

## Glade Hall

### Chapter 2 - Agnes

**“There is talk of some young ladies fainting away.” Said Emma. “Mind you, it didn’t take much to give them an attack of the vapours in those days.”**

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~ Then ~

It was a terrible night and Agnes was trying to hurry without running. The soldiers still in the area might spot a lamp, so she was relying on the full moon to find her way. The bundle under her shawl was already wet and she didn’t want the child to be completely drenched. It moved, a boy child she thought, though there hadn’t been time to make sure. Mary had given her instructions, but her memory wasn’t perfect, she just hoped that the sex of the child wasn’t important.

“It has to be alive.” Mary had told her. “Offer dead blood and they’ll punish you.”

Mary had told her a lot about punishments and how dangerous The Glade could be, but she had her child, it had worked for her. Her precious Thomas, who was now six and was already watching his father as he worked the local wood into furniture and floor boards. No, not father, though they treated him as theirs.

“He’ll never be the brightest.” Mary had told her. “But he’s ours and we love him.”

Agnes had often watched Thomas as he walked and talked and fitted perfectly into the village. There was a faraway look in his eyes every so often, but nothing that had ever scared the priest. The child attended church and there had never been any incidents, no signs of celestial fire come to destroy him.

“I carried him for a full nine months.” Mary had told her. “The birth itself was agony, but I’ve been told that’s normal.”

Mary had been forty three and Agnes was only forty, perhaps a younger body would feel less pain ? Agnes had a good husband, who’d never treated her even slightly differently when she’d failed to produce any children.

“Plenty of time my dear.” He’d often said. “These things are all God’s will.”

They were farmers though and every year the work seemed to be harder. Agnes had married at fifteen, her parents had agreed the match with a family in the next village. Nearly twenty years she’d been in her marital bed and her husband had been a vigorous and attentive lover. If God intended her to have children, he was leaving it a little late.

“A son to help with the harvest.” Mary had told her. “You can ask for a son, or a daughter.”

They should have had two sons by now and a daughter to help in the house. Unless something was done, they faced destitution once they were too old to work the land.

So Agnes was on her way to The Glade, with a baby wrapped in a dirty shawl, a boy child. The travellers had so many children, dozens of them, almost an infestation of dirty brats. They probably wouldn’t even miss one. She just had to get to her destination without running into any soldiers. Cromwell’s men were still chasing Royalists out of the area.

“You might die Agnes, many have.” Mary had told her. “The spirits of The Glade can be fickle and they may take against you for no particular reason. Remember Nell !”

Nell had gone to ask for nothing more than the love of a boy she wanted to notice her. She’d made the offering and no one had ever found fault with her observance of the correct ways. Nell had

returned home screaming, the left side of her face rotting off the bone. She still lived, but never left the house again.

"Keep still child." She muttered. "I don't want to drop you."

The child was still alive and well, she could feel it kicking around inside the shawl. The boy child had looked to be less than a year old, Mary had told her the younger the better. Fancy his parents leaving him outside on a rainy night, they only had themselves to blame. Agnes had considered keeping the gypsy child, but she wanted a child that looked like her, the way Thomas looked like Mary. Besides, people asked questions about children who arrived readymade and one year old.

"Here, we're here." She mumbled.

Another few yards of sodden, clinging grass and she was on the oval, between the standing stones. No going back now, the spirits didn't take kindly to being teased. She looked up at the yews, seeming to form a cage over the entire glade. There were shadows too, the spirits, according to local folklore. None of it worried Agnes, just so long as she gained a child from the horror she was about to commit. She walked towards the largest of the standing stones and knelt as close to it as she dared, close enough to just about reach it with outstretched arms. There was a sound behind her and she turned, seeing two or three shadows beside the smaller stone.

"I come to offer a sacrifice."

