

Glade Hall

Chapter 13 – Battle Plans

“The body looked drained of blood and life. Emma began to understand where stories of Liches and Vampires might have originated.”

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~Then~

Eloise was as shocked as the living, by the huge changes to England, during the reign of the Tudor monarchs. She and her sisters, Maude in the middle and Rose the youngest, had been born into an England with a far smaller population. Their village had consisted of a dozen dwelling at most, probably no more than sixty people.

There was no regular or reliable census, but the population had grown from about two million in fifteen hundred, to four million in sixteen hundred. Already a good proportion of those crowded themselves into London and the south east. Not that dates really meant anything to Eloise, she just knew that her world seemed much more crowded. Queen Elizabeth 1st was just plain Queen Elizabeth then and still on the throne. The manor house near The Glade had no particular name, it was just known as The Manor, home to Edward, Earl of Oxford and his family. Edward was wealthy enough to afford books, a hundred or more of them, a library by Elizabethan standards. Most of the books seemed to be about his favourite topic, botany. Eloise loved the books, with their neatly printed words and occasional etching of herbs and plants. It had occurred to Eloise that her love of Edward's books, might have caused the current problems.

At first she'd been content to read what he had open on his desk, standing behind him for hours.

The earl was no sensitive, but he began to look nervously over his shoulder as he read.

“He's no fool, that one.” Maude had told her. “He feels you there and no good will come of it.”

Rose was going through one of her quiet phases then, they could last for years. She'd just nodded in agreement. Eloise could move objects, it just made her feel tired and drained. She began to move books around on the shelves, opening and reading the ones at the end of rows. Eventually that too wasn't good enough for her and at midnight one night, she'd attempted to move a book onto his desk. Disaster ! It had fallen from her tenuous ethereal grasp and hit the floor with a loud crashing sound. The noise brought one of the house guards and events began to escalate towards the current problems. It was a religious age, when the supernatural was not only believed in, but considered a constant threat. The next day, Edward had sat in his library, surrounded by his best advisors and the leader of his guard.

“I have felt some evil presence in here before.” He'd said. “An exorcism of some kind seems essential.”

His advisors agreed, that was their job, to agree with his ideas. Besides, it was the logical way to remove the evil presence from the manor house. His oldest and most trusted servant, was given the task of arranging the exorcism.

“Get someone from Oxford, not some local fool.”

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There was no Bishop of Oxford; the post had been vacant since the death of John Underhill. Edward had one of his friends visit John Bridges, the famous Dean of Salisbury. The Dean thought that a minor exorcism in a rural part of Oxfordshire wasn't fitting to his rank. He must have looked back on that as one of the best decisions in his life. He did recommend someone though, a famous dispeller

of demons and evil spirits. Expensive, he charged a fee equivalent to a year's wages for most. Not that Edward, Earl of Oxford was short of money. On a cold October night in the year sixteen hundred, a carriage came to a halt outside Edward's manor house. Hugh Curwen, the famous exorcists, had arrived to rid the house of anything unholy. Heavy leather bag in his right hand, he thumped on the door with his left.

"Your master is expecting me."

"Yes sir, come in. I'll tell the master that you've arrived."

Hugh strode in, swirling his cape slightly. A little theatricality was expected, his was a business with a lot of competition. A maid took his cape and gloves, blushing as he smiled at her. He enjoyed the fame and riches that being a good exorcist gained him. With reading came knowledge and that knowledge led to questions. If the clergy could speak directly to God, then maybe something else could use that same conduit? Maybe your neighbour wasn't sick, maybe he was possessed? Women were being burnt as witches and everyone thought the odd smell in their kitchen, might be brimstone from hell. Hugh was in demand and already had a considerable personal fortune. He was a little cynical about some of the nonsense he was called in for, but not every haunting or possession. He'd seen enough to know that about one in every hundred or so, was very real indeed. His current client approached him, hand out to be shaken.

"I'm so glad that you could come. Hopefully you can restore peace and tranquillity to my home."

No money changed hands, the fee was always paid after the event. Hugh felt a need to impress the client, convince them the fee was worth paying. He wasn't above using a little trickery if it was needed and his bag contained one or two such tricks. It only needed one client refusing to pay him, for his almost legendary fame to disappear like morning mist.

