



THE DEVIL'S FEAST

BY DR. DOUGLAS COURTNEY

The Devil's Feast

Sally set the table. Each plate was placed precisely. Each fork arranged in its queue. It seemed a waste of time and energy in this old mansion of grit and filth. Spiderwebs cluttered the rafters and swayed above her head. The dust of ages left her footprints embedded in its depth. It invaded her clothes, mouth and nose causing her to sneeze repeatedly and often. Still she kept to her chores.

Fine china and glassware perched atop a long table that was gracefully covered by a high quality, but very old and greying tablecloth. Sally had counted and knew there were 33 place settings. Each was set before straight-backed solid oak chair. At the head of the table sat a monstrous throne bedecked with carvings of boar's heads, wild game, and in the center top a full maned lion. Each chair was covered with dust and grime. It just tore at Sally that she wasn't permitted to clean even the most remote artifact in this grand old dining room. She wondered as she worked at how beautiful this mansion must once have been.

Sally stood at the head of the table, just behind the large throne and looked to her left. Two pocket doors stood askew, open enough to view the grand ballroom beyond. Large chandeliers hung from the ceilings. Like their counterpart in the dining room each was covered in webs, dust, and filth. Yet the elegance of the crystals somehow shown through as the fading autumn light fell upon them. A twinkle here, a momentary glow there gave evidence to their beauty.

The ballroom floor was pockmarked from the occasional water stains that had formed from errant roof tiles and broken window glass. Still the small stage where chamber music had played remained secure in its position. The floor of the room still strong despite more than a century of neglect. Sally sighed and placed the last fork and spoon on the table. She measured and marked until she was satisfied and stood back to review her work. She sighed again.

A knock was heard at the front door. Sally was startled at the sound, but not frightened. She had been told the musicians would come just before dark. Sally suspected they had arrived. She made her way to the entrance and opened the door. Four men and a woman in formal attire waited patiently with their instruments.

"Sander's residence?" One of the older gentlemen asked as she held the door open. Sally nodded her head and stepped aside to let them in.

"I wouldn't have believed it if I wasn't here." The lady said. She turned to Sally. "Margaret Williams, violin. And you would be Sally?"

"Yes, ma'am. I am. Pleased you found the place." Sally smiled.

"Well we had to look for it. All the weeds and old growth really hid it from the highway. Still for what we are being paid I wasn't going to miss it." Margaret responded. "By the way, you ever meet our benefactor?"

"No. Probably contacted just like you. Mysterious letter in the mail?"

"On high quality parchment with old English lettering." Margaret countered.

"Same here. Burrow, Burrow, and Gone, Esquire or something. I can't remember the name." Sally replied.

"Lord neither can I. But the check cleared. That was enough for me. Couldn't have come at a better time."

"Same here. Remember the rules?"

“Yes. No cleaning, no dusting, no clearing the cobwebs. Just go to the ballroom, set up and play. We have three breaks of 20 minutes. We start playing promptly at 7 pm, no earlier. Have to play through the last hour. We end at midnight on the spot, get up and leave. Must be gone by 12:30 am. One-time gig. No more. Remainder of the payment sent on complete adherence to the rules.”

“Correct.” Sally responded and then led the five of them into the ballroom. They moved quickly to the small stage and the sparse, but elegant chairs, scattered on its deck. One of the men winced as he reached to down to wipe off the chair before sitting.

“George!” Margaret chastised. “No cleaning, no wiping, nothing. Remember? Just sit on it. It will be right enough once your pants dust it off.”

“My best pants, might I remind you.” George grumbled as he retracted his reach.

“You may. And you can buy another pair or two for what we are being paid.” Margaret responded.

“Right you are. I will abide by the rules.”

“Thank you, dear.” Margaret turned abruptly as she anxiously and excited addressed Sally. “So, what’s the story here? Why all the rules? Any idea what’s going on. Quite the mystery for a Halloween night. Some sort of spooky Halloween Party? Best place for it, I must say.”

