

## THE MURDER HOUSE

Liam was absolutely positive that he didn't want to see the house, but Jeanie tricked him. They had just viewed a two-bedroom ranch-style house on Highland Street when she suggested, jokingly of course, that they take a quick peek inside the murder house since they were in the area. It would be fun she told him as she caressed his hand and followed with a playful wink. Just pulling up to the driveway gave Liam chills. He almost didn't get out of the car. But Jeanie and Gayle, their real estate agent, had already stepped onto the porch.

"Gruesome," said Jeanie excitedly, "Come on slowpoke." She beckoned to Liam. As Gayle unlocked the door, Jeanie shot past her. Wiping his glasses, something he did when he was nervous, Liam carefully stepped inside the house. He was caught off guard by how warm, bright and pleasant the room felt. He had expected it to be cold, dim, with the walls covered in blood. As Gayle pointed out the different amenities in the room such as the fireplace and bay windows, Liam stood in the center of the living room staring up at the ceiling. He had recalled reading in the papers that blood had been found on the light fixtures.

Gayle leaned her head toward him. "It happened in the bedroom. But this room...the whole house has been professionally cleaned and painted." She smiled reassuringly.

"Liam!" shouted Jeanie from the kitchen, "Come here! Hurry!"

He sprinted, something he hadn't done since high school. Slipping a couple of times on the newly waxed hardwood floor, his heart beating fast and hard, slamming against his chest, he reached the kitchen in seconds. Seizing the doorframe to slow his pace while bracing himself for the worst, Liam's eyes quickly scanned Jeanie's body for injuries.

A beaming Jeanie sat on the counter. Always smiling, outgoing and full of energy, she was prettier than most of the women he had dated. He couldn't figure out what she saw in him, a boring corporate tax attorney eight years her senior. He was just handsome enough. His face was always serious, except for those occasions when Jeanie would tickle him until she made him smile, even laugh.

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Jeanie wasn't Liam's type. He preferred women who enjoyed books, quiet evenings at home and who practiced traditional religion. Nothing about Jeanie was practical. She favored people (alive or in spirit) over reading, lived to party and believed in wandering souls, parallel universes, psychic energy, eastern philosophy and possibly UFOs.

His sister, who spent her days exploring her past lives to the chagrin of their ultra-conservative parents, had taken him to a psychic reader as a thirtieth birthday present instead of dinner at Andre's as he had expected. There he met Jeanie, co-owner of *Sacred Travelers*, a new age store. Whether it was fate, as the tarot cards predicted that he would soon meet the love of his life, or the fact that Liam was eager to dump his pink and blue-haired, tattooed sister for the pretty Jeanie Whatley, he would never know for sure.

Jeanie was smart, playful and had a wicked sense of humor. They spent the night together. By the end of the week, she'd moved in with him.

Jeanie turned out to be just as eccentric as his kid sister, Dora (now called Starlight). 'Your heart is never wrong, even when it seems wrong,' that's what Jeanie always said to him. She was always saying little phrases to him that made no sense, but he loved her and she loved him. They were an unlikely couple; she had her set of new age freakish friends who spoke of past lives, channeling spirits and alien visitations. He functioned solely within the boundaries of this reality; his friends were Christians, afraid of nonconformists and just about anyone who looked different from them. But to his surprise, this "apples to oranges" relationship seemed to work. Plus, he discovered something quite pleasant about his wife. Jeanie, this odd, new age chick, was open to new experiences in and out of bed. She wasn't shy about any requests he asked of her. This certainly helped Liam to overlook the scented candles, chanting, spirit rocks, tarot cards, jars of pixie dust to ward off negative energy, etc., etc., that Jeanie kept around the house.

"Look, honey!" She extended her arms. "Can you believe the size of this kitchen? It's bigger than our living room."

"Mrs. Garber..." Gayle said, then hesitated, "the previous owner loved to cook."

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“That’s right. She used to be a chef,” said Jeanie, excited as usual. “I wonder where she hid the knife she used to kill her lover and her lover’s lover.” Jeanie was beaming. She loved this kind of stuff. “You know they never found it. The murder weapon. We probably could get Starlight to channel the energy here and find it.” Jeanie wrapped her arms around herself like a kid who’s made some type of cool discovery. “Wow, there’s so much...anger in this house.”

“An angry house,” replied Liam. He wanted to laugh, but did not want to face another lecture from Jeanie about other worlds and spirits and blah, blah, blah.

“Don’t make fun of me. Spirits, *energy* is everywhere. I can feel them and you could too if you just opened your mind up to the possibilities.”

Liam, placing his hands on each side of her once tiny waistline, helped his wife down from the counter. “You need to be more careful, Jeanie. You can’t be jumping on top of counters when you’re pregnant.”

Jeanie automatically rubbed her stomach. “I’m only five months.” She grinned. “Just like Tina.”

“Tina?” asked Liam puzzled.

“Tina...Christina Garber, the murderer who killed her lover when she found him in bed with his boss, Malcolm. Juicy...don’t you just love it.” She kissed Liam’s frowning lips.