"The Dean said your need was great." He said. "Perhaps you could show me where the unholy occurrences have been at their worst?"

"It's all been in the library, though the kitchen staff have complained about seeing strange shadows."

Four servants formed a supportive cloud around them as they went upstairs to the library. One opened doors for them, while another two seemed to be a personal guard. The maid who'd taken his cape, hovered about, probably in case her master needed refreshments. Hugh had visited quite a few homes of the rich and powerful and most great men had their foibles. Edward led them into his library, upstairs at the rear of the house.

"In here, this is where it seems to be the worst."

"If you could point out the places please?" Asked Hugh. "And tell me exactly what happened?"

The earl put his hands on the back of a comfortable looking chair in front of a desk.

"I sit here and have definitely felt as though I was being watched. It has been going on for months and sometimes I feel a cold draught on my neck, with no windows open."

Hugh listened and nodded, already putting the visit into the category needing a little trick to gain his pay. Maybe a small amount of evil smelling smoke, as he read the final line of the exorcism ritual? His client was moving towards the bookshelves.

"I've noticed books moved and they're not light." Said the Earl. "Usually the ones at the end of rows. I know how I've left things, they were definitely moved."

More nodding, as he decided that his client was one of the great mass or worried but un-haunted.

The earl was now pointing at a spot on the tiled floor.

"There was no one in here and I'd retired for the night. One of my guards heard a crash and found a book here, on the floor."

"Which book?"

"This one, The Changing Flora of England."

Hugh picked up the book, heavy, a good six pounds in weight. Far too heavy for a domestic animal to have knocked off the shelf, or even a careless servant. For the first time, the story began to interest him.

"Did it happen again?" He asked.

"No, but when I read in here, I still feel that I'm being watched."

"Then here is where I shall carry out the exorcism."

Hugh Curwen placed his large leather bag on his client's reading desk and opened the two brass clasps that held it closed. It always gave him a thrill, watching the awed look on his client's face, as he brought out the paraphernalia for the exorcism. Silver plates and goblets, a gold crucifix, a dagger with a Latin phrase etched along its blade. A huge old hand written bible of course, one written in Arabia, it had cost him a small fortune. He had jars and bottles full of nails from the cross, pieces of bone from the saints and a shrivelled eyeball of John of Patmos. It was all junk of course, to convince the gullible and the earl wasn't gullible or uneducated. He left the jars and bottles in his bag.

"There may be some risk to those who remain in this room." He said.

No one left, they rarely did. Someone's wife had decided to leave the room once. The clients wanted to see if they were getting value for money and the servants had no real option. Hugh opened his ancient bible to a section with hand drawn pictures of demons. The writing was in a version of Arabic that few still spoke but he'd learned the ritual by heart.

"A ritual written by King Solomon himself." He said. "It has never failed me."

The book wasn't junk, it was the genuine article. He had never believed the seller, that it was the famous Clavicule of Solomon, but several of the rituals had real power. The ritual he was about to read had worked well on a few of the cases that had turned out not to be the result of too much anxiety and not enough common sense. Hugh had a wound on his upper leg, far too close to his manhood. It had been put there as a parting gift, by a particularly unpleasant demon. Hugh spoke the first line of the ritual.

"I exorcise thee, every unclean spirit, in the name of God the Father Almighty."

A cold breeze hit his neck and the others felt it too. The earl crossed himself and began to quietly mumble the Lord's Prayer. Hugh removed two silver candle sticks from his bag and lit the candles. They'd been blessed by Saint Judith herself, or so the merchant from Rome had told him. Hugh had used them before and just lighting them gave him courage.

".....and in the power of the Holy Spirit, that thou depart from this creature of God, Edward, Earl of Oxford which our Lord hath designed to call unto His holy temple."

One of the large heavy and freestanding bookcases appeared to be thrown against a nearby wall. It and the books it contained must have weighed as much as three or four grown men, yet it had been sent hurtling across the room. The maid gave the beginning of a scream and clasped her hand to her mouth. Edward, Earl of Oxford, looked startled, but not terrified. His guards simply stood there, trying to give the impression that they'd been through far worse.

"We should continue." Said Hugh. "Or the unholy ones will only grow in their evil and contempt for our Lord God."

"Carry on." Said Edward.

