

ELIZA & THE GHOST OF CAPTAIN TILLER
A Monroe Manor Mystery
(a humorous ghosts of Key West Paranormal Culinary Cozy Mystery)

By
Kitty Newbold

Chapter One

A Spirited Welcome

The little engine of my '68 VW Beetle rattles and pops, *brrr-pfft-putt-putt*, struggling to keep pace as I push the pedal down and hit the 7 Mile Bridge. The sound of the engine echoes off the scorched asphalt wiggling in waves for miles ahead. The brilliant sun sends diamond bright rays bouncing off the endless expanse of turquoise waters stretching out to meet the cobalt blue of the Atlantic. The wind rushes in the open windows and my hair dances with the salty breeze to the rhythm of the music. As Miami fades in the rear view mirror, so does the pain of the divorce.

"Wasted away again in Margaritaville", I belted it out with Jimmy Buffett crackling on the 8 track as I rounded the corner onto Caroline street. The back seat of the beetle is crammed with all I could take. My Wüsthof knives and my favorite All-Clad pieces were the only things I could stuff in the bug from our Coconut Grove cafe. All the papers were signed and the ink was dry and I am coming home alone.

"Well, here I am," starting over in Key West. Back where my family came from in the old Key West Conch house I inherited from my great Aunt Sarah. My mind is swimming with dreams of a B&B. I need a challenging project now,

"Not exactly what I expected", the breath escapes like the air out of a balloon. "Darn", I continue talking to myself, "This project will likely take every dime I inherited".

As I step out of my bug, the red and yellow braided lobster claw heliconias rustle with a "meeeeoow". Out saunters a scrawny black cat with white boots weaving a figure eight around my ankles.

“You look mighty hungry and I am guessing you don’t belong to anyone. How about I call you Tabitha?” She approvingly rubbed her chin up and down my ankle. I gave her the rest of my Egg McMuffin. I made my first friend in Key West

“Okay, Tabitha, let’s go inside and see what I got myself into”. She snaked through my legs the whole way up the front porch to the grand entry door nearly tripping me. I don’t think she wanted me to go inside. She definitely wanted to stay with me.

At the reading of my great aunt Sarah’s Will, I received this ring of a dozen rusty skeleton keys and the deed to old Monroe Manor. The keys jangled like an old heavy charm bracelet as I tried them one at a time.

“Ah ha” success. The key turned with a clunk. I turned the large door handle but nothing happened.

“Darn it”, the large old wooden door was swollen with time and humidity. I rattled the door handle back and forth, pushed and leaned my whole body in and the heavy door finally gave way with the whoosh of a broken vacuum seal.

The floor creaks and complains with my footsteps. My head is spinning and my heart pounds against my chest as I cross the threshold. I have a flashlight from the glove box in my hand, but the sidelights around the door allow just enough light to stream into the foyer.

“Oh, dear”. I suck in the heavy air tinged with the musty scent of secrets and old wood. My long skirt brushes dust from the floor as I twirl around and take in the grandeur of this foyer. I have wrapped myself in cobwebs that cling and I wave my hand against my face. I pull my fingers through my long hair, but the cobwebs get more entangled.

A beautiful grand staircase curves upstairs. The walls to the second floor are lined with portraits. “What a treasure”, I said aloud. It was too dark to make out the portraits. If they were family, would I recognize any of the faces?

A tingling shakes me from my head to toes and goosebumps rise on my arms even though it is in the dog days of summer. I wonder why this grand Manor has been locked up and uninhabited for so long. Why didn’t Aunt Sarah just sell it instead of leaving it to the ravages of time.

I look in the mirror of an antique umbrella and hat rack stand to remove the cobwebs from my head. “What is that?”, looks like a faint reflection of another face behind mine. I can see the mirror has lost some of its reflective backing with age. “That will have to be repaired”, I say to Tabitha. The piece is exquisite with its nautical carvings and inlaid ivory. Just perfect for the entry into Monroe Manor B&B.

Tabitha followed me into the parlor off the foyer .I pulled back a dusty tattered drape to let some light in. I shook off the dust that fell on me and opened my eyes to see the once lovely wallpaper was faded and peeling off the wall. Despite the neglect, the room was beautiful and the furnishings timeless.

As I turned to leave the parlor, the air went ice cold. My skin tingles again and the hairs on my neck bristle. “Where could that have come from?,” I turned to Tabitha and noticed she was standing statue-like with her ears pricked up and her whiskers flickering back and forth.

The flashlight points the way down the hall to the next room Tabitha and I enter. It appears to be a gentleman's study. The walls are lined with leather bound classics. One wall contains all maritime related books. A large table containing rolls of nautical charts sits in the middle of the room with one beautifully detailed chart of the Caribbean sea rolled out. A writing desk sits next to the table.

I hear a whispered “welcome”, but I do not see anyone else in the room. “Who’s here?, I call out, but I hear no reply. As I walk towards the desk, I notice there is a book pulled half out of a shelf on a wall of classics. I did not notice that when I first surveyed the room.

“That’s strange”, I say aloud to Tabitha, and walk over to inspect. It is a Dickens classic, **Great Expectations**, one of my favorites. When I push the book back on the shelf it is clear it has just been moved. The layer of dust is gone where the book passed over it.

In the dark room the lamp atop the desk begins to glow like the first light of dawn. “What the heck is going on? Who’s here?”, again no one replies. A dried up ink well, fountain pen and large leatherbound book rest on the writing desk. “Ah choo”, I sneeze as the pages begin to flutter and the book falls open. Tabitha is crouched, neck back looking up into the air and making an unearthly low rumbling growl. The air is charged with electricity. My hair stands out and the temperature drops.

Above the book a figure appears with a finger scanning the open page. The specter is in a stiff Naval Officer's blue uniform. There is a full cloud like beard above the gold buttons that broadly line down the chest. Gold epaulets adorn his drawn back shoulders. I try to reach my arm out to touch but I can't move. I try to speak, but no words will form. Although there is an air of stern authority to this vision, I am not afraid of this specter. I do not sense any malevolence.

I am drawn to the desk by this figure that is surrounding me now. I feel an arm around me pulling me closer to the desk. I can make out a finger pointedly tapping at a specific place on the open page. The ink has faded, but in the dim light of the mysteriously lit lamp, I can make out that this is a journal. I blow more dust from the book and chair to sit down and read. Tabitha remains on alert. She curls up at my ankles with her head high.

