

Windows

The coach had arrived at dusk, and it had taken her a while to feel at home at Schoeffley Manor. She was still awake now, watching the black, bare branches of the oak sway in the gray moonlight. The window was open and the mauve curtains, hung especially for her homecoming, flew slowly away from the window and back again as the wind blew and then ceased. The candle on her nightstand flickered and soon was blown out by the breeze. She sat up sharply and blinked in the sudden darkness.

Slowly she pushed down her covers and slipped out of bed, the icy floor creaking under her warm feet. She slipped into her robe and went over to the window. From her window seat she could see the cobblestone road, its grayness illuminated by the moonlight. She heard the faint whinny of the horses in the stable. The dark lawn was damp with the night's mist, and she felt tiny drops of rain fall onto her face. She shut the window quickly and tied the curtains together with the pink ribbon. Slowly, she walked back to her bed, the canopy's fringe brushing her forehead. She dropped the robe to the floor, jumped into bed, and pulled the blanket up to her chin.

She awoke hours later to the sound of rain driving against her window and the wind ferociously howling. She heard the branches scraping against the roof. She did not want to be alone that night.

She took her robe and slippers and hurried out of her room and into the hall. A window was open, and the rain was making a puddle on the floor below it. She closed it and hurried to the library, where the shutters banged noisily against the frame of the window. She ran over and shut them. She then turned to run out when the window flew open and a gust of wind blew in. With trembling fingers she slammed it shut. But it opened once more and she slammed it shut again. Again and again until, exhausted, she shut it a final time, but it opened once more and the glass shattered at her feet. Branches blew in with a gust of wind, and her sop- ping nightgown clung to her wet skin. The violent wind blew her drenched hair around her head, and the room turned black.

She couldn't see.

Desperately she groped through the blackness to find the door. Her shaking fingers found the frigid knob and pulled it. The door flung open and she raced down the stairwell. The marble chilled her feet and the polished wooden banister was slippery under her damp hands. Arriving at the bottom, she hurried to Hannah's quarters and banged loudly on the maid's door. Hannah opened the door, with a white shawl around her shoulders and a white candle in her hand.

"Why, Miss Deborah, what happened?" she whispered.

"Oh, Hannah," Deborah gasped, out of breath, "don't you hear the storm? The windows, the wind banging against the windows!"

"Come in," Hannah beckoned. "See outside, it is not raining. You must have had a bad nightmare. The ground is dry and the sky is clear. Do you not see Polaris?" She pointed to the shining star.

"Yes, but—"

"Miss Deborah, you will get chilled. Go change into dry garments before you get ill. I will see you at breakfast," Hannah said, and she shut her door.

Deborah looked at the grandfather clock's face and saw it was nearly two o'clock. She quietly started towards the guest bedroom across the hall. She took a blanket from the chair and curled up on the sofa when she spotted the window in that room. Deborah got up, closed the shutters, crept back to the couch, and fell asleep. ★

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