

Glade Hall

Chapter 11 – Murderer !

“There weren’t many local traditions these days, but not speaking ill of the dead was hanging on in there.”

Σ

~Now~

Emma borrowed her dad’s car and drove to the hospital in Oxford. The John Radcliffe was a major teaching hospital, the largest in the county. Sean was in good hands and seemed likely to be allowed home fairly quickly. He just didn’t want to see her though and that hurt.

“You don’t want to come all this way Emma. Besides, my relatives are always here.”

He’d told her over the phone and made several other excuses. Emma had decided to simply turn up, he could hardly throw her out. She needed to talk to him about recent events at Glade Hall, mainly the arrest of Tommy for murdering Lysette Anders.

“Yes, he’s in Level 0 West Wing. The nurse’s station there can show you where he is.”

Emma thanked the receptionist and examined the map on the wall. Why did they make public buildings so confusing ? She took a picture of the map on her phone and left it open, the hospital was a maze. A wrong turn led her to oncology and it took her half an hour to find the right place. Two nurses were sat behind what looked like an office reception desk. One of them pointed down the hallway, it appeared Sean had his own room.

“Does he get lots of visitors ?” She asked.

“You’re only the Second.” Answered the nurse. “I was quite worried about him, he seems such a nice man.”

So, all the nonsense about his family filling the place was exactly that, nonsense. The nurse seemed mildly smitten, Sean had that effect. He had those twinkling Irish eyes and they crinkled up when he smiled. She too was slightly smitten by Sean, which was why she’d come on her own. Emma had no intention of being another notch on his bedpost, but there was nothing wrong with a little harmless flirtation. It might actually do Sean some good.

He was asleep when she found his room, which didn’t surprise her. From her own experiences, she knew that hospitals at night were about as quiet as a steel foundry. Most patients tended to catch up on their sleep during the relative quiet of the day. Sheila had made up a gorgeous bunch of flowers and given her a plastic flower pot to hold them. She filled the pot from his water jug and placed it on his bedside cabinet. Sean woke up and looked at her as though he’d seen a ghost.

“What have I done Sean ?”

“You shouldn’t be here, it’s not right.”

He could talk well, for someone who’d just had reconstructive surgery on the left side of his face. She pulled a chair up and sat by his bed, dropping the obligatory bag of grapes onto his blankets.

“Why isn’t it right ? Talk to me Sean !”

“Our ages Emma ! People will talk and I can do without that.”

“Bullshit ! I’ve seen my dad’s friends checking out my arse. I want the real reason Sean. I thought we were friends.”

Emma hadn’t intended to cry or wanted to, the tears just came. She’d lost a friend in Tommy, who the police had carted off in the early hours of the morning, after her parents had found Lysette

nailed to the chapel floor. Now it looked like she was losing Sean too. Sean grabbed her hand, holding it tight.

"Stop that !" He said. "We are friends, it's just impossible for me to work at Glade Hall again." There were no tissues, so she used a corner of his hospital blanket to dry her eyes. It smelt of the detergent that only hospitals seemed to use. The left side of Sean's face was still bandaged, from where they'd had to rebuild part of his eye socket. The woman who'd used her nails on him, had been close to leaving him blind in one eye.

"Why Sean ? Tell me why and no more crap."

"I can't Emma. To be honest I'm scared shitless..... after this happened."

His one good eye was looking straight at her; he wasn't joking or telling lies. They'd had a family meeting after the police had carted off poor Tommy, her father has insisted on a vote. Her mother understandably had wanted to pack up and leave, to keep Jerry Jr safe. Her father had voted to stay. "Alice be reasonable." He'd said. "They found blood stained tools and a knife in his barn. We don't need to leave now, the police have caught the maniac, it was Tommy Milner."

Never a wise move to ask her mother to be reasonable, it made her dig her heels in. Emma was left with the casting vote and she'd voted to remain at Glade Hall.

"Sean, I promise not to repeat anything you say to anyone. I cast a family vote to remain at Glade Hall. Did I do the wrong thing ?" She asked.

"You need to tell your parents to leave Emma. You'll soon be back at college, but they'll be stuck there. There is real evil in that place and I'm not going back, ever."

"But Tommy killed Lysette and the sheep." She said. "The police found all sorts of evidence and bloodstained clothing."