The spirit has pointed me to the last entry in the journal. It contains the musings of an anguished soul. He fears he is going to be arrested for murder. The next paragraph tells of an all consuming love for a woman. Her name is Estella. He is poetic in his description of her. He writes of her beauty and poise. She has long soft radiant black curls that fall back off her shoulders when she laughs. Her large dark shiny eyes pierce his soul. He sees the sadness that lurks there. He wants to envelope her in his arms, heal her and keep her safe.

I turn to the beginning of the journal and see it belonged to Captain James Tiller. Is the specter I have seen the ghost of this Captain Tiller? I am suddenly woozy and can't focus anymore. This vision shakes me to my core.

Since I was a girl, I have been told how perceptive I am. But this is more. This is like ESP, extra sensory perception. Could it be that I have a sixth sense? That I am psychic?

"Ohhh no", I groaned. Family lore has it that my Aunt Sarah had the gift of second sight. The family would speak about this 'so called' psychic gift that some of the women of our clan possessed. The sentiment was that the 'gift' could be both a blessing and a curse. Why was this happening to me now? I had never seen a ghost before.

I tell myself, "Shake it off". Perhaps these strange sights and sounds are only an overactive imagination. After all, the old house certainly fits the description of a haunted mansion. I have been through so many changes lately. My marriage fell apart and it

cost me half of everything I had worked so hard for. I had to leave the home and cafe I lovingly built. My psyche was battered.

“Yaaahh” I stretch and rub my eyes. The sun and wind beat on me as I made my way across the overseas highway. No time to give these strange events much thought. I have a car to unpack and I have to find a place in this house to lay my head before the sun sets.

I wander to the back of the house and find a large kitchen. The late afternoon light pours in the windows that surround the room. The room is charming and inviting and I am excited by the possibilities. I can offer tropical culinary classes in this kitchen. A nice addition to Monroe Manor B&B. The setting is perfect with the large sash windows above the oversized porcelain sink overlooking the courtyard.

I hope this gift Aunt Sarah left me will be my salvation and not a curse. I am grateful for this new beginning in the place of my own. I feel warm and safe in the kitchen. I am in my element. I can picture myself in this room preparing for brunch and happy hour for the guests of Monroe Manor B&B.

I step through the French doors from the kitchen. They lead to the back of the porch that wraps around to the front of the house. A feeling of peace washes over me as I look at the Robin’s egg blue paint on the porch ceiling. Practically speaking the Haint blue color kept wasps and birds from nesting on the ceiling.

The old Conchs believe the Robin’s Egg blue on the porch ceiling brought good luck to the home and helped to ward away evil spirits as the lost souls are unable to cross water. “Hum”, I uttered to myself, “it seems there is a spirit in the house and he can’t get out.

The roving chickens foraging in the yard are beginning to roost on a low lying branch of a gnarly Tamarind tree shading the back corner of the courtyard. I find a small room off the kitchen that must have been for the live-in help of the manor. This will do for tonight. The natural light is fading fast.

I collect my paltry belongings from my VW Beetle and begin to settle in for the night. I can hardly keep my eyes open, yet I was compelled to grab **Great Expectations** from the library before turning in and begin reading by the flashlight as I drift off to sleep.

* * * * *

“Whiiiiieeeeeee” I am jolted awake by the shriek of a teakettle. It is pitch black, but I can see a glow from the coal burning stove. I stumble across the kitchen to the stove, but there is no heat and the old tea kettle sitting there is cold. I have had quite a day. I am bone tired. I must be dreaming.

I turn to go back to the little room and I notice a tea cup on the edge of the table in the center of the kitchen. Steam is rising from the cup and a shadowy figure appears. I do not know what to think. I do know, I am surrounded by echoes of the past and I feel my life is about to change irrevocably.

Chapter 2

Light and Shadows

“Cockadoddle do”, a free range rooster crows me awake. The morning light softly falls in the kitchen. Tabitha and I greet the morning in the courtyard. Tabitha crouches, tail twitching with slanted eyes honed in on the Quaker parrots squawking in the tamarind tree.

“Tabitha, chase those parrots off. They are making a terrible racket”. She springs up and the tree explodes with the parrots departure. Tabitha returns to my ankles, “Good Kitty”, I scratch her chin and she answers with a purr.

As I turn to go back inside, I spy what looks to be an old red hand pump water well outside the kitchen door with a bucket over the top. “Wouldn’t that be sweet if that worked” I said out loud. I start pumping and lo and behold clear cool water begins to fill the bucket. Until I get a contractor in here, this is a blessing. I should be able to pour a bucket of water down the toilet to flush. My hurricane survival skills are coming in handy.

I wash up, pull on jeans and a T-shirt, slide into flip flops and head to the Hardware store I saw around the corner. I need to pick up a Coleman camping stove, lanterns and all the basic hurricane a/k/a survival supplies to get by for now. We are in hurricane season and I will need to have it on hand anyway.

When I get in my VW bug, Tabitha jumps in and plants herself on the passenger seat. I try to shish her out, but she will have none of it. "Okay, Tabitha, but cats aren't allowed in the store." She just turns her head and looks out the window. She is my shadow.

A bell gangles as I push the door to Sawyer's Hardware open.

"Hello", I call out as I approach the counter.

"Good Morning, how can I help you?" says the gentleman behind the corner. There is a Cockatoo on a perch behind the counter who is dancing back and forth. It is Key West, I tell myself.

"A good morning to you too, Steven", I read his name off his shirt. "I need a Coleman stove, a large cooler, lanterns, and some other basics".

"Alrighty. Grab a cart and follow me," he replies. The Cockatoo flies and lands on my shoulder. "Jack", he calls out to the bird who turns and looks at him but doesn't move. He reaches his arm up and Jack climbs on.

"Sorry about that. Jack belonged to my father and has always lived in the store. He was gifted to my father as a boy by a sea captain. Jack is part of the family and I have been taking care of him since my father passed." Steven says "When a bird lands on your shoulder it is believed to be a good omen. Birds are messengers and a symbol of our connection to the spiritual world."

"No worries", I counter. I had never heard that about birds before, but I am happy to believe in good omen. "I have heard Cockatoos live a long time. How old is Jack?" I ask.

"We think he is near a 100 years old. That's about the lifespan of a Cockatoo. He does some talkin' but mostly just makes noise." As if on cue, Jack lets out a loud squawk. "If only he could tell us all the things he has seen" replies Steven. "Are you camping nearby?" he inquires.

“Nah, I have just moved down here from Miami. I inherited Monroe Manor from my Great Aunt Sarah Sawyer.”

