

BELLE
ROUGE

by

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VA

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To Anyone who has ever faced fear and conquered it

PROLOGUE

Old houses have always held a curiosity for me. Who lived there? What happened to them? I've been able to get into some of the houses and I've come out of some, quite quickly. For me, it's as if they still hold the energy from their past. And some of that energy is not very pleasant.

When setting out to write a book, it isn't difficult to latch onto a story--it's more difficult to weed out those you don't want to write. It's as if many people who have passed on are clamoring to have their stories told, even though only bits and pieces of the truth are there in historical fiction.

I had begun to feel the nudge to write a book, and one house held a real fascination. I had been there twice before. Some friends, who were the relatives of the elderly man who lived there, took me along when they visited. I recognized his name as being from a prominent family who raced horses. All I remember of that day is seeing him sitting on his back porch as we drove up. After he passed away, my friends took me there to the estate sale.

As we walked toward the barn, I could see their training track behind it. I bought a horse blanket and brought it home, to my mother's dismay. I still don't know when or how she disposed of it, but the image of the house and land stayed with me. This was the place that became Belle Rouge.

CHAPTER 1

Laurel Mackenzie turned off the main road onto a gravel driveway and maneuvered her car between the weatherbeaten stone gateposts at the farm's entrance. She was unable to see what lay ahead, for the entire length of the driveway was canopied by magnificent crimson maples. She inched the car forward eagerly trying to catch a glimpse of the mansion known as Belle Rouge. When she had first asked about the property, the real estate agent warned her. "A house that's over a hundred fifty years old is bound to have some 'stories' circulating about it."

"What kind of stories?" she remembered asking.

"You know---stories about sounds, happenings."

"Are you trying to say Belle Rouge is haunted?"

"Really, Miss MacKenzie, you don't want this house. There are plenty of others, more modern, I can show you."

The agent's words only piqued her curiosity. She had asked him for directions and insisted on going alone.

Now, as the car moved up the drive, Laurel's pulse quickened. Finally, the trees parted and the mansion came into full view. At that moment, Laurel MacKenzie knew she had to own Belle Rouge.

Certainly no ghosts had manifested themselves in the first few weeks she lived at the farm. In fact, she already felt at home in the comfortable old house. And she was thankful to be experiencing a little nudging to sit down at her typewriter, for it had been over a year since she had been able to write. Her first three novels had met with great success, but she had begun to

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wonder if the well of her creativity had run dry. Perhaps some of the problem was due to her restlessness. During the past year she had had an overwhelming desire to leave her home in North Carolina.

“I can’t move,” she argued with herself. “I’ve lived here all my life.”

“But,” another voice presented itself, “maybe it would be good to get away and start over again.”

Her divorce from Robert Bradford was final and even though she had initiated the separation, she didn’t like seeing him every time she went into town. She never knew what to say to him.

“Where could I go?” she asked herself. Then her mind flashed to a faded photograph she kept in a desk drawer. In the picture, an obviously happy young couple stood next to a storefront. On the window of the store were printed the words, Cedarville Hardware, R. Price, Proprietor. On the back of the photograph in her mother’s handwriting were the names, Richard and Dora Price, my grandparents in Cedarville, Kentucky.

“Not a very logical way to pick a place to move,” Laurel told herself. “But why not? Maybe it would be fun to find my roots.”

Laurel considered herself lucky. She found it necessary to spend only a small portion of the inheritance from her parents’ estate to buy Belle Rouge. She cashed in some certificates of deposit, in which she had invested with the money from her writing and opened a checking account in a local bank. She needed some cash on hand for the minor repair work on the plumbing and the electrical wiring in the mansion.

She moved to the farm in early September, just when the crimson maples were beginning to show the first hint of autumn. The furniture arrived at the designated time, and all of the antiques she had collected over the years seemed to find their niche in her new residence.

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In her desire to own Belle Rouge, she had not noticed how much the weather had taken its toll on the outside trim of the stately brick house. The paint was flaking off the frame of the entrance and the large cathedral-style window. The mansion's somewhat Italianate architecture was unique, and she felt a driving force to restore it to its original beauty.

There was one thing that bothered Laurel about the house. She felt an unexplained queasiness in the pit of her stomach each time she looked up at the glass-enclosed room on top of the two-story mansion. "I know that's where the overseer stood to watch the slaves as they worked. Maybe that explains why it affects me as it does," she reasoned.

