

## Glade Hall

### Chapter 3 – Church of Enlil

**“Sadly sex and drinking were fairly ordinary sins among the students, but Sister Natalie was rumoured to be committing far worse sins.”**

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~Then~

Brother Gideon Crabb sat at his desk and wondered, not for the first time, what all the paperwork achieved. The UK immigration people seemed to want the same information, repeated in about twenty different ways. Then there were the various government departments that checked on the safety and wellbeing of their students. It had to be done, Gideon understood that. It was just that when he'd been appointed to his current position, head of the college, he'd expected to be doing less paperwork.

The Church of Enlil was a back to basics Christian organisation with definite leanings towards Old Testament Christianity. They believed in heaven and hell as real places and that homosexuals and women priests were definitely going there. Not that anyone from the church shouted about those views, they tried to keep their beliefs and lives private, as far as possible. There had been one unfortunate article in a local paper.

‘Cult in Oxfordshire – Are the views of The Church of Enlil, compatible with current public opinion ? This is the 1980s, not the 1880s.....’

The article had gone on for several columns and had been quoted in a few Sunday papers. Gideon had saved the day and gained himself a bit of a reputation in the church. A reputation that saw him appointed to his present position, a few years later. Things had come to a head, when an MP had called for their state funding to be removed. In truth they received only a tiny amount of public money, but losing it might scare off the parents of some of their overseas students. And their fees of course, the large fees that kept the college solvent.

“We need to bring the public in.” Gideon had said. “Show them everything, have our own version of meet and greet. We must break bread with them !”

It had worked. The public came to the open days and generally liked what they saw; a lot of overseas kids, smiling a lot, being polite and calling each other brother and sister. What harm could there be in that ? The people of Oxfordshire didn't come in their thousands, but a few hundred turned up to each open day and they still did. They ate the bread baked on the premises and enjoyed the fresh fruit from the college gardens.

It wasn't that the public saw the college as a good thing, intense religion will always make people a little wary. The important thing was that the locals saw the church as harmless, maybe even a bit boring. That was perfect; the college kept its government funding and happily drifted into public obscurity once again.

Gideon ticked a box on a form that asked the same thing as another five boxes he'd already ticked. Normally he hated interruptions, but the knock on his door was a bit of a relief.

“Yes, come in !” He shouted.

His office was quite large and the students were often timid. Gideon had found that he needed to shout quite loudly, or they assumed he was busy and wandered off.

“Sister Natalie was seen heading for The Glade again last night.”

Sister Juliet taught the Bible Core Course and she was also very good at keeping him informed on what the students were up to. Sadly sex and drinking were fairly ordinary sins among the students, but Sister Natalie was rumoured to be committing far worse sins. He closed his eyes and quickly prayed for guidance.

“Were the other two with her ?” He asked.

“Yes, Brother Umar and Brother Ryan, her usual little gang.” Answered Juliet.

“Thank you. Do you know where they are now ?”

“In the Chapel, all of them.”

Juliet left him to his thoughts, something had to be done about the three of them. It might have to be something drastic, perhaps permanent expulsion from the college and the church.

Glade Hall had a reputation for being a little odd. There had been reports of various manifestations and sightings for hundreds of years. It was why the church’s patron, the odious pop singer, had been able to buy the estate quite cheaply, with a guarantee there’d be no trouble getting permission to add two dormitory blocks. The problem was that rather than being put off by the unfortunate history of Glade Hall, some parents actually saw it as a plus. Rumours of spiritual manifestations fitted in well with the local version of Christianity in some parts of the world. As for Gideon ? His main aim was to keep a low profile and keep things nice and quiet. If some of the kids brought in Ouija boards or dabbled in a little witchcraft..... he could and often had, turned a blind eye. Besides none of the ‘kids’ was younger than eighteen, they were hardly children.

“If only she’d kept it all in The Glade.” He muttered.

Various members of the staff had told him about dead animals being found in The Glade, some mutilated in a quite horrific manner. Sister Natalie was always seen just leaving or entering The Glade and she’d defied his ban on going there after dark.

“With respect sir.” She’d told him. “I’m not a child.”

