors be sealed shut from the outside.

So Miss Verity started peeping in through the windows. She never heard the voice of Emily Alborn once, nor saw her at all. However, she often picked up on Alborn talking to himself. He was talking as if Emily was still there. The old man must have finally gone insane, Verity thought.

Months passed, and Alborn's rants had become more delusional. Verity had once seen him walking back and forth in the bedroom, looking like he was talking to the wallpaper. Each time she had spied through the windows, there was a sicklier version of the man she saw the day prior. It was like watching the living dead shift throughout the room, his steps teetering like a puppet learning to walk without his strings. She also noticed that his hair was shedding rapidly, and his skin became ghastly. He must have been starving to death, she would think to herself. With each passing day, Verity noticed his eyes becoming more and more alone.

Then one day, when she was snooping through the bedroom window, she saw the lifeless body of Edward Alborn contorted on the ground beside a torn-off piece of the wallpaper—that much she could remember. His skin was almost pure white, and the once lonely eyes now stared blankly into the distance. A guttural scream erupted from her throat, and soon Verity was racing off to tell someone.

After that, the house was put up for sale, but none in town ever had the gall to buy it. So it sat alone for decades on the edge of town.

"That is, until your husband purchased it" Miss Verity finished.

Lucy, in her disbelief, didn't know what to say. But looking past Miss Verity and out the window, she'd realized just how dark the sky had gotten. Lucy quickly stood up and scrambled for her coin purse.

"How much do I owe you?"

"Darling, it's on the house" the old woman smiled. So Lucy thanked her kindly as she took the bread from the counter, and left the store with much to think about. On her walk home in the dark, it began to rain.



That night, a thunderstorm was brewing over the house. The rain drummed heavily against the roof, but Lucy could hardly hear it. It was drowned out by the noises she was hearing once again from behind the wall. The last time she'd heard it, it was much louder than the first. But this time, the sound was almost deafening—berating her ears while her husband snored faintly beside her.

When Lucy had heard the noise for the first time, she thought it sounded like faint whispering. But now, it was much louder, and she could now fully distinguish what it was.

*It was the sound of weeping.*

She sat up in bed, completely enthralled by the noise, and stared at the bricks. Her eardrums were pounding, sending horrendous vibrations bouncing around her skull. As the rain began to pour heavier, Lucy listened to the wailing that consumed her thoughts like a siren song. Then, her thoughts began to take over.

*There's something in the wall.*

She crawled out of bed and drifted down the stairs that curled and descended into the foyer. She took a candle from the wall and floated consciously through the corridor until she'd reached the parlor.

*It's trying to get out.*

She entered the room and looked around before she saw the pile of renovation tools. Quietly, Lucy sorted through until she found the sledgehammer at the bottom.

*It's calling for me to free it.*

She hauled the hefty tool up the stairs and dragged it down the hall, passing each painting until she'd arrived at the bedroom door. Lucy pushed open the door and walked dazedly over to the bricks. She raised the sledgehammer the same instant as a bolt of lightning that struck the roof.

***THERE'S SOMETHING IN THE WALL!***



Without warning, Lucy smashed the steel against the bricks, jolting Francis from his sleep. Quickly, he caught his breath and jumped up to stop her.

"What the hell are you doing!?" he yelled, trying to pry the hammer out of her hands.

But she continued on. With each crack of thunder, she drove the tool into the brick wall, causing the house to tremble in fear.

"Lucy, stop this at once!"

"Can't you hear?" she cried frantically, "She's crying to be freed!"

Lucy continued to swing.

"Love, you've gone mad!" Francis screamed, "We can fetch a doctor in the morning, and he can fix whatever is wrong with you!"

But he was thrown backwards by the sledgehammer. Lucy heaved the hammer up and drew it backwards, and with one final roaring blow, the brick wall crumbled to pieces. A plume of dust emerged and quickly dispersed, filling the room with an overwhelming putrid smell that made the pair both retch. What once was a brick wall, was now a small opening into a dark, narrow room that reeked of decay. Francis peeked into the room, and instantly fell back, mortified. Chained up in the corner of the room were the decaying remains of a person. The flesh had rotten off its bones, tarnishing the once opulent dress below. One of its pale blue eyes was left in a socket, and above it were patches of blonde hair still attached to the skull. Its jaw looked broken in several places.

The Prescotts stood horrified in the darkness as the rain continued to pour. Yet somewhere in the darkness, down the hall and amongst the paintings, the portrait of the young woman showed her gratitude with a smile.