They must have heard her, she felt safe to continue. She laid the sodden shawl on the ground, ignoring the infant inside it, for now. Agnes had borrowed a knife from Mary, the same one she'd used the night Thomas was conceived. It was long and sharp and Agnes ran it over the palm of her own left hand, feeling the blood begin to flow.

"I come to sacrifice." She said. "I seek a child of my own, a boy child."

"The words aren't that important." Mary had told her. "The spirits will see into your heart and know why you're there."

Agnes rubbed her bloody palm over the front of the stone, feeling it warm up. She moved back and there was a slight orange glow where her hand had been, which quickly vanished. Was that right? The problem was that there was no bible for such things, no holy man to see. It was all in the memories of the local villagers, mainly the women. It only took one wrong instruction and Agnes knew she might die, or end up like poor Nell. Perhaps Nell had done everything right and she'd been given the wrong telling of the lore? Agnes remembered seeing Nell without a scarf around her face once, she'd been able to see her teeth through the hole in her face.

Agnes trembled as she unwrapped the child from the sodden shawl. It wasn't moving, a corner of the shawl had become wrapped round its neck. It couldn't be dead, not after all she'd been through. She'd started the offering, promised a sacrifice, the damn thing had to be alive.

"Wake up you brat!"

She prodded the child's leg with the knife and it moved, she was certain of it. Its body was warm, but there hadn't been long enough for it to cool down, if it was dead. Perhaps hot blood would do as well? Agnes put her cheek against the child's and waited to hear any sign of life. The wind had picked up and the rain was drumming against the yew leaves.

"Damn, damn, damn!"

She calmed herself and carried on, there was no other choice. A little blood was needed first, so she cut the boy's arm, just above the wrist. Good, the blood was hot and still flowed freely. Agnes made sure her palm was well painted with the blood and then held it against the standing stone.

"Feel the life of the one I offer, drink his blood."

Again the stone felt hot and this time the orange glow carried on for several seconds. It had to be a good sign, the child had to still be alive. Now for the part Agnes had been dreading, but stress and agitation made it easier. She held the tiny body steady and pushed the knife up under his ribs and into the heart. Lots of blood now, the dark crimson of deep arterial blood. Agnes had helped her husband to butcher their livestock, so a pool of crimson on a child's belly didn't bother her. She dropped the blade and used both hands, getting as much of the blood onto the standing stone as she could. The dead boy was unimportant now, she pushed his body away, so that she could get closer, almost caressing the stone.

"I made my sacrifice, please grant me a child."

Still one task to do and one final use for the knife. Any of the trees near the smaller stone would do.

"They all need feeding." Mary had told her.

Just a shallow grave, barely a few inches under the leaf mould, but that was deep enough. No one dug around in The Glade, everyone knew what they were likely to find. Agnes put the knife away and hoped it had worked, though it might be a few weeks until she knew if she carried a child.

The pain in her feet was the first sign that the offering hadn't gone to according to the rules. Agnes fell backwards onto the ground, as the blackened flesh fell off her feet and ankles. The boy, the damn child must have been dead, she'd done everything right.

"Please !" She shouted. "I beg you ! Don't make me a cripple."

The necrosis moved fast, eating the flesh off her thighs. Agnes was unconscious by then, but she didn't need to worry about being left a cripple. She died long before her heart and lungs were turned to decaying, foetid tissue. It rained hard all night and by morning, the body that had once been Agnes, was just a few pieces of bone.

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~ **Now** ~

Nick Goodwood didn't like being told off, he had an almost morbid fear of being the target of anyone's anger. It made life difficult and he found it very hard to keep control of the people who worked for him. It was his late father of course, his Honour Judge Goodwood. His father had been an angry man, who'd served his time as a fairly junior judge. Every night, before he went to bed, his father had talked to him as though he was the defending barrister at a murder trial. His whole day held up for inspection, every action queried and judged. It had an effect and Nick doubted if he'd ever be comfortable with face to face confrontation. Strangely Nick had joined the army, where pointing a rifle from a distance didn't worry him at all. He did his twenty years, surviving a few fairly unpleasant postings. Nick came out of the army with the rank of Major, some savings and a decent pension to look forward to. Then, for reasons he was still unclear about, he decided to buy a small building company, which specialised in renovating listed buildings.

