



THE HUNTED

BY MALLOW HUB

A Novella

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Horizons Mallow Hub

“Box undone, chains unmade. Rise now free, no longer stayed”.

PROLOGUE

The year is 1879 and Stephen Jackson has been the manager of The Clifftop Castle Hotel for many years now, having inherited it from his father and grandfather before him. He knows every inch of this castle having lived here all his life.

It's just before nightfall during the off-season and the rain is rapping against the windows outside. Stephen is carrying out some repairs in Room 19 when he notices an attic door that he has never seen before.

“Surely...” he thinks to himself. “Surely I’m imagining this”.

He had been working hard all day getting the castle ready for the upcoming busy season and thinks maybe he has



worked himself too hard, to the point that maybe he is dreaming awake.

That is when the attic door, which he is certain that had never been there before, opened on its own and steps mysteriously appeared leading up to the attic.

Like a man hypnotised, he felt himself drawn to the attic that just moments ago did not exist. As if he was being pulled to it by some sort of invisible rope.

Slowly he began walking up the stairs toward the attic, and as his eyes adjusted to the darkness he could see something crouching in the corner of the attic. Something horrible that had a stench of rotting meat coming from it. That's when he saw the glowing red eyes and a smile that made Stephen feel like he might go insane if he continued to stare at it.

“What are you?” Stephen asked the thing in the corner.

It looked at him and began to laugh, Stephen was frozen where he stood. The thing began to laugh louder, and then it spoke.

“What am I?” it said menacingly.

“In a few seconds, Inn Keeper.... I am you”.

Then with a sickening speed it grabbed Stephen.



In another room of the castle, Stephen's son, Hugh, awoke to the sound of his father screaming. At 16, it would be the last time he would hear his fathers real voice.

CHAPTER 1

JACK BREAKS DOWN.



“Sometimes things break, so that others can begin.”



It was a cold winter's night in 1921 as Jack Richards drove his car through a long and winding forestry road. For the last fifty miles of the journey, his faithful old car was making a strange rattling sound. When all of a sudden there was a loud

clunk from his engine and then his car coasted to a silent halt.

The rain pelted down on his car as Jack sat there, unsure of what to do. Although he



was in almost total darkness, his eyes caught sight of a weathered sign that said:

“Cliff Top Castle Hotel, 1km This Way.”

The sign pointed to a small slip road which he decided to follow on foot through the thunder and rain. He would get shelter there tonight and seek help for his car in the morning.

As Jack hurried up the forest path, he began to hear a rustling sound in the trees that seemed to be keeping pace with him no matter how fast he walked.

In the distance, he could see the warm lights of the castle hotel, and this kept him calm.

However, what Jack did not know was that a hungry pair of red eyes tracked him from within the forest. They were hunting him.

“You must run!” a voice bellowed from the castle rooftop.

“Hurry for your life!” the voice cried again.

And in that instant, Jack ran for his life. Something raw and terrified in that voice told him this wasn’t a joke. And in this darkness, why take the chance?

As he drew closer to the castle, Jack heard a loud cracking sound, as if something very large was falling.

A heartbeat later, everything went black. Jack knew no more.



CHAPTER 2

The next morning, Jack awoke in a castle room as the sun shone in it's window. He heard the sound of birds chirping outside and nothing else. He noticed his shoes placed neatly beside his bed.

“What happened?” he muttered. “Where am I?”

Jack put on his shoes and made his way out of the room. As he stepped into the corridor he looked back at the number of his door, it was 19.

The hotel was empty and very dusty. Jack saw no one around that he could talk to.

When Jack reached the lobby he walked past a roaring fire which had recently been lit, so he knew he was not alone.



His eyes fell upon a big wooden door that led outside. He went through it, greeted by the cold morning air, and saw the lane he had both walked and ran through last night.

“This is very familiar,” he thought to himself as he looked at a fallen tree which blocked the path. His memory was still foggy from last night and for some reason he felt hungover.

“Hello, young man!” a voice said from nowhere it seemed.

“How’s that head of yours today?”

Jack spun around, even more confused than he was this morning as he couldn’t see anybody.

Then he looked upwards and saw the source of the sound. There was a ladder to the right of him, and when he looked to

the top of it Jack saw an elderly man with pure white hair and a pair of glasses that reminded Jack of his grandfather.

“Hugh Jackson is my name,” the man called down from the top of the ladder. “I’m the owner of this fine establishment, well... my son J.J. runs it now of course but I still help with the day-to-day running of it”.

Jack reached up to touch his head where he did indeed find a bump.

“My car...” Jack said as he began to point down the road.

