

## Dessery's diary

Christian Zajdek.

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### Preface

Although this novel is about witchcraft, there is no hocus pocus in its pages. It is full of cold realism which is lighted by dark humour, however it ends up being just as, if not more enthralling than any fickle fanciful fiction founded in a boundless world of magic. By bringing together such curiosities as grimoires, witch trials, and the rumours surrounding the affair of the poisons linked to Louis XIV, this historical thriller come dark comedy, makes for a fast and twisting ride. The story begins as three teenagers with very singular but comparable issues, stumble upon a diary written by a seventeenth century bohemian green witch. The diary includes an alternative account of the life of their town's patron saint. For various reasons the group set about trying to bring it to attention, but though their lives all end up better for the journey that it leads them on, they don't get all that far with their aim.

Yours sincerely,

Christian Zajdek.

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### 1st Night

"Did I mention to you two that my aunt died last month?" said Fea.

"Gee, you don't sound all that cut up about it." said Jarath.

"That is probably because I'm not. She was utterly horrible. She was sort of like a fairy tale harridan."

"I hate how you have to pretend that you care when a relative dies, even if you barely knew them." said Imogen.

"I'm sure there are very few people out there whose mortality you are concerned with." said Jarath.

"Snuff off!"

"If people hear of a massacre on..." said Fea.

"I care whether you die."

"Yeah, you care if I don't die." said Jarath.

"People will say a handful of sympathetic words for the victims of a catastrophe, but if a stepsister dies they will mourn and cry for a week." said Fea

"People do not mourn out of respect for the dead. People are merely saddened because death alters their lives."

"You say that I am detached." said Imogen.

"Sadly I agree with your cynicism, but let's not anger them." said Fea.

"There's no such thing as ghosts." said Jarath.

"You do not know that. You cannot just say that."

"Look, firstly..."

"It's stupid." said Imogen.

"Even if only a select few become ghosts the number of sightings would have risen exponentially over the past few centuries. As it would correlate to the population growth, and secondly..." said Jarath.

"Its stupid."

"If they can in fact move things and pass on messages, surely at least one of them would have provided us with something insightful. As opposed to rubbish outlining how they are looking over and caring for loved ones. Who would care for a message untold, over that which the other realm beholds."

"You seem well set to be a ghost Jarath, you talk a profuse amount of rubbish. What were you talking about Fea?"

"Your aunt."

"My aunt did not make..." said Fea.

"How did she die?" said Imogen.

"Liver failure. She did not have a will so we are currently sorting through her stuff, and it is taking forever since she collected an epic amount of tat. However, we did manage to find a few items of interest, like this for example."

"A book."

"It is not just any book I..."

"It looks properly old." said Jarath.

"They are the worst kind of books. Old books are boring." said Imogen.

"What about Shakespeare?"

"Shakespeare is terrible. A king misjudges his daughters, a brother and sister get mistaken for one another. I do not understand how on earth that managed to entertain a queen."

"I think that it is a spell book." said Fea.

"What." said Jarath.

"Cool." said Imogen.

"Either that or it is a really messed up cookbook. There are numerous pentagrams and..." said Fea.

"Devil worship."

"The pentagram is a basic geometric construct that has undoubtedly been around and connected to religion since the evolution of creativity. The meaning that the West has of it has only..." said Jarath.

"What's it say?"

"Most of it is written in foreign languages..." said Fea.

"That looks really old, like it should be in a museum old." said Jarath.

"Another book was also found. It's written wholly in English, but is seemingly indecipherable. My cousin Gabriel, the son of a different aunt, has it."

"No offence but he is crazy, not in a good way but literally." said Imogen.

"How many aunts do you have?" said Jarath.

"Six. Gabriel is doing a minor in English history at university, and he wants to do part of his course work on the book. Thus he is currently transcribing it. Its written in old English and apparently abound with slang and spelling errors, as such he thinks it will be sometime before he is finished. As for the spell book I thought that we could do..." said Fea.

"Can we summon something? Are there hexes? Can we make a sacrifice?" said Imogen.

"Well, most of the book is in Latin, there are a few pages in old English though. The rest of it looks like it is written in Sanskrit." said Fea.

"You two actually believe in this stuff don't you." said Jarath.

"Why not? There is so much that is unknown in the world."

"Imogen, do you really think that there is something in this stuff?"

"I don't really care if it works or not, its a bit of fun." said Imogen.

"What is to say magic is not real?" said Fea.

"Please, Shaman, witch-doctors and sorcerers have been around for millennia, so I find it hard to believe that there is still as of yet no definitive..." said Jarath.

"Can I have a look at that?" said Imogen.

"There is still no proof, whether certain persons can do magic."

"There are forces beyond our understanding, so what if they are temperamental." said Fea.

"The hardest thing to swallow is that the supernatural supposedly bypasses the fundamental laws as we currently understand them. If they can be broken so readily, surely the technology that depends on them would not work quite as impeccably as it seems to."

"You always think that you are right. Your problem is that you do not open your mind enough."

"Your problem is that you open your mind too much. You've got fairies floating in and out of there."

"Let's do this one." said Imogen.

"I understand it, I do. If there is a problem I want to do something to rectify it, it doesn't matter if the action works or not, the act in its self is therapeutic." said Jarath.

"No, let's do this one."

"You need a snake though." said Fea.

"What is that meant to say?"

"I think it has something to do with increasing ones mettle."

"What about this one, we could make flowers bloom. How about trying to make it rain...what's the point of that."

"How about averting famine." said Jarath.

"This one, we have got to try this one, it supposedly helps you obtain that which you most desire. First, pull off the heads of two turtledoves and draw circles in the sand before you with their blood. Using the bird held in your right hand to draw a circle on your right and with the other likewise. Draw a line that bisects and connects the two circles. Then recite the incantation as cited, to call forth a truly terrible and scarring noise, which if you can withstand will result in your desire being at hand."

"We should do that, we could easily get some turtledoves from a pet store."

"You are not killing any birds." said Fea.

"How about this one? My Latin is a bit rusty though." said Imogen.

The pleasing nature of the night could have made any setting shine. However, in saint Mary's graveyard below the haze of streetlights and a quarter moon, there was little to improve on. Imogen, Jarath and Fea were sat together on the grave of one, Robert Baxter, who died 18th of April 1846 aged 62 years. Imogen was doing her best to recite the Latin written in the book resting on her lap, while struggling to cast additional light with a candle. Jarath and Fea paid little attention to her, for they were in the midst of a mild argument regarding human and animal rights. Steadily disrupting the group's utterances was the disjointed singing of a drunkard, who was walking the path that crossed in front of Mr. Baxter's grave. Imogen, Jarath and Fea had long since accepted that such disturbances were part of the price to be paid for living in a free country, and so took no notice of the disorderly passerby. Imogen did, however come to notice that those accompanying her were not paying her sufficient attention. She believed her admirable attempt at reading Latin warranted note and so began to elevate her voice. She would have ended up shouting had the passage been longer. A split second after Imogen had silenced, a dull thud and a high pitch diminuendo made the three's attention turn to the drunkard. He had collapsed and hit his head on the stone walkway, while the bottle that had been glued to his hand was dancing down the pathway.

"No snuffing way." said Imogen.

"Coincidence." said Jarath

"No, no, no snuffing way..."

"I know what you are thinking."

"There are no such things as coincidences." said Fea

"That saying depends on the circumstances. If two things have little connection they can easily occur independently of one another."

"No snuffing way, I just killed a man." said Imogen.

"Don't worry, he is probably just unconscious." said Fea.

"No, I mean cool."

"Do you really think that words, a sound wave, could cause someone to die?" said Jarath.

"You could use embedded commands or some sort of hypnotism." said Fea.

"I'm going to look at him." said Imogen.

"Yet we are fine. Besides it was in Latin, I would bet my life that that drunk barely has a grasp of English let alone..." said Jarath.

"Is he dead?" said Fea.

"I don't want to touch him, he smells." said Imogen, as Fea and Jarath got up and made way to join her. On their way they shared a smile for the look of revulsion on Imogen's face was one of note.

"He has got a pulse, barely though. He looks like he hit his head hard. There is a lot of blood...Call an ambulance."

"Really? I say we leave him here and hope he dies. This my friends is what they refer to as natural selection. Isn't that right Jarath?"

"You are such a cold-hearted bitch."

"Yet you hang around with me."

"Who has got a phone?"

"Wait, I want to see if he has got any money. If we are going to save his life we might as well get paid for it."

"Don't you dare!"

"Of all people, why on earth would you have to or want to steal money from a paralytic drunk?" said Jarath.

"Put it back!"

"OK, but if I don't take his money then the paramedics will...Jarath there are two things you can never have enough of, one is wealth and the other is power." said Imogen.

"Aren't they one and the same?" said Jarath.

"Imogen, that is the sort of greed inspired apathetic mentality that has made Sodom and Gomorrah seem like cities of saints in comparison to New York, London town and Dubai." said Fea.

"The lefties will in time have the day, but as for now, you just sound like a fool Fea."

"Has anyone actually got a phone?"

"I don't like phones. If people want to contact me they should have to go to some length to do so." said Imogen.

"How is that working out for you?" said Jarath.

"I still think we should just leave him be."

"There is a phone box near the theatre."

"Come on then." said Fea.

"There is probably one that is closer."

"Do you know where one would be?"

Fea's question was met with silence, and so without so much as sharing a glance, the three unanimously decided to go with Jarath's suggestion

"Who actually goes to our theatre? I can barely stand the acting in movies, so I can't imagine what it would be like to have to sit through an amateur stage production." said Imogen.

"The amateurs of today are the potential masters of tomorrow. If you do nothing but criticise they will never blossom." said Fea.

"Has Gabriel got any idea as to what the other book you found is?" said Jarath.

"He is pretty certain it is a diary."

"Miss Shelly keeps a diary. I stole it out of her bag once, but there was nothing remotely interesting in it." said Imogen.

"You took it! I remember when she found it missing. She was beside herself."

"I found it...I doubt there'll be anything interesting in the one you found."

"Better insight into what everyday life was like back then would be enough."

"Do you have a date?" said Jarath.

"Sixteen forty-four."

"That book must smell of money."

"That was when the civil war took place." said Imogen.

"Please do not take offence to this, but I am quite surprised that you know that." said Fea.

"Mr. Ferson teaches history."

"OK...moving on..." said Jarath. The conversation did move but not toward anything of importance. As such several eyes rolled before the group reached their destination.

"There is absolutely no way that I am going in there." said Jarath.

"That is disgusting." said Imogen.

"What is that smell?" said Fea.

"Seriously let's just forget about the drunk, someone is bound to find him, eventually."

"We are not going to leave him, we are at a phone box someone just has to brave going in it. Here, I have got some baby wipes."

"I'll do it. Have you got any money?"

"It is a free number." said Jarath.

"I know that, I just want to call a taxi to pick me up in an hour or so."

"That is plain excessive. You are not calling a taxi, you live less then ten minutes away. Jarath and I will walk home with you." said Fea.

"What if I get attacked?"

"We will be with you." said Jarath.

"What are you going to do? What help is a pacific hippie and, whatever you are meant to be, going to be when faced with an attacker?"

"Hurry up and make the call." said Fea.

"Firstly, this is a small provincial town, and secondly, I've seen you walk home on your own before." said Jarath.

"I was probably on sherbet, and had the whole superman complex." said Imogen.

"The phone call!" said Fea.

"What number do I call?"

"You are joking right?" said Jarath.

"I do not think she is." said Fea.

"It is written on the phone."

"That's handy." said Imogen, as she finally picked up the receiver and began making the call.

"I want an ambulance please...You have got a really nice voice...What...Yeah, a man has collapsed. He hit his head...Where are you stationed...The path that cuts through St. Mary's grounds in Welbeck town...Are you married?"

"She is such a chore." said Jarath, as the call finally concluded.

"Let's rock and roll." said Imogen.

"Where are we going?" said Fea.

"We left our stuff back at the graveyard, so there I guess."

"Can we not stay here for a bit? I really do not want to have to talk to the paramedics."

"It will take them at least five minutes to get to saint Mary's. We could easily beat them there and leave before they arrive." said Jarath.

"We might as well watch them take the dolt away, it is probably the most exciting thing to have happened in the church grounds. Well, the most exciting thing that is lighted."

"What is that meant to mean?"

"Shall we tell people at school about this? They would find it interesting, no?" said Fea.

"Who are you going to tell? You have not got any friends."

"Neither do you, people only hang around with you because you are rich and give out handouts."

"That's not true."

"Well, either that or you sleep with them."

"Snuff off."

"You do seem to have a lot of partners." said Jarath, and with that the party was silenced. They remained as such until they reached the place where the drunkard lay.

"If we kill him we could easily get away with it, I haven't seen anyone around and there are no cameras in graveyards." said Imogen.

"Graveyards are the safest places to be." said Fea.

"Well, evidently not for him." said Jarath.

"Death is theoretically the orgasm of life. Have you two never wondered what it would be like to kill someone?" said Imogen.

"That sort of crazy talk is why the two of us are the only ones willing to hang around with you."

"I know it is quite hard to see in this light, so let me tell you that I'm currently making a hand gesture."

"I really feel sorry for your husband to be."

"That's weird because I have always had my heart set on marrying you."

"I can actually see that happening." said Fea.

"Can you also see me digging a shallow grave?" said Jarath, oblivious that he was to set off a repetitive barrage of insults, which would last until the ambulance arrived.

"Let's go over there. We will be better hidden." said Fea while motioning towards a shaded and uninviting area. Jarath and Imogen decided to humour her and so they relocated there, where they quietly watched the paramedics handle the drunkard.

"It's really quite boring just sitting here. I want to talk to them." said Imogen, after she had already begun to make her way toward the paramedics. After an exchange of words Jarath and Fea reluctantly followed her.

"Wow, he looks pretty messed up." said Imogen.

"Where did you come from?" said one of the paramedics.

"I was just passing with my friends, and we saw the lights so..."

"Does this happen a lot then?" said Jarath.

"What happen?" said the paramedic.

"Getting called out to deal with drunken accidents."

"How do you know that it was a drunken accident?"

"Are you joking? He smells like twelve drunks. It must be fairly disheartening when the only people you end up helping are drunkards and the elderly who are reluctant to die." said Imogen.

"The job is actually very..."

"I'm going to see if he has a phone, I'll phone his wife or something."

"There is really no need."

"Just let us do our jobs." said the other paramedic.

"He hasn't got a wallet." said Imogen, as she turned to make eye contact with Fea.

"I do not mean to offend you, but get lost kid." said the paramedic.

The three left the scene but the decision to do so probably had more to do with waning interest. However the words said still made an impact.

"What a mar. I hope that their ambulance crashes." said Imogen.

"I cannot believe that you were right about his wallet, but I don't know how they managed to take it. We were watching them pretty much the whole time." said Fea.

"They didn't take his wallet. I was just joking around."

"I don't understand how you manage to act so cool."

"She is a sociopath, that's how." said Jarath.

"Yeah, and you are a frigid queer that doesn't have any friends." said Imogen.

"No, I'm a frigid queer that doesn't have any friends, who you want to have your wicked way with."

Once they finally made it back to their stuff, they settled down before a headstone which time had long since removed the markings from.

"What would you say the perfect murder would be? I'd say knife throwing would be good. You could make the blade yourself, so it would be untraceable, plus you can remain at a distance from the victim." said Imogen.

