

THE HAEX CURSE



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DIMITRI HAEX

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To my wife, Lulu Sun.

*For every dream we shared, and every shadow that still remembers
our names.*

PROLOGUE - THE FIRST WHISPER

The rain had not stopped for three days.

Some said it was the sky's way of mourning, but Dimitri knew better.

He had seen the same storm once before — the night the monastery called to him.

The village of Saint Verena lay silent beneath the mist.

Locals spoke of an ancient vow carved into the stones, a promise sealed with blood and echoes.

Dimitri never believed in curses until he met Lulu Sun — the woman whose dreams matched his own nightmares.

Now, standing before the rusted gates, he felt the weight of something watching from the shadows.

The air trembled.

A whisper brushed against his ear, soft and distant:

"Welcome home, Dimitri."

And when the gates opened by themselves, he stepped inside — not realizing that the monastery had been waiting for him all along.

CHAPTER 1: WHISPERS IN THE MIST

Dimitri Haex gripped the steering wheel tightly as rain hammered against the windshield, the wipers struggling to clear the deluge on that stormy autumn night in the Belgian countryside. His wife, Lulu Sun, sat beside him, her face pale in the dashboard glow, drawn to the abandoned monastery by dreams that had plagued her for months.

The narrow road twisted through fog-shrouded fields, leading them deeper into isolation until the silhouette of Saint Verena's Hollow loomed ahead, its crumbling spires piercing the low-hanging clouds. Dimitri, ever the historian, felt a thrill of anticipation mixed with unease; he had spent years poring over records of the disappearances that had terrorized the region in the 1800s, and this place was the key to unlocking those forgotten horrors. Lulu shifted in her seat, her fingers tracing the edge of her camera bag, her mind echoing with the vague, insistent murmurs from her nightmares—voices that promised revelations but delivered only dread.

They parked the car at the edge of a overgrown path, the engine's rumble fading into the howl of the wind. "We're here," Dimitri said, his voice steady despite the storm's fury, though inside, the shadows of his past clawed at his thoughts, reminding him of other forsaken places where the line between reality and nightmare blurred. Lulu nodded, her eyes reflecting the faint light of the monastery's broken windows, and together they stepped

out into the biting cold. The air was thick with mist that clung to their skin like damp fingers, and the distant toll of bells—phantom echoes from a bygone era—seemed to pulse through the ground beneath their feet.

As they approached the massive oak doors, warped and splintered with age, Dimitri pushed them open with a creak that echoed like a scream. Inside, the monastery was a labyrinth of stone corridors and vaulted ceilings, frozen in time as if the world had forgotten it. Dust motes danced in the beams of their flashlights, and the air carried a metallic tang, like old blood mixed with mold. Lulu, feeling an inexplicable pull, unslung her camera and began snapping photographs, her movements graceful yet hesitant. "Something feels... off," she murmured, her voice barely audible over the rain pattering on the roof.

At first, the images on her camera's screen appeared normal—faded tapestries and shattered altars—but as she reviewed them, ghostly figures materialized in the backgrounds, translucent shapes of people long dead, their eyes hollow and accusing. One photo showed a woman in Victorian garb standing directly behind Dimitri, her hand outstretched as if to grasp his shoulder. Lulu's breath caught, and she shoved the camera toward him. "Dimitri, look at this. They're... they're in every shot." He examined the images, his heart pounding, the silver watch in his pocket growing cold against his skin. It hadn't stopped yet, but the familiar weight of impending danger settled over him like a shroud.

They pressed on, venturing deeper into the halls, their flashlights casting erratic shadows that seemed to shift and writhe independently. Dimitri's curiosity drove him forward, his mind racing with thoughts of the disappearances—villagers who had vanished without a trace, their stories intertwined with tales of a ritual to "preserve the soul." In a dimly lit chamber, he stumbled upon an ancient wooden desk buried under layers of debris. Brushing away the dust, he uncovered a leather-bound journal, its pages yellowed and brittle. As he flipped through, his eyes widened; the ink described a forbidden ceremony, one that bound the living to the afterlife, ensuring eternal watch over the monastery's secrets.

