'I was completely engrossed by Machray's vivid retelling, which lifts the veil to explore Havisham's desire for revenge and her yearning for love. *Havisham* brings a fresh perspective to one of literature's most complicated figures, and the side characters that shadowed *Great Expectations*, including Molly, Magwitch and Jaggers' **STACEY THOMAS**

'Deftly woven and alive with rage, *Havisham* is a compulsive read, equal parts fierce reclaiming of one of literature's most monstered women, and tender exploration of betrayal, loss and love' **KAT DUNN**

'*Havisham* is a spectacularly daring book and Machray is fast becoming one of my favourite historical fiction authors. This bold reinvention of one of literature's most fascinating gothic figures weaves a deft web of strands from Dickens's original story together with fresh elements from Machray's glorious imagination' **ANNA CAIG**

'Oh my goodness – *Havisham* was a bold and brilliant idea! Delving into the nooks and crannies of Dickens, it had me gripped to the end, with twists that left me breathless. It's a story of women's empowerment, and revenge – but also a story of redemption and above all, of love in all its glorious manifestations. I loved it!' **MARY CHAMBERLAIN**

'From the very first page, you know you are in the hands of a supremely talented writer. Elle Machray draws us in to a spellbinding tale of 'what if' that becomes 'if only' before long: Charlotte and Molly had me utterly captivated. This is a glorious feminist reimagining of *Great Expectations* that gives Miss Havisham the story she deserves' **NAOMI KELSEY**

'Elle Machray is a fearless historical fiction writer. *Havisham* is a fantastic reimagining of one of our most beloved stories, mixing the delight of familiar faces with shocking twists to recreate Dickens' world into something new' **EMMA HINDS**

'It's a brave task to take on one of literature's most maligned, but Elle Machray has done Miss Havisham justice. This is a novel that will make you weep before punching the air. A proper feminist retelling with women at its heart, I loved every moment of it' **LOUISE HARE**

'This book is shouting-at-the-page levels of investable. I was hooked by this page-turner, deeply loathed the antagonist and really rooted for the revenge! *Havisham* has such a captivating plot with a beautiful message at its heart' **CHARLOTTE PARADISE**

'A compelling and meticulous retribution story for one literature's most notorious figures' ***SCOTTISH FIELD***

HAVISHAM

Jilted bride. Vengeful heart. Hopeless romantic.

HAVISHAM

ELLE MACHRAY



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To every woman diminished for the simple truth of feeling

Author's Note

Great Expectations, in my mind, is Dickens' greatest work – but in it lies a great mystery. *Havisham* was inspired by one of the story's most infamous characters, Miss Havisham, and attempts to reclaim the agency, interiority, voice – and first name – missing from her story.

I wanted to ground her in a world that is both vividly of her era and reflective of our own. While you needn't have read the original text to enjoy this story, there are many references to the plot, setting and characters of *Great Expectations* throughout. *Havisham* explores the biggest question I've had since first reading Dickens' novel: what if Miss Havisham had stepped out of the shadows of Satis House? To answer it, I have respectfully taken some creative license.

Part One

Chapter One

It is no secret that a great deal of melancholy could have been avoided if Charlotte Havisham had listened to her father. His lessons, delivered as often during their days at the brewery as they were at parties and funerals, were mostly well heeded – except one: *no one owes you love*. A commandment as vital as any other, but one she had nonetheless ignored, until it pierced her, arrow first, through a heart long considered to be made of stone. Perhaps that is why it fractured so easily – why the pieces remain so difficult to gather.

It is three years since her exile, three years since her would-be wedding, and still, Charlotte wears the dress. Not every day. Not anymore – but she has fastened herself into this silk coffin often enough that the pearl buttons at the sleeve have fallen away, and the fabric is yellowing at the hem.

Her lace veil, however, is fashioned to the top of a mop's head.

It has been so long since she has heard her wedding march. Seated at the pianoforte, Charlotte's fingers glide easily over the keys, foot thumping against the pedal as the music swells through her morning room. She should stop. Should get dressed properly, eat breakfast, take the air. Complete the rituals that used to anchor her days before – *before him*. But she plays on.

And the groom collapses two bars before the coda.

Naturally, he is not a living groom. Only a broom, its handle trussed up in a bow tie and propped against the instrument. Whether it was the thump of her foot, the vibrations of the melody or divine intervention that caused it, Charlotte is uncertain. But he falls,

and his bride follows suit, swooning dramatically to the floor like a keening lover.

Sighing, Charlotte pushes back the piano stool. Her will to play has fled and no amount of self-berating could bring it back. This whole endeavour had been absurd in any case. A spinster on a rapid decline into her thirties, spending a morning preparing a wedding for cleaning implements: tweezing the groom-broom's errant bristles, rinsing and drying the mopstick bride's cloth hair.

The happy couple lie prone at her feet and she can't summon the will to fix them.