"It is somewhat worrying that you have actually put thought into the answer." said Fea.

"I would use hot heroin, for even if you have a strong motive, the suspicion would straight away fall on their dealer. The police would just think that the victim's dealer thought they were a nark. Of course your victim has to be a user, but that doesn't matter too much, you could get a nun hooked on smack." said Jarath.

"You would never get away with it. You always hear on the news about the police catching murderers."

"I think that we should try to do one of those spells." said Imogen.

"The police aren't going to readily broadcast that they have failed to catch a murderer, and excluding the armed forces, the vast majority of people who commit homicide are absolute idiots."

The conversation continued for sometime, but the subject matter steadily grew stale, and the participant's restlessness increased.

"I am going to take some gravestone rubbings." said Fea.

"How many have you done so far?" said Imogen.

"How do you know which ones you have done, and how are you going to see what you are doing?" said Jarath.

"Well, I mark them, and I intend to use this." said Fea.

"What, why on earth have we not been using that torch, instead of these stupid...candles?" said Imogen.

"I won't be long, I only have a few pieces of paper."

"I think it is so funny how all the female graves say, wife of X, on them." said Jarath.

"That is not funny."

"Come on, in a society that is supposedly post sexism, surely you can laugh at that."

"No." said Imogen, while Fea made way to the far end of the graveyard.

"So Imogen, are you still sleeping with your psychiatrist?" said Jarath.

"His wife found one of my stockings, he collects them, it's a thing that he has, so we are laying low at the moment." said Imogen.

"Why do you wear stockings? Stockings are for wives whose husbands are losing interest in them."

"Nobody loses interest in me."

"Do you not think he might be taking advantage of you? He has note books full of your inner thoughts, surely it cannot be too hard for him to use that to his advantage."

"Believe you me, I have control of the situation. You should know that. I want something, and then I take it."

"Don't you think there is a possibility that he initiates your want?"

"You don't know him."

"No, but I want to. I worry about you."

"Book an appointment with him."

"I want to get to know him, not let him in my head. I really don't trust him, and besides I don't have that sort of money."

"Your concern is sweet, it really is."

"That maybe so, but will you pay heed? Surely you can see that he is using you."

"Nobody uses me, I use them."

"Surely you can see that he is getting the most out of your situation. You need love, and there's only a hand full of people that can give you the love you require. Now don't say anything crass because you know that, that is not what I mean."

"I admit I have problems, I am seeing a psychiatrist about them, but what about you? I know that you are not as sane as you like to think. Before Fea and I first met you, we saw you several times. We actually thought you were properly...(whistles)...You would spend what would seem like hours in this place on your own, not doing anything, just sort of hovering about over there. Tell me what is that all about? Fea and I know very little about you, what is your story Jarath?"

"What if I am not really here, what if I am just a product of your twisted little mind?"

Following Jarath's slightly more cutting then intended comment, the two of them fell into what proved to be a prolonged silence. It was not the sort of silence shared between close friends, but rather that in which each party was astutely aware of the other. Both wished Fea to returned soon, but they did so in vain, for she only made way to rejoin them once content with what she had reaped.

"What the hell. I thought that you were...some sort of...a..." said Jarath, as Fea snuck up on him.

"Yes Jarath." said Imogen.

"I don't know. She could have been some sort of...weirdo."

"We are the weird ones Jarath. We are the ones people act nervously around. We are the ones that are bemused and confused by even the simplest of societies idiosyncrasies." said Fea.

"No, you miss understand me. I mean, chloroform over the mouth and dress up as a children's television character weird."

"You're out of step Jarath. None of those psychos walk the streets any more, they all scrawl the Internet day and night waiting for a fool to come along, to invite to their version of the mad hatter's tea party." said Imogen.

"Do you use the same chat rooms as them or something?"

"Yeah, and we talk about you all the time."

"I think it is meant to rain tonight. I better go home soon." said Fea.

"Yeah, let's call it a night. After all we do have school tomorrow."

"Like you care about school." said Jarath.

"Like she even needs to care about school." said Fea.

"The diary you mentioned, Fea, sounds really interesting. I would love a copy of Gabriel's transcription if possible. I'll give you some money to give to him for a printout."

"I want one too, I'm interested too." said Imogen.

"Yeah, I will get copies to you both, but I don't know how long it will take exactly. I have not managed to talk to Gabriel recently, he has been somewhat reclusive." said Fea.

"What about the other book, the spell book, are you going to keep it?" said Jarath.

"I do not know yet, but I doubt anyone could appreciate it quite like I do."

"Do you want to come around to my house Jarath? I'm not tired." said Imogen.

"Take some sleeping pills then, but only the recommended dose mind." said Jarath.

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## 30th April 1644

It is May day, but this diary entry concerns its eve, and though the shadow of other events domineered them, I am determined to write of the joyous aspects of the day. Solely to try to keep back, for as long as possible, the melancholy that is all too eager to consume. The Puritans are causing an increasing amount of turmoil in our lands. Even though Charles's reign is interwoven with insanity, it is familiar insanity that is predictable and endurable. However, no matter how gravely bad things appear, I fear that these moments are but the calm before the storm shows its true ferocity. The melancholy seems to be winning, but I shall resist.

Dawn Lighted a singularly beautiful day that sported a western breeze, which when stepped into instantly stripped away ones fatigue. The cloudless sky fostered excitement for the evening's festivities, but also inadvertently caused the day to pass frustratingly slow. Twilight began as the moon was edging above the

horizon, in the sign of Scorpio. Although beautiful the sight was, it caused panic. Since I knew how hard making the journey to be made would be in the dark. I quickly gathered what I needed and made way north along the River Lark's edge. It was a most serene walk. I wished to draw it out longer, but twilight never lasts long and so the sights were soon destroyed. Leaving me with but the stars, and an incomplete moon to light my way. I thought about going back every cautious step I made. However, I came to notice a faint glow a way away, which emanated from the depths of the wood the river carved through. I thus found my way to the proceedings, which had evidently started without me, with ease.

Much to my disappointment, there were only around twenty people present. What made it especially sad, was that memories of times when the age-old tradition had been ardently honoured, played out vividly in my mind. Ever since the arrogant minded Puritans became a predominant force in East Anglia, my fellow brothers and sisters have been too fearful to practice our so called bohemian beliefs. Those of us with the fortitude, come madness, to stick up for what we believe in are being drawn ever closer as a result. I learnt that Sarah Spinlow is with child. I cannot believe that the gods had cruelly denied her children for so very long. She is overjoyed. After anecdotes had been shared and new developments divulged, we sat down for a feast of fish, nuts and biscuits. It was nice despite not nearly being enough to give us our fill. Summer will in time ease our hardships though.

Ester was more than deserving of the title of May Queen. She is the personification of beauty. I knew it to be wrong yet I could not help but look to her with envious eyes. I should think the same went for the other women too. She cannot be much older than fourteen. To have such youth is glorious, I fondly remember when I had the privilege of wearing the crown of spring flowers. Ester has a bright future ahead of her, for she could surely manipulate any man.

As was traditional the May queen led the processional offering of last year's sacred broom blossom and seed pods, into the central fire of the wood clearing. During which the Matthew's son, James, sculpted a rhythm that later became the backdrop of a whole host of gayety. Some say that James is a young prodigy, I cannot but agree. Though sadly talent such as his has long been demonised by the Christian churches. Ester unwittingly caused yet more to envy her, as during a lull in the proceedings, she performed an aria with James. She sang with an enchantingly silk voice and moved majestically when in dance. Once all came to a close we were to choose a companion, to be married off with for the evening in the name of the southern star. However this was not to occur as our enemy struck fast and without warning.

It is hard to relate in detail for the gods had succeeded in estranging my senses. Even so, I shall try. Six horsemen, who I suspected to be mercenaries, because of their queer attire, rode out of the shadows. They wore veils and were shrouded in black cloaks. This made them appear as little more than silhouettes with eyes. Since the darkness masked them so readily, it is fair to assume that they could have been watching us for quite sometime. Even now I find that a disconcerting thought. They circled around us in the restricting clearing, and took turns to break formation and attack us indiscriminately, with animal like ferocity. Vile bastards. If they were in fact mercenaries, It is probable that they live locally. I would not be surprised if there are ties between our two parties. Man will do anything if the price is right, but you cannot really hold that against them, not when self-preservation is our most basic and most firmly ingrained instinct. If the horsemen were local men, they will undoubtedly cower the next time one of them meets our eyes in the street. I thank the gods that so many of us managed to get away, and have the chance to provoke said shame.

There was so much chaos that conscious thoughts were barred from entering ones head, reactions which seem impossible to account for took over instead. Near enough everyone tried to run the gauntlet posed by the circling horsemen, however over half of them were thrown tangentially from the horsemen's path by unease provoking blows. This did not deter anybody, though as we knew that we could not afford to get caught. I was eventually brought out of the delirium the disorder led me to, by a blow to my right side that made me stumble to the ground. The path the blow directed me toward inadvertently led me out of the clearing, while at the time the resultant searing pain caused little concern, I did worry about it later on. I had a taste of freedom, but I wanted to gorge on it, so I ran aimlessly through the woods. I am astonished as to how I did not hit a tree.

I can remember what happen next, in perfect detail. I was gripped by a grave fear as I heard somebody fast approaching from behind. Then what felt like razor blade lashes shot up and down my back as whoever it was placed their hand on my shoulder. I felt commanded to scream, but thankfully, with all the horror faced I had lost my voice. When I heard Maeve's friendly and familiar voice, my fears were levelled, my heart remained beating at a ferocious pace though. Together we ran until we got into the depths of the wood, and there we rested up in the undergrowth to catch our breath. For what seemed like eternity passed, as we sat in silence listening to the horse hooves that sounded fearfully close, and watched flickering torch lights pass to and fro. Those that had pursued us did eventually disperse, however we were far too fearful to



venture out into the open, so decided to stay the night where we were. To pass the time we narrated scary stories to one another with muffled whispers. I myself have never been much of a storyteller, Maeve on the other hand told many enthralling tales. There was this one story she called, the voiceless child, which stuck firmly in my mind. I shall recall it as best I can.

There was once a woman who chose to renounce her spirituality in order to seek glory in life. She was gravely ambitious, and wanted only to work. Her life seemed to seamlessly follow the carefully laid out plan that she had crafted in her head, however her plans were eventually upset for she fell pregnant. She greatly resented the child that was yet to be, for she feared that the thing would hold her back. Once the child was born the said fear was realised, as its dependence on her was unrelenting. The woman tried to free herself from her responsibility, and countlessly attempted to kill her parasitic seed, but the child had been blessed by the gods, and so survived. She tried poisons, casting death hexes, drowning and strangulation. The only thing that amounted from her gross cruelty was the child being rendered mute. This favoured the woman's aim, for with screams that could not be heard, she could simply leave the helpless infant in a nearby wood, and not fear a kind neighbour playing a saviour. The child was soon found by the nymphs and spirits of the wood, who promptly swore to do all that the absent mother hadn't. The guardians learnt the child's story of pain and anguish and unanimously decided to carry out revenge. As legend states, the child will cry out silently in distress whenever a woman ventures near, due to the unwelcome memories that are invoked. Bound by the vow that they made, the nymphs and wood spirits heed the child's call, and seize and judge the woman that caused the alarm. If they find but one dark thought in her mind, they undress her of her flesh and leave her helpless where she falls.

Maeve then went on to say that she thought that we were in the very same wood that the child was abandoned in, and then she implored me not to think dark thoughts. That is enough of reliving yesterday, I must now live this new day that the gods have kindly given us.

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#### **4th August 1644**

Today, I feel like a giddy young girl. Jonas has come home. He has warned me it is to be but a fleeting visit, though for he is risking much being here. He had abandoned his station the night before, and travelled several miles by foot to find and claim a horse. Due to the need to move furtively he had to make the last stretch of his journey by foot. So understandably, when he arrived he longed for rest. He had a mere hand full of hours sleep, he tried to assure me that he had slept enough, however his blood shot eyes convinced me otherwise. I cannot help but feel special after knowing what he had risked and endured simply to see me for a day. He says he felt he had to take the risk since Sir Nathaniel Barnardiston seems unwilling to let anyone have leave, and because of which he feared that we would never see each other again. I do not want to think that's a possibility.

It is wonderful to see him, he is sleeping now, he hates me writing so I do it at night whenever he is around. He says I do too much of it and that I should be living instead of scribbling on a page with the pencil, which seems to be stuck to my hand. All of my attempts to explain that writing is the distraction to life that I have chosen, and that consequently the stimulation it provides is living, are in vain. Besides in this day and age, literacy is a skill that only the privileged few seem to have. So I should be grateful for possessing it, and thus exercise it as often as I can, so as not to lose it. Jonas's sleep seems somewhat restless, he might be having a nightmare, but I don't want to steal yet more sleep from him.

I forgot how handsome he is. Despite appearing worn and ruffled from fighting and being deprived of rest, he still remains dashing. His lustrous green eyes that over power you once you fall into their gaze, jet black hair that makes the night seem light and sharp angular features that appear to have been carved by the Greek sculptors of old, could entrance me indefinitely. Though it can't deliver in quite the same way, his embrace provides a great sense of security that no wealth could, and when it is one in prelude to his departure, as it will be tomorrow, you will wish to be forever contained in it.

Jonas has revealed how torn he is feeling, for his morality has led him to develop feelings of disgust towards those he fights for. Their views on populism seem promising, but the arrogance and strictness that stems from their fundamentalism is deathly worrying. When it comes down to it, all he needs to know is that he will surely die if he chooses not to fight. War and the amorality that it brings are utterly detestable, it is so unfortunate that you cannot fight amorality with morality. If one tries they will surely die. Agendas aside, this war spells danger for any bystander. If there is a reform of power, I do not believe that things would get any better for the average citizen, but then I doubt that things could get much worse either. If the Long

parliament does procure absolute power, would the populism that their rule is said to be based around, be the right ruling for the land or would it merely be the enforcement of popular beliefs and opinions, regardless of whether they are right or wrong? While Jonas is at war, I am freed from having to decide which side to root for.

The reports I have heard of the war give the impression that it is going in the Puritan's favour. This is a comfort for had it been the other way around, it would have only been a matter of time till a bloody battle reached saint Edmundsbury's walls. As of present there is a battle raging in Cambridgeshire, as the Cavaliers are pushing in from the North and west with the clear intention of taking Essex and ultimately the capital. Although the sovereign's men out do the Puritan's with resources and training, thanks to one Oliver Cromwell, Jonas and his fellow soldiers have been blessed with tactics. The party Cromwell rides with have grown to be renowned and revered throughout the land by both sides of the conflict. From what the many detestable stories that are currently floating around, imply, even though in games of war he is deserving of honour and praise, on a personal level his morality is more than worthy of being questioned.

To pass the evening we decided on a picnic. We moved stealthily towards the East gate and then set ourselves down in an isolated meadow. It was most important that Jonas was not seen, for with the exception of the priesthood and those of wealth, near enough every man capable of bearing arms has been called to war. We made sure to be far enough from town to alleviate said concern. Most of our time was spent telling one another about what we had seen and done during our months apart. He spoke of the progress of the war as already mentioned, and of several close calls in combat which I do not wish to note down. Much to his discomfort, I started crying when he told me the worst of them. I would rather have revelled in ignorance.