“Goodness, that place has been vacant for a long time. What are your plans?”

“Well, I need to find a contractor in a hurry. The electric and the plumbing need to be turned on as soon as possible. I plan to live in the manor while it is being restored. So, for the time being it will be alot like camping at Monroe Manor. Can you recommend some contractors?”

At checkout, Steven hands me a card of a general contractor.

“Call Jim Albury” he said with a wink. “He is a native Conch and has done quite a few restorations and renovations of these old Conch houses. Creating these Key West Bed & Breakfast Inns is one of his niches. I think you will be happy with him.”

“Thank you. Steve, can I use your phone to call Mr. Albury? I don’t have phone service at the manor yet.”

“Sure”, and he passes the phone over the counter to me. When I told Jim Albury I was looking for someone to handle restoration and renovation of Monroe Manor, he said he could be over after lunch. That was fast, I thought.

As I turn to leave the store with my bags, I shout over my shoulder “I am sure I will be seeing a lot of you, Thanks again.”

Next a quick stop at Faustos Food Palace on Fleming Street.

“Tabitha, I will be right back and I will bring you some cream. We need to fatten you up.”

I walk the aisles and fill my basket with survival staples. I see a little cafeteria to make Cuban coffee. Cafecito is essential. I double back for some Cafe Bustelo and sugar. And most importantly, I grab a few bottles of wine. I can’t pass up the sunflowers at checkout. The manor needs a little something sunny.

I arrive back at the house and take everything to the kitchen and load up the cooler. I set up the Coleman on top of the old coal burning stove. Set the cooler in the

oversized sink, pack it and fill it with ice. I pour a little cream for Tabitha and set it in the corner by the door.

The cafeteria is loaded with espresso and water. I lean over the stove to strike a match to light the Coleman. “Braaaaap”: The flame launches like a rocket ready for flight. There is a lingering smell of methane, but there is a flame. There shouldn’t be a smell.

“Geez, what was that!” It reminded me of my cousin's antics the summer the families spent at the beach house on Sanibel. But I am the only one in the kitchen, except Tabitha. She has stopped drinking and wrinkled her nose.

“Let’s try this again.” I strike the match and “Fraaaaap”. “Tee hee hee, whoo hoo” the sounds of laughter come out of thin air. The laughter is followed by soft moans. Tabitha and I are the only ones I can see in the kitchen. “Now, cut that out.” I instinctively yell out. The specter I saw last night in the library materializes and is doubled.

“I have a flatulent phantasm!”. I exclaim, and it seems he is laughing at me. I suppose boys never grow up. At least he has a sense of humor. “ Whooty Hoo, this won’t be boring.” I say aloud.

I managed to get the cafecito made and have my caffeine fix.. That is all I have time for this morning before Jim Albury arrives. I hope this ghost doesn’t start to toot again when Albury is here. It would be embarrassing and how could I explain.

I pass through the swing door in the kitchen to a large dining room to check it out. Thick faded red velvet drapes run from the floor to ceiling. I push aside one heavy dusty drape to reveal the double hung sash windows that open to the large wrap around porch. With good ceiling fans, I think I will be able to have this room opened up to the porch year round. It will be perfect for events at Monroe Manor B&B.

The dining table is large, and there are extra chairs against the wall. There is a large heavy mahogany breakfront server with drawers and cabinet shelves on the opposite wall. I turn on my flashlight and peek inside. It is stacked with tableware and unique serving platters. There is even silverware in the drawers. Seems the occupants of Monroe Manor left in a hurry.

I hear footsteps on the front porch and a knock on the door. I open to find 3 men in jeans and a very stylish lady. “Jim Albury, pleased to meet you.” He gestures back and says “I brought my electrician, Willy and our plumber, Tony.” He turns to the lady,

“This is my Aunt Trudy, she is a designer and space planner. I wanted everyone’s input after we had a look around so we could discuss your best options”

I extend my hand to them all, nod my head and say “Eliza Stewart. Pleasure to meet you. Come in. Thank you so much for coming today.” As we pass through the foyer, the crew looks around sizing things up and I get a sense there is a great deal of curiosity beyond just the job at hand.

“Please excuse the condition of the place. I just arrived late yesterday”, I say as we enter the parlor. Before we continue, Jim asks Willy to check out the electricity and sends Tony to check on the plumbing. Jim, Trudy and I continue the tour.

In the parlor, I pull back all of the drapes so we can take in the whole room. I discuss with Trudy my desire to use the same style wallpaper and keep as many of the antique pieces as possible, including the silver tray and the lead crystal decanter. We need to have someone check out the piano, too.

We move down the hall to the gentleman’s study. I tell them I love the feel of this room but it needs more light. My thought is to restore the books and to make this a reading room for the B&B. There are only two windows in this room and it is awfully dark and dank. I would like to be able to open the room up to the adjoining rooms for more light. The extra space will be needed for weddings and other events at the B&B.

While we are in the study, the desk lamp starts to glow again. Jim doesn’t say anything, He must not see it. I remain silent. Trudy is looking right at it but doesn’t say a thing. She doesn’t know that I see it.

We climbed the grand staircase for a look around upstairs. As we enter the rooms, I draw back the curtains tattered and worn by decades in the sun. Jim is scribbling notes in the notebook he pulled out of his back pocket. Trudy and I are discussing possibilities.

The eyes in the portraits that line the staircase seem to follow us as we return downstairs to enter the kitchen. “This is my favorite room” I tell Jim and Trudy. “ I want to bring in the modern conveniences and be able to accommodate small culinary classes. The original charm of the kitchen needs to be preserved”.

We pass through the swinging door to the dining room and it feels as if another person has passed with me. The chandelier in the center of the room begins to glow and flicker like a candle. “Willy, are you connecting the house to power?” Jim yells. Jim

didn't ignore that. Wonder if he did see the lamp in the study. "I haven't gotten that far yet" Willy replies. Seems this ghost isn't shy, I say to myself.

They both look at me with knowing questioning faces. Trudy breaks the ice with, "Jim called me after he took your call and I just had to come. The local lore has it that this house is haunted. It has an interesting past. The widow who owned the manor in the late 1800s had fallen on hard times, The manor became a fine boarding house where many mariners who sailed out of Key West Harbor would reside when in port. After the widow passed, her daughter abandoned the house and no one ever saw her again. I just recall your Aunt Sarah lived in the house alone. One day, she locked up the manor and moved to Miami.

