Wicked Girls

An Honors Project
By Katherine Emberton
With help from Dr. Jeff Spanke
This is a work of fiction. All the characters and events portrayed in this book are either products of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously.

WICKED GIRLS

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This novel is dedicated to
the most supportive partner I could ever wish for, Brandon,
the most patient advisor I have ever worked with, Dr. Spanke,
and to my own pride for being the only thing that kept me going
when all else had failed.

Thank you.
These 66,000 words couldn't have happened
without you.
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Chapter 1

Abbi

I’ve always been one to root for the under-dog.

I’ve always been on the side of the little guy. From the start, I just wanted the playing field to be even and fair for everyone. Women especially have always drawn my attention. They make up half of the human population, and yet they have always been the bottom tier.

From the very beginning I was only trying to help, but even so, people called me a snake in the grass. I wasn’t breaking any rules, I just wanted to help a woman to reach her potential. She wanted knowledge, and I led her to a garden full of knowledge. Now, the stories say that I’m the ultimate evil. For my supposed crimes, I have been stuck here ever since. I can’t move on. All I want is rest, but what I get is a never-ending life. Trying to help that woman was my first mistake, and sadly I have been only managed to make more mistakes since then.

I still support the underdog, women, but I’m much more careful now. I don’t get quite so involved anymore. In fact, you would hardly know I’m there. I’m a ghost, just a whisper on the wind. Only once have I ever returned to the world in a human body, and that time went just as terribly as you could imagine. You see, the world is full of magic, and people tend to get nervous when they see a woman with power. In a little town called Salem, some women had too much power, and now their names and lives will live in infamy forever. I tried to help them.
I became a part of their world, and all they gave me was their scornful words.

The worst part of it all is that I am stuck here no matter what. So, even if every attempt I make to help people just makes things worse, I have no way to escape it. Instead of sulking about it, I have decided to keep trying. I have decided that protecting woman, especially those women that hold any kind of power, is my calling. Even if this is just a punishment, I will make it work.

It's been nearly 300 years since I was in Salem, and now, I'm responsible for another mess. Now, I have to watch it all happen again: Now, I have to deal with the same nonsense that's been going on since the beginning of time. The thing is, the story I'm about to tell you is not at all original. It has happened time and again, and it will continue to happen even after the story is done. It happens in different places and different times, but it's always the same. It always starts the same way, but hopefully, with my help, it won't have to end the same way this time.

This ancient story always seems to begin with a girl. This time, the girl's name was Abbigail Gains, but she went by Abbi to everyone who knew her. I knew at once that this was the girl I needed to watch. This was the girl that would need some protection. She was quick and smart, yet she was often quiet and unconfident. When I came to her she was especially lonely. You see, she had just moved from her home in the warm and sunny southwest to the cold, gray heart of the Midwest. It was there that the trouble all started, and it was there that our story unfolds.

Abbigail had spent the first fourteen years of her life with warm weather and even warmer friends in Phoenix, Arizona. She had grown up with the sun shining in the sky every day and the desert sand hot and dusty beneath her feet. She knew, somewhere in the back of her mind that the temperature outside could get into the negatives in some places, but she had never experienced such hardships for herself. She also knew that rain could last for days and days, but every rain cloud she had ever seen floated away after just a few drops. Abbigail knew there were other places on earth, but all she ever longed for was the
perfect weather and long days of her home, not to mention her friends. Abbigail had to leave behind everyone she had come to know to settle down halfway across the country with no one but her mother to keep her company.

Although Abbigail loved her mother dearly, she needed more. Her mother had always been there to take care of her. Since she had no siblings, and her father had left 5 years before, her mother was the only real family Abbigail had. Her mother worked very hard to provide for her, and Abbigail knew it. Sometimes her mother would work two or even three jobs at a time just to keep food on the table for them both, but that was all going to change now, or so Abbigail’s mother told her when she had announced to Abbigail that they were going to move so far away. She had gotten a job, a good job, working at a plant in the middle of a small town surrounded by soy bean fields called Pine River, Illinois.

Abbigail was happy for her mom, and was glad that she wouldn’t have to work so much anymore. She just wished that her mother could have found a job closer to home, a job that didn’t require Abbigail to live in such a small town in the middle of nowhere. Now, Illinois would be Abbigail’s home. As Abbigail and her mother drove up to the small, red brick house just across from the field of freshly turned soil, Abbigail knew immediately that this would be nothing like the southwest. She knew that her life would no longer be warm and sunny like it had been for so long, it was going to be boring and gray and dismal.

Abbigail sighed as she stepped out of the car onto dark pavement of the driveway. The house sat on a small plot of land, much bigger than the small patch of grass that sat outside of their old apartment, but not big enough for a child to run or play in. From the front, the backyard didn’t look all that promising either. The driveway wrapped around to the side of the house, where it ended at the white metal door of a single car garage. On three sides, the house was surrounded by thick, ancient looking trees whose limbs twisted like the gnarled fingers of an old woman. The presence of the forest seemed odd to Abbigail; everything else in the area had been turned into fields of corn and soy beans,
or neighborhoods and housing developments. Yet, this thick
patch of trees and underbrush remained. From where she stood,
Abbigail imagined that the forest went on forever, even though it
was likely only a mile deep. Tearing her eyes from mesmerizing
depth of tree line, Abbigail looked up at the sky. The sun was
nowhere to be seen. It wasn’t raining, but somehow the huge
fluffy clouds had decided to linger in the sky just to ruin the
view.