“Yes yes, all taken care of, my boy,” Hugh smiled. “My son J.J. and I towed it up behind the hotel, it’s safe, but you’ll be here a few days before it’s fixed.”

Hugh could see this worried Jack.



“Why don’t you go in and make yourself some breakfast? My son J.J. will be back to the hotel soon and he can fill you in on how you got that bump on your head”.

Jack thanked Hugh and went to make some breakfast, for he was indeed very hungry.

CHAPTER 3

As Jack stepped back into the dusty old hotel, a sharp ringing sound shattered the silence.

It gave him quite the scare as he was very close to it when it rang. Knowing that no one was in the hotel, he decided to be helpful and answer the phone so he could take a message, seeing as the hotel had been so kind to him in his time of need.

“Hello,” Jack said. “I’m...”

He didn’t get to finish as he was cut off by a frantic woman on the other end

“Have you seen him? Is he gone?”

“Who?” Jack asked, forgetting that he was not the intended recipient of the phone call.

“The Demon of course!” the lady said as if he had cited a very stupid question.

“Demon?” Jack echoed, almost laughing.

“You’re not J.J.!” the lady said with a scowl in her voice, and then without warning, the line went dead.



Jack rested the phone back into its cradle, and as he did, he noticed an old blue Mercedes van chugging up the driveway. He noticed the hotel's logo on the side of it.

“This must be J.J.,” he thought. Finally he could get some answers.

CHAPTER 4

Jack sat across from J.J. in the main dining area.

“So you just found me under a tree in your driveway?” Jack asked.

“Yes,” J.J. replied. “Don’t you remember anything about how you got here?”



“No,” said Jack. “Not a thing. The last thing I remember was my car broke down, then I woke up here feeling like I’d drunk all the beer in the world”

Jack noticed an almost relieved look on J.J.’s face but didn’t know why.

“Oh, by the way,” Jack said, “some lady rang here just before you arrived and she was talking about demons of all things.”

“Yes,” J.J. replied. “That’s my mother, Mary.”

“Unfortunately, she is getting on in years now and tends to come out with some strange stories. I’d take no notice” he said in a reassuring tone which Jack found very false but didn’t know why.

“She left my father and I many years ago, she was never a fan of living in this castle for some reason and that’s what drove her away”. J.J. shrugged and for some reason offered a half-hearted smile.

An awkward silence fell between the two men.

“I best get back to my room to freshen up” Jack said. In truth, he just wanted a few minutes to get his head together.

“No problem,” J.J. replied. “You are our only guest as it’s now our quiet season so feel free to wander about.”

Jack thanked him and went on his way.

CHAPTER 5

Jack went upstairs and as he turned to make his way down the hall to room 19, he saw a beautiful girl just standing in the hallway staring silently at him.

She had the blackest hair he had ever seen. But surely, Jack thought, his eyes must be fooling him, or maybe his head was still suffering from the knock he had taken last night. Because he thought he could see a soft blue glow around this woman.

Before he could rub his eyes to make sure she was real, the young woman had walked, if not floated, into Jack’s room.

He hurried after her, but when he got into his room, there was no one to be seen.

He did, however, notice an attic door had been opened in his room and a narrow stairs led up to it. “Was that there when I woke?” he asked himself.

He then felt the urge to walk up that stairs, there was nothing he could do to stop himself. He looked down and saw his feet walking as if being pulled by a force he couldn’t see.

CHAPTER 5

Jack went up the small stairs and began to stick his head into the attic. Immediately he saw how small the space was.

Jack had feared small spaces ever since he was a boy. He wanted to back out and

almost did, but that's when he saw a candle lighting in the corner of the attic, and that candle illuminated an unusual box beside it.

As much as Jack feared going into this small attic, he felt something inside him that he must have that box in his





possession. Nothing mattered but that box. He felt if he could just hold that box, everything would be right with the world.

Suddenly he was no longer afraid of this small space anymore and quickly climbed toward the box. Once he had the box in his hand, the candle blew out on its own and the attic slammed shut behind him... and all his bravery had vanished, and terror rushed in to take its place.

Jack was swallowed by darkness, and began to scream.

CHAPTER 6

Outside J.J. was with his father Hugh when they could hear the muffled screams of their only guest.



They rushed towards Jack's room, fearing the worst.

Numerous guests had gone missing in this hotel across its many years. It was often rumoured by people in the surrounding areas that a witch would lure guests in to the woods, never to be seen again. Legend had it that she would stand under a tree, weeping, until a guest would look out



their window, and then she would just curl her finger at them, beckoning.

“Is this why Jack was screaming” J.J. thought as he ran.

But when they reached Jacks room, what they saw there confused them completely.