“Not quite. As I understand it, it’s a bit more than a one-percenter Halloween Party. Lore has it that at 6:00 pm the ghosts come to life. By 7 long dead guests begin to arrive and a full-fledged dinner of ghost and demons begins at 8.”

“Here? In this place? You’re joking. A ‘for real’ ghost story? I signed up for a ghost story?”

“Well, it’s what I was told.” Sally continued with a mischievous conspiratorial glint. “It’s actually hard to find any information on this place or the party. When I reached out to last year’s hostess - yes there were previous parties - she refused to discuss it. Something about a bonus. The one before her refused as well. I did get to speak with some woman whose mother had been a host about 75 years ago. She said her mother claimed the place came alive at 6 on the dot. The dust and dirt of ages disappeared, and servants just appeared dressed in the style of the 1800’s. A feast began promptly at 8 attended by the best of society, at least society that had been alive over 100 years ago.”

“One hundred years? You’re pulling my leg.” Margaret chuckled.

“It’s what I was told. Site to see if it is true.” Sally smiled and giggled as well.

“If it is. We’ll know soon enough. It’s about a quarter to six now. So, if the annual party is true, why the yearly haunting?”

“Probably has to do with old man Sanders. It’s his place. I know a bit more about him. Hard not to in this town. Left a mark, I’ll tell you. Not a good one. Was known for his anger. Made Ebenezer look like a saint before the Christmas ghosts. Local legend has it he made his fortune in land and shipping with the help of Old Scratch, Lucifer himself. Sold his soul for riches and power. But there was a catch in the contract. To keep the riches and power Sanders had to get his son to sign his soul over as well, before midnight on his 25th birthday.”

“Halloween night is Sander’s son’s birthday?”

“As I have been told. Anyway, the feast was his son’s birthday party. All the guests were the most influential and well-to-do of local society. Just before midnight Jason, with great fanfare, was supposed to sign his name in blood on the contract. As a reward he was to inherit all his dad’s wealth and continue in the luxury he had come to love. But just before midnight, at the head of the table, before his dad and Lucifer, he refused.”

“Ballsy.”

“Yep. Apparently, Lucifer was none too happy. Cursed Jason, old man Sanders and everyone in the house. Each Halloween they relive the entire event and will continue living it until the son signs over his soul. So far, he hasn’t. Still refuses.”

“Bet that pisses off the house guests and servants.”

“I think that is the point. Their lives continue to be cursed with no rest in their graves until he signs. The pressure from them each year continues to build as they wait year after year in their own Purgatory. But it got worse for ol’ man Sanders. Next day he was arrested for fraud. His assets were frozen, and he was cast out of his home. The richest man became a beggar in his own land. He spent decades in filth and mire of the lowest of the low until he passed, left to rot in some unmarked grave. Only respite is the 6 hours on Halloween where he is the richest man in town once again desperately trying to get his son to sign.

The estate was put into a trust, the mansion abandoned, and the son forced out as well. He lived a life of poverty and abuse until he died years later. It was said he died with a smile on his face. Never regretting his decision. No one knows why he did it. Most speculate he just wanted to save his soul.”

“So why a new hostess and band every year? Weren’t they part of the scene?” Asked Margaret.

“Don’t know. Gossip says the hostess and musicians were taking a break out back when the house was cursed. Since they weren’t in the house. They weren’t cursed. So, every year they must get a new hostess and musicians. But both have to be out by 12:30 or forever a part of the curse.”

“Wooooooo. Nice ghost story. Scary. Still, a ghost comes dancing in here tonight I will be gone well before 12:30. You can bank on that.” Margaret grinned.