Laurel adjusted readily to life in the country, except for the time she decided to pull the weeds that had grown up around a fireplace standing some thirty feet away from the back of the house. Just as she reached down, something slid through her hand. When she drew back, a garden snake slithered between her feet.

"I don't want to tear this chimney down. I'm sure it's the only thing left when the original kitchen burned."

"Now what made me say that?" she asked herself. "I don't know that the kitchen burned. Oh, well, maybe I'll come up with something to do with the fireplace. It's an eyesore like it is."

Laurel had been settled in at Belle Rouge for a month when a phone call came. "Miss Mackenzie?" the pleasant voice inquired. "My name is Eva Farnsworth and I'm president of the Cedarville Historical Society. I was wondering if you would consider attending our meeting next Friday. I thought you might speak to us on how you go about researching your novels."

"I just write fiction, Mrs. Farnsworth."

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“I know, but your historical facts are so accurate. I realize this is short notice, but we would certainly consider it a privilege if you’d speak to us.”

“Well, I am about to start a new novel, and I think it will be about this area. Perhaps your historical society would have some information I could use.”

“Oh, we’ve done extensive research on our town’s history,” Eva Farnsworth replied excitedly. “You can have access to anything we have.”

During the days that followed, Laurel outlined her talk. It felt good to be sitting at the typewriter again. In fact, she took time to type the title page of her new novel. *The Secrets of Cedarville, by Laurel Mackenzie.*

On the evening of her scheduled talk, she rinsed the dishes, placed them in the dishwasher and found herself staring out the window at the fields, which were ragged with their uneven growth of grass. “I hate to spend more money, but I’m going to have to invest in a tractor and bush hog sooner or later,” she told herself. She glanced at her watch. Eva Farnsworth was due any minute. The dilemma of the fields would have to be decided tomorrow.

Laurel waited in the parlor until she saw the headlights of a vehicle coming up the drive. The car circled in front of the house and stopped by the door. When Laurel opened it in response to the knock, she found a rather plump, gray haired woman with a ready smile standing in front of her.

“Hello, I’m Eva,” came the same cheery voice she’d heard on the phone.

“Come in,” Laurel returned the smile.

“Oh my, Miss Mackenzie, you’ve done wonders with this place. It almost looks like it did when I was a child.”

“You lived at Belle Rouge?”

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“No. Goodness no, but I’ve lived in Cedarville all my life. My family came with some of the first settlers.”

“Do you know anything about the history of Belle Rouge?” Laurel asked.

“A few things,” Eva replied. “My great-grandfather wrote quite a bit about the Kilgores of Belle Rouge in his record book. They were an interesting family.”

“Would you mind if I read his record book---sometime when it’s convenient for you?”

Eva’s eyes widened. “Miss MacKenzie, is Belle Rouge going to be the setting for your next novel?”

“I think it very well might be.”

Laurel climbed in the seat next to Eva Farnsworth and as the old station wagon lumbered its way down the drive, Laurel suddenly realized she was experiencing something at which she truly marveled. She felt as if Eva Farnsworth was an old, old friend. How happy she was to have found her!

About a dozen members of the historical society had gathered at the library for the monthly meeting. Laurel found all the people to be friendly and appreciative, with the exception of one man who seemed to prefer to stand alone in the back of the room. His stare was mildly disconcerting, but she completed her talk and answered questions without showing any irritation at his odd behavior.

When the audience finally moved toward the refreshment table, Eva edged her way to where Laurel stood. “Don’t let Lucien bother you,” she said.

“I thought I was hiding my annoyance.”

“You are. It’s just me,” Eva’s eyes twinkled. “I sometimes pick up what people are thinking.”

“Are you psychic?”

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“Don’t say it too loudly. There are a couple of people here who would stay up all night and pray for me if they heard that word.”

“Well---who’s the man with the riveting eyes?” Laurel asked.

“Lucien Caulder. He only comes to the meetings once in a while. He perked up, though, when he heard you were going to speak.”

Laurel accepted a cup of coffee and took a sip. “I wouldn’t picture him as one of my readers.”

“I don’t know why not. Anyone who loves history would love your books. I’ve often wondered why someone doesn’t make them into movies.”

“My agent says we have a nibble on one,” Laurel smiled.

“Oh, that’s wonderful! And just to think you’re living here in Cedarville now.”

“Please don’t spread that around. I came here where it’s quiet so I could write without distraction. The fewer people who know, the better.”

