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Opening extract from  
**The Whispers in the Walls**

Written by  
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## Prologue

**M**y name is Scarlet Grey, and until today I thought I would be lost forever.

*I was taken away from Rookwood School in the dead of night, locked away in an asylum and given a new name. They told me I was crazy. They told me I'd imagined everything that had happened.*

*Everyone else forgot about me.*

*Everyone but my twin sister Ivy...*

I couldn't believe my eyes. I thought I was seeing my reflection

on the other side of the window. And then she moved.

She put her hand up against the glass. For a minute, I just stared. Our eyes met through the window, and I held up my own hand – a perfect mirror image.

I was *saved!*

Throwing the doors open, I ran outside, Nurse Joan calling after me. I skidded to a halt and hurled my arms around my twin.

“Ivy! Is it really you?”

She looked back at me, and immediately burst into tears.

Maybe I should have cried too, but I couldn’t. I’d never been so happy. I could’ve flown off the ground at that moment. She’d found me, I was being rescued, I was getting out of the asylum. I was *free*.

So instead, I laughed. I laughed and I span my sister round until she had no choice but to laugh through her tears, and we both collapsed by the pond in a heap.

“Oh, Scarlet,” she sobbed. “Miss Fox told me you were dead. I... I believed her, I really did. Father believed you were dead too. But then I found your diary, and I pieced it all together, but still I... I never thought...”

I realised then that we weren’t alone. The nurse and the secretary had stepped outside, but that wasn’t all.

“Miss Finch!” I jumped up. “Why are *you* here?”

My old ballet teacher was staring at me, happiness and

shock mixing in her wide eyes. “Hello, Scarlet,” she said. She ran a hand through her red hair and exhaled loudly. “I can’t believe this. You *are* alive. I think I need to sit down.”

I guided her to a bench, and she sank down awkwardly. “When I get hold of my mother...” she muttered.

*Her mother?*

Ivy clambered up from the ground, still shaking and clearly torn between smiling and sobbing. “We’ll get you out of here,” she said.

Reality came crashing down around me. What if the doctors wouldn’t let me go? What if they still thought I was insane?

I turned to my twin. “Did it all really happen?” I asked quietly. “All of it? Violet’s scheming? The fight on the rooftop? Miss Fox taking her away?”

Ivy stared back at me for a moment, and then she nodded. “All of that, and more...”

Miss Finch went back inside with the secretary. I almost tried to stop her going, half worried that they’d persuade her to leave me here. But she said she would set things right and get me discharged.

Ivy and I sat shoulder to shoulder on the bench next to the pond. It was just like we’d done so many times at our aunt Phoebe’s house when we’d stayed there as children, long

before Ivy went to live with her.

Once I'd convinced her that I was all in one piece, Ivy told me everything that had happened. I learnt about how she'd been forced to go to Rookwood and pretend to be me, the hunt for the diary entries, her new friend Ariadne, evil, money-hungry Miss Fox and her secret daughter: Miss Finch.

For the first time in my life, I was speechless.

When she'd finished, I was gapping like one of the goldfish. Finally, I managed to say something.

"You know what this means?"

"What?" she said.

"I'm a GENIUS. My plan actually worked! You found the trail I left you!"

Ivy gave me a withering look. "*You're* the genius?"

I grinned.

"What's happened to you?" she asked, her face suddenly slipping back into concern. "This place, I can't imagine..."

I wasn't ready for that question. I frowned, feeling sick. Despite everything, I was free, that was all that mattered now, wasn't it?

"Please," she insisted. "I need to know."

A thought occurred to me. In the pocket of my horrible regulation grey smock, I had something that could answer all her questions. Wordlessly, I handed it over.

I am insane.

At least, that's what they tell me. I didn't believe it at first. Of course I wasn't insane. I knew what I'd seen. Her name was Violet, and Miss Fox made her disappear. I was there. I'd written it all down, hadn't I?

Doubt crept in. They said I was having delusions, that I'd dreamt up a scenario on a rooftop, where a teacher had made a girl disappear. Doctor Abraham told me it couldn't be true. Why would a teacher do that? It didn't make any sense. It was a delusion, created out of my dislike for Miss Fox, he said. All I had to do was admit that I'd made the whole thing up and they'd consider sending me home.

Well, I wouldn't admit it, obviously. And I'm not even sure that I want to go home. Of course I want to leave this living hell, but my father and stepmother haven't so much as written me a letter. If they know I'm locked up in here, then they don't care a jot. The only person who cares is Ivy, and she can't possibly know. Because she'd come to get me out if she did.

wouldn't she?

So, anyway, the days pass. They keep calling me Charlotte, no matter how many times I tell them that's not my name. I have a tiny room, like a cell, with bars on the windows. It's painted this horrible shade of mint green that makes me want to vomit. But I've spent so much time staring at the walls now that I could

draw you a picture of every crack and every paint bubble and every tiny strand of spiderweb.

I have to see Doctor Abraham at noon on weekdays. He says I have a "mental disease", but honestly he seems to think being a girl is enough of a mental disease on its own. For the first few appointments I just screamed at him and knocked his papers off his desk, demanding he let me out, and all he would say was, "You're being hysterical, Charlotte".

Hysterical! I'd like to see how he'd react if he were locked up in here and people tried to act like it was for his own good. "SCARLET!" I yelled back at him. "My name is Scarlet!" It didn't seem to help.

I no longer have a diary. My old one, the lovely leather-bound book with SG scored on the cover, is now in pieces around Rookwood, where I prayed my twin Iry would find it. Once upon a time Iry had one the same, only with her initials, but she was always too busy with her nose in other people's books to write down her own story.

I begged and begged the nurses for a notebook to write in, and finally Sister Agnes gave in and brought me this one that she'd only used a few pages of. It was just grocery lists and dull things like "must send that package to Aunt Marie in Dover", so I tore out the pages and made them into tiny paper planes, which passed a good half hour in this place, where the days are long and empty.



I wish I knew how long I'd been here. Until today I had no way to count the days. I tried scratching marks into the paint, but it had been done by so many inmates before me that I couldn't keep track of my marks.

But... I'm not like them. Some of them are truly disturbed, they cry and shriek all the time, and I don't.

It's just... sometimes, I think perhaps, just maybe, the doctor is right. Why would I be in an asylum if I was perfectly sane? Maybe I just made up the whole thing.

I dreamt that I had a twin who would always be there. I dreamt that I was my father's little girl, that he wouldn't let anyone hurt me. I dreamt that there was a girl named Violet who disappeared into thin air.

The only way that I'll know if it was all real is if Ivy finds me. But it's been so long now... it could be too late. The trail I left could have been destroyed; Miss Fox could have found it and tossed it into a fire.

I must have hope. Ivy will find me. She'll come.

I know it.

I watched the tears roll down Ivy's face.

"You did it," I said. "You found me!"

She tossed the tatty notebook aside and swept me into a bone-crushing hug.

"I'm never losing you again," she promised.