She wasn’t, Natalie Roberts was a nineteen year old from Dudley in the Midlands and she scared him. There was something about the look in her eyes. Tonight though he was going to face the three of them and expel them all. Gideon left his office and walked through the main building, on the way to the new extension.

“You’re actually doing it ?!” Said Brother Walter. “Juliet told me you might.”

“Yes, enough is enough. I’m sending all three of them home.”

Walter was older than him and should have been the next head of the college. He didn’t seem to resent Gideon though and they were good friends.

“Would you like some moral support ? I can come with you.”

“Thank you Walter, that would be appreciated.”

The dormitory blocks were dull and drab. Low ceilings and room after room, all small and all about fitting in a large number of fee paying students. Preferably overseas students, paying all those huge tuition costs. The one good thing about the West Dorm, was that it linked onto the chapel. No more going out in the rain to pray.

“Brother Umar Musa is a good lad.” Said Walter. “His father is a government minister in Nigeria.”

“I know, but if I’m expelling the other two, I can hardly spare Umar !”

Walter always wanted to play devil’s advocate and normally it was appreciated. Not when he had three kids to send home though. Brother Ryan Dantzler was from Chicago and he was a good student too, likely to get a first class degree. It was her doing, all of it.

“Be firm old friend.” Said Walter. “You handled the Sister Kukuwa affair very well.”

“I will ! There’ll have their bags packed and be out of here at first light in the morning.”

There had been a few kids who claimed to have been touched by ghosts, or spirits. A few had even shown the nurse bruises on their arms. Strangely the occurrences seemed to suit a religious college and no parent had ever complained. Kukuwa was from Ghana, a long way from her family and their support. She'd claimed to have been interfered with in the middle of the night.

"Fingers..... actually penetrating her." The nurse had told him.

The girl had been eighteen, far from home and still claiming to be a virgin. It was all likely to be a fantasy, but there was a procedure for such things. The fingers might have been real and on the arm of another student, or a member of staff. It had to be reported. But Gideon hadn't reported it, his quiet life would have ended if he had. The local press might ignore a strange religious college with iffy views on women clergy, but it would have field day with sexual abuse.

"You've been seen with several male students." He'd told her. "I'd have to mention that to your parents."

More threats, it had become easier as he became used to bullying her. She'd cried a lot, but had agreed to say nothing and simply go home to Ghana.

"Emotionally unsuited to living away from home." He'd written on a letter to her family.

Gideon wasn't proud of himself for bullying a vulnerable young girl, but he was proud of keeping things quiet for the church. Nothing could be allowed to rock the boat, certainly not one hysterical student.

"What..... Who is that ?" Asked Walter. "Is someone with them ?"

They were still some distance from where the corridor widened to give access to the chapel doors. A deep male voice was shouting in Latin of all things. Gideon had once been good at Latin, but not the way it was being pronounced. He picked up pieces though, portions that scared him.

"You dare invoke me here....."

punish you all.....

consume you all....."

Then there had been a scream that made his ears hurt, a male voice, obviously terrified. Gideon might well have run away, but Walter was striding towards the chapel.

"Come on." He said. "They need our help."

Several faces appeared round doors, shouting out questions and answers in a string of different languages. It was all adding to the chaos and Walter had just entered the chapel.

"Shut up ! Go back into your rooms." Shouted Gideon. "Now !!"

There was the noise of several doors closing and he was alone. Gideon Crabb called on what little courage he possessed and walked into the Maynard Family Chapel. It was long, the same length as a small village church. He could see Walter arguing with someone and a bloody carcass on the ground. "What have you beasts killed now ? Some poor soul's dog again ?" He fumed. "It won't do, it definitely will not do !"

His mind wasn't strong and it rebelled at what he saw, as he walked closer. One Nigerian boy had shown him a picture once, of a relative almost cut in half because of their religion. His mind had refused to properly see that, refused to accept that such horrors existed in the world. He carried on walking and then, a few feet from the body, he recognised Brother Umar Musa.

"You've murdered him, you bitch !" He shouted.

He'd been cut open from neck to crotch and Natalie was holding a bloody knife. Walter didn't seem as shocked by it all, or he was better at handling it. He was grabbing Natalie's hand, trying to get her to drop the knife.

"Leave her !" Again the strident voice, speaking Latin.