Jonas inevitably had more to speak of. Town's seem to sleep during periods of war. Women seem to dominate the streets and fields as they attend to their absent husbands' work. When I told Jonas about what happened on May day's eve he had a similarly potent outburst of emotion to mine, only his was one of anger. It was initially directed at me, but then he made endearing threats towards the unknown horsemen. All of which was in spite of having told him the edited version of the account. I did not want him to get too angry. Of course he prohibited me from attending such events in the future, which I agree would be best. Ester, Marian, Nathaniel and Alice still have not been seen since that dreadful night. It makes me feel sick to think of what might have happened to them. I hope that the charms and the prayers that I made to the gods in their honour have found them.

With all of our weights and worries having been lifted, we enjoyed the simple pleasure of one another's company below a darkening sky. Jonas started to speak poetry to me, I however sadly killed the moment by rummaging about for some charcoal and parchment. Nonetheless he continued the rest of the poem. I am glad that I managed to note it down instead of merely enjoying it, as it can now act as a lasting memory of the day.

I thought I could endure being without you,  
however the longing your absence brought grew.  
I see you where there is nothing to be seen  
but its a haunting that I dearly value.  
Contentment is that which in life I pursue,  
what completes me there is nothing equal to.  
Of all the pains to be endured our parting  
is the worst that I could ever go through.  
The first day parted I wished it was not true,  
and on the second day the desire grew,  
I long for the night to draw in in earnest.  
as I find comfort in the dreams that ensue,  
Have you ever felt entrapped by a virtue,  
have you ever wished for your fear to subdue.  
Know that you could never be truly alone,  
know that I will always be thinking of you.  
Every day our uniting was overdue,  
my fondness for your bewitching smile grew.  
While on distant soils I am reminded,  
of your countenance by every serene view.  
Have you ever wanted warmth when on your own,  
have you ever wanted love honest and true.

Know that you could never be truly alone,  
know that I will always be thinking of you.

We made love during the twilight and then went home before the coldness of the night drew in. I tried all I could to savour every moment of the day that has come to pass, as after he leaves early tomorrow morning, I fear that I will not see Jonas again for many months. I pray for his safety.

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## 9th October 1644

Though several months have passed since the fateful events of May day's eve, my thoughts have not strayed from those missing for any wealth of time. I had been tortured by my wondering mind, as it tried to imagine what had become of them. Was it on the inquisition's orders that the hooded horsemen acted, and if so did those captured, have to endure hours of questioning and the sinful practice of strappado, or any of the other torture techniques cleverly crafted to not result in bloodshed? Were they put to death? Or forced to convert to Christianity, on the promise of freedom, only to be condemned to spend the rest of their lives inside a monastery? Or alternatively were the horsemen vigilantes who were acting in what they perceived to be a moralistic manner. If the latter, I feared that those captured would have been immediately lynched, or worse. However, Ester, whom I was most concerned about, since she is but a child, happened to arrive at my house today. I was elated to learn of her safety. I thought it a miracle.

Despite the relief I felt, I was still very much concerned for her. She had only just entered the house when she burst into tears. I could do little to nothing to comfort her. It is ever so distressing to see such beauty, scarred by worry and tears. Although it did not show, she was apparently pregnant. She pleaded relentlessly for me to give her an abortion. I duly refused since it is such a detestable action, which should only be done in the gravest of circumstances. However she was adamant and was not swayed by my supposedly nonnegotiable stance. She implored me to aid her, warning that she would attempt a termination on her own, if I did not. If she was to attempt such a dangerous procedure, she would surely meet her end. I became ever more concerned with every word she said, and so demanded she explain why she was so desperately determined to have an abortion.

"When they came I was in a state of delirium, and the chaos that their arrival brought only exacerbated the matter, the consequence of which was my regrettable capture. Two day's ago I fled from the Ipswich friary, however my transfer there was a recent one, and because I was blind folded every time I was relocated, I have no idea as to where I was originally taken or detained. Once the fiends had finished their folly, they travelled for what must have been several hours with us unfortunate souls in tow. During the journey I recall hearing familiar voices, which I believed to have belonged to Marian and Nathaniel, however that was the last time I did, as near enough the whole time I was detained I was kept in isolation. The following day I was taken to a room, within which I faced a senior priest and a scribe whose job it was to take note of everything said. The man who sat calmly before me behind a desk, gave out an aura of superiority, though he was no one I recognised.

He repeatedly asked me to explain why I had been brought before him, but I was utterly incapable of answering as I promptly broke down in tears. He then relentlessly asked me whether I was the May queen for the slaughter. I had no idea what he was talking about, which duly exacerbated my distress. My dialogue thus became nonsensical at best. Although I thought differently at the time, with retrospection, my state was not the reason the scribe was sent away.

Once it was just the two of us the priest's behaviour changed noticeably, as he started to talk in a pleasant manner and act in a comforting and reassuring way, which to say the least, confused me. The situation was so notable that I can remember almost word for word what was spoken. He said that since I was so young I could not be fully blamed for my actions, and then accused my mother of having seduced me into flirting with certain supposedly deplorable beliefs. His words caused my blood to boil. Once my interrogation concluded I was taken to the room that was to be my prison for two months. Even though I only saw two persons during said time, the building I was in seemed to teem with life, for disturbances would continuously play out day and night.

The rations I was provided with were barely enough to suffice. However I never went hungry, as without fail, once a week the very person who had condemned me would smuggle me gifts of wine and cheese. Whenever he did so he was always sure to mention the risks he was braving. He strove to befriend me, for as well as the gifts, he would seek out eye contact and give reassurance. His words were crafted and seemed to

linger long after he left. He would often ask had I ever felt so and so, or something like. After a while he introduced himself as Jonathan Corwin, and we came to be on first name terms with one another. Since I presented little to no threat to him I believe the name he gave to be real. His visits steadily became more frequent, I however was thankful for this, for it meant more gifts and contraband.

Eventually he arranged for me to be relocated somewhere more comfortable. I was moved to a countryside cottage, which I shared with him and several of his servants. I welcomed the move for my freedoms were substantially increased, for example I was allowed outside and around the house, however only while in the presence of Mr. Corwin, or several of his staff. All other times I was confined and locked away in a room. He increasingly snuck words of flattery and slight touches into our encounters, to the extent that it became clear where his interest in me was rooted. During the time I had to myself I spent hour after hour mulling over my situation, and every time I did so I came to the conclusion that it was hopeless. If I were to dare to refuse him, then my situation would undoubtedly deteriorate substantially. I deeply hate men for having the ability, and ill taste to dominate us women. I know that to form a generalisation would be ignorant and wrong, but when you see so many examples of men displaying such said abhorrent behaviour, the assumption that such a trait exists in them all proves inevitable. It is even more distasteful when their only defence for their attitude and behaviour, are words that were written by persons from a considerably less developed civilisation. Women, the bringer and cultivators of life should by rights be held with a divine regard. A world, in which a woman exists only as a resource for man, can only be defined as one that is misguided and amoral.

I can remember the night that Mr. Corwin first came to me with regrettable vividness. The pain and the hopelessness that over came me were the only things that played throughout my mind. I swallowed my self-respect, almost choking whilst I did so, and amused him. I knew that if I did not keep him sweet than any potential chance of escape would soon be squandered. I hated myself for allowing him to touch me, and I hated him even more for doing so. I felt dirty. After he had left me locked in the room, I stayed up the whole night silently weeping, whilst using the bed sheets to wipe my legs clean of blood. The tears that streamed down my cheeks meant I was able to clean myself fairly quickly and proficiently. Even so I had a deep seated desire to wash and cleanse myself, so I continued to wipe my legs until they became too sore to touch.

From then on Mr. Corwin visited me near to every night. After the first few experiences I developed a numbness that enabled me to bear through. In conjunction to said numbness, I developed heightened senses that came into effect whenever I was alone, due to my longing to escape. I obsessively evaluated every possible opportunity to break free that I lighted on. However, after weeks began to pass while blending into one another, my hopes began to die. I fell into a deep melancholy. My Situation finally changed when Mr. Corwin was required to be temporarily stationed at Ipswich. Apparently he could not bear being without me, as two days after he left I was sent to join him. Whilst at Ipswich I stayed in his quarters, and consequently was granted the opportunity that I had longed for.

I was with Mr. Corwin in his room, reluctantly engaging him in conversation when a man, thankfully, knocked at the door. Mr. Corwin did not want to let him in, but the man was adamant he came in, as he had some important information to pass on. The man was eventually granted attendance, and the two of them started talking about Dutch East India Trading Company shares.

I paid little attention to their conversation, for the door had been left open and they were positioned near to the centre of the room. I was transfixed by the route that had been opened up to me. I was determined to take advantage of the situation, and as I had been walked through the complex by Mr. Corwin, I felt confident that I could find my way out. As these thoughts formed my heart began beating three times its resting pace. I leapt from where I sat and ran to, and through the doorway. I did not have the slightest desire to look back, I simply ran with all my might. I know well that it is not over until it is over, so I held back the triumphant feelings that were eager to surface. It was wise to have done so, for I struggled to make it through the labyrinth of corridors I was faced with navigating. Despite all odds I made it out of the grounds, but I did not stop my flight until I was clear of the town's boarder. Then after two and a half days of travelling I eventually made it here.

I feel As though my body has been enslaved to host this entity, and due to the manner it was created I hold no warmth toward it."

After having told her story she looked at me with tear glazed eyes and pleaded for my help. Every miracle of life should be celebrated, but due to the vileness of Ester's story, I felt reluctant to make such a comment, and when I eventually did I moved past it as quickly as possible. I was so moved by her regrettable fate and abhorrent situation, that I could not but aid her. No one of her age should have to suffer the pains and responsibility coupled with childbirth. For someone her age it is not uncommon for deformities to form after pregnancy, while her underdeveloped body will also raise the chance that one or both of them will die.

Regardless of whether the child has the potential of being moulded into a person of importance, Ester's life is unquestionably more important.

As Ester was only in her first term, and the quickening had not yet occurred, the risks faced were not excessive. Luckily I had preserved some Tansy which I had harvested last spring. I thus promptly set up all that was required, and began distilling the residue from the ground flowers. During which I made sure to reassure Ester at every possible moment, since she clearly needed it. Undoubtedly her decision was deliberated, and an uneasy one to make. While the steam distillation was in process, I examined Ester to identify what quantity of oil of tansy was needed. Her health was good, largely thanks to the favourable treatment she received during her detention. Getting an accurate measurement of her weight was quite difficult, but I was happy with the estimate obtained. The time for knowledge then came to be replaced by that of hope and prayer. I added three drops of the distilled oil to a shot of firewater, and hoped for the best as I reluctantly handed the mix to Ester.

I stayed up through the night monitoring and tending to her, but I did not feel fatigue for I had a duty that I could not waver. Fifteen minutes after the concoction's consumption Ester began to sweat profusely. Five minutes later she started to moan and grimace in pain, and so I gave her crystallised Papaver Somniferum seed juice, which considerably lessened her discomfort. The first of her three fits came at around midnight. The best that I could do to help was wash and cool her sweat soaked skin, and pray. She eventually drifted off to sleep when dawn arrived, during which time I took the opportunity to wash the bed sheets and tidy the house, to save her having to relive the horror of what took place.

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### 13th October 1644

Since the current political climate has created unrest and unprecedented tension, the three of us felt uneasy about doing what we had in mind. As though to exacerbate the unease the storm the evening sported, unfortunately forced us to seek shelter in saint James's church. As the lightning flashed and tailing thunder roared to dramatise the night's events, we found ourselves at the very edge of our nerves. We jumped at every pin drop and grimaced during every thunder clap. Common sense would have normally commanded us to undertake the deed some other time, however because of the alignment of Venus the night was of particular importance. If we truly wanted the hex to yield a success it had to have been issued then.

To be sure we went unnoticed, we timed the opening of the church's giant oak doors, to coincide with the storm's epic crescendos. Understandably we were gravely cautious while walking into the blackness of the nave. Quite often, and especially when it is raining, the homeless and outlaws tend to take refuge in churches. We first went about making sure we were alone, for which the lightning was a great help. In an elongated fraction of a second various shades of blue, red and yellow danced across the walls and floor, while shadows jumped about as though responding to a piece of chaotic staccato music.

Once confident we were alone, we set to work. After having borrowed and lit several of the church candles, Anne began marking out the symbols called for, while William and I performed the required ritual to empower our wax figurine of the victim. The three of us then set about designing Jonathan Corwin's demise. I foolishly felt what was conceived was of note, because of which, I felt urged to make a copy of the transcript. This annoyed the others, for they saw it as an unwelcome delay.

Sleepless nights will soon emerge to be your blight,  
As by right you relive your wrongs with contrite,  
And I promise you this you cannot resist,  
As fate begins to play out its unseen twist,  
Those unfortunate to have died by your hand,  
Whisper to you from beyond this mortal land,  
They are soothed as your days left on earth run thin,  
And unrelenting desperation sets in,  
Comeuppance for your mortal sins is certain,  
What at first starts out as bearable and tame,  
Will rapidly grow into a searing pain,  
Sores will emerge and grow to tarnish your skin,  
The pain of which will mirror what's felt within,  
Slowly your sight will fade until you are blind,

Only to be replaced by visions unkind,  
This is a battle that you cannot ever win,  
Death will arrive once you are withered and thin,  
Comeuppance for your mortal sins is certain,

Being our unofficial leader, William naturally took the lead and read aloud my verse. Anne meanwhile took up the job of maintaining the level of emotion that the death hex called for. She did so by stating all of Jonathan Corwin's numerous and detestable crimes perpetrated as West Suffolk's chief inquisitor. Anne made particular reference to Ester, as it was upon her behalf that we acted. I was thus left with the responsibility of abusing the wax figure. It was imperative that I stayed true to the demise described in the transcript, however this proved quite challenging, for what had been written was purposely vague. The transcript was then burnt in the flame of the candle centred in our configuration. However, before we ended the ceremony we decided to take advantage of the fact, we were in one of the churches from which Mr. Corwin worked. So Anne set about crafting a graphic depiction of his demise on the floor space of the apse, directly in front of the altar.

Despite our trepidation, William and I were willing to suffer and wait around for Anne's artwork to unveil itself. Even though we could only see it by candlelight, the finished work looked beautiful. I wish I could see it in daylight, to see its true finesse, but to return to the scene, would probably rouse suspicion. Once Anne was finally happy with her composition, we spoke the relevant enochian passage in harmony and rang out a bell to mark the end of the proceedings. The latter act was regrettably done with too much zeal. We realised the mistake and silenced the ring in an instant.

However our fears were realised as we heard slamming doors and fast approaching footsteps from the vicinity of the vicarage. We made haste to gather our things and distort the ceremonial symbols, lest our culpability be lighted. We then blew out all the candles bar the one that was to guide our escape. It was a closer call than any of us would have liked. Just as we were exiting via the route we had entered, we saw the light that guided our pursuers grow to illuminate the back of the church. Each of us was as unsettled as the other, and craved for a haven. So without so much as a gesture, look, let alone a good bye, we fled our separate ways.

I had hoped to meet with a warm feeling of security, but when I finally got home I met with the misfortunate sight of Vinegar-Flowers's lifeless shell. It was most certainly a bad omen. I pray that my beloved familiar's spirit lives on, he was a dear companion. The poor vole seemed to have got caught up in the storm and suffered accordingly. He has served me well, and so I fully intend to lay him to rest in a manner that he rightfully deserves. The night was not suitable for such a proceeding, so I used an old cloth as a shroud, and hid him away, to protect him from those foul beasts that may well seek to feast on him.