I don't know why I felt so comfortable around this woman, but I opened up to her and told her about the strange things that have happened since I arrived yesterday. It was plain to see by Jim's body language he was skeptical and thought this was all a bunch of hooye and had a logical explanation.

Trudy confided she sensed the presence when you came in the front door. I didn't go into too much detail for fear they would think I was crazy. But, she was especially interested in the journal I told her about.

Jim, Trudy and I sit down at the table in the dining room to go over Jim's notes. Jim takes out a notebook, but Trudy grabs my hand and Jim's hand and tells Jim to take my other hand. I see Jim roll his eyes, but he plays along with his Aunt Trudy. She closes her eyes in silence. Jim and I close our eyes too and we all remain still.

After a spell, Trudy begins to speak and says she feels the presence here has a story to tell. That there are injustices and that the truth is not known. I invite Trudy back to go over the journal with me.

Jim gets back to business at hand. He calls his guys to the dining room and we go over the initial findings. Everyone agrees to return tomorrow morning to begin work.

Chapter 3

Curious Clues

I stumble, half awake, out to the courtyard to get a bucket of water. As I open the door, I hear the squeak the hand pump makes. When I get to the pump, it is not moving, but there is water trickling down. Strange, I am hearing and seeing things

I get myself together quickly and Tabitha and I make a trip to Five Brothers at the crack of dawn to pick up a box of pastelitos for the crew. When they have my kitchen up and running I will make the crew some Bahamian Coconut Bread and Sea Grape jelly with fruit from the grounds. One more stop to make.

“Good morning, Steve”, I call out as the bell jangles on the door at Sawyer’s Hardware. Jack jumps down off his perch and walks across the counter and hops up on my shoulder. “Good morning to you too, Jack”, he bows his head up and down and squawks a good morning back at me..

“Hey there” says Steve as he approaches the counter. I see Jack remembers you. “Were you able to work with Jim? How’s it all going?”

“That is what I am here for. Jim is wonderful. Thank you. He has got a big crew at the manor and they are going great guns. I would like to open a charge account for them for my project.”

“Certainly. So glad to hear it. The old manor was something in its day. I have heard stories that there were fabulous soirees held at the Manor before old man Stewart turned up dead in a turtle kraal. Us old Conchs appreciate the efforts to preserve what makes us special and keep the crazy in Key West. Monroe Manor is such a grand old place it would have been a shame to see it razed and Holiday Inn take its place.

“I had no idea the Manor had such an interesting past”, I reply. “How did he end up dead in a turtle kraal?” I ask.

“Who knows, such a long time ago” Steve replies, “I just know the gossip of the old timers I would hear in the store as a kid. The talk was he had a thing for the ladies

and drink. One theory was it was a jealous husband who done him in. Another, that he was so drunk he fell in the kraal and drowned.”

“Well, I am working to restore the old girl and bring the grand parties back to the Manor, and you will be first on the guest list, Steven.” I raise my arm for Jack to crawl off my shoulder and return him to the counter before I turn to leave.

We had just returned when several pickups pulled on the front lawn. I pick a few flowers from the yard to brighten the inside before walking into the kitchen with the hot box of pastries. The guys pour out of the trucks with purpose and get right to work setting up generators. They are back at the trucks gathering their tools as Tabitha and I step onto the front porch.

“Good morning, guys. Would you all like a colada?” I called out.

“We’d love it”, replies Jim.

I go to get a platter for the pastelitos from the dining room breakfront. I open the cabinet door and I feel a resistant pull. I pull a little harder, and the door pulls back equally as hard. This goes on a few more times. “Quit playing with me. I don’t have time for this”, I say. The game is over and I pull out a platter with handles to serve the pastelitos on.

I go to light the Coleman for coffee and the tooting begins. The stove doesn’t light before the match goes out. “Whew”, I am almost afraid to light another match for fear of the shooting flame. I hope the crew doesn’t come inside now and get a whiff of this stink.

I get the coffee made and take it out with the pastelitos for the crew. I pass the little tacitas to the guys and fill each one with the steaming sweet coffee. It is so nice to see the old house open, full and life and light and buzzing with activity.

“Thank you, Eliza. We all appreciate it. The pastelitos are a nice touch. We expect to have the electricity and plumbing working today. I have already spoken with the utilities and they will turn on the account when I give them the word. You will need to stop by their office to set up an account today.

“Briinnng briinnng”, a bicycle bell announces Trudy’s arrival. “

“Good Morning”, I greet her at the front door as she ascends the steps up the front porch. “Would you like a pastelito and some cafe?” “I’m good”, she replies. She grabs a canvas bag from the basket on her bike. “I have some ideas for the manor I would like to discuss with you this morning.”

“Welcome to my parlor”, I say waving my arm to invite her inside. We settled in at the dining room table. Trudy pulls out the sketches she worked on last night and we go over them and make some decisions for the renovations. We pass the sketches to Jim and he reminds me to go to the utilities offices to set up accounts. “I can show you where the offices are”, says Trudy. We take off in the VW and Trudy points me towards White street.

The clerk at the counter of the utilities office couldn’t be bothered to look up when we entered. I ring the bell and request to open an account for Monroe Manor. Her chair swivels around. As she walked back to pick up forms, she whispered to the other women along the way. Back at the counter she was chatty Cathy treating me like a long lost acquaintance. Cathy’s head bobbed and questions about the plans for the manor tumbled down like Niagara Falls. The three other women in the office stopped typing.

“Cathy, we have a full day”, Trudy cuts the conversation short as I hand back the completed new account request form. “Thank you for taking care of getting this account open. Jim will be in touch.”

“Now”, says Trudy, let’s stop in at the library. There is someone I want to introduce you to. Trudy gives me directions to Fleming street and we pull up in front of the Library.

The librarian at the front desk greets Trudy with a cheek kiss. She is a mature attractive woman with wavy white shoulder length hair and sharp blue eyes that have a knowing twinkle. She studies me, up and down, before Trudy introduces us.

“Eliza, this is Kathryn Kemp. She has been our librarian since 1947 and she knows most everyone and everything there is to know about Key West.

“Pleased to meet you, Eliza. Is there anything I can help you find today?”

“Likewise. Yes, there is something you can help us with. How would we find some information on a mariner in Key West from back in the 1880s?”

“I think we could start with looking at the records of the Captain of the Port”, Miss Kemp replies. Can you narrow the date down? What is the name of the mariner or the ship?”

“I am not sure of the year or ship. The name is Captain James Tiller”.

