Contents And Prologue

by Cerdic519

Summary

The contents page and prologue(s) to The Hexhamshire Inheritance. No Cas or Dean here except in mentions, but you will probably understand the main story better if you read this.

Notes

My two most popular stories on AO3 have been the original Supernatural-Jane Austen fusion 'Duty And Devotion', and the short-sex-scene story that (somehow) became the 155-chapter 'The State We're In'. Between them, they have about a third of the total number of kudos (I LOVE KUDOS, by the way) of all my stories. I thought for some time about fusing these two together, and 'The Hexhamshire Inheritance' is the result. Kudos and kind words will be greatly appreciated, as I LOVE KUDOS.

In writing this, I took the original files of Duty and Devotion, then changed a ton of things around (i.e. it's more than just added sex). If you come to THI from that fic, be prepared for many, many differences, including some of the key characterizations. I'm not sure if the whole thing really hangs together, but I think it would be better out there than just sitting alongside the two dozen unfinished fics on my computer. The ending is... well, I won't spoil it too much, except to say that of course Dean gets his Cas. Or in this case, Cas gets his Dean. Repeatedly!

Tags will only be added as they become relevant, and please be aware that the story contains non-graphic references to past rape of a minor character; I have included an extra
warning the first time this is mentioned. Oh, and in case you didn't spot it, I LOVE KUDOS!
Lastly, a shout-out to the blessing on humanity that is Misha Collins. In the darkest hour, he is the angel that keeps us battling on.
Cerdie519

P.S. I LOVE KUDOS!
CONTENTS AND PROLOGUE

Contents
Part 1: Wills And Wonts
Part 2: Secrets And Secretaries

THE HEXHAMSHIRE INHERITANCE
Chapter 1: Barns And Balls
Chapter 2: Recipes And Rumpy-Pumpy
Chapter 3: Bennets And Back-Rooms
Chapter 4: Lawyers And Lay-Bys
Chapter 5: Soldiers And Soreness
Chapter 6: Greed And Gossip
Chapter 7: Death And Devilry
Chapter 8: Back-Stabbing And Bailing
Chapter 9: Love And Lace
Chapter 10: Cousins And Cudd... Comforting
Chapter 11: Spying And Speculation
Chapter 12: Rogues And Receivers
Chapter 13: Lovers And Leftovers
Chapter 14: Frankness And Foolishness
Chapter 15: Testing And Timing
Chapter 16: Petting And Persuasion
Chapter 17: Exhaustion And Etiquette
Chapter 18: Herbs And Honey-Bees
Chapter 19: Colonels And Carriages
Chapter 20: Ladders And Learning
Chapter 21: Penances And Proposals
Chapter 22: Bans And Brothers
Chapter 23: Declarations And Discoveries
Chapter 24: Hot-Headedness And Heats
Chapter 25: Relatives And Rescues
Chapter 26: Leave-Takings And Loose Ends

THE EPILOGUES
Part 1: Sons And Surprises
Part 2: Progeny And Panties
January 1780

It is a truth universally acknowledged that, whilst money cannot buy happiness, it most definitely allows you to rent a far superior class of misery - albeit only for as long as it lasts.

Mr. Reuben Rosencratz sighed as his carriage drew up outside the impressive Hexhamshire House in London. Being a lawyer tended to expose one to both the best and worst of humanity, and now that he himself was nearing a well-earned retirement, he seemed to find the whole thing increasingly exhausting. But his family had served the Earls of Hexhamshire ever since the Restoration over a century before, and he was determined to see this through. Especially given the report from his friend Doctor Sepowitz, who had quietly intimated that he did not expect the twelfth earl to see out this winter, possibly even this month.

At least the news from the dratted war with those faithless Americans was better, the lawyer thought, as the papers today were full of the great British victory off Cape St. Vincent. That might have given the earl a boost; the Fitzwilliams were heavily linked with the military, and several family members were in the armed forces. He mounted the steep stairs and knocked on the door, proffering his card to the perfectly-presented footman who opened it to him.

Less than five minutes later, he was with his client. His first thought was that the doctor's assessment had, if anything, been over-optimistic. Henry Earl of Hexhamshire looked set to shuffle off this mortal coil any minute.

“Did you do the research I asked?” the nobleman asked brusquely.

The lawyer nodded, and opened his briefcase. One did not usually expect manners and money to go together. The rich could afford to be as rude as they liked.

“It is not good news”, the lawyer said shortly. One of the earl's few good characteristics was that he appreciated directness from those he employed, which the lawyer supposed was understandable considering the sycophancy he must have received from so many in his life. “Of your own descendants, only one is an alpha of alpha-line descent. That is your great-grandson, Mr. John Winchester's son Dean, who has his ninth birthday next week. The next double alpha is a descendant of your brother James, your great-nephew Mr. Cole Trenton. He lives in the town of Boston, in the Massachusetts Bay Colony.”

“I'll be damned if I let someone from that bunch of traitors have my money!” the earl spat out.

