



Eye of the Storm (Hudson Family)

By V.C. Andrews

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After the death of her beloved Grandmother Hudson, Rain found herself caught in a battle for the vast Hudson family wealth. Marked to inherit millions, Rain faced the fury of her unaccepting mother, her manipulative stepfather, and her cold, vicious Aunt Victoria. But no amount of money can keep Rain's world from crashing down when sudden tragedy strikes.

Left helpless after a devastating blow, Rain sinks into despair as her precious dreams are washed away?dreams that cannot be bought with the Hudson fortune. Her only hope for rebuilding her life rests in trusting a stranger who has come into her world -- a man whose generosity and kindness does not appear to come with strings attached, much to Rain's amazement. But just as she opens her heart to a promising new future, her past comes back to haunt her -- and Rain is pulled into a furious whirlpool of bitterness and heartache.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

One of the most popular authors of all time, V.C. Andrews has been a bestselling phenomenon since the publication of *Flowers in the Attic*, first in the renowned Dollanganger family series which includes *Petals on the Wind*, *If There Be Thorns*, *Seeds of Yesterday*, and *Garden of Shadows*. The family saga continues with *Christopher's Diary: Secrets of Foxworth*, *Christopher's Diary: Echoes of Dollanganger*, and *Secret Brother*. V.C. Andrews has written more than seventy novels, which have sold more than 106 million copies worldwide and been translated into twenty-five foreign languages. Join the conversation about the world of V.C. Andrews at [Facebook.com/OfficialVCAndrews](https://www.facebook.com/OfficialVCAndrews).

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Chapter One: Jake's Secret

Very often during the first few days I was alone in Grandmother Hudson's grand house, I would stop at one of the many antique mirrors and ask my image just who I was at the moment. The expression I caught on my face was so strange and new to me, I hardly recognized myself. It was almost as if some spirit in the house had possessed me for a while or as if the ghosts moved in and out of me at will, each changing my moods, my look, even the sound of my voice.

Back in Endfield Place in London, my great-uncle Richard and great-aunt Leonora's home, a ghost was supposedly trapped, the ghost of the original owner's mistress, poisoned by his wife. I didn't really believe in ghosts, but Grandmother Hudson used to tell me that a house such as this one, a house that had been home for so long to a family, was far more than just wood, stone, glass and metal thrown together to form a structure. It took on the character of the people who resided within it. Minutes, hours, days, weeks, months and years of reverberating with their voices, their laughter and their sobs filled it with memories.

"Think of it as if it were a gigantic sponge around us, absorbing our thoughts and actions, filling itself with our very natures until it became a part of us and we became forever a part of it. A new family can come in here and have the walls repainted, the floors covered with new carpet, different curtains and shutters hung on the windows, new furniture brought into every room, but we will linger in the heart of the house.

"The new owner might awaken one night and hear strange voices as the house replays some moment from our past like a sponge that has been squeezed and drips its contents, revealing what's really deep inside."

She smiled at my look of skepticism. Long ago I had stopped believing in tooth fairies and magic. Harsh reality was in my face too much.

"What I really mean, Rain, is when you look at something, whether it be a home or a tree or even the lake and see only what anyone else can see, you are partially blind. Take your time. Let things settle around you, in you. That takes some trust, I know, but after a while, it will become easier and easier and you will grow stronger and fuller because of it. You will become a part of all you see and all you touch," she told me.

These were rare moments, moments when she permitted herself to let down her own fortress walls and give me the opportunity to look in on whom she really was, a great and powerful lady on the outside, but no more than a little girl on the inside longing for love, for softness, for smiles and laughter and rainbow promises. Even at her age, she could blow out birthday candles and wish, too.

Much of her, of that, remained in the house. Her body rested in the graveyard a few miles away from it, but her spirit joined the spirits of the others who passed from room to room in a chain of memories lighter than smoke, looking for a way to resurrect some of the glory.

They were testing me, visiting me, challenging me by tinkering with my thoughts and feelings. They filled the shadows in the corners and whispered on the stairs, but I wasn't afraid even though I quickly began to have strange dreams, strange because they were about people I had never seen or met. Yet, despite that, there was something familiar about them, some laugh or wisp of a smile that filled me with even greater curiosity. I saw a little girl sitting all crunched up on a sofa, her eyes wide with surprise. I heard sobs through the walls. My eyes traveled down until they found two teenage girls listening, their mouths open with astonishment. Well-dressed people paraded through the hallways to rooms filled with displays of food and wine. There was the sound of violins and then a beautiful voice could be heard singing the famous aria from *Madama Butterfly*.

