

# ~ The House On The Hill ~

by Cheyne

E-mail address: [cheynecurry@me.com](mailto:cheynecurry@me.com)

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Fandom: None. This was written for the RAOB 2009 Halloween Invitational.

Warnings: None. Only a brief mention of sex between two women.

Teaser: It was a dark and stormy night...

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*"Turn left in one mile."* The canned, female voice emanated from the GPS device affixed to the dashboard.

Erin, the passenger in the compact car, studied the scenery that passed. The foliage was in full bloom and the autumn colors were stunning. As they headed south on a county two-lane highway, Erin noticed a weathered, faded, billboard to her right, promoting car insurance, followed by another newer billboard advertising a harvest festival that happened a month ago.

"Does any of this look familiar to you?" Sandy, the driver, asked.

*"Turn left in zero point five miles,"* the GPS announced.

"No. And we're not in Vermont yet."

Sandy anticipated the turn and slowed the vehicle down. "Are you sure? I know we crossed the state line."

"Then we must have crossed back because Vermont doesn't allow billboards anywhere in the state, remember?"

"Huh. How did that happen? I was following directions."

"Maybe it's me but I don't see any side roads up ahead," Erin said.

*"Turn left now,"* the disembodied voice ordered.

Erin and Sandy both looked left. There was no road and no indication there had ever been one. "Where in hell's the road?"

*"Recalculating..."* the GPS announced.

"I hate it when she says that; her tone is always so scolding," Erin said, annoyed.

*"Make a legal U-turn wherever safely possible and go back zero point five miles. Turn right,"* the voice directed.

Erin yelled at the dashboard instrument. "There's no road, you stupid, piece of -!"

"Honey...honey, calm down, she can't hear you," Sandy told her, soothingly. She slowed down and made a U-turn.

"You're right, I'm sorry. I just hate being lost."

"We're not lost," Sandy said. She didn't sound convinced.

"Right. We just don't know where we are. And, obviously, neither does our GPS." The screen clearly indicated a road to the right and displayed a huge red arrow pointing the direction they were supposed to turn.

*"Turn right now,"* the device instructed.

Once again both women saw that there was no visible sign of any break in the dense forest that lined the right side of the highway, much less a road.

*"Recalculating,"* the GPS announced.

"I hate that bitch," Erin said and turned the machine off before she gave in to her fantasy of throwing it out the window.

They continued to drive until they reached a gas station/convenience store where they hoped to be able to ask for directions. Their hopes were dashed when they found the facility closed for the evening.

"One thing I hate about small towns is that nothing stays open for 24 hours," Sandy commented. She looked eastward at the darkening sky. "We need to find out where the heck we are and how to get back on track. It's going to be night soon and I hate driving on unfamiliar roads at night."

They both heard the rumble of thunder in the distance. "And I hate driving at night in the rain." They got back in the car. "Do you want me to drive for a little while?" Erin asked.

"No, I'm good." Sandy started the car. "Let's drive until we reach civilization. First," she looked at the dashboard gauges, "we need gas and second, if we are too far away from home, we'll find a room for the night." They pulled back out on the road.

"But it's Halloween...we'll miss Abbie's and Brandon's costumes and Cole's first time trick-or-treating." Erin wasn't whining because she knew how much Sandy disliked her tone when she did that but she did sound disappointed. She and Sandy adored their next-door neighbor's three kids and volunteered to watch them whenever the opportunity arose.

"I know, honey, but something tells me even if we made it home a half-hour from now, we'd still miss it. It's almost the kids' bedtime. Josh and Em have most likely taken them out already." Sandy turned on the windshield wipers as the rain began to pour.

Erin looked at her watch. "Wow. It's so late already!"

"I know. I'm really leaning more toward finding a room for the night at the next decent looking motel we come to and not pushing it."

"You're right," Erin sighed. She watched as it got darker outside and the rain volume increased. "How're you doing? This rain is nasty. Maybe we should pull over."

"Well, it is hard to see the lines in the road but I'd rather not pull over because it would be difficult for another car to see us if they came up behind us, even with our lights on."

