



LOVELAND CASTLE

By

Debbie Kuhn

The petite Lenore floated high enough into the air to reach one of the dueling swords that hung above the library’s massive stone fireplace – brandishing it back and forth on her descent.

“I say we lop off the wench’s ‘ead!”

Lady Olivia stopped pacing for a moment. “Lenore, do please mind your accent. You were doing so well.”

The Duke of Edgewood glanced nervously at the weapon Lenore was holding before turning his attention to the lovely, preoccupied Lady Olivia. “For shame, my dear.” He would’ve shaken his wobbly, gray head in disapproval if not for the fear he had of losing it again. “Transparency is most unseemly. One should either appear to be alive, or invisible.”

Lady Olivia sighed. “Forgive me, but I’m quite distressed. Time is running out.”

The Duke frowned at the Cockney maid. “For pity’s sake, child, away with that sword. Violence is NOT the answer.”

Lenore pouted. She’d grown quite fond of watching gory horror flicks on the little telly in the sitting room. “The weddin’s tomorrow, ain’t it? You got any BETTER ideas?”

The trio each had their own reasons for wanting the castle's new American owner, Max Loveland, to call off his wedding to Claire – a spoiled socialite. Max's fiancée had recently convinced him to sell the haunted, drafty place and move to Rome.

The Duke couldn't bear the thought of his five-hundred-year-old legacy belonging to anyone other than a direct descendant. Lenore had been in service at the castle since the age of thirteen and hated the idea of it being renovated. Lady Olivia simply wanted handsome Max all to herself.

"All right, then." Lenore placed the sword back on the wall and glided over to the floor-to-ceiling bookshelves. "Let's just poison Claire."

"No." Lady Olivia shuddered. Two hundred years ago, an act of adultery had led her husband to poison her with a glass of sweet wine. "People can't get away with such treachery quite as easily these days, and I'm afraid Max would be blamed."

"Don't look so despondent, my dear," the Duke said. "I'm quite certain we'll find a way to solve this dilemma before the dreaded event."

"Well, I'm tired of thinking." Lenore drifted off towards the sitting room door. "And I don't want to miss *All My Lovers*. Maddie is all ready to tell Justin that little Eric is 'is – I mean HIS."

The lavish ceremony was to take place at high noon on the lush grounds of the estate, by the private lake. By ten o'clock that sunny, summer morning, swarms of noisy, cheerful guests had already filled the castle to overflowing.

Lenore watched the commotion from her perch upon the entrance hall's enormous crystal chandelier – the same one she'd been dusting back in 1880 when she'd slipped and fallen. Only twenty-three at the time, she'd thought it bloody unfair that her dedicated efforts had resulted in such an untimely death.

Ah, but at least she'd had two companions to help her haunt the place. Lady Olivia had even taught her how to read.

Right now, her friends were ensconced in the third floor drawing room, still pondering their problem. Her Ladyship had grown even more distraught and the Duke seemed more befuddled than usual.

Lenore swung gently back and forth, eyeing the champagne fountain visible through the doorway of the banquet hall. What she wouldn't give for a wee little sip.

Her attention was drawn to the attractive, tuxedoed groomsmen as they trooped up the winding stairs, Max leading the way. Funny how they wanted to take photographs BEFORE the ceremony. The man with the camera made them line up single file on the steps, close to the second floor landing.

“Only one hour of freedom left, Max,” the Best Man said, grinning.

The man with the camera clicked away.

A wicked, clever idea suddenly occurred to Lenore. It could be the answer to all their problems. She floated down next to Max, who still stood on the topmost step, joking with his groomsmen.

All it would take was one good, strong push.

As the poor man tumbled wildly down the stone stairs, Lenore did feel a twinge of guilt – but only for a brief moment.

The uproar caused by the tragedy soon had the Duke and Lady Olivia rushing to the scene, their appearances disguised.

“LENORE! What have you done?” Upon seeing Max Loveland’s lifeless body sprawled on the floor, Her Ladyship immediately became transparent.

“Do be careful, my dear, someone might notice you.” The agitated Duke spoke to Lady Olivia with a jerky voice, his head now bobbing furiously. He grabbed it with both hands before it could topple off, and then risked a glance up at Lenore, who was floating serenely above them. “Young lady, this is dashed irregular.”

The maid yawned. “Ow do you know it wasn’t just an untimely accident? Same as what HAPPENED to me?”

“Oh, it was you that pushed me, all right,” said Max’s disembodied voice. “I caught a glimpse of you when I fell. Would someone like to explain to me why I was murdered on my wedding day?”

The not-so-heartbroken Claire moved to Rome after the funeral, whilst Lady Olivia comforted Max, helping him through his “transition.”

Peace reigned supreme until the day the renovators showed up. Apparently, Max's uncle had decided to turn Loveland Castle into a hotel.

The ghosts were none too happy.

Especially Lenore. "I say we lop off their 'eads!"

THE END