Hugh had forgotten the next line, that happened sometimes. Not that the client would realise. He turned to the front of the bible, where he'd inserted the Christian version of the exorcism ritual. It was probably the banned catholic version, but Hugh just needed something to say.

“.....that it may be made the temple of the living God, and that the Holy Spirit may dwell therein. Through the same Christ our Lord, who shall come to judge the living and the dead, and the world by fire !”

He put emphasis on the word fire and something reacted to his words. The earl drew his sword, as did his guards. The three figures with hideously burned faces, had appeared to walk through the solid stone outer wall of the house. In truth, Hugh had faced very few genuine demons, just one actually. There had been one or two wailing noises after his exorcisms had been completed and a rather foul smell once. The only real demon he'd ever beaten, had nearly removed his manhood. That tussle with evil had lasted for over twelve hours and had left him broken and bloody. Now he was up against three truly hideous creatures.

“In odorem suavitatis. Tu autem effugare, diabole; appropinquabit enim iudicium Dei.” He yelled. He saw the tallest of the figures wince at his words, but that seemed to be the total effect of his words. She spoke to him, the first time he'd ever heard English from something unholy. It was a woman, of that he was certain. Flames had left little of her face, but her body beneath the burned rags she wore, was that of a woman.

“You like fire man of God ?” She asked. “I can give you fire !”

The maid was now fingering her rosary and mumbling, while Edward looked ready to battle the phantoms with sword and shield. Hugh had always promised himself and his wife that he'd know when he was outmatched.

“If I ever meet an entity with real power.” He'd told her. “I'll withdraw from the exorcism. I give you my oath.”

Hugh was strangely calm as he put his bible back in his bag and reached for the candles. He was going to run away, it was the only way to survive. No more Latin verses, they would just annoy the witches. He was certain that was what he faced, three genuine and extremely powerful witches. The taller one had a growing ball of flame in her right hand and he didn't want to be around when it had finished building.

“What do we do now ?” Asked Edward, Earl of Oxford.

Hugh ignored him while he patted out the candles and put them in his bag. When he'd finished and had the brass clasps closed, he picked up his heavy bag of precious objects.

“Run you fools !” He shouted. “You can't fight them with steel swords.”

For some reason he grabbed the maid's hand, dragging her with him. He ran out of the library, just as the witch released her fireball.

“Don't look back.” He told her. “Run ! We must run for our lives.”

Hugh had seen the earl, covered from head to foot in fire, which seemed to hug his body like a living thing. That image stung his mind, as he dragged the maid along the corridor. She seemed unwilling to move, holding him back.

“Move !” He shouted. “Or I'll leave you for the witches and their flames.”

The threat made her run. The unnatural fire appeared to be chasing them, scorching their backs and singeing their hair. Hugh didn't hesitate or falter, as he dragged the girl down two flights of stairs and towards the front door. It had been bolted, three different night time bolts.

“Damn ! Help me girl or neither of us will see another morning !”

“No ! You'll jam it doing that.” She replied.

It was a house she knew far better than him. Hugh stood back and let her deal with the bolts and a lever lock that he hadn't even noticed. There was no hurrying what she had to do, yet the fire was

gradually catching up with them. Flames were moving along the ceiling, like tongues of fire, eager to taste their flesh.

"That's it !" She said.

He pulled at the handles and the heavy door moved towards them. As soon as the gap was big enough, he grabbed the maid and pushed her through.

"Run ! Keep going until you reach my carriage."

Hugh needed a bit more space than her and the flames seemed intent on having at least one of them to engulf. She was now walking through the flames, her, the tallest witch.

"I thought you liked flames !?" She shouted.

He had no reply for her, he was terrified ! Hugh pulled the door so hard, that he felt something twist in his shoulder. He winced with the pain, but didn't stop pulling. The flames were upon him and her voice, cackling and taunting.

"Your God seems to have forgotten you."

Pain as fire took the skin off the back of his hands and arms, burning his hair and igniting his jacket. The gap in the door was big enough, he ran through, by now a human candle, lighting his own path. He ran, not wanting to give up and die near that cursed place. He didn't die though, his jacket dropped away from his back and his hair stopped burning.

"Blessed rain !" He said.