A hall clock suddenly chimed 6:00 pm. Sally and Margaret stared at each other. The clock had been as dead as the house when they walked in. On the final chime the flames flickered in the chandeliers, fires sparked to life in the fireplaces, and the cobwebs fell, disappearing like the mist before they reached the floor. A gentle breeze wafted through the house and the lingering dust was swept away. In a moment Margaret, Sally and the other musicians were standing in a warm, fully furnished, well lighted luxury home wiped clean of all ancient dust and grime. A small voice from the door leading to the grand entrance attempted to politely intrude on Margaret’s and Sally’s conversation.

“Miss Sally, will you go over tonight’s menu with the staff please?”

In the doorway stood a maid complete with pressed grey dress, white bonnet and apron. She looked directly at Sally. Sally looked back and then turned to Margaret. Margaret was backing towards the stage, eyes wide. She raised a finger while looking at Sally. “I will be out just after 12. I am not waiting until 12:30. Not even giving it a chance.”

“Don’t stand in the doorway.” Sally mouthed towards her. She turned to greet the maid.

The maid curtseyed as Sally approached. Sally, recovered from the shock of the transformation just enough to regain her composure and purpose. With a flick of her wrist she led the maid back to the kitchen of the old mansion. As she crossed the threshold she was greeted by a cook, another maid, two servers and a butler.

“Good evening.” Sally felt herself say. It was all so surreal. Sally decided to let her instincts take control as she wrestled mentally with the reality of working in a haunted mansion with long dead ghosts. Fifteen years in the catering and event business taught her how to organize an event. Especially a birthday banquet.

Very quickly the cook had the soup prepared earlier hot and piping. Bottles of wine were found chilled in their carriers and hors d'oeuvres were being placed upon plates. Sally had been given the menu earlier. She had had prepared most of the meal in advance well aware one hour before the banquet was hardly time to prepare a full meal. What she was amazed about was how efficiently and expertly the staff followed instructions. It seemed the more she treated them professionally and like living humans instead of ghosts, the more they appreciated it and responded.

Sally had learned the maid that had greeted her was Ann, the butler Charles, of course. Peggy was the cook. Charlotte, Tom and Peter rounded out the rest of the staff. As 7pm approached Sally made last minute instructions and moved toward the front door. Charles, as well as Ann, followed at her heels. It was moments before 7 when Sally saw Jason come down the staircase. She gaped. He froze. They knew each other. But, how? A knock at the door interrupted the awkwardness. Charles took his station and opened the door. The clock chimed 7 and the band began to play. The first guests had arrived.

Sally took another glance towards the stairway, but Jason had moved on into the dining area. Sally returned her attentions to the entering guests. As hostess for the evening she welcomed each individual and couple into the home while Charles attended to the door and Ann gathered their outer garments.

Sally was curious as to how the evening would progress. The guests were, after all, ghosts. At least they were now. At the original party some century past they were very much alive and engaged, but time had moved on. Each and every one was now deceased. Even their heirs had passed away. Would they see her, know how to interact with her as one of their own? Could they even eat the expensive repast she had prepared for them?

"Mr. Frobisher." Charles announced as the first guest arrived.

Mr. Frobisher grinned at the announcement and turned toward the voice. "Ah, another Halloween is it? How many this time, Charles?"

"I'm sure I don't know sir." Charles spoke with detached professionalism. Mr. Frobisher turned to greet Sally and was startled at what he saw before him.

"My word. Are you Megan? Back again?" Mr. Frobisher asked in incredulous tones.

Sally leaned forward and extended her hand. "Sally. Mr. Frobisher. My given name is Sally..." Sally offered when Mr. Frobisher leaned forward took Sally's hand into his and raised it to his lips. A very continental introduction she had not expected.

"You will please excuse my impertinence, Miss Sally. I did not mean to offend. You look so very much like someone from my, well our, past." At that Mr. Frobisher dropped her hand and made his way towards the drinks offered by Tom at the entrance to the dining hall.