“That name rings a bell”, Miss Kemp replied “But, I can’t recall why. What’s your interest? That may help me with your research?”

Trudy steps in, “Eliza just arrived in Key West from Miami. She inherited Monroe Manor from her Great Aunt Sarah Sawyer. She has engaged Jim Albury to renovate and convert the Manor to a B&B. She has found a journal in the study of Captain James Tiller.”

Miss Kemp’s back stiffens and she folds her hands on the desk. Her blue eyes scan Eliza and settle back on Trudy before she speaks. “Trudy, you know that house is said to be haunted.”

“Yes, we know”, replies Trudy. “Eliza is aware”. She does not offer any more information.

“I will be glad to see what I can find out about Captain James Tiller. You know, Eliza, your great Aunt Sarah inherited that house from her widowed Aunt. There are tragedies associated with the Manor. In the early 20’s Sarah locked up the Manor and left Key West for good without a word to anyone. Give me a few days and come back to see me.”

As Trudy pushes her chair back, she says “Thank you, Kathryn. You know all the Conchs and know more about our Key West history than any living soul.”

Trudy takes me to A&B Lobster House for lunch. I ask Trudy what she knows about the tragedies Miss Kemp was talking about. I tell her what I heard from Steven Sawyer this morning.

“Eliza, it is hard to know what is fact or fiction, but there has always been a lot of stories told about the manor. You know people like to talk.” “Well, what do they say? I ask as I take a bite of lobster dripping in butter down my chin. Now, I don’t feel so stupid with the bib the waiter put on me.

“The widow your Aunt Sarah inherited the house from had an adopted daughter who was said to be a great beauty. She had two serious suitors. Benjamin Taylor, from an old well-to-do Conch family and the other was a merchant ship’s Captain who made port in Key West. One of the men turned up dead and it was not the Captain.”

“And, how did it happen? What happened to the Captain? What else do you know?”, I pepper her with questions. “Not much”, Trudy replies.

We share a slice of sublime key lime pie before returning to Monroe Manor to check in on the progress of the crew. I am going to have to reverse engineer that pie recipe for the B&B.

When we arrive, Jim looks exasperated.

“What’s up?” asks Trudy.

“Well, the good news is the guys have the electric all ready to go. I’ll go back over that in the morning. If it all checks out, we’ll flip the switch tomorrow.” says Jim. “The plumbing is another issue. We have been all through it, replaced and repaired what we can see. Don’t see any other problems, but there is still the odor of sewer gas. Somethin’ ain’t right. I’ll look again in the morning. I don’t smell it now, so you should be okay. See you tomorrow.”

“Thank you, Jim”, I call out after him as he pulls away. How can I tell him about the gassy ghost?

“Trudy, I think I know where the smell is going from.”

“Where”?

“The ghost has a problem with gas.” I tell her of his antics.

“No!” she gets the giggles. “I don’t think we can sell that as the smell’s source to Jim. Let’s see what he finds.”

We head to the study. We sit at the desk with the journal and start reading from the beginning. The journal mainly chronicles travels and work so we start to flip the pages ahead. We find a spot where Estella’s name comes up. She lives at the Manor. She is the widow’s daughter. I can’t help thinking Estella is key here. Why else would the spirit have moved **Great Expectations** on the bookshelf? The captain is clearly

captivated by Estella. He writes of her bewitching beauty, her laughter, and the way the air is sucked out of a room when she walks in.

We rush ahead. All he thinks about when he is out at sea is her, and getting back to the Manor.. Yet her general demeanor, when he is there, is distant and feigns indifference. Sounds like Dicken's Estella, I think to myself. She has many suitors seeking her hand, but rebuffs them all. He writes about the times it is just the two of them in the parlor, and how he enjoys being with her. He sees her smile, despite herself, and this gives him hope. He cannot give up on her.

Trudy pulls the desk drawer open. "Check this out", It is the boarding house register.

"Whoa! We open the register and I run my finger down the list of names searching for Tiller.

"Here is an entry for Captain James V. Tiller, Schooner La Florida, February 7, 1886 - March 18, 1886, Room No. 5. There must be more entries". I continue to run my finger down the pages to find his name again. Trudy pulls a notepad out of her canvas bag and jots down the dates. Tiller is always in room number 5.

It is late afternoon and there is still enough daylight to see inside the manor. My constant companion Tabitha follows Trudy and me up the stairs. I take my time and look at the portraits lining the staircase. There is one portrait of a young lady. The dark hair is pulled back from her stunning face, and dark curls fall on her shoulders. The complexion is flawless and her dark eyes look to the side. There is a bit of a wry smile on her lips. I think this must be a portrait of Estella.

At the top of the stairs, we conclude that logically the rooms would be numbered left to right and we turn the door handle to the 5th door to enter. We remove the dust cloths from the furniture. We don't uncover any clues. It is a small sparsely furnished room. There is a plain poster bed, one nightstand, a mirrored wash basin stand with a pitcher on the open shelf below and a wardrobe against the wall across from the bed.

The light is fading and Trudy and I return downstairs before night falls. "I can be here at 8 a.m. tomorrow to work on renovation plans. We can do some more poking around too. Call it a day?"

"It was a good day, Trudy. Thank you for all your help. So much is happening, I am turning in early."

Chapter 4

Secrets of the Past

The handle of the well pump squeaks as the water trickles into the bucket. I fill a stock pot and put the water on the Coleman to boil for potable. Before I sit down at the kitchen table, I pour some cream for Tabitha and a glass of wine for myself. I close my eyes and feel the warmth from the wine travel to my toes. I exhale and feel the day wane. I blankly stare out the window. The glass reflects the events of the last days. They clickety-clack like the film in an 8 millimeter home movie projector. Everything in fast motion.

I rise from the table to turn off the boiling water and I fill my glass again. I should go cuddle up in bed with **Great Expectations** and Tabitha. But the journal overwhelms my reason. Like a detective cartoon image the flashlight points the way down the hall to the study. Tabitha scampers up behind me.

“My gosh, it is cold in here, and it stinks” I shiver as Tabitha polishes my ankles. I assume I am not alone. I settle in at the desk with the open journal. Flashlight in my right, wine in my left, bottle on the desk. As I turn the page, Tabitha jumps in my lap for warmth and I pour more wine.

The captain appears. His figure is stoic, but I can feel his heartbreak. I am seeing a torrent of events from the past through his eyes. I feel his crushing disappointment, mainly in himself, for allowing himself to be misled and misplacing his trust. He is a broken man.

