

Hereditary

An old rock song sang from Davea's phone, lulling her from her slumber. Rolling over in her plush queen size bed and pushing long locks of ebony hair out of her ivory face, Davea hits snooze on her phone and curls into her floral comforter, blinking the sleepiness out of her whiskey colored eyes.

Emerging from her blanket cocoon, Davea reaches for her phone and checks her messages before her alarms goes off again, signaling it is time to get out of bed. Davea crawls out of bed and heads to her closet, searching for something to wear.

Davea has a very unique style, preferring vintage to anything modern. Her room is decorated with various antiques: a clawfoot bedside table, a Victorian wooden wall mirror, pastel yellow wallpaper, a milk glass table lamp, cameo pendants lining the wall, an old typewriter, velvet curtains wrapping around her four-poster bed, and a rusted harbor-view library bookshelf, overflowing with the works of Edgar Allen Poe, Anne Sexton, Ernest Hemingway, and Emily Dickinson.

Since it was a brisk October day in Connecticut, just a few days before Halloween, Davea tucks a black and white polka dotted button up sweater into a full-length olive-green skirt and secures it in place with a wide brown belt. Lacing up her leather ankle boots, Davea steps in front of her mirror as she brushes her dark hair that cascades nearly down to her hips. Ready for her Saturday morning garage sale hunting, she grabs her messenger bag and the keys to her 1970 Mercury and heads out the door.

Being an only child with a single mom means Davea spends a lot of time alone, since her mom is always at one of her three jobs, trying to make enough to scrape by. Davea is responsible

for her own bills, like her phone and car insurance, as well as any extracurriculars, like going garage sale shopping every Saturday. Davea counts out the cash in her wallet and sees she has a little over \$30 to spend today. To earn the money she needs, Davea works after school tutoring other high school kids in English and history, as well as selling some craftwork on the side.

Taking a left at the light, Davea cruises up and down Main Street while blasting heavy metal as she searches for a garage sale. It is starting to get cold outside, which means Davea doesn't have many more weekends of shopping before the town closes down for the winter. It appears the wind and dropping temperatures have turned off the majority of the usual people who host garage sales and Davea has almost given up on finding one when she spots a faded poster with "SALE" scrawled out and an arrow pointing down the road. Davea takes the right turn and seems to travel down Ker Avenue for miles upon miles with no sight of the sale. Deciding the sign must have been old, Davea starts to turn around when she spots the tiniest of garage sales a couple houses down.

Parking her car, Davea steps out and is looking at the singular table of items for sale. A Yale sweatshirt with a stain on the chest, a coffee mug with a chipped off handle, a miniature Christmas tree that is sloped to the side, a deflated football, and an antique vase. The pearly vase sat atop a bronze mount and was shaped like a teardrop, porcelain with a chipped painting of flowers. Engraved on the mount was a phrase that appeared to be in Latin and was followed by the date: 1890.

Davea picked up the vase and was shocked at how heavy it was but knew that this piece would go perfectly in her collection and that she must buy it. Seeming to appear out of nowhere, an elderly man came limping towards her, coughing with every step.

“How much for the vase?” Davea asks, preparing for disappointment since she only had \$32 to her name.

The old man laughed, then coughed, then answered, “I ought to pay you to take that thing. How’s \$10 sound?” Davea could not help but notice a pang of familiarity in his liquor brown eyes.

Davea blinked rapidly and considered pinching herself to make sure she wasn’t dreaming. An 1890 vase in mint condition could easily sell for thousands of dollars and this man was only asking \$10? Davea dug out the money and quickly handed it to him before he changed his mind. She had a million unanswered questions, like where had the man gotten this vase and why was he so eager to get rid of it, but she was practically stealing this vase and wanted to get out of there before the police got there!

Almost as quickly as he had appeared, the man disappeared back inside, leaving Davea no time to figure out how she knew him. Feeling giddy from her new purchase, Davea secured the vase in the passenger seat of her car, tightening the seat belt. Driving with more caution than she ever had before, Davea could barely repress her screams of excitement over acquiring such an amazing antique and for such a low price! Pulling into her driveway, Davea carried the vase inside to her bedroom and debated where just the perfect spot was. Deciding to place the vase on her bookshelf, she carefully rearranged her novels to allow room.