It was odd. It was weird. She could touch them, feel them, talk to them. Each and every one was well aware they were dead, but alive. They knew they were cursed and here for the briefest of times. Yet they drank and munched on the hors d'oeuvres as if alive. It was like old home week where each seemed to be catching up with the other, yet with little or nothing to talk about. After all they had been, well dead for the last year. Still there seemed a genuine buzz of excitement. Possibly because there was little else to talk about. That excited buzz all revolved around Sally's very close resemblance to someone named Megan.

After most of the guests had arrived, Sally excused herself from the front door to attend to those that had arrived and see if she could find Jason. It was with Mrs. Grace Shelby that things, if they could, began to get weirder. Sally had seen her picture before. It was in a house in which she

had hosted and catered an event. After Sally had re-introduced herself, she inquired about Mrs. Shelby's family. Her inquiry drew immediate attention.

"Whatever do you mean, dear?" Asked Mrs. Shelby.

"Well, the Shelby's are a well-known family in the area, especially after Thomas Shelby went on to become Governor of the state." Sally replied. She continued explaining what little history she knew of the Shelby family tracing it all the way back to the picture she saw in the home. Mrs. Shelby began to tear up at the news. Sally stopped talking and offered a handkerchief.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Shelby. I didn't mean to hurt you." Said Sally. She was now concerned she may have broken some unwritten rule, some demonic no no that could curse her forever.

"Oh, my dear, no. You didn't offend and don't worry you have not broken any of this evening rules. I just I never knew what happened to my family, my children, grandchildren. I'm just so happy they have done well. It is quite a gift you have given me." Grace rested her hand on Sally's.

Sally soon found herself the center of all attention as each and every guest began to ask questions, request news, offer insights. Each revelation, tidbit and nugget of information Sally provided gained momentum in the retelling. Soon the gathering was buzzing with excitement and conversation. As the hour approached 8 Sally was tapped on the shoulder by Ann. She excused herself in order to make sure preparations were ready for the elder Sanderson and Jason as well as the dinner itself.

A few minutes before 8 Sally heard the shuffle of heavy footsteps on the floorboards above. She signaled to Margaret and the small orchestra ceased their playing as the guest made their way to their assigned place settings. Just before the elder Sanders made his way down the staircase Jason showed himself in the dining room. He glided to the front of the room past Sally and took his place to the right of his father's chair. With a small glance Jason smiled conspiratorially at Sally.

Sally stood at the entrance to the dining room and as Mr. Sanders reached the doorway made her announcement. "Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Joshua Sanders."

With but a glance her way, Mr. Sanders acknowledged her introduction. "Thank you, Megan. And welcome all to my son's birthday once again. May we never see another." After his introduction he made his way down the left side of the long table to his seat among a few twitters and small laughter. Only at midway through his greetings and amble along the length of the dining table did he pause and look up at Sally. An anxious Mr. Frobisher was pointing her way and informing Mr. Sanders, that she was not the aforementioned Megan. The look in Mr. Sanders' eyes confirmed his startled response.

Sally ensured each guest had their glasses filled by the staff and began the dinner. Hot soup, followed by a unique salad, followed by succulent goose, fish, or ham as was their choice. Potato, greens, fruits and vegetables were in plentiful supply. It was a concert of culinary cuisine and Sally was the more than capable director. Even the unaffable Charles was impressed and strode mightily to keep up the professionalism that Sally had provided. The staff seemed to relish the challenge to their talents. Margaret and the orchestra resumed their playing in exactly twenty minutes, mixing a soft background ambience to the chattering guests and hosts.

It was after Mr. Sanders invited a few of his closest friends to join him for a cigar and drinks that the guest arose from the table and made their way into the ballroom. Sally turned the supervision of the dining room cleanup over to Charles. She then made her way into the ballroom to ensure the entertainment of the guests. This is where Jason took her hand and asked her to dance. It was if he had been waiting in baited anticipation for the chance.

“So, what do you know of me, fair Sally?” Jason began as he twirled her around the room. Sally smiled and then regaled him of what little facts she knew.