"Come on Henry." He said. "Finish your toast and we can begin."

"Ok, has his nibs been moaning again ?" Asked Henry.

Henry was his best man, a middle aged stone mason who was one of the best in the country.

Normally Nick liked Henry's easy going attitude, but not if it meant being threatened by Jerome Hooper.

"Difficult working with timbers this old." Said Sean. "They've often been treated with lead based preservatives."

Sean was good too, he'd even appeared on a TV show that renovated old houses. When it came to the woodwork of stately homes, they didn't come much better than Sean. His team worked at a slow and careful pace, which tended to annoy some of their clients, including Jerry Hooper.

"We need to pick up the pace." Said Nick. "Bring in some helpers for the heavy work."

"I know a couple of local builders." Said Henry. "But they've never worked on anywhere this old and delicate."

He just about understood Henry, as he munched at yet another piece of toast. They were meeting in the back area of Mrs Hargreaves' kitchen, or the Club House as Jerry Hooper called it. He'd had an hour of being told off that morning and some of it had been brutal, but accurate.

"One of your guys brought a radio in Nick !" Jerry had fumed. "The cook told me they just about live in the kitchen, it's become their fucking club house."

He was right of course, Nick found it hard to keep his people focused or even working at all some days. Jerry had said a lot more, including a promise to find another contractor if there wasn't a suite of rooms ready for his wife to use.

"Get the two guys in Henry, get them in today if you can." He said. "And Sean , I remember you had a cousin who helped us once ?"

"Declan, yes he hasn't got much on. He doesn't come cheap though."

"Clients get their panties in a bunch Nick, he'll calm down." Said Wendy.

Wendy James, the third of his team, sat in the club house. Nick suspected that Wendy was deliberately stirring up trouble, he just couldn't prove it. Wendy had joined him as an apprentice and then gone on to take a college course on interior design. She was good at her job and hadn't liked it when Jerry's wife drew up the plans for the refurbished hall.

"This won't blow over." Said Nick. "He really will give the contract to another builder if we don't finish the suite before the August holiday weekend."

"Aww crap." Said Sean. "Did you promise him that ? It's impossible."

"This is warm indoor work for next winter." Said Nick. "Do any of you fancy another winter job like the old Styles place ?"

There were no smiles now, working on a building open to the air in places, in minus seven, wasn't something any of them wanted to repeat. Their only shelter had been a draughty portacabin with no heating. There had even been an icy crust over the water in the chemical toilet.

"There's always other work." Said Henry.

The problem with Nick's hatred of confrontation was that when he couldn't keep it bottled up any longer, his temper was legendary. Rare of course, he could go for years without an eruption, but when it went... it was like Krakatoa exploding. There were no other jobs, nothing on his books at all. There had been, but he'd let them go. Glade Hall was a gravy train, capable of being spun out for years. If he lost the contract, he faced bankruptcy. Nick felt his face go from warm to red hot and his heart was racing.

"No !" He shouted. "There will be no other work, because I'll sack you all !"

They were attentive now, Henry had even stopped munching on his toast.

"You !" He said, pointing at Henry. "Will get the two guys in today and I want to hear sledgehammers hitting brick by the end of the day."

"And you !" Sean the target now. "Will get Declan in today and at standard industry rates. Today Sean, not tomorrow or next week."

Wendy next, uppity Wendy who seemed to think that working was beneath her now.

"Wendy will call and book the skips for the rubble !" He yelled. "She'll forget about her part time course in interior design and actually do some..... Fucking work !"

Nick Goodwood liked to think of himself as a model employer, he understood all about bringing the best out in people. He also knew that industrial tribunals frowned on swearing at staff. The red mist was there though, the same red mist that had earned him a commendation in the army.