Maybe his God hadn't deserted him ? The torrential rain fell out of what had been a clear sky. It extinguished his burning clothes and soothed the agony in his hands and arms. By some miracle his hand still held his leather bag, which smouldered but still seemed intact. Of his carriage there was no trace and he found the girl waiting by the main road to Oxford. She jumped up as he approached and seemed ready to run from him.

"It's me." He called. "Though I barely escaped with my life. The rain saved me."

"You poor man, I barely recognised you."

She fussed over him, prodding at burns that he'd rather were left alone. It was her turn to encourage him to keep moving.

"There's nothing left for me here." She said. "My village isn't far and someone will have balm for your burns."

Hugh Curwen followed her, knowing that his career as an infallible exorcist, was well and truly over. Behind them, the fire had already turned the manor house into a pile of burning timbers and blackened stones.

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~Now~

Emma had quite a lot of information in her head that seemed almost alien to her. Cleanliness mattered, she was certain of it. The unholy phantoms of Glade Hall were unclean creatures, she'd even seen that mentioned in the information Ginie had sent her. If evil liked the unclean ? Then she'd fight it with cleaning the house and its occupants, whether they liked it or not. Besides, it would give them a task and keep them from brooding all day. Not Mel of course, she'd been allowed to sit in the garden and read, while the rest of them scrubbed, dusted and nearly killed Alex's elderly Dyson cleaner. Once the house was gleaming and smelling of bleach, it was their turn.

"Now we must all shower and remove every trace of dirt from our bodies." She'd told them. "Even Mel isn't exempt from this one."

Mel had cheered up since the previous night and seemed pleased at having some part in Emma's plans. Emma undressed and helped her into the shower, pointing the water at places Mel was

unable to reach. It cleaned them both and bonded them in a way that little else could have. There was something powerful and primeval about mutual grooming.

"About last night." Said Mel. "I didn't mean....."

"We both said things we didn't mean." Said Emma. "It's stress and anxiety talking. I almost hit Dean this morning, over a tube of toothpaste. Here, let me rinse your hair."

She was used to Mel's damaged body now and her scars. Emma ran the water over her hair, stroking out the last drops of lather from the shampoo.

"Did he squeeze it from the middle or something?" Asked Mel.

"Oh, you'll think me so crazy."

"Tell me?"

"I didn't know you could buy tubes anymore. I thought it was all pump dispensers now. Dean bought the things for our long weekend and he found a huge tube of toothpaste to buy."

"And that annoyed you? He sounds a keeper to me."

"Oh he is, but I hated him and that awful plastic tube. We'd used a bit by this morning and the thing refused to stay folded up. It kept fucking straightening itself!"

Mel was laughing and she was laughing at herself.

"You may laugh, but this morning I hated him and that tube of toothpaste. For a fraction of a second I'd have gone fully Lizzie Borden on him and that tube."

Mel began to half sing the folk rhyme;

"Lizzie Borden took an axe
And gave her mother forty whacks.
When she saw what she had done,
She gave her father forty-one."

"So you know it?! My mum told me, she was brought up on that kind of thing in Massachusetts. There were stories about Lizzie being possessed by something. Anyway I now love Dean again, but for a fraction of a second....."

"Sorry Emma, I didn't give you enough support last night." Said Mel. "Tonight will be different, I promise."

She helped Mel to dress and then went back to her own space in the converted attic. Dean was finishing his grooming and looked good enough to eat. Emma controlled her urge for a little pre-seance sex. If evil really could latch onto the smallest speck or dirt, it probably thought freshly ejaculated semen meant Christmas had come early.

"I know a guy who can get us a gun." Said Dean.

"Crap Dean, talk about random. Where did that come from?"

"Your father said Tommy was firing a shotgun at them. I know Tommy was mad, but....."

"Tommy isn't mad!" She shouted.

"Sorry. I just thought that if we got a gun each and had a priest bless the bullets. It might at least sting them a bit."

She found herself nodding at him.

"It might, but it's not a solution to destroying them. Twenty first century weapons are no use against this enemy. We face an ancient enemy and only ancient weapons will remove them from The Glade."

"Such as?"

"I have no idea, which is why I'm hoping Lydia Maynard can tell us."

Emma changed her own clothes and put on the top that showed least of her cleavage. Lydia was from an age when women were chaste and modest. She might now be a homicidal monster, but there was no need to antagonise her for no reason.

"Ready?" She asked. "We can pick up Mel on the way."