"That's true. There's got to be a town somewhere up ahead with a motel. I'm getting a little hungry, too." Erin had just finished her sentence when Sandy seemed to lose control of the car on the rain-soaked road. She held her breath as the car went into a terrifying spin. When it stopped, the vehicle was facing south on the northbound lane, half on the road, half in a furrow. The car sputtered and stalled.

It seemed like a full minute passed in total silence. "Are you okay?" Sandy reached over and took Erin's hand.

"Just really shaken up. How about you?"

"More scared than hurt." They were both trembling. Sandy took a deep breath. "Looks like we might be in a ditch." She looked out through the passenger side window at the perilously close trees. "We were lucky." She tried to start the car but it wouldn't turn over. They silently sat in the dark for a few minutes and Sandy tried again.

"Uh oh." Erin nervously cracked her knuckles, a sound that seemed amplified by the surrounding quiet.

Sandy tried one more time to no avail. "This is not good. Let's call Triple A for a tow truck and then I think the next thing we need to do is get the car completely off the road."

"Which means going outside in this monsoon," Erin clarified.

"Yeah." Sandy smiled. "Happy Halloween, huh?"

Erin gestured to the trees. "Could've been worse." She flipped her cell phone up. "Okay. It just got worse. No signal."

"What?" Sandy leaned over to see for herself. "No!" She rummaged through her inside blazer

pocket for her own cell phone. It also registered no signal. "This is crap. Well, we can't spend the night in the car. I don't think we should take the chance of someone skidding off the road and running into us."

Erin looked out the passenger side window as the front windshield provided her with a much less clear view. A flash of lightning lit up the sky, followed by a resonance of rolling thunder. "There are trees all around us. I'm not real keen on walking under them during an electrical storm."

"Neither am I, sweetie, but without lights or even the emergency flashers, we can't warn other traffic that we are here. I'd rather take my chances with lightning than being smashed up against these trees by a semi that didn't see us in time."

"Understood. But where will we go? There's nothing here."

Sandy looked out the rear window. "We did pass a driveway before we got turned around, remember? There were pumpkin lights on the posts?"

"I didn't see that."

"You were too busy yelling at the GPS," Sandy reminded her.

Headlights became visible in the distance and, as the vehicle sped closer, it appeared as though it was headed straight toward Sandy's side of the car.

"Shit, shit, shit," Sandy squealed and jumped over to Erin's side as the oncoming car screeched by, horn sounding, while barely avoiding a head on collision.

"Okay. I'm ready to take my chances on the lightning," Erin said into Sandy's upper arm.

Sandy blew out a breath of relief and nodded. "That was way too close." She readjusted her position and looked around the car. "Anything we need to take with us?"

"No, let's just go back to that driveway and see if anyone is around. If we can call a tow truck from there, we should be able to ride with the driver into town and find a room until the car gets fixed."

"If not, I guess we'll have to figure something else out."

"Right. Kiss me before we risk our lives out there," Erin said and put her arms around Sandy's neck.

"Anytime." Sandy smiled and pressed her lips to Erin's. The kiss started out as a reassuring peck but unexpectedly turned to something more passionate and almost desperate. "Wow," Sandy said, barely above a whisper. "That was nice."

"I just thought about how close we came to losing each other twice in less than five minutes. I

got carried away," Erin said, offering a reason for her sudden ardor. She moved in for another kiss.

Sandy shook her head. "I understand. I feel the same way but if you kiss me again like that, I'll be rolling you into the back seat, dangers be damned."

They locked stares, amber eyes capturing dark hazel in an expression of deep love. "Ending a life of only seven years with you would not be enough but, damn, what a way to go, huh?"

They both nervously laughed as they untangled themselves from each other and climbed out of the car, into the pouring rain. Sandy reached in and put the gear in neutral. "Okay, steer us more toward the ditch and push from here," she indicated the driver's side door, "and I'll push from the back."

"Okay," Erin answered. They were already soaked to the bone. She couldn't imagine how much more soaked they'd be once - or if - they reached shelter.