Ester is recovering nicely, though is still too weak to be up and about. I feel it will be a long time before her psychological wounds begin to heal. To prevent crippling scars from forming it is imperative that, no matter how painful it may be, she confronts and comes to terms with what happened. She must relive it in her mind and re-evaluate the situation. She must see that the shame and low self-worth she feels as a result, is nothing other than a poorly conceived self defence mechanism. While it goes without saying, these steps need be taken with delicate care and patience. I think it is best she doesn't learn of the hex, for I feel the empathy that she shows toward her captor in certain instances, should first be addressed.

As agreed with her family, whom I pray never find out the truth of what happened, Ester is to stay with me until it seems safe for her to return to them. It is not yet known how much Mr. Corwin knows about her. I am happy with this arrangement, though, for the two of us share many interests. It is like having a sister, and although I am from a large family that is something I am not too accustomed to, for I have long since lost my siblings through death or estrangement. I am more than used to nursing duties, in fact I find it a soothing act, due to the many months spent tending my mother on her deathbed. Just like the tender smell of wild daisies reminds me of the first time I met Jonas, the act of nursing reminds me of my mother. Even though the memories invoked are by no means the happiest I could draw on, to simply be reminded of her presence is enough to make me smile.

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## 16th October 1644

The day after the hex was cast an ominous notice was pinned on the Norman tower, which I, and I suspect the others, were deeply troubled by. It is so cruel how only after the damage has been done, do you see the possible repercussions to your actions. I have heard vile stories concerning the public inquisitions that occur

on the continent, but not to my knowledge has there ever been one held in England. It was plainly clear what Mr. Corwin had hoped to achieve as a result of today's proceedings. If his track record had been anything to go by I had cause to be anxious, and not just because of my guilt. Thankfully my nerves did not give me away. As I now mull over the wording of that seemingly ominous notice, I cannot help but feel a queer mixture of disappointment and relief. As is almost always the case, the feelings formed while anticipating what lay in store surpassed those felt during the actual event.

Everyone I had seen since the note's appearance, not just those who had reason, but everyone, seemed filled with a sense of grave dread. Regardless of whether they were deserving of the blame, it was clear that someone was being sought to carry it, and it was nigh certain that that someone would be found. Considering what occurs in Spain and France, I thought choosing not to turn up would have been simply out of the question, and lead to suspicion automatically falling my way. I was hard pressed to see how individuals could be accounted for in a town of a thousand or so people. Nonetheless, I felt that it best to turn up. The event also afforded those foolish god fearing simpletons, I'm forced to coexist with, the chance to offer themselves up for punishment due to some unfounded deep-seated guilt. To me such a thing seems an act of masochism, or at worst suicide. Even so there is never a short supply of people willing to be imprisoned and punished, or as they word it, reformed, within Moyses hall.

Only around a hundred people actually decided to turn up and line up outside the abbey gate, as instructed. Though it had not been stated, the purpose of the event was as I had guessed. Once Mr. Corwin showed up he explained the situation and in doing so took the liberty to add vile concepts and descriptions to what in truth took place at saint James's church. Such as blood libels, osculum infame and orgies with the devil. He and his associates then proceeded to walk up and down the line up. In doing so he would take time to assess each of us in turn, which proved both intimidating and degrading. More than once, I felt as though Mr. Corwin's gaze was on me for a disproportionate amount of time. I do not and cannot know whether this was paranoia or due to my countenance portraying guilt. Even so, no matter how agitated and full of anguish my counterparts and I became, our inquisitor became even more so. He paced before us with increasing vigour, and more than once his colleagues had to take him aside to try to calm him down, albeit in vain.

Threats of detention were casually thrown around, as Mr. Corwin demanded to hear solid alibis from everyone he questioned. To the extent that his words were lucky to have been taken with a pinch of salt. He was led away by his associates, and raised voices could be heard as they strove to talk sense into him. The words of reason fell on deaf ears, and so the spectacle continued. Mr. Corwin then highlighted his ignorance by suggesting implementing the crying test. Putting aside the fact that it was a ludicrous suggestion, it would have been near impossible to carry out. Continuing his embarrassing display, he then suggested that everyone present be scratched with bramble, in the hope of breaking the hex placed on him. At this point I was struggling to hold back laughter. Mr. Corwin was obviously extremely rattled. No sane person in his position would have dared to consider resorting to folklore to seek out an enchanter. It appears that the hex is taking its course. Mr. Corwin was once more led off, and when he returned he was noticeably subdued, which made me believe he had been given gin or something equivalent.

With a strangely monotone voice, he asked whether any of us would like to confess anything. I felt convinced he was directing the question solely to me, and all attempts to pass it off as paranoia failed miserably. I was terrified, and so did the only thing that seemed sensible. Fighting what had seemed to be a losing battle with my desire for flight, I reluctantly forced my shaking foot forward and stepped out of the line up. I then proceeded to confess to having betrayed my Jonas, by having lustful thoughts towards another man. Hoping that I would in the process disarm the suspicion I felt was on me. The silence that ensued gave me time to realise just how embarrassing the situation was.

I felt shamed, and as more people's attention fell on me, my cheeks began to burn red, which of course exacerbated my embarrassment. It took what felt like more strength than I could ever possibly possess, to remain standing straight and not move my hands to my face. There were several others that followed my lead. Their confessions were just as petty as mine, only truthful. Mr. Corwin and his counterparts did not pay much attention to these little outbursts. Instead they went off to the side to make council, which provided us with a welcome opportunity to stand at ease, talk and comfort one another.

Our inquisitor and his men spoke for so long that those with gall left the line up. This soon came to attention and the officials returned to us, however they only prevented a handful from leaving. Regrettably I was one of them. I looked on with envy and worry as the last of the people disbanded. The thirteen of us kept behind, were then taken away and individually questioned. I had been singled out because I am supposedly well connected. The interrogation I was subjected to was surprisingly informal, even so, due to what I felt was at stake I found it both uncomfortable and foreboding. I was questioned in regard to the regular coming and goings that have evidentially been reported taking place at my house. The truth behind these sightings

are the healing and fortune telling sessions I offer my friends. Despite how beneficial and warmly received such services are, they would have undoubtedly been looked upon with disgust by my questioner. While I desperately tried to remain composed, I reluctantly put forward the explanation that said activities were due to private prayer groups I hold with loved ones. The fears I had that my explanation would prove far from adequate were put to rest, as my words were eaten up and I was allowed to leave.

As I walked home, I began to analyse what had occurred, to the point at which my mind was driven to a queer state of turmoil. I repeatedly plunged through thoughts of dread and despair, then briefly into warm feelings of elation, with no recollection of the state that had proceeded. I could not help but ponder what impression I had left, and whether I should be worried about what is to come. Even now as I write this entry some of that chaotic mental state remains. The rest has been comforted away by Esters youthful optimism.

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## 21st October 1644

It has been almost a week since I performed the evocation that brought forward the spirit of Meklock in the form of a crow. During the time that has passed it has become clear he holds great power, and so today a linking ceremony was performed to consolidate our bond. Meklock's wings were clipped and he fed from me for the first time. What would have normally been a moderately large celebration became, through necessity, a small private ceremony. It was, nonetheless, still special. I chose to make the incision from which Meklock was fed under my wedding ring. I thought this ingenious, for who in their right mind would ask a lady to remove their wedding ring?

I decided to go to the town market before going home. It was uncomfortably busy since horse trading was in progress. I don't see how anyone can claim man to be superior above all else, while observing how they act when faced with the prospect of profiting. There I happened to meet with Mercy. I was glad to have done so for we had not seen one another for a fair while. She happens to be employed as a cleaner, come servant, at saint James's church and the adjacent vicarage. So once we had swapped narratives of the recent chapters of our lives, I edged the conversation toward Mr. Corwin. The spectacle that he made of himself four days ago strongly hinted that the hex was taking its course. I was eager to learn how things had progressed since, but felt it unwise to ask directly lest I hinted on being involved with his woes, and inadvertently endanger her. Though there was not much of it, when woven together, the information provided was remarkably telling.

Although Mr. Corwin is a somewhat discreet individual, under normal circumstances you would see him every now and then, or rather, you would be warned by someone who had. Thus you could do your utmost to be on your best behaviour, and avoid reproach. However, there has not been a single sighting of him lately, despite it being known that he is presently posted at saint James's church. Mercy tells me he has been praying relentlessly in some obscure corner of the grounds, ruffled, unshaven and sporting unsightly deep shadows around his eyes. She says he seems to be increasingly shunned by his piers, for rather than being respected and revered he has become the butt of their jokes. The reason for this devolution of stature, is supposedly largely due to rumours that he has been heard querying voices that are not there.

I do not believe in the church's primitive mindset of revenge, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," (Leviticus 24:20). Although the action that has been taken against Mr. Corwin, appears to be an act of revenge solely on behalf of Ester, in all honesty it is not. The wrong done onto Ester was merely the most recent and most unacceptable of a long list. I fear, or rather I know that from an outside perspective there seems to be great hypocrisy in going to lengths to end a man's life yet professing to uphold the values that I do. However, when there is blight in a complex system like a society, that cancer which degrades the functioning of those around it needs to be removed for the benefit of the collective. Ideally William, Anne and I should have acted to reform Mr. Corwin, as oppose to scheming his demise. However it would have been quite impossible to gain the opportunity to do so. As it would have been laughably pointless to attempt to remove the position the individual holds, disposing of him seemed the only viable course of action. Because of all of the misery and death he has indirectly caused, we in fact felt it our moral duty to kill him. None of us has any remorse for what we did. His demise will be music to our ears. Once his death comes, all we can do is hope that his successor is a just individual.

In the evening I met up with Anne and William, and after relating all that Mercy had said, we unanimously decided to drive the last nail into Mr. Corwin's casket. Part of the scheme we settled on showed that I had been right to note down the transcript of his demise. I went home, unearthed it, then took a copy with me to a prearranged meeting point with Meklock in tow. Once my conspirators arrived, we agreed that



Meklock's first favour for me would be to deliver the perverse verse to Mr. Corwin. Meanwhile the three of us were to bury the wax effigy used in casting the hex, at the crossroads outside the Abbey Gate. The figurine was scarcely recognisable, for one, what had once been the head was but a twisted mess. As under Anne's charge it was often subjected to abuse in order to stave off boredom. The risks faced were substantial and surpassed all that I had previously incurred, but I wholly believed in our aim. In such an open and central region of town, even in the dead of night, spying eyes are never far away. Being caught with the wax figure would undoubtedly result in the three of us being lynched. I shamefully recall how I had promised Jonas I would not take part in such activities. Regardless of the words I craft, the guilt remains.

I took station as a lookout on the Western road, Anne on the Northern, while William quickly dug a hole to the side of their intersection. Our movements were fairly well veiled by darkness, since the moon was only half illuminated and low in the sky. Even so anyone watching could have surmised that our actions warranted following up. All turned out well, for William managed to dig proficiently with his knife. Before he had even started to pat down the disturbed soil, Anne and I were already by his side saying our good-byes. Each of us wanted to get away as quick as possible, I in fact felt compelled to run, and I did so until fatigue forced me to stop.

Ester was quite alarmed to see me arrive home flustered and out of breath. I quickly crafted an explanation, which I doubt she was taken in by. Just like I doubt she has believed any of the other excuses I have given lately, even though they were of slightly better design. Although she is housebound, I am sure she has heard some of the hearsay making its rounds and has thus made sense of my recent secretive behaviour. When I sense she is trying to raise her suspicions I haul the conversation in a different direction, as I find the whole situation awkward. I have a fear that she will blame herself and feel guilt for what has been done, but in time I'm sure it will prove to be unsubstantiated.

I averted the questions I saw dancing on Ester's tongue, by drawing attention to Meklock, who had surpassed my expectations by beating me back home. I dearly thank the gods for sending him to me. I can see that he will be of great assistance. To reward him for his faithful service, I gave him a saucer of milk with three drops of blood, bled from the cut on my ring finger that I carefully reopened. I then had a lengthy conversation with Ester, who is now well recovered. She appears to be more than just healthy, she seems stronger because of the ordeal she endured. Once we got bored of those that are trivial, she and I moved on to more serious matters. As there have not been any signs that Mr. Corwin is seeking her out, and of course, because he is not long for this world. We came to the decision that on the condition she keeps a low profile, she should return to her parents. Despite being pleased that she is to reunite with her family, I will be saddened to see her go. I will greatly miss her friendship, beauty, youth and relative innocents.

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### **31st October 1644**

All Hallows eve played host to the Abyssus-flam Ball at Hengrave hall, which I had been looking forward to for near a month. The event always proves to be, how can I put it, eventful. I was quite surprised that it was to go ahead. Due to the prevailing tensions, I thought that the event would surely be cancelled or at least downgraded. Just like the previous year, I was mistaken. Be it due to bravery, bribery, idiocy or the increased security, the event was just as grand and as untamed as it had ever been.

I received a lift from a gentleman I met at the event the previous year. The difference between our lifestyles could not be starker, but for one night at least, a shared contact and contempt for society's constraints, brought us together. Upon arriving it was immediately evident that my concerns, were echoed. Precautionary measures had been accordingly put into place, for example the security at the door was heightened. Not only was there the usual call for a prearranged password, but also doormen, and a tiresome system of locking and bolting, unlocking and unbolting.

Mary and Mr. Darcy are quite a pair of bohemians, especially when you take into account the type of social circles they are expected to roam in. Sadly we were brought together by a sorrowful circumstance, although no other kind could have done so. I am just as taken aback now as I was then by the fact that they are the Lord and Lady of a Tudor manor. They seem more suited to living a humble life in some hard to reach region.

Although Mr. Darcy initially intended the annual ball to simply be an eccentric gathering, it evolved in line with his and his wife's insatiable interest in unearthing the ways of the old. They seem especially intrigued with how the religion the Romans brought to our shores, intertwined and melded with certain pre-existing beliefs and customs. They often talk about the lone Yew tree that stands in the grounds of the church

opposite the manor. For they are convinced it insinuates it was long ago a place of importance and worship. Though their attempts to add depth to the proceedings were admirable, they were clearly in vain. Most people are far too distracted by the pleasures of the present to be concerned with spirituality.

The main hall was so beautifully decorated, stepping into it was coupled with a sense of the fantastic. Below the oriel window was a banner with the French phrase, *fait ce que vouldras*, written, which perfectly encompassed the essence of the evening. Everyone was extravagantly dressed, and many to a sinfully alluring effect. Some people adhered to the masquerade theme but the majority, myself included, did not. Those that made the effort sported anything from simple bands with eye-holes, to beast like masks, which were beautiful in their own queer demonic way. I had but one suitable dress to wear, and even though it has been repaired more times than worn, it still remains presentable. So much so that it was the subject of compliment. If not for anything else, I am thankful for having had the opportunity to dress up. It is remarkable just how high your spirit can be raised, when people turn your way and make pleasant comments about your appearance. It is a welcome change from my usual, gloomy existence.

I happened to have been one of only a small number of females that had been formally invited. The guest list was primarily composed of strumpets and noblemen. I recognised several of the latter as they held various positions of power in the county. Their attendance was no doubt but one example of the hypocritical lifestyles that even fools know they lead. However, for the evening we were meant to forget backgrounds, titles, lifestyles and even names. We were to merely refer to one another as nuns and brothers. Of course that was not what happened, since pride is not something that can be easily done away with. I thus became very aware that everyone, except for the whores, was well above my station.