"I've seen it all on TV and it seems to be all the nurses ever talk about. You knew Tommy, he'd never hurt a living soul and he'd never kill those sheep. They were like family to him. And don't forget Wendy's car crash and Oliver's infected face..... None of it was natural !"

"You're beginning to sound like our cook. If it rains twice in a day, it isn't natural."

"Don't you dare patronise me young lady ! You didn't see what I saw."

"Then tell me ?!"

She actually felt the same way about Tommy. Fuck the evidence, he'd never have killed anyone and the sheep were his furry children. As to leaving Glade Hall ? Curiosity was holding her there, the mystery of what was really going on.

"You promise to keep it secret ?" Asked Sean.

Emma crossed herself in a very dramatic fashion.

"I swear, never to tell a living soul."

"Oh, living soul. That means nothing at Glade Hall. I thought Natalie was alive when I first saw her."

"Who's Natalie ?"

"I might as well tell it all. Here, help me get comfortable. Push a pillow behind me."

Emma helped Sean to sit up and poured him a plastic glass full of water.

"She was wearing robes, looked for all the world like a monk." He said. "There was a name badge with Natalie written on it. She talked and moved about, like any real living thing, but her head was in the wrong place."

Emma couldn't help letting out a small giggle. Sean didn't seem annoyed, his one good eye smiled back at her.

"Now you can see why I let everyone think a scorned girlfriend used her claws on me. If I told most people the truth, I'd be locked up and on heavy sedation. It happened though, her neck was broken

and her head was perched on her shoulders at a weird angle. Her skin had patches of green on it, though I didn't notice that until she was trying to blind me. There was a smell too, Natalie smelt like something that needed burying."

"Why did she attack you ? Did she say ?" She asked.

"Oh yes, she told me to leave you alone. It was all about you ! I had to stop helping you and then it all became about not trying to..... have sex with you."

"Crap Sean, you should have told me."

"And get the other eye clawed ? I'm not easily scared, but Natalie scared me. I'm not even sure what she was. Some sort of dead thing that walks through the corridors of your home. You need to get your family out of there !"

"Doors were left open then." She said. "It might have been a crazy person with some kind of physical deformity."

Sean laughed at her, even though it obviously hurt his face and caused him to wince.

"If you'd seen her and felt her strength."

"Crazy people can be very strong."

"Crazy people don't vanish in a puff of dust."

"Did she do that ?" She asked.

He drank some water before continuing. Anyone else and she'd be taking it all with a pinch of salt but she trusted Sean, he wasn't the sort to make up fantasies.

"She suddenly stopped clawing me and just stood next to the car door. The bitch smiled at me, as though proud of what she'd done. She gave me a final warning not to talk to you, not to help you and not to fuck you. She knows you Emma, stay at Glade Hall and something bad will happen to you."

"How did she vanish Sean ?"

"One moment she was there, grinning at me and the next, she sort of exploded into a cloud of dust. It was glittering in the car park lights for a while and then that too vanished. You can see why I told the police that an ex-girlfriend decided to attack me."

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Oliver had no family, but Dan Freeman still waited for a while, before clearing the crap out of his room. He imagined how he'd feel, if a landlord was boxing up the belongings of a loved one, before his body had gone cold. Only Oliver didn't seem to have loved one's or anyone who gave a crap about him. Dan had even asked his regulars at the Copper Kettle, after banging on the bar to get their attention.

"Does anyone know a relative of Oliver's ?" He'd asked.

Lots of blank looks, not even any smart arse remarks, now that Oliver had died of the lurgy. There weren't many local traditions these days, but not speaking ill of the dead was hanging on in there.

"I'll box his stuff up." He'd said. "I'll put it in store, if anyone asks about it."

Dan had a dozen proper moving boxes delivered, there was even a panel to write the contents of each box. He'd left June to run the bar, she wasn't keen on going through Oliver's things anyway.

"Wear gloves and bleach your hands afterwards." She'd told him.

Given her way, they'd have burned the contents of the room and washed it down with caustic soda. That wasn't right though, the room had been Oliver's home for years and his possessions deserved treating with respect.

"Maybe not these." He chuckled.