CHAPTER 7

Jack lay sound asleep in his bed when J.J. and his father Hugh burst into his room.

He slept on his side, facing away from the pair.

J.J. and Hugh looked at each other in a confused manner and backed out of the room, quietly. Hugh thought that maybe Jack had been having a nightmare.

But for Jack, the nightmare hadn't even begun in this hotel.

If J.J. and Hugh had went around Jack's bed they would have seen that Jack was



clutching a strange old wooden box. And if they had seen this box, they would have wanted it just as much as Jack did.

CHAPTER 8

Jack woke up three hours later with the box still held lightly in his arms.

The last thing he remembered was being trapped in the attic in total darkness while holding the box and screaming, only to





wake up and find himself back in his hotel bed.

He looked to where the attic door was, only to discover that there wasn't any door, nor was there a stairs. "This is all too strange," he thought.

Then thinking that maybe he was going crazy, he looked at the box in his hands and wondered "if I am crazy, then where did this come from?"

CHAPTER 9

Jack spent the next hour frantically trying to get the box open in his room, but it was impossible. Something was in this box and he *just knew* that he had to free it. It called to him over and over.

When it would not open, he decided he would hide the box up high on the wardrobe in his room, so that he could go check his broken-down car for something that might help him open this strange box.

He then left Room 19 to make his way to the car, before he did he gave one look back to see if the attic door had returned.

It had not.



As he made his way downstairs, he was struck by how quiet the hotel was. There was no sign of J.J. or his father Hugh.

He could just see through a window that night-time was fast approaching.

Having finally reached his car, Jack opened the boot door searching for something that could open that box.

As he moved things around in the boot of the car, he just became aware of a letter in an old sealed envelope. On the envelope was one word:

“Jack”

CHAPTER 10

Jack opened the letter quickly and it read:

“Jack, you are in huge danger. He hasn’t fed in a long time. I’m not sure I can protect you much longer. Stephen was the one who chased you last night in the forest. Do you remember J.J. screaming for you to run before the tree fell on you?

You’re very lucky to be alive.

Stephen was hunting you and he was the one that pushed the tree on top of you.

You must get that box open as soon as possible. It's the only way you'll get out of this hotel alive.

I must go now, but I'll be with you when I can.

Your friend, A. ”

CHAPTER 11

Having found nothing to open the box within his car, Jack returned to the hotel.

He decided it was time to get answers from its owners. At this point, night had fallen but Jack could see the warm lights of the hotel almost calling for him to return back inside. Luring him.



He walked into the hotel's small bar to find that not only was the fire lit, but Hugh and J.J. were sitting there waiting for him.

They both had a glass of brandy in their hand, and Jack could see a third glass on the table waiting for him.

“Jack,” Hugh said in a warm but serious voice. “You’ve had quite the time in this hotel... it’s time we had a talk. Sit.”

Hugh pointed to the seat near the brandy glass. But still, Jack hesitated.

“Please,” J.J. said warmly.

Silently, Jack sat. He knew this conversation would be like no other he’d ever experienced.

CHAPTER 12

“It’s time we filled you in, and then you, or should I say, we, can decide what to do next,” Hugh said.

Jack sat in silence, staring, and waited for the pair to proceed.

“This hotel has an interesting history. It’s been in our family for many generations. And it wasn’t until my father, Stephen... that we ran into a spot of trouble,” Hugh said.

Then Hugh looked Jack straight in the eye, and Jack knew that whatever was about to come next would be life changing...



But then suddenly, the lights went out all over the hotel. Outside the wind began to howl and scream. Getting louder and louder with every passing second. The stench of rotting flesh began to fill the room.

Then a loud scraping sound began, it was a sickly cutting sound coming from every window that surrounded the room.



Jack covered his ears in the darkness, feeling like he had been thrust into a nightmare. The sounds quickly became deafening.

Suddenly a large window smashed in and Jack could feel something very old had entered the room with them as the sounds continued to grow.



Through the darkness Jack could make out that a large dark creature with terrifying speed had grabbed Hugh with one arm, and J.J. with the other.

It emitted a vile sound that was neither human or animal as it fled the room, dragging the two men in its wake.

Then.... silence... stillness.

Jack froze in place as the lights came back on. He could see them sway from side to side, dangling from the ceiling.

Just as Jack began to regain his senses he saw that not only had J.J. and Hugh been taken from the room, but a trail of blood led from both their seats in the direction of the stairs.

CHAPTER 13

Jack stood there, stunned, looking at the bloody trail.

“I should run” he thought. “Just leave this crazy place.... But how?”

Outside was total darkness and rain. His car didn’t work and God knew where J.J.’s keys were.