In previous years, I had survived feeling out of place by clinging to friends and acquaintances. However, that was not possible on this occasion as there were but three people I knew, and so even within the bustle of the crowded hall I felt utterly alone. The queer band which consisted of a percussionist, harpsichordist and singer played out irresistible melodies and rhythms. I danced for a while, and took various intoxicants in a bid to improve my perception of the evening. My efforts were admirable, but I could not help but get worn down by that unwelcome inner voice we all have. I submitted to disheartenment, and in doing so became aware of the actions of the supposed noblemen who were about me. It made me sick to watch them as they consumed vast amounts of alcohol and behaved without modesty. They had taken the notion of doing what one willed, to a disagreeable extreme. Why is it that even the most successful men fail to be deserving of admiration? Is it because man is designed by nature to lack self-control? Maybe it is due to the need for equilibrium that virtuous actions are ever so commonly coupled with vile deeds.

I decided that I would leave, and so sought Mary and Mr. Darcy to beg my pardon. Whilst I searched through the manor, a curious deal of commotion shrouded the arrival of a new guest. People flocked around him, whoever he was, as though he was god's legitimate son. It was a remarkable spectacle, one which successfully distracted me from my aim. I eventually found Mary and Mr. Darcy and gave them my thanks, and then claimed I had a pressing personal matter to attend to. I did not lie because I feared offending their hospitality, it just made things easier. They pressed me on how I was to get home, and were concerned to learn I had no chaperone. I assured them I would travel safely, and then to explain away their confusion of how then I had arrived, I made the fairly commonplace jest that I had flown.

I was at the entrance readying my cloak, and was about to brave the cold autumn night, when I happened to catch a glimpse of the famed arrival. He was in the act of flaunting money in front of the whores and admirers that swarmed about him. He was not wearing a mask and although his attire was very fanciful I got the impression that it was his usual dress. In an unchristian manner he remained to wear his striking large brimmed hat, inside. Sprouting out from the hat, and acting to frame his milky sculpted face were jet-black locks of hair that rested snugly on his shoulders. He wore a tight fitting black military thigh length jacket, over a frilled white shirt that was tied off with a cravat, along with dark grey tights and brown knee length riding boots. It is indeed remarkable how money can make behaviours or characteristics which would otherwise be regarded as inordinate, appear quaint.

Through the corner of his eye, my assessment evidently caught his attention, for he turned to meet my gaze. Our eyes locked for an uncustomary amount of time. His unflinching focus brought forth a rush of sexual desire, which I had to forcefully push away and replace with thoughts of Jonas. In the moment that I had mentally betrayed my love, flesh had begun to burn and skin, dry and crack, culminating in a shameful blush. I wrapped my cloak around me and sought to leave in haste, as I succumbed to my desire for flight. However the action was not quite as elegant as my words suggest. For I had to fumble my way through the numerous locks and bolts, before I could finally embrace the cooling air outside.

After tormenting myself with thoughts of the handsome stranger, and the embarrassment incurred, I settled into a state of mild meditation while walking with vigour. The cold, though eventually broke through

my mental barrier, leaving me with but hollow proclamations that I would soon be home, sitting snugly by a fire, to drive me forward. I had completed about half of my journey when I reluctantly accepted that I had been wrong to leave Hengrave manor. For there, there were open fires, sustenance and beds to rest in. What made things yet worse was that the strange concoction of intoxicants I had consumed, were slowly beginning to take effect. In a cold and unfamiliar landscape, this was unwelcome. The road before me elongated out, insofar as but a few yards became a mile long trek. Whereas my mind fell into a queer state of being whereby vile daemons would make unexpected appearances out of the blackness. I grew ever more daunted by the journey that was ahead of me, and so on numerous occasions contemplated resting up in the undergrowth of a thicket. To have done so would have surely spelt my death. All unfounded fears and dangers faced, are now embarrassing to reflect on.

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## 6th November 1644

Once a month, for several years now, I have performed augury for my close friends whenever the moon is in my star sign. Today I duly expected to unearth the vague subjective messages, that I am used to, but that was far from what happened. I do not think that I will ever take a reading again. I have never really liked reading people's fates, and never wanted to do it in the first place. I never wanted the responsibility that such a duty holds, however my friends implored me otherwise since I am a seventh daughter of a seventh daughter. Which also happens to in part be why I became their appointed herbalist and healer. Personally I find it quite offensive that the medical knowledge and skill I have obtained through hard work and study, can be attributed to a birthright.

My belief in medical practices is devout as it is often possible to judge the effectiveness of a treatment. Whereas not even a drunk vicar could say the same about divination. I refuse to adhere to the ancient guidelines that exist for the practice. When I do make a successful reading, I feel it is simply a case of educated guess work rather than mysticism. The reason belief in divination has enjoyed longevity seems rooted in the human mindset, for we have a habit of highlighting success. If it took me one hundred attempts to achieve an aim, it is only natural to place focus on the one attempt that yielded a success, rather than the ninety-nine forgettable failures. To a degree my scepticism enables me to dismiss what I observed today, however as there is so much not yet understood in our complex world, I fear it is possible the practice of divination could have some credence.

A little after midday, Elizabeth and I prepared a clearing in a nearby woods, and after the necessary symbols had been drawn and incense lit I called forth the divining spirit. We then sat in silence, waiting for it to make its presence known. Our ears became accustomed to the symphony of subtle sounds that surrounded us, such that the crackling of the incense stick seemed like the sound of distant thunder claps. The ambience remained for a while, then the light breeze stalled and consequently lighted the distressing sounds of a crow. We promptly got up to investigate. The sound led us to an adult bird with a broken wing, scuffling along in an Easterly direction. The god of the East is Lucifer, and is represented by the element air. The bird then turned to us, stretched out its wings and gave out a violent screech. The creature's suffering was clear to see in its eyes. What we had witnessed was without doubt an omen of death. More specifically I foresaw a breathing related death, perhaps tuberculosis or some sort of asphyxiation. The two of us carefully picked the bird up, but before we could do anything to aid, it died. Elizabeth gave me a wretched look and asked what I had seen. I of course lied. I told her that I had been too distracted by the bird's distress to take the reading.

The second reading performed was for Evea, and its outcome was no less disturbing than that of Elizabeth's. My mind was still fixed on what the death of the crow forebode, and so only went ahead as planned due to my reluctance to disappoint. I cleared my head with a drawn out breath and then made preparations to call forth the divining spirit. Once the required spell had been cast we became tense as we anticipated what was to come. Thankfully, we did not have to wait too long for the tell tale sounds of life in the surrounding undergrowth. We got up to investigate, and came upon a dead stag. Judging by the near by tracks that had been freshly laid, the sound we had followed was made by a furtive fox.

The dead stag's eyes were still open, and were painted with a look of misery. Its head was resting on the ground, pointing in a Westerly direction and its features frozen, lighting the distress it suffered as it met its end. The god of the West is Leviathan, and is represented by the element water. All said details led me to conclude that a death by drowning, was supposedly laying in wait. When Evea asked about the reading, I withheld the melancholic truth, in favour of a lie referring to the fox that had fled the scene. I dearly wish that that could have been the real reading, but the stag was the first animal sighted.

I was feeling uneasy as a result of the two previous readings, yet I proceeded to make preparations for the third and final one. I did so in silence, for my mind had much to mull over. To tell the truth I was rather curious to find how Maeve's reading would turnout. To my horror, surprise and dismay, it followed the trend. After all had been prepared and but a moment's wait, an owl's call, which is strongly linked to calamity and death, fractured the silence. In a state of distress the bird flew low over our heads in an Easterly direction. Maeve looked to me worryingly, and as I was reluctant to reveal my interpretation of the event, I returned a comforting gaze. Before the situation was allowed to become uncomfortable, a muffled pop of a rifle, and a whistle caused by a musket ball flying by, grasped our attention. Simultaneously our countenances contorted in alarm. Nobles are the only persons that hunt with guns, and as almost all nobles are puritans, albeit hypocritical ones. It was best that we were not discovered, and so we quickly gathered our belongings and then ran in the same direction that the owl had fled.

I have toyed with augury for many years now, yet before today I had never seen a death omen. Before today I had barely even given out any bad news. I am somewhat unnerved. If you were to walk through a wood, as I often have done, you would undoubtedly see nature functioning harmoniously. You would be hard pressed to find one distressed or dead animal, let alone three of them near to one another in a short time period. I have tried to reinforce my scepticism, however the fear that I am merely thinking wishfully, and that something terrible lays ahead has regrettably become deeply rooted in my mind. Since I am the common denominator, perhaps it is I who should be most worried. Fearful of what I would learn, I would never agree to have my fortune told. Ignorance is most certainly bliss. I can but only keep a worried eye open and do my best to tread carefully, while making sure Elizabeth, Maeve and Eeva do the same.

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## **21st November 1644**

Cylvia came around in the morning, but it was not a social visit. She had suffered a bite on her ankle from an adder. I did the best I could for her. I dressed the wound and prepared a remedy, which took the form of a herbal tea. It consisted of grated dragoon root, honey, old vinegar, sea salt and water for boiling. Note to self, I need more dragoon root. Since Cylvia's partner was stationed in the same region as Jonas, we had plenty to talk about. We talked well into the late afternoon, then bade each other fair well, so that we could each make ready for the celebrations planned in honour of the full moon.

The location chosen for our gathering was a clearing north of saint Edmundsbury, at the edge of the River Lark. The lay of the land was such that we would be able to have a clear view of the moon till it set. The moon was so unusually large, we could may well have done without lighting fires. Ever since Mr. Corwin's demise, people have become more relaxed and daring, the night's turnout supports that. When I arrived there were twenty or more present, and yet I was early. For the first hour or so everyone hugged the warmth that bellowed from the bonfires and listened to one another's anecdotes. We enjoyed a modest feast, and then an infectious rhythm was thundered out for us to dance to. The dancing never began though, for a terror stricken woman appeared, ran to us in a clumsy manner, and commanded that we made flight, alluding to some danger that was soon to come.

We responded with looks of bewilderment, which seemed to anger her. I cautiously sought to learn more, however, before I could put forth any of my questions, I was distracted by the sound of galloping horses, which originated from the north stretch of the river, and was getting louder. I turned to face the others, with a look that warned those that had not yet heard the approaching danger. Disorder then erupted, as we all fled for safety. I ended up hiding in the Lark amongst the reeds with the stranger. While immersed in the dirty and cold water, we slowly edged our way southward. From a position several yards up stream we watched cautiously as a group of riders arrived and swarmed about the wood clearing. They proceeded to search the surrounding area. Some of them split off from the group and went into the woods, while the remainder continued along the riverbank.

Thanks to our vigilance, steady nerves and of course the darkness, we remained undiscovered even though the horsemen repeatedly passed close by us. We endured the bitter cold water until we were certain of our safety, then got out and took a round about route home through the wood, using the moon's position as guidance. It was pitch black, so it took a fair while to navigate our way out. With our hands tightly locked together, we stumbled from tree to tree, all the while taunted by the irrational fears the creatures about us spurred into being. The only words we shared were those of comfort and reassurance. We had to wait until we got out to exchange pleasantries, and for her to tell me her name was Circe. As we made way, I could not

help but to relive the horrors of May day's eve in my mind. I have brushed with more danger this year than I would have liked, for there is only a certain amount of luck one can have.

As soon as we got to my house I lit the fire, and then as if it were a race, we frantically undressed. Though we were but strangers, there was no modesty, due to the extent that we had been abused by the cold. After having put on dry clothing, We let the flickering flames entrance us. Even though I could sense that Circe wanted to tell me her story just as much as I was curious to hear it, we sat in complete silence. Once warmth and dexterity had returned to our limbs, we became more comfortable, in both aspects. She told me her tale while I listened intently, and committed it to paper.

"About a week ago I had a falling out with an old friend. We had known each other for several years, and there was scarcely a day that went by that we did not see each other, for we ran in the same social circles. However, it turned out that we were more like mere acquaintances. Our relationship was labelled as a friendship, simply due to the lack of a better word. Things turned sour when I saw her son committing a crime, and I mistakenly thought it right to inform her. I did not intend to offend or question her parenting. Though she is quite aware of her son's criminality, she was offended by my words. People are often ever so reluctant to hear truths spoken from another person's lips. Four days and several insignificant exchanges later, I was detained by an individual who many referred to as being a witch-finder. Under his charge, I was driven to a deplorable state and kept awake for two days and nights, while three persons questioned and watched me in shifts. At one stage in the perplexing madness, I was stripped and examined. They were looking for what they repeatedly referred to as the devil's mark. I had absolutely no idea as to what they were talking about, and sadly did not take enough in to hazard a guess, for I was far too distracted by the humiliation I was enduring. In a similarly harsh manner by which a farmer handles his live stock, a female physician checked every inch of my skin for abnormalities, while repeatedly seeking confirmation of her assessments from an out of sight associate.

At around noon I was led out of my prison, to a pool that led off a tributary for the Little Ouse River. I looked on in confusion as a priest stepped forward to the waters edge and recited a short incantation and made several supposedly meaningful hand movements. As I later sorrowfully learnt, this was in prelude to the vile practice that they called swamming. In total eight people witnessed my torture, two of whom seemed to be engaged in some sort of queer apprenticeship. From what I managed to hear from the teaching given, the justification for the torture I was to endure, came from a piece of Christian mythology noted in a passage in King James's Demonology. It was apparently believed that a person who has not been baptised, is repelled by blessed water. Their fickle minds thus saw a sure way of identifying a heathen. However the truth of the matter is that said explanation, was nothing other than a flimsy justification for an attempt at torturing a victim into submission. With my arms crossed, my thumbs were tied to my toes and I was then thrown into the pool. Using ropes that had been tied around my waist, they then repeatedly raised me out of the water after letting me sink near to it's bed. After suffering several submersions, I managed to break free under the water. I swam some distance and surfaced a way away, clambered onto the bank and fled."

She seemed unnerved after narrating her harrowing experience, but for clarity sake, I wanted to hear certain aspects of it in more detail. Fatigue was the only reason I did not press the matter. Although it was unlikely that a house to house search would be mounted in the night, or at all, for cautions sake we thought it best if Circe slept in the house's hideaway. I did my best to make it comfortable, even so it remained terribly uninviting. Yet when I checked on her five minutes after she had settled in, she was sound asleep.

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## **22nd November 1644**

When Circe awoke this morning she was somewhat morose, but with good reason, for her night's sleep had resulted in neck, arm and back complaints. Even so it was clear to see that she had relished the chance to have a much needed undisturbed rest. For about an hour or so, we talked while I massaged her neck and back. The result of which was not only a lessening of her sores, but a decision that it would be best if she went into hiding. Once all other possibilities were eliminated, I thought of the small community hidden in Thetford forest, with which I had frayed ties with. I assured her that providing we were not followed, they would be more than happy to gain a new resident.

For a long time I have wanted to relocate there myself, for they live an idyllic lifestyle. There are no major crimes, as everyone knows everyone else by name. There is also a strong emphasis on fairness, as the whole community is involved in decision-making, and everyone pulls their weight, as it is easy to identify those that do not. Truth be told, I really should have used the word, like, rather than, want, for I find the

benefits of living in a large society, too great to leave behind. When you trade the product of your time for that of someone else's, the larger the pool of skill to be drawn on, the better. Circe, however does not really have the privilege of exercising a personal preference. After deliberation, we settled on a course of action, and so began putting together provisions.