In the corner of her bedroom, the grandfather clock ticks on, ancient brass hands threaded with verdigris veins pointing to twenty to nine in the morning. A lifetime ago, aged six and twenty, Charlotte would have been almost two hours into her day at the brewery, skilfully checking the progress of the mash tun or enjoying bartering with a supplier. Her days had purpose. But now …

A new decade approaches, and she's resorted to playing with dolls. Retying the bow at the back of her own wedding dress, Charlotte pads barefoot beneath the beams of her room to examine the scene as a coroner might. The splintered elm floor slopes in the centre – a quirk her father insisted was due to the building's Tudor charm. Charlotte suspects otherwise: that two centuries of Havisham family secrets have bowed the planks, the old house itself grown weary of its melancholy residents.

In truth, she has too.

Charlotte picks up the motionless mop-bride and lays her beside the broom-groom. Together, they resemble a housemaid's sorry recreation of Romeo and Juliet in the catacombs. Charlotte flops down beside them, staring dreamily as rose and emerald fingers of light trickle in through the stained-glass window. A saintly glow illuminates the matted strands of the mop head.

Then, a sound. Scuttling.

Too loud to be rats. Too precise to be the wind.

More like … shuffling?

Charlotte dismissed most staff long ago and her only other guests, largely unwelcome and never invited, are her cousins, Raymond Carmilla and Sarah and Georgiana Pocket. Now, years into her solitude, even their visits have dwindled to twice a year: her birthday in October, and Christmas, which is two full seasons away.

In essence, should this stranger turn out to be a murderer, she could rot for weeks before anyone would notice.

The last time she'd heard shuffling, Charlotte had left a hastily scrawled note by her bedside. At the time, she'd been reading the latest edition of the medical journal her mother used to read before her admission to Bethlem. This one had been about phrenology students learning to dissect the souls from fresh bodies.

The last wishes of Charlotte Havisham, it read.

Let the doctors dye my heart and drain my blood.

Scrape my bones clean of legacy.

They can number my skull and label my flaws.

I predict they'll find an overdeveloped region of destructiveness.

Charlotte arches an intrigued brow, ready for this unscheduled adventure downstairs. With no other weapons nearby, she grabs the mop-bride, grasping the sun-warmed handle to her chest.

Sneaking along the landing, she considers if the sound will again turn out to be nothing.

Her former fiancé, Compeyson, always said she had a vindictive imagination. She knows what they say about her in the town.

Proud and lonely, desperate and mad.

The Spectre of Satis House, they whisper. *The Witch of the Place.*

A living corpse in a rotten wedding dress.

But what would they know about it? About her? About anything at all?

Peering over the edge of the staircase, there's nothing but lime-washed walls and sharp oak corners. She creeps down the steps, bundling her

dress above her knees to remain quiet, and prepares to laugh about this invented intruder when she reaches the bottom.

Then the shuffling comes again, followed by the bang of a stubborn drawer and a mutter of, 'Oh no.'

Not a hallucination then. Nor her imagination.

Ignoring the spark of fear in her chest, Charlotte draws closer. At least she has the element of surprise. Conscious not to draw attention to herself, Charlotte holds her breath and blinks a stranger into focus. A woman.

Her shoulders slump, disappointed. Where's the amusement in that? She half expected to tussle with some dashing rogue, or at the very least to scare away a trespassing youth with her impression of a wicked crone. In Charlotte's experience, women's malice is far less pronounced – less confrontational, more poisoned poached eggs.

Subtlety has never been her preferred method for settling a dispute.

Charlotte has never laid eyes on the woman before. She does not recognise the knot of chestnut hair, which is too curly to belong to Georgiana, nor the exposed nape of her swan-like neck, too dark to be Sarah's. Even though the stranger's shoulders are broad enough to draw comparison to Cousin Raymond's, her hips are wide enough to rule out his comically triangular frame.

So, who is she?

Beside the intruder is a large, cloth-filled bag, though Charlotte catches no glimpse of jewels or trinkets stuffed inside. Remarkably, glancing around the room, all the valuables appear untouched. The intruder's interest is solely fixed on the drawers and the cabinets and the papers inside them. If she is a thief, she is after a specific prize.

But what?

The intruder hunches to open the next drawer; Charlotte moves in time with her and crawls into the parlour. Alerted by a treacherous hiss of silk, the villainess straightens. Charlotte ducks for cover behind the more expansive of the room's two armchairs, then waits to be caught.

But the woman only rubs her back before returning to her search.

With the mop still gripped, Charlotte slowly, stupidly, scoots closer, keeping the rounded end trained on the stranger. From here, she glimpses the woman's profile: her odd, misshapen nose. Then the thief's head snaps towards Charlotte – full, rosy lips and then wide, mean eyes staring straight at her.

Charlotte thrusts the mop stick right between them.