“What the hell do I do?” he asked himself.

Just then Jack saw a blue glow in the corner of his eye. He turned to see the girl that he had seen walking into his room earlier that day.

“Don’t be afraid,” she said.

“I’m on your side. It was me who left you the letter.”

Jack just stared at her, completely stunned.



“Who... are you?.... And what are you?” he asked because he knew by looking at her that she was not human, at least, not anymore.

“My name is Alexis, and I have been in this castle for 352 years,” she said softly.

“When I was human I served the King that owned this castle. I was his psychic advisor and was much revered throughout the land. But at 19 years old I died.”



“How did you die?” Jack asked her, while still struggling to believe he was talking to a ghost.

“I don’t remember, it’s like a bad dream. I think I was pushed off the castle but it’s all a blur.”

Jack noticed a look of sadness on her face.

Just then, screams came from upstairs.
Jack and Alexis froze.

“We must try to save them,” Alexis said.
“They don’t have much time.”

CHAPTER 14

J.J. and Hugh found themselves thrown into a dark corner by the thing that was both Stephen, and The Demon. He had incredible strength and speed.

They were in the highest part of the hotel, which was known as The Tower. Before Stephen had become what he now was, this was his favourite spot in the hotel where he could often be found reading.

But Stephen wasn't human anymore, and now he was walking toward J.J. and Hugh with glowing red eyes and a rage on his face.

“How could you!?!” Stephen roared at the pair.

“How could you be so stupid!? So reckless.... So.... USELESS!” he bellowed.

As Stephen walked closer, two large wings with black slimy scales opened from his back. They spread wide across the room which was only illuminated by moon light, casting shadows as they spread.

“You must pay for what you've done to me.... The visitor should never have laid his hands on that box. But he has and you will pay”.

“Please, Father...” begged Hugh.



“It was a mistake, we didn’t know she would help him find the box” Hugh said.

“I AM NOT YOUR FATHER, INN KEEPER!” The Demon screamed in a rage.

“I am the unburied, I am the unbound, I AM THE UNHALLOWED!!” it roared as it stood to its full terrifying height.

“If he opens that box, there is a chance that I could suffer.... And that cannot happen” Stephen said to them in a sudden calmer voice, as if trying to reason the idea to itself.

“He won’t get to open it I promise” Hugh said. “I swear it!”

J.J. could barely breathe as he lay on the ground looking at The Demon. He had been hurt from when Stephen grabbed him in the living room, and now may he may have broken ribs as well from when Stephen threw him against the wall in this room.

“Here is what you will do” Stephen said to Hugh. “Lure this visitor, this.... weakling outside the castle. And when you do, I want you to lock every door behind him. For I want to hunt him, I want to eat... him”.

“You will do this tonight, if you do not. You will never see your son again” Stephen said looking at J.J.

And in that moment The Demon lunged at J.J. snatching him from where he lay and then flew through a closed window with him, shattering the glass.

J.J. felt a sudden coldness as he was pulled higher and higher into the air. He could hear the sounds of Stephen's wings flapping as he continued to go higher and higher. The hotel below began to look like



a child's playhouse, and then Stephen/The Demon looked J.J. right in the eyes and J.J. felt like he might go insane. That gaze seemed to stare into his soul. He began to scream, and the last thing he heard before passing out was the sound of The Demons laughter.

CHAPTER 15

Jack burst in the door to the room that Hugh was in, followed by Alexis. It was there that they found Hugh sitting on the ground, pale and in shock. Just staring into nothing. Almost like a man who had suddenly been switched off.

“Hugh!” Jack said while grasping Hugh's shoulders. “Can you hear me?”. But there was no reply, it seemed like Hugh was no longer inside his own body.

“Hugh!” Jack once again tried. “Talk to me!?”.

Hugh’s eyes suddenly had a look of awareness, and they searched the room as if for the first time, and then settled on Jacks face.

“We must save him, my boy, he took J.J.!” Hugh said in a panic.

“That.... thing, took him?” Hugh asked. “Where?”.





“If you don’t do what he says, he said he will kill J.J.!!” Hugh said with tears in his eyes.

All the while Alexis just stood in the corner watching the events unfold with a sad look on her face.

“We must tell him everything” she said in a voice that stilled the room. “Do not forget that Jack is a guest and doesn’t know what has been happening here while we have

been dealing with this for what feels like forever”.

The two men looked at Alexis who illuminated the corner she stood in with her blue glow.

“Let us go to the kitchen, we can tell Jack everything over a cup of tea” she said.

Hugh knew she was right, but what he didn't know.... was how he could lie to Jack, to save his son. And lie, he most certainly would.

