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ALSO BY KIERSTEN WHITE

*Hide*

*Mister Magic*

# LUCY UNDYING

KIERSTEN  
WHITE



PENGUIN BOOKS



Salt Lake City, January 10, 2025

DRACULA

**I**t starts the moment you look out the window. You don't see him through the glare of the night-dark glass. You just *look*, safe inside but flinging your soul outward.

Your features transform whenever someone speaks to you, but you drop your sweet smile as soon as they turn away—a girl who wears a disguise to survive. It surprises and intrigues him, so he follows when you walk outside.

The night caresses with a grasping cold. Your head is down as you hurry to get home, soft brown curls hiding your face, hands shoved in the pockets of your coat. Rushing for safety and warmth. So dull and predictable, just like everyone else.

Though he has infinite time—a vast and depthless pool of it, holding him in place while the world's currents drift around him—he no longer has any more time to waste here. He's ready at last to move on.

But.

Your steps slow as soon as you leave the pools of manufactured light. Your head drifts up, the curtain of your hair parts, and you gaze heavenward as though seeking the sun for warmth. The stars offer no such comfort. Theirs is a piercing, lifeless grace. You linger in the darkness and devour eternity with your eyes.

His own heart, stilled so long ago, seems to judder to life at the sight of you. You're *special*. He aches to make your strange blood his own, to take everything you were or are or could have been.

If others weren't watching, too, he might not have had the will to

hold himself back. He loves the hunt, but you are a prize worth waiting for.

It doesn't matter how many times he's started this dance over the centuries, how many yous there have been. Because it feels new to him every time, when it's right. And every time, for him, there is only *you*. There has only ever been *you*.

He is Dracula, and you are young and lovely and vulnerable, and he knows exactly how this dance will end.

You will invite him in.



London, October 4, 2024

IRIS

Everything in London looks suitably old. Not in a run-down American way, but in a wearily ornate way. Like a grandma whose entire house is covered in plastic to preserve it in exactly the same state forever. England settled into “fussily impressive and obsessed with history” as its aesthetic and never changed. I admire the English for their commitment to it. The only thing *I’ve* ever been committed to is destroying my own family legacy.

I answer my phone without checking as I navigate out of the train station. Only one person ever calls me now, and I have to pick up so he doesn't get suspicious. “Dick. Seriously. Give me at least a day to settle in before you start trying to lawyer me back to America.”

“Your mother,” Dad says, his voice as cracked as the ancient sidewalk beneath my feet. I stop dead. A tourist bumps into my oversized backpack, cursing. I barely hear them.

“Dad? Dad, what’s wrong?” I shout, both out of fear and so that he can hear me. My dad has always been an old man, nearing fifty when I was born, but he’s gone downhill fast recently. The slide started years ago, though, when I opened a door that should have stayed shut. My *fault, my fault*.

His voice drops as though he’s worried about being overheard. “She was here last night.”

I put my free hand to my forehead. I don't know what hurts more—my head after the transatlantic flight and train ride into London, or my heart as I hear how scared and confused he is. I'm sorry to leave him alone, I really am, but—

But he abandoned me when I needed him most, didn't he? The only way he can make it up to me is by letting me go, whether he knows he's doing it or not. I can't feel guilty about it. He's in the nicest home money could buy, with the best staff, the best meals, and an upfront payment so large I can be assured he'll be safe and taken care of for the rest of his life. That's what we Goldamings do: slap some money on the problem and move on.

"Dad," I say. "Mom wasn't there last night. She's dead."

"She was beating against the window. She had red eyes and an evil smile. Please, Iris, you have to get me out of here. She knows where I am. You have to hide me or she'll get in."

I try to sound gentle, but I'm exhausted. "Mom couldn't have been at your window. Both because you're on the third floor, and because she's dead."

"I saw her, though. I saw—"

"I watched her die." Blood being pumped out as fast as she could produce it, her body consuming itself. I rub my arm, tiny bumps of scars hidden beneath my sleeves, thinking about tubes sucking, sucking, sucking the blood. "I'm sorry you couldn't come to the funeral, but I promise, we sealed her right up."

Maybe if he'd been healthy enough to travel to Miami, he'd be convinced. It still makes no sense why she was buried there when she lived and died in the desert West.

"But I saw—"

"She's gone, Dad. I promise." I don't tell him that I took a few minutes alone with the casket on the long flight to her custom mausoleum. I expected her waxen, bloodless face to haunt me. Instead, I keep returning to the memory as a comfort. She's *dead*, and I'm so close to being free.

"But she was here," Dad whimpers. "She told me to open the window and let her in. She'll be back tonight; I know she will." He sounds like a child, scared of the dark. But he never protected me from the darkness *or* from my mother.

I glance down the street, trying to get my bearings. All the buildings feel too close to each other, so there's no way to see where the sun is. "Tell your nurse to make sure the window's locked and close the drapes nice and tight. And if Mom comes back, tell her to fuck off. Bye." I

hang up and immediately regret it. And then try my hardest not to regret it.

God, I'm never going to escape. No matter where I go, she follows me. Exhaustion radiates from my core, like if I don't sit down and dissociate right now, I might die. I have no idea what to expect when I get to the house, either. Will it be in good enough condition for me to stay there, or will I have to get a hotel? That bastard Robert Frost taunts me, my mind repeating, *The woods are lovely, dark and deep, but I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep, and miles to go before I sleep.*

I guess it's "kilometers" here, though. Such a typically dry English joke, giving us their nonsense measurement system and then switching to metric themselves.