I could make little sense out of any of it, but I kept trying, searching for some clues, some answers. Even though I had lived in the house for a while before going to London, there was still much for me to look at and explore. I spent hours in the library perusing the books and then sifting through the old papers and some of the correspondence still kept in file cabinets and drawers. Most of it was about the various projects for development Grandfather Hudson had started. However, there were some personal letters, letters from old friends, people who had relocated to different states or even different countries, some of them old college friends.

I discovered that Grandmother Hudson had had a close girlfriend in finishing school who had married and moved to Savannah. Her name was Ariana Keely and her husband was an attorney. She had three children, two boys and a girl. The letters were filled with details about her children, but very little about herself and her husband. Occasionally, she would drift into something revealing and I would be able to read between the lines and understand that apparently neither she nor Grandmother Hudson believed they had found the happiness and the perfection both somehow had thought was inevitable for people who had been given all the advantages.

"As you say, Frances, we're privileged people," Ariana wrote in one letter, "but all that seems to guarantee is a more comfortable world of disappointment full of more distractions, more ways to ignore reality."

It all made me wonder that if someone wealthy, born with status and advantages couldn't be happy, what should I really expect?

I was thinking about all this as Jake drove me home from the cemetery. Neither of us had spoken for quite a while. I sat gazing out of the window, but really not looking at anything. The sky continued to darken.

"You all right, Princess?" Jake asked finally.

"What? Oh, yes, Jake. I'm fine. Looks like it is going to pour."

"Yes," he said. "I was going to go into Richmond tonight, but I think I'll wait until morning, get up early and make the airport pickup."

I sat back. The dreary sky and my rush of sad memories filled me with a cold loneliness. You're too young to have to do battle with a great family, I told myself. I didn't ask for any of this. Thoughts about my mother, her husband and Aunt Victoria ganging up on me again tomorrow consumed me with dread.

"Maybe you oughta go to a movie or something, Princess," Jake said. "I can come by and take you, if you'd like."

"No thanks, Jake."

He nodded.

"Did you keep in contact with any of the friends you made when you went to school here?" he asked.

"No, Jake," I said smiling. He was trying hard, worrying about me. "I'm okay for a while. I'll keep myself busy by making myself dinner. Would you like to come to dinner?"

"Huh?" he asked.

"I've got a great recipe for chicken with peaches, something my mama used to make."

"Hmm. Sounds delicious," he said. "What time?"

"Come by about six."

"Should I bring anything?"

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"Just your appetite, Jake," I said and he laughed. "You know how well stocked Mrs. Hudson kept the house."

Jake nodded, looking at me in the rearview mirror. Something in his eyes told me he knew I should be calling her Grandmother Hudson. It occurred to me that Grandmother Hudson herself might have told him the truth, but he never asked me any prying questions. Sometimes, I thought he seemed like someone on the sidelines who knew everything and was just waiting and watching to see how it would turn out.

"That I do. I took her shopping enough," he said. "No matter how I assured her, she always behaved as if she could never get me when she needed me. She'd always hit me with something like, 'Why add another worry to the load you're already carrying on your shoulders?' That woman," he said shaking his head, "she never stopped trying to change me."

"She was very fond of you," I said.

He nodded, his eyes smaller, darker. Suddenly he was the one who grew quiet. Neither of us said another word until we pulled up to the house. The first drops began to fall.

"Thank you, Jake. I'll get my own door," I added before he could step out. "See you later, Jake."

"Okay, Princess," he called as I rushed up the steps and into the house.

I was excited. I had something nice to do. I was going to make us a wonderful meal, my first dinner in my own big house. Wouldn't Mama Arnold laugh if she saw me now?

About an hour before Jake arrived, however, the phone rang and my mood took a plunge back into the pool of depression. It was Grandmother Hudson's attorney, Mr. Sanger.

"I received a call from Grant, Megan and Victoria's attorney a little while ago, Rain. It looks like they're deciding to go forward with this challenge. They'll be requesting all Frances's medical records and they'll try to show she wasn't of competent mind when she changed the will and gave you so much. It still might all be just a tactic to get you to compromise."

"I know they're coming to see me tomorrow," I said. "Jake told me."

