

## Glade Hall

### Chapter 5 – Branca

**“Adam was good at picking his victims, he’d never once been interviewed by the police.”**

Σ

~Then~

Adam Morris hadn’t booked in to The Glade Hall Hotel before. He’d used several other hotels and resorts owned by the Oleander Hotels Group and they’d sent him a flyer, offering five nights for a truly silly price. There were rumours about their Oxfordshire hotel, even the mainstream press were picking them up. Occupancy was obviously low and Adam had decided to accept the offer of a very cheap vacation.

“Mr Morris, we received your booking and you’ve been allocated one of our VIP suites in the main building.”

The girl at the reception desk was pretty and blonde, just his type. He smiled at her and wondered if she lived on the premises. Oxford was quite a distance away and he was certain the hotel must offer staff accommodation to get decent employees. Not that the pretty and confident blonde was likely to be his next victim. He liked his victims to have a certain aura of vulnerability, a feeling that they wouldn’t fight back or tell anyone afterwards. Adam was good at picking his victims, he’d never once been interviewed by the police.

“Thank you.” He replied. “The offer was just too good to ignore. Is the golf course finished yet ?” She was frowning a little.

“No, it’s almost there, but not ready to use. Our heated outdoor pool is open and ready to use and the sauna.”

They really did seem to have it all, five star accommodation and he was paying peanuts for it all. God bless the loonies who believed in evil spirits and ghosts.

“Will you be having dinner in our restaurant ?” She asked. “I can take your booking now.”

“Yes, that would be nice. Book me in for about 8pm.”

There was a young guy in uniform to put his bags on a trolley and take him to his room. There were certain areas that had obviously been quickly tidied up and painted over, but the general impression of the building was good. Not that Adam was really interested in the facilities. His hunger was for other pleasures, a real hunger, likely to be sated by one of the cleaning staff, or maybe a waitress. Always female though, never a boy, no matter how pretty he might be.

“Thank you.”

He tipped the porter and ignored his cases for now. Adam looked out of the window and loved the view of the estate.

“The old aristocracy knew how to create beauty.” He muttered.

Well cut lawns and neat trees, seemed to go on for miles. There was a lake just within his view, with a beautiful arched bridge crossing one end of it. It was all his to explore for five days and who knew what fun he might have at night, in amongst those trees. There had to be a staff wing, his first move would be to find out where that was and if there was CCTV installed. Research was everything if he wanted to keep a clean police record and his career as an external auditor for a large multinational. There had been a girl in the early days, when he’d been younger. He’d made the mistake of getting to know her too well and she’d lost any fear of him. As she’d sat on the edge of the bed, naked and threatening to call the police; he’d offered her money. That had been a terrible mistake and one

he'd never repeated. Adam had killed her, the only one of his fifty two victims that he'd ever killed. Sex was one thing, he loved to feel in control of them. Killing wasn't something he enjoyed, it seemed such a waste. Offering her money had made her near hysterical and strangling her had been an effective way to stop the screeching. She'd been his fourth victim though, when he was still learning his trade. One of the staff of The Glade Hall Hotel, was going to be number fifty three and he felt a little bit of fluid ejaculate into his boxer shorts, at the mere thought of it.

~ ~

Branca knew that seeing guests in their rooms was against the rules, but a few of her friends had dated the guests. Adam had been so nice to her, asking her about her son. The son living with her ex-husband, at his house in Tavira, Portugal. She'd cried a little in front of Adam once, remembering the day the bastard had been given sole custody. Adam had given her a clean hanky and seemed to understand her sorrow. Branca had been using drugs in Portugal, but not now and not ever again. The man she'd been living with then had been a low level supplier. Branca had loved him, but she loved her son far more. She saved nearly all her salary, staying clean, hoping to get her son back one day. Cleaning rooms wasn't much of a career, but she'd learned the hard way, that any job is better than no job.

"Mr Morris." She said. "It's me, Branca."

It was a good idea of his, not using her staff access card to open the door. Someone might wonder why she was entering a guest's room at ten on a Saturday night. He was always so clever and thoughtful. Branca didn't need to tap again, he opened the door and asked her to go inside. She slipped off her coat to reveal a very clinging and short black dress. It had been borrowed from one of her friends and was a little too tight in places.