The lawyer nodded sympathetically. His client's circumstances were a little unusual; he had inherited his title from his grandfather at the age of eighteen, his naval father having died at Cape
Passaro that same year just two months prior. Said grandfather, the eleventh earl, had married late in life to a Portuguese lady-in-waiting at the court of Queen Catherine, King Charles II's sorely-tried wife, and the Fitzwilliams had made a considerable fortune out of the spice trade as a result. Thus the man in front of him not only had his own inheritance, but had in his thirty or so years of trading amassed a second fortune, which was his to dispose of as he wished.

“Still can’t see what Hal saw in that Winchester girl”, the earl muttered. “Money, I suppose.”

The earl's eldest son Henry had married a Miss Felicity Winchester, a rich heiress. Their eldest son, also Henry, was like his father sound enough, the lawyer knew, though the earl had taken it badly when their second son had been given the Winchester rather than the Fitzwilliam surname. Conversely, the earl had actually welcomed John Winchester marrying his first cousin Mary Campbell, most probably (the lawyer thought uncharitably) because his son (i.e. John's father) had opposed it.

“The reports of young Master Winchester are generally positive”, the lawyer continued. “However, the sum of money involved would make him one of the richest men in England.”

“But he is the only true-blood alpha”, the earl pointed out. “Are you saying I should ignore him just because the money might ruin him?”

The lawyer shook his head.

“As the only man who fits your requirements, it is right that you leave him at least some of the money”, he said. “Possibly the estate of Pemberley, which itself constitutes about half the sum. That would guarantee him an income in excess of ten thousand a year.”

“And the rest?” the earl asked.

The lawyer pulled out a further sheaf of papers from his briefcase.

“I have a suggestion for that.....”

Chapter End Notes

Note: The county of Hexhamshire is one of two ancient English counties that did not make it to modern times. Created some time after the year 1100 by King Henry I, it was aimed at weakening the powerful Prince-Bishops of Durham, as well as solidifying the recently extended border with Scotland. It disappeared in 1572, merged back into Northumberland, but the area around Hexham still has a different feel to the rest of that county to this day.
August 1800

All things considered, the firm of Rosencratz and Goldsworthy had survived the passing of its senior partner quite well. Of course Mr. Jabez Rosencratz mourned his late father, but he still had to earn a living, and he had been relieved in recent days that the vast majority of the clients that his father had attended had seemed content for the company to continue managing their affairs.

Except that, whilst he had thought that his father had trusted him with most things, the will whose contents he had just read showed that there may have been the odd one that had been 'missed'. The will had been drawn up some twenty years ago, and because of its unusual terms, a certain event that had to happen before it was put into effect had not yet occurred (his father's accompanying letter, dated to the month before his own death, showed that the elder Rosencratz had been monitoring the situation for the intervening two decades, waiting for such an event). So for the eight people affected by it..... well!

The Earls of Hexhamshire were amongst the company's most prestigious clients. The will was that of the twelfth earl, grandfather of the current (fourteenth) one. Old Earl Henry had, it seemed, made a fortune trading in spices and other goods from the Far East, and as was traditional, he could choose whomsoever he wished to receive this windfall, worth in excess of twenty thousand income per year. Apparently his father had advised the old man on the disbursement of that wealth, and..... well!

The lawyer's thoughts were interrupted by the arrival of his mate, Oliver. The omega smiled as he slipped into the musty office, and his husband managed a tired smile in return. Oliver was nearly a decade younger than him, and it always quietly amazed him that the handsome boy had accepted his suit.

“Miss Roberts scowled at me again”, his mate said with a smile. “I presume you finally told her that you were letting her go?”

“She did not take it well”, the lawyer smiled. “But I cannot have someone who drinks as much as she does greeting my clients. I have promised to keep her on until after Christmas, as she is then retiring to live with her sister on the coast. I will pay her a fair sum when she goes.”

“You have too big a heart, Jay”, the omega smiled, kissing his alpha's slicked-back hair. “Want to scandalize her even more?”

“Bad boy!” the lawyer hissed, though he was still smiling. “Wait till I get you home.”

“Promise?”
The lawyer scowled at him, and turned back to the will.

“The Hexhamshire Inheritance?” Oliver asked. Sharing legal information with a non-work partner was of course frowned upon, but Jabez would have trusted his mate with his life.

“Yes”, he said with a sigh. “The private detectives I employed were both fast and efficient, although their abuse of the English language was painful in the extreme. Especially when they handed this to me and said, and I quote, 'this is the gen'!”

Oliver smiled.

“Who are the runners and riders?” he asked.

His husband frowned at him, and the omega managed an innocent look that the beta knew full well was fake. He picked up the summary sheet of the run.... the potential beneficiaries.

“The twelfth earl was an alpha supremacist”, he said with a sigh. “There was only one of his legitimate successors at the time of his death who was an alpha descended from alphas, the son of the earl's grandson John Winchester and grand-daughter Mary Campbell. His name is Dean Winchester, and the earl left him his secondary country seat, Pemberley in Derbyshire, with the attached estate. The whole inheritance was around twenty thousand per year in term of income, and Pemberley represented about half of that sum.”

