

Dear Readers,

When I think of hauntings, I first think of my maternal grandmother. I suppose this is because it was my earliest (that I remember) experience. Sweetheart, as we called her, lived with us for a number of years. I'm going to add sweet because I adored her—though it is NOT the first word that comes to mind when I think of her.

Tough, opinionated, funny, fey, acerbic, quick Irish temper all rank before I get to sweet. She had flaming red hair, and was quite the dish in her day. She was married five times (before I was born). Yes, I said five, and she didn't keep any of them.

She had her own apartment in our house—bedroom, bath, living room with a fireplace, kitchenette. She read palms and loved watching the Roller Derby.

In the house where I grew up, we had a huge backyard, tons of fruit trees, a veg garden we worked in every summer. A good-sized front yard with a pussy willow tree sort of centered between the front and side walkways.

My father hated that tree. I have no idea why. My grandmother loved that tree. Also no idea. He would, periodically threaten to cut it down, and she'd bring the axe down on my father. The tree stayed.

One evening a week or two after Sweetheart passed, my father thought of that tree. I remember him saying: "Well, Eps is gone, (Eps was his nickname for her—something from a comic or cartoon), and I'm cutting that damn tree down tomorrow morning."

And that night, it was hit by lightning, split cleanly in two and taken to the ground.

She just wouldn't give him the satisfaction.

She stayed in the house for some time, winding her cuckoo clock, closing doors, probably watching the Roller Derby or kibbitzing at the Friday night pinochle game at our dining room table. I know my mother felt her often, and it brought comfort—and amusement.

Since that first experience, I've had others. But then I live on a Civil War battlefield, so—to me—it would be odd if I hadn't. Hearing battle drums in the middle of the night while walking a fretful baby, or some strange knocking when no one's there. A child's voice—and I admit this one creeped me—downstairs while I worked upstairs, alone in the house, calling for Mama. I did get my guts up to go down and look for her, but I wasn't Mama, so she didn't show herself to me.

And as it happens, I own a haunted inn. Now, some of you will say: Oh, please, Nora, the others were coincidence or imaginings. But I know what I know. So does the staff at Inn BoonsBoro, who often have to turn off showers in locked, empty rooms, or put some item back from where it mysteriously moved. Doors opening, doors closing, footsteps on the stairs. Many guests have had encounters while staying there. Our ghosts are, fortunately, benign. Playful, but benign. We even have a ghost cat who visits guests in their rooms often.

His name is Johnson.

Once a year, along with several girl pals, I spend a week at The Greenbrier in West Virginia. We book a house that's attached to the hotel. The very first time I walked in, I thought: Oh, okay. We're not alone here. All of my pals, plus my grandson Griffin, who goes with us, have had encounters. Oh, I could tell you stories. So I decided to.

When I thought about the theme of my next trilogy, I thought of old houses with history and spirit occupants.

Personally, I love haunted houses, (and, so far, I've been comfortable with those who walk there), so why not write about one?

My fictional one stands on the coast of Maine, a house—or manor as it's called—the main character inherits from an uncle she didn't know she had. I don't want to get into the reasons why and spoil it, but the reasons worked for me.

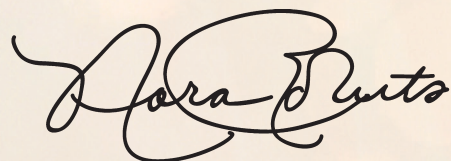
This manor's not only haunted, but carries a two-hundred-year-old curse. As it's in the Prologue, I don't think it's a spoiler to say a woman was killed on her wedding day by an evil, jealous, crazy witch—who cursed the house, and subsequent brides.

A haunted house, a curse, doomed brides through the ages. Well, that checked a lot of boxes for me. Add a mystery to solve to break that curse, some romance, the not-at-all benign witch who haunts the place, and a bevy of other spirits, and more boxes checked.

I liked the idea of having my very rational-minded main character find herself in a completely irrational situation, and discovering her heritage, her family history, while she takes the risk of rebuilding her career. With bonus points for learning to trust her heart.

I had such fun writing *The Lost Bride Trilogy*.

I hope you'll enjoy it, and all the things that go bump in the night.



Nora Roberts



Photo By Bruce Wilder