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They had walked approximately a mile when they finally came to the driveway Sandy had noticed earlier. The two posts on either side of the gravel driveway were adorned with strings of small, orange pumpkin lights that were no longer lit.

"This is a good sign," Sandy said. "It means someone is home to turn them off."

"Or they're on a timer or they lost power," Erin said.

"Ever the optimist."

"Come on, Sandy, that last hit of lightning nearly fried the tree behind us and I'm still shocked I don't have to change my pants."

Sandy attempted to wipe the water away from her eyes with a drenched sleeve. It was a wasted effort. "At this point, we have nothing to lose so let's find the house, see if anyone is home. If not, maybe they have a shed or something we can use until the storm passes."

"I'm ready to suggest we go back to the car and take our chances."

"We're closer to the house, I bet," Sandy said and began to walk up the long driveway.

Erin trotted up next to her. "It better be a normal-looking house. I suddenly feel like we're in a scene from The Rocky Horror Picture Show. If something resembling Riff Raff opens the door and proclaims we're wet, I'll be running all the way to the next town."

"I don't know, Magenta was kind of hot," Sandy kidded. She took Erin's hand and pulled her to keep up with Sandy's long strides. About every two steps, one or the other would lose their

footing in the mud.

The rain started to let up and when they reached the top of the hill they were both delighted to see a cozy-looking log cabin home with light inside. The source of the glow seemed to be a fireplace and candles as the light was flickering instead of steady. As they walked up the steps, they both noticed that festive Halloween decorations graced the porch. "Looks friendly enough," Erin commented. "Maybe they have kids."

Sandy took a deep breath and knocked on the door.

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The door opened to reveal a middle-aged couple, casually dressed, attractive and, hopefully, friendly if their expressions were any indication.

"Yes? Can we help you?" the man asked, pleasantly. "You're a little late for trick-or-treating. We're all out of candy."

"You actually get trick-or-treaters up here?" Erin asked.

Sandy stared at her partner as though she'd lost her mind then took over the conversation. "Actually, our car hydroplaned and spun out a little ways from your driveway. The car won't start now and our cell phones don't have a signal. Is it possible we could use your phone to call a tow truck? Or if it makes you more comfortable, maybe you could call Triple A for us?"

The man stepped back and gestured them inside. "Please, come in, get warm."

"Thank you," Sandy and Erin chorused.

"I'm Scott and this is my wife, LeeAnn."

LeeAnn extended her hand. "Hi."

"Hi," Erin said. "I'm Erin and this is my part - uh, my friend, Sandy."

"We'd shake your hands but we slipped in the mud a few times coming up the driveway and we're filthy," Sandy told them.

"Yeah." Erin displayed her palms to emphasize Sandy's words.

"Ah. I appreciate your consideration. Nice to meet you both," LeeAnn said. "Okay, well, here's the bad news. There are no cell towers in this section of the county."

"No cell phone service? Ever?" Erin asked.

LeeAnn shook her head. "Nope. The residents want to keep the area quaint and think cell towers

would destroy that image so every year they've voted against them."

"The rest of the bad news is that we've lost our power which means no phone service right now," Scott said.

"You're kidding...no, of course you're not kidding, why would you kid about no phone service when two strangers are standing in your house?" Sandy's hope deflated which was reflected in her body language.

"Look, chances are we won't get our power back until morning. So you might as well make yourselves comfortable," LeeAnn told them.

"Would it be too much to ask to take us to town where we might be able to get some services?" Sandy asked.

"If it would do any good, we would love to but if we've got no power, the town has no power. And, even if it did, everything would be closed. The only place usually open on Halloween night is the high school where they have a party for the kids and a dance for the teens," Scott explained. "So LeeAnn's right. Why don't you two go over to the fireplace and try to warm up and we'll try to find you some dry clothes to change into."

"That's very kind of you. Thank you," Erin said. As Scott and LeeAnn left the room, she and Sandy dripped all the way to the braided rug that covered the hardwood floor in front of the stone fireplace. "This feels wonderful!" She rubbed her hands together.