How hadn't he seen it? The figure was huge, barely hidden by a column near the altar. Only it wasn't a figure of a man, the size, the posture. Gideon's mind had another few seconds of down time. It couldn't be of course, no religious person truly believes in Satan. He found himself on his knees, watching something rip Walter apart and then Brother Ryan Dantzler. He picked up Ryan in his claws, yes his mind accepted there were claws at the end of those large muscular arms.

"No, no, this can't be happening." He muttered, looking at the floor tiles.

It was true though, he looked again and saw the horned beast, putting Ryan onto the altar and ripping him open. Blood, lots of blood, covering the floral displays. Gideon managed to get to his feet.

"You don't exist." He called. "This isn't real, can't be real."

Not just the beast, there were several shadows now, all clustered around Ryan, drinking blood from him, eating his flesh. There was no sign of Natalie though, no sign at all. He had no weapons on him, he was a man of God after all. A candlestick was nearby, but it was far too heavy to be used as a weapon. He just about lifted it to shoulder height and advanced towards him, Lucifer himself.

"Be gone foul serpent, this is not your place!" He shouted.

The creature faced him and smiled, oh those terrible eyes. Like fire filled smoke he looked, the destroyer of man's innocence. No doubt now, no hiding behind modern logic. Lucifer himself had been summoned up by those stupid kids. Or was it?! Gideon's mind kept switching from seeing a solid creature with horns to something purely existing as flame filled smoke.

"No! You go, spineless coward. Before you're the next to be devoured!"

English now, but still the same voice. Gideon dropped the candlestick and ran from the chapel. He didn't stop running until he reached Walter's rooms. Walter had an old Webley revolver that his father had brought home from the great war, the war that was supposed to end all wars. Satan couldn't be killed by bullets of course, but just holding the heavy gun, gave him confidence.

Lucifer and the shadows had gone when he returned, but Ryan was still draped over the altar, his blood dripping over the flowers that had been fresh that morning. No sign of Natalie, she never was seen again, not by a living soul. Walter was dead, his throat ripped out by hugely powerful fingers, or claws. As for Umar, poor Umar.... Little was left to identify him by, apart from a small tattoo of a frog on his left wrist. Eaten, most of his soft tissues and a few tendons. Gideon sat on one of the pews for a while, trying to make sense of what he'd seen. Was mortal man supposed to see him clearly, Lucifer, prince of lies? All he could be certain of was seeing something rip his students apart and his friend. Whatever it may have been, it wasn't all in his mind. Three people were dead!

Gideon Crabb had called his church and asked them to decide if he called in the police, or they could help him tidy things up. There had been a lot of previous minor problems, which might all come out at the inquest. A class action might ruin The Church of Enlil. Gideon spoke to the parents, it was what he was good at. The three bodies were buried in the Maynard Cemetery, a church doctor had provided death certificates.

"Terrible really." Gideon told their families. "A virulent flu virus. Truly awful that it should claim three of our brothers. Their wish was to be buried at the college....."

There had been a lot of blood to clean up and Gideon always imagined that some of it would never clean off his hands. The church sold Glade Hall soon after. They really had experienced more religion than they could handle.

Gideon Crabb died three years later, never having discussed the night with anyone. His sister had heard him talk a few times, when he was drunk and needing an ear. No details, just telling her to believe in the devil.

“He’s real..... I saw him when he visited Glade Hall.”

As to Natalie Roberts ? Her family reported her missing and the college co-operated, but as Gideon told them.

“She was a troubled young woman. Personally, her disappearance doesn’t surprise me.”

Despite all the best efforts of the police and the local community, no trace of Natalie was ever found.

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**~Now~**

Alice Hooper quite enjoyed taking three year old Jerry Jr with her on her trips out. That worried her in a way, it meant baby brain had won the battle; she was now a slave to her child. He wasn’t quite three, he was two and nine months, but like all parents, they rounded up. Jerry Jr walked tolerably well and knew quite a few words. Often he’d repeat one of his new words very loudly, over and over again. Baby brain forced Alice into believing this was adorable, in the same way picking up a toy he’d dropped for the hundredth time was adorable. It was all part Mother Nature’s plan, to stop moms from drowning their kids.

“Oh, he’s adorable ! How old is he ?”