When all was ready, I called in on a long since owed favour and acquired a horse for the day, then we set off. During the journey I began to think about how presumptuous and flippant it was for me to try to have Circe brought into the secret community. Thankfully, however I needed not have worried for her inclusion was warmly welcomed. I stayed and enjoyed the people's hospitality for a while, but I was in a way relieved to leave. Since nothing substantial ever really happens in their small and isolated world, they do not have much of interest to talk about. I guess Circe will just have to bear. As I bade my farewell, Circe thanked me, somewhat excessively. In all honesty I should have thanked her an equal measure, as it was rewarding to help someone of a similar mindset.

In the afternoon I went to the abbey gate with some friends, for rumours had quickly spread that the so called witch-finder would be formally arriving in town. Apparently many others were also interested in this man whose reputation preceded him. A large crowd congregated along the side of the road facing the gate, which sported a potent stench of apprehension. In some areas it was intermixed with fear, while in others it was mixed with excitement. In total we waited for near to two hours, during which the crowd almost doubled in size. There had to have been close to three hundred people present, representing every flavour of class and creed. As my boredom grew close to peaking, a message that the witch-finder's arrival was imminent, shot throughout the crowd. When he and his party finally entered into our line of sight, a gasp echoed through the air, as some people had mistaken them for cavaliers, because of their fanciful dress.

After the initial reaction, the crowd noise mulled to a level far from what one would expect. Most people were more concerned with overcoming the person in front of them, to catch a clear view, than passing on pointless remarks. There were six of them in total, each riding their own prime stallion, two, whom I presume were the leaders rode several yards in front. When I was finally able to distinguish their faces, I was hit by a faint yet no less disgusting taste of sick. Since one of the lead riders was the lavishly dressed man who had caused a commotion at the Abyssus-flam ball, I later learnt that he was in fact the, witch-finder. I felt as though I was stricken by some vile illness, one with pus and boils, as I remembered the lustful stare we shared.

I am sure that many others like me are worried about what the near future holds. Once I had got over my shock, I put careful thought to the matter. I knew that he was not a true puritan, but there are many more, and perhaps worse, heinous things than subservience. Circe's harrowing tale comes to the front of my mind. That coupled with what I witnessed at the Abyssus-flam ball, I fear that this witch-finder worships a god far worse than that of the Christian faith. I fear he worships money and power. Sadly, I am not an ignorant woman. I know full well that the supposed wrath of the Christian's god, is superfluous to that which man can exert whilst on his futile quest for importance.

The thoughts I was led to, lingered and brought forth a mixture of restlessness and depression. Consequently, I felt reluctant to do much of anything, which seems a grossly flawed response, since only through action can one ever hope for improvement. Though reluctant, I forced myself to perform a small ceremony, in the hope that with intense concentration I could reach a better place. It proved to be quite challenging. An epic battle took place in my mind's eye, as the day's events had whipped up a seemingly untameable chaos. It was only through sheer determination that I eventually reached the tranquility of nothingness. It felt like a spring wind had blown through me and ripped away all that was unwanted. In my much improved state I was able to be productive and set about renewing the protective charms on the house.

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### **30th November 1644**

For two whole days I was denied penning my thoughts, and it felt as though someone had butchered out my innards. For I actually had a tale to tell, as opposed to just wanting to scrawl pointless ramblings.

My brethren and I came to the consensus that a meeting was called for to discuss what, if anything should be done about our town's newest arrival. It is said that if you speak of the devil then he will come, and although it is early days and it is not yet known if this individual will turn out to be the devil or a lesser evil, said statement rang true. For after but a handful of words had been spoken at the meeting, the most note worthy of which identified the witch-finder as one Frances H. Welbeck, he and his men turned up. After having spent sometime reliving the moments that played in prelude to our capture, I found myself confused

by how Welbeck and his men came upon us. Whenever we are to gather, for whatever reason, we put cautious thought into choosing a location, and if possible never use the same one twice. We congregated in an isolated valley on the outskirts of town, which only with hindsight seems to have been a foolish choice. In but a moment after having been sighted, the dirt kicked up from the horses they ferociously drove forward, was on our tongues. They had not consulted one another on how to proceed, nor did they change their direction. I am quite certain they knew exactly where to find us. Either someone was followed or perhaps there is a traitor amongst us. However, what is done is done, we can only hope to learn from it.

There was little nearby cover and our pursuers had a clear advantage, so sadly less than a handful got away. We were bound by our hands, joined up in a linear formation, and then directed back towards town. After taking the scenic route, no doubt to avoid crowds, we were brought to Moyses hall. Till I stepped foot in the place, I was near to blind ignorant as to what went on there. It seemed a bizarre cross between a school and a prison with faint hints of a torture chamber. The overall feel of the place was more than just unpleasant. It was filthy, and what was more, thanks to the many lawless drunks, the ground floor sported a pungent smell of urine and sick. Then as if that was not enough, the penetrating sound of men and women of a sick mind, screaming out nonsensical obscenities, provided a final insult to ones senses. The cell that my friends and I were locked in was so dirty I am sure even disease would find it an unsavoury place to exist. I retreated to my thoughts out of necessity. As I did I found that several of the potent descriptions Ester had made of the place she had been detained, resurfaced.

Though the door of the adjacent cell was unlocked, it was filled close to its full capacity. After watching the occupants for a fair while I learnt that they were free to leave, and in fact many did, however they always returned. I found this, to say the least, perplexing. I have sympathies with those that flagellate, but while the sting of a whip fades, the conditions within Moyses hall stay with you. A more experienced detainee, told me some yet stranger behaviour, for apparently some of those pitiful individuals pay their captors for the expenses incurred. It is very disturbing to see first hand how easy it is to manipulate a person's mind, and install it with guilt. I have long since been aware of the power of the imagination. If I imagine myself obtaining or achieving something for long enough, I will invariably do so in reality. As such I cannot but be unnerved by the possible consequences of when it is instead eccentric dogma that rules a mind.

Admittedly my thoughts were self-centred, but when in a dire situation desire for self-preservation becomes overpowering. I thought that if I were to be recognised by Welbeck, then he would show me some favouritism due to the contacts we shared. However, he frustratingly paid very little attention to his captives. Except for acts that might have made me look insane, I tried near to everything to get his attention. In time Welbeck went on his way, but I did in a way welcome this, for the layout of the floor meant my best chance of getting his attention was upon his return. Things did not exactly go the way I hoped, but with perseverance, I eventually got him to notice me. We briefly shared a familiar gaze, and then I watched anxiously as he turned to consult with his associates. Without even looking at me he pointed my way and told them that I was to be first. I panicked, as I tried to make sense of what his words meant, and began to fear that contrary to my intention, I had made my situation worse by getting recognised.

I was taken from the cell and led up stairs to an empty room. Anxiety quickly ruled and distracted me to the point that at times I forgot to breathe. After a wait that seemed longer than it truthfully was, two female physicians entered and ordered me to strip. It then became clear that I was to suffer a familiar humiliating experience to that which Circe had spoken of. Once they started the examination, I suddenly became aware of how inadequate words are at transferring certain information. Circe's words had not prepared me. Throughout the whole experience I sensed eyes burning down on me from the shadow filled corridor beyond the open door. I tried to make myself as detached from the situation as possible, however I did remain lucid enough to hear the physicians speak of, devil's marks, and teats, as they scoured my body for suspect blemishes.

When it was finally over and I was allowed to get dressed, I found myself feeling far from relieved. For I knew that in Circe's case, the examination was but one of numerous horrors endured. I raced through the corridors of my mind, searching and praying that I could devise or conjure a means of escape. It seemed futile, but I could not just do away with hope. The window in the room I was in was far too small to flee through, presumably due to the current obscene tax system. The only real viable option was to attempt to make to and out the front door, but that seemed foolishly audacious. So in the hope that my fortunes would in time change, I submitted to the will of my handlers.

Soon after the physicians had left the room, two escorts entered and led me downstairs. I was disappointed to learn that I was not to rejoin my friends. I was instead taken to a discrete door at the back of the building, which opened up to a narrow spiral staircase. I was led down into the building's Cellar, with but a feeble oil lamp to light the way. Piled up against the walls of the space, were an unnerving assortment of

torture devices of old, such as iron maidens, Judas Cradles, racks and vices. I curse my over active imagination, for at that point in time I was scrolling through a vast list of unfortunate fates that I thought I was to endure. With a barrage of shoves, I was led to a crude hole in the far wall. Stooping and edging through it brought you into a cavity of sorts. At first I thought that it was merely an extension of the basement but after my lengthy stay, I felt it seemed more like part of a tunnel. There is a prevailing rumour that long ago monks built an extensive tunnel network which radiated from the abbey, intended for smuggling, refuge and escape. Instead of having the luxury of finding out if what I was in was one such tunnel, I had to endure hours of discomfort.

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## 1st December 1644

After only having been down there for a few minutes, I had already become crippled by the chilled air. I was by no means dressed scantily, but I felt as though I was wearing little more than a night gown. My body repeatedly suffered spasms as it desperately strove to keep warm. Before my escorts left, they bound my feet and hands, and waited for the arrival of a spindly elderly man. I felt that restraining me was unnecessary as I was quite incapable of mounting an attack or an escape attempt. He whose company I was to enjoy for several hours was the man who had been riding along side Welbeck, on the day his party came to town. His countenance was such that it instantly caused me to irrationally dislike him. However, his unpleasant nature proved my prejudgment correct. The whole time that I spent with him, I tried not to look at his face for his sinister looks made me fear for the worst. Besides he was not the most attractive of persons, his aged thinner than silk skin, clung to his skull in places and over hung in others, in a manner not too dissimilar to dripping wax on a heavily used candle.

If I were to have to concisely describe the man, I would use the term religious nut. The knowledge that he carried in his head regarding King James's bible, was so extensive that anyone would be forgiven for thinking he actually wrote it. Whenever he fired an assortment of biblical quotes at me, I could not help but notice how the wording of those that I was familiar with, differed drastically to how I recalled them. Such reworks would inevitably have the effect of making the meanings open to whole new interpretations. I have not yet read from king James's bible, but I am keen to do so to learn what other verses in the book, the previous king's translators exercised their artistic liberty on. Maybe I have been foolish to think that the religious propaganda that was rampant in the age, when which Christianity was declining, had dyed out. I find it amazing how people have come to just except that there are near to a hundred different names for the devil, and yet there is a mere handful for Yahweh. What is more, how can a king that has been repeatedly marred by stories of controversial conduct, come to have such an influential effect on Christendom? I guess that some people simply crave guidance, so much that the source of it is irrelevant.

Since I was feeling the effects of fatigue, I failed to put to memory all the quotes, and the context in which they were used. There were a few that resonated though.

Exodus 22:17. "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live. Whoever lieth with a beast shall surely be put to death. He that sacrificeth unto any god, save to the LORD only, he shall be utterly destroyed."

Ecclesiastes 25:22. "Of the woman came the beginning of sin, and through her we all die."

Peter 2:13-14. "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well."

After spending more time in the man's presence than I thought I could bare, a shift change occurred. At which point I distinctively remember being filled with a deluded sense of relief. My new interrogator was a woman. She was utterly vile, so much so that I began to want for the return of he who had preceded her. Although I tried my best to maintain a tough veneer, the barrage of harsh comments that she forced me to suffer, eventually wore me down and made me feel utterly worthless. Her mind was filled with an assortment of misguided ideas. She spoke of how I apparently sleep with the devil and let imps suckle me in return for help in carrying out despicable deeds.

The comment about permitting Imps to suckle from me, and talk of the devil's mark, I sense relates to the practice of keeping familiars and using ones blood to reward them, or as part of a ritual. No matter what similarities there may be, it is clear that they are gravely ignorant of the way of life that they persecute. Should my assumption be correct then some of the queer behaviour that my overseers exhibited, becomes slightly more comprehensible. Like when they would scour the ground about me, and pay particular attention to any large insects that happened to be travelling in my direction.



Welbeck took on the last shift, which proved to be the most bearable. Though it was also the shortest of the three. The changeover took place but a few hours before sunrise. This was evident due to the sudden drop in temperature which marks what many rightfully refer to as the death hour. My involuntary spasms became so vigorous that my muscles grew sore. However in spite of this exertion, I craved for sleep, but every time I managed to come within reach of the blissful state it was cruelly dragged, kicking and screaming away. By some unknown means Welbeck had managed to acquire a considerable amount of information about me. He knew things that I thought few or none did. Like for example, that I was schooled at saint Mary's nunnery, which I then left in sixteen thirty-seven to tend to my mother who had fallen victim to the plague. I am not sure what worried me the most, that he had the power to obtain such obscure knowledge, or the simple fact that strangers could know so much about me.

Once he had finished citing a fair amount of my life story, he looked to and through me with wide eyes, which made me feel as though he was to make a proposition. Provided I was not betrothed, he was not the perpetrator of vile deeds and I had not been as good as tortured on his behalf, I would have been moved, for he is a very handsome man. He eventually broke off his revealing stare and then bent down, cut the ropes that shackled me, and in an emotionless voice, told me I was free to go. He led me out of the basement and up towards the front door. Then just before he turned to leave, he told me that I would find safety in silence. The manner in which this was said was far more informative than the actual words. I found myself standing outside the front of Moyses hall, somewhat unaware of what I should have been feeling. On one hand I was safe and had been given my freedom, which was obviously wonderful, especially with my growing suspicion that I am with child. Yet on the other my friend's fates were uncertain. As I reflect it seems that I had received the favouritism I sought, and it is because of this that I fear what is to become of my friends. Unwillingly, I find myself repeatedly going back in my mind to the day that I made those wretched melancholic augurs. Elizabeth, Evea and Maeve all remain in that horrid building, awaiting whatever is to come their way. All I can do is pray that fortune finds them.

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## **5th December 1644**

I had intended to sleep in till late, as I am still to fully recuperate from the ordeal I was put through. I was refused my will by a restlessness inducing sickness. I was at first doubtful, but today I am certain that I am pregnant, for the quickening occurred. All my attempts to take note of the concoction of new and potent emotions that I felt, were futile. Nothing that I know of is capable of conveying what I feel to another. Knowing that there is in fact a separate life growing within me, crowns me with a purpose and meaning that cannot be ignored. It has begun to revitalise my degraded love and appreciation for the world, and my place within it. I have been blessed with a miracle, so cannot but pledge to solely exist for his or her well-being. It would be gravely selfish for me to partake in dangerous activities in the future. Though I am grateful for the fortune that has found me, I cannot help feeling, to a degree, guilty for potentially bringing a child into such a ruthlessly cruel world.

In between the noise and discomfort caused by my sickness, I became aware of a commotion taking place outside. When I was finally capable of doing so, I went to investigate. I found Welbeck and several of his men congregating outside Rebecca Nurse's house. I initially felt relief for I had thought that she had been released, but as I saw more, the feeling changed to dread. It became clear that they were in the act of clearing out her house, while I could not see any sign of Rebecca. I suspected that the worst had happened, or was soon to. Why is she deserving of such a fate? Are the gods not looking out for her? After all of her years of unflinching devotion, is protection simply too much to ask for in return?