"I could be there if you'd like," he offered.

"That might just make it all nastier. I'll call you if I need you," I said.

"Sorry," he said, "but this is often the way these things can go."

With the wind picking up and whipping the rain at the windows and the roof of the house, and now the news of an impending legal war between me and my reluctant family, I couldn't keep the trembles from making my hands shake as I worked in the kitchen. I set the table and brought out the candelabra. I imagined Jake would like some wine. I didn't know anything about wine, so I decided to wait for him to make the choice. When I glanced at the grandfather clock in the hallway, I saw it was about three hours slow again.

That brought a smile to my face. I remembered how unconcerned Grandmother Hudson was about time. Most of the clocks in the house were off, even the electric ones in the bedrooms and kitchen. The fancy French clock in the office had a malfunction she never had fixed and her cuckoo clock in the breakfast nook sometimes worked, sometimes didn't. It could pop out at the most unexpected times. I asked her many times why she didn't get it and the other clocks repaired.

"At my age," she would say whenever I mentioned the clocks, "you don't want to be reminded how many hours have gone by."

I told her she wasn't that old. Jake was older than she was and didn't even think of slowing down.

"Jake," she said, "hasn't the sense to think about his age. If he did, he'd realize just how much of his life he's wasted."

I had to smile at that too. She sounded disapproving, but she never really criticized Jake. Her complaints were like whippings with wet noodles. I could see by the way they looked at each other that they had an endearing affection. It was just that whenever Grandmother Hudson smiled at him, she always looked away first as if smiling directly at him might shatter some essential glass wall they had to keep up between them. I thought it had something to do with employers and employees, but I could never be that way, no matter how rich I was.

Anyway, I would soon find out that there were other reasons.

I rushed to the door when the bell sounded. Jake surprised me by being dressed in a sports jacket and tie. He had a box of candy too.

"You didn't have to get dressed up, Jake," I said, laughing.

"I couldn't imagine coming to Frances's house for dinner without being properly attired," he said as he entered. "Sweets for the sweet." He handed me the candy.

"Thank you, Jake. Is it still raining pretty hard?"

"Slowing up. The front's moving north to get the Yankees now," he said.

When he saw the dinner table, he blew a low whistle.

"Very nice, Princess. Very nice. Looks like you learned a lot being an English maid, huh?"

"I know what bangers and mash is and I can speak some Cockney slang," I told him and he laughed. "I didn't know what to pick out for wine, Jake. I thought I'd leave that to you."

"Oh. Sure," he said.

"You know where the wine cellar is, right?" I asked him.

"I do, Princess," he said. "I even know which floorboards creak in this house."

I nodded. Of course he did. He had once lived here a long, long time ago.

"Okay, Jake. I'll get things started while you do that," I told him and went to the kitchen.

When I brought in our salads, he had already opened two bottles of wine and poured me a glass. It looked like he had poured himself a second already.

"One thing about Frances," he said. "She always had good wine, whether it be a good California wine or French. She was a very refined woman, classy," he added. "Let's have a toast to her." He held up his glass and I lifted mine and we tapped glasses after he said, "To Frances, who I'm sure is setting things right wherever she is."

We both took a long sip of our wine.

"Good-looking salad, Rain. Warm bread, too! I'm impressed already."

"Thank you, Jake."

"So," he said, "tell me about your time in London. I hope you were having some fun."

I described the school, told him about Randall Glenn, the talented boy from Canada who was studying to be a concert singer and how Randall and I had done a great deal of touring. I told him about Catherine and Leslie, the sisters from France, the showcase presentation I was in and all the encouragement I had received.

"It sounds like you should return then," he said. "I hope you don't get stuck here for some silly reason, Rain. Take advantage of your opportunities. Frances would want that. She'd be disappointed if you didn't," he said.

When Jake and I looked at each other, I couldn't help feeling there were things that were not being said. Every time he would mention Grandmother Hudson's name, he would get a misty glint in his eyes.

I brought out the main dish and he raved about it, saying someday I'd make a lucky man a wonderful wife.

"But you'll probably be one of these modern women who thinks the kitchen is beneath her," he added.

"I don't think so, Jake. Not the way I was brought up," I said.

He wanted to know more about my life growing up in Washington, D.C. He listened attentively, his face turning hard and his eyes cold when I described with more detail than ever before what exactly had happened to my stepsister Beneatha.