"You look beautiful." He said.

"So do you. Look handsome I mean."

He was tall and dark and she'd liked him from the first moment he'd smiled at her. He was much older than her, but there were advantages to dating mature men. He worked for a large organisation, always flying off to another part of the world. She hoped and dreamed that if he liked her enough, she might become part of that jet set life.

"I poured us both some champagne." He said.

Champagne, the real stuff, not cider with bubbles in a screw top bottle. It was her first taste of real champagne and she liked the taste. It wasn't her first date with an older man, but it just might be her first time to have sex on a first date. Adam Morris was checking out the next day and Branca wanted to leave her mark on him.

"Oh, it's gone straight to my head."

"Sit with me here.....sit beside me." He said.

There were chairs and even a small sofa, but sitting on the bed with him felt the most natural thing in the world. The drink was making her movements a bit sluggish, so she dropped the empty glass onto the carpet and leant back on the bed. Somewhere in her mind, there was an idea that Adam might have put something in her drink. Why though ? He must have realised she'd come to his room to sleep with him.

'Stay still." He said.

"You're hurting."

"Quiet !"

His left hand went under her jaw, pressing her head back as he hissed at her.

"You'll do as I say, do you understand ?"

“Yes.”

Branca was scared now, was he going to kill her ? The hotel had a strange reputation and all the staff had heard rumours about some college students being killed. His left hand continued to push her head back until she could hardly breathe.

“Please, you don’t need to do this.” She said.

His face looked nothing like the sweet and kind Adam, who’d been so understanding about her battle for custody of her child. His eyes were hard now, hard as granite.

“Shut up ! You’re here to be fucked. Make no fuss and you’ll just get a few bruises.” He hissed at her.

“Make trouble, try to scream..... and you’ll regret it !”

“I’ll do anything..... Just don’t hurt me.”

He was smiling at her now, sure that he was going to have his way with her. His right hand pulled the top of her dress down, revealing her breasts. He seemed to like what he’d found, actually chuckling.

“Oh, I’m going to hurt you Branca. Nothing too bad, but you’re going to suffer.”

His right hand squeezed her breast, as his left held her mouth closed. It hurt, hurt quite a lot as she felt his finger nails dig deeply into her left breast. She couldn’t talk, she couldn’t move and all she could see was the smile on Adam’s face.

Out of nowhere she saw a woman’s hand appear, holding a small blade that glinted in the room lights. The hand was white, the palest skin she’d ever seen. Adam let her go and jumped back, after the knife had carved a long red line into his cheek. He was rubbing his cheek and looking with disbelief as the blood covering his hand.

“Bitch ! Did you do that ?”

Branca still hadn’t moved, couldn’t move from the effect of the drug he’d given her. He looked at her empty hands.

“How..... how did you do that ?”

He didn’t seem to be able to see the young woman in old fashioned clothing. He was looking right through her and Branca suddenly realised that Adam had been cut by one of the infamous Glade Hall ghosts. She laughed, it was impossible not to.

“Shut up or I’ll kill you !” He shrieked.

He didn’t seem worried about making a noise now. He picked up a heavy ornament from the mantelpiece, one of those heavy Victorian pot dogs. He held it like a weapon and moved towards her.

“Wasn’t me.” She managed to say, though her throat still hurt.

The ghost of the girl was in his way and she swung the blade, cutting deeply into his arm and making him drop the pot dog. The girl spoke, though it didn’t seem as though Adam could see her or hear her.

“No !” The phantom yelled. “William treated me like that and then left me to die !”

She used the knife again, digging it deep into his stomach and twisting it around. Adam wouldn’t survive such a terrible wound, no one could. Glade Hall wasn’t finished with him though, the three shadows appeared, as though they’d walked through the windows.

“The sacrifice is ours Hermione, not yours.”

The shadows became solid as she looked and they were three women. Dreadfully burned, their skin looked like the crackling on a Sunday roast. The taller one had spoken and Hermione backed away.

Adam was crouched on the floor by now, watching his blood form a pool on the expensive hotel rug. They circled him, the creatures made of burned skin and filthy rags.

“Take our sacrifice.” They said.