But then, in the margins, he saw it—his own handwriting, scrawled in a looping script dated 1886. "This can't be," he whispered, tracing the familiar strokes with a trembling finger. The words spoke of a man tormented by visions, much like his own, and a ritual that twisted time itself. A chill ran down his spine as the watch in his pocket ticked slower, the seconds stretching unnaturally. Meanwhile, Lulu had wandered ahead, drawn by the whispering voices that called her name, soft and insidious, promising the secrets her dreams had teased.

The corridors seemed to elongate, the walls closing in as if the monastery breathed around them. Lulu paused in a narrow passage, the whispers growing louder, urging her to remember that fateful night in the ancient house they had explored together. Shadows pooled at her feet, and for a moment, she swore she saw figures emerging from the

darkness, their forms flickering like candle flames. "Dimitri?" she called, her voice echoing back mockingly, but there was no response. The couple had become separated, the endless maze of halls swallowing her up.

Dimitri, still fixated on the journal, felt the air thicken, the temperature dropping as if the very stones exuded frost. Time began to warp; minutes felt like hours, and the storm outside raged on without end. The monastery pulsed with a malevolent energy, feeding on their fear, its ancient stones whispering of souls trapped in eternal limbo. He called out for Lulu, his voice lost in the void, the watch now silent in his pocket—a harbinger that death lingered near.

As the night deepened, the boundary between past and present blurred further, leaving Dimitri alone with the journal's damning words and the growing certainty that they were not the monastery's first visitors, nor would they be the last.

CHAPTER 2: WHISPERS IN THE SHATTERED GLASS

Dimitri Haex stirred from a fitful sleep, his body aching from the cold stone floor of the monastery's library, where he and Lulu had ventured deeper into the shadows just hours before, only to be ensnared by the building's malevolent grip. As he blinked away the haze of disorientation, the weight of isolation pressed upon him, amplifying the unresolved terror of their separation amid the whispering walls.

Dimitri pushed himself up, his hands brushing against the rough, dust-caked stones that formed the library's foundation. The air was thick with the metallic scent of old decay, and the candles he had lit earlier—meant to ward off the encroaching darkness—had burned down to mere puddles of wax, their wicks extinguished and leaving the room in a dim, oppressive gloom. His heart raced as he scanned the space, the towering shelves of forgotten tomes looming like silent sentinels, but Lulu was nowhere to be seen. "Lulu?" he called out, his voice steady yet laced with an undercurrent of dread, but the echo that returned was not from the direction he faced; instead, it reverberated from behind him, as if the very walls had twisted the sound to mock his fear.

He turned sharply, his breath catching in his throat. The stone surfaces seemed to pulse subtly, expanding and contracting like the lungs of some ancient beast, the mortar between the bricks glistening with an unnatural sheen in the faint light filtering through a cracked window. Dimitri's silver watch, ever his harbinger, lay cold and still against his chest, its silence a grim reminder that death's shadow lingered close. Shaking off the chill that crept up his spine, he strained his ears and caught a faint, ethereal humming—Lulu's voice, soft and familiar, yet distorted, as if carried on a wind from another realm. It pulled at him like a siren's call, urging him forward through the labyrinthine corridors.

The monastery's halls twisted unpredictably, the air growing heavier with each step, as if the building itself were alive and reshaping to confound him. Shadows danced erratically along the walls, cast by his flickering flashlight, and Dimitri's mind raced with fragments of the journal he had uncovered earlier—the tales of souls bound in eternal limbo, their essence trapped to guard forbidden secrets. He pressed on, his historian's curiosity battling against the rising tide of panic, until he reached a heavy iron door at the end of a narrow passage. Engraved with arcane symbols that writhed like living ink under his gaze, the door stood as an ominous barrier, its lock rusted yet unyielding. The humming grew louder here, seeping through the cracks, and with a surge of determination, Dimitri forced the door open, the metal groaning in protest.