"No wonder your mother wanted to get you out of that world," he said.

Again, our eyes locked for a longer moment. I was surprised that Jake had already finished a bottle of wine himself and was well into the second. I had yet to finish my first glass. I looked down at my plate, pushed some of my food around with my fork and, without looking up, asked, "How much do you really know about me, Jake?" I lifted my eyes quickly. "How much did Mrs. Hudson tell you?"

He started to shake his head and stopped, a smile on his lips.

"She used to say you had a divining rod for the truth," Jake said softly.

"Divining rod?"

"You know, those things some people swear can find water."

"Oh." I nodded. "So what well of truth have I discovered, Jake?"

He laughed but then grew serious quickly.

"I know Megan is really your mother," he admitted. He fingered his wineglass. "I always knew."

"Grandmother Hudson told you?"

He nodded.

"What else did she tell you?"

He looked up.

"Not long before she died, she told me how you hunted down your real father in London," he said.

"I didn't exactly hunt him down."

"Those were her very words. I just knew she would do it, she said. Frances wasn't angry about it. She was impressed with your resourcefulness."

"Why did she trust you with all these deep family secrets, Jake?"

I fixed my eyes on him intently and he poured the remaining wine into his glass.

"Maybe because she had no one else she really trusted," he said and drank his wine.

"I didn't think she needed to tell anyone anything."

He looked surprised, his bushy eyebrows hoisted.

"Naw," he said. "That was just what she wanted everyone else to think. She wasn't really as much of the iron queen she pretended to be."

"Why did she leave me so much and make it so difficult for me with the family? Did she tell you that? Did she explain what she hoped would happen?"

He shook his head and shrugged.

"She thought a lot of you, Princess. You came crashing into her life like a wave of freshwater. She was very depressed about her family until you arrived on the scene. When you're that age and your family is disappointing, you start to wonder what it was all for and that can make you very sad. You took most of that sadness away. She wasn't going to check out without making sure you were strong."

"I'm not so strong, Jake, even with all she's left me. I'm by myself again. Grandmother Hudson's attorney called me a short while ago to tell me that my mother, Grant and Victoria are pushing forward with the legal challenge even if it means dragging everything into the open, Grandma's health records, my mother's past, everything about me, too. She'll make me look like some fortune hunter taking advantage of an elderly lady. I'd be better off if I had inherited nothing," I moaned.

"Hey, hey, don't talk like that," he ordered, but I couldn't keep the tears behind the dam of my lids. They began to pour over and streak down my cheeks. "All the people I love are either dead or too far away to help me."

"I'm here," he boasted and rose from his seat. He came over to me and put his arm around my shoulders. "You're going to do fine, Princess. We owe it to Frances," he said.

"Sure," I muttered and flicked the tears away with the back of my hand.

"I'm going to help you," he insisted.

"Okay, Jake."

"I mean it. I can help you."

"Okay, Jake."

He stepped away and stared at the wall.

"I've got to believe she worked it so I would do this," he muttered, more to himself than to me.

"Do what, Jake?"

He was silent for a long moment. Then he turned and gazed at me, looking down at me as if he was high up on some mountain.

"Give you our secret."

"Whose secret?" I shook my head. "You're confusing me even more, Jake." I looked at the wine. Was he babbling now because he had drunk so much?

"Frances's and mine," he said. He smiled. "And now yours, but you keep it like some last resort, some last bullet to put into your gun, okay?"

I stared at him. He still made no sense. Jake was nice. He was a kind man. I actually loved him, but it was best to just nod and finish up the dinner, I thought.

"You don't believe me, don't believe I can give you something to strengthen your position and your resolve, huh?"

"Sure I do, Jake."

He sat and turned to me.

"Frances and I were lovers once," he said quickly. "We had an affair. It lasted quite a while actually. We had lots of opportunity and we took advantage of it. We stopped when she became pregnant."

"Pregnant?"

"With Victoria," he said. "She's mine. I'm just about positive and so was she."

I shook my head to throw the words back out of my ears. Grandmother Hudson, unfaithful to her husband? She was my rock of morality.

"It wasn't anyone's fault. It just happened. Everett neglected Frances. He was obsessed with his business interests and rarely traveled or went to a social occasion unless there was a financial benefit or reason to do it.

"One day we started to spend more and more time with each other. I don't think it ever occurred to Everett that she might stray or have a romantic interest in anyone else, not that I ever believed she had any for him.