"We will use 21<sup>st</sup> Century material." He raged. "Wendy can order them. We will work hard and we will finish the family suite in time for Alice Hooper and her son to use. Do I make myself clear?"

"Of course boss." Said Wendy.

He glared at Sean.

"Sure, I'll call Declan."

Sean picked up his phone and dialled, while looking at Nick the way people look at a friendly family mongrel, which has just bitten their finger off. Only Henry was still just sat there, looking at his now cold toast.

"Henry !!" Bellowed Nick.

"Yes, I'll get them here and working this afternoon."

"Good ! Good !"

Nick glared at them again and stomped out of the kitchen. He needed to get to his car and sit in it for a while, the adrenaline would wear off soon. Within the hour he'd begin to feel tired and then anxious. He might even throw up a few times.

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Tommy Milner had managed the Glade Hall farm since taking over from his father, who had taken over from his father, and so it went on. There had been a village once and there had been lots of Milners in the village, though there was no record of a Lower Worton Village in any of the parish records. There was an Upper Worton, even a Higher Worton, but just a gap on the map where Lower Worton should have been.

"Vanished," he'd once told Jerry Hooper, "as though it had never existed."

Tommy knew it had been there, he could put his finger right on the spot, on any map. His mother had told him about the village, as her mother had told her children. It passed on from generation to generation, until no one outside of his family took the legend seriously.

"It's the Oxfordshire Mary Celeste." Tommy had heard Nick Goodwood tell the young Emma Hooper one night. They'd both laughed, but Tommy knew there had been a village and his family were the sole survivors. He now had his five year plan for the farm, spread over Jerry's desk.

"Sheep." Said Tommy. "If there are no tourists wandering about, sheep are perfect."

Sheep were Tommy's minor fixation, he tried to get the Church of Enlil to create a flock and they hadn't even smiled at his joke. Oleander Hotels Group had ruled out the idea completely.

"We can't have our guests walking through miles of sheep droppings."

The Maynard family had sold Glade Hall in his father's day and his father hadn't shared his obsession with the woolly creatures. Jerry Hooper was looking at the projected numbers and so far, he hadn't laughed.

"We'd need to replace a lot of fencing." Said Jerry.

"The fence along the main road is solid." Answered Tommy. "And we could use electric fences at first. You know..... until we'd seen how the sheep worked out."

"Hmmm I like the idea of sheep wandering around and controlling the grass and weeds naturally."

There was going to be a but, the head of the college had liked the idea of sheep, but hadn't liked the idea of spending money on better fencing. There was bound to be a but on the way.

"There's the wool to sell and organic lamb still fetches a good price." Said Tommy. "Plus sheep get into places that mowers and strimmers can't."

Jerry was grinning at him in a way that told him they were going to get the sheep.

"I like enthusiasm, especially after dealing with the builders." Said Jerry. "Get your sheep, but make sure any electric fences are clearly marked. I don't fancy Emma and her friends stumbling into one." "That's great I'll contact someone about buying a small flock." Said Tommy. "I'll keep the fencing well away from the house and make sure there are lots of signs. We'll need to use mowers near any yew trees of course, they're toxic to sheep."

Tommy packed up his paperwork and his head was full of plans to buy the sheep and any extra fencing that might be needed near the road. The fences on the main Oxford road, weren't quite as good as he'd told Jerry.

"How many gardeners would James Maynard have employed, in the good old days?" Asked Jerry. "They didn't have power tools then..... hmmm about two dozen full time gardeners and a head gardener, someone very skilled."

Jerome K Hooper was unlike anyone Tommy had ever worked for before. He was spontaneous and made quick decisions. The hotel people had needed four meetings to decide on a new sign for the front gate.

"Hire one Tommy, a good head gardener. Working for you of course and then work with them to find three full time garden staff." Said Jerry. "No more farm staff doing bits round the garden, I want the gardens to look worthy of the name again."