"They almost seem too good to be true," Sandy said to Erin, keeping her voice low. "Hopefully they won't come back into the living room wearing hockey masks and carrying chain saws."

"Oh, *now* who's the optimist?" Erin teased.

"It's almost like they knew we were coming. They really didn't seem that shocked to see two soaking wet adult women at their door at nine o'clock at night."

"Hey, if you want to go screaming like a banshee out into this cold, rainy night because you're spooked, be my guest. But I'm staying right here where it's warm and dry."

"No, I'm just saying it was a little strange they didn't seem surprised to see us, that's all."

"Maybe they have one of those electronic thingies at the bottom of the driveway that warns them that someone is coming," Erin reasoned.

"A - the power is out and B - I think those are set up for car traffic not foot traffic."

"A - maybe it's on battery and B - maybe it's a beam."

Scott and LeeAnn returned to the living room with two pair of sweats. He handed a set to Sandy.

"This one is mine and will be a little big but it should fit you and Erin, LeeAnn's should fit you."

"The bathroom is right in there." LeeAnn pointed to the back of the house. "You can rinse off, too, in there but I can't guarantee any hot water. Sorry."

"No, it's fine, thank you. You're all ready doing too much. We're so sorry to put you out like this," Sandy said.

"Don't even think that," LeeAnn said. "We were expecting some friends to drop by tonight but the storm ruined that at the last minute and before the power went out, they called to cancel."

"So, unfortunately," Scott sighed in mock disappointment, "we have a ton of food and drink to get rid of."

Erin's eyes lit up. "Well, let us go get changed and we'll gladly help you dispose of it."

"You are too kind, really. We'll be right back," Sandy told them and smiled.

"Great. You can hang your wet clothes over the shower rod," LeeAnn directed.

Once behind the closed bathroom door, both women peeled off their clothes and dried off with two lush bath towels that had been provided for them.

"There! See? They *were* expecting company. Just not us," Erin said and scrunched the towel through her auburn hair.

"Fine. But they are overly friendly. How do they know we're not serial killers or something?" Sandy kept her voice to a harsh whisper.

"Okay...when we get home? No more Lifetime Movie Network for you." Erin slid into the navy blue sweat pants. "Oooo, these are nice and warm." She tied the waist and pulled on the matching sweatshirt. She looked up at her taller, blonde partner who fit very nicely into Scott's black sweat suit. "This is obviously a small town and people are a lot friendlier and trusting than they are in the bigger places, like where we live."

"Erin...we live in Burlington. It's not exactly a metropolis."

"Well, it's not East Buttcrack, either. Let's just go out there, enjoy and be grateful for their hospitality."

Sandy hung up the towel. "Why have you suddenly become the rational one and I've suddenly become the hysteric?"

Erin hung up her own towel. "Because - hey, wait a second! I'm not a hysteric..."

There was a light knock on the door but it still made both women jump. "Everything okay in



there?" The voice belonged to LeeAnn.

Sandy opened the door and gave LeeAnn her most amiable smile. "Yes, of course. These fit great. Thank you again."

"Oh, no problem. Are you sure you're both not hurt or injured from the accident?" LeeAnn asked.

"No," Erin said. "We were pretty shaken up because it was so unexpected but we're fine."

Sandy studied the interior of the house as unobtrusively as possible. The atmosphere was warm and welcoming and the décor was as charming as their hosts. She tried to relax and hoped Erin was correct in her assessment of this nice couple.

LeeAnn led them to a dining area where the table was loaded with Halloween-themed hors d'oeuvres like veggies with pumpkin dip, "worms in dirt" cupcakes, sliced "snake" stromboli, ghost peeps, "eyes and ears" pasta, mashed potato "spiders", "mummy" wrapped little wieners, a bread "cauldron" of salsa con queso, "cobwebbed" crab cakes, spinach and artichoke dip with dipping bread set up like gravestones and "bloody eyeball" martinis.

"Wow!" Sandy said and grinned. "This is a lot of food!"