After she finished Jason smiled and pulled her to a small couch in the corner. “The outline is fair, but the details are missing.” Jason began.

“I was born in luxury. I came to crave it. I enjoyed the power and the position. It is like ambrosia and you never feel you would want to give it up. I have watched so many men, including my father, addicted to its taste and feel. They can and will do anything to keep it. They become drunk in its glory. I did as well. Fully expected I would sign my soul over as my Dad wished with no regrets. Ah, those without power and wealth just don’t understand its pull. It is greater than any drug. I can personally tell you.”

“But you didn’t.” Said Sally.

“No. I didn’t. I did live as you said, mired in poverty, filth and stench. But what you didn’t know is I lived with a smile on my face. Everyday. I loved my life. I was buried in a pauper’s grave. But I was buried next to my wife, Megan.”

“The hostess that night, Megan. She was your wife?” Sally was incredulous.

“Yes. Men look at the downfall of powerful men. But they fail to see those by their sides. While everyone was talking about me, they never spoke of Megan. She and my children are the reasons I will never sign that paper, no matter the entreaties or pleas. To sign that paper means I lose Megan and the children. It is really no contest.” Jason smiled.

“Does your father know? Does he know he has grandkids?”

“Not that I know of. He has been so determined to have me follow in his footsteps. So unrelenting in his disbelief that I could relinquish all this power and money he has never wondered about my life. When he was arrested all those years ago he wandered. Never sought me out or my family. I could never find him and eventually stopped looking. He died unaware and remains so. Every Halloween trying every entreaty and trick to get me to sign. The guests have long since tired of pressuring me. This has become his lonely hell. We are all but the sad backdrop to his anger and loss.”

“So why do I look so like Megan?”

“Have no idea. Who is your great grandmother or grandfather?”

“Never met them. Only ones I know had the last name of Farmer.”

“Would that be the Farmer family in Hollow’s Grove?”

“Only Farmer family I know in this area. My family used to live in Cornish next to Hollow’s Grove. Why?”

“Well, my oldest grandchild married Tate Farmer and lived in Hollow’s Grove. Had two kids, Chad and Elise.”

“Elise Meadows was my grandmother. Shit. We’re related?”

“Appears we are, granddaughter.” Jason grinned.

Just as the evening was getting very interesting Charles appeared with a small aperitif for Sally and an announcement.

“The table is set for the presentment of the presents and the cake. Would you like to review, Madam?” Sally nodded, still a bit in shock. Jason stood up and offered a hand.

It took moments to review and affirm. The staff was particularly pleased Sally approved. A possible smile turned up on Charles face, but it would be difficult to confirm. Sally only noticed a tick on the corner of his mouth. Then Sally made her way back to the kitchen to confirm the

cleanup was progressing properly. New revelations had been made, by ghosts no less, but her duties did matter. When all was as expected, Sally made her way to the ballroom. The band was on their last break as 11:00 pm was approaching. Mr. Frobisher and Mrs. Shelby made their way to Sally. Each grabbed a hand. Mrs. Shelby spoke first.

“Sally, Lucifer will be here soon. He comes every year to witness. To see if Jason signs. He is as expected, slick, talented, and very, very evil. He will frighten you if Jason refuses again and he will. It is a terrible sight to behold. But Mr. Frobisher and I will be beside you. When it is done, we will see to it you are outside before the final curse falls. We wouldn’t wish this on anyone.”

At the last sentence a loud thumping on the old oak front door was heard. Sally could see the fear in Charles’ face as he moved forward to answer the knock. Ann was cowering just behind. Charles looked over to Sally. She raised a finger and he halted. Sally moved to the front door and took her position, firmly placing Ann behind her. At her nod, Charles opened the door.

“Mr. Morningstar.” Charles announced as Satan walked through the portal. Sally reached out her hand.

“Ah, Sally. So nice to meet you my dear.” Lucifer said as he raised her hand to his lips.