"Difficult.....anyone local knows about the unfortunate reputation of the house. I could advertise in Oxford, but then he'd want Oxford rates."

"Did I say I wanted cheap Tommy? Pay what you need to and who said it had to be a he? There are some great women gardeners. Hire someone and get your sheep."

"Thank you, I'll get the advert in a couple of Oxford papers today."

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Emma had spent the morning exploring, taking Dean to see the famous Grotto. It was a fake cavern of course, built as something to thrill the weekend house guests of one of the Maynards. Most big houses had a folly, or a Grotto, they were the Alton Towers of the seventeen hundreds. The Glade Hall Grotto was deep and it had several side tunnels that went for some distance under the grounds. "This has to have some sort of lurid legend attached to it." Said Dean.

"Well..... you never come here at night." She answered, winking at him.

The maze of interconnecting passages and caves hadn't been maintained in over thirty years. There hadn't been many electric lamps put in and even those few had stopped working. Emma thought it added to the ambience of the place, as they coped with yet another pool of water. Bones and crystal were the themes of the Grotto, all fixed to the walls and ceilings by plaster and concrete. It might have wowed the weekend crowd in the eighteen hundreds, now it just looked a little sad. The centre piece was a rib cage, supposedly of a dinosaur, but which was really from a cow.

"They must have been easily pleased in those days." Said Dean, as he looked at his sodden trainers.

"There was the story from eighteen twenty." Said Emma. "Of the missing MP's daughter who was never found. If you're interested that is?"

"Don't tease you wicked girl, tell me....."

"Well they didn't have electric lights here then, or oil lamps." She said. "They'd fill the heads of their guests with ghoulish tales and then bring them here with just a few candles to light the caves."

He was into her story now, so she turned off her electric torch, leaving just a slight glow from the Grotto entrance.

“Darker than this,” she said, “they’d come here at midnight on moonless nights. The most nervous guests were put at the lowest levels and then a mischievous son or daughter of the house, would blow all the candles out.”

“What ? I’d be in big trouble from my mum for doing that, even at my age.” Said Dean.

“There is talk of some young ladies fainting away.” Said Emma. “Mind you, it didn’t take much to give them an attack of the vapours in those days.”

She waited, timing was everything.

“It was all fun and games until young Hermione never came out of the caves.” She said.

“You’re making it up.”

“I’m not, you’ll find it on the net. The story might not have had such a long shelf life if she hadn’t been the daughter of a prominent MP. They searched and then broadened the search, right up to the outskirts of Oxford.”

“But they never found her ?” He asked.

“Nothing, no trace was ever found of Hermione.”

Emma had her flashlight on again, when they heard a strange noise coming from the far end of the passage.

“Come on Hermione, you’re late.” Said Dean.

He stopped smiling when the steady flop, flop, flop came closer. Like someone walking through wet mud and gradually coming closer. As they both clung to each other, a large toad flopped into view and grunted at them.

“Let’s get back, lunch and then the pool.” Said Emma.

“Fine.”

They hurried on the way back, only to find that the pool was yet another item on the list of things that needed sorting out. It was full of dirty leaves and the water smelled foul. Emma decided to spend the afternoon reading more about the house, while Dean snoozed until dinner time.

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Henry should have been on his way home, he lived on the far side of Oxford and it could be a long journey, if he caught the early evening traffic. One of the casual workers he’d hired had hit an original panel with a four pound sledgehammer and he blamed himself for the damage. After seven, everyone had gone home and Henry found himself, fiddling with the panel and talking to himself.

“Not his fault.” He muttered. “I should have supervised him properly.”

The client had come to look at the progress and had seen just a partially removed breeze block wall and a pile of rubble. He’d gone away happy, unaware that a hole had been made in one of the panels from seventeen forty.

“It can be repaired.” Henry mumbled. “Everything can be repaired.”