Oliver had told him that some of his old Playboy Magazines were quite rare and worth a bit of money. Dan put them in the bottom of a box and added them to the list of contents.

'Playboys – various dates.'

His ex-tenant had been a connoisseur of pornography, or so Oliver had liked to put it. Under the bed was a huge and grubby collection of many infamous top shelf titles. Dan wasn't boxing all that crap up, so it went straight into two large bin bags. Some of the guys in the bar would like the old Maxims of FHMs, but June would kill him for even handling them. Dan couldn't resist opening one at the centrefold.

"I prefer my June any day." He muttered.

As he tied up the bags, he thought he heard a sound from near Oliver's bed. He prayed it wasn't rats, they'd already been through that scare with Oliver. He'd finally seen the wisdom of removing old fast containers from his room, after a rat tried to nest in his wardrobe. Dan kicked the bedside cabinet and nothing ran out.

"How could you live like this Oliver?"

The bedding went into another two large bags, all of it. He stripped the bed by rolling the sheets up; keeping his gaze averted from whatever human bodily fluids might be on them. The smell was enough to make him begin to cough and wheeze. Oliver had actually asked June to do his laundry once and she'd told him to piss off and use a launderette in Oxford. Oliver probably hadn't changed his bed in years. Another sound as Dan boxed up the contents of the bedside cabinet. It sounded like a woman laughing, but very quietly. Dan looked at the empty room and decided it was all his own over active imagination.

"Crap ! I bet these are out of date."

Condoms, several boxes, all unopened. Dan had intended to be thorough, itemising everything in each box. He looked at the mess in the first drawer and simply emptied it into a box. The next three drawers of assorted junk followed.

'Contents – bedside cabinet.' He wrote on the box.

That would do ! No one would want the boxes and Dan had already decided to keep it all in the cellar for a year and then get a skip in to take it all away. He was only keeping it stored, because it seemed the right thing to do. More laughter, from near the wardrobe. Dan opened it, having no idea what he expected to find. It was full of work clothes, some hung back up without being washed.

Again, the smell made him cough.

"He was a shit ! Deserved to die !"

The voice was right behind him, but as he spun around, no one was there. It was an odd voice, very faint and barely audible. Dan thought he was probably hearing the wind over the roof and his mind was playing tricks on him.

"I'll bring June with me next time." He mumbled.

The contents of the wardrobe were almost entirely grubby and stained. There was one set of obvious night out clothes on a separate hanger. A shirt and jacket that looked straight out of a seventies clothing catalogue and a pair of fairly decent jeans. Everything really needed throwing out, but Dan put it all in a box, lovingly folding it up.

'Wardrobe – contents.'

Not quite all the contents, at least a dozen pairs of worn out trainers were piled up on the wardrobe floor. As Dan bent to pick them up, he felt something touch his arm.

"Burn it all ! He was a total bastard ! Killed his own mother !"

"No he didn't, she died of canc....."

Dan thought he really was going crazy. He walked to the door and looked over the entire room. There was nowhere for anyone to hide and apart from being filthy, the room looked harmless. No arms coming out of the bed, no ghostly apparitions. There wasn't even a mark on his arm, where he'd felt something touch him. He refused to run away from his own lunacy. Dan went back and put all the trainers into a bin bag and then put the bag in the box.

'Trainers – Assorted Makes.'

The awful thing was that many of the locals did think Oliver was responsible for his mother dying in misery. He hadn't killed her of course, he hadn't given her the cancer. There had been serious neglect though and a lot of needless suffering. His mind had obviously been churning over recent events and..... Dan didn't like to even think about hearing voices in his head, that was serious stuff. "I'll bring June next time." He mumbled, again.

There was still a lot to box up, but it could wait. Dan still locked the door for some reason, even though only he and June could get to that part of the building. There was nothing worth stealing either, but he still turned to put the key in the lock.

"Jesus !"

For a split second, through the gap in the door, he saw the suggestion of a woman's face. She was smiling at him, actually smiling ! Dan wasn't good at personal confrontation, but he was no coward. He opened the door wide and there was nothing there. He definitely wasn't coming back alone, his mind was obviously playing up. He locked the door and went back downstairs.