Adam Morris began to scream as they touched him. Branca felt no sympathy as his flesh instantly began to rot and fall off his bones, in the places they touched. Witches, she was now certain of it, as she heard them mumbling spells as rhymes. Adam stopped screaming quite quickly, but they carried on caressing his flesh until nothing was left of him, apart from a few pieces of bone.

"This is hotel security. Please open the door !"

Noise, there had been so much noise. Adam had wedged a chair under the door handle, though she hadn't seen him do it. The now dead pervert really had thought of everything. Well, apart from dying at the hands of the Glade Hall ghosts. The door was bashing against the chair, they'd soon be inside. The phantoms in the room seemed to notice Branca for the first time.

"This one can see us." Said one of the burned creatures.

"She can join us." Said Hermione.

"There have been no words from her, no sacrifice."

"He can be her sacrifice." Said Hermione, pointing at the remains.

There was muttering and the taller witch nodded at Hermione. The girl approached her just as the chair holding the door fell over.

"Do you wish to join us ?"

"Oh yes, yes !" Branca replied.

Anything to get off that bed and away from Glade Hall. She'd often thought that having your throat cut from ear to ear was just another meaningless expression. She realised it wasn't, as Hermione did it to her. The pain was unbearable, but only for a few seconds. Branca quickly passed into unconsciousness and died. The last words her mortal ears ever heard were those of the hotel security manager, yelling at someone to call the police.

~ ~

**~Now~**

Alice Hooper looked at her son strapped into his buggy and had to agree with what Emma had just said.

"Mum ! He looks like he's in prison without committing a crime."

He was already struggling, a tantrum was only fifteen minutes away, half an hour at most.

"I know, but he'll run about and the Chapel is hardly child friendly Emma. So many things for him to collide with."

Her husband seemed really worried about them opening up the Maynard Chapel, perhaps his anxiety was infecting her ?

"Kids have run around that Chapel for hundreds of years mum." Said Emma. "Lots of kid's heads will have rounded off all the sharp edges."

"Fine, but you have to keep an eye on him too."

"I will mum."

"I'll watch him when you want to take pictures." Added Dean.

That was the clincher, Dean was far more responsible than her daughter and Jerry Jr seemed genuinely fond of him.

"Deano !" Shouted Jerry Jr. It was his latest war cry.

Alice unbuckled her son from the buggy and let him run to her daughter's boyfriend. Dean picked him up and seemed genuinely pleased with looking after her monster. The other Jerry, her husband, had been quiet all morning and still hadn't shown up with the Chapel keys.

"So, we're all waiting on your father." Said Alice. "Again ! Is he really that scared of these heritage people ?"

"You know dad, he doesn't like anything that might rock the boat." Replied Emma. "And to be honest, I think he's a bit of a believer in all the Glade Hall ghost stuff."

"Ohhh. Well you've seen more of him lately than I have."

That did explain a lot, but her husband had always ridiculed talk of ghosts and supernatural beings. It was hard to get him to even attend a church for weddings.

"Right, enough time wasted." She said. "I'm going to find your father and those keys."

She'd barely taken two steps across the family's lounge, when Jerome Hooper appeared. He had a piece of grubby string in his hand, with about a dozen keys hanging off the string. He began to rattle a large tin of WD40 at them.

"I was looking for this." He said. "Some of these locks haven't been used in decades."

He then obviously noticed that his son had been let out of buggy jail and was climbing all over Dean.

"You're letting him run around then." Asked Jerry.

"Well, he is nearly twenty." Said Emma.

They all chuckled while her father began to rub rust off the largest of the keys.

"Very funny." He said. "It might be dangerous in there."

"We had this debate while you were gone." Said Alice. "Jerry Jr gets to run about, but under close supervision."

"Is that the Chapel key dad?" Asked Emma.

He sprayed some of the WD40 onto the key and used a piece of rag to rub it well into the rusty areas of the huge steel key.

"Yes, though the others are a mystery. We'll need to use trial and error with any doors we need to open."

"I thought the Chapel had to be opened up to the public, on the quarter days." Said Emma.

Her father held up the rusty keys, some with cobwebs still attached.

"I'm beginning to think that Oleander Hotels ignored that part of the title deeds." He said.

They gathered and followed Jerry towards the Maynard Family Chapel, with Jerry Jr still held in Dean's arms.