“Why are you telling me all this, Captain? I beg of him.

“For fair winds and following seas. To sail with my Lord, my captain. Help restore my honor, I beg of you”

“No, no, no. no, this isn’t real. You are not real. This is the wine and I am dreaming. How can I, of all people, help you?”

Now, playing before my eyes is a forest of masts and spars of tall ships in Port. A crowd opens up to 2 men in a fist fight. There are drunken sailors staggering out of

bars along the street. There is one well dressed, angry, disheveled young man in the fist fight..

Images flash by of a dour, severe, woman dressed in black from her neck to her shoes. Scenes of time through years in the parlor of the woman in black lecturing or instructing a very young girl until she becomes a woman.

A vision of the lady in black with a blank look leaning over a written register on a stand-up desk. She passes a pen to a merchant seaman in an officer's dress uniform to sign.. He is quite handsome and stands very proud. I see her often at that desk watching Estella in the parlor..

More images of a loud, belligerent, well dressed young man staggering down the street, bottle in hand, always looking for a fight.

A blue satin gown flows by towards the parlor. The wallpaper isn't faded, it is vibrant and the room is full of laughter as a young woman entertains several of the manor's seafaring guests. She refills their glasses with Port from the canister. She plays a small piano in the corner. I glimpse her with the captain in the parlor. They appear much at ease together. There are times when it is only them two.

The captain is standing on a dock and oversees his ship being loaded with lumber and other goods. There is another port, a tropical port, where the ship is being loaded with sacks of sugar and barrels of rum. At Key West Bight he unloads some sugar and rum and takes on turtle meat.

The captain now appears in his quarters at sea. There is a Cockatoo on a perch in the corner. The Cockatoo is squawking and talking. There are three men standing before the captain. He is reprimanding them and writing them up.

Flash to an image of a handsome well dressed young man on his knee before a seated girl who does not look at him and appears to yawn.

The woman in black is in the kitchen with several bottles. She is mixing and filling the Port decanter which lives in the parlor on a silver tray with glasses.

I see the well dressed young man and the beautiful woman are in the parlor. It is the same guy who I see drunk and fighting. They are standing and he appears angry and defiant. She slaps him across the face and he returns the blow.

I keep seeing a single skeleton key on a ring around a woman's wrist. There is an image of a diary that keeps popping up. I see what looks to be the false bottom to a drawer.

There is a vision of the Captain in jail. With that the specter vanishes along with the smell and the cool air.

The wine glass shatters on the floor and I am startled back to the present. The flashlight is dark. I have been dreaming – I think – the things I just read, and more, played out before me.

My hand against the dark hall wall walks me back towards the kitchen. Tabitha is calling me and I follow her sound to our room. The curtains flutter with moonlight as I collapse in bed.

“Briinnng briinnng” its Trudy's bike. I open my eyes and the little room is full of sunlight.

“Ohhh” I groan. My mouth feels full of cotton and my head full of cobwebs. I spring up and the room spins.

“Good morning” I say hoarsely as I open the door.

“Wow, you look rough. Did you hit Duval street last night?” Trudy says as we walk back to the kitchen. I give her a side eye. “Hardly” I reply.

“Pee-ew, that smell is still here”.

“Well, the ghost is still here and he paid me a long visit last night”, with that I head for the study. “I think I left an empty bottle and glass”. Trudy follows.

“What happened?” Trudy bends down to help me pick up the broken glass and the bottle from the floor.

“You won't believe it. I need a little hair of the dog. Let's go to Pepe's for breakfast.”

I leave the door open and tuck a note in the door jam for Jim. We walk down Caroline Street and enter the patio at Pepe's with Tabitha in tow.

I grab a stool at the bar. “Good mornin’” I greet the old man and his dog at my left elbow”.

“Looks like you had a grand time last night Darlin’. Nothing that a drink won’t cure” he replies. “Ha”, I say to Trudy. If only he knew, I hope he’s right”.

“Hey, Dick. How’s business?” Trudy greets the old man.

“The old boat still floats. Still doing the sunset sails.”, he replies.

“Ladies” the bartender interrupts.

“Screwdriver with the fresh squeezed orange juice for me. Poached eggs, rye toast and bacon”.

“Me too” says Trudy. “What happened last night?”

“I don’t know how to describe it. I don’t know where to begin. It’s hard to make sense of it.” I recount the occurrences of the night, what I read and the visions I had. I am curious to know more about the widow my Aunt Sarah inherited the house from. Who was the widow to Great Aunt Sarah? Aunt Sarah never had any children. She and my Dad were cousins and only children. My grandpa must have been the nephew of the widow. So, I am related to this woman. I am an only child and the last of the Stewarts of this family line, as far as I know.

“Well, people keep many secrets. Some they hold too tightly and it suffocates them” Trudy states.

I noticed Dick was eavesdropping. Small towns! Dick chimes in with “I always heard the old man had a pregnant mistress and his old lady poisoned him”. Trudy and I exchange glances.

We stroll back to the manor discussing the restoration and renovation. Trudy has brought catalogs of appliances and fixtures and I need to make some more decisions today. I change the subject and ask Trudy, “What do you know about Dick. Is he for real?”.

“Oh, everyone here wants to know everyone else’s business and thinks they know it all.”. We arrive and the front lawn is full of trucks with lumber and equipment. The clean smell of sawdust fills the air.

“Yoo hoo” Trudy hollers over the saws as we enter the house.

“Over here” Jim calls back. We follow his voice to the study. His blond hair is covered in sawdust. He smiles “Do you notice anything different besides the new hole in the wall?”

I cock my head, “The lights are on! Fantastic. You are a wizard”. I flash a big smile his way. A good looking wizard, I think to myself. He isn’t wearing a ring but not all guys do - especially ones that work around tools.

There is a lot of banging going on up upstairs and saws buzzing outside. He has a veritable army on the job. This guy does not mess around and I admire that.

“The sewer gas smell is still an issue and I can’t run it down in the plumbing. I have hooked up the detector meters to the plumbing and nothing shows there. Wherever the smell is coming from it is not producing anything detectable on the meters. My crew says it’s just someone farting. When they hear it, there is a lot of finger pointing going on but no one is fessing up. Tony says it’s not coming from the plumbing. He says we have a prankster. I think it is safe to turn on the water when we leave this evening. Just to be safe until I can check it in the morning, spend the night outside the house.