“You as well Mr. Morningstar. Welcome to our small gathering.” Sally replied and motioned Ann to take the cape offered by the devil. “May I escort you into our ball room?” Sally continued.

With a flair reserved for the arrogance of evil, Lucifer took Sally’s arm and made his way into the ballroom and the waiting guests. Margaret and the band noting the time on the clock above the mantel kept playing. It was one hour to 12 and the rules required the band to continue playing until midnight. With Lucifer himself in the room they weren’t going to allow any margin for error.

With the music playing Lucifer took advantage and had a few turns around the dance floor with Sally. Mr. Frobisher, keeping his very word, then interrupted. He asked if he might dance with Sally as well. Considering the elegance of the environment and narcissistic personality of the devil, of course Lucifer acquiesced. He was not going to be out shown by any mere mortal.

Mr. Frobisher took Sally into the hallway while Mrs. Shelby entertained Lucifer. Sally had to concede that was a very difficult thing she had just done. While Lucifer was slick and unassuming he had an evil quality about him. She felt cold and distant the whole time she was with him and never once felt she mattered any more to him than a flea matter to a dog.

“We’ll keep him occupied. You go help Joshua Sanders.” Mr. Frobisher directed.

“Jason’s Dad? Why?”

“This is always hard on him. Every year Satan doesn’t get the signature he bears down even harder on your Joshua. It is a hell hopefully we both will never know. Now go.”

Sally made her way to the library. She knocked briefly before going in. Joshua Sanders sat alone, drink in one hand, cigar in the other. His head hung down and a tear fell across his cheek. He shuddered as he sat. He seemed perfectly aware of what was to come. He feared it. But he could not stop it. It was out of his hands, out of his control and he was not a man used to feeling this vulnerable. Sally felt deep sorrow for her grandfather.

“Would a new drink help, Mr. Sanders?” Sally walked over to the small bar to refresh his drink. She then worked her way back to his chair. Sally placed a hand on his arm. Joshua looked up and saw Sally.

“A kindness from a stranger.” He said. “Sorry I called you Megan earlier, Sally.”

“It’s quite alright, grandfather. I am happy I have such a resemblance to my grandmother.” Sally spoke quietly. She hoped to give this man, however undeserving, some peace.

Joshua's head wavered a bit then his focus began to grow. "Grandfather? What are you getting at, Sally?"

"Your son had children. They had children. Each flourished in their own way. I am one of that line that began with you."

"Grandchildren? Really? I had grandchildren. They carried on well past this abomination?"

"Yes, you do."

"That is why he won't sign. By God, he never will sign. I have nothing I can offer to top that. There is nothing." Joshua sighed realizing he had been fully beaten. But then he rose his eyes and looked at Sally. "And I need nothing. Because he survives. I survive. I cannot be beaten."

It was not the reaction Sally had hoped, but it provided the spark that Joshua needed. His spine straightened. A gleam appeared in his eye. "I survive. I win. Suck that you black hearted bastard." Joshua slammed the glass down on the table and looked at Sally.

"I am not the grandfather you probably would want. I am who I am. But I am not ungrateful granddaughter. Thank you. You have helped a great deal."

Joshua rose and extended his arm. Sally took it and looked at the clock in the library. It was a quarter until midnight. She and her grandfather made their way back to the dining room. He wearing pride like armor. She wondering what fate had in store on this evil night. The guests had taken their places at the table and Charles was awaiting Sally's nod to bring in the cake.

Sally affirmed Charles' duties and took Joshua to the head of the table. Lucifer stood just to his left while Jason sat to Joshua's right. The contract, signed in blood sat before Joshua's chair. Joshua sat down and watched as Charles set the cake down before Joshua and Jason. Joshua clanged his spoon on the fine crystal to get everyone's attention.

"Friends and associates, it has occurred to me that every Halloween we have a cake set before us and I have never even tasted of it. Sally would you mind?"

Sally leaned over, took the cake knife offered by Ann and sliced a big piece. She placed it before Joshua.