Inside, he entered a vast hall of mirrors, their surfaces fogged and cracked, reflecting infinite versions of the room in a disorienting maze. The air felt charged, electric, as if the space thrummed with unseen energy, and Dimitri's reflection stared back at him from multiple angles, distorted and unfamiliar. One mirror, larger than the others and framed in tarnished silver, suddenly cleared on its own, its surface rippling like water disturbed by a stone. There, in the glass, stood Lulu, her face expressionless and pale, her lips moving in a whisper that seemed to echo directly into his mind: "Dimitri..." Her voice was hollow, devoid of the warmth he knew, and yet her reflection smiled—a grotesque, unnatural grin that didn't match the stillness of her actual form.

A wave of nausea washed over him as he stepped closer, his hand reaching out instinctively, only to meet the cold barrier of the glass. "Lulu, what's happening?" he murmured, his words tumbling out in a rush, but she didn't respond, her eyes fixed on him with an unsettling vacancy. The room seemed to close in, the mirrors amplifying his ragged breaths, and in the dim light, Dimitri spotted a crumpled page from the monk's journal lying at the base of the mirror. He knelt to retrieve it, his fingers trembling as he unfolded the brittle parchment. The text, written in faded ink, described "The Room of Echoes," a chamber where souls were deliberately severed from their bodies to forge an eternal bond, preserving love at the cost of sanity and life. The words painted a horrifying ritual, one that trapped the living in a cycle of whispers and reflections, ensuring the monastery's guardians never faded.

Dimitri's pulse quickened as he read aloud, the ancient phrases rolling off his tongue despite his hesitation: "In the glass of eternity, the heart divides, and the soul endures." The moment the final word left his lips, the hall erupted in chaos. Cracks spiderwebbed across the mirrors with a sound like shattering thunder, and hundreds of whispers surged forth—a cacophony of voices, male and female, young and old, screaming in unison. They wailed of lost loves and broken pacts, their cries piercing his ears and echoing through his very bones, as if the trapped souls were clawing their way into the world. Dimitri staggered back, covering his ears, the air growing thick with an icy mist that clawed at his skin.

As the din began to fade, leaving only a lingering hum that vibrated in his chest, Dimitri lowered his hands and noticed something on the floor near his feet—Lulu's camera, discarded and cold. He picked it up with a sense of foreboding, his thumb flicking through the images until he reached the newest one. There they were, captured in a frame that should have been ordinary: himself and Lulu, standing side by side. But her eyes—once warm and full of life—stared back at him, completely black, voids that seemed to suck in the light around them, hinting at a darkness that had already claimed a part of her soul.

CHAPTER 3: WHISPERS OF THE TWISTED REALM

Dimitri Haex stood in the dim haze of the Room of Echoes, the photograph of Lulu's black-eyed gaze burning in his mind like a brand, as the last faint screams of trapped souls faded into silence. Having just survived the mirrors' chaotic outburst, he now faced the shifting walls that pulsed with unnatural life, his silver watch hanging heavily and silently at his side.

The largest mirror, its frame tarnished and etched with cryptic runes, began to warp before his eyes, the fogged surface rippling like water disturbed by an unseen hand. Cracks that had spiderwebbed across the glass now sealed themselves with a wet, sucking sound, and a hidden passage emerged behind it, glowing with an eerie, ethereal light that cast long shadows across the hall. Dimitri's breath caught in his throat as the air grew thick with the scent of old parchment and damp earth, the whispering shadows around him intensifying into a chorus of muffled voices that seemed to echo his deepest fears. He clutched Lulu's camera tighter, the device feeling unnaturally warm in his grip despite the chill that seeped from the walls, and he knew he had no choice but to press forward—Lulu's pale, grinning reflection had called to him, and the pull of her absence was a hook in his soul.