“Come spend the night with me” Trudy offers. I am grateful for the offer. I have been holding on tightly to my money. A hot shower and a good night’s sleep would be wonderful.

“This ghost has got to go. I cannot run around Monroe Manor B&B with a can of Wizard air freshener”, I whisper to Trudy, and we giggle. “I can’t imagine what you girls think is so funny” Jim glances at us over his shoulder shaking his head.

Trudy and I wander upstairs to see the progress. The crew has started to move walls. All the old furniture is covered in cloth and in the middle of the rooms. Trudy and I discuss coming early before the crews get there to make decisions on what to keep. “I saw a drawer with some kind of false bottom last night. We need to hold on to anything with drawers. We might find something”.

We walk into the corner room at the top of the stairs. It has a door adjoining two rooms. I notice the door between the rooms has a keyhole. Could these two rooms

have belonged to the widow and Estella? They are more private and separated from the other rooms. We are converting this space to the honeymoon suite.

It is really hot in the house especially with all the activity and the men steaming the old wallpaper off upstairs. The color fades from my face. Trudy looks at me “ We need to get you out of here” “Please” I say. I need a break. I grab a change of clothes and we head to my beetle. Tabitha jumps in. I look at Trudy. “She can come too” she replies.

I spend a few more days at Trudy’s. The dust and the debris in the manor now is too much and the noise level during the day is deafening. We can’t get much of our work done there. We spend hours going through catalogs and placing orders. I pick her brain on what she knows. I am especially interested in who this Benjamin Taylor is.

“You know that Cathy at the Utilities office?”

”Yeah, I remember that sassy chatty Cathy,” I reply.

“She is a Taylor.” Trudy states. “Wonder if she knows anything. She sure wanted to talk to you once she found out you were opening up Monroe Manor.”

“Tomorrow, let’s get a bike for you. It is the preferred method of transportation on the island. I know a guy off Duval by Captain Tony’s who sells good used bikes.”

“It has to have a basket for Tabitha” she purrs in my lap as I stroke her silky fur.

Chapter Five

Brighter Days

We walk to Moe's bike shop first thing in the morning. Trudy walks with her bike and Tabitha follows behind us. The 'shop' is just a line of bikes parked on the sidewalk across the street from Captain Tony's bar.

"Hey Moe, meet Eliza. She is new in town. She needs 2 wheels to get around. Something comfortable with a nice basket in front." Moe has a cigarette hanging from his lips. He wears a red bandana tied around his head to keep his long hair out of his face. His skin is brown, like leather. He is barefoot, shirtless and only wears too tight too small shorts. He is so thin his chest is concave. I wonder where he got the bikes, but Trudy is okay with dealing with this guy so I ignore my better judgment.

"Hello, pretty thing", he says to me with a toothless smile. I have just the thing for you. He disappears down an alley and wheels back a blue Schwinn cruiser with a large wicker basket in front.

"How much?", I inquire.

"For you, \$50".

We settle on \$40. Tabitha leaps into the basket. Trudy and I ride off to the library to meet with Ms. Kemp.

Kathryn sees us riding up and is at the door to meet us. We settle in at her desk. "Girls, after you left the other day it dawned on me why the name of Captain Tiller was familiar. He was the accused of murdering a Taylor boy. This all happened before my time, but the Taylor family made a saint out of Benjamin and kept his memory and the story alive for years. It has been a while since I heard people talk about it so it took a while before it came back to me."

"How did he die?, I ask.

“Here are some newspaper articles I found about the incident. You can imagine it was big news ‘cause he was the mayor’s son.” Trudy passes the articles to us and Trudy and I read as fast as we can.

Kathryn continues, “I recall the talk was Ben had always been a problem ever since he was a boy. He got by on his looks, his Daddy’s money and his family’s name. His parents had been forever rescuing him and he never suffered any consequences”

Trudy reads “the Coroner noted the smell of alcohol and blunt trauma, but has listed the cause of death as inconclusive. The body was found in an alley near Key West Bight. There were reports he was seen the day before his body was found publicly drunk and fighting on the street with the sailors.

I chime in “here is a later article that says the family brought in a medical examiner from New York and he concluded that Ben was poisoned with wood alcohol. Wood alcohol, or methanol is a toxic by-product of moonshine. There have been incidents of bars stretching their liquor with moonshine and too much of it will kill you. The police have multiple suspects and they are working the case. I guess our guy Ben made his fair share of enemies”.

Kathryn continues “You will find a later article about the trial. They tied Captain Tiller to the murder. At the trial one of his crew came forward with a bottle of moonshine they found tucked in the ship’s store of rum and it was later found in the captain’s quarters. His testimony was corroborated by 2 other crew members. The defense put other crew members on the stand as to the Captain’s character. They all defended the Captain and testified that the crew that came forward had recently been called before a Captain’s Mast for dereliction of duty that had something to do with the rum onboard. The Coroner concluded at trial that Ben had ingested methanol and he died of methanol poisoning. The verdict was guilty and the Judge sentenced the Captain to life in prison”

I speak up “This article speculates that the Captain’s reason for killing Ben Taylor was that Ben and Estella were going to marry and he was jealous. Estella’s mother refused to let the police interrogate her saying the poor girl had been through enough. She claimed Estella was inconsolable and a doctor has administered sedatives that make it impossible to have any meaningful conversation with her. The Taylor family and the widow Stewart made much show of mourning young Ben.”

“Is there anything about what happened to the Captain in prison?” Trudy asks.

“Several years later I found an Obit and a small article that he passed away in prison from Dysentery.” Trudy offers. I look at Trudy “Well, that explains the smell.” Kathryn looks at us puzzled and we offer no explanation. We change the subject and make small talk with Ms. Kemp and tell her about the renovations at Monroe Manor before heading back to check in with Jim.

On the bike ride back, we are both silent. It is a lot of information to digest. I wonder what happened to Estella. I wonder if Estella attended school, did she have any friends. The visions suggest to me her mother kept a close eye on her. But, the Taylor boy came to call so maybe she did have friends.

When we turn the corner on Caroline, we see the guys are all milling around outside. “Something happened” Trudy says. Jim sees our bikes and walks towards the street to meet us.

“Eliza, you are not going to believe this”. I step off the bike. “We came across several secret compartments in the wall of room number 5”.

“What’s in there?”, I am thinking he found the diary I saw in the visions.

“Gold pieces. Lots of them.” he goes on to say the pile of coins is on the dining room table. He hasn’t counted them, but he guesses there’s over 1,000.