He had a genuine concern about the listed building, but he was also there out of curiosity. After he’d sworn at young Oliver for hitting the wrong wall and then spent ten minutes apologising for his anger, Henry had noticed the panel move slightly. The builders then weren’t anywhere near as good as people think, but a large wooden panel would have been fixed securely in place. Henry thumped different places with his fist and came to a conclusion.

“Hollow, definitely hollow.” He muttered.

“What is ?”

The voice made him jump, the client’s daughter was stood in the doorway. Henry quite liked Emma, she seemed to have a genuine interest in the history of the house. He beckoned her over.

“A panel was damaged, but don’t worry, it can be repaired.” He told her.

“You said it moved.”

“It did and it sounds hollow.”

He thumped the panel and pushed it around with his fingertips. The heavy panel could clearly be seen to move about inside the hardwood frame. Not by much, but it shouldn't have moved at all.

“Is it a priest hole ?” Asked Emma.

“Priest holes tend to be found in old Tudor buildings.” He answered. “But this was the bed chamber for the lady of the house.....”

He grinned and left the rest unsaid.

“A lover's secret passage !” Said Emma. “Come on, I'll help.”

They pushed and shoved and Henry even used a discarded chisel to lever the panel. In most houses that much noise in the evening would have attracted attention. They were in a wing that was currently unoccupied though and no one heard the noise.

“I feel it loosening.” Said Emma.

“To the left and try to pull it.”

It came away and several centuries of dirt came with it. The panel was too heavy for Emma and she'd let it fall to the left of the hole where it had been. They both coughed and sneezed, while waiting for the dust to settle.

“Skulls.” Said Henry. “Oh my God, they're infant's skulls, babies !”

Emma moved back and gasped. The dust hadn't quite settled, yet there was no mistaking what he was seeing. Seven tiny skulls, set out on a line of bricks. There were other things in the hole in the wall, but the skulls made it impossible to concentrate on anything else.

“How could they ?” Said Emma. “This is horrible.”

Henry moved forward and looked properly, there was something vaguely familiar about the skulls. He'd only taken Biology up to O level and it had been many years before. The elongated upper jaw though, the two long canine teeth. He actually chuckled with relief, causing Emma to stare at him.

“Cats.” He said. “They're cat skulls.”

“I've read about cat skull altars.” Said Emma.

She seemed calmer now, though she was still sneezing and rubbing the dirt off her clothes. Henry leant into the hole and it was full of the paraphernalia of witchcraft. Various bowls and bottles with labels that had become indecipherable with time. Even a large book wedged up against the wall.

“This is all old.” He said. “Probably put here when the house was built. It may be horrible, but this sort of thing is all of historical significance.”

He placed the panel back over the hole, making sure it wasn't likely to fall on anyone.

“I'll talk to my boss tomorrow.” He said. “He'll know who we have to inform.”

“I think we should tell my dad, now !”

“Yes, of course I wasn't thinking. Go and get him.”

Henry sat in the pile of eighteenth century dust and wished he'd left the panel alone. It was likely to be his very own Pandora's Box. Whoever came to examine the witch's materials in their hiding place, was likely to want the renovation halted for a while. Nick was going to have another of his bad tempers.

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Emma had a built in clock and it woke her just after one am. They'd been leaving a lamp on in a corner of the room, it made it easier to get to the bathroom in the middle of the night. She pulled back the sheet and sat on the edge of the bed for a while, giving her brain a chance to properly wake up. Dean slept on, he was now used to her getting up at weird hours, to call her mother in New York.



She lifted the sheet and looked at Dean's naked body and remembered their early night and the long slow sex. He was good, so good that she found his sexual persona difficult to equate with the buffoon act he put on. Dean was as clever as her, probably brighter than her, but he constantly acted the fool. He'd grow up of course and she was happy with him, for now.

Emma gently ran her hand over his flat stomach and felt him move slightly. No, not until she'd had a chance to talk to her mother. She looked at his now tiny and shrivelled up penis.