"Theirs was one of those Old South, old-fashioned marriages. You know, parents get together and decide wouldn't it be perfect if your daughter married our son. Parents always knew better in those days. So much for what they knew better, huh?"

He finished the wine in his glass.

"Did my grandfather know? I mean, about Victoria not being his daughter?"

"I think so, but he never said anything. He wasn't the sort who would," Jake said.

"What sort is that?" I asked, grimacing.

"Upper crust," Jake said. "One just couldn't conceive of such a thing in that world. Frances never said anything to him. As soon as she realized she was pregnant, she just decided that was it for us.

"When I returned from my years in the navy and knocking about, Victoria was already in her late twenties. I used to be afraid that anyone could take one look at her and see me in her face, but Victoria has one of those faces that seems to have created itself. She doesn't look much like Frances and I don't think she looks very much like me. Our noses are different, our mouths. Maybe we have similar eyes and ears," he conceded.

"Maybe she isn't your daughter then," I said.

"She didn't look much like Everett either. You've seen his pictures. What do you think?"

"Maybe there was someone else."

"What? Someone else?" He shook his head. "No, never."

"Why not? If my grandmother had an affair with you, she could have had one with someone else, too."

He stared at me a moment as if the idea had never occurred.

"Or are you upper crust, too, Jake, more upper crust than my grandfather, and can't even conceive of it?" I asked him.

He continued to stare and then he smiled and shook his head.

"No, Frances told me with an air of certainty that couldn't be challenged. We stood down by the dock late one afternoon, just before the sun set, and she said -- I'll never forget it because of how she put it -- she said, 'We've gone and done it up good, Jake.' Of course, I didn't know what she meant.

" 'What's that mean, Frances?' I asked.

" 'I've got a cake in my oven,' she said. That's what she said. Some cake. 'Too much unbridled passion,' she added, 'passion that makes you throw caution to the wind.'"

"I was stunned. I just stood there playing with a stick in the water and watching the ripples and thinking, *What's going to be?*"

" 'Of course, we won't see each other that way anymore, Jake. I'm sorry. I'm sorry I needed you so much,' she told me and walked away.

"I felt like everything had evaporated inside me. I felt like a shell. Any minute a wind would come sailing over the water, lift me like a kite, and blow me over the trees.

"I guess in a way it did because soon after that I joined the navy."

He sat there silently, staring down at his plate and his empty wineglass and then he closed his eyes.

"I never loved anyone but Frances," he continued. "I couldn't. It was like I was given just enough love fuel for one woman and I used it all on her. I returned to work for her just so I could be around her.

"Sometimes, when I drove her places, I'd pretend I wasn't her hired driver. I'd imagine we were man and wife

and I was taking her somewhere just the way any husband would take his wife some place. If Victoria went along, I even imagined I was like any other husband and father."

Everyone spends time in his or her fantasies, I thought. Everyone.

"Does Victoria have any idea? Did Grandmother Hudson ever tell her?"

"Oh no, no," Jake said quickly. "But that's why I wanted you to know, to have this information. When and if she has you up against the wall, you can fling it at her and I'll be there to verify it.

"They got ways to test the blood and prove it beyond a doubt, you know. She'll know that so she won't be so sure of herself. It will knock her off that high pedestal," he promised.

"It would be revealing Grandmother Hudson's secret, too. I don't know if I could ever do that, Jake."

"Sure you can. If the time comes, you'll do it. You knew her well enough to know she wouldn't mind," he said confidently.

"Wow," I said shaking my head. "Talk about skeletons in the closet. The closets here should be rattling."

He laughed.

"I'd better get going," he said. "I got to get up early and head for Richmond to pick them up at the airport."

"Don't you want some coffee, first?" I wanted him to have coffee because he had drunk so much wine, but it didn't seem to faze him.

"No. Thanks. This was a great meal. You want me to help you clean up?"

"No, Jake. I'm very experienced at it, remember?" I said referring to my days at Grandmother Hudson's sister's home in London, as well as my days here.

"Right. Okay. Maybe I'll see you some time in the afternoon when I bring them around."

"Oh, are they staying overnight?" I asked quickly.

"No. I'm taking them back for a nine o'clock flight."