“I understand. But, may I please tell just one other person? That’s her serving the cake. You’ll like Jane. She’s a very serious person, but lots of fun when you get to know her.”

Laurel studied the woman standing behind the table. She was attractive, fashionably dressed and her blonde hair was done to perfection.

“Jane and I went to high school together.”

“You and she?” Laurel spoke without thinking.

“Hard to believe she’s sixty, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it is,” Laurel sighed. “I look older than she does and I’m forty.”

“Come on, I want to introduce you. You’ll like her.”

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The woman looked up as Eva and Laurel approached. "I enjoyed your talk, Miss Mackenzie," she said.

"Laurel, this is Jane Miller."

"I'm glad to meet you. Eva says I'm going to like you."

"Not everyone does," Jane winked. "I have too many ex-students still living here in Cedarville."

"Oh don't listen to her," Eva scolded. "They all loved her."

"You're a teacher?" Laurel asked.

"I used to be, but thirty years is enough. It was time to do something else."

"And what do you do now?"

Jane Miller laughed. "Sometimes Eva and I get into trouble. We travel together and work with the historical society. And we've both just finished our family genealogies."

"You've lived in Cedarville all your life, too?"

"Yes. My family came about the same time as Eva's. I could never leave here."

"I know what you mean," Laurel replied. "My attachments were pretty deep in North Carolina, but my parents are gone now. Do both of you still have relatives living here?"

"My parents are gone, too, and I never married," Jane responded. "I do have one cousin. He's a deputy sheriff."

"The only thing I have is an ex-husband," Eva giggled. "And he moved to Florida with a new thirty-year-old wife. What about you, Laurel?"

"One daughter in college. But she prefers her father's company to mine."

"Then you're divorced, too," Eva said. "Well then, how about joining forces with two old women? The three of us could probably find some kind of monkey business to get into."

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“I think I’d like that. However, writing is going to take up a lot of my time, as will taking care of Belle Rouge. But I can’t work all the time, and you two sound like a lot of fun.”

“Good, it’s settled,” Eva clapped her hands. “This weekend is Cedarville’s homecoming, and we could go to the sale barn on Saturday and visit all the booths.”

Laurel winced. “I’m not sure I’d enjoy that.”

“What better way to get acquainted with the citizens of Cedarville than to look at their junk?” Jane smiled.

“OK, why not? Would you like to meet at Belle Rouge? I’ll fix breakfast.”

“That sounds wonderful,” Eva exclaimed. “Jane, I can’t wait for you to see what Laurel’s done with the house.”

“I’d love to see it. But, Laurel, I’ve been dying to ask you a question all night. Why in the world did you move to Cedarville, of all places?”

“You’ll think I’m crazy if I tell you.”

“No, please,” Jane insisted.

“My mother had a photograph of her grandparents. They were standing in front of their store. It was here in Cedarville.”

“Then let me be the first to welcome you home,” said a voice from behind her.

Laurel wheeled around to find herself staring into the dark, brooding eyes of Lucien Caulder.

CHAPTER 2

The following Saturday morning, after breakfast at Belle Rouge, Laurel drove Eva and Jane to the Salt River Sale Barn, where an unusually large crowd had gathered for the annual county homecoming.

“Sorry, ma’am, this lot is full,” said the security guard. “You’ll have to park down the street and walk back.”

“Why don’t you two get out,” Laurel suggested. “I have an errand to run in town and I’ll meet you back here in about a half hour.”

The honking horn behind them helped Eva and Jane make the hasty decision to get out of the car and Laurel quickly drove off.

“We should have stayed together,” Jane said as they walked into the grounds.

“Oh, she’ll be all right,” Eva answered. “Anyway, I think she was looking for an excuse not to come to the flea market.”

Forty five minutes later, with her business in town finished, Laurel parked the car in a vacant spot close to the last row of stalls at the sale barn. She realized that because of the impatient driver behind them, they had not designated an exact meeting place. Surely she would eventually run into them in one of the aisles.

Laurel was beginning to see the futility of trying to find her friends in the endless sea of stalls crammed full of pumpkins, gourds and Indian corn, when she spotted what she considered to be some of the finest pieces she had ever seen in all her years of

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antique hunting. Not even in North Carolina had she found such well-preserved pre-Civil War furniture. When she inspected the pieces closely, any doubt of authenticity was erased from her mind.