~

~

Dan Freeman was often a little embarrassed that Oliver seemed to think of him as a best friend, confidant and next of kin, all rolled into one. In truth no one had ever liked Oliver, he was the kid at school who was a good inch taller than everyone else and used that height to intimidate and bully the other kids. In a large city it might not matter, but villages remember the class bullies. Sat in his kitchen was a lady who'd told him her reason for calling was important and concerned Oliver, but had yet to properly introduce herself.

"We're not related or anything." Said Dan. "We were just friends at school."

"But he does live here?" She asked.

Oh yes, he lived there. Oliver had latched onto a little kindness shown by Dan and moved himself in. No one else wanted him after his mother had died and the landlord had finally evicted Oliver for two years unpaid rent. No one else was crazy enough to take in Oliver. It was supposed to just be for a few days, but two years later and Oliver was still living in the attic room of The Copper Kettle.

"Yes, he lives upstairs. Can I ask why you're here?"

"Sorry." She said.

She was showing him a laminated card on a chain, with her picture and who she represented. Her name was Helen something or other and she was from a hospital visitor's charity in Oxford.

"I don't know much about Oliver." She said. "But the visitors group in London asked us to contact his next of kin."

Damn, Oliver had been using him as next of kin again. He hated that, they weren't related and to be honest, he was beginning to seriously dislike the lodger in the attic. His wife, June, had been muttering about Oliver coming downstairs in the night and helping himself to their stock.

"I thought he just had a bit of lurgy on his face?" He asked.

She was going through her notes and frowning.

"It's much more serious than that I'm afraid and no one has visited him."

There was no way he was going all the way to London to visit Oliver. June would kill him, they were short staffed and quite busy.

"As I said, he's not a real relation of mine and I can't leave my wife to run the place on her own, even for just a day."

Helen was looking at him with some distress.

"He's dying Dan." She said. "I'm breaking the rules to tell you that, but his consultant doesn't think he'll last another week."

"But..... it was just his face."

"The anti-biotics haven't worked to reduce the infection. If you don't go to see him this week, you might not get another opportunity."

"We're so busy at the moment."

Helen had puppy dog eyes and she obviously wasn't going to take no for an answer.

"It would mean so much to him." She said.

Too soft and he knew it, everyone had told him to evict Oliver after the first bottle of tequila had gone missing. June would go crazy, but the guy was dying.

"It'll take me a couple of days to move my schedule around." He said. "Even then it'll be a quick visit, no staying overnight or anything."

"That is very good of you Dan. I'd better give you the address of the hospital and the visiting hours."

Too damn soft and now he'd agreed to see a guy he didn't like, who had a disgusting case of the lurgy on his face. And June was probably going to make him sleep on the sofa for a month.

~

~

Jerome Hooper sprayed a liberal amount of WD40 into the lock on the Maynard Chapel door and tried the key again.

"It's turning a bit further this time." He said.

He twisted the key, jiggled it about and then heard a click. The key turned completely and he felt the door move slightly. He pulled at the door and then realised it opened inwards.

"You did it dad." Said Emma.

The heavy oak door swung inwards, revealing rows of pews and an altar in the distance. It was lit up by the morning sun coming through stained glass windows. The overall effect was beautiful and not in the least bit scary or sinister.

"There isn't even that much dust." He said.

There was some, blown into drifts by draughts from the windows, it had ended up against the eastern wall. Webs too, once they'd walked close enough to look at the pews. Generations of spiders had tried to reclaim the chapel as part of the outdoors and almost succeeded.

"Ewww spiders." Said Emma. "Millions of them!"

"It needs a professional clean." Said Jerry. "And a spray with insecticide, or they'll just keep coming back."

He went in front, using his trousers to clear a path through the webs. Insects are no respecters of religion and even the cross behind the altar was coated in webs. Emma was already busy with her camera, getting it all recorded for posterity.

"My friends on Facebook are going love this stuff." She said.

"Mention that we are going to clean the place up a bit." Said Alice.

The silverware had been left on the altar and it had all tarnished and turned black. The crucifix, the candle sticks and a few bowls. It was all probably worth a fortune, but its condition just added to the feeling of total neglect.

"It must be years since anyone came in here." Said Dean.

He was still holding Jerry Jr, who didn't seem keen to wander among the spiders and their webs.