Good, I thought. Jake kissed me on the cheek and left. When the door closed behind him, the emptiness of the great house settled around me like some dark cloud. The thickness of the night still heavily overcast turned the windows into mirrors flashing my image back to me as I crossed through the rooms. The wind was still strong enough to make parts of the house creak and groan. Just to have other sounds floating through, I turned on the television set and found a music channel. I made it loud enough to hear while I cleaned up the dining room and then the kitchen.

Afterward, I returned to the den and watched some television until my eyelids felt heavy and I caught myself dozing on and off. I'll sleep well tonight, I thought, but the tension over tomorrow's family meeting slipped in beside me as I walked up the stairs. By the time my head hit the pillow, there was static in the air crackling around me, and with its tiny sparks of lightning, scorching my brain.

No matter how I turned or scrunched the pillow against my cheeks, I was soon uncomfortable, turning and tossing again and again until it was nearly morning. Then, I finally fell asleep the way someone would accidentally step into a poorly covered old well, descending in a panic down into the darkness, my screams rushing out above me as if they were tied to a hot red ribbon. The moment I hit bottom, my eyes clicked open. Sunlight was already streaming in, flooding the room with wave after wave of insistent, unrelenting illumination.

I groaned. Every part of me ached. I panicked with the possibility of my getting sick. If there was ever a wrong time for that, it was now, today of all days, I thought. When I rose, I poured some of Grandmother Hudson's sweet-smelling bath powder into a hot tub and soaked for nearly twenty minutes before I got dressed and went down to make myself some coffee.

The phone rang almost as soon as I entered the kitchen. It was Mr. MacWaine, the administrator of the Burbage School of Drama in London, the man who had discovered me and, with Grandmother Hudson's help, had brought me to England.

He wanted to know how I was doing and what I was planning for my immediate future.

"If I've had one inquiry concerning you, I've had ten," he told me. "We do hope you'll be returning, Rain," he said.

"Thank you. I expect I will. I was going to contact you about arrangements to live in the dorm this time, Mr. MacWaine."

"That won't be a problem," he assured me. "I am happy to see you will continue with us. I am sure Mrs. Hudson would have wanted that," he said.

I thanked him for his concern and interest.

"Oh, before I forget," he continued, "there was one inquiry I promised I would pass on to you. Apparently you won the admiration of a London professor, a Shakespearean scholar, Doctor Ward. He's an acquaintance of one of the board of trustee members and he's asked after you. Was he at our showcase?" Mr. MacWaine wondered.

"Yes," I said. I didn't know what else to say, but almost immediately after I said it, I regretted lying. Whenever I lied about my secret past, I just added to the deception, the false foundation beneath this family now, I thought. I hated being any part of that.

"Lovely," Mr. MacWaine said. "Do keep me informed as to your arrangements. In the meantime, I'll see to the dormitory space," he promised.

Speaking with him lifted my spirits and reminded me that I did have a place to go, a future just waiting for me to fulfill it. I was certainly not stuck here. How wonderful that my real father was asking after me, thinking about me, looking forward to seeing me and getting to know me. Grandmother Hudson had been disappointed in people too often to believe there would be any value for me in pursuing my real father. I understood her cynicism, but I wasn't at all ready to accept it.

Buoyed, I discovered I was hungry and prepared myself some breakfast. Then I went through the house, dusting and cleaning some so that Victoria couldn't point to anything and say, "See, see how she is letting

our property deteriorate."

As I was cleaning up after breakfast, the phone rang again. This time it was Aunt Victoria.

"Your mother," she said punctuating the word with such venom, she turned it into a curse word, "and Grant are flying in this morning. We will be at the house by two

o'clock. We're meeting with our attorney for lunch first," she added, which was clearly meant to intimidate me.

"It seems like lawyer's day," I replied coolly.

"What's that supposed to mean?" she fired back.

"I'm meeting with my attorney for lunch here at the house, too," I said.

I wasn't, of course, but I wanted to do her one better and show her I could be just as intimidating. There was a long pause.

"You're making a big mistake being so obstinate," she said.

"Isn't that odd?" I countered.

"Isn't what odd?"

"I've been thinking you're making a big mistake being so obstinate."

If a moment of silence was ever packed full of explosive energy, this was it.

"We'll all be there at two," she repeated. "Make sure you're there as well."

"I have no place I'd rather be today," I said. "Thanks for the warning."

When I hung up, my heart was pounding.

But to me it sounded like all the ghosts in the house were clapping.

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