Davea took a picture of her newly organized library, featuring her precious vase, and sent the picture to her mom. *Look what I snagged for 10 bucks!!*

Her mom wrote back almost instantly, *OMG! So cool! Working a double tonite, won't be home until midnite. There is lasagna in the freezer. Make sure u lock the house up before bed. Love ya.*

Hiding her disappointment in going yet another night without seeing her mom, Davea wrote back that she would and that she loved her too. But even the sadness of missing her mom couldn't damper her mood too much because the very sight of the vase lit Davea up with excitement. She felt a weird draw to the vase, like she absolutely needed it. Like it had always belonged to her and had finally found its way home.

Surprised that it was now noon, Davea decided to make lunch and take a nap before she got to work on her latest artwork, a clay flowerpot. Walking to the kitchen, she grabbed some meat and cheese out of the fridge and was assembling the contents on two pieces of wheat bread when she heard a loud thud from down the hallway. Intrigued more than scared, Davea padded down the hallway to where she had heard the sound. Living in a two-bedroom home worked in Davea's favor because the sound had either come from her mother's bedroom or her own. The door to her mom's room was still closed, so she tentatively peeked her head into her own room. She laughed when she saw what had caused all the commotion; she had left her window open and the wind must have blown the books surrounding the vase to the floor. What a silly thing! To think, she was almost scared over it. But wait... did she ever even open her window this morning?

Deciding that she must have and simply forgot, Davea ate her sandwich and curled back into her floral blanket, trying to sleep. But something didn't feel right. It was an odd feeling, as if she was being watched, even though she knew she was alone. A strange whistling sound also seemed to flood her room, which was probably coming from the creaky window, right? Whatever the

reasoning, Davea grabbed her comforter and headed to the living room to take a nap. She instantly felt better and the whistling had stopped. Chalking up the weird feeling to a crack in the window causing the cool air to flow, Davea fell into a restless sleep.

Sleep was no solace for Davea. Nearly as soon as she shut her eyes, she was greeted by nightmares. She was in a forest of some sort, wearing only a dirty white nightgown. It was cold outside; much colder than any October in Connecticut she had ever experienced in her seventeen years of life. Wrapping her arms around her chest, Davea softly trembled, both out of cold and out of fear. She could barely see a foot in front of her, the forest was blanketed in darkness. Her feet crushed the cold, wet grass underneath her as she took a hesitant step forward, trying to figure out what was going on. Suddenly, her chest locked in a panic and she took off running, although she was not sure why she was running. All she knew was that if she slowed down, something terrible would happen. She felt like she was running through water, in slow motion, and she could feel the presence of someone—no, something—behind her, getting closer and closer with every small, slow step she took. Her ankle got snagged on an erect root and she went tumbling, hitting the dirt face first. She began to cry as she felt the monstrous breaths of some terrible creature smack into her back. She was too scared to turn around, too scared to see whatever was on top her...

“Davea! Why are you sleeping in the living room, silly girl?” her mother’s warm voice awoke her from her frigid dream and she sat straight up, dazed and confused.

“What time is it?” Davea choked out, dehydrated and hungry.

Her mother glanced at her wrist before answering, “12:30, I just got home from work. Why are you sleeping on the couch? Are you okay?”

Rubbing her hands over her eyes, she stared at her mother and nearly tackled her in a hug. “Yeah, yeah... I’m okay. I was just having a really bad dream and you woke me up just in time,” she explained, burying her face in the crook of her mother’s neck.

“It’s all okay now, hon. Hey, where did you get this? It’s all dirty! What have you been doing?” her mother laughed, fingering with the hem of a dirty nightgown.

Davea felt the panic of her dream flood back into her veins, turning her blood cold. “I- I didn’t... I wasn’t...” she tried to tell her mom about the dream and about how when she fell asleep she was in a sweater and a skirt and that the only time she had ever seen this torn and stained nightgown was in her nightmare and how on earth had she slept from 12 noon to 12 midnight? But all that would come out were hiccups and tears.