CHAPTER 16

Hugh, Jack and Alexis sat in the hotels dining room as the wind howled and the rain pelted outside. Both Hugh and Jack drank warm tea but Alexis did not, she hadn't eaten or drank anything since that



fateful day she was pushed from the castles roof top.

Hugh was still pale, but the shock had left him now because he knew he would get his son J.J. back if he could just trick Jack into walking outside of the castle so that Stephen could hunt him. The thought had calmed him. He did not care that he was sending Jack to his death, what was one more body missing in that forest? After all many guests had been lost to that woods

over the centuries. He would get his son back, that is what mattered.

For awhile they sat in silence just listening to the sounds of the weather outside.

“I’ll start” Alexis said calmly.

“The night you came to this hotel Jack, you were chased by a demon called Stephen”. Alexis began.

“Stephen is Hugh’s father, or at least he was. In 1879 Stephen was attacked by a Demon that took over his body. When it did, it put Stephen’s soul in a special box.... That same box that you have in your room right now. While that demon is running around with Stephen’s body, his soul is stuck inside that box.”

Jack once again had a feeling that all this was a dream.

That was when Hugh spoke for the first time since they entered the dining room. “I searched the castle for that box...” he said. “Why didn’t you tell me where it was hidden?”.

“If I told you, it might have put you in danger” she said softly.

Hugh spoke again “that night in 1879, I heard my father scream from my bedroom and never saw him again.... Well not the human version of my father at least”.

“It was around 8 years later that people reported seeing red glowing eyes in the forest. It wasn’t long before we figured out that those eyes belonged to... what used to be my father”.

“The locals believed that a witch somehow introduced The Demon to the woods hundreds of years ago, and

somehow he found his way into the castle, and into my father” Hugh said.

Hugh continued, “The Demon never really came into the castle after he took over my father, not unless it was angered, I don’t know why he chose to stay in the woods. Maybe because it knew how much my father loved this hotel and The Demon was afraid being in here would bring out the parts of my father that still survived within the creature”.

“You’re correct” Alexis spoke. “Plus my psychic powers offer protection within these walls I love so much”.

Then out of nowhere, Hugh began to weep, surprising the other two. They sat there startled.

“He wants me to trick you” Hugh said. “I have to send you to your death to save my

boy” he said as tears flowed down his face.

“The Demon told me that I have to lure you outside the castle and lock you out so that he can hunt you, and... eat you”.

Then a grin appeared across Alexis face and she looked at Hugh and said two words;

“Do it”.

CHAPTER 17

Outside the castle a figure stood in the path that lead to the main door. Its eyes glowed red as the rain splashed off the dark shapes coat, and the wind howled around it. It waited like a stone. It stared silently at the castle before it bellowed in its demonic voice.



“COME OUT WEAKLING!..... I HUNGER FOR YOUR BLOOD. I MUST FEEEEED”.

Seconds later the castles door opened slowly with a loud creak, and there in the doorway, stood Jack. He didn't look scared, he looked angry.

The Demon was around 60 feet from the castle door way and it smiled at Jack.



“How good of you to come out, my boy”
The Demon said to Jack.

“I expected more cowardice, more....
hiding?” The Demon said with a playful
head tilt.

“Why would I run?” Jack replied. “Death
comes to us all, does it not?”.

“Perhaps” The Demon said in a tone that suggested *but not to me*. It took off its coat and its horns grew from its skull.

Jack appeared calm on the surface but in his mind he was panicking. “I just need his full attention” he thought to himself.

Then Jack went against everything in his body and began to walk toward The



Demon, with every step, his heart pounded like a sledgehammer.

CHAPTER 18



As Jack faced The Demon, Hugh left the castle through a back door and ran fast into the woods.

His plan was to run deep into the forest and then come up behind The Demon to surprise him.



All the while Alexis watched everything unfold from the tower that she had been pushed from hundreds of years ago.

CHAPTER 19

The Demon was old, very old, and therefore it knew something wasn't right. He didn't survive this long by being a trustful fool.

He watched Jack approach him head on and sensed a trap.

Jack paced faster and more confident the closer he got to The Demon. That was when The Demon spread his black wet wings to their full horrible size and showed Jack its teeth in a threatening display.

Jack was less than ten feet away now when a loud roar came through the rain



from behind The Demon which said one word:

“FATHER!...”

CHAPTER 19

The Demon spun around, and there on the path stood a very tired Hugh. He had given his all while running through the



woods. He stood facing The Demon, breathing heavily, and soaked through from the rain.

“Your father is long gone, Inn Keeper, and I am what remains.... I am *ALWAYS* what remains”.

“Thats not true!” Hugh shouted back.