Driven by a desperation that gnawed at his resolve, Dimitri stepped through the shimmering passage, the world beyond twisting reality into something out of a fevered dream. The space unfolded like a distorted reflection of the monastery's library, but here, books floated in mid-air, their pages fluttering as if caught in an invisible wind, and shadows slithered across the ground like living entities, whispering fragments of forgotten conversations. Dust motes danced in the unnatural glow, forming shapes that resembled spectral figures reaching out with elongated fingers, and the air hummed with a low, dissonant vibration that made his ears ring. His silver watch, still cold and mute, seemed to weigh him down further, a reminder of the time that had already begun to slip away in this cursed place. As he ventured deeper, the floating books brushed against him, their covers ancient and leather-bound like the journal he had found earlier, pages turning of their own accord to reveal glimpses of handwritten notes that mirrored the 1886 marginalia in his own script—hints of a connection he couldn't yet fathom, pulling at the edges of his sanity.

The realm's surreal landscape pressed in on him, the whispering shadows growing bolder, murmuring Lulu's name in voices that shifted from her gentle tone to something more sinister, more demanding. He stumbled through the floating tomes, their pages whispering secrets of souls severed and bonds forged, echoing the crumpled page from the monk's journal that he had left behind in the hall. The air grew colder, his breath visible in faint clouds, and he felt a presence watching him from the darkness, an

observer in this twisted mirror of the library. Then, materializing from the gloom, a figure emerged—a spectral librarian, its form translucent and wavering like smoke, clad in robes that seemed woven from the very shadows themselves. The librarian's face was a blur of features, eyes like hollow voids that reflected the same blackness as Lulu's in the photograph, and it hovered with an unsettling grace, books orbiting around it like planets around a dying star.

"You seek the one who wanders the veil," the spectral librarian intoned, its voice a chorus of whispers that echoed through the realm, blending with the ambient hum. "The bonds of eternity demand a price, historian. Your wife's soul teeters on the edge, caught in the ritual's grasp, her essence frayed by the whispers that called her here." It gestured with a spectral hand, and images flickered in the air—Lulu's form, pale and ethereal, trapped in a web of mirrors, her eyes devoid of light. Dimitri's heart pounded, the camera in his hand trembling as he recalled the Victorian woman in the earlier photographs, wondering if she too was part of this web of disappearances. The librarian's offer came swiftly, its tone devoid of mercy: "To save her, you must surrender your memories—the threads that tie you to your past, to the visions that haunt you, even to the watch that marks your curse. Or let her slip into the darkness forever, her soul bound as one of the echoes."

Time warped around them, the floating books accelerating in their orbit while the shadows stretched and contracted, creating a disorienting blur that made Dimitri's head spin. He felt the weight of his choices pressing down,

his loyalty to Lulu clashing with the terror of losing himself –the handwriting in the journal, his own from another era, flashed in his mind, a warning of the torment that might await. The spectral librarian watched impassively, its form shifting as if feeding on his hesitation, the realm's whispers growing louder, urging him toward the brink. In that moment, Dimitri stood at the edge of sacrifice, his love for Lulu a beacon in the encroaching darkness, but the cost loomed as an abyss, twisting his resolve into a knot of fear and determination. The air thickened with anticipation, the shadows closing in, leaving him to face the ultimate test alone.

CHAPTER 4: SHADOWS OF FRACTURED MEMORIES

Dimitri stood frozen in the hall of mirrors, the spectral librarian's ultimatum still echoing in his mind, as the icy mist that had filled the room began to twist and coil like serpents awakened from slumber. In the Running Summary, he had been offered a dire bargain to surrender his memories for Lulu's soul, but now, as the fog swirled, it revealed glimpses of alternate realities where his wife was ensnared in twisted echoes of their shared past.

The mist thickened, coiling around the cracked mirrors until their fogged surfaces cleared in patches, each one framing a distorted vision that pulled at Dimitri's resolve. In one reflection, Lulu laughed under a sunlit sky on their wedding day, her face radiant as she clutched a bouquet of wildflowers, but the image warped before his eyes— shadows creeping across her features, turning her smile into a grotesque leer and her eyes into bottomless voids that mirrored the blackness in the photograph he still gripped. Another mirror showed her in their cozy Brussels apartment, poring over old maps with the same quiet grace that had first drawn him to her, yet now ethereal chains bound her wrists, pulling her toward an unseen abyss while whispers slithered through the glass, murmuring her name in tones that shifted from tender to malevolent. Dimitri's breath caught in his throat, the weight of his silver watch