There were two side offices at the rear of the Chapel and the door to one was already ajar. Jerry looked inside and found yet more webs, covering what looked like a priest's dressing room.

"There are even robes left on the hooks." Said Alice.

"I'll ask Nick Goodwood to get some cleaners in here." He replied. "Quite quickly."

Emma was already trying the door to the larger office and wrinkling her nose. It was obvious that the door was securely locked.

"It's only faint, might be quite old." She said. "But there's a trace of something nasty in there. It reminds me of when we accidently dug up Mr Jingles."

Mr Jingles, the cat Emma had loved and had been buried by Jerry, under the rock garden. Probably not the best place to leave a much loved pet to rest in peace. Jerry had unearthed him by accident, a year after he'd been laid to rest.

"If it is a dead cat." Said Alice. "We can't just leave it in there."

Jerry sprayed the lock a couple of times and gave the fluid a minute or so to do its stuff. The first key was far too big, the next far too long. The third key he tried almost turned, so he jiggled it about for a while.

"I'm getting quite good at this." He said.

The door moved back into the room and he heard Emma gasp.

"Keep the baby well away." Said Jerry.

"Oh, Christ Jerry !" Said Alice.

~ ~

Mrs Hargreaves liked her job and she liked the Hoopers. As far as she was concerned there was far too much twaddle being talked about Glade Hall, by people with too much time on their hands.

"Over fertile imaginations." She'd told the new head gardener.

Some of the locals had worked for the hotel and told stories of seeing shadows around the grounds, when the light was just right. As if shadows could hurt anyone ! It was all twaddle and nonsense.

Hilda Hargreaves was easy going, prided herself on it. Until she felt people were putting on her.

She'd ignored the builders taking over part of her kitchen. She'd even tolerated one of them bringing in a transistor radio. But, Wendy was definitely approaching the line that marked Mrs Hargreaves point of feeling decidedly put upon. Everyone else had finished breakfast and gone to get on with their work. Wendy James remained sat there and she appeared to be muttering at her cold cup of tea.

"Sorry to hurry you." Said Hilda. "The whole family are in residence now and I have to start getting their lunch ready."

She gave Wendy what she hoped was a warm smile, almost conspiratorial.

“Can’t have the lady of the house thinking I was feeding her husband slops while was in America, can we ?”

Wendy banged the table and picked up the butter knife, brandishing it as though it was a serious weapon. Hilda looked at the young woman’s expression and forgot all about being put upon. She sat down opposite Wendy, even putting her hand on hers.

“Are you alright dear ?” She asked. “You can always talk to me..... about anything.”

“I just..... it’s nothing.”

She still looked tense, but she put the knife back on the table.

“I’ve a daughter your age dear.” Said Hilda. “You can talk to me about anything. It’ll go no further and I’ve been told I’m a good listener.”

Now that she was close to her, she could see the dark rings around Wendy’s eyes. The young woman didn’t look as though she’d had a proper night’s sleep in a while.

“You live in the village.” Said Wendy. “You must have heard the rumours about this place.”

“Oh, well. Yes of course I’ve heard things. Mainly from silly people who should know better than to spread silly stories. I’ll get you some tea that’s drinkable.”

Mrs Hargreaves gave Wendy a clean cup and filled it from the pot of earl grey that she’d just made for herself. It gave them both a minute or so to collect their thoughts.

“There’s no problem that isn’t a lot better after a cup of tea.” Said Hilda.

“It can’t all be coincidence though.” Said Wendy. “The stories of things being seen, the people who’ve been injured and even killed. You can’t simply ignore all that !”

“It’s an old house dear. It could well be that a hundred or more people have died here since it was built. That’s just life I’m afraid, most will have died in bed of old age or disease.”

“But you can’t put it all down to hysteria and bad luck.” Said Wendy.

She looked so upset ! Hilda felt a real need to help the poor girl.

“Would you like to hear my theory about the Glade Hall ghosts ?” She asked.

“Yes.”

“Most of the problem is up here.”

Hilda tapped the side of her head with her index finger.

“I’m not saying people are crazy, just that what they believe can actually hurt them. It’s a bit like worrying too much about turning the iron off. You check and check again, until instead of turning it off, you turn it on and set the kitchen on fire.”