Eager to change the conversation and to make a sale, Gayle said, “Let’s check out the rest of the house.” They followed her to the guest bathroom. “There are three bathrooms and they’ve all been upgraded. The one upstairs, in the master bedroom, even has a new tub.”

“They probably couldn’t scrub all of the blood and bones from the tub. You know she cut up the bodies in it. Can we see it?” asked Jeanie. She pranced up the stairs before Gayle could respond or Liam could object. When they caught up with her she was standing in the master bedroom. “The bed was right here. Tina had a clear view of them the minute she entered the bedroom. She screamed, ‘What the hell is going on!’ They were so into their lovemaking that they didn’t even hear her. It wasn’t until Ryan felt the knife in his back that they realized that they had been caught. Ryan tumbled out of bed screaming as he crawled away. Tina, turning her

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attention to Malcolm, stabbed him in his...private area.” Jeanie blushed for Gayle. “Tina continued to stab him several times. The police said that he was stabbed over fifty times, most of them in his...you know.” Her hand circled her private area. “He was cut up so bad that at first the cops couldn’t tell if the body was male or female.”

A sudden wind swooped around Jeanie; she jumped. “Oh. Wow!”

“What is it?” asked Liam, nervously looking about. He was used to Jeanie’s bizarre stories, but this place was creepy and he wanted to leave immediately.

Jeanie’s face grew animated, cartoonish. “They’re still here.”

“Who?” asked Gayle, stretching her neck as she looked about the room.

“Ryan and Malcolm,” replied Jeanie, now whispering. “I can feel their spirits. Oh, no...no, that’s not right.”

“What? What’s going on?” Liam asked.

Jeanie stared at the murder spot. “Ryan is very angry. He didn’t like being killed.”

“Well, who would,” said Liam frustrated. “Let’s just get out of here. We wouldn’t want to upset Ryan any further.”

“Oh, he’s not going to hurt us,” Jeanie said, shooing away her husband’s hand.

“How do you know all of this?” asked Gayle. She had of course heard about the murders, like half of Seattle, but preferred not to dwell on the grisly details. The house, which had been on the market for months, had had many lookers including three requests for séances, but not one serious offer. She’d come close once when a couple from San Diego viewed the property. They loved it until a nosy neighbor told them all about the murders. They immediately ripped up their deposit check, scattering it on the front lawn.

Liam shook his head, before addressing Gayle. “She’s really into this crazy stuff. Spirit this and ghosts that. It’s all crap to me.”

“Just because you can’t see it, Liam, doesn’t mean it’s not real. Our world is mostly made up of the unseen.”

“Nonsense.” Liam shook his head, again. “Let’s get out of here.” He reached for her hand.

She pulled away. “Do you believe in love?”

“Of course.”

“Where is it? Point to love,” Jeanie demanded.

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“That’s not the same,” answered Liam. He glanced at his watch. “It’s getting late. Don’t we have two more houses to look at?”

Gayle nodded.

Jeanie wandered to the bathroom. “Love the new tub,” she shouted. Poking her head out from the bathroom, she added, “I can see it all now. Tina...after she killed Malcolm, she went after Ryan who was still alive. She dragged his bloody body to this tub...or the tub that used to be here and started cutting off body parts. Earlier that day, Ryan had been cutting tree limbs in the back yard, so Tina used the same saw to hack off each limb. He was still alive when she chopped off his left arm. She stuffed his mouth with a bloody bath towel to muffle his screams.”

Liam rolled his eyes, looking at his watch, again.

Gayle sensing a possible sale said, “It’s a steal.” She herself would have never bought this house. Not that she believed in ghosts, but this was a fresh murder—still on the minds of people. Folks needed time to let an incident like this pass...move through the memory of murdered neighbors and the media circus that followed. With the trial set to start in the summer, news reporters were still airing reports from the front lawn and more were sure to come when the trial began.

“How much?” asked Jeanie coming out of the bathroom.

Gayle, never without her laptop, quickly brought up the listing. “It’s worth \$785,000, but it’s listed as \$585,000.”

Jeanie gasped, “Oh, Liam.” She grabbed his arm, caressing his back. “Let’s take it.”

“Are you crazy! A gruesome double murder occurred in this house. One of them happened right where you’re standing,” said Liam, pointing to the floor. “And according to you, the victims are still here and pissed off.”

“Ryan’s the only one who’s pissed off. Malcolm has made peace with his situation. So...,” replied Jeanie. “What are you afraid of...that they’re going to haunt you? And even if they did, we can get a spirit cleanser. I know someone who would give us a discount.” Jeanie peeked inside the large closet. A full-sized SUV could fit inside of it. Tucked away on the back of the shelf, she spotted a torn piece of police crime scene tape and enthusiastically showed it to Liam, which she immediately realized wasn’t a good idea. Quickly placing the discarded tape in her pocket, she would give it to

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Starlight later. She had a booming website business selling items she'd picked up at various crime scenes around the city. "Liam, the closet...it's huge!"