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Emma was tempted to take Jerry Jr with her to see Alex Godfrey, but turning up with a noisy three year old might seem impolite. Her mother hadn't calmed down much since discovering a body in the chapel and who could blame her. She still wanted to leave Glade Hall and Emma felt guilty about voting against her. Family votes ! What a daft way to settle anything.

"He was awake at dawn." Said her mum. "Knew you were going away for the weekend and insisted on seeing you off."

It wasn't that long after dawn and Emma was making an early start on a beautiful Saturday morning. It was the bank holiday weekend and traffic was predicted to reach Armageddon levels by the afternoon. Her little brother ran into her arms and hugged her as though she was going to the moon. "Love Emma !" He muttered.

"Love you too. I'll bring back heaps of sweets."

He grinned at her, anything sweet was the way to his heart. Emma put him down and once again went through a mental checklist. It wasn't that long, there was only her and Dean and they only needed clothes for the long weekend.

"Call if you need anything." Said her dad.

"I will."

She'd inherited it from her mother, that feeling that something had been forgotten. Alice had once made them unpack half a dozen cases, only to find the passports were still in her handbag. Emma removed Jerry Jr from the driver's seat of her dad's car and handed him to her mum.

"You'd better keep an eye on him mum." She said. "Or he'll climb into the trunk."

They were off to Broadstairs on the Kent coast. A small tourist town with a population of just under twenty five thousand. For some reason, Alex had decided it was an ideal place to set up home. Ted Heath had been born in Broadstairs, but Emma would do her best not to hold that against the place. She got into the driver's seat of her dad's car and gave her family another wave goodbye.

"Got everything ?" Asked Dean.

“Bastard.”

They grinned at each other, the Hooper traveling anxiety was quite famous. She started the car and prepared to follow the instruction from the SatNav system.

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Visiting hours were relaxed a little at weekends, so Nick Goodwood had decided to spend an hour or so with Sean. He had huge sympathy for Sean of course, but the real reason he'd driven to the hospital, was because he needed him back at work. Experts on eighteenth century wood panelling weren't exactly falling over themselves to work at Glade Hall. Sean was propped up on two pillows and watching TV when he arrived.

“You're looking fit and well.” Said Nick.

Sean turned the TV volume down and gave him a long hard look with his good eye. Nick had brought fruit, everyone knew you took fruit into sick people in hospital. He was getting out of his car in the hospital car park, when it occurred to him that Sean might hate fruit.

“I brought you a basket of fruit, not sure what you liked.”

Sean looked at the basket as he put it on the bedside cabinet. Nick noticed Emma's flowers and the card attached to them.

“I'll eat everything in there, apart from the tangerines, can't stand them.” Said Sean.

“I see Emma Hooper visited you.”

“Yeah, she's a good kid.”

That was it, no details and he still hadn't been invited to sit down. Nick pulled over a visitors chair and sat by the bed.

“I'm not coming back ! Ever !” Said Sean.

“The work is three quarters done Sean; we need you back to finish it. I'll hire people for you to supervise if you like ? You won't even need to get your hands dirty.”

It was serious, far more serious than Nick wanted to let on. The media had reported on Lysette's murder and then they'd added Oliver's strange infection to the story. A Channel 4 team had called his office, asking about Wendy's accident. No one would want to take over from Sean ! If the work wasn't finished, there would be no final payment. Nick Goodwood was staring at bankruptcy once again.

“I'd be back there though Nick, in the building again.” Said Sean. “Sorry, you're a decent boss, as bosses go. But I'm not setting foot in Glade Hall again, for anyone.”

“You can't blame where you work for a woman attacking you Sean, especially with your reputation.”

“Don't act the fool ! We both know that no crazy ex-girlfriend tore my face up.”

Nick kept quiet, the bad reputation of Glade Hall was something he didn't want to talk about. He'd written a number on a piece of paper before leaving his office. He passed the folded paper to Sean, watching the reaction as he saw the figure.

“What the hell is this Nick ?”

“It's how much I'll give you in cash. No tax, no paperwork, no contract. Just a handshake now that'll you'll finish the woodwork at the hall. You have my word that on the day you finish, you'll get a bag with that amount of cash inside.”

It was a small fortune, but Nick really did need Sean to get the job completed.

“You can even leave before sunset every day. I won't complain, just make sure your team have enough work to keep them busy until six.”