"Yeah, so you see we need a little help with eating it," Scott said.

"I'm starving!" Erin said, her eyes lighting up.

"Good," LeeAnn said and laughed. "Please, help yourself."

"You're very creative," Sandy told them and picked up a paper plate decorated with bats, moons, black cats and jack-o-lanterns. She put a little bit of everything on it, as did Erin.

"Not me," LeeAnn said. "I don't have a creative bone in my body, it's all Scott. He's a chef at Café Anglais."

The name meant nothing to either Erin or Sandy and their expressions showed it. Finally Sandy said, "Sounds good."

"Martini?" Scott asked. He held up a martini glass with an "eyeball" in it.

"I'm not a big fan of Vermouth," Erin made a face.

"Neither are we," LeeAnn told them. "These are made with vodka, ice cold water and olive juice."

"Ooooo, I'll try one then," Erin said.

"Me, too," Sandy said. "How did you make the eyeball?"

"Oh, it's easy," Scott said as he poured the concoction into the smoke-tinted glass. "It's a radish with crooked lines of skin left on it so it looks like a bloodshot eyeball. Then you scoop a little hole out and stuff a green olive with pimento in it and voilà! An instant eyeball."

"Cool!" Erin said and accepted a glass from Scott. She tasted the contents of the glass. "Oh my God, Sandy, taste that. It's wonderful."

Sandy did as Erin instructed. "This is excellent."

Scott and LeeAnn smiled as they filled their own glasses and drank. They also made plates of food for themselves and led their guests back to the seating area in front of the fireplace.

"Where are you two from?" LeeAnn asked

Sandy swallowed a bit of delicious stromboli. "Vermont. Burlington, actually."

"Oh. You are a ways from home," LeeAnn said.

"Yeah - where *are* we, anyway?" Erin asked. She took another sip of her martini.

"Shattuck's Bridge, New Hampshire, about twenty-five miles north of Littleton."

"What? How did we get so off-track?" Sandy wondered out loud.

"You needed I-89 and you're much closer to I-93. Ever thought of buying a GPS?" Scott asked.

"We have one. It guided us here," Erin explained.

"Oh. Well, that's not very useful," LeeAnn said. "We'll get you back on your course tomorrow after your car gets looked at."

"Great, thanks." Erin had finished all that was on her plate and looked longingly back at the table.

LeeAnn laughed. "Please, go get some more. Scott and I will never finish it all."

Erin got up and filled her plate again. She was joined at the table by Sandy. "I didn't realize I was so hungry," Sandy said.

"When was the last time you two ate?" LeeAnn asked.

"This morning. We had a really big breakfast before we left Maine."

"Where in Maine? We sometimes vacation in Kittery," Scott said.

"We were in Ogunquit for a week," Sandy said. She and Erin returned to the living room and sat back down.

LeeAnn studied them. "So how long have you two been together?"

Erin and Sandy stopped eating and looked at each other before looking back at LeeAnn who knowingly smirked.

"Uh..." Sandy stammered as Erin swallowed audibly. "Almost seven years."

"You'll have to excuse my wife," Scott said, genially. "She sometimes speaks before she thinks."

"No, it's okay," Erin said. "How did you know? We've been told we aren't stereotypical."

"You're not." LeeAnn smiled, warmly. "Neither is Scott's brother, Michael, who just came back from a big GLBT festival in Ogunquit this past week. And the way you two look at each other is undeniable."

"That's not...um...won't be a problem...tonight, will it?" Erin asked as she looked back and forth between LeeAnn and Scott.

"Absolutely not," Scott reassured. "We may be small towners but we're far from small minded. My brother's my best bud and there have been times I've liked his boyfriends a lot better than I've liked him. He's my spoiled baby brother and he acts like it sometimes but I love him dearly and would hurt anyone who intentionally brought him harm."

"That's great. Really. You two are almost too good to be true," Erin said, not glancing at Sandy.

"We are firm believers of treating others the way they treat us," LeeAnn said. "Another martini?"