Sensing Abbigail’s distress, her mother said quickly, “It’ll be
alright, Abbi. Now c’mon. Look at the beautiful grass and flowers
that this house has,” indicating the short, drooping begonias
under the windows. “We’ve never had grass before.”

“Yeah, mom,” replied Abbi reassuringly, “I didn’t even know
grass could be that green.”

The two of them walked up to the front door. The house had
a small porch with wooden overhang that would have shielded
the door from the sun, if there had been any out that day. Abbi
imagined that the little porch might be a pleasant place to sit on
warm afternoons. Sadly, she remembered that with the summer
coming quickly to an end, there probably wouldn’t be many
warm afternoons left this year. Her mom flipped her keyring
around in her hand until the shiny, new house key found its way
into her fingers. With a twist of her wrist, the door was open
and Abbigail stepped into her new home.

The house was small, although it was bigger than the apart-
ment that she and her mom had had before. As she walked in,
Abbigail could see the kitchen, which was connected to the small
dining area just off of the main living room. Past the kitchen
was a small hallway that led to a bathroom and two bedrooms.
Abbigail took a deep breath. The house smelled a bit like dust
and strange laundry detergent, but underneath those smells was
the light, sweet hint of apples.

Abbi made her way towards the bedrooms. As she passed
the dining area, she could see the imprints still left in the carpet
where the last tenants of the house must have kept their dining
table. Four little circles, perfectly spaced apart, just like the legs
of a table: a table that belonged to someone else. Soon, though,
this house would be filled with their things, and it would smell like their laundry detergent. Until then, Abbi would just have to put up with sleeping in a house that didn’t feel like a home.

Abbi lowered her eyebrows in a look of mixed frustration and curiosity. She looked to her mom still standing by the doorway and asked, “When does the moving van get here?”

The movers had come to their house only two days before and packed nearly everything they owned into boxes. They had shoved and stacked those boxes into a giant truck along with all of their furniture, including the dining table, the chairs, the couch, and their beds. Abbi’s mother had grabbed some blankets, clothes, and food, enough to last them a week, just in case. But without their beds, did Abbi’s mother just intend for them to sleep on the floor? How barbaric.

“It probably won’t be here ‘till tomorrow, sweetie. Remember? They called and said that our van had gotten lost somewhere near Texarkana,” Abbi’s mom replied.

Abbi wrinkled her nose a little, involuntarily. “So, we’re sleeping on the floor then,” she asked accusingly.

Her mom tilted her head down a bit to look at Abbi over her glasses. “First of all,” she said in her most motherly warning voice, “I don’t need the attitude. I know we’re in a new place, but it’s hard on both of us, and I don’t need you to be snippy with me. The movers will be here as soon as they can. Until then, we have plenty of blankets, plenty of food, and a brand new washer and dryer to do our laundry.” She walked over to Abbi and wrapped her arms around Abbi’s shoulders. “I love you, and I know that things are different, but I’m telling you, this is going to be good for us. Things will be better here. Plus, once the moving van gets here, there will be a lot of unpacking to do, so enjoy the free time while you have it.” She released Abbi with a smile and a kiss to the forehead.

“Mom,” Abbi whined, struggling against her mother’s cheesy words and over emotion. Abbi twisted away from her mom’s kiss, and throwing her backpack in her empty room she said, “I’m going to grab the rest of the stuff from car,” and hurried back out the front door.
From the front yard, Abbigail couldn't help but stare into the forest again. It seemed so mysterious and old. For a moment, Abbi's eyes had a hungry look in them, like she wanted nothing more than to run into the trees, feel the fallen leaves and sticks crunch beneath her feet, and never turn back to that little house. Instead, she blinked, shook her head to clear her thoughts, and grabbed the big plastic tub full of blankets, toting it back to the door. After a few trips she had gotten everything out of the car and into the house.

After bringing the last box inside, Abbi flopped onto the floor of what would soon be their living room and took another deep breath. Now that we had spent close to half an hour in the house, you could barely smell the dust and detergent anymore, but somehow the smell of apples still lingered in Abbi's nostrils. It was an unexpectedly pleasant scent, and Abbi smiled a little. I hopped that it might stay even after the movers had brought all their things in. Apples could be a reasonable smell for a home. People don't always make such a distinction between houses and homes, but the farther people get from anyplace they consider home, the more they realize that houses are just empty buildings that wish they could be homes. Apples are for homes. Houses smell like soap, laundry detergent, bleach, and other cleaners, but homes always smell like food. No one ever talks about how their grandparents' homes smell like Febreze. They always talk about the smell of warm pies and cookies, or cold lemonade. Home is supposed to smell like mom's cooking, not sterile floors.