“Christ Nick, that is a hell of a lot of cash.” Said Sean. “Can't you get someone else in to finish off the panels ?”

“And the staircases Sean. You are the only person who can finish it all off. I’ll be honest, we need the next stage payment from Jerry Hooper, or everyone will be claiming Job Seekers Allowance by Christmas.”

He smiled at Sean.

“No pressure old friend.”

Sean still seemed reluctant, but he put his injured right hand out to be carefully shaken.

“Thanks Sean, when do you get out of here ?”

“The bandages come off on Tuesday and if all is ok, I’ll be home by Friday.”

“Can you be in on the following Monday ? Purely to supervise. You can even wear slippers to work and sit in the kitchen all day.”

Sean was grinning at him.

“Like Wendy.”

That killed the mood, Wendy’s accident seemed as inexplicable as Tommy suddenly becoming a murderer.

“Sorry, wasn’t thinking.” Said Sean. “I’ll be in at nine on that Monday.”

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Leaving early hadn’t made them immune to the problems of bank holiday traffic. The journey from Oxford to Broadstairs was supposed to have taken them three hours, four hours with the obligatory stop to pee, refuel and buy an overpriced sandwich. Five hours after leaving home, they finally entered the small Kent town. There had been no phone call, no text to see where they were. Alex would know that any plans to travel over the August bank holiday, were always going to be subject to delays.

“There !” Said Dean.

The house looked exactly the same as it had on street view. Fully detached, with a two car garage on the right hand side. Alex had told her to park on the left of the house, just in front of the dustbin shed. The place was huge and they’d been promised the whole of the converted attic to themselves for the weekend.

“I like it.” Said Emma. “Now I’ve seen it, I’m glad we came.”

“It’ll be nice to get away for a few days.”

She knew what he meant, the atmosphere at her home was so thick you could have cut it with a knife. Emma parked and pulled the lever to open the trunk. She’d been driving for so long that her knees were stiff as she stood up.

“I’ll get the bags.” Said Dean. “Go and ring the doorbell and let them know we’ve finally arrived.”

She walked round to the front of the large house. It looked Victorian, there was even stained glass in the panels on the front door and above the downstairs windows. Emma was beginning to fall in love with Alex Godfrey’s home. She rang the bell.

“Hi Emma, come in, I guessed the traffic would slow you down. Leonard is in the kitchen preparing lunch and Mel should be here soon.”

Emma rarely hugged strangers, but she felt as though she’d known Alex for years. Much to her relief, he hugged her back. Dean arriving with their bags spoiled the moment slightly.

“This is Dean.” She said.

“Dean Jenkins, thank you for having us.”

“I’ll show you the attic and you can unpack. Are you ok with all those bags Dean ?”

“No problem.”

“Dean is part packhorse.” She said.

Emma was young and reasonably fit, but she was breathing hard as they reached the large attic room.

"It was going to be two bedrooms, but Leonard thought one really nice room was far better." Said Alex.

"He was right." She replied. "It's beautiful."

"Come down when you're ready, Mel should be here soon and you must meet Leonard for a pre-lunch drink."

Leonard was on Alex's official bio, a partner he'd lived with for decades. So far they'd hadn't felt the need to get married. Their host spoke to them just before leaving.

"No talking about Glade Hall until after lunch, ok ? Let Mel enjoy her meal."

"Yes fine." She replied, while Dean just nodded.

Once he'd gone they explored their home for the long weekend. Dean had the bathroom door open.

"Oh Emma, the bathroom is the size of my parents lounge."

She opened another door to find a walk in wardrobe, bigger than the room they were sleeping in at Glade Hall.

"I always wanted a walk in wardrobe." She said. "Maybe Alex will let us move in, permanently."

Dean was undoing his trousers and for a second, Emma wasn't sure of his intentions. Not that she'd have objected to a pre-lunch quickie.

"I claim first shower." He said.

"We could always share it." She replied.

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Lunch had been perfect and they'd all drunk enough wine to feel relaxed and mellow. Leonard looked like a slightly older version of Alex and she'd instantly liked him. They'd chosen Broadstairs as somewhere with large houses at reasonable prices, at the time.

"Plus the people here are so friendly."

Mel had arrived in a large SUV, converted to be driven by someone with mobility problems. She arrived supporting herself on two sticks, but there was an electric wheelchair in the back of the SUV.