“The ghost in the castle told me everything. I know that my fathers soul is in that box and if it dies, so do you”.

The Demon snarled, he couldn't help it.

He had hidden that box in the attic, where he himself had once resided until he took Stephen's body and soul, because he knew that no human could see that attic door and stairs, without spiritual help.

That is how Stephen got in there that day in 1879, because the demon had opened it for him so he could trap him and take his soul.

And on the day that Jack had gotten in to the attic it was because Alexis had revealed it to him, using her psychic powers.

“Where is the box now, Inn Keeper? Is it protected”.

Hugh just stared at him, still out of breath, but he did not answer, and this angered The Demon even more.

“I said....” roared The Demon, “IS..... THE BOX.... SAFE?!”.

But Hugh just stared back at him, trying to remain calm.

And then... it happened.

CHAPTER 20

The Demon was suddenly, and unexpectedly, pulled backwards

It was Jack who had pulled The Demon backwards. He used all his might to pull The Demon into a circle of salt that Jack



had put on the ground while Hugh distracted The Demon.

It was all part of the plan that Alexis had made when they were in the dining room.

She told Hugh and Jack how she had learned many years ago that a ring of salt can protect a person from bad energies, malevolent spirits, the restless undead, or even demons.

It is believed that if you surround yourself with a circle of salt no bad energies can get in to that circle, or more importantly in this case, nor can they get out if they are trapped inside a circle of salt.

Alexis had only heard of this theory... she had never tried it out.

As soon as Jack got The Demon into the circle, it turned around, grabbed him, and flung him toward the castle wall with such force that Jack immediately lost consciousness, for all anyone knew, Jack could have died from the impact.

The Demon instantly knew it had been trapped. It produced a sickening shrill sound that pierced Hugh's ears as it proceeded to beat its fists into the ground.

It then tried to fly up and out of the circle but could not, its powers had been



weakened in this circle. He felt as if magnets were pulling him toward the ground.

“INN KEEPER!” The Demon screamed.

“Get me out of this or you’ll never see your son again, I swear it” he said as his eyes turned from red to the darkest black.

That was when it seemed like an angel was falling from the sky.

Alexis for the second time in her existence fell from the tallest part of the castle. But this time she fell slowly, with grace.

Both Hugh and The Demon could see that she was holding something in her hands. And with a sickening realisation, The Demon howled.



CHAPTER 21

“I’ve waited to meet you face to face for a very long time, Demon” Alexis said in her warm tone.

“And what better time than now?” she smiled.

The Demon went silent, he stared at her with an evil look that went from her eyes and then to the box she was holding, the box that he knew, contained Stephen’s soul.

“Greetings fake witch, greetings trick prophet, greetings grief vulture.... You saw all.... but not your own death.... You saw all, but not me” The Demon sneered.



Alexis froze, because she immediately knew what he was referring to.

“Yees.... I was the one that pushed you all those years ago, I was the shadow born night fiend, that you never knew was there” The Demon cackled.

“Oh yeeees, you told the King many times “oh the castle is haunted m’lord”.... “an evil spirit dwells within”.... “we must cleanse and purify the grounds within these walls” he said in a mocking voice.

“So I had you killed before you could bring harm to me” he grinned as he stood there staring.

“I merely gave one of the night watchman a little touch of insanity, and told him that you would bring harm to the King, I said that you must be killed for his safety!” he laughed.

She knew what The Demon said was true. No part of him suggested that he was lying.

“Of course” The Demon continued, “that night watchman spent the rest of his life warding off rats in a dungeon below the castle, and the King... he never recovered. He loved you like a daughter the blithering fool”.

He paused to see her reaction, to see if he was doing what demons do best, which is to bring suffering.

“Tell me little girl, do you remember the fall?” He grinned.

“Did it....” he started to laugh.

“Did it hurt?” and at this, he howled into convulsions.

CHAPTER 22

She knew she couldn't give in. She could not show The Demon that his words had power over her emotions for this would feed him and possibly make him strong enough to take flight from the ground and make his way out of the circle of protection that Jack had so swiftly made.

She looked to where Jack still lay unconscious, possibly dead. She found

strength in her anger for what had happened to him.

She began to glow even brighter than usual as she stepped toward The Demon, it was as if the glow protected her from The Demons power.

She set the box down just outside of the circle and it too began to glow a bright golden colour. That was when she began



to chant the words of an ancient spell over
and over;

“Break, bind, release.
Shadow flee, soul at peace.
Box undone, chains unmade.
Rise now free, no longer stayed”.

Hugh came around The Demon to stand
beside Alexis, and he too joined in
chanting the spell over and over.