Her mother gently helped her to her bedroom, where Davea barely noticed that the fallen books had somehow been picked up. Regardless of her twelve-hour nap, Davea fell asleep as her mother whispered words of encouragement and sang her an old lullaby until she finally stopped shaking and drifted into slumber.

Davea awoke the next morning feeling refreshed, memories of last night nearly all faded. She had decided that she must have not slept well the night before, which is why she slept all day and all night. She also decided that she must have changed from her sweater when she was half-asleep because she got too warm and found this dirty nightgown on her closet floor. As for the books, her mom must have picked them up before putting Davea to sleep. And that nightmare was just that, a nightmare, nothing more. Davea quickly stripped of the tattered nightgown and threw it in the trash before stepping into the shower.

Changing in to a pair of leggings and an old AC/DC concert hoodie, Davea braided her hair into two braids and lugged all her art and clay things outside. It was a chilly morning, her damp hair making it that much colder. Nonetheless, Davea put in a pair of headphones and set to work sculpting a flowerpot. Morning seeped into afternoon before Davea had shaped her pot and was ready to put it in the oven. Heading back inside the house, Davea preheated the oven and brought in the remaining supplies while she waited. After the oven was ready, she put the flowerpot inside and set a timer for one hour.

She sat in the living room, flipping through channels, when she stopped on a local news station. *BREAKING NEWS! GRAVE ROBBERY!* Read the screen, catching Davea's eye. She listened intently to the anchor speak.

"This just in! There has been a robbery from Union Cemetery in Easton. According to staff, someone dug up and stole the urn of a proclaimed witch from 1890 who was allegedly burned at the stake after a young boy went missing and his body was found in her home, believed to have been used in some sort of demonic summoning. Union Cemetery has a long history of hauntings, and it is believed that whoever stole the urn of Maddock Shelley was liking trying to summon a demon, just as she had done over one hundred years ago. Reporting live from Easton, this is Amy Markus, signing off."

Davea stood, frozen, staring at the TV and the weather forecast for the upcoming week. The timer going off in the kitchen shook her from her daze. Although the news showed no pictures of the urn, there was something deep inside of her telling her that the vase in her room was actually the stolen urn of Maddock Shelley. Trying to shake off her fears, Davea dumbly grabbed the pot without mittens, burning her hand and dropping the pot, shattering it into a million pieces.

Cursing under her breath, she went to the garage to get the dustpan to clean up. When she walked back into the kitchen, however, the flowerpot was intact and sitting upon the dining room table, mocking her.

Davea's breath caught in her throat. She blinked rapidly, trying to understand what had just happened. She scrambled to sit down because of how light headed she felt. She quickly began researching Maddock Shelley. Davea searched and searched the internet, finding nothing until she spotted a single paragraph obituary.

October 31, 1890. Maddock Shelley of Easton, age seventeen, accused of witchcraft and kidnapping local 10-year-old boy and sacrificing him in a satanic ritual, was found burnt at the stake in her backyard. There are no suspects at this time. Shelley's sole kin is to collect her ashes and put her to rest at Union Cemetery.

Right under the exert was the tiniest photograph Davea had ever seen. It was Maddock Shelley. Although the photograph was in black and white, Davea could tell that she had very pale skin and very dark hair and eyes. In fact, she kind of resembled Davea...

Without hesitating, Davea grabbed her keys and raced to the house where she had bought the urn. Surely the creepy old man would have some answers, right? She sure hoped so. Afternoon had turned into evening and the sky was starting to melt into nighttime. Davea had maybe an hour before she lost all light, but this needed to end tonight.

She seemed to drive on autopilot and wasn't quite sure how she remembered the way to the house she had only been to once before, but she let her body guide her. After fifteen minutes of driving, she was there. 1317 Ker Avenue. When she pulled in the driveway, the old man was waiting for her.

“Surprised it took you this long to come back,” the old man coughed, leaning heavily on his cane. “Did you have the nightmare?”