A stranger on the street, a middle aged woman, confirming her theory. Of course he looked adorable, humans were programmed to like large eyes and tiny round faces. It was why her unmarried friends all had five cats each. God missed a trick in not giving babies fur and a built in purring noise.

“He’s coming up to three.” She replied.

The stranger picked up his toy and made cooing noises as she put it back in his buggy. Jerry Jr could walk quite well, but it might well be a long day. His inevitable emergency change of clothing, drinks, nibbles etc, were hung in bags on the buggy handles. It wasn’t quite the small chemical factory they’d carted around when he was tiny, but it was still too much for her to carry. Of course he’d be bored and want to walk and then want to go back in the buggy five yards later. No problem, she was now hard wired to find it all adorable.

“Shush now honey. Mummy needs to concentrate.”

He smiled at her with his father’s blue eyes and Alice had to kiss him on the forehead, before using the map app on her phone. It wasn’t the best part of New York, most of the houses in the street had been converted into small apartments. There was a coffee place next to the building she was looking for, her smartphone was pointing right at it. Alice carefully crossed the street, picking up her child’s toy without really thinking about it. It was still one dwelling, a four storey town house, quite a rarity in modern New York.

“Nathaniel can’t be short of money.” She muttered at Jerry Jr. “This place must be worth a small fortune.”

“Pussycat.” He yelled, pointing at a large cat, sat in a ground floor window.

“HMMMM big pussycat Jerry.”

The door was set back from the street and up a few steps, which was awkward. It didn’t surprise her that someone opened the door before she rang the bell.

“Are you ok ? Let me get that for you.”

There was an advantage to pushing her child across New York, he gained her instant empathy from just about everyone she met. The woman bent down, picked his toy up and gave Jerry Jr his dinosaur back. Her age was difficult to judge, but Alice had her at no more than forty. Jerry Jr thanked her by

making a loud farting noise with his lips. Alice suspected Emma had taught him how to do it. He then chuckled, quite loudly.

“Oh, he’s adorable.”

Alice thought the police should take young kids around with them, they’d never meet a hostile witness. The woman was smiling at her, obviously waiting for Alice to speak.

“I don’t have an appointment, but I was hoping to see Mr Nathaniel James Maynard.”

The smile was replaced by a slight frown.

“Could I help ? I look after Mr Maynard’s day to day business matters. He is rather old and quite frail.”

Alice had decided on the curious child approach, the mom and child project ploy. No mention of locked chapels and weird glades. Definitely nothing about unfortunate histories and cat altars.

“We recently bought Glade Hall.” She said. “My daughter is obsessed with the history of the house, so I volunteered to come and see Mr Maynard.”

She took the list of questions out her bag. There were quite a few questions that Emma wanted her to ask the last surviving male of the Maynard line, but none of them were that contentious.

“Emma, my oldest..... even gave me a list of questions.”

“She is still in England ?”

“Yes, sorry I haven’t introduced myself. I’m Alice Hooper and my husband is Jerry Hooper. And....this little monster is Jerry Jr.”

She tousled his hair, just to emphasise how adorable her little monster was.

“Pussycat !” He yelled for no apparent reason. She was used to that.

“So random, we should get him onto Facebook.” She joked.

The smile was back on the woman’s face and Alice didn’t think they were going to get dumped back onto the street.

“Come in and have a seat and I’ll take him the list, if that’s ok ?”

“Yes, of course. Though it would be nice to meet him.”

“He is very frail, he’ll be eighty eight in a few weeks time. I’ll take him the list, while Monique shows you into the drawing room and fetches refreshments.”

The woman still hadn’t introduced herself and she began a steady call for someone called Monique.

“Ah Monique. Please show Mrs Hooper and her son into the drawing room and fetch them some refreshments.”

Monique looked about twenty and already bored by life, but she smiled at Jerry Jr. He made his farting noise and she smiled even more. The woman still hadn’t taken her list of questions anywhere.

“I might be some time. Mr Maynard’s speech can be rather slow. Is that Ok, do you have time ?”

“Yes, I have all day. My daughter wouldn’t forgive me if I left now.”

Monique took them into a light and airy room and then brought a jug of homemade lemonade and a plate of small cakes. Jerry Jr pulled a face at the first sip of lemonade, but he loved the cakes.

