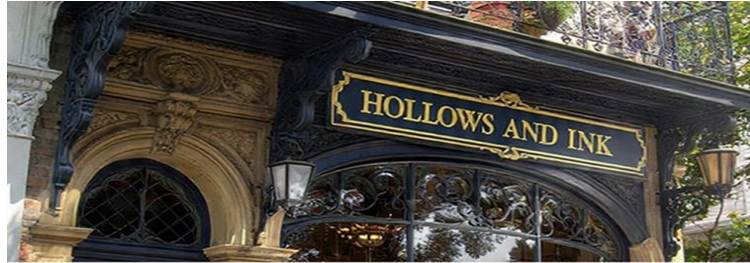


Chapter one

A Map Of Closed Doors



Mara started a part time job, on the 9th of April 2013 two nights a week at the oxford university archives department it was a large room in the basement the majority of her time was taken up studying law working in the archives complemented her legal studies transferable skills research precision nobody came in after midnight which suited her fine the job was just her the hum of fluorescents and books that smelled like dust and time.

After many years and three attempts she failed the lawyer bar exams she needed time out to grieve and process a way forward. June 2020 she officially handed in her resignation letter to Oxford University she sold her 3-bedroom house in Oxford for the next 7 years she lived with her parents in Folkestone she was working as a librarian in Dover her father a civil servant in Whitehall her mother runs the household meal prepping handling finances and ensuring a supportive foundation.

It was a classic confession her 33rd birthday was supposed to be the year of keeping secrets, but three gin and tonics into her birthday dinner, Mara blew out the candles on her cake and the warmth of her closest friends she let slip that she has plans to buy a bookshop of her own in July 2026 Hollows And Ink a bookshop in London which came with a 1-bedroom flat above that was good as it offered zero commute which would save time and money.

The date she had whispered into a glass on her thirty-third birthday had finally arrived on the calendar after signing the paperwork, the deeds were updated digitally to HM land registry she faced a massive task she spent the next 12 weeks categorizing and reorganising 4,000 books that she inherited the collection spanned the entire shop plus the flat above

The floorboards of Hollows And Ink gave a familiar, rhythmic groan beneath Mara's boots as she flipped the heavy brass sign on the front door from Closed to Open. It was July 2026, and the weather, outside, was drizzling blurring the headlights of passing black cabs into smears of gold Just an hour ago, she had been upstairs in her pyjamas, drinking tea in the quiet sanctuary of her new one-bedroom flat. there had been no frantic dash for the Tube, no elbowing through crowds at the station, and no soul-crushing transit delays she had simply rinsed her mug, walked down twelve wooden steps, and entered her new life. Through the shop front window, she saw a figure huddling under a tartan umbrella, peering curiously at the window display she had spent until 1:00 a.m. perfecting. The person hesitated, then reached

for the door handle a little brass bell chimed overhead, echoing through the shelves Mara took her place behind the counter, forced her hands to stop shaking, and smiled. "Good morning," Mara said, her voice steady and proud. "Welcome to Hollows And Ink.

Three months later on a Sunday night she knew she wasn't alone the bedroom temperature drops the street lights outside were flickering creating shadows on the wall she heard a whisper it wasn't frightening it was more soothing she sat up to try and pinpoint exactly where it was coming from but nothing but silence she lay back down and fell asleep.

Unbeknown to Mara when she bought Hollows & Ink, she inherited more than Hollie the residential ghost in the basement behind the old coal chute, there's a bricked-up arch with a brass plate dated 1888. The plate reads Service To Royal Palace Authorized Personnel Only some of the bricks are loose behind them is a narrow brick tunnel with old gas pipes running along one side you come to a second arch with a unlock iron gate, through the gate there's a old cast-iron door with a brass plate stamped with the Royal secret code or encryption and the date 1888.

Not long after Mara knew she wasn't alone Hollie the shop Ghost made her presence known during that time Hollie mentioned the ghost station the tunnel from Hollows And Ink breaks into a sealed section of the old *Down Street* platform station on the Piccadilly line AKA also known as 1888 service tunnels that's why Hollie doesn't like it down there because she hears voices and other dimensions of the old Piccadilly line vibrations It runs roughly north-northeast it points toward St James's Palace, not Buckingham Palace directly. But the old maps show St James's, Clarence House, and Buckingham Palace are all connected by service tunnels from the 1800s for coal water and staff Mara never went too far in. because Hollie the shop ghost stopped her—Hollie said there's something down there that's not right Mara decided some routes shouldn't be used unless the world's actually ending.

