

Managing the Vampire's Mansion

By K. M. Shea

Chapter 1

Abi

"You got kidnapped, didn't you? I knew it! I knew that house manager job sounded sketchy!"

"No, Mom." I leaned back against my car and peered up at the imposing house before me, looking valiantly for the house number. "I called you because I made it to the house and I wanted to let you know my location."

Just in case this job does prove to be a front for illicit activities... but it wasn't like I could say that part out loud to my mom. She was already questioning my sanity for taking this job in the first place. I couldn't admit I had my own doubts.

"Oh. Well, you made it safely, right? Did you stop and eat like I told you to?"

"Yes, Mom."

"Are you sure about this, Abigail?"

Oof, she'd busted out my full name for this four-times repeated conversation. That meant she was serious.

"Don't get me wrong," she continued, not giving me a chance to reply. *"I'm thrilled you left that accounting job of yours—that company was going to suck you dry until you dropped dead from overwork. But leaving town and heading north into the boonies of Wisconsin to take a job as a house manager?"*

"Algoma, Wisconsin isn't the boonies, and as summer has just started, it's going to be the height of the tourist season so this area is going to be very busy." I squinted, still looking for the house number in the quickly dwindling sunlight. "And I needed a change of pace, something to break my cycle of overwork. This job is a perfect fit. Plus, it pays so well I should be able to knock out the last of my student loans!"

"I know, you told me all about that while raving about compounding interest and waving graphs in my face. But I still don't like you moving so far away from everyone you know."

"Bonnie worked in this area for a summer when she was in college," I reminded her, referring to my younger, extroverted sister.

Bonnie had given me the idea, actually, when I'd impulse quit my job. She said a summer in the Door Peninsula—the finger-shaped part of Wisconsin that jutted into Lake Michigan—might be just what I needed to clear out my head.

Of course, she'd been referring to the more typical seasonal work you could get in the area—at a restaurant, hotel, bed and breakfast, etc.—and not taking on a position as a house manager.

Unfortunately, I wasn't gifted with charisma like my charming little sister, and I'd blown all my phone interviews for service industry positions.

"Yes, but Bonnie thrives on personal interactions," My mother continued, her tone careful. *"You Abigail, are... well... you're very talented with numbers."*

Mother, it seemed, shared my reservations regarding my people skills.

I finally spotted the house number—I was at the right place. “I’m hanging up now. I need to go inside and meet my employer.”

“Carry your pepper spray, and did you take a baseball bat with you like your father suggested?”

It took another minute of assuring my mom I’d brought plenty of self-defense tools before I was finally able to get her off the phone.

In that time the sunset had morphed from a bright pinky-orange to something closer to a crimson red, but when I compared the Queen Anne styled Victorian mansion before me with the picture the interviewer back in Magiford had texted me, it was easy to see it was the same building.

The place inspired a curious mixture of awe and unease.

Naturally, it was beautiful, the siding colored blue-gray and the gables, trim, and various porch fencing all white made it quite stark against the gardens and greenery of the vast mansion grounds. But the asymmetrical building seemed unable to settle exactly how many floors it was as various turrets, cupolas, and roof peaks competed against each other to poke higher and higher into the sky.

The army of trees that surrounded most of the lot only added to the air of almost sinister mystery as they blocked out a lot of sounds and all sights except for the stretch of Lake Michigan beachside, not to mention that while the mansion had the Algoma postmark, it was far enough out in the country that the only neighbors I’d seen that broke the swaths of farmland and occasional patch of trees were antique farmhouses.

None of this, however, bothered me much.

I’d been hired by a reputable real estate company that operated out of Magiford—the hub of magic for the Midwest. It was unlikely they worked for a serial killer when they managed a number of apartment buildings in the magical city that were—according to my research—in high demand.

Although, admittedly, breaking my apartment lease and selling everything I couldn’t fit in my Toyota Rav4 was perhaps a bit of a gamble.

But I was determined. The old workaholic, no-social-life Abigail that had worked as an accountant was dead. This was a new era. Apparently an era for managing-houses-that-looked-expensive-but-haunted.

I grabbed my folder that contained all my signed paperwork as proof of identity, locked my car, and strolled up to the front door, ringing the doorbell that sounded more similar to a church bell than a door chime.

I peered around the doorway and the immense porch it was nestled into. Some of the house’s weirdness faded with this closer look. It became obvious to me just how much money this home owner had sunken into it.

There wasn’t so much as a chip in the paint job, and the cushions on the wicker furniture looked brand new.

The door opened, revealing a tall, handsome, but simultaneously imposing man. “Abigail Marshall?” he asked.

“Yes. Mr. Kinge?” I replied, unsure.

“Yes,” he said in a deep and gravelly voice that matched his broad-shouldered build.