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Emma had never been one for early mornings. She could get up early if she had to, but it had always been a struggle. Maybe it was the fresh country air, or the long summer break to look forward to.

Whatever the reason, she found herself up, showered and dressed by seven. Dean had muttered a few times, as she’d clambered over him to get her trainers, but he was now fast asleep again.

It had been a few days since finding the cat altar and all in all, the reaction of the authorities had been disappointing. She’d been waiting for the top people from the British Museum to arrive, but had to make do with two keen amateur archaeologists from Oxford. Two young men, who didn’t

look much older than her. They'd packed everything up into about four cardboard boxes and then wedged bubble wrap into the gaps. The book had been made illegible by hundreds of years of mildew and the effect of age on poor quality paper.

"X-rays might show something." One of the men had told her. "And we have a few other tricks." She'd given him her email address and he'd promised to send her details of anything legible they found in the book.

"Don't get too excited. It's probably just cures for warts and curses." He'd told her.

Still, you didn't find a witches book from the seventeenth century every day. Emma was keeping her fingers crossed that there might be something about the house in it. Today was one of her afternoons helping out at the local florists, Sheila's Flowers. It was a little extra money and she got to drive her dad's car to the village.

She left their room and decided to walk round the outside of the house and end up at the kitchen for toast. She had no idea what time Mrs Hargreaves rose from her bed, but there was always toast on the go from six thirty every morning. Emma wasn't in the mood to jog, so she strolled and it was a fairly leisurely stroll. Out to the chapel, then a quick look at the graveyard. There was someone there, a woman dressed in a Barbour jacket and wellington boots, even though it was a nice morning.

"Good morning. This is private property." Said Emma.

"Yes I know, I work here now."

The woman appeared to be about forty and had a mop of ginger hair, that looked to have been a long time between brushings. Her eyes smiled though, as she wrote notes into an A4 pad.

"I'm Lysette Anders, the new head gardener."

She offered her hand and Emma shook it.

"I'm Emma Hooper. Yes, I remember Tommy saying he'd hired someone from Oxford."

"Headington actually, not far out of Oxford."

Emma wasn't too sure about Lysette and she rarely budged from a first opinion. There was no reason they had to be friends of course, Tommy Milner had hired her to make the gardens beautiful again.

"You start work early." She said.

"There's so much to do." Said Lysette. "Your father wants the gardens brought back to their former glory and there has been a lot of neglect."

"I'm sure you'll do it. Anyway, good to see you, but there's coffee and toast in the kitchen, some with my name on it."

Emma began to climb over the graveyard fence and Lysette was pulling at her arm.

"Where are you going? Haven't you seen the signs?"

The signs were full of dire warnings to keep the hotel guests out of the cemetery.

"Yes, the hotel people had them put up. It's safe enough, if you're careful."

The ginger haired head gardener was now red in the face and showed no inclination to let go of her.

"No young lady, no! You've obviously been able to do whatever you wanted. Things are going to change though."

Emma was no longer unsure about Lysette, she knew she hated her and that they'd be enemies. She grabbed Lysette's wrist and twisted, just enough to make her let go. Lysette Anders jumped back and her face went an almost impossible shade of purple.

"I have never, in all my life....."

Strangely Emma was calm, just bored with Lysette's nonsense. There had been a girl at college who had a similar attitude, considered herself to be the arbiter of what was and wasn't, 'the right thing to do'. Emma had just ignored her and she intended to ignore the new head gardener.

"No ! I'll tell you !" Emma shouted. "You may work for Tommy, but Tommy works for my father. I go where I please in my own home !"

She carried on over the fence , intending to quickly exit on the other side of the graveyard. The Maynard Crypt always seemed to call her over though, to read the crazy inscription and caress the cool marble.

"I can see this relationship is something we're both going to have to work on." Called Lysette. She could work on what she liked, Emma had no intention of ever saying another word to her. She climbed over the fence on the other side of the Maynard Family Cemetery and took the path that would curve round to the kitchens and toast. She heard Lysette Anders calling to her for some time.