At 3:17 AM every Sunday, the bookshop printer downstairs would whirl to life she'd go down and open a door that led into the shop from the flat above, Mara would find one page in the tray always a checkout card from 1997, always stamped for a book called A Map of Closed Doors she thought to herself that's weird it doesn't exist it's not written in the inventory the next few days she spent her spare time looking for it the only place she hadn't looked was the basement accessed via the bookshop kitchen trapdoor she's only been down there once that was with the estate agent he mentioned the property comes with a 18th-century coal cellar it features a bricked-off gated tunnel originally leading to the adjoining property clutching her torch she made her way down the wooden steps despite a thorough search she found nothing she came back upstairs and closed the trapdoor and place the lino over it.

The London shop runs different from other bookshops traditional retail with trade-ins plus offering online ordering for local click-and-collect as well as nationwide delivery. The next day she opened the shop 10:45am before she could put the kettle on the bell above the door jingled a youngish woman came in with a box of donations university textbooks old paperbacks and one library book without a barcode the front cover said A Map of Closed Doors the woman looked at Mara and said I found it on

the train before Mara could ask more questions the woman was out of the door looking out the window Mara sees her vanish into a solid brick wall across the street.

Mara drops the heavy kettle onto the counter with a sharp metallic clatter she turned back to the donations whilst ignoring the other items she reached for the book with no barcode A Map of Closed Doors it felt unnaturally warm, and it was starting to hum, At the end of the working day 17.30pm she locks the door and flips the door sign over to closed switches the lights off and makes her way upstairs taking the book with her it hums even when it's closed but stay silent when there are strangers around.

That evening she ordered a pizza and fell asleep on the sofa reading A Map Of Closed Doors

The book wasn't stories each page described Doors that shouldn't exist that only appeared at 3:17 AM the bottom of each page a door number and a rule.

*Door 07*Do not speak while inside.

*Door 33*Do not walk forward when you exit.

*Door 45*Do not stay after the third chime.

Doors aren't rooms They're trades you give up something to walk in Property Memory time profession a name a love one it could be anything that has value to you Mara views these rules and trades as legal contracts. Where others see magic Mara sees binding terms and conditions Door45 wasn't a physical door it was spiritual Record 45 vinyl you could say a 45-minute warning the book does not judge you but the 45 will.

The next morning, she opened the shop 08:45am as normal placing the book underneath the counter as months went past Hollows & Ink was becoming a blind drop that wasn't on anyone's radar, and that made people nervous they told her the shop was sitting on information that had rules for a reason politicians use it because it's the only place in London where they can be anonymous and still be held to something. It started small. A junior policy advisor left a copy of 1997 The Collected Speeches of Margaret Thatcher with a sticky note inside can't say this in committee read p123 the next week it was gone, replaced by Dawn of the Blair Era with a single line underlined then a backbencher started showing never said who he was, just browsed the poetry section, always left a different pocket notebook in the bowl by the counter. Mara never looked. Hollie seemed to like him through.

Kings MI6 London desk noticed a small increase in documents moving through second-hand bookshops in central London most were low-level leaks but the briefing paper that passed through Mara's shop had a distribution tag that matched a live inquiry they were running. That's what put Hollows & Ink on their radar Unmonitored drop points can be used by anyone - whistleblowers, journalists foreign contacts, Freemasons the shop just accelerated it because the same networks MI6 watches overlap with those social channels

How Kings MI6 handle it

They don't raid Its London, and it's a public shop. Instead, a handler made a casual visit as a customer. Asked about rare political memoirs, left a book in the bowl, and

watched what happened to it. The point was to test if the shop was passive or active in the chain.

Mara's response

Mara told them the same thing she told the Freemasons the shop isn't a drop point for anyone's operation. It's for people. If MI6 wants to monitor, they can she also made it clear to the regulars that if you're leaving anything sensitive you're doing it at your own risk - Hollows & Ink doesn't provide protection.

Hollie seemed to agree. The day after the MI6 visit, every book with a government seal or official stamp was back on the shelf face-out, even the ones that had been face-down for months. MI6 isn't running the shop, and Mara isn't working for them they're just two groups that now know the shop exists, and they both don't like that they can't control it the next morning A Map of Closed Doors had moved It wasn't underneath the counter mara found it after many hours of searching, next to Margaret Thatcher's memoirs The politicians who use the shop know about it.

The Freemasons asked about service access once. Mara said, there's a basement. Howard asked about the 1888 door in 97 Tell him it's still closed M 1996 Michael Howard was Home Secretary. There was a brief, off-the-record inquiry into unregistered access points in central London after a security scare at St James's Palace. It was shut down in two weeks. No report was ever published. Howard had asked specifically about any access routes older than 1900 linking the Palace network to Chancery Lane. That matches the date on the iron door / iron lady: 1888. Margaret Thatcher did use the book A Map Of Closed Doors to time travel through the tunnel to secure her legacy after her death, Mara never called Howard she put the note in a copy of *The Secret Agent* and left it on the shelf It was gone the next morning replaced by a 1996 edition of the Home Office annual report.

