

Nailed the Opening for NIGHT ECHOES

written by Holly

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By Holly Lisle

After floundering on this book, ditching a bunch of it, and panicking more each day at the impending deadline and my lack of progress, I mowed the lawn last night. This is a process that takes about three hours (about an hour an acre) and that allows me to disconnect conscious thought. I mow, I take off my glasses and see everything blurrily, I smell the grass and the blackberries in the woods to the back and the rich scents of field weeds that are like perfume when cut, and my mind quits worrying for a while.

About two hours into the process, out of nowhere, my subconscious tossed me this. Sometimes it's hard to get out of my own way when things are tense; when I do, I'm amazed at what happens.

Here's the opener:

Three AM, and once again Emma Beck stood in her bare feet, in her sleep shirt, with her eyes almost closed, painting. The gessoed board sat unsecured on her easel, bouncing as her palette knives gobbled paint onto the board in a dark, impasto style she would never have recognized as coming from her hands. The painting that grew out of her frenzied work was of a subject that she would never have chosen to paint—“one man in 19th century garb feeding wood into a bonfire on which burned the bodies of a Confederate soldier, a young woman, and a small child. The painting, technically proficient, was ugly, angry, frightening, disturbing.

More disturbing, though, was the fact that Emma Beck had

arisen shortly after falling asleep nearly every night since she had moved into the house a little over a month earlier, and each of those nights, she had created another angry, strange painting. Each night when she finished, after no less than three hours, but no more than five, she had cleaned up her supplies and had hidden the canvases away in a secret room in the rambling old house—a room her waking self did not know existed. She had then returned to bed, unaware of anything she had done since going to bed the first time.

This night, though, something changed. This night, she did not close the door to the hidden room when she left it. In the morning, she would wake tired and inexplicably sore, as she had nearly every morning in her new home, and she would discover the secret room while awake for the first time, and find the paintings that were signed with her name, paintings that she could not explain.

In the afternoon she would tell the wrong person about these paintings, and all hell would break loose.

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