Lucifer roared. "What the hell do you think you are doing, Joshua. You try my patience!"

Lucifer's anger erupted and with it his slick manners and gleaming ensemble. There in the room sat an ugly grotesque figure with cloven hooves, red skin covered in boils and scars, tattered leather looking huge bat wings and a head topped with curling horns. He bellowed hot smoke and his body was covered in red dripping blood. Sally recoiled in fear. Jason stood and held her behind him. But his father was unflinching.

"I am having a piece of birthday cake. It's what one does at a birthday party." Joshua provoked Lucifer even further.

"What about my contract? I need his signature!" Lucifer screamed. "I have much better things to do than repeat this every year, you tired old man."

Joshua stood up with the contract in hand. He turned and faced Lucifer head on.

"Then go do them, sir. I will never, ever ask my son to sign this contract again. No matter how many Halloweens or years come. I say to Hell with you, sir. I condemn the day you ever came into my life!"

"Then Hell it is!" Lucifer screamed, and a large burning chasm opened up in the middle of the ballroom floor. Lucifer grabbed Joshua, flew into the air and then screamed down into the chasm. Joshua could be seen in his taloned grip, a look of victory on his face.

“Well, I’ve never seen that before, in all of these years.” Said a stunned Jason. Mrs. Shelby and Mr. Frobisher grabbed Sally and pulled her to the front door then pushed her through as midnight was chiming in the hallway clock. Margaret, George and the rest of the band were hauling ass right behind her. As soon as they were out the door it slammed shut behind them. The warm and lighted mansion went dark and they were left in an old decaying front yard of a moldy old mansion.

Sally stood, did her best to regain her balance, and dusted herself off. Margaret and the band stumbled to a standing position, grabbed their instruments and dusted themselves off as well. They all stood in a stunned circle trying to gain some sense of themselves and their surroundings.

“Hellava Halloween night.” Margaret said.

Sally nodded in the affirmative.

“Need a ride?”

“No. Car’s around back next to the kitchen.”

Margaret began making her way to her ride. “Don’t call us. We’ll call you? Ok?”

Sally nodded in assent and stumbled back to her car. It was gonna take her a bit to recover from all of that.

Six months later the deed was delivered by an attorney. A sizeable sum was deposited into her accounts on the first of each month for its upkeep, care and any personal expenses. Sally was at the least entirely confused. There was no explanation, no rules to follow. She was just given the deed to the old mansion and became the sole heir to Joshua’s estate. Only one proviso was entered into the will. There had to be a yearly Halloween party, a Devils Feast.

“Oh hell no.” Sally thought. But she thought again and considered. It was scary, but she suffered no harm. So, Sally moved into the old mansion. She did clean the dust and fix the windows first thing. Where she could she added modern conveniences. But the budget wasn’t unlimited, so the repairs were taking time.

Two months after moving in the Shelby family attorneys appeared at the door. A small stipend had been socked away by Mrs. Grace Shelby more than a century earlier and just come to their attention. By direction of Mrs. Shelby’s bequest it was to be given to Sally. To say there was some confusion on the part of the Shelby’s was an understatement. But the authenticity was assured, and the funds bequeathed as directed. What was a small stipend had become quite the gift over a century later. Sally smiled when she received it along with several pictures of Mrs. Shelby’s extended family.

Mr. Frobisher was not to be outdone. A slew of paintings, jewelry, and gold had been locked away in a forgotten vault. His attorneys had passed his last will and testament along each year in anticipation of delivering it to Sally. She received it and the contents of the vault on Halloween morning. Very apt considering she was planning the first of the Devils Feasts as directed in the will.

Sally had sent out invitations weeks in advance of this years Devils Feast in hopes some of the heirs would attend. To her surprise there wasn’t one refusal. She smiled as she anticipated the upcoming event. She wondered if Jason or Joshua would be in attendance. Had the curse survived? Would Lucifer return? It was all tense and scary as it was terribly exciting.