As they said it louder and louder the box
glowed brighter and brighter. Then its lid
burst open toward The Demon and a
dazzling bright golden glow shot toward
it, engulfing him as he screamed.

CHAPTER 23

“NOOOOOO..... YOU DARE NOT!” The Demon bellowed.

It's scaly wings began to wither apart and fall to the ground, it eyes began to turn more human with each passing second, its teeth began to unsharpen into something that resembled human teeth.... And then he fell to the ground.

The box began to dim in brightness, as did the glow around Alexis.

And on the ground... lay a human that hadn't been seen for over 50 years. On the ground, lay Stephen. He had gone back to the age he was when The Demon first took over his body.

“Dad?!... Father?!....” Hugh said and hurried toward him.

CHAPTER 24

The next morning Jack awoke in a castle room as the sun shone in the window. He heard the sound of birds chirping outside and nothing else. He noticed his shoes on placed neatly on the ground beside his bed.

“What happened?” he asked himself.

“And where am I?”

“He’s awake!” a voice that Jack didn’t recognise said.

“Welcome back to the land of the living”
the voice continued.

Jack began to focus his eyes on a healthy looking man who was vaguely familiar....

Then he sat up straight in the bed with terror for he knew he was looking at the face of The Demon that he had faced before getting thrown against the castle walls.

“Please!” the man said, “relax!”.

“You cured me, I’m human again”
Stephen said.

At that moment footsteps approached and Hugh along with J.J. entered the room with smiles on their faces to see that Jack was awake.

“Ah, the hero awakens” Hugh said with a warm smile.



“J.J.” Jack said. “You’re okay?”

“I am” J.J. replied. “All thanks to you it must be said... I owe you my life”.

Jack could see that J.J. was sore because he moved with strain and occasionally his face would indicate that he had felt a sharp sudden pain. J.J. had indeed broken

his ribs when The Demon flung him against the wall.

“Not at all” Jack said and made a waving away gesture with his hand.

“You’ve been passed out for 5 days” Stephen told Jack.

“We were really worried about you” Hugh added. “But there has been lots of good news while you slept”.

“There has?” Jack asked.

“Well firstly, as you can see my father Stephen is back to normal. When The Demon left his body, he went back to the age he was when The Demon first took his soul, so now.... My own dad is younger than me!” Hugh said and the three of them began to laugh.

“Secondly” Hugh continued, we were able to get a mechanic to look at your car while you were unconscious. We covered the cost of course, after all you have done for us it’s the least we could do. You can leave here whenever you want to now” he said with a smile.

“That’s great” Jack said “but.... Where is Alexis?

This question was greeted initially, by silence.

CHAPTER 25

Jack searched all their faces for an answer.

“She left you this” said Stephen as he handed Jack a note from inside his jacket pocket.

Jack took it, bewildered.

My Dearest Jack,

I knew from the first time that I saw you, that you would be the one to save this castle and its occupants from evil.

That is why I chose to reveal the attic door to you. I knew you would have the strength to do what had to be done.

When we destroyed The Demon thanks to your help, I regained the memory of the night I died. It was him who pushed me, and I could not be freed from the castle until I had banished him from it. That was my purpose for being here all these years. I just didn't know it.

With The Demon banished, I knew I was free. My beloved King came back for me while you've been sleeping, and he helped me cross over to the land of the spirit world finally. I am free now. I have been 19 for far too long.

I can never thank you enough for all you have done for me and this family, whom I have watched over for many years.

But always know, I will now watch over you. And always know, that you are a hero.

Thank you, Jack.

Your friend,

A.



Jack felt a tear roll down his cheek, so much had happened to him since his car broke down. He had met a ghost, a demon, and found his own inner strength.

“I would like to rest now if that’s okay” Jack said to the three gentlemen.

“Of course” said Hugh, “we will leave some food here for you. Please eat, and rebuild your strength. You can stay with us for as long as you need. Indefinitely if you want. We can never repay you fully.”



CHAPTER 26

Three days had passed since Jack had regained consciousness, and he was now strong enough to leave The Cliff Top Castle Hotel and continue on with his journey.

Hugh loaded Jack's bags into the boot of his car which now ran better than ever.



They even cleaned the interior and exterior of the car while he was resting, and today's sunset made her look as beautiful as the day she left the car lot where he had bought her brand new.

They said their goodbyes and shared hugs and handshakes. Then Hugh, J.J. and Stephen stood at the Castle door as Jack sat into his car and began to drive down

the lane towards the main road. The three men waved him goodbye, and as they did, Hugh shed a single tear for he had gotten not only his father back, but also his beloved son J.J. too. All thanks to Jack. They shared a bond that few other humans would ever know after having endured such an adventure. It was a story that they dared not to tell anyone for fear of being ridiculed.