"No way," he said, shaking his head and backing away, "I don't want to sleep in the same room were someone was killed...while having sex." He didn't know why but he whispered the last part. Uneasy, Liam snatched off his glasses and cleaned them. He rubbed so hard that the lens separated from the frame. "Dammit, you see." Showing her the glasses, he added, "If you're looking for a sign that this is a bad idea. This is it."

"Liam, it's perfect. I want this house," said Jeanie, ignoring his paranoia.

Seizing her opportunity, Gayle said, "I could probably ask for \$575,000, another ten thousand off the asking price. I'm sure the estate attorneys would agree to that. They need the money for the trial. They've already sold her restaurant, her boat and the other home Mrs. Garber owned on Bainbridge Island."

"Please Liam," said Jeanie, pulling on his sleeve.

"No way," he said, shaking his head, "I don't want to live in the house that everyone points to and says, 'You see that house over there? That's where two people were brutally murdered.'"

"And chopped up," Jeanie added sarcastically, "then placed in garage bags, driven to Diablo Lake and disposed of. After which Tina returned to Seattle just in time to make it to her restaurant to prepare her many delicious meals to unsuspecting customers."

Liam was silent. All he could do was to stare at Jeanie while he searched for something to say that would get them the hell out of this mad house. The only thing he could come up with was, "We'd never sell this thing."

Jeanie looked to Gayle for help. "Houses like this sell all the time," Gayle said.

"You see," said Jeanie. She gently seized Liam's hands. "Honey, what happened in this house occurred over a year ago. People forget..."

"You haven't forgotten," he interrupted.

"It was a local crime. It didn't even make the national news. And besides, we don't have to tell buyers that something bad happened in our house," she said, arching her left brow like a villain.

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Gayle added, "She's right. The sellers only have to disclose this information if the potential buyers ask."

"You're kidding me?" replied Liam.

"It's true. A murder or tragedy in a home doesn't decrease the value. As a matter of fact, foreclosures do more damage to a neighborhood than a house where a murder took place."

Jeanie gave Gayle a thank you smile. "And...Liam." He turned away from her. She gently swung him around. "Wait...wait, hear me out. It's not like we are going to be selling this house any time soon." Again, she rubbed her belly. "And, honey, we're just blocks away from Langton. That's the private school Liam wants our kids to attend." She said to Gayle, before addressing Liam again, "We could have our dream house at a bargain price. Where are we ever going to find another three-bedroom, three baths, a fireplace, hardwood floors, ceiling fans, newly remodeled kitchen, 2,650 square foot brick house, on a shady cul-de-sac, in a nice neighborhood in Seattle for \$575,000?"

"Maybe there'll be another double homicide," said Liam, smiling at his cleverness. "No sane person is going to want to live in the middle of a crime scene."

His smile surprised her. She folded her arms, pouting like a kid. "I want this house Liam Mercer."

"Jeanie, no," he said softly. He took her hand, kissed it, patted it and gripped it tightly planning to drag her out if necessary. "We'll find another house. So what if we have to pay a little more."

"There's a patio. We could barbecue."

Liam said nothing.

Jeanie continued looking him dead in his eyes, "I want this house! It's perfect. It's my dream house."

"My parents would never visit us," he uttered throwing up his hands.

"No problem. They don't visit us now," she responded quickly. "They don't like me."

"They will when the baby comes. Mother's excited. The first grandchild and all," Liam explained to Gayle. "This is not the place to start our child's future. No, I don't want my kid growing up in a murder home."

"Liam, I want this house," said Jeanie, refusing to move.

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He dropped her hands as if they were fire. "I don't want to live in a house with such a nightmarish history, or raise our child...our future children here."

"Can't you see that the love we can bring to this house will lift any grim energy that's still present," she said pleading. "There's a big back yard. You can relax while I mow the grass." Her voice softened.

He shook his head, "I don't know, Jeanie. The house is haunted."

"I thought you didn't believe in ghosts?"

"I don't," said Liam. "At least I don't think I do. Why is this room cooler than the others?" He asked hoping to distract Jeanie.

"Spirits like cool places," she said smiling, "or maybe it's because the window's open." This time she laughed. "Please, Liam this is the right place for us. I can feel it." She walked around the room, stopping in front of the open window. "Look at this view of the Olympic Mountains. Liam, this house was made for us."

"I'm sure that I could get the estate attorneys to pay your closing costs, even moving costs," Gayle interjected. Hopeful, she looked at Liam. "I'm not making a promise, but I could ask them to drop the price even more. Say, another ten thousand."

"Great!" shouted Jeanie, clapping her hands.

"Jeanie, no," his voice was firm.

"Liam, yes," her voice was firmer.

The room was tense. Gayle nervously stepped back as Jeanie folded her arms meaning she was not budging.

Liam knew the fight was over. "Breakfast. You have to make me breakfast...every morning for the rest of my life. And you're going to," he began to whisper, "do things to me. You know what I mean."

"Whatever you want, sweetheart," she said, wrapping her arms around him with a playful hug. "Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you." Jeanie twirled around, taking in the room and the invisible energies present. "Oh, we're going to be so happy here, you, me, the baby, Ryan and Malcolm. Maybe Malcolm could babysit for us. He loves kids."

Liam's smile dropped.

**The End**  
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