“Holy Moses”, my jaw drops.

“And some of them are old Spanish coins. All kinds of coins. All Gold.” Jim explains.

As I walk in the dining room and see the pile of coins, it is surreal. I feel like a pirate. “Captain Tiller must not have believed in banks. You suppose he hid it in the wall before the trial?”

“Makes sense”, they both reply.

“Can you ask the guys to keep this to themselves, please? What do I do with all this now?”

“You need a lawyer”, he looks at Trudy “What about John Thompson?, I think he could handle this”. Trudy agrees and jumps on the bike to Thompson’s office on Whitehead Street nearby.

“Any other surprises?, I ask Jim. “I’m looking for a diary. Did you find any false bottoms on a drawer?”

“No, wasn’t looking” he replies. He sends the guys home for the day and asks them to keep this to themselves for now. We don’t need hordes of people showing up here.

We go upstairs and start pulling all the drawers out of the furniture and we inspect them. We find nothing upstairs. I was sure Captain Tiller would have hid the diary upstairs in his room. “There are some drawers downstairs”, with that Jim grabs his tools and we head downstairs. We systematically go through the rooms and end in the dining room.

“There is a drawer at the bottom of the breakfront cabinet” I noticed that when I was inspecting all the beautiful tableware. The drawer contains table linens yellowed with age. I stack them next to the gold and Jim pulls out the drawer. “I think I see it. Look at that?” he points to a seam in the wood in the middle of the drawer. He studies it, pushes, taps and finally hits a corner and it pops up.

“Here is that diary you were looking for” he passes it to me and I clutch it to my chest. I am realizing I am holding Estella’s diary. My rocker keeps pace as I turn the pages as fast as I dare for fear they will fall out of the diary.

I am skimming ahead. It is apparent that her mother controls her every move. Her mother is a bitter vengeful woman who disdains all men. She taught Estella that men only use women and discard them when they are done. Estella’s mother never had children of her own and she was adopted after her mother was widowed. She longs to know who her real mother is.

Estella is used as a tool for revenge. She is named Estella after a Dicken’s character and is forced to study portions of ***Great Expectations***. She has never been able to read the whole book. I marvel that Estella managed to hide the diary from her overbearing mother. There is no affection, and it is a lonely existence. She only has the empty pages of the diary to pour her heart out to. I skip ahead and a gasp escapes, I stop rocking.

“Oh, my lord!” Estella knows her mother is behind Ben Taylor’s demise and she has set up the Captain. I just keep shaking my head. I set the diary on my lap and

stare blankly ahead. The air cools and I notice the rocker next to me begin to rock. Captain Tiller is here with me now.

The sound of footsteps climbing the porch steps and Trudy's voice bring me back to the present. I hear Jim greet them at the door. I slowly rise and enter the house.

"Are you Okay? You look like you have seen a ghost. You are white as a sheet." Jim speaks to me. Trudy turns to face me and breaks away from the men she has brought to the house. "What happened?" I show her what is in my hand. Her eyes become owl-like. I stuff the diary in my bag and sling it over my shoulder. Looking at Trudy, "Later", and I walk into the dining room with the gold, Jim and the men Trudy brought. We make all the arrangements with the lawyer and the banker.

As we leave the bank, Jim breaks the silence. "This will be all over the news tomorrow. This is too big".

"Champagne! This calls for a toast" Trudy lightens the mood.

"Someplace quiet please. I have had enough surprises and excitement for a lifetime".

Jim offers, "Let's go watch the sunset from my boat".

"Excellent" and with that we jump in Jim's truck. I am still clinging tightly to my bag crosswise on my body.

Sipping champagne as the sun sinks into the gulf and the sky flickers with the orange, red, yellow and violet light of an explosive day, I give quiet thanks for my new friends. Jim silently listens as I give Trudy the cliff notes on the diary Jim and I found earlier this same day.

"Tomorrow the Manor will be crawling with press and cameras. We won't be able to get any work done for a day or two."

"There will be a lot of questions. Everyone will be so curious and want to see the gold coins", Trudy adds.

"Yes, and I am going to show them and tell them what I know, believe or not. I think this is a great opportunity to promote Monroe Manor B&B."

“I will invite everyone back in the evening before sunset. We can entertain the crowd on the front lawn. That will allow us to show and tell from up on the front porch.”

“Let’s bring some of the things from inside the manor to decorate the lawn. We can make seating groups with furnishings near the porch, set up standing tables in the back. Let’s serve Prosecco, sparkling lemonade and bring in a couple ice cream vendors. Heck, I have the money.”

“Jim, can you string some lights in the morning?” Trudy asks.

“Certainly, anything for you ladies” he flashes a smile at us.

We are feeling no pain and enjoying the company. We are lulled to sleep by the rocking of the boat. Jim shakes us awake on deck with the sun rising on the new day. “Time to rock and roll.”

Trudy starts the coffee and turns on the TV. We watch the news break while we are getting ourselves together. I don’t have any business attire, but this is Key West. I put on the best skirt I have and Trudy loans me a blouse and her makeup.

We arrive at the house and Jim is already there controlling the Press and the cameras. We speak to them briefly and announce the invitation for this evening on the air. When they disburse, we set the stage for this evening's event.

The lawn begins to fill up around 6 p.m. and the press returns shortly thereafter. I scan the crowd and see Steven Sawyer in a seating group up front with Jack on his shoulder. I recognize Cathy and the other ladies from the utilities office in a different seating group of antiques. They all need refurbishing but they create the perfect setting for this event. We have tropical flowers we picked from the yard in arrangements sprinkled throughout. I am proud of how everything looks.

Kathryn Kemp waves at us. Jim’s crew is serving the beverages for us. Mr. Thompson and the banker, whose name I never got, make their way through the crowd to the porch. I even spot Moe way in the back straddling a bike.

“Welcome to Monroe Manor” I begin.

I feel a cool breeze at my back and hear the rocker creak. Captain Tiller is here. The banker brings out a few coins and Willy shines a spotlight on the coins for the crowd. I share my story of Monroe Manor, the journal, the diary and the ghost of

Captain Tiller. The crowd is silent, hanging on every word. Jack flies up to the porch and perches on the back of Tiller's rocker. I look back and the captain tips his hat at me and departs as Jack flies off. Conversation begins to bubble up and there is applause.

I turn back to the crowd as Jim and Trudy approach and wrap their arms around me. I raise my glass to the crowd. I offer a toast to Monroe Manor, to brighter days ahead and new beginnings.

“