Even to Hugh, the last few days seemed like a crazy nightmare that was now thankfully over.

The three generations of Jackson's, son, father, and grandfather walked back into the hotel for a stiff drink.

CHAPTER 27

Later that night as the clock struck midnight, J.J. was in his bedroom. He was not asleep, nor was he even laying in his bed.

Instead, he was sitting upright in a chair in the corner of his room, surrounded by complete darkness. Not one muscle in his body moved. So still was he, that it



would've been easy to mistake him for a statue or mannequin.

A large female Wolf spider crawled down his head and across his pale face. She had egg sacs attached to her back, her hatchlings would be born any day now, free to roam inside these castle walls.

As the Wolf spider crawled on J.J.s face its sharp long legs were digging into his skin for grip. But yet, he did not move.

The spider moved over his open eyes, yet he did not flinch even when its legs dug into his eyeball as it crawled.

It paused for a moment, with its large legs covering parts of J.J.s nose and face. Maybe it would rest here on this human statue, maybe it would put its eggs in the nostrils of this cold stone like human.

Or maybe it would....

Instantly the spider was no more.

With a speed that wouldn't have been visible to the human eye, J.J. caught the female Wolf spider and forced it into his mouth to feed himself. It was juicy and delicious to him. J.J. felt and heard the spiders eggs pop between his teeth, spilling their warm liquid on to his tongue.

A maddening smile crossed his face....
And then his eyes began to glow red.

The Demon... began to laugh.

THE END.



EPILOGUE

Demons are old. In fact, The Demon in this story was old when the world was young. And with age, comes wisdom. Comes... devilment, one might say.

Let us now revisit a part of our story where The Demon demonstrated some true magic, some misdirection. Where he made our heroes look where he wanted them to look, and therefore he caught us, the readers, off guard as well.

Cast your mind back to the moment our heroine Alexis was chanting the spell to free Stephen of The Demon. That spell did indeed work, but our heroes, as well as you the reader, presumed that The Demon died as the spell was being



cast... but he did not. He just wanted you to think he did.

Instead, when The Demon left Stephen's body, he transformed himself into a rat, and that rat hid in Stephen's clothing and then waited...

He waited for Hugh to pull Stephen out of the circle of salt because The Demon could not do that himself, transformed or not. He was pushed into the circle, and needed to be pulled back out of it.

Once Hugh had pulled Stephen out, he was too overcome with joy to see what was really happening. As were you dear reader.

The Demon, or should I say *the rat*, scurried into the woods. He hid behind a tree and watched Hugh and Alexis get Stephen and Jack back into the castle.

And once the coast was clear, The Demon took his true form once again and calmly walked, to the circle of salt for the one thing he needed.... The empty box that formerly held Stephen's soul.

This box had been given to him by a witch he had met in these very woods many years ago, and he treasured it dearly.

And why wouldn't he? It gave him the power to put someones soul into it so he could take their body and become even more powerful than he already was. With a human body, he could spread demonic evil in a human world.

He then walked back into the woods, for there was a cave where a certain prize was waiting, and that prize as I'm sure you've guessed, was a bloodied and bruised J.J.

In the cave, The Demon took over J.J.'s body as he had done with his grandfather all those years ago, and he had placed J.J.'s souls in his precious box. Then, The Demon simply walked back to the castle using J.J.'s body, and was embraced by Hugh as a father would embrace any son that he feared he may never see again. You could say The Demon was welcomed in to the castle with open arms.

That is just how crafty demons are.

Once The Demon was cosy within the castle walls, he did what every good demon would do. He waited.

Waited for our heroes Alexis and Jack to leave.

And this, is where you must wait dear reader. You must wait to find out what does The Demon do now that he is in the castle. You must wait to see if our heroes Jack and Alexis return to once again save the day.

And most of all, you must wait to see if evil can come out on top this time.

Always remember dear friends, demons are old, some are older than time itself. And they are crafty... too crafty.

Always be on your guard.

Until next time.

Mallow Hub.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

This story was written by the students of Horizons Mallow Hub with the help of staff member Finbarr Murray. This is their first story and was written over the course of a few months. All characters were invented by the students and each class they decided what would happen to the characters.

Thank you for such a gripping tale: Euan Pickard, Mark Twomey, Timmy Sheehan, Shaunna McGowan, Marian Maher, Brian McDonald, Lisa O'Brien, Amanda O'Connell, Jason Buckley, Mateusz Kaczmarek, Jerry Crowley, Patrick Crowley, Eimear O'Riordan, Billy Gallagher.