Davea began to shake. “How did you know? Who are you? What is going on?” she rushed out, scared she would lose her bravado if she didn’t ask at once.

“All those questions will take me a very long time to answer, Davea. Why don’t you come inside?”

The fact that he knew her name not slipping her, Davea stood in place. “No! I want to know what the hell is happening, right now, right here!”

“Very well,” said the old man, stretching his back and seeming to grow a few inches. “My name is George Shelley,” his voice had suddenly become much less hoarse, “and I am the grandson of Maddock Shelley. I am your grandfather.”

Leaning against the hood of her car for support, Davea’s head reeled. This was just some crazy old bat, right? Surely everything he was saying was nonsense? Right? RIGHT? But as she looked up to meet his gaze, that same ping of familiarity sparks inside her.

“You believe me, don’t you?” Asked the old man with a bitter laugh, “so, would you join your dear old grandpa for a cup of tea inside? It’s cold and dark and I wouldn’t want us to catch a cold.”

Without a second thought, Davea robotically walked inside the stranger’s house. The door creaked open and the overwhelming aroma of smoke and sweat nearly knocked her off her feet. There were no lights in the house and the only thing luminating through the stained windows was the musky fading light of sunset. The old man moved with a surprising ease and Davea followed him into the kitchen. From what she could make out, the kitchen seemed to have come straight

from the 1970s. A smoke-stained checkerboard wallpaper lined the walls and the floor had a matching black and white pattern. The appliances seemed to be rusted and appeared as if they had not been used in many years. Dirty cups and plates were stacked on top of each other in the sink, and Davea was fairly certain she could smell mold.

George sat down at a small circular wooden table in the middle of the kitchen and lit a candle that smelt like sage. The shadows cast by the candle made the old man, her grandfather, appear much older than he was. But she got a good look at his eyes now and was able to recognize that feeling of familiarity. They had the same eyes. Davea sat down carefully in the opposing chair just as George began to speak.

“In forty-eight hours, it will be Halloween. In forty-eight hours, it will be the 128th anniversary of my grandmother’s, your great-great grandmother’s, murder. Did you know that, Davea? Did you know that Maddock was brutally murdered for a crime she did not commit? Or did you buy into the witchcraft theory?” Davea chewed on her bottom lip, refusing to meet the old man’s wild eyes. “Answer the damn question!” he shouted, pounding his fists on the table.

“I don’t know! I don’t know anything! All I know is that I bought a stupid urn from you and then freaky things started happening and then I saw that Maddock’s grave had been raided and her urn was gone and that her urn was my urn and...” Davea began to tremble too hard to talk and wrapped her arms around herself, trying to calm down.

“The story goes that Maddock kidnapped and murdered a child as part of some satanic ritual, so her neighbors burned her alive as punishment. But that could not be further from the truth. Do you want to know the truth, Davea?” Davea lifted her eyes to stare at the man, her answer written

on her face. “The truth is, Davea, that Maddock was no witch, no kidnapper, no killer. All Maddock was was a poor single mother, guilty of nothing but having a good conscious.

“Maddock was born into a poor family. Her mother died giving birth and her father has a cold-hearted man. She was the youngest of the two children. Her older brother, George, tried his best to protect her and to take the beatings, but there was only so much he could do to curve his father’s wrath. Maddock had always had a special sewing ability, so special that her neighbor offered to hire her as a fulltime seamstress. She spent her entire day sewing for that man, dawn until dusk. It was after dusk, though, that the man’s real intentions with Maddock came out. Every night she would try to sneak out the backdoor before he noticed her leaving. But he caught her more times than she escaped. She was only sixteen, she had no idea what to do. After nine months of working for this man, my father was born.

“Maddock’s father was furious and accused her of being a prostitute. He wanted nothing to do with Maddock and kicked her out. She was crying on the front porch when her brother came home and saw her with a child on her lap, sobbing. He asked her what had happened and even though she couldn’t find her voice, her eyes portrayed the story. Without hesitation, her brother wrapped up the naked baby in his shirt and carefully rocked him to sleep. He returned the baby to Maddock’s arms and kissed her forehead softly before he took off towards the neighbors. She knew he was going to do something he would regret, so she laid the baby down and took off after her brother, wearing only a stained and torn old nightgown.