In her excitement she hardly noticed the small elderly black man who was smiling at her and her childlike enthusiasm. “Howdy, ma’am. You like ole Barney’s merchandise? Ever since I heard someone bought the Kilgore place I figured they’d be here sooner or later.”

“How did you know it was me?”

“Word gets around in a town no bigger than this. It’s not easy to keep secrets here.”

“You have some excellent pieces, but I notice you don’t have a complete set of anything. If only that dining room suite had the two captain’s chairs. And why in the world would anyone cut off the top of that high-backed bed?”

“It had the family crest on it, ma’am. Rumor has it one of the Kilgores destroyed everything with the crest on it.”

“But why would anyone do that?”

The old man’s face grew serious. “Some things are lost with time, ma’am.”

“So. You mean to tell me all this furniture came from Belle Rouge? How did you get it?”

“My Grand-daddy. Don’t rightly know how he got it. Every year I bring the furniture to the homecoming thinking it might find its proper owner. I keep the price so high that no wrong person could buy it.”

“Do you think I’m the right person?”

“Ma’am, if you bought Belle Rouge, you are the rightful owner.”

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Eva and Jane were standing by the front gate when Laurel found them. "I hope I didn't keep you waiting too long," she apologized.

"No, we've just now finished looking," Eva answered. "But we were beginning to worry about you."

"Oh, I've been looking around, too, and you were right. This is an interesting place. Didn't you find anything you wanted to buy?"

"No, nothing," Jane replied.

"Well, I guess I made up for both of you. My errand in town was to buy a tractor and bush hog. And when I came back to the sale barn and started looking for you, I ran into a most interesting find."

Eva's eyes brightened. "What was it?"

"It's some of the original furniture from Belle Rouge. Come on, I'll show you. The man said he'd deliver it Monday."

Hurriedly, Laurel led them down the aisle, where she stopped at the last booth. "That's funny. He was here just a few minutes ago. I guess there was no need for him to stay, since I bought him out," she laughed.

"Maybe we could come over Monday and see the furniture when it's delivered," Jane said.

"Of course you're welcome. But if my tractor is delivered late this afternoon, like the store said it would be, I might be mowing in back of the barn. Just come on down there and give me a yell."

"You're not going to mow when there's no one there with you, are you?" Eva frowned.

"I'll be fine."

"The field will be too wet with dew until midmorning. Don't start till Jane and I get there."

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At ten o'clock Monday morning, Eva knocked on the front door of the mansion at Belle Rouge. When there was no response, she and Jane proceeded to the back door. Again there was no answer.

"Look, there behind the barn," Jane exclaimed.

The almost comical figure proudly bounced along on the new John Deere, dressed in faded jeans, old plaid shirt and sweat-banded hat pulled down so far that it showed only a rim of her reddish blonde hair. Laurel waved and headed the tractor toward the house.

"I thought I told you to wait for us," Eva scolded.

"There wasn't any dew this morning. Besides, I have to learn to do things for myself."

"You're one stubborn woman, Laurel Mackenzie."

"I've been told that many times before. Come in and look at the new furniture," she said, turning off the engine. "Barney delivered it early this morning. I had him put it on the second floor."

"How could an elderly man carry furniture up these stairs?" Jane asked.

"Barney's very strong, and I helped him."

"You're going to overdo it and make yourself sick."

"Eva, you sound just like my mother used to." Laurel led them to a large room on the second story. "Here's the furniture. What do you think?"

"Oh, it's beautiful," Jane exclaimed. "It must have cost you a fortune."

"No, on the contrary, Barney gave it to me for next to nothing."

Curiosity led Eva toward the staircase leading to the glass-enclosed room on top of the mansion. "Have you been up there yet?" she asked.

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“No,” Laurel answered, “and I have no desire to.”

“Would you mind if I painted up there sometime?” Eva asked. “I love to paint watercolors and I bet there’s a wonderful view from up there.”

Laurel felt the queasiness return. “No, I wouldn’t mind.”

Eva inched her way up the stairs to where she could reach the door. “It’s been nailed shut.”

“Leave it alone,” Laurel snapped. “It must be dangerous up there or it wouldn’t be nailed.”

“Let’s just see,” Eva persisted. “The view has to be breathtaking from that height. Think about it. If we go up there, you can see the results of all your mowing. I saw a crowbar over in the corner of the room. Get it for me, Jane.”

“That’s strange,” Jane said. “The room on this side of the staircase is smaller than the one on the other side.”