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Alice expected to be sat there for maybe thirty minutes, but it had been over two hours until the woman came back. Not that the time had been uneventful, no two hours with a three year old ever is. There had been two trips to the bathroom, one minor vomiting incident because of eating too many cakes and a full blown tantrum. Monique had helped clean up the vomit and kept popping in every fifteen minutes or so.

"I'm sure Ginie won't be much longer. Do you need anything ?"

Monique had become almost one of the family and she'd discovered that Ginie wasn't a shortening of Virginia, but a pet name that Angela's father had given her when she was a kid. Monique loosened up quite a bit in the second hour and told her that 'in her opinion,' there wasn't really much wrong with Nathaniel Maynard.

"Nursing round the clock, a doctor in to see him twice a week !"

Monique threw her hands back and rolled her eyes.

"He's healthy for a man of his age. I reckon he'd just scared of where he's going next and wants to put it off as long as possible."

It was all good information for the project with Emma and Alice felt the two hours hadn't been wasted. Ginie returned looking a bit flustered and carrying a handful of loose papers.

"I'm so sorry Mrs Hooper." She said. "Mr Maynard was keen to answer the questions and it took longer than I expected."

She put the papers on the desk, a good fifty or sixty pages of neat, tidy handwriting. Emma's questions also had arrows and notes against them.

"I had to use plain copy paper. I hope this is ok ?"

"Yes perfect." Said Alice. "Emma will go crazy about all this information."

Alice flicked through the pages and the writing became less neat, but it was legible. The last few pages even touched on rumours about The Glade from the days when Rome ruled most of Britain. Emma was going to love it. Alice dug a business card out of her purse, handing it to Ginie.

"I know this is an awful cheek." She said. "But if he ever feels like dictating more about the history of Glade Hall. You can always post it to me."

"I will, it seemed to do him good. I've never seen him so animated about anything in a very long time. He'd actually like to see you, if you have time ?"

It was why she'd come, but she had the pages of information and Jerry Jr was beginning to give her his tired look.

"I'd love to see him, but it's already so late."

"Just for a second...really, it would mean a lot to him. There is an elevator, no climbing stairs all the way to the top floor."

"Fine Ginie, you've convinced me, but only for a minute or so."

The elevator was down a corridor and was obviously not an original part of the house. It had been built against an outside wall and part of a rear staircase had been removed. It was large and the three of them hardly made it wobble as they stepped inside. Ginie had to press a code to get access to the top floor.

"Nathaniel likes his privacy." She said.

First name terms, no Mr Maynard now. Alice felt that she and her son had passed some kind of rite of passage and were now accepted in the Maynard house. The lift opened to reveal several oxygen bottles leant against a wall and few boxes of meds. Monique had been right. Nathaniel was a rich man and he was using his money to try the impossible.... Keeping death at bay.

"Is he ok with children ?" Alice asked.

"Yay ! Children !" Yelled Jerry Jr, for no reason at all.

He might have seen it on TV in a cartoon show for kids. Ginie just laughed and carried on walking along the corridor.

"He can be grumpy, but I think he'll be fine today."

The room was large and well furnished. Alice had expected him to have a hospital bed and various drips ready. His bed was a normal looking pine bed and the only sign of his health obsession, was rather a lot of pill bottles on his dressing table.

"Father, Mrs Hooper is here to see you, with her son."

Father ! So Ginie was Angela Maynard, his daughter and only child. That explained why she seemed to be running everything. Nathaniel was sat in the window, watching the people pass along the busy streets.

"Welcome Mrs Hooper, please come in. I enjoyed answering those questions."

He wasn't at all what she expected. His eyes were alert and she'd have put his age at no more than seventy five. He didn't stand though and she saw two sticks leant against his chair.

"Come and sit with me." He said. "I'm sure Ginie can keep your son entertained for a few minutes."

They were nice people, yet she'd only known them for a little over two hours. Something made her hold Jerry's hand a little tighter.

"I'd better hang onto him." She said. "He can be a monster at times."

"Monster !!" Shouted Jerry.

He put his hands up and tried to pull a scary face and of course, looked adorable. The last male Maynard laughed and pushed a chair towards her.

"Of course of course." He said. "I only have a few minutes before the doctor arrives."

Alice sat and pulled Jerry Jr close, hoping he didn't have a full blown tiredness tantrum.

"So, you're making Glade Hall a family home again ?"