When Welbeck and his men finally finished their thievery, I went and had a look around the house. Everything that was of slight importance or value had been removed. Everything else laid shattered and broken on the floor. After the grave thoughts that circled my mind became stagnant, I remembered that Rebecca had had the book of Levine in her care, as she had been trying to transcribe some of the Latin that was contained within. Though the book is as good as worthless in the practical sense of the word, for despite many attempts much of it remains illegible, we prize it for its ancestry.

I began to search the already searched house, in the vain hope that the book had been over looked and left behind. I looked through pile after pile of clutter and in every cubby-hole, but eventually came to the conclusion that it was most certainly not there. Since I still had a taste of sick in my mouth I desired to remain in the fresh air. Consequently, I submitted to my curiosity and worries, and in turn visited each of the houses of my friends who were still detained by Welbeck. One after the other I found their houses intact. As

Rebecca's house had been the only one ransacked, I initially assumed that the others had not yet been interrogated. However, several days have elapsed since my release.

It must then surely be assumed that there is something about Rebecca that is of particular interest to Welbeck. The others and I have known her for several years now, and so I believe I know her fairly well. Possessing the book of Levine seems to be the only thing that sets her apart, so maybe that was in fact why her house was searched. Perhaps she used the book to try to bargain her release. If so though, what would a puritan, or rather someone pretending to be one, possibly ever want with a book of ancient pagan spells? If a bargain was agreed on, I seriously doubt it was upheld.

Although I knew it would break my heart to do so, I decided to take Meklock to Thetford forest and release him. For in these strange days I feel it best to distance myself, from the beliefs that make me a target for inhumane treatment. If not for my safety, then for that of my unborn child. Give it a week and the repeatedly abused cut hidden by my wedding band will re-heal. So even to the most scrupulous investigator I will seem no different from the mindless fools I despise. I did in a way undercut my precautions, for I struck my neighbour's child, and the grievance that may well result is archetypical of the root of many accusations of witchcraft. In my defence, he was being a bastard. He was putting forth his own accusations in a jest, and with all that is occupying my mind, I had little patience for it.

I Hope that by letting Meklock into the wild, I have not endangered him. For with clipped wings he is at a considerable disadvantage, however I know he is powerful. He will, or at least I hope he will, jump to a new shell before danger comes his way. If he somehow finds his way back home, as has occurred on occasion with other people's familiars, I don't think I will have the strength to see him off again. I would hide him in some small box where none would look. Where I released him was fairly close to where Circe had relocated, and so I decided to pay her a visit. I hoped she might have had some information on the witch-hunting campaign, which had not been divulged. As I neared the community at the heart of the forest, I could not but notice the impact that the year's bizarrely harsh winter was having. I saw not one single deer or any of their tracks and only a handful of robins, while the holly and ivy that should have been flourishing appeared to be withered. I am unsure whether I have sufficient amounts of grain, fruit and nuts, to see me through.

Circe was no longer living in the community. The residents simply woke up one day and found her missing. I just hope that wherever she is, she is safe. Because it was growing dark and vilely cold, I requested to stay the night, which meant I had to bear a mass of the resident's numbing conversation.

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## **18th December 1644**

This morning, the east of the sky sported a blood red hue, as though it was purposely striving to set a tone fitting for the unjust deaths that were to later occur. Ever since I first learnt of the fate that was to beseech my friends nothing has felt truly real. As it would appear, Welbeck has indeed turned out to be the devil. Has he no shame? Is he really so devoid of humanity he is able to let the small commission he receives for dispatching a suspected witch, justify the act of murder? I feel as though I am in part responsible for the recent sorrowful turns. It would have been naive to think that there would not have been repercussions for placing a hex on Mr. Corwin. Even so I never could have imagined the course of events that were to arise. Oil has been put on the fire, and now nothing and no one is safe.

Officially there are not meant to be many, if not any, spectators at executions, however in practice people are in fact discreetly encouraged to attend. For it is believed that persons will be deterred from committing acts of criminality and heathenism by the spectacle. At around midday I journeyed to the freshly erected scaffold, which stood outside Moyses Hall. To my utter disgust a remarkably large crowd had already congregated. I was fully justified being there. I wanted to support my close friends, in their hour of death. The vast majority of the crowd, though, had merely turned up with the hope of being entertained. You could see on their faces that they were thirsty for blood. Seeing such a sight, moments before you die must truly be a heart wrenching experience.

At around two o'clock, Anne Leech, Elizabeth Cox, Maeve Greene, Martha Corey, Rebecca Nurse and William Hobb were led out of Moyses hall. Elizabeth was the first out of the building. The moment that I saw her, I was compelled to look away, for the fear and hopelessness that was carved into her youthful face was quite simply overwhelming. All of them were solemn, with the exception of Martha Corey, who lashed out and flailed a poisonous tongue whenever the opportunity to do so presented itself. If she had not been bound so tight, her handlers would have undoubtedly been without eyes in an instant. No matter how energetic her resistance was, she was unable to break from the procession, up and onto the scaffold.

As the nooses were placed around their necks, all the jeers, cries and shouts of the crowd suddenly imploded, to leave but a mellow eerie ambience. The local magistrate then took centre stage and read out a list of the crimes that the condemned were supposedly guilty of. The list included, placing hexes that caused poor harvests and the wrecking of merchant ships. Along with a whole load of lesser deeds, which were hard to perceive as being wrong doings. Despite the disagreement I had with what was being read, I wanted the recital to last for as long as possible. As right up until the stools were kicked from beneath their feet, I clung to a hope that a fortuitous situation would arise and result in their saviour. I had hoped in vain. It was going to happen, right before my eyes six of my closest friends were to be murdered.

Following several long drop hangings having recently led to the decapitation of the individual, the practice has been suspended due to witnesses having been offended by the sight. This thus led to the reintroduction of the short drop, which proved gravely misfortunate for my friends, as it meant their deaths were far from quick and painless. Their wretched contorted faces seem set to be imprinted on my mind for many days to come.

With tear filled eyes and a never before felt nausea, I watched their bodies twist and sway as they struggled for air. Slowly, one by one, the bodies ceased their resistance and turned limp. In but a moment what had once been a living functioning life form, was transformed into a mere thing, a corpse. I knew they were dead and yet I seemed relatively unaffected, the experience was simply like watching something that I found to be abhorrent. As I sit here writing this entry, the effects of losing my friends are only just starting to make themselves known. What I currently feel will surely get worse once I realise just how much their absence is to alter my life. Their contorted faces are disgustingly vivid in my mind. By rights I should have shared their fate. With retrospect it seems purely down to chance that I have been spared. If I had not made eye contact with Welbeck on All Hallows Eve I would surely, undoubtedly, be dead right now.

As though to add insult to injury, in tern, the bodies had a stake driven through their hearts. Which was in compliance with the popular Christian lore that claims the act will prevent a soul from escaping. Once this was done, the majority of the crowd dispersed, for they had received their fill of entertainment. I stayed behind, as I wished to learn where the bodies were to be taken, so that I could, in private, pay them the respect that they rightfully deserve. However, doing so proved quite unnecessary, for the bodies were to be made into a tasteless public deterrence. They were carried to saint Mary's graveyard, and then in turn rehung on an oak tree adjacent to the shire hall. From the nearby markets in the town centre the utter horror of the display was not initially evident. The tree, in a way, merely looked to have been transformed into a weeping willow. My friends have had their honour and spirituality unmercifully raped from them.

I did not want them to remain there, and wanted for them to be laid to rest in a marked grave. I went to every one of the immediate family members and friends of the six, and asked whether they would be willing to help me cut down and bury their loved ones after dark. Not one person, however showed the slightest bit of interest. Admittedly I probably had no intention of acting either. I think it was merely my anger and frustration that made me say what I did. Even so, I still thought at least one person would have been admirable enough to brave the risks. I waited until the crowd of people that had built up around the spectacle thinned, and then whispered the words I wanted to say. All the while fearful of who may have been looking on. It would appear that Welbeck has successfully brought a new level of fear to the ordinary people of this town. Everybody seems reluctant to step even an inch out of line. Ironically this will surely have a negative effect on his livelihood.

When I finally got home I found it hard to go about my normal business. I could not even write, which is normally my chosen refuge. A night had to pass until I could bring myself to pen the day's occurrences. Somehow, though I did manage to scrape together enough focus to perform rites of passage and pray, for the dead. I feared that nobody else would think or care to do so, and had hoped, albeit in vain, that doing so would have given me a sense of closure. Lest bereavement weighs on my health, I need to soon come to terms with what has happened. More nights like the last will simply be too much to bare. My head buzzed with activity, and horrors flicked in and out of my mind's eye. The jolt and drawing of breath, which each of the lifeless bodies made after being cut down from the scaffold. The image of the silent screams that several of them made as they were choked by the noose. The sprays of blood from when their hearts were staked.

Whether it was nearer to dawn or dusk I know not, but I eventually grew tired of my insomnia. My body ached and was covered in sweat, while my mind was exhausted. I lit a candle and went to make a honey, lemon balm and rose sap tea. I had hoped that my dreams would have been less torturous than my wondering conscious mind, but I was proved wrong. Looking back, I seemed to have paid very little attention to the quantities used in making my sleeping potion. I could have all too easily poisoned myself. I must be more attentive.

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**10th January 1645**

It is their war not our war, it is their war, their war. The only title that those who forced Jonas to fight, should be able to be self appointed with, is blackguard. Will men never be content with life enough, so as not to feel the need to create purpose and goals via the act of waging war? Knowledge is the only thing that is worth dying for, as only through knowledge can security and peace be found, assuming of course that such things are for mankind to possess. By thinking of any one of the bloody scenes that have sprung up all over England, I cannot help but feel there is something disturbingly primitive about humanity. Are those in positions to wage war, really no better than the wild beast that attempts to lay claim to its neighbour's land, purely because it thinks it can? It is strange that I should feel so ashamed for how these soulless sinners behave.

Though I have long since held a distaste toward those who made Jonas fight, and even though, deep down, I knew that it would be miraculous for him to return home. I now feel an anger toward said individuals, which surpasses any that I have ever felt before. My thoughts in time turned from my loss, and toward the graver loss, which my unborn child will never truly be aware of. The duty of providing guidance and protection will now fall solely to me. This is daunting to say the least, but the war will make things all the harder. I feel it is of the utmost importance my child knows his or her father, in essence at least. I shall recount details of the blessed time we had together, as well as detailing the traits that set him apart from the standard class of weak, apathetic men.

We were utter strangers when he came up to me in the street all those years ago, to tell me he thought I was beautiful and ask if I would be willing to sit for him. At the time I was convinced his request was merely a ploy to woo me, but I did not care as I had already become seduced by his boldness and beauty. I was slightly taken aback when I realised he meant his words. He took me to and positioned me in a green beside a cluster of wild flowers. I felt utterly powerless and became increasingly spellbound as he tentatively studied every inch of my exposed skin, and showed off his mastery of a Greco style of drawing. He could have done absolutely anything he wanted to me and I would have shown no objection, but to my disappointment he did nothing. We met again a few weeks later, and with the help of numerous shots of firewater we spoke long into the night. He revealed that he had in fact wanted to make an advance during our first meeting, and that he had had no intention of drawing me, but sadly anxieties compelled him otherwise.

I should show gratitude for having been told of Jonas's death, for there is no reliable means to communicate with men at war. What happens more often than not is that widows like myself, it feels weird to say that, have to simply guess what has become of their husbands after they fail to return home. Even though one may have an inkling as to what happened, they cannot ever be sure. Being in such a state of limbo must be truly terrible. I must somehow find a way to thank Mary. I am quite sure that by ensuring that a message got passed onto me, her husband was simply fulfilling an unspoken agreement he and Jonas had made, while pushed up against one another in the heat of battle. Mary however had no pact. The support that she gave me was instinctive and wholly sincere. Surely this shows just how petty those differences which often aspire to grow into grievances are. On occasion Mary has been one of my biggest critics, and under normal circumstances we would not have dreamt of associating with one another. Yet this morning she was by my side, doing her best to comfort and console me. Once I had gained a degree of emotional stability, we spoke of the concerns she had for her husband who is still currently fighting their war. He is due to be transferred, in order to take part in the claiming of Lowestoft and other coastal towns. She need not worry though, for I have heard there is set to be little, if any, resistance there.

Although the notion of there being an after life, whereby I can once again be united with Jonas, is extremely romantic, I simply cannot entertain such a belief. Everything in nature has a beginning and an end, so why should we humans be an exception? In a way I am confused as to why people are not content with the miraculous life that is here and now, and feel urged to concentrate on one that may or may not follow. Jonas had found a way to complete me, and without him I am once again a jumbled up puzzle with missing pieces. However, I have learnt that I cannot argue with fate, for it is a one sided battle. Besides I know that Jonas is not yet truly dead, as he lives on in the consequences of his actions, and the actions and thoughts of those that he left an impression on. Only when there is nobody left alive to remember or care about him, will he be no more. I can safely say that I will ensure he will at least remain alive till the day I meet my own end. It is heartbreaking that, like my recently departed friends, he will be denied a proper burial.

In the afternoon I went through his belongings with the intention of casting a charm, but I felt somewhat reluctant. Since it would in part help me move on, and I do not want to. I don't want to let go, I want to hold

on as tightly as I can until my death loosens my grip. Amid my sorrow, I was plagued with a queer craving to eat red meat. Even though I strongly believe such animals are unclean, I fear I may at some point give in.

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## 27th January 1645

As much as I dislike going to market, due to that ghastly tree which seems to continuously swell in grotesqueness, I was running desperately low on provisions. When I arrived the horse trading was only just starting. People were shouting over one another to place bids on the horses on display. I felt anger toward them for acting so normally, when but a short distance away there were twelve decaying corpses hanging from a tree. However, after having spent sometime there I found myself retracting the harsh words that I had in my head said to them, for I too ended up acting indifferently. I was pretending the bodies were not there, as a kind of crude coping mechanism. I suspect everyone else, though, simply just did not care. It was probably best that I did the same as those about me, for if I had been seen to care, it could have resulted in me being accused of some fictional crime. I managed to get the Dill and Lavender, the other items, however, the slightly more obscure items, will have to be found elsewhere. I think the weather may afford the opportunity to go harvesting in the countryside this weekend.

On my way home I ran into Cylvia. We exchanged a well worn greeting and spoke of frivolous matters, then lowered our voices to discuss those that were more pressing. I was eager to learn what our crowd had been getting up to, for it was the first time since Jonas's death that I had the chance to. My questions had also been spurred by the woefulness of her countenance. I could sense that something was wrong. Cylvia is not quite as good as I am at hiding emotions. During our conversation, she did not once pick up that I was masking a desire to confide in her about my loss. Yesterday, Cylvia and a few select others held a secret meeting with the aim of addressing the unprecedented dangers that are faced. It turned out that their meeting was not as secret as thought. A mere moment after proceedings had begun, Welbeck and his men arrived. She seems to have no doubt in her mind that he knew exactly where to find them, which makes me think back to the night that I was captured. She believes that at least one person has been taken into custody, but is uncertain who. For as she fled from the scene, she only looked back once and what she saw was a confused capture. Cylvia is presently preparing to continue her flee, with the hope of settling down in some quaint coastal town or village, as she fears her name will be brought to attention. It is indeed sad when one can no longer trust alliances, but when you take into consideration the repercussions of being denounced, her precaution does not seem too unreasonable.