“You’re right,” Eva agreed, taking the crowbar from her. “There should be a window in the small room. I know I can see a window from the outside.”

“If that’s so, someone has walled up this end of the room,” Laurel replied. “It must be like the glass room, closed for a reason. Please, Eva, come down.”

“Now, who’s being the worried mother? I’ve almost got it open. I can’t stop when I’m this close.”

Judging by the age of the nails and the handmade brackets, Eva was certain the door had been sealed for many years. The minute it opened she knew she was being covered by dust from a different era. Hastily, Eva climbed up into the glass enclosed room. “You should see the view from here!” she cried. “Come on, you two. It’s wonderful.”

“Go on,” Jane urged Laurel. “I’m right behind you.”

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Laurel couldn't quite determine if it was because of the heat and humidity, or because she had been working so hard, but suddenly she felt faint.

"Are you all right?" Jane asked.

Laurel wiped the sweat from her face, sat down and leaned back against the glass wall. "Yes, just let me rest a minute."

"Look, it's starting to rain," Eva said. "Isn't it beautiful? Belle Rouge looks like some French impressionist painting through the rain and these old window panes."

"It's magnificent," Jane sighed. "Laurel, don't you think it's just the most..."

She turned to see Laurel clutching the railing, her face pale and sweaty, her eyes glazed. "Dear God! Sit back down and put your head between your knees."

"I have to get out of here! Help me down the ladder."

"You're in no condition to get on a ladder. Let me get you a glass of tea," Eva said.

"And I'll get a cold cloth," Jane offered.

Before Laurel could respond, both women were down the stairs and out of sight. Then, she heard an unfamiliar voice.

"Boy, get back on that horse!"

"Jane! Eva! Someone's out back. I hear them talking."

When no response came, Laurel pulled herself to her knees and wiped a pane of glass to peer toward the back of the house. She thought she could make out an oval ring in the field by the barn which had not been discernible at ground level.

The voice came again. "There's not another horse in Kentucky that can beat this crimson devil!"

"It's a race track!" Laurel exclaimed. When she wiped the pane again, she could make out the words painted on the barn...*Belle Rouge: Home of Red Satan*. Then she saw them. A

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black jockey was being given a leg up on a prancing red stallion by a tall, dark man.

The red stallion's long legs carried him effortlessly around the track and into the homestretch. "Barnabas! Don't let him bear out! Keep him in tight."

The jockey pulled out a whip concealed under his left arm, raised it high in the air and hit the stallion a sharp blow on its right shoulder. The horse veered away from the whip, while the jockey grabbed for its mane, desperately trying to keep his seat. But the full weight of the horse's body fell against the rail, and the fence gave way. The animal hit the ground with a thud and rolled over, barely missing the prostrate rider.

The tall man's stride quickly took him to where the stallion was struggling to get up. He grabbed the reins, pulled the horse to its feet and tied it to the post. His jaw was set in anger as he picked up the whip and stood towering above the dazed jockey. "I'll show you what to do with a whip, you idiot!" The whip came down on the young black man's back with such force he fell to his knees. "I've told you never to hit a horse of mine." Again the whip found its target.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Kilgore, I'm sorry," the jockey apologized.

A petite girl with long golden hair ran across the track and threw her arms around the man's waist, placing herself between him and the black man. "Don't hit Barnabas again. Please, Daddy."

"Claire, keep out of this!"

"Please, leave him alone. We must see to Red Satan."

Kilgore's anger subsided at the thought of his prized stallion. But with one final statement, he pointed the whip at the black man. "Don't you ever go against my orders again or you'll live to regret it."

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Claire Kilgore stroked the stallion's neck while her father ran his hand gently over the horse's knees and ankles. "Lead him around, daughter. Let's see if he favors that left leg."

"He seems to be fine, Daddy. He's so strong, it would take more than a fall to hurt him."

"We're lucky nothing bad happened. I didn't keep his sire and dam hidden from the rebels for four years just to lose him when some boy disobeys my orders. This horse is the best chance we've ever had to win the Gold Cup." A slight smile played at the corner of Kilgore's lips. "You will have to say that Red Satan is starting to live up to his name."

"Daddy, could you please come to the house and talk to Momma. She's been watching from the observatory, and you know she's bound to have one of her spells after all this excitement."

Kilgore looked up toward the glass enclosure on top of the house. Even from that distance, Laurel could feel his riveting stare. She felt like a bird trapped in a cage.

