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OCTOBER NEWSLETTER HAPPY HALLOWEEN

MEET ABIGALE: MY REAL-“LIFE” GHOST

Welcome to October. The month of Halloween feels like the right moment to tell you about our most unusual housemate. This isn't fiction. This isn't a plot twist in one of my Polly Pepper cozy mysteries. I live with a... ghost. Seriously! A spectre. A phantom. A shadow.



Several years ago, after we'd barely moved into our nearly 500-year-old English country cottage, a cell phone rang downstairs at dawn. Not my ringtone. Not David's. Both our phones sat silent on bedside tables. I went down to investigate... nothing. No phone. No person? Only the stillness of a house that had stood for centuries. That was the moment I became certain someone — or something—was hiding here.

Friends suggested the sound came from outside. But with nineteen-inch-thick stone walls, we don't even hear planes landing at nearby Bristol Airport. Whatever I heard, it was inside.

Abigale, as we call her, announces herself in many ways. On another of our early days here, the dishwasher roared to life, full-blast — a dishwasher we had never used—or even touched. Ever! She also hijacks our smart speakers. I prefer classical music; she apparently likes rock. We'll walk in from shopping or an evening out to find Led Zeppelin (I'm a Puccini purist) echoing through oak beams older than the Pilgrims.

It was a maintenance worker who first murmured that a “female presence” lingered in the house. Giving her a name made her feel less like just a visitor — after all, this was her place long before it was ours. Her essence is stitched into the fabric of this old cottage. Mischievous, yes, but not malicious.

Sometimes she's protective. One night, we both heard an odd sound, low and insistent. I don't often investigate the noises that ripple through these rooms (there are so many sounds), but that night I felt drawn to it. The moment I stepped off the stairs, my feet were deep in water. It was pouring from the cistern behind the toilet in the downstairs loo, flooding our parquet floors (which we're told were probably laid about 250 years ago). Without Abigale's “warning,” the first entire floor of the house would have been ruined.

I've never seen Abigale, but I know she's here. Guests have reported feeling a hand on their shoulder at night in the guest room. Frankly, I'd love to see her — but I have no intention of trying to instigate that. Years ago, while renting a castle in Wales (I know how that sounds, and yes, I'm pathetically pretentious), my cousin and I tried the candles-and-incense ritual to conjure... something. The outcome was unpleasant enough that I'll never do that again.

So for now, Abigale remains a friendly mystery. She inspired the ghost in my novel *Murder and a Missing Manuscript*. Every time my smart speaker erupts with Metallica or Guns N' Roses, I'm reminded that she's here entertaining herself—and us. She's a presence, a muse, and, on stormy nights, the best company imaginable. This whole ghost story may be merely fantasy on my part. But I don't have better explanations for the many interesting experiences we've had in this ancient house!

I'm positively giddy to announce that my newest Polly Pepper mystery, *Murder in Mint Condition*, will be published by Oliver-Heber Books <https://oliver-heberbooks.com/> next month! Polly's latest mystery adventure finds her deep in the glamorous (and surprisingly cut-throat) world of antiques. When a television appraisal show rolls into Thistlethorne Lodge, she expects polite chatter about provenance and patina. Instead, one of the experts ends up polished off—as in dead as a doornail. Cue Polly, who must untangle rivalries sharper than a Georgian carving knife, secrets dustier than the attic at Downton, and a suspiciously cursed antique French clock. As always, you can expect eccentric suspects, laugh-out-loud moments, a few heart-stopping twists, and Polly Pepper proving once again that murder never goes out of fashion.



LAST MONTHS CONTEST WINNER

Let's give a warm round of applause to reader Carl Coalson who is the winner of last month's Pumpkin Pie “Yay or Nay” contest. He and I are on the same “Yes!” to pumpkin pie page! I know I'm a broken record about this, but pumpkin pie is one of the things I miss most about living in America!

CONTEST! JUST ANSWER THIS SIMPLE QUESTION

Which is scarier: haunted houses or haunted smart speakers?

Hit reply to the newsletter with your choice — “house” or “speaker” — and you'll be entered to win a fun prize. (No, sadly, not a séance with Abigale. She's booked solid.)

My cleaning lady, Flora Scrubb, will draw a winner at random from all entries and announce it in next month's newsletter. Easy-breezy!

Thanks again, my friends, for taking the time to read this month's message. I wish you all a fun Halloween, and happy fall/autumn! I'll chat with you again next month. In the meantime, drop me a line if you have questions or just want to chat! I'm always up for that!

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