“When she got to the neighbors, she heard shouting. She crouched behind a bush and peered in through the window. There was her brother, hands wrapped around the man’s neck, squeezing the life out of him. Just beyond the man stood his ten-year-old son, frozen in horror. Her

newfound motherly instincts kicked in and she ran through the back door to rescue the son. She swooped him up in her brittle arms and took off running through the forest. She didn't stop when she heard the first gunshot, she just kept running. After awhile the boy became too heavy for her to carry so she sat him down, holding tightly onto his hand as they raced through the trees. Then she heard, and felt, the second gunshot. The wind of the bullet blew across her as it entered into the little boy. Blood poured out of the boy's mouth as he fell to his knees, and Maddock watched as the life faded from his eyes.

"Having no time to grieve or to cry, Maddock took off running again. She could feel the presence of the man gaining on her and she was becoming so, so tired. She tripped on an uprooted branch and that's when the man captured her. He dragged her back into town, claiming that she had been the one to kill his son in the name of the devil. The very next night, on Halloween, the neighborhood strung Maddock up and lit her on fire, burning her alive."

The pieces were starting to click together for Davea. The dream she had was her reliving what Maddock had gone through. Maddock was not trying to haunt her or hurt her, she just wanted her story told.

"What about her brother? The baby? Her dad?"

"Her brother was shot in the chest but managed to survive. He went into a coma after being shot and by the time he had awoken, it was too late. The man who killed Maddock was powerful and rich. Maddock's family was poor. Nobody would believe George when he tried to prove his sister's innocence. Not even their own father. So, George took the baby and raised him as his own. That baby grew up to my father and had me. I grew up to be your grandfather and had your

father. He grew up and had you. You are the first girl born to the Shelley bloodline in over one hundred years, did you know that?"

Davea stared at her grandfather, the one she had never known. "What happened to my father? Why have I never met you before? Why have I been kept in the dark my entire life about my family?"

All throughout her childhood, Davea had persistently asked about her father. Her mother never answered her questions and always changed the topic. Davea had eventually given up on trying to discover who her father was, but now was her chance to understand.

George's eyes filled with tears as he answered. "My son was named Michael Shelley. You look so much like him. He was a spitfire and there was never a dull moment with him. He fell madly in love with your mother when they were both seventeen. A year later, your mother was pregnant with you. Michael was terrified but could not have been happier to be a dad. But when your mother was six months pregnant, a man broke into the tiny apartment they shared. There was an altercation and Michael... he got shot and killed. Your mother was so heartbroken. A widow at eighteen, how on earth was she supposed to raise a child? She came to me, crying and begging for help," the old man stopped speaking long enough to wipe his eyes and blow his nose. "I told her that it was for the best if she gave you up for adoption. I meant it in her best interest, but she took great offense. She swore that so long as she lived, you would never know anything about me. And for the past seventeen years, she has kept true to that promise."

"So what changed? And why are you telling me all of this? What am I suppose to do? How am I supposed to help?"

George regained his composure before answering. “Because Maddock cannot rest in peace until she receives a proper burial. The burial must be done by a seventeen-year-old female on the anniversary of her death, and you are the first female of Shelley descent to be born since her death. That is tomorrow. You must be the one to put her to rest. Please,” he begged.

“Okay. What do I have to do?”

An hour later and Davea was back in her driveway. She rushed in to grab the urn and quickly scribbled a note to her mom that she was spending the night with a friend. Easton was a two-hour drive from her house and the ritual had to be complete by sunrise. With a little less than six hours to work with, Davea set off.

The drive seemed to fly by and before she knew it, Davea was at Maddock’s home. It was currently three in the morning and the sun rose in less than three hours. She had to hurry.

It wasn’t until she unclicked her seatbelt that the reality of everything dawned on her. It was now officially Halloween and she was breaking into an abandoned house in the middle of the night to return a stolen body. What the hell had she gotten herself into?