"Yes, ma'am," Erin said and held up her glass.

"Please," Sandy said.

Scott retrieved the martini mix and refilled the glasses. "More eyeballs, anyone?"

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The foursome visited well into the night. They discussed everything, including the conversational taboos of politics and religion. Interestingly, they agreed on nearly all subjects.

Finally, Erin began to fall asleep in the middle of sentences so Scott and LeeAnn showed them to the guest bedroom and bid them goodnight.

Sandy and Erin climbed into the small double bed and snuggled tightly to each other. Erin's front

rested against Sandy's back and her arm snaked around her lover's middle. It was their usual 'fall asleep' position.

"What really nice people," Erin said.

"Absolutely. As long as we don't wake up tomorrow and none of this really exists, like in those spooky Halloween stories we used to tell by the campfire during Girl Scout outings."

"*You* were a Girl Scout?" Laughter pealed from Erin.

"Shut up!" Sandy pinched Erin's arm, playfully. "I was a very good Girl Scout, I'll have you know. I achieved the level of Ambassador and the Girl Scouts started my love for camping and the water."

"Uh huh. Okay, well, you do love sex in the shower, does that count as love for the water?"

"Very funny," Sandy said and then laughed.

"What?"

"Sex in the shower. We haven't done that in a while."

"Let's rechristen the shower at home when we get there."

"Good idea. I love you, baby."

"Love you, too, honey."

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"Do you think they'll be upset that we left without saying goodbye?" Erin said, as they walked down the last part of the driveway.

"I left them a nice note and thanked them again," Sandy said. The day was blustery, the air was crisp and the sun was out. "I'm glad the power came back on so I could make the call. I told the tow truck driver we'd meet him by the car."

"Let's have a nice big breakfast in town," Erin said.

"I'm still full from last night." She saw the disappointed look on her partner's face. "Okay. After the car is fixed and we get gas, why don't you get a little something to tide yourself over and we'll stop at that place you like outside Montpelier for brunch."

"Oh, yeah. Much better idea." Erin grinned and grabbed Sandy for a hug before they made it out to the main road.

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She walked into the general store to pay for gas and to buy a candy bar. She smiled at the young clerk behind the counter as he rung up her sale and took her cash. He handed her \$1.12 back.

"How was your Halloween?" he asked with a knowing smirk.

"They came back, if that's what you're asking," she told him.

"I knew it!" He clapped his hands together. "Did they remember you?"

"Nope. Just like the last three years, it's like they're meeting us for the first time."

"Man, that's awesome. I want to be there next year."

"No. Scott and I agree that if the set up isn't exactly the same, they won't come. And we look forward to seeing them every Halloween."

"It's like guaranteed Trick-or-Treaters, huh?"

"I guess...in a way."

"Man, that is just way cool! I wish I had my own personal ghosts."

LeeAnn smiled at him. "Be careful what you wish for, Brad. Your ghosts may not be as friendly as ours."

"Or as gorgeous," he added before she left the store.

She remembered four years ago to the first time Sandy and Erin showed up on Halloween night; lost, soaking wet, confused and grateful. It wasn't until the next morning, after the women left, that she and Scott drove to town for breakfast to find out that two young women had died instantly in a horrific car accident the afternoon before. The newspaper had said the car hydroplaned into a group of maple trees about a mile from the bottom of LeeAnn and Scott's quarter-mile-long driveway. By the next morning the car, debris and bodies of the women had been removed from the scene.

When LeeAnn saw the photos of the victims in the paper, she nearly fainted. She and Scott knew if they reported their visitors to the police, they'd have been laughed out of town. Eventually, she mentioned the two women to her best friend, who also happened to be Brad's mother, but swore her to secrecy. Had they known Brad was around the corner and heard the story, they would have sworn him to secrecy, too; luckily none of his high school friends believed him and before he became a laughing stock, he shut his mouth.

When she got back into her car and headed toward Main Street, she thought about how much she couldn't wait until next Halloween when Sandy and Erin returned.

Trick or treat, indeed.

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The End

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