"I get good days and bad days." Mel had told her. "Today is a very good day."

After lunch it was Mel who decided when it was time to talk about Glade Hall, or as she put it;

"Well, I'm here to scare Emma into leaving that place, so let's get to it."

They all chuckled, but the atmosphere in the room changed.

"We signed gagging orders." Said Alex. "And I for one can't afford to return the payoff I received."

"Me neither." Added Mel. "A production assistant is really a glorified runner and I don't run too well these days. What Alex is saying and being far too polite about it is; nothing we say can be repeated to anyone !"

Mel was gasping for air after talking that much and looked to be in pain. Alex didn't seem concerned though and he obviously knew her very well.

"It's important Emma." Said Alex. "Do we have your promise, to never repeat what we tell you, to anyone, even your family ?"

"You have my promise." She said.

"Yeah, me too." Added Dean.

"You tell them most of it." Said Mel. "Then I can play my part as Exhibit A."

Alex looked at her with some concern on his face.

"Do you want me to go out to your car for the oxygen bottle ?"

"No, nice to forget about that fucking thing for a while."

“Just kick me if you need it.”

Alex Godfrey smiled at her and Dean and settle back in his chair, sipping occasionally at a glass of brandy.

“It all began when the on-screen talent began to refuse to enter the basement.” He began. “Mel and I decided to prove how safe it was.”

“We were arseholes !” Spat Mel.

Alex told them about the day when Josh had refused to film a section for the programme, in the deep part of the cellar. He told them everything, even admitting that seeing the Hunter seemed crazy to him, now that quite a few years had passed.

“It didn’t stop there.” He added. “Two electricians tried to recover the Steadicam.”

“One was thrown against a wall and the other ran for the stairs.” Said Mel.

“No one was badly injured.” Said Alex.

“Apart from me !”

“Sorry Mel. No one was hurt as badly as Mel, but there were cuts and abrasions. After a few attempts they simply locked the door and left everything behind. They did promise to brick up the door, but obviously didn’t.”

“They paid off my solicitor’s claim fairly quickly and made me sign a gagging order.” Said Mel.

“And I got a golden goodbye to keep my mouth shut.” Added Alex.

“Tell them it all.” Said Leonard. “That is why you asked her here !”

Alex looked at Mel, as if waiting for an answer to a question no one else had heard. She nodded at him.

“Someone will need to help me up.” She said.

Leonard helped her stand up and then she leant against him for support.

“I never saw the Hunter.” She said. “Something came back out the tunnels with Alex, but I have no real idea what it was.”

Mel had a light dress on, which she began to slowly pull up, wincing whenever she needed to bend forward.

“Don’t worry ! I put on my granny knickers and bra.”

She pulled until the dress was rolled up under her chin and then let Leonard hold her upright.

“Something came back with Alex. There was damage to both lungs and it’s a miracle I’m alive.”

Mel coughed and struggled to take a breath, as Emma gasped at the scars on her body.

“The doctor said it looked like I’d been clawed, but he doesn’t know what could have done it. You need to get out of Glade Hall Emma Hooper, and take your family with you.”

The claw marks began just above Mel’s granny knickers and extended right up to her collar bone.

Some of the scars on her chest still looked deep, where something had torn into her left lung. It was horrendous, but Emma couldn’t stop looking. Leonard helped Mel to turn to her right, the claw marks continued round her hips and over her spine.

“I need to sit.” Said Mel. “And I think it’s time for my oxygen.”

Emma helped her smooth her dress down, as Alex ran out to her car. Leonard was actually crying.

“Thank you for showing me.”

“Are you going to leave that place ?”

“Yes, though I will have to convince my dad to leave, without mentioning you or Alex.”

“Do it Emma ! You don’t want to end up like me.”

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It was the first quiet night at the hospital since he'd been admitted. Many of the patients had received long visits from relatives and had settled down for the night, like over tired toddlers. The medical staff seemed to have been reduced to a skeleton crew and the usual chatter of passing nurses, had largely ceased. By midnight, Sean was ready to turn his TV off and go to sleep.

"No ! No ! No !"

