



The House Cleaners
by
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“Ahh, another day, another housecleaning job,” Jack thought as he walked to the car, Steve trailing along behind. Jack slid behind the wheel and shook his head as his partner deposited his case of tools in the back before clambering into the passenger seat. He really wasn’t in the mood for breaking in a new guy. “What the hell was Charles thinking, going back to the church? How could he do that?”

Well, nothing to be done about it now. He sized up his new partner and sighed. Young. Very young. And green as green could be. Looks like he climbed off a fashion magazine cover. “Why me?”

Steve smiled at him. “So, my first job. How do you want to handle this partner?”

“We are not partners,” Jack growled. “You are my apprentice and I am your trainer. What you need to do is shut up and pay attention. First, do you understand what we are supposed to do?”

Steve shrugged. “We are hired by Ever After Real Estate Services to... Well, to clean...um... ghosts out of houses so they can sell them. Is that correct?”

“Exactly.”

“You mean, they’re serious? There are actually ghosts in these houses? For real?”

“Listen bud. We have a serious job to do. I’m the clairvoyant and you are the priest...”

“Seminarian. I didn’t complete my vows.”

“Wonderful. At any rate, we both have our jobs to do. So if you are having any problems with faith or belief, I would like to know right now. Because I am not going into a haunted house with a partner who doesn’t believe in ghosts or the afterlife.”

“Ok. I believe. I believe.”

“You had better.” Jack started the car and put it into gear.

Steve began humming under his breath, “Da da, tah da dah, who you gonna call?”

“Stop that!” Jack snarled.

“Ok.” Steve slumped sheepishly in his seat and Jack exhaled a loud sigh.

They pulled up in front a large, gothic-style manor house.

“Typical,” Jack thought. Exactly the kind of house you would expect to be haunted. The way Jack saw it, Ever After Real Estate was doing it all wrong. Instead of paying him to remove the ghosts,



they should be charging extra for having one. After all, nutballs who buy houses like this may actually appreciate having them haunted.

As they stood at the foot of the sidewalk, thunder pealed overhead. Jack shook his head and smiled grimly. Nice touch. At least they were expected. He started down the sidewalk.

Steve followed, hauling his heavy case with him. “That was a coincidence. Right?”

“Sure.” As he got to the door, Jack reached in his pocket for the key, but before he could get it out, the door creaked slowly open in front of him. “So was that. Come on.”

Jack walked quickly into the house. Steve stepped inside and froze in the doorway, looking nervously around.

“Move your ass!” Jack grabbed Steve’s sleeve and yanked him inside as the door slammed shut with a crash.

“Lesson one. Never stand in doorways or stick your head out open windows!” Jack admonished. Steve was on his knees, his hands trembling as he opened his case and removed a crucifix. He stood up, holding the cross in shakily in front of him with both hands.

“If you want to get through this, you need to obey my orders without question. Otherwise...” Jack paused, his senses reaching outward. “Uh oh. Duck!” He dropped to the floor.

“What?” The heavy book caught Steve square in the forehead, laying him out on his back, the crucifix flying into a dark corner of the room.

Jack helped Steve to his feet. “Boy. You are going to have to be quicker than that if you want to do this job.” He looked at the red lump forming on Steve’s forehead. “You going to be ok?”

“Yeah,” Steve said shakily as he dug in his case, removing a much plainer cross and a holy water aspergillum. He stood up and they surveyed the large foyer for the first time. Fortunately, there was enough light coming through the large windows so they could see reasonably clearly. He followed as Jack led them into a much larger main room with the standard giant chandelier and spiral staircase.

“I hope I don’t have to warn you not to walk under the chandelier.”

“No. I saw that movie.”

“Good. Ok then. Let’s find our host, or ghost, as it were.” Jack closed his eyes and concentrated. His head rotated like a radar antenna. Suddenly his eyes snapped open. “Oh No! Not here!”

“What is it?”



A mist began to form in the centre of the floor and gradually took the shape of a young woman. The apparition smiled at Jack. “Hello Jack. Wonderful to see you again.”

“Lilly! How many times have I told you not to bother me at work?”

“She’s my ex,” Jack said dryly. “And she’s not supposed to be here.”

“Your ex is a...”

“It’s complicated. Let’s not make a big deal of it. Lilly! I have work to do, so would you mind haunting someone else?”

“Jack. That isn’t very polite. You haven’t even introduced me to your new friend. What happened to Charlie?”

“Charles decided to return to the church. This is my new partner, Steve. Now could you please let us work?”

“Charlie left? Oh dear. I hope it wasn’t anything I did. Steve seems very young.”

“He is young. And he’s new on the job, so please be nice.”

“Is Lilly aware that she is your ex?” Steve asked.

“That’s one of the complicated parts. Lilly, we really have work to do so if you don’t mind...”

“Oh Jackie. Please don’t be mad. I just dropped by to say hello.”

Steve faced Lilly, his cross stiff-armed in front of him, his other hand shaking the aspergillum, sending a spray of holy water towards the apparition. “The power of Christ compels you. The power of...”

“Christ! Is this kid for real?” Lilly screeched.

“He’s new Lilly. Please humour him.”

“Oh, if you say so Jackie,” Lilly began to hiss and flow into a puddle on the floor.

“I’m m-m-e-el-l-t-i-n-g...” The puddle sizzled, bubbled, then disappeared entirely.

“Oh for God’s sake...” Jack shook his head.

“Well that wasn’t too difficult,” Steve said.

“Duck!”

“What?” This time the book caught him in the bridge of the nose, sending blood spraying across the room as he crashed to the floor again.

“Damn it Lilly,” Jack yelled. “Now I’ve got blood all over my shirt.”

He yanked open Steve’s case and used his purple priest’s stole to staunch his bleeding nose.

“Lilly! That wasn’t funny!”



Lilly reappeared in front of him. “That is a matter of opinion. That kid is a royal pain in the...”

“Lilly. Can’t we discuss this some other time? This isn’t even your haunting.”

“Jack darling. I’ve missed you. Haven’t you missed me?” She saw Steve reaching for his case and with a wave of her hand sent it skittering into the middle of the floor.

“Look Lilly, we’ve been through this before.” Then Jack saw Steve chasing after his case. “Oh shit. No!”

He slammed into Steve and threw them both against the far wall as the chandelier crashed down on Steve’s case. Jack looked Steve in the eye. “Kid, I really don’t think you’re cut out for this work.”

He spun around to face Lilly. “Lilly. Would you mind not trying to kill my partner? I...”

Then he realized that she wasn’t paying any attention to him. A second apparition was in the room, a tall, slim male apparition. They were weaving and circling each other appraisingly. They also seemed to be locked in some non-verbal conversation.

Finally Lilly separated from the other ghost and returned to Jack. “I don’t know how to tell you this Jack,” she said, “but it’s over between us. I think I have found someone more my type. Don’t worry about the house. You can have it. I have a nice little condo on the South Side and I’ve invited Randy to come back and haunt it with me. Take care Jack. Please apologize to Steve for me.”

“See you around Lilly.” Jack watched as the two ghosts faded away. Then he turned to where Steve was sitting on the floor, still holding his stole to his bleeding nose. “So kid, how did you like your first day on the job?”

“Last day, Jack,” Steve said. “You’re right. I’m not cut out for this.”

“Not everyone is,” Jack agreed. “Come on. Let’s head back to the office and break the news to them.” Jack helped Steve up and walked him back to the car.

He paused for a moment and looked back at the house. He smiled wistfully and began to sing, “Love is kinda crazy with a spooky little girl like you,” under his breath.

Then he got into the car. Oh well. Another day, another haunted housecleaning job.