"Yes, converting it back to how it was in the seventeen hundreds, but with hot water, proper sanitation and electricity."

He looked more than pleased, he was almost jumping about on his seat, out of pure joy.

"A family home, perfect." He said. "The house needs a proper family to bring it to life. Those awful cult people tried to buy it from me you know ? I told them to go away, so they had that pop singer buy it. Then a hotel ! Business seminars and weddings !!"

He said weddings as though it was a rude word, but she understood his discomfort at seeing his ancestral home, turned into a kind of weekend resort.

“Wonderful.” He muttered. “A family again.”

“The doctor will be here in a minute.”

“Yes, yes. Dear Ginie, what would I do without you.”

Alice got up and fondled Jerry’s hair. She’d buy him ice cream later, as a reward for being a good boy. Emma would read a lot into Ginie still being unmarried and looking after her father. A young woman kept as a flunky by a domineering parent. Alice wasn’t so sure, Ginie seemed like an intelligent woman and marriage didn’t suit everyone. For all she knew, Ginie might have a string of young Latino lovers. They were almost out of the door when Nathaniel asked her a question.

“Are you changing any of the original structure of Glade Hall ?”

“No, it’s all grade 1 listed. We’re just demolishing the new alterations.”

“Good. Don’t interfere with the original walls. They wouldn’t like that.”

He was smiling at her and obviously meant English heritage, or did he ? Alice was about to ask him who he meant, but Ginie was closing the door.

“I’ll have the driver take you home, after he’s dropped off the doctor.”

“Thank you, it is rather late.” Replied Alice.

Jerry Jr decided to make loud airplane noises all the way down in the lift. Ginie gave her a card, which she pushed into her bag. Jerry was fast going beyond adorable and into pain in the behind territory. He was tired and he’d had far too much sugar in those cakes.

“I’m sorry, he normally has a nap about now.”

“It’s fine. Nathaniel loved him, I could tell.”

The car was an expensive top of the range BMW and Jerry’s buggy was folded up and put in the trunk. He was falling asleep as he climbed into the back of the car and she held her son as she slept. The driver was smiling at her in the rear view mirror. He drove carefully and Alice had a chance to look at Ginie’s card. Good a phone number for the house and an email address. A source for yet more information about Glade Hall, Emma would love that. She turned the card over to push it into her purse.

“Keep your children away from The Glade.”

It was Ginie’s neat but small writing.

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Oliver was hot, sweaty and mildly annoyed at Henry. He’d been brought in to speed up the demolition and removal of the breeze block alterations to Glade Hall. Henry was still in a moody about a damaged panel though and treating everyone as though they were fools. Oliver had his own renovation business; there was even a van in the car park with his name on it. He had done his City and Guilds and knew the difference between 80s plasterboard and eighteenth century Lath and plaster.

“I’m not a complete bloody fool.” He muttered.

He looked at the drawing though, the one Henry had gone through with him, several times. It showed where he was supposed to leave alone and what needed removing. It was all obvious, but Oliver wanted to keep on Henry’s good side.

“Do it right and I can keep you busy until next summer.” Henry had told him.

That meant a winter doing indoor work, something important if you worked in Oxfordshire. No builder wanted to be renovating an old and draughty barn in January or February. So Oliver swallowed his pride, checked Henry’s drawing and picked up a sledgehammer. For some reason, whacking something with the heavy hammer always made him feel better. He had all the tools for

delicate work, even a trowel and brush in case anything historically significant was found. There was just something wonderful about slamming a sledgehammer into brickwork.

"That shifted it." He mumbled.

The partition walls had been put up sometime in the 80s, but had a surprising amount of dirt and soot behind them. Every hammer blow was sending up clouds of choking dust. Oliver hated doing heavy work while wearing a mask, but there was no alternative. He put on a dust mask and checked the drawing again. He was still three feet from anything important; it was fine to use the hammer for a while. He took it right back and knocked a row of breeze blocks completely out of the makeshift wall. Oliver had to jump back to avoid the mini-avalanche, as the rest of the wall collapsed. It looked foolhardy if anyone had been watching, but it meant the job being completed on time. Besides, no one was watching.

"Christ ! It's shitty behind there." He muttered.