It's so tempting to find a hotel and sleep off the jet lag. Burrow into white sheets, be blissfully unconscious for a day or two. But I can't risk the delay. I can't be sure they aren't already following me. My beloved running-away-backpack straps dig into my shoulders, and I welcome the weight. It helps me focus. It reminds me why I'm here.

This is the only chance I'm ever going to get, and I won't blow it because I'm tired.

My phone rings again and this time I check before answering. "Can I just burn the house down and be done with the estate that way?"

Dick's voice is as dry as kindling. "That's arson, Miss Goldaming, and even in the UK it's quite illegal."

"What a hassle."

"You could always return home and address the responsibilities you have here."

I want to punch his voice in the mouth. My mother really outdid herself when she put Dick Cox in charge of executing her will. A name like that, he should be a world-renowned adult film star, not a pedantic attorney so relentless I'll never escape him.

"Don't want any of it. The responsibilities, the company, even the money. Once I sell the London and Whitby houses, we'll talk about getting me out of the rest."

"You will want it," Dickie says with bland assurance. "It's in your blood. And the blood is life."

I flinch at the hateful mantra. It feels like my mother, pinching me under the table so I'll sit up straight and smile. "In my case, the blood

is my eventual death, so thanks for your continued insensitivity. Bye, Dickie." I hang up. Between my dad and Dick, I'm a walking panic attack. I thought I'd feel brave when I got here. Ready. Instead, I just feel haunted.

There's a café across the street. Coffee is my greatest ally; it will help me fight my jet lag, fight my blood, fight my past. I can do this. I look to the left and step into the street.

Three things happen at almost the same time:

A hand grabs my pack and yanks me so forcefully I fly backward through the air.

A black cab passes on my right within inches of mowing me down.

And I fall onto my ass, looking up at a stunning porcelain angel of a woman, golden head haloed by the sun, still holding the backpack strap she used to save my life.

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May 6, 1890

## JOURNAL OF LUCY WESTENRA

Mother's been in my room. I leave little traps for her everywhere, little ways that I'll know where she's been with her prying fingers and cutting eyes. But she didn't find my journal. Dear, dear Mother, who loves like a knife, slicing me into ever smaller pieces until I'm exactly the shape that pleases her the most.

Though this shape she cuts me into is pleasing all around. Doctor Seward has been by again. What business does he have doing house calls for my mother? He shouldn't be looking after a fussy woman convinced that every cough or snuffle is the plague. I wish he would tuck her into his big black bag along with his vials and bottles and take her to his sanitarium. She could complain all day and have him instead of me at her beck and call. But he loves sitting for tea after he listens to her heart and her ever-lengthening list of ailments. And all the while, he watches me over those glasses, tracking me more carefully than he tracks her pulse.

Sometimes I smile at him, as placidly as I imagine a saint would. What he doesn't know is I'm Saint Joan of Arc, waiting to take up a sword and make all of England cower before me.

But that's wishful thinking. I could no more wield a sword than Doctor Seward could inspire a young woman to blush. But as my mother taught me, if someone frightens you, make them love you. Then you will be in control.

If my mother's love is any indication, that's not true. I certainly don't control her. But I will not make an enemy, and I will pray Doctor Seward grows tired of my mother's complaints long before he grows

tired of my face. He promised to come again next week and bring his friend from America, and I had to pretend to be thrilled at the prospect. I do not care for Doctor Seward—why should I care for his friend?

But oh! My dearest heart is coming today, and I think I will die of all the love I have in me, the flutters and the hopes and the absurd little dreams that always come when I know what the train is bringing. A respite. Someone who cares about me, who cares for me, who wants only my happiness.

**FIE! A CURSE ON** my earlier hopes. Arthur Holmwood and his flesh-colored mustache are coming instead. He sent a card asking to call on us this afternoon. I forgot he existed until he insisted on reminding me.

He picked up my glove at the opera last week and assumes he also picked up my heart. As if I would be so easily won! I have dozens of gloves. I could lose a glove a day for the next month and never miss a single one of them, just as I could lose a dozen of these exhausting men and never think of them again.

What a waste of a day. I'm all foul moods and tempers, the worse for having to hide them. I shall go crazy pretending to be happy. Then Mother will send me to the sanitarium and Doctor Seward can study me at his leisure. He would like that very much, I think. Perhaps that's why he's always lurking about. Waiting for me to crack into pieces so he can examine each of them.

Speaking of torments. Arthur Holmwood and his horrid lip caterpillar are here. My journal must go into hiding along with all my true feelings. Smile, Lucy! Time to pretend.

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Boston, September 25, 2024

CLIENT TRANSCRIPT

**T**hank you for inviting me in, Vanessa. You didn't need to. Both because this is your office, not your home, so technically I don't need an invitation, but also because I wasn't going to kill you if you didn't.

It must have been upsetting, though, seeing me decapitate that other vampire in your parking lot. Are you sure *I* shouldn't be giving *you* therapy? No? Probably for the best. So kind of you, offering to listen to me. Therapy might be the only thing left that I've never done. How fun to be having a new experience!

Well then, to answer your questions in order of importance:

Yes, it's fine that you're recording this. I don't mind. All these endless years, and I have nothing to show for them. Might as well live on as a ghost in your phonograph, or whatever they call them now.

Yes, vampires are real, and yes, I'm one, and yes, that other vampire was trying her best to kill me, poor thing. She might have succeeded, too, had I not outrun all her friends.

I hope your neck doesn't hurt too much. The bleeding has stopped, at least. I'm sorry I didn't get her before she bit you, but please don't think too unkindly of her. She was basically a baby rattlesnake. All instinct and no control. You startled us, so she attacked. Which, again, I'm grateful for. They'd injured me enough already that I needed a little help, and you were an excellent accidental distraction.

And now to the other questions you peppered me with as I helped