Davea quickly exited the car and grabbed the urn before she lost what little courage she had. The house looked as if one gust of wind might blow the foundation over. All the windows had cracked glass with vines weaving through the shards. The wooden door was splintered and hung off the frame by one hinge. The panels of the house were covered in cobwebs and termites. It was two stories and seemed to slope to the right. Overgrown grass and weeds barricaded what remained of the front door. Using her phone as a flashlight, Davea carefully stepped over the greenery and the door creaked open upon her nearing, without her having to touch it.

The inside of the house paralleled the exterior. The floor had obviously once been wood, but now was covered in dirt. Coldness intertwined its way through Davea's veins, a type of cold not caused by the weather. There was no furniture; the only décor in the house was graffiti from years before. The stairs that led upstairs were gone, leaving only the foundation of a staircase in its place. The entire house looked as if nobody had lived in it since Davea's father died and the graffiti artist had come once a long time ago and did not stay long, as the paint was chipped and faded from the initials on the wall. Not even the moonlight managed to seep through the holes in the walls. The flashlight of Davea's phone was swallowed by the darkness and she couldn't see more than a few inches in front of her.

The urn seemed to grow heavier and heavier in her arms the closer she got to the backdoor. When Davea got to the backdoor, she understood why. From the doorway of the house, there was a perfect view of the neighbor's house. The house next door seemed lived in and loved in, nowhere near the house Davea was in. From where she stood, she could see a window with a bush just below it and knew immediately that that was the window where Maddock watched her life come to an end. A chill ran through her body and brought Davea back to the task at hand.

The first step in the cleansing process was to light sage and walk around the immediate area. Pulling the bundle and lighter from her backpack, she lit the sage and began to walk around, repeating the phrases George had taught her.

"It is time for you to go. You must go. Go now and be free. Free yourself from this world..." Davea chanted until the sage had burnt out. Now it was time for step two.

“Maddock Shelley, it is time for you to leave this world and go to the next. Your story has been told and your innocence has been proven. It is time for you leave and to join your brother and son on the other side. May you rest in peace!”

The room seemed to suddenly get darker, which Davea did not even believe to be possible. The walls seemed to whistle and the floor boards creaked and croaked. Wind stirred around the house and wrapped around Davea, but she had been warned this would happen. She knew that Maddock was present and that it is now time for the final step.

Davea unscrewed the top of the urn off and dumped handful after handful of ashes onto the floor while she recited the same Latin phrase that was engraved on the urn: “Rumpere, contundo, caedes.”

After Davea had completely emptied the urn, she said the phrase once more, put the urn on the floor, and returned to her car. A strange calm came over her, but only briefly. Then, a sudden anxiety overwhelmed her, but only briefly. Assuming the mood swings were caused by the exiting of a spirit, she called George to tell him that she had completed the burial, and just in time, because the sun was starting to struggle through the darkness.

As George answered the phone, he laughed an evil laugh. When he spoke, he sounded decades younger and a thousand times stronger. “Thank you, Davea.”

A feeling of uneasiness crept its way up Davea’s spine. “What did that phrase say?” she asked, not so sure if she wanted to know the answer.

“Now is a hell of a time to ask. It means to destroy, crush, and kill. You have freed my mother, at last!”

“I... I don’t understand. What are you talking about?” Davea asked, although she was afraid she already knew the answer.

“You are far too naïve, Davea. You simply took my word for it that Maddock was an innocent victim! Didn’t your mother ever teach you not to trust strangers?”

The front door of the house suddenly swung open and, in the doorway, stood a woman. The woman was milky white and had stringy black hair that clumped around her sunken in face. Her eyes were as black as her hair and seemed to pierce Davea’s soul. The woman was wearing a tattered and stained white nightgown. Her feet were on fire. She was on fire! But it wasn’t burning her. The fire coiled around her as a cat does to its bed. Her bones all stuck out of her body in awkward angles and she walked with a severe limp as she slowly approached Davea.

When the man spoke again, he sounded even younger and even stronger. “Maddock Shelley is a witch. She sacrificed a child as a way to gain immortality for her and her son but she was stopped before she could complete the ritual. You, Davea, just completed the ritual for her.”