“I think I understand what you mean.” Said Wendy.

“Don’t let it in.” Said Hilda. “Some people believe these ghosts can hurt them and that belief can lead to real harm. Refuse to believe in all the nonsense and it has no power to harm you.”

Wendy was looking quite relieved, though Hilda didn’t think she’d told her much, apart from a bit of old fashioned common sense.

“I hope that helped.” She said.

“Yes it did. A lot actually..... I’m going to throw them away the instant I get home.”

Wendy left the kitchen and Mrs Hargreaves had no idea what Wendy was about to throw out, but if it made her happy..... She had lunch to think about and a hungry family to feed. There was some fresh Hare that had been hanging for just the right amount of time.

“That’ll be a nice surprise for them.” She muttered. “I bet they never ate that in London.”

~

~

Emma was looking at the door as it opened and had full view of whatever had been killed in the office at the rear of the Chapel. It was big, or had been big before decay had turned it into a skeleton with bits of fur and sinew stuck to it.

"Keep the baby away from here." Said her father.

Dean took Jerry Jr to the other side of the Chapel, but Emma had to know what had died there. Her mother was curious too and walked nearer to the office door. The true horror had long passed, the flies, the flesh turning to evil smelling fluid. That had all happened years before and all that was left was a hint of those events.

"I think it might have been a dog." Said her dad.

"A big dog." Added her mum. "Probably a German Shepherd, by the shape of the jaws."

They all became more confident as the horror became another piece in the puzzle of Glade Hall. Emma and her mother joined Jerome Hooper in what had once been the priest's office, standing around the remains of a murdered dog.

"Christ !" Said Alice. "They nailed its skin to the floor."

"Ewww don't touch it dad."

Her father pulled back the few bits of remaining fur, to show lines of small nails that had been hammered into the floorboards. The dog had been cut along its belly from neck to tail and the skin stretched back and nailed down. Emma just hoped that the poor thing had been dead when it had been done.

"Do we need to inform the police ?" Asked her mum.

"You do if you run one over." Said Emma.

She could feel her parent's eyes on her.

"I looked it up once. A dog has value, so killing it must be reported."

"We didn't kill it though." Said her dad.

Her father was still picking at the remains, as if fascinated by it.

"We should call the cops." Said Emma.

"The papers would have a field day with this." Said Alice.

"Yes." Said her father. "This must have happened years ago. I'll get some tools and a few bin bags and we won't be calling the police about it."

"Dean.... Be a darling and take Jerry Jr back to the lounge."

"Of course Mrs Hooper."

Her father stood up and Emma remembered seeing Henry using really strong plastic bags.

"Henry has some really tough bags dad, for the building rubble."

"Great, I'll get a few. Don't fiddle with it while I'm gone."

"Dad ! I'm not six years old."

Part of her still was six years old and she aimed her camera at the remains as soon as he'd gone.

"Don't put them on Facebook Emma." Said her mum. "You'll get us all arrested or on some weirdo list..... or something."

Emma kept her finger on the camera button and created a ten second movie. The still pics would come next.

"Of course not mum, but it all needs to be recorded. For our project."

"Yes of course dear, the project."

By the time her father returned with Henry and one of his labourers, she had over fifty pics of the dead dog and was busy taking pictures of the Chapel altar.

"No word of this leaves this room." Said her father. "Understood ?"

“Yes of course Mr Hooper.”

“Good. There’ll be a bit of a bonus for you. I’ll have an envelope for each of you later.”

It took quite a while for all the nails to be pulled out of the floor and the grisly remains to be put into one of the sacks. There was still a stain though, like a snow angel, but formed by the action of decaying tissue acting on the wood floor.

“You’ll never get that out and the wood in here is over eight hundred years old.” Said Henry. “You’ll never find matching timbers.”

“A rug can go over it.” Said Alice.

Emma admired her mother’s can do attitude. A decent Indian rug and no one would ever know the stain was there. It would get out though, the story about the new owners of the Hall, finding a dead dog nailed to the Chapel floor. By the time she did her next afternoon at the florists, Sheila would know, she’d have put money on it.