"Oh, are we friends with her again?"

"Yes, we are very much friends again."

It was all much easier when she was friendly and cooperative. Dean fetched her electric wheelchair and they both helped her sit in.

"I'm not sure if I can reach the Ouija board in this." Said Mel.

"I don't think we'll need the board for long, not tonight." Answered Emma.

Alex was already in the dining room, with the Ouija board set up on the table. That too had been cleaned, the lacquered wood and pointer polished. Everything Emma looked at, glinted and shone from being thoroughly cleaned.

"Leonard is cutting a few fresh flowers." Said Alex. "From the garden."

It was as though they were expecting a visit from a favourite aunt, rather than an evil entity who'd been dead for hundreds of years. They waited for Leonard to return with the flowers and arrange them into a vase on the table.

"Best not leave it there." Said Emma. "Flying glass can be lethal.... If it goes wrong."

Leonard moved the vase to another part of the room. Anyway, Emma didn't think that Lydia sounded the sort to be into flowers.

"Are we all ready?"

"Yes."

All together and all looking keen to begin.

"Are you there Hermione?" She asked.

They weren't even sat close enough to touch the pointer on the Ouija board, yet it instantly flew to the sun design, yes.

"We know you now Hermione, no need for the board." Said Emma. "Please join us."

Once again the seventeen year old in her best party dress was with them. This time she stood to one side, quite close to Emma.

"Lydia has agreed to come." She said.

"Now?" Asked Alex.

"Yes, right now. She arrives this very moment."

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Tommy Milner was sat on his bunk in HM Prison Bullingdon. The building was fairly new, built in the mid nineteen nineties. The prison had the dubious reputation of being the most overcrowded in the country. Luckily he only had one other person in his cell and he had barely said two words. There was a smell though, a pervasive smell, a mix of too many unwashed bodies and an odour that reminded him of school dinners. Tommy wasn't an expert on things like circuit judges and he'd largely missed the media coverage of events on the Glade Hall estate.

"Your case has gained some notoriety." His solicitor had told him.

She was fairly young, a solicitor provided for him at the original arrest. Her eyes grew a little brighter when she talked about the stories that had now reached the TV news. He was a stepping stone for her, almost guaranteed to bring her a little fame and bring in new clients.

"I think they'll transfer your case to the London Courts, the Old Bailey."

She looked like a child opening her Christmas presents. To Tommy it could well mean spending the rest of his life in prison. She'd already told him that a plea of insanity was unlikely to succeed.

"The public don't like criminals in cushy hospitals." She'd told him. "Insanity pleas are now rarely accepted."

"You're forgetting one thing." He'd told her. "I never actually killed anyone. Not even the sheep."

She didn't believe it; he could see it in her eyes. The whole country would be reading about his case and seeing it mentioned as the 'eccentric and strange' item at the end of the TV news. He'd resigned himself to his fifteen minutes of fame, being in the Old Bailey. He'd be convicted of course and spend the rest of his life in a prison far worse than HM Prison Bullingdon. So Tommy was staring at the wall in front of him and brooding, when Eloise paid him a visit.

"You always used to do as you were told."

It didn't even make him jump, as the burnt and twisted body appeared in his cell. He'd seen far worse over his years working at Glade Hall. Some of the shadow creatures only had half of their head left, some had arms shredded by stone weapons. The evil attracted to The Glade, covered all of history and Eloise was far being the most hideous. She moved closer, hissing at him and whispering to him.

"I could still save you." She hissed. "Leave evidence elsewhere, implicate outsiders."

Outsiders was her word for anyone not born within about five miles of The Glade. It was strange that she and her sisters had coped with all the changes brought by the centuries since their deaths, yet still had an almost childish distrust of strangers.

"What would you have me do?" He asked.

She had her face no more than six inches in front of his. The dead witch was actually trying to smile, but her burnt skin wouldn't let her. Her eyes had lost their almost perpetual look of hatred and her mouth was just about managing a half smile. Eloise thought she had won.

"Do you know where Emma Hooper might have gone?"

"How would I know? I've been locked up in here for days."

She didn't like that, a long and sharp finger nail was run down his cheek. Tommy felt a few drops of blood run down his cheek. He was going to be more careful with his attitude. A life in prison was bad enough, without being hideously disfigured too.