He should have brought a radio, Wendy had one on while she worked. The client seemed cool, but Nick Goodwood seemed to have a bug up his arse. A radio would have been good. Hitting a wall with a hammer, always went better with a little pop music. Oliver now had the bit he hated, bagging up all the rubble he'd created. It all went in heavy duty plastic sacks and then into a skip outside. He'd left his phone some way off and had to run to answer it.

"Yeah, half the wall down..... Yeah..... yeah.... Just bagging it up."

Oliver had been polite, but he banged the phone down after the call ended. Henry, checking up on him, making sure nothing important was damaged.

"I'm not a fucking kid !" He yelled.

Oliver was twenty five and there was an old transit in the car park with 'Oliver's Renovations,' on the side. A wary potential client might have worried about age of the vehicle and that only a mobile number was given. Oliver was currently living in a room above the village pub, which was owned by a friend.

He knelt down to get the rubble up from the floor and noticed that it was incredibly sooty. He hadn't touched the old original walls, not so much as a dent. There was black soot everywhere though and something that looked like a birds nest. He took off his mask to look at it properly.

"More witch crap."

It was twigs with two tiny dolls wrapped up inside. Something in Oliver wanted to clean it up and call for the client. There had been Henry's warning though and he really didn't want to be working outside on a freezing February day.

"No delays, the client won't put up with it." Henry had told him. "If you find anything important, tell me first. Anything else..... forget you found it and bag it up with the rubble."

It was just a few twigs and a couple of old dolls. Oliver knew it was a sin against history, but he chucked it all into a bag and covered it in rubble. Besides, it was inside the cavity of the 80s wall. It couldn't be that old. Oliver smiled, he'd just made an executive decision. That would have given him something to tell his old Mum, if she hadn't died of cancer two years before.

"Always told me I'd amount to nothing." He muttered. "Well fuck you mum."

It was an odd and unhealthy train of thought, he knew that. Too much time working on his own, he'd definitely bring in a radio tomorrow. Radio 1 played the same crap songs over and over, but just might save him from going completely crazy. He leant into the wall cavity and brought out more handfuls of twigs. It all went into the bag, to be covered in breeze block fragments. As he stood up he felt something touch his cheek.

"Your mother was right about you.....you little shit."

He spun around and there was no one, just the client's daughter, still some way off. He'd buy an Ipod at the weekend and listen to rap music while he worked. That would stop him hearing things. Emma had his attention, she was walking his way and smiling at him.

"We're making progress." He told her.

She was looking at him a little oddly.

"Your face..... you've cut yourself."

He put his hand up to his cheek and found blood, quite a bit of it.

"Your hands are filthy." Said Emma.

Oliver let her pull at his cheek, the attention was quite nice. She was close to him now, her breath on his cheek.

"This is deep." She said. "I'll drive you to the hospital if you want?"

"Hospital?! I must have just brushed against a sharp edge."

Out of the corner of his eye he saw blood beginning to drip onto his shirt. Blood didn't bother him, but something needed to be done about it. Hospital would mean time off and delays, maybe being taken off the job.

"I've got a proper first aid kit in the van. I'll be fine."

"If you're sure?"

"If it needs stitches, I'll go to the hospital after work."

She was still looking concerned as he left, walking along the corridor to get outside and then almost running to his old van. He never bought a first aid kit until his insurance company had kept going on about it. He unlocked the rear doors of his transit and removed it from the hooks on the wall. Two years and it had never been opened, it was the cleanest thing he owned. He noticed blood begin to drip onto the van floor, as he leant forward.

"Crap!" He shouted.

A huge handful of the cotton wool stuff and a liberal amount of the cleaning liquid. The wool came back bloody and he used a fresh handful. Oliver looked in his wing mirror and the cut was about two inches long and deep. It looked like a knife wound and would need stitches. He rubbed in deep with the cleaner and then cut off a large strip of adhesive plaster. He looked like a pirate or something, but it stopped the blood dripping over his shirt. He felt himself trembling as he looked back at Glade Hall and almost called in sick, giving himself time to think. Maybe ditch the job and find another.

"You need the money." He muttered to himself.

It was the thought of a nice warm place to work in the winter months, that made him return to his work. One more though, one more odd happening, one more mystery cut. And he'd leave.

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