



*Wicked
Moon*

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AWARD WINNING AUTHOR



In 1863, a captain built a 19th Century mansion on Cape Cod Bay. Secrets destroyed his family, and led to the death of his daughter. Belinda's ghost strolled the widow's walk, waiting for her love to return. Determined to restore the mansion, handed down for generations, Kelli returns to Manomet to find a developer has claimed ownership of the property. Will Kelli stand her ground, risking her life to hold on to her beloved Manomet Mansion?

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CHAPTER 1

Manomet, Massachusetts
Present

Kelli Goddard's stomach tensed when she recalled the letter she received two weeks ago. Compelled to deal with the property tax issue herself on her inherited mansion on Cape Cod Bay, she turned into the uneven rocky driveway on Manomet Point Road just as dusk set in. Intertwined, overgrown knotweed had created an impenetrable barrier that hid the old mansion from the two-lane road. She slowly crept up the winding drive.

At the top of the driveway, she came to a halt. The silhouette of the house reminded her of a horror flick movie set. The dilapidated mansion had obviously been neglected too long. No lights were on, inside or out. An upstairs window had been boarded on the top quarter panel, crooked steps and a slanted porch obvious even in the growing darkness.

Something creaked, maybe a shutter, maybe not. Goosebumps traveled up her arm and caressed her spine. Not knowing what she faced, her breathing quickened.

She parked and rolled up the window in her decade old Jeep and grabbed the bulky flashlight from the cracked leather passenger seat. She had been afraid of the dark since a small child. Her pulse quickened. Fallen tree limbs, uneven stones, and warped steps caused her

balance to falter. It was as if the old house warned her to leave. Nevertheless, she bravely faced the ten-foot double wooden doors.

Imposing overgrown lilacs and wisteria, tangled with bittersweet, swayed with the strong north wind and clamored like a woman with long nails, scraping wood on the side of the house. The wind swirled restlessly and sounds emitted from the interior.

Was someone whining or crying? No, it was just her imagination.

With fumbling cold fingers, despite it being late June, she propped the flashlight between her bare knees and struggled with the padlock. After several attempts to unlock it, she tried to force it only for the padlock to smash her stiff ring finger before giving in.

“Damn,” she muttered, shaking her injured appendage. Then she mustered all her strength to push open the cumbrous doors. Rusted hinges creaked loudly. Her ears vibrated.

She hated to admit, but she was scared shitless. Her heart beat fast and hard; she held her breath. She focused the flashlight beam up the massive curved staircase, catching a red reflection at the top. Was that Belinda, the ghost she’d seen as a child? Strong drafts hurled dust and debris through the ray.

The batteries in the flashlight weakened and drained fast. If there had been moonlight, it might have helped her strained eyes. She’d driven over twenty hours straight from Illinois.

A board creaked on the second floor. A piercing wail reverberated throughout the house. She quivered. Maybe she should leave and come back tomorrow during daylight?

Without warning, a crushing blow smashed the side of her head. Luminous streaks of light flashed around her as the darkness overtook her.

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When Kelli woke, her head pulsed which quickly reminded her something serious had happened. Her eyes darted around the pristine white room. She searched for anything familiar. An IV machine beeped next to her. Doctors and nurses scurried in the hall with stethoscopes draped around their necks.

Why am I here?

“Miss Goddard?” The doctor strolled into the room with a small laptop in his hand. “I’m Doctor Brown and you’re one lucky lady.” He stepped closer and made eye contact. “If that blow had been a quarter of an inch closer to your temple, I’m afraid the outcome would have been significantly different. The CT scan didn’t show any swelling of the brain, which is remarkable given the size of the wound to your skull.”

“What happened?” Her fingertips recognized the gauze surface which covered the side of her head, the wound tender to the touch. “I don’t remember anything.”

The young intern stepped to the right side of her bed, leaned down and flashed a bright light in each eye temporarily blinding her. “That’s not uncommon with head injuries, ma’am. Actually, Officer Scott is here to ask a few questions, or I can tell him to come back tomorrow.”

Acid swelled in her throat. Her body was sore, reminding her of the time she’d flipped over the handlebars of her bicycle at twelve.

“You have a concussion, so you may experience dizziness, nausea, or blurred vision, all normal symptoms. We’re going to keep you overnight for observation,” the doctor said. “I’ll let the officer in, but just for a few minutes. If you need anything, let the nurse know. I’ll check on you tomorrow morning.”

Before she could reply, a man, oddly familiar, in a blue uniform entered.

“Officer Scott,” Dr. Brown said, “you may find she perseverates or repeats herself. You have five minutes and that’s all.”

She rearranged her body in the uncomfortable hospital bed. Each move caused a throbbing pain.

“Kelli, it’s Gregg. Officer Gregg Scott now. Didn’t think we’d be meeting up after all these years like this.”

“Gregg?”

“Sorry about the accident. Heard rumors you were coming back to handle the probate for Hattie and do something with the mansion.”

Gregg Scott. Of course. She hadn’t seen him in at least thirty years, but she would never forget those baby blue eyes. And, how she’d felt about him at one time.

“What happened? I don’t remember anything?”

“A passerby found you lying on Point Road unconscious and bleeding from the head. Thought you’d been involved in a hit and run, but doctors said that was unlikely with your head wound and no abrasions or broken bones. Were you walking on the road? We’re hoping you could shed some light on what occurred.”

“Side of the road?” She lightly ran her fingers through her tangled hair; flecks of blood dislodged and fell on her loosely-fitting hospital gown that would expose all if she stood up.

“Try to remember, Kelli.”

She closed her eyes and laid her head against the pillow. “All I recall is going to the mansion. Just got into town and was anxious. I went inside and that’s the last I remember.”

“Were you alone?”

“Yes.”

“Did you see anyone or hear anything?”

When she opened her eyes, two of everything danced around the room which caused her to be woozy and queasy. “No. It was dark and windy. Did someone hit me on the head?”

“Doctor said you got a dandy blow. Who would've known you were there? Maybe some plaster from the ceiling fell on you? But that doesn't explain how you got back down the road.”

A petite nurse entered the room. “Officer, I'm afraid you must leave. Doctor wants Ms. Goddard to rest now.” The woman grabbed her wrist and checked for a pulse.

“Kelli, we'll get to the bottom of this. Where are you staying?”

“The Blue Spruce, but haven't checked in yet.”

“Once you're feeling up to it, we'll need to interview you. If you need a ride when you're discharged, let me know.” He handed her his card. “Nice to have you back in town. Sorry you got off to a rough start.”

“Thanks, Gregg. My car?”

“It's parked in front of the mansion. It's not going anywhere.” He exited the room with a familiar lazy gait she recalled from their teenage days. Apparently, over the years he'd gained extra weight, especially the bulging midsection that obscured his belt. A fan of locally

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brewed beer, no doubt, or maybe too many donuts.
Then she frowned.

Why would someone want to hurt me?



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