He recognised the voice of the Asian lady in the room opposite his. She visited him twice a day and talked to him in a language he didn't understand. Her chatter seemed to consist of loud open vowels and her English vocabulary consisted of 'No, Please, Yes and Thank you.' Despite that, he was becoming quite fond of her and her visits. She hated the hospital food and seemed to survive on packets of crisps, bought from a guy with a trolley, who came round just after breakfast.

"Are you all right ?" He shouted.

Sean heard her shouting at someone and climbed out of bed. All the tubes had been removed from his arm, but the cannula had been left stuck in his forearm. He caught it in the blankets as he stood up and winced at the pain.

"Come in here if you're scared."

There was more shouting in whatever language his friend across the corridor spoke. There was just the night time lighting, which was good enough to get to the toilet, but little else. Sean managed to stub his toe before he found his slippers. There was also the general clumsiness from a week in bed to contend with. Sean managed to collide with his now redundant drip stand.

"Bloody hospitals." He mumbled. "Can't wait to get home."

He took it slowly as he walked to his room door. The Asian lady was sat in the centre of the corridor, pointing at something in the distance. There was nothing there though, just ceiling night lights going off into the distance.

"There's no one there. Let me help you back to your room."

She began to screech as he lifted her up off the floor, almost carrying her back into her room.

"Shush, you'll wake everyone up !"

What was he saying ? Wake people up ! The place was usually like Kings Cross Station during the night, even the nurses said everything at maximum volume. She was quiet as he helped her back into bed. Then she hung onto to his arm, the bad arm. She hung onto him as though her life depended on it.

"Let go ! Crap, that hurts !"

She let go, but pointed at the door and kept shaking her head.

"No " ! No Sean !"

It was the first time she'd used his name.

"If only you could tell me what you're worried about."

He filled her water glass from a jug and sat beside her bed until she seemed to be asleep. It must have taken her over an hour to settle down and for her breathing to become slow and even. Something had really scared her. The wall clock said one in the morning, before he left her room, intending to get some sleep. The medicine trolley rounds and general hospital ruckus tended to start up again at six.

"Sleeping out in the street would be more restful." He muttered.

For some reason he looked down the corridor and thought he saw Emma Hooper in the distance. She'd told him about visiting Broadstairs for the weekend, even made a joke about it being only the sixth most boring town in England.

"Emma !" He called.

He cursed the lack of proper lighting, as the girl opened the door to the stairs and vanished. It was Emma Hooper, he knew it. Yes, he had probably watched her a bit too intently at times, he knew her walk, the way her arms swung. It was her ! Sean managed to coax his body into a near run, as he tried to catch up with her.

“Emma ! Wait !”

He heard footsteps on the stairs above him, but couldn't see her. He began to climb the stairs, ignoring all the doorways to all the floors, as Emma kept going up. Six floors he went up, following her. It might have been seven, he was concentrating more on trying to catch up with her.

“Slow down Emma !”

Still footsteps above him and then a door being pushed open, a heavy metal door, screeching as it's pushed. He reached the door to the roof and ignored all the warning signs and threats about it being off limits to patients. He didn't even wonder how a nineteen year old college girl, had opened the two tough locks and panel with a keypad. She was there, quite close to the edge of the flat roof.

“What the hell are you doing up here ?”

She turned and became Natalie. It was as fast as that ! One moment it was Emma with her back to him and then crazy Natalie was facing him.

“You've been a bad boy Sean. What did I tell you about talking to her ? And now you're coming back to Glade Hall.”

Terror gripped him, she had a blade in her right hand. Not a knife, a straight razor that glinted as it caught a reflection of the light above the door to the stairs. Sean wasn't sure if he was more scared of Natalie or heights. He backed up slowly until he was just two feet from the edge of the hospital roof. Natalie kept coming, the razor held up like a club.

“I won't go back there.” He said. “I promise. I'll move, miles away. You'll never see me again.”

“Oh, how right you are Sean.”

She slowly advanced on him, like a cat playing with an injured mouse. Natalie spun the razor around, making sure he was looking at it.

“You're going to suffer Sean, like Lysette. Soon you'll know how it feels to be cut open from dick to lying mouth.”

Sean finally found out that Natalie scared him more than heights. He turned and ran, leaping off the hospital roof and landing on the concrete of the car park, six or maybe seven floors below.

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