Dear Reader,

I could say that this novel took me two years to research, write, and edit, but like most stories, things are never quite as simple as they first appear.

Lockwood Manor is a gothic country mansion of my own creation, a fictional amalgamation of the British country estates that were put to use during the Second World War to host all manner of evacuees and valuable historical collections spirited away from London, but it also takes its inspiration from the ramshackle Victorian farmhouse in the English countryside where I spent the formative years of my childhood utterly terrified of ghosts and other spectral visitors.

My house wasn’t nearly so grand as Lockwood Manor, with its ninety-two rooms, but it was old enough to have the idiosyncrasies of a row of cobwebbed servants’ bells in the hallway that I feared might one day ring of their own accord, a bricked-up indoor well whose unfathomable depth frightened me, strange rustling and banging noises in the walls, and a ghostly woman who visitors reported walking out of a wardrobe in the middle of the night. I was also unlucky enough to suffer from sleep paralysis episodes that meant I would wake in my bedroom in the dark to see ghoulish figures peering at me from corners of the room, which, for a child with a rich imagination, made me utterly convinced that there was a malevolent force haunting the house.

My interest in the gothic turned scholarly at university when I studied *Jane Eyre* (whose eponymous heroine I was named after, and a book I had been too frightened to read beyond the second chapter as a child because of the ghost in the red room) and its
literary descendants—*Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Rebecca* among them—and wrote a masters dissertation on gothic doubles, ghosts, and hidden libraries; tropes which also found their way, ten years later, into this novel.

I had the setting for my story then, and some of its gothic flavor, but I knew that to hook a reader, Lockwood Manor would also need some intriguing inhabitants. I have always loved museums, and while visiting the Museum of Natural History in New York during my first week in the city as an MFA student, I found myself wanting to write a story where the eeriness of taxidermied animals might play a central role. Later, when I was researching the history of London’s Natural History Museum, I came across an article referring to the wartime evacuation of its collections, with each department being sent to a different country house, including Fawley Court, where a major and his daughter had a contentious relationship with the evacuated museum and its workers. This immediately sparked the idea for my novel, of an imperious major with secrets and his haunted adult daughter who welcome a collection of bones, skins, mounted animals, jars, boxes, and crates to their home; along with a fictionalized museum worker, Hetty Cartwright, a lonely workaholic who is instantly intrigued by the major’s daughter, Lucy Lockwood.

I loved immersing myself in the research for this novel—studying thick nonfiction tomes and gripping personal diaries from World War II, visiting natural history collections, and rewatching *Brief Encounter* and Hitchcock’s *Rebecca* so often that I once dreamed in black and white.

I hope, dear reader, that you enjoy reading my novel just as much as I enjoyed writing it.

*Jane Healey*