As the man disappeared around the corner of the house, her attention was drawn back to the barn, where Barnabas untied the horse's reins with a snap. Wild eyed at the sound, the animal arched his neck, reared and struck at the black man with his front hooves. Barnabas yanked the horse's head down. "Whoa, you red devil!"

A statuesque mulatto woman leaned against the stall door, watching the dancing stallion follow the limping jockey to the stable. "Better not let Mr. Sumner see you jerk Satan in the mouth."

Barnabas undid the girth and placed the saddle across the railing. "I gotta teach this horse some manners or he gonna hurt somebody bad."

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“You mark what I tell you, little man. Mr. Sumner Kilgore loves his horses better than anything, or anybody. So you best be careful how you treat ’em.”

The black man picked up a cloth and began to rub the stallion’s glistening coat. “I’d say he loves Miss Claire, Miz Kilgore and Mr. Ross, first.”

The woman’s eyes narrowed. “If you think that, you are dead wrong. I know him better than anybody.” She walked a few steps away from the barn where she could see Sumner Kilgore and his daughter entering the house. “Look at her up there,” she pointed toward the glass enclosed room. “She’s crazy. Miz Kilgore’s out of her mind. Do you think Mr. Sumner could love anybody like her? He needs a strong woman.”

“Like you?” Barnabas asked, lifting the stallion’s hoof and picking it clean.

Ignoring the remark, the woman continued. “And Mr. Ross? All he wants to do is paint pictures, just like his mother. Mr. Sumner deserves a son who’ll run this farm. It’s a disgrace that Miz Kilgore bore him a child like Mr. Ross.”

“Genevieve! Shut your mouth! I’m not gonna let any wife of mine talk about Miss Lily and Mr. Ross that way.”

“Wife of yours? I will never be a wife to you. You never have touched me, and you never will.”

“I’m aware of the ‘arrangement’, woman. But you got no right...”

“I got every right,” Genevieve seethed.

Barnabas undid the stallion and placed him in the stall. Calmly, he turned to face her. “If you think you got any rights with Mr. Kilgore, you’re mistaken. The only place you got with him is in his bed and that’s whenever HE says so. Don’t you get no ideas---like YOU could be mistress of Belle Rouge. Miss

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Claire's the one who'll get this farm when something happens to Mr. Kilgore. He'll leave it to her."

"Humph! She won't stay here. Mr. Sumner tries to hold her too tight. She'll marry the first man who comes along, just to get away from him."

"You sound like you got this all figured out, but you ain't, Gen. I give you the same warnin' you give me. Don't ever cross Mr. Kilgore. You're no more to him than a whore and a whore can be replaced without no trouble at all."

"Don't you never call me that! I know who he loves and I know who deserves to be by his side...it's me. And nobody's gonna keep me from it...not you, not Miss Lily, Mr. Ross, or Miss Claire. Nobody gonna stop me!

"Don't you never try to pull none of your fool 'stuff' on this family!"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"I seen you. You foolin' with evil and it's gonna backfire on you. Leave it alone, I tell you." Barnabas took the saddle and bridle, placed them in the tack room, then headed for the house. "Come on. It's time we got dinner on the table."

Genevieve smiled as she reached into her pocket and slipped the red stallion some sugar. "He trying to tell me what to do, but he's too late, ain't he, red devil? Me and you already got an agreement. Ain't nobody gonna stand in our way."

It was Eva's voice that drew Laurel back. "Are you all right? You must have fainted."

"Did you hear someone out back?" Laurel asked. "I tried to get up. I heard voices and I saw..."

"Oh, dear! You're burning up with fever," Jane exclaimed. "Let's get you into bed."

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The storm clouds had passed, and the sun was radiating through the window when Laurel awoke sometime later.

“Are you feeling better?” Eva asked.

“Much better. How long have I been asleep?”

“Several hours.”

“I guess I’m just exhausted.” After a brief pause, Laurel continued. “But the strangest thing happened while I was alone in the observatory.”

“It couldn’t have been as strange as the talking you’ve been doing in your sleep,” Eva added.

“What did I say?”

“Something about a race track out by the barn and a red stallion.”

Laurel bolted upright in bed. “That’s what I saw from the observatory.”

“When your fever broke and you seemed to be sleeping peacefully, I decided to investigate what you were mumbling about,” Jane said. “The rain made it easy to see the outline of a race track in the back field. And I could barely make it out, but on the side of the barn I saw the name---*Red Satan*.”