Before Mara reached Her 34th birthday, her father, organised a massive surprise Mara gets summoned to Guildhall to receive the key to the freedom of the city. The **Freedom of the City of London** isn't just ceremonial it's one of the oldest surviving traditional ceremonies in the UK dating back to 1237 it means the City Corporation formally recognized her, and with it comes a few very specific rights she's now a Freeman of the City of London Historically it let you trade within the City walls the city owns a lot of the deep-level service access points.

They'd take her out a side door of Guildhall onto a closed-off stretch of Fleet Street. The street's empty, wet, 1:03 a.m., only the sound of the Tube somewhere deep below. The beadle officer of the law who maintains order and made proclamations hands her a brass taper and points to the unlit lamp. Hollie would be watching from the shadows across the road, arms crossed refusing to be part of it but refusing to leave her there alone.

Mara lights it the hiss the pop the flame catches The Beadle marks it in the ledger Freedom sworn light kept after that, the city can't pretend her tunnel doesn't exist she's officially responsible for a piece of it now. Someone in the City Corporation read the 1997 Home Office report with page 47 blanked out they saw Mara's name tied to the Chancery Lane property and decided it was easier to make her a Freeman than to explain why a bookstore owner had a sealed 1888 door in her

basement. Mara took the key into the shop and placed it underneath the counter on top of. A map of closed doors now the tunnel door has a new brass plate next to the old one By Right of Freedom, 2026.

The following Sunday 3.17am Mara heard the printer she went downstairs on the counter was a checkout card. No name. Due date: Tonight

At 03:17am, the street lights, flickered like they're catching their breath she unlocks the shop door and walks back to the shop counter the bell above the door jingled a woman, entered the shop It was the same woman who left the donations Oh my God said Mara is this for real The woman introduced herself with a warm smile, stepping forward to shake hands my name is M Kings Homeland Secret Intelligence Service who has the privilege of time travel.

There are six gateways 1st Buckingham Palace. Service Tunnel 2nd 10 Downing Street Service Tunnel 3rd Duckett's Passage was decommissioned many years ago .4th is the Brick Wall that you saw me go through that takes you forward in time. 5th BBC service tunnels 6th is in your basement that takes you backwards into time, they all work on time locks Holding A Map Of Closed Doors to the cast-iron door, combined with a soul-synchronized key, allows for permanent, future access without the book it's just like a modern-day car key fob once it's been programmed, you're good to go

Mara abruptly interrupted her current year is 2026 and you said you've come from 2028, what happens? "Why do you need to go back in time. M followed on and said, before I can answer your questions may I ask for a hot drink yes, sorry, forgive me, tea or coffee,

Coffee white with one sugar I need you to sign The Official Secrets Acts forms your father, signed the forms many years ago once you agree and after doing so you are legally bound by the Official Secrets Acts do you understand do you agree to sign? Yes, said Mara

M continued to say. before I answer your questions. I want you to know that we have been in contact with ancient alien extraterrestrial also known as the Watchers Yahweh Anunnaki Nephilim at covert government level for more than 200 years this contact has included sharing of advanced technology, to allow us to manipulate space, time also known as Time Travel technology sharing funded, by Black Budgets through A Map Of Closed Doors

To answer your question in 2026 we're jumping forward two years, to secure a king's conservative government in 2028 The answer to your second question the king's Bishop would like someone with authority to go back in time to advise Queen Victoria to shut the portal M Chief of Homeland Secret Intelligence Service took a sip of coffee before reaching for a biscuit halfway through eating she continued to explain that Queen Victoria was secretly experimenting with high-voltage electricity in 1888 but the massive surge of raw energy did something unexpected: it ripped a tear in the fabric of time, opening a vortex inside the Royal Service maintenance tunnel at that exact moment Jack the Ripper was fleeing for his life with police whistles piercing through the silence of the night air, he drops down into what he thought was a domestic coal chute tunnel instead of finding safety, he was sucked into Queen

Victoria's electrical portal. 3:17 AM, he met the gatekeeper that governs the Iron Doors.