~ ~

Tommy Milner was out in the dark, checking on his precious new sheep. They were still wary of him and ran off as he approached. That would change though, as the timid creatures became used to seeing him around. He had a bucket of feed in one hand, dropping handfuls as he walked through his small flock of woolly bundles. Some followed him, keeping a few feet away. Soon they’d come right up to him and he’d be able to stroke them as they fed.

“Good grass here.” He muttered at them. “Generations of horses grew strong on it.”

He swung his flashlight around, happy that all the sheep were within the small area enclosed by the electric fence. Tomorrow he’d enlarge the area, gradually getting them used to the full half acre that was to be their main home. Tommy noticed one of his flock snag a rear foot on something. He ran over and found just a piece of bindweed rising up out of the grass. He was behaving like a new mother, but he couldn’t help it. He saw something out of the corner of his eye. Skin, pink naked skin walking past, a good fifty yards away.

“Oh no ! She’ll get hurt !” He muttered.

He aimed his torch at the girl and knew from her walk that it was Emma Hooper. People did sleepwalk, he’d seen programmes about it on late night satellite TV. One of his sheep was actually pushing her nose into the feed bucket. That was the sort of thing he’d dreamed of, but Emma took all that from his mind. The gate to the fence was some distance away and he’d lost the girl by the time he was where he’d last seen her.

“Heading for The Glade.” He muttered to himself.

Tommy ran and caught up with Emma just before she turned down into The Glade. She wasn’t naked, but she was only dressed in a pair of panties and a skimpy nightie. She wasn’t wearing shoes and her feet were already caked in mud.

“Emma !” He called.

He had the light held almost straight in her face and she didn’t appear to notice. Tommy wanted to grab hold of her and wake her up, but seemed to remember the late night satellite show had said that was dangerous. Of course that might be total crap, the same channel had run a whole season on the benefits of homeopathy.

“Wake up Emma.”

He didn’t feel comfortable enough to man handle a near naked girl he barely knew. Tommy followed her down the path, marvelling at how she managed to follow a path that was a challenge in bright sunlight. He held back a little as she walked onto the oval of grass between the standing stones.

Tommy didn't believe in the power of The Glade, he knew it existed, with the same certainty that he knew the sun would rise in the morning. It was a dangerous place, he knew it ! Following Emma onto that oval of grass was like most people putting their hand out to a fierce dog, which was bearing its teeth. He did it though, he put his right foot onto the grass and then moved his left foot. Tommy didn't walk that fast, but he was behind Emma when she knelt in front of the larger of the stones.

"Emma you're dreaming..... wake up girl. Wake up !" He shouted.

He grabbed her shoulders and shook her and still Emma Hooper showed no signs of being aware of her surroundings. Tommy knelt down himself and touched the stone, in the way his mother had once told him was the right way.

"I mean no disrespect." He said. "This girl is not one of us, she doesn't know our local ways. Please release her."

Tommy pushed his hand onto the sharp edges of the stone and pulled downwards, opening up several nasty wounds on his palm. As the blood flowed, the stone began to pulse with a dull yellow light and Emma started to cough. Tommy put his jacket around her shoulders, knowing her modesty would return with her consciousness.

"Come on Emma, let's get you home."

They were halfway up the path before Emma was fully awake and beginning to talk.

"Tommy ! I had a dream and you were in it."

"It wasn't a dream Emma. You walked to The Glade in your sleep."

Her feet were beginning to look bloody, but he wasn't strong enough to carry her home and he wasn't going to leave her alone.

"I've had dreams of going there before."

"We need to wake your parents and let them know."

That seemed to really upset her. Emma began to fight him, trying to walk back down the path.

"No Tommy, please. They'll want to move and my parents are just getting back together."

"You don't understand." Said Tommy. "It's not a game. Keep going there at night and there will be a price to pay for whatever you've received. There is a very real chance that you'll die."

"But..... I haven't asked for something."

"Not with your voice maybe, but you're a young girl. I bet your heart desires something."

She seemed to understand and nodded at him.

"I'll see a doctor Tommy, get some sleeping pills. Please don't tell my dad."

"Alright, but I'll be watching The Glade for a few nights. If you walk that way again, I'll take you to see your parents."

"Fine, thank you Tommy."

She kissed him on the cheek and put her arm through his. He walked her all the way back to Glade Hall and waited, half hidden in the bushes, until he was certain she wasn't going out again.

~ ~