Abbi was clearly beginning to understand the distinction between houses and homes, as she was many, many miles away from the only place she had ever called home. Abbi stared and the ceiling, deep in thought for a long time. Eventually though, she realized that she was beginning to doze off. She took some deep breaths and sat up, leaning against a wall, but with nothing to do except stare at the bare room around her, she quickly slumped to the side and fell deeply asleep. It had been just after eight o'clock when she laid her head down, and sometime around nine her mom put a blanket over her and tucked a pillow beneath head.
Sometime in the dark hours of the early morning, the noises of the house woke Abbi up. A new house always squeaks and creaks differently than a familiar one. After living in a house for a while, you can no longer hear the sound that the wind makes against the shingles, or the way the floorboards creek as the house settles into its foundation at night. When you come to a new place, the sounds always seem strange and mysterious. Abbi sat up for a moment, listening to the house sing and moan around her. Eventually though, she got up, blanket and pillow in hand and wonder to her mother's room, where her mother had curled up against the wall, under a window to sleep. Abbi sleepily stumbled and slumped into a spot next to her mother and cuddled up next to her to sleep. After only a few moments, Abbi fell asleep once again to the smell of her mother's perfume and the light, lingering scent of apples.
It was an unexpectedly pleasant scene. Abbi was sixty years old, but I imagined that it might have even after the measures had brought all their changes in. Apples could be a reasonable smell for a home. People didn't always make such a distinction between houses and homes, but the farther people get from anywhere they consider home, the more they realize that houses are just empty buildings that wish they could be homes. Apples are for homes. Houses smell like soap, laundry detergent, bleach, and other cleaners, but homes always smell like food. No one ever talks about how their grandparents' homes smell like helene. They always talk about the smell of warm pies and cookies, or cold lemonade. Home is supposed to smell like mom's cooking, not sterile floors.

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Chapter 2

Sam

The next morning, Abbi woke up to the sound of a moving van backing up into the driveway. The loud, rhythmic beeping was almost mesmerizing in her sleepy, early morning state. Abbi's mother had already been up for a while, waiting for the truck to arrive, and as Abbi grabbed her cell phone off of the floor beside her she looked at the time and realized that she had slept nearly twelve hours. At first, Abbi had thought that the movers had gotten there early, but she realized it was now nearly noon. She had fallen asleep in the clothes that she wore the day before, so she quickly changed her shirt before running out to the front yard to watch the movers unload her things.

Abbi's mother was holding the front door as a three tired and sweaty men carried everything Abbi and her mother owned into the house.

"Is there anything I can do to help," Abbi inquired of her mother.

"No," she responded, "I think the movers have it all under control. I would rather you just stay out of the way for now, just until everything is inside. If you'd like, you can go for a walk or something. I think the realtor said that the path over there leads into town, or you can just check out the woods a bit. The sidewalk at the corner leads to a housing division. You could see if there are any kids your age around." As she offered Abbi options, she nodded her head in different directions indicating
where Abbi could go.

Abbi nodded as her mother spoke. "Okay, I'm sure I can find something to do," she said once her mother had finished.

"Alright. Be back by 3 and we can just have an early dinner. Okay?"

"Yeah, that sounds nice."

Abbi headed first to the side of the house to see if the movers had managed to unpack her bicycle yet. She sighed with disappointment when she saw that they had not. Where ever she wanted to go today, she would have to walk. She walked to the street in front of the house. There was no sidewalk directly in front of the house, but turning right, she could see that a sidewalk appeared at the crossroads about a block down. The road that the lived on now was not a busy one. There was a corn field on the opposite side of the street, forest on three sides of the house, a farm house about a half mile up the road on one side, and a small group of four or five houses about the same distance away up the road in the opposite direction. Needless to say, there was not much to entertain Abbi within walking distance.

She decided to walk back to the side of the house where her mother had indicated that there was a path through the woods. Sure enough, as Abbi got just out of sight of the moving van, she caught sight of an old, trampled down path winding its way between the short grassy scrub of the forest. The branches of the trees hung over the path, completely obscuring it from the sun which had finally made an appearance in the sky. Abbi looked up at the sky then back toward the dark trees, she seemed reluctant to spend much of her time in the shade. I didn’t blame her; it was clear how much she really missed the sunny skies of the dessert that she had left. I had been in the American southwest before, looking for women to help, and I’m here to tell you that it is some of the most beautiful land in all the world. If I didn’t have the need to help people, I may have stayed there forever, just wandering the deserts. After pausing for a moment and looking back at the empty street, I could still hear the noise of the movers shouting back and forth to each other, Abbi turned to
When Abbi moves from the sunny desert of Phoenix, Arizona to the small, conservative mid-west town of Pine Creek, Illinois, she expects her life to become far less interesting. When she discovers a secret about herself, her life becomes absolutely magical. Suddenly, it's up to her to save not only herself but her friends and family as well. Along the way, she discovers what real friends are and just how wicked girls can be.