Sally had informed the guests to arrive at 6. It was now 5 and Sally was putting the last measurement on the last place setting when she heard the knock at the door. She smiled as last

year's memory filled her mind and went to open the door. Margaret, George and the rest of the band stood on the doorstep.

"Upped your game. We couldn't turn it down and you knew it?" Margaret grinned. "How you doing Sally? Ready for another go?"

"Just fine. Come on in and get set up. It won't be too long to wait."

"Woo. I thought the outside looked better. Least we could find the place. But you did it up in here, too." Margaret admired the new surroundings.

"Just a nice dusting."

"No shit."

Margaret and Sally chatted for a while more as the band set up on stage. The tuning of instruments and good conversation passed the time until they heard a small voice at the ballroom door threshold.

"Miss Sally, will you go over tonight's menu with the staff please?" Ann was in the house, but with a small smile upon her face.

"It would be my pleasure, Ann." Sally followed Ann into the kitchens where Peggy, Tom, Charlotte, and Peter waited patiently for her instructions. A gentle air of anticipation filled the room.

"I'm pleased to see you all again. But I was hoping to see Charles as well." Sally intoned.

"Here, Miss Sally." Came a voice from the pantry. Charles strode forth uncomfortable with his tardiness.

"Well done, Charles. Are we up to it tonight? Shall we be our best?"

"Most definitely, Ma'am." Replied Charles.

"Then let's begin." Sally laid out the menu plans and schedules. The room became abuzz with anticipation and excitement. Just before 7 Ann tapped Sally on the shoulder. Charles was waiting at the threshold. Sally nodded took her place in the company and headed toward the front door. Just as they arrived Jason descended the stairs. He took Sally's hand in his as he bent low and placed a kiss.

"May I join you?" Jason asked. Sally nodded in the affirmative as the first knock on the door commenced.

"Mr. Frobisher." Charles announced. "And his heirs, Henry and Cathy."

Mr. Frobisher turned to see the invited heirs to his estates. The look of joy filled his face. A tear streaked down his cheek. He leaned over and grabbed them both to his chest. Then turned to Sally.

"Please excuse my manners, dear lady. This is such a surprise. Such a surprise. I am so pleased to see you again." Mr. Frobisher took Sally's hand and raised it to his lips as well. When done he led Henry and Cathy into the ballroom to begin a hearty conversation.

The announcements lasted the whole hour. Mrs. Shelby was so overcome she almost had to be carried from the door upon being introduced to her heirs.

Just before 8, Ann and Charles headed towards the dining room. A much larger table had been put in place to adjust for the guests. Tom and Charlotte had the meal well in hand. Charles oversaw all with the discipline of a field marshal. By 9 the gathering had broken up into groups. Some dancing to Margaret's band. Other's crowded into the library and study. Mr. Frobisher commented greatly on one of the paintings he had bequeathed to Sally that she had hung just inside the foyer.

“He won’t be here. Just as well. Probably means Lucifer won’t attend either.” Sally sighed as she commented on the absence of her grandfather Joshua.

“He won’t, and neither will Lucifer. That contract is broken. But fortunately, the curse lives on.” Jason replied as he raised a small toast to his father.

“Fortunately? Really? You don’t mind?” Sally asked. “I thought you wanted to rest in peace.”

“I do. And we will. Just a small detour every year to spend with family. Not a bad trade at all.”

Just then the quick tune of Happy Birthday began to play. A large cake appeared, and everyone joined in on wishing Jason another Happy Birthday. The cake was cut. The pieces passed out and soon the clock struck midnight. Quickly and happily the band led the way as each and every human guest left the mansion before 12:30. All but Sally. She stayed, unaffected by the curse, and wished the best to her deathly guests as they faded away. As her head fell softly on her pillow that night, the new Mistress of Sanders Hall was already beginning preparations for next year’s Devil’s Feast