

Maybe This Time by Jennifer Crusie
2010, St. Martin's Press, 342 pages.

Andie Miller is moving on with her life. She's confident and happy, and she's met a wonderful man. But there's one detail she must take care of before she is free to marry Will Spenser.

North Archer was Andie's first husband. A successful lawyer, he went head-over-heels for free-spirited, strong-willed Andie the first time they met. Their passionate marriage ended almost as quickly as it began, when Andie realized that North couldn't make room in his career for their life.

When Andie visits North to inform him of her impending new marriage and return 10 years' worth of never-cashed alimony checks, North asks one final favor of her.

He's become the guardian of two children living in an allegedly haunted old mansion in the country. The children have driven away every nanny North has hired. He is confident that Andie can get the situation under control in one month, and offers her \$10,000 for her time. Curiosity gets the best of Andie, but she accepts the job with some trepidation. She isn't fond of being back in North's world, even as a paid employee.

The situation at Archer House is much worse than Andie expected. The house has fallen into a state of disrepair, considerably worse than "crumbling," and only slightly better than "ruin." The driveway is treacherous, the electric and phone lines are temperamental, and the garden is completely overrun by weeds.

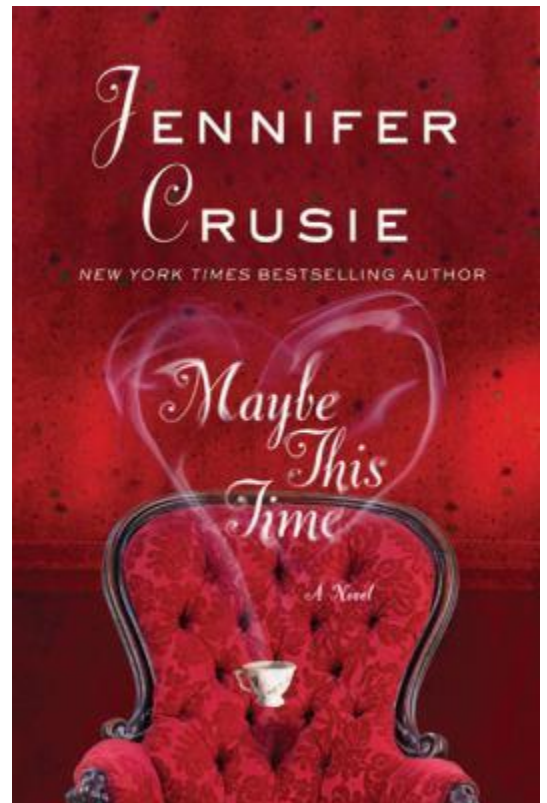
The children's most basic needs have been provided, but it quickly becomes evident that nothing extra has been done for them in the months following their parent's deaths. Andie jumps in feet-first, making an enemy of the ancient housekeeper, Mrs. Crumb, who resents Andie's changes.

As Andie settles in, she realizes that there is definitely something strange going on at Archer House. The half-glimpsed shadows, strange apparitions, unexplainable cold spots and vivid, disturbing dreams soon have Andie questioning whether ghosts really do exist.

Just as Andie begins making progress with the children, her ex-brother-in-law, Sullivan, arrives with an unethical journalist and a skeptical parapsychologist in tow, anxious to explore the supernatural history of the house. The situation goes from bad to worse when her former mother-in-law, her tarot-card-reading mother, her jealous fiancée and, finally, North, all appear on the doorstep. Andie must face the ghosts of her past, as well as at least one all-too-real and ill-intentioned spirit if she and the children are going to make it out of Archer House alive.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. The characters are engaging and, in some cases, completely over-the-top, but their exaggerated quirks serve to make them that much more entertaining.

Maybe This Time is fabulously atmospheric and creepy, but author Jennifer Crusie's trademark humor lightens the mood. Crusie does a great job of blending the elements of a traditional gothic story with modern chick-lit. The resulting read is a fun, page-turning romp that I couldn't put down.



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