

Lindsey Cochran: Retail Exorcist

Robert D. Moore, Jr.

Lindsey woke to the sound of screaming. She sighed and rolled over, trying to go back to sleep, but the sounds of abject terror kept filtering up from the floor below. Finally, she just got up. It had been a late shift, but this clearly wasn't going away on its own, so action was required. Someone better be getting murdered.

Taking time only to put on a tank top and pair of jeans, she left her apartment and tromped downstairs. There was a crowd gathered outside apartment 313. 313? She had never noticed that. Didn't they try to avoid the number 13 in buildings?

She shouldered her way through the crowd to reach the door and looked at the people standing there. They were just looking into the apartment. "Okay, does someone want to clue me in on what's going on? Some of us work and need sleep." The people turned to stare at her and then gestured inside.

Lindsey managed not to roll her eyes. A simple verbal response wouldn't do, huh? Oh well, retail work had to have some advantages to it, right? One of them being the ability not to show what you were thinking on your face, much less say it. Besides, these people looked terrified, so she turned and looked into the apartment.

Inside the apartment was a madhouse. Lamps, ashtrays, pretty much any small, loose items were sailing around the room. A haunting? Really?

She'd get no sleep as long as this was going on. Pursing her lips, Lindsey crossed the threshold into the apartment. The people at the door gave startled amazed gasps and reached out to stop her as she moved into the room. They didn't try very hard though and stopped altogether when a lamp came zipping across the room to slam into the doorframe, just missing Lindsey's head.

"Clean-up aisle 4," she grumbled under her breath. She moved to the center of the apartment's main room. She was the center of a whirlwind of loose items, so she stopped, still completely unfazed by the surrounding commotion. "Sir or madam, if you require an item on the top shelf, you should ask for assistance, please. It avoids nasty messes such as this, and possible injury to yourself or others."

Everything flying around her came to a stop. There was muttering from the hall behind her, but in the room, there was a feeling of stunned disbelief. "Do you require assistance in returning items to their proper locations? I'm here to assist you in any way I can." The tableau held a moment longer, then several fragile items came crashing to the floor at her feet. Lindsey sighed. "Were the products not to your liking? I could check if there are other selections—colors or sizes—in the stockroom?" She moved about the apartment, looking for something, while brushing aside the still floating items that were in her way.

In the kitchen, she found a broom with a dustpan and came back to the living room to sweep up the debris. "If you think this is bad, you should have been around for clean-up when a kid threw up in the bike aisle. Not in the middle of the way or something, mind you. Oh no, this kid was an overachiever at trying to hide things. It was all up under the bikes and racks. Ever try to get a mop under ten bikes and a metal rack that doesn't want to move? I thought I would never get it all cleaned up."

By the time she finished cleaning up the mess, the remaining objects were settling back to spaces throughout the room. Maybe not where and how they were supposed to be settled—most lamps were not meant to stand on their shades on the dining table for instance—but they were settling. Lindsey walked back to the kitchen and emptied the dustpan into the trash. When she turned around, a ghostly, nebulous figure confronted her. She could tell its lips moved, but there was no sound. She had the impression, though, that it was asking her what it needed to do?

Without missing a beat, Lindsey said, "What you're looking for isn't on this floor. You'll either need to go upstairs via the Stairway to Heaven,"

she pointed to the figure's right, "or downstairs by the Escalator to Hell," and she pointed to its left. She could see nothing there, of course, but what did it matter? "Personally, and my boss would kill me for telling you this, while it's easier to head downstairs, the merch there is cheap and prone to breaking regularly. It'll cost you more in the end." The figure just stood there for a bit, then turned and drifted away to the right. It rose into the air and slowly faded from view.

Lindsey stood there for a minute then turned and stalked back to the door. She elbowed her way through the gawking crowd. Could people not even get out of the way?

As she reached the back edge of the crowd, one lady, likely the apartment's living occupant, said, "Please, ma'am, that was amazing. What can we do to repay you?"

Lindsey paused for a moment, then started up the stairs. "Just keep it down. I have an early shift tomorrow."

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