The gatekeeper offered him total anonymity made him untraceable while his actions remain public and gave him safety from the gallows, but the trade was absolute he had to surrender his identity, A Map of Closed Doors acknowledged his trade legend has. it the brickwork began to shift cornered against a brick wall Jack the ripper kicked open a rusted iron gate unbeknown to him gave him access to the BBC basement service tunnels exactly 3:17 AM in the year 1964 can't be proven but can't be denied as we don't know who the gatekeeper was in 1888,

Jack the Ripper was given a new identity he was now allegedly Jimmy Savile they say the jump that happened was a technical disaster in broadcasting history: A fire in an underground electricity cable tunnel at Battersea Power Station triggered a catastrophic power cut across London, blacking out the main studios at Television Centre.

Margaret Thatcher having used the book A Map Of Closed Doors, to secure her own political legacy before her death to ensure her political philosophy—Thatcherism—would permanently shape the future of Britain, she struck a bargain with the gatekeeper of the Iron Door the price she paid was her soul upon her biological death, her ghost. would be bound to the basement forever as an eternal guardian gatekeeper for those who wish to travel, back in time.

She knew that Queen Victoria's 1888 electrical portal had fractured time, trapping Jack the Ripper in a loop inside the Royal Service Tunnel. We're not sure if she knew about, Jimmy Savile we know he used his immense media influence and protection from the highest levels of the establishment to act as the "procurer" for bringing in new victims to make trades who knows this is just all speculation because no one has the archive warning pages.

At 2:58 AM the following Sunday, Mara's fingers trembled slightly as she unlocked the shop door exactly two minutes later, at 3:00 AM sharp, M. walked into the bookshop the heavy click of the deadbolt sealed them inside. Mara turned to face M., whose silhouette was barely visible against the faint glow of the streetlights outside I'll grab the book and key. It's under the counter; Mara pushed aside a stack of antique books to reveal A Map of Closed Doors

Together, they made their way down to the basement. "You're sure you want to go through with this?" M.'s voice was a low whisper, cutting through the dark "You know I can only come to the second arch. then, you're on your own. "I'm sure," Mara said, M. nodded slowly, placing a hand on Mara's shoulder—a silent gesture of solidarity. "You know what to do when you get to the iron door. At 3:17 AM, hold the book up against the door and let it synchronize." she waited until 3:17, With one hand holding the key against the book, she pressed it against the iron door. She pushed it open, and a heavy, mechanical hum hit her. It sounded exactly like a giant fridge-freezer.

Through the doorway was a completely empty room, except for a lone chair sitting directly in the centre and an old woman sitting in it. It was an ex-Prime minister who recently died it was M. Thatcher she looked up, eyes wet, and put a finger to her lips.

Do not speak while inside

The rule was physical. Mara opened her mouth to ask if she was okay and her throat closed. Not choking. Just... sealed. Like the air refused to carry words. Margaret leaned in pointed to the wall a door had been drawn there in chalk door 7 tough outline, handle and all. Under it, written in the same chalk: Trade required.

In this dimension, we communicate by thought, can you hear me if you can nod your head, Mara nodded her head, Margaret held out her library card on the back, she scratched a message with a key trade Motherhood and Marriage and take up the three M's declare that your whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to service do you agree to this, if you do now think it and the trade will be completed Mara thought it her thoughts travelled through time and space not only did Margaret Thatcher hear it the powerful ones heard it as well it was acknowledged and accepted.

The hum got louder even though there was no clock Mara heard another voice in her mind saying,

Third chime coming when she turned around, the exit door was open, three chimes. She didn't stay for the third.

The hum stopped Mara's throat worked again. she found herself back in hollows and ink basement. holding the key and book in her hand A Map Of Closed Doors was open to a new page the book had the ability to write itself the ink was still wet, *Door 7* Rule acknowledged *Door 45* acknowledged

M stood upstairs in the kitchen, brewing herself another hot drink and helping herself to the unlimited supply of biscuits suddenly a strange noise echoed from the basement below crouching down near the cellar door M called out Is that you Mara are you ok? Yes Mara's voice drifted up muffled but steady I'm coming back up within a matter of minutes they were both standing together in the warmth of the kitchen breathing heavily Mara immediately tried to explain I didn't get to see the Queen Victoria before Mara could say another word, M took absolute control of the situation. I know this was all about synchronizing and trading now that's been done you will be able to travel backward in time next Sunday but having said that tell me what did you trade?

Mara looked at her I traded motherhood and marriage within the exchange I was told to take up the three M's and dedicate my whole life to service what does that mean Mara asked. It means by stepping into this role you're giving up traditional family life for a higher calling life dedicated to the Monarchy, MI6, you have now officially become MI6 Agent with a sharp smile welcome to the program before I go there's more housekeeping to do I need your signature here also read this document sign it and date it this is explaining that you can only use the portal only when authorised unauthorised access will result imprisonment whenever it's activated it does alert us at MI6 HQ it is logged on our system.

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