"Seriously." He said. "I've always helped you..... But I have no idea where she might be."

"She's gone." Screeched the witch. "Hermione won't help me anymore and Lydia has gone too. She has a way of hiding herself from me.....The bitch is up to something."

"You mean Lydia?"

"No fool, her, Emma Hooper..... That trouble maker, that damned GIRL !!"

Tommy had no idea of the proper name of his cellmate, the warders just called him Spike. He doubted if Spike would be able to see his ethereal visitor, but he'd obviously heard her. Spike rolled over and fixed him with a steely glare.

"Stop talking to yourself freak! Wake me up again and I'll shove your fucking face into the wall. Got it?"

"Sure Spike. I don't want any trouble."

"Fucking weirdo. They should have put you in a loony bin."

Spike swore at him a few more times, to make sure that Tommy understood about the hardness of the brick wall and what it would do to the soft bits of his face. Then his cellmate rolled over and went back to sleep. Tommy went back to his brooding, as Eloise seemed to have left his cell. Fifteen minutes later she was back, whispering into his ear.

“You must have an idea where she is.” She said. “She talks to you, must have mentioned friends she might be visiting. Think Tommy ! I can still save you from this. Where is she ?”

Sometimes memories rise up, almost unbidden. Tommy remembered Dean joking about nowhere in the world being more depressing than Broadstairs. A passing joke about the home of Alex Godfrey, the TV producer. He almost told Eloise, but decided not to. For most of his life he’d kidded himself about what he gained by helping the spirits of The Glade. In reality he gained nothing, only being slightly immune from being a victim in their constant squabbles among each other. To hell with it, he actually felt safer in jail.

“Sorry. I have no idea where she might be.”

“Then you’re of no further use to me.” She hissed. “Care to think again ?”

Tommy wasn’t brave, noble or possessed of much integrity. Yet he’d had enough of being a pawn of the unholy creatures that seemed drawn to The Glade. Perhaps being torn apart by Eloise was better than life in prison ? It had to be quick though.

“Eloise ! Go fuck yourself and your sisters !” He yelled.

Tommy expected death, but it wasn’t to be his. Eloise left him and dragged the sleeping Spike out of his bunk. Spike was a large man, no one dared to call him fat. Muscular too, a good two hundred and fifty pounds of hate and aggression. Eloise threw him against the wall as though he was rag doll, both her hands around his neck. Spike screamed a few times, the warders would come to investigate, eventually.

“This one is for you Tommy.” Yelled Eloise. “Now you will spend what’s left of your life in a cell.”

He didn’t look away in time, seeing the first time she rammed Spike’s head into the wall. No attempt to stop his screams or the noise of bone slamming into brick. There was only the two of them in a locked cell, of course they’d add a second murder to his list of crimes. Now it would be a maximum security lockup, probably solitary confinement until his trial. No one, not even Emma, would believe he was an innocent man. Eloise kept going until Spike was dead and his face unrecognisable. She then left without saying another word.

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Emma’s first impression of Lydia was hair, long streaming hair that covered most of her face and appeared to be moved around by an unseen wind. Yes, the room temperature dropped by a good ten degrees, but Emma always remembered that hair.

“You are very welcome here Lydia.” She said.

The dead wife of James Maynard ignored her and didn’t attempt to hide her dislike for them. She hovered an inch or two off the floor, like an angry humming bird. Her clothing had once been elegant and expensive, but now hung off her like rags. Could time destroy the clothing of the dead ? That and many other strange questions filled Emma’s head.

“I came but I’m of no use to you. James is far too powerful for me to ever harm. If I could destroy him, I’d have done it for myself, years ago.”

The voice had the same echo quality that Hermione’s voice had. There weren’t the cut-glass vowels though. Lydia had a definite rural twang to her words. Out of the corner of her eye, Emma noticed the freshly cut vase of flowers. They were nothing now, but blackened stalks.

“We need a way to destroy them all.” Said Emma. “I will do it, if you know a way ?”

“I’ll help her.” Added Mel.

Lydia laughed at them, but not in an unkind way.

“Kill James ! Even your God himself might find that difficult.”

She moved close to the table and Hermione gave a gasp. Emma felt the whole room become tense, but Lydia just pointed a long thin finger at Mel.