"Later, I'll wake you with a kiss." She whispered.

She covered him up again and found her panties, flung over a nearby chair. Slippers next, grit from the building work was being trodden into all the rugs and carpets. Lastly a light gown, just on the slight chance that she did meet someone on the way. Not quite lastly, there was a small file of papers to talk to her mother about. There was a phone in their room, but she preferred the privacy of the phone in her father's study. Never her own iPhone of course, her allowance didn't cover huge phone bills.

Emma had to walk along three corridors and then up one short flight of stairs. There were lights though, the hotel had installed background lighting that was on all night. Into his room and she checked the chair before sitting down. She'd once sat on a hole punch, in just her panties. Not something she was keen on repeating. She picked up the phone and hit speed dial one.

"Hello darling, so nice you could call."

"Mum ! One day it won't be me calling."

"Oh, I call everyone darling."

Emma laughed, her mother probably did call everyone darling including the pizza delivery guy and the building supervisor.

"I heard you had some excitement. Witch stuff."

"Oh.... I wanted to tell you."

Of course her father would have told her, her parents chatted by Facebook and Email more than most seventeen year olds.

"Your father sent me a long email about it. He seemed a bit scared of the heritage people."

"Yes, he thinks English Heritage will lock him up if he breaks anything."

There was a silence and then she could hear her baby brother, making baby chuckle noises.

"You will come won't you Mum ? I miss you and Jerry Jr."

"Yes of course I will. They're going to put the panel back and carry on with the renovation work. I can live with a cat altar in my lounge wall, it's rather exciting."

"Mum, if that excites you.....you are going to love Glade Hall."

It was nice to hear her mother laugh. Her Dad was a nice man who tried really hard to look after her, but she was nineteen and needed her mum.

"Can you help me with something Mum ? Something in New York."

"If I can, what do you want me to do ?"

Emma had been thinking of how to ask her all day, but forgot all the rehearsed lines, now that she was on the phone.

"I think the Maynard who sold the house to Oleander Hotels, might know something about the history of the house."

"I'm sure he does Emma. But he must be dead by now, I seem to remember he wasn't a young man when he sold the house."

Emma went through her file and her scribbles about Nathaniel James Maynard, last male in the Maynard line.

“Eighty eight mum, he’s eighty eight and still alive.”

“How do you know ?”

“Our solicitors had a small query on the title deeds and contacted him. Just a tiny note on a long and boring document. Checked with Nathaniel J Maynard and dated, just before Dad completed on the purchase of Glade Hall. He’s alive Mum and he lives in New York now.”

Her mum was actually chuckling down the line.

“Nathaniel ! His parents should have been shot.”

“There was worse, one Maynard boy was called Jedediah. They obviously liked biblical names.”

“Did you try calling him Emma ?”

“I tried, but there is no listed number for the address and the solicitors didn’t have one either.”

“You called the solicitors ? Did you ask your dad first ?”

“Erm not really..... but he won’t mind, he did give me all the papers. I could copy them all and send them to you by UPS. There’s the girl who vanished and why is the chapel always locked ? And then there’s the inscription in the grave yard.....”

“Emma, slow down. I’m not telling you off, but there’s a lot of money involved with the house. You need to tell us before you call the solicitors.”

“Ok, I’m sorry.”

“Send me a list of what to ask him and his address of course. I’ll bring the information with me and we can go through all the papers you have. You know ? Make it a mum and daughter project, the sort we’ve been talking about doing since you were ten.”

“Like the pony.”

“Yes, remind me of the promise I broke when you were eight.”

“I’ll sit at Dad’s computer and do the list right away.”

“And I’ll take Jerry Jr with me and go banging on Nathaniel’s door.”

“I love you mum.”

“You too.”

After the call, Emma sat at the computer and began the email. The questions couldn’t be too vague and open ended, he was a very old man. She’d keep the questions simple and straightforward, just asking for facts about the unfortunate history of Glade Hall.

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