Oliver nodded. Marriages between cousins was common enough, given the desire of most families not to 'dilute the bloodline'. He and Jabez were distantly related through an ancestor from the time of James II and their families had stayed close, which was how they had first met.

“Dean Winchester was only nine when the earl was suffering his final illness, so my father advised that such a huge sum of money as he had amassed should be more evenly distributed”, the lawyer said. “A wise precaution as it turned out; Dean started receiving an allowance at the age of eighteen, and such was his misbehaviour that his grandfather the thirteenth Earl, who was managing his affairs, terminated it. Fortunately he seemed to have learnt from his mistakes because he inherited fully three years later and has run things very well since.”

“We are all allowed our youthful follies”, the omega said sagely.

“A second potential heir was identified in a beta great-grandson”, the lawyer continued, “by the name of Samuel Bingley, Mary Winchester's nephew, and also of alpha-line descent. You may remember the scandal when his father Hereward died shortly after the boy's death, and his widow not only married but actually had a child with her second husband whilst still 'in mourning' for her first.”

“I do”, Oliver said gravely. “The Times was Most Displeased with her.”

“In addition, there are the Bennets”, the lawyer continued. “They are not even blood-related, but.... well, one might almost say adopted. The late earl's third son Mark married a lady called Caroline Bennet. It was a marriage urged on him by his father when he was barely eighteen, and sorry I am to say but he most cruelly abused her, leading her to seek and obtain a divorce. Most unusual for the times; the courts hardly ever granted such requests. I think the old earl may have felt partly responsible for her sufferings, because he actually sided with her against his own son, disinheriting him and supporting her. Even when she married a friend of hers, an alpha merchant called Mr. Lucien Black, whom she then had four children with.”

“I remember that”, Oliver said. “The Times ran the headline 'Black Day For A Noble Family'. Almost as bad as 'the gen'!”
His husband smiled.

“Their children were an alpha, two girls and an omega”, the lawyer said. “Charles, Karen, Ellen and Luke. You may remember Luke from another scandal back in the 'sixties; he became Philip Duke of Holderness' kept omega, and the father of the duke’s current son and heir, Lucifer. Of course Mr. Lucifer Peltwaite is only legitimized so cannot inherit, but he has cousins who can. I do not know if it was deliberate or just good luck on his part, but Charles Bennet married Miss Rebecca Rosen, a leading actress of the times whom the late earl quite admired. Enough, it turned out, to consider her offspring as potential heirs – except that by the time of the earl's last illness, their six children had all turned out to be omegas.”

“An abject dereliction of duty!” the omega smiled.

“The remaining sum of money would have generated an income of around ten thousand a year”, the lawyer said. “My father ran it as a trust for Dean Winchester, for whom a sum of money was set aside each year until his fiftieth birthday, upon which he would then get everything. However.... if he or any of the seven other beneficiaries marries and has an alpha son during that time, all moneys and the capital sum are appointed for the boy, to be handed over to the management of the boy's father on his fifth birthday. Should that child die, then the remaining money is split, half to the boy's parents and half to Mr. Winchester.”

“The childhood disease clause”, Oliver observed. “Why did the money not just pass to another alpha son?”

“My father apparently advised the earl that that might endanger the first boy's life”, the lawyer said, again thinking on the weakness of humanity. “For the parents of a second- or third-born alpha, the temptation would be enormous. Controlling such a huge estate for over a decade, venal parents could enrich themselves enormously.”

“Sad, but probably a wise move.”

“Indeed”, his husband said. “So one of those eight has the chance of becoming very rich – yet they cannot know it, not even Dean Winchester! Oh, and Charles' Bennet's sons, like those of the current earl, are all named after angels. They are Castiel, thirty-four, Samandriel, thirty-three, Gabriel, thirty-two, Michael, thirty-one, Raphael, thirty, and Balthazar, twenty-eight.”

“A choir of angels”, Oliver said. “And all six of them un-mated?”

“Michael and Raphael are both priests”, his husband said, “and as you know, none of our churches allow omega priests to marry, so they are technically ineligible. Although I suppose there is always the chance they might leave their churches if they found husbands who demanded it, as sadly many do. And although their father has an estate in the county of Hertfordshire, it is most unfortunately entailed in default of an alpha heir to a nephew of his. Which, I suppose, makes it even more surprising that Mrs. Bennet has not forced one or more of her sons up the aisle as yet.”

His mate smiled and draped himself over his mate, who blushed. The chair beneath them creaked ominously, but held. The problems of the Hexhamshire Inheritance could take second place for the time being.

Outside the office door, Miss Roberts put the glass she had been using to listen at the door away, and smiled sourly. It looked like there was a definite opportunity for her to earn herself a nice little retirement bonus......
Note: Entailing was a system aimed at stopping an estate from leaving the family. Because a wife's property automatically became that of her husband, it did not matter that their house was/had been technically hers; once Mr. Bennet died, his widow would become homeless, the house passing to her beta nephew Crowley as he was Mr. Bennet's nearest male-line successor. As was customary, she and her husband had received some financial support from the current earl; for a noble family to allow anyone associated with them to be considered 'poor' was socially unacceptable, which was why they had managed to secure small inheritances for each of their six sons.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!