"She has felt what James can do, when he was just being playful. You can never destroy him or the spirits who inhabit..... that place."

"Can we at least hurt them ?" Asked Alex. "Perhaps drive them away for a few hundred years."

"And me of course !" Yelled Lydia. "I am one of those who you wish to destroy."

Lydia became darker, the features of her face hidden by a veil of shadow.

"You will know I'm coming." Said Emma. "There must be other places you can go."

"Perhaps, though there are less such places than there once were. I might know something, but what do I get out of it ? I am the one who will need to find a new home."

The phantom actually touched the ceiling with her hair as she hovered and a dark patch formed. It looked like mould, but Emma had other things on her mind.

"You will be free of the man who killed two of your children." Said Emma. "Surely that is reason enough to help me ?"

"Help us !" Said Dean. "We're all involved in this."

"Yes. We are." Added Leonard.

Something was happening to the edge of the table nearest to their ghostly guest. It was cracking, as if several hundred years of ageing was being condensed into a few seconds. Emma began to wonder if it had been a good idea, to invite such darkness into Alex and Leonard's home.

"I can't guarantee you'll survive the effect, but destroying the altar in the basement would destroy the weaker shadows and severely weaken James. He might even lose the ability to become corporeal..... But I can't guarantee that."

"Is the altar that important ?" Asked Emma.

"Oh yes, it's the conduit to the other place, the place where his power comes from. It is a place we all fear, yet need the connection to maintain our existence."

"How ?" Asked Dean. "How do we destroy it."

"I've seen enough of your time to know that destruction is everywhere. Surely you can obtain a weapon to do it ?"

"I know someone." Said Alex. "An ex-special forces guy. Bit of a gun nut, used to give us info on munitions for a film I was once involved with. He'll be able to get something."

"You're sure ?" Asked Emma.

"Yeah, he turned up on set with an M72 Laws rocket once. We'll need money though."

"I can get money." She replied.

Lydia was beginning to fade, as though being in the house was tiring her. The carpet below her was now blackened in a circle around her. Emma felt tired too, as though the presence of such darkness, was draining her too.

"I recommend you use fire as a diversion." Said Lydia. "It doesn't kill them, but it hurts them. They live in the fabric of the house, returning to it if in danger. It is there home and their shield. Destroy the house Emma and the altar."

Lydia was gone and the room was instantly warmer. The damage remained though, the unnatural decay near to where she'd been. Hermione was still there, standing beside Emma.

"Looks like I'm destroying Glade Hall after all Mel."

Emma put her hand on Mel's and it was cold, colder than room temperature.

"No ! Not Mel !"

She was on her knees in front of Mel's chair, wishing that there was something she could do. Mel's eyes were open but lifeless, her skin the colours of white marble. Her arm was still supple, but she looked like someone who'd been dead for quite a time.

"I was afraid something like this would happen." Said Hermione.

"Lydia did..... This ?!" Snapped Emma.

"I'm sure it wasn't intentional Emma. It's just what she is, what she's become. You must never invite her into your homes again."

Hermione faded away. Emma wanted to cry for Mel, but couldn't. She was too angry for tears, too intent on destroying Glade Hall and the creatures who used its walls as their home.

"Oh Mell, I'm so sorry." She muttered.

Alex could easily have blamed her, said that he'd warned her. Instead she felt his arm round her shoulders.

"We have a way now Emma." He said. "A real and fairly good chance to do them some serious damage. Maybe even destroy a few of them for good."

They were all looking at Mel's body, their friend who'd been alive that morning. It felt unreal, couldn't have happened. Yet it had ! The body looked drained of blood and life. Emma began to understand where stories of Liches and Vampires might have originated. They were enlightened twenty first century people, yet Emma felt stunned by Mel's death. She could imagine what finding such a body would do to a medieval village.

"I'm not even sure if she had any people we need to call." Said Leonard.

"The police will take care of that." Said Alex.

Emma instantly pictured more items on the TV news, more lurid stories in the local papers. Her parents would go crazy.

"Do we need to involve the police ?" She asked.

"Look at her Emma." Said Alex. "It hardly looks like a natural death. If we just call an ambulance, they will inform the police."

"And then they might haul us all off to the local cop shop." Said Dean.

"Fine, Fine. I get it, we call the police." She said. "But we need to agree a plausible story before they arrive."

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