Cylvia believes Welbeck has an informant, namely her suspicions fall on Sarah Spinlow. If Cylvia is in fact correct then it would help explain Sarah's brief disappearance, following the events that took place on the twenty-first of November, as well as the slight changes in her behaviour that have since been observed. It is a most distasteful notion. As little as a year ago I would not have believed that one of our own could have been seduced into an act of betrayal. Never before has it been so dangerous to be opposed to the teaching of the gospel, and as there are now so few of us, safety can no longer be found in numbers. It seems it is now simply a case of every man and woman, I'll rephrase that to lady since I dislike the term wo-man, for his or her self. Many are talking about vengeance, but if Sarah is in fact an informant, punishment should not be dealt out rashly, for her family may have been threatened. An eye for an eye is a primitive mindset. I put forth my thoughts, and judging by the way her face changed as I did, I don't think Cylvia had thought of such a scenario. Clearly her rationality has been clouded by her emotions.

While I was walking home, I became drawn to the sound of children playing. However, the welcome joy this brought was done away with as I neared. For they were singing a rhyme that had some mighty queer lyrics. It surely is a bloody age when children refer to abhorrent matters in their merrymaking.

If you think she cast a hex,  
Then administer a test,  
Tie her fingers to her toes,  
And find out whether she floats,  
If she doesn't let her go,  
If does then to the gallows,  
But don't forget to stake her heart,  
Lest her spirit can embark.

Dear my child, everyday without fail your father would say how much he cared for me, which would almost always result in one or both of us blushing.

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## 1st February 1645

Initially I was opposed to what had been planned, for I saw it as barbaric and unjust. So it is somewhat ironic that after all avenues had been explored, it turned out to be the most favourable course of action for all.

I only learnt of what had been planned this morning, and it was quite by accident. I saw Cylvia walking past the house and felt an urge to go outside, say hello and question her. I can't explain why, for I had already learnt the developments of her story the day before. My face drained of tension when she began disclosing the details of what was planned, and who was involved. As she spoke, the disgust that I had at first directed toward her changed into hatred directed toward Welbeck, his men and Christendom as a whole. When the inevitability of the act dawned on me, I told Cylvia I wanted no part in it. However, my want was of little importance as I knew I was the only person who had any real experience in dealing with such procedures. If the proper post treatment was not provided, then the wound inflicted could have easily turned septic. Also, if the cut had not been made in the right place there would have been a chance of Sarah bleeding to death, and my friends would not have wanted that on their consciences, even if some professed otherwise. I felt that it was my duty to take part in, or at least oversee, the bloody act of revenge that had been schemed.

Sarah Spinlow's routine had been carefully noted, so it was known that she was to be at home the whole morning. Before we made our unwelcome arrival, we met up with Aubrey, and Mercy who sadly had some bad news. Evea is dead, more specifically, she died while being forced to endure the swamming test. Upon hearing this I was filled with guilt, which to some extent still lingers. Maeve and Elizabeth died by hanging, and Evea by drowning. I had foreseen these sorrowful events months ago. I had sworn to keep a watchful eye open, yet I sorely failed to protect them. I have worshipped Grannus and Sirona for a little shy of seven years, and it appears that they have awarded me accordingly. The events I have seen unfolding in recent times led me to focus on fact and reason, as opposed to having faith in the gods and the gift I was bestowed with.

It may seem as though we live in a simple world of cause and effect, whereby our sense of individualism is but a mere illusion, and that we are no better than the clouds that get shaped and moved by the surrounding winds. Even so, that does not mean that there cannot be another realm, which every now and then shows itself and interacts with the one we know. Though this hypothetical world may well be governed by simple laws that are analogous to those of our own, until we understand them, assuming that it is within our capabilities, it will always be seen as being divine in nature.

As soon as we arrived at Sarah's house, Dahal, who had been waiting by the entrance demanded Sarah's attention. She venomously asked if she had heard about Evea's death, and then claimed that the blame for which was on her head. Sarah had heard the news, and was distraught because of it. I cannot believe that she failed to foresee what might have resulted from her actions. She seemed truly penitent, but in the eyes of Dahal and the others present, her betrayal was unforgivable. Sarah could see hurtful intent in the eyes of those that stood before her, and so promptly made her defence.

"They took my boy! Welbeck has him! He said that I would never see him again if I did not comply. What was I to do? Please! What am I to do? Please! You must understand, please!"

Argument and counter argument shot back and forth for a fair while, but with no means and to no end, for it is impossible to rectify what has already happened. After Sarah was questioned on how Welbeck got hold of her son, she put forth a wordy account, which I duly took note of.

"The last time we gathered during a full moon, the time when we were interrupted by that panic plagued woman and her pursuers, I, like many others ran into the woods to get away. In my haste I tripped on the root of a tree and twisted my ankle. Afterwards it was quite impossible to run, so I decided to hide in the undergrowth. I made sure I was well covered and then sat there feeling anxious, with a slight reluctance to breathe. My hopes were raised as the horsemen sounded ever further away, and I consequently thought my ordeal was soon to be over. However, one of the horsemen passed inches from where I was hiding, and in a moment that I have come to regret every day since, I lost my nerve. I was certain I was seconds from being discovered, and so got to my feet and limped off as fast as I could. I was captured and taken to Welbeck. He demanded I gave him my name and that of the others. I refused to give up such details, and so we entered

into a battle of wills. He would make me endure near to unbearable experiences and I would bear them. He would make threats and I would dismiss them.

I figured that one of two things could have happened, either I would die by his hand or he would tire of me and let me go. I simply did not foresee the third scenario that regrettably played itself out. A local resident had been employed to help with the interrogation process, and unfortunately the bitch knew me, and for whatever reason gave a damning character assessment. Then after it wasn't too hard to find out more information. My mother was taking care of my son at my house, oblivious to what had happened. Without warning, three men arrived at the house, forced their way in and then searched it from top to bottom. They told my mother I was safe and then took my son from her. I was then released the same day, with the details of a rendezvous, and a foolish sense of relief. When I got home I found my mother in an utterly wretched state. There was scarcely an unmarred portion of her skin. I questioned her, but she merely cried, so I had to deduce what happened for myself, though that wasn't too hard. What was I to do? What am I to do?"

After hearing her account, there was not one person in the room that did not sympathise with her, and the notion of reaping revenge was nigh forgotten. We all sat down together and debated the situation, and bizarrely we came to the conclusion that cutting out her tongue as planned was the best course of action. Mounting a rescue for her son was simply inconceivable. We were to cut out her tongue, rough her up, and then she would tell, or rather let her wounds inform, that she had been ousted as a nark. After that is done, all we can do is hope the end outcome is to her son's favour.

Agreeing to do something and then actually doing it are two completely different matters. I went back home to get some botanicals to help lessen the pain of the procedure, however I did not have what was required, so Sarah had to bear through the pain. We had absolutely no idea how much of the tongue could be removed before speech became unintelligible. We flirted with the idea of striving to cut but part of it off and having her pretend she was mute. However our lack of expertise meant that precision was impossible to achieve. Thankfully I was not to partake in the amputation, due to my pregnancy.

Blood started to rain out of her mouth as the blade got half way through the organ. This sight consequently spurred our haste, but the pooling that occurred hindered our progress. Sarah had been looking faint during the procedure, but only after the tongue had been cut free did she collapse. Her unconsciousness added an unwelcome complication, for her tongue had to be manually manipulated, as the leather twine which was to stem the blood flow, was carefully lassoed around it. We washed her down since much of her torso was stained with blood, and then nursed her back to consciousness. When Sarah awoke, she could not say a word, but there is still hope that she might regain speech once the wound heals. I gave her some Fox's Clote root to chew on, to help fight infection, and promised that if she had lost her speech I would do my best to teach her to read and write. I pray her son is soon returned to her.

Dear my child, your father would forever be crafting limericks and poems in his head, many of them were diabolical and cringe worthy, but some beautiful, and others demanding of a smile.

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## 2nd April 1645

Only a fool would think that this small town would not stand for any more death, sadly I was one such fool. Clearly the decision to take control of Jonathan Corwin's fate was ill-conceived. Clearly a revenge seventy sevenfold, reminiscent of biblical times is now in swing. Welbeck almost certainly deserves an untimely demise more than Corwin did. However, he has created a state of fear and paranoia so great that nobody dares to attempt to cast a fatal curse. Besides, without William and Anne, casting such a spell would be almost impossible. It is indeed a shame, as there need not be any fear regarding repercussions. Unless the plague returns to saint Edmundsbury, things cannot get any more grim.

Because I am currently so uncomfortably large I was unable to witness the murders first hand, but from what Mercy has told me that was fortunate. I passed the morning away by making breads, completely unaware of the diabolical acts that were taking place. Ignorance, although sinful, is indeed bliss. Some time after noon, Mercy came around. She wore a countenance so grave it was catching, and when it infected me it did away with my prized carefree thoughts and made me fear for the worst. I welcomed her in, made her comfortable, and then she told me of the horror she had witnessed, while I noted it down.

"I was up town, busying myself with some errands. There was a fair amount of bustle owing to cheap grapes being on sale, but this was shadowed by the energy of a conversation a group of persons were having. My curiosity implored me to find out more. I learnt that one of them had seen Welbeck and his men leading some, bound and hooded individuals out of Moyses Hall. Largely due to the words I contributed, the group

made the decision to find out more. It was made just in time, for when we turned the corner by saint Mary's church we saw the last of the described procession entering the abbey grounds through the abbey gate. We hurried along Crown Street with the intention of discreetly following them. I did not think that the gate mechanism worked, but it did and had been swiftly put in motion. We were not prepared to give up, so with the addition of the few persons that had just that second joined us, we went to the northern entrance. However, we were again met with obstruction, as a couple of armed men on horseback, refused us entrance. We were still undeterred, and so with the addition of the few people that had just that second joined us, we crossed the River Lark and travelled south on the far eastern edge of the abbey grounds.

As I had suspected, there was to be a series of executions. The apparent aim of keeping it a hush affair, was very nearly achieved, thanks due to the horsemen that guarded the area. We took up a position that was partially camouflaged and just within earshot of the freshly erected scaffold. We sat in silence, and attentively listened. Once the prisoners had their hoods removed, we tried desperately to identify them. As they stood a fair distance away, and rarely looked in our direction, we had much difficulty. The eighteen convicts eventually had their names read out, but only nine could be distinguished. Mary Lakeland, Simon Cooper, Jane Rivert, Katherine Todey, Susan Manners and Margery Sparham were amongst the unfortunate group. There were persons we were unfamiliar with, such as one father Peter Winterworth and a Thomas and Mary Everard, but from what was heard we assumed, not all the victims were local. We scarcely took our eyes off of the proceedings till the end. I think that I was hoping for something miraculous to postpone or delay the executions.

With the exception of Mary Lakeland, the prisoners were directed to take up their positions on the scaffold. At this point I thought that Mary had been spared from the atrocity, but this turned out to be wishful thinking, for her fate was far worse than that of those who were about to be hung before her. In turn those on the scaffold were addressed, and had their supposed crimes read out. Many of the accusations were so absurd it was almost beyond belief. Susan Manners was accused of consorting with the devil, with there supposedly being witnesses who saw her performing Osculum Infame. It makes me wonder what on earth Susan was actually doing, however it is likely that the testimonies were simply fabricated. Jane Rivert was accused of bewitching a crop and causing it to fail. Father Peter Winterworth was accused of wizardry and corrupting his parish. Thomas and Mary Everard were accused of having bewitched and caused the death of persons, at the Brewery where they work.

To the side of the scaffold was a large wood pile, which I mistakenly assumed to be for cremating the bodies. It was absolutely horrible to bear witness to. I left as soon as the abhorrent scene started to play out, as it was too much for me. Her screams were unbearable, and the smell that drifted our way was nauseating. Her screams still seem to be reverberating in the back of my mind. To be wrongly sentenced to death is a horror in itself, but to then die in that manner, to be burnt alive, is a horror beyond comprehension. What made the matter all the more distasteful was that the accusation against Mary Lakeland was by far the most ludicrous we heard. She was charged with bewitching and causing the sinking of H.M.S. Unity. As far as I know she has only ever lived in saint Edmundsbury, thus it is unlikely that she has ever even seen a ship."

It has got to the point where deaths seem more like statistics as opposed to losses. It is not just unfortunate, but also curiously strange that Welbeck has stayed in this seemingly insignificant town for so long. To my knowledge, he never normally remains in one place longer than a fortnight. He causes death and destruction, claims his commission, and then leaves. Why should saint Edmundsbury be any different? It stands to reason that the Corwin incident would have commanded his focus, but not for this long? I can picture him willingly condemning every last man, woman and child. He is the only one in this town that has an amour with the devil. The general public will no doubt tolerate his presence for as long as his victims remain the bohemians they look down on. Somebody needs to make a stand now.

It would be wise to burn this book, for I have no doubt that if it fell into the wrong hands, I would be sent straight to the gallows. I could never part from it though. I know I promised my unborn child I would live a risk free life, but my days would surely be wretched if I was to be denied my sole comfort. My child is due any week now, yet I still have not thought up a suitable girl's name. The further my pregnancy progresses, the more lethargic I seem to get, yet at the same time the harder I find it to gain a filling rest. I have had so much Lavender tea as of late, I may well soon develop an addiction. It is starting to tell on my mind, for I saw Jonas for the second time today, even if it is just a cruel trick, the apparition gave me strength and comfort.

Dear my child, one day while your father and I were enjoying a walk along the river bank, a young girl fell from a passing barge. Without a moments thought, your father rushed into the water to her aid. She was in no real danger, but his actions gave her great comfort and made me deathly proud of him.



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**12th April 1645**

Yesterday was both eventful and tiring, but I make no complaint for I received invaluable insight. I know that it is unwise to travel so late in my pregnancy, but my mind would not give me peace. For whenever a notable thought is spawned, it harasses me until I am enslaved by it.

In the morning I managed to catch a lift up town, from a young farmer who had got lost and had driven his father's horse and cart by my house. I went on to Shire Hall and met with James May. He has a wretched condition that makes his joints painful, and so is the only one of Jonas's friends not to have been called to war. I have told Jonas many a time that I could help to alleviate the man's affliction, for I often forget how his religious persuasions make him frown on my methods. I had been cautious to probe James for information on Welbeck, but much to my surprise and relief he voiced views which resonated with my own. He told me how much he despised the man's character due to how he uses careful wording, devious persuasion and charisma to further his cause. Though James was so open with me, I was still sure to speak with caution. I said I was acquainted with one of those condemned, and asked if there was any doubt regarding Welbeck's judgement. I learnt that there is currently a national inquiry into the practice of swamming. On top of which, following the questions that were raised after the recent executions, the local council have refused to pay Welbeck for any future services. Apparently father Peter Winterworth, who was one of the condemned, had many powerful friends and they have recently added significant weight to the criticism of the witch trials. Consequently Welbeck has hastily published defensive arguments.

Although only a small number were printed, I acquired one of the pamphlets, since the council saw little value in them. I then asked if James knew who might have information on Welbeck, and ended up with the home address of an older brother living in Ipswich. Since my inquiries were going well, and a plan was still wanting, I asked whether he knew if Katherine Tody had any local relatives, while using the colourless lie that I wished to offer my condolences. The truth being that I was looking for someone willing to help me find out more about the Witch-finder, ideally someone with money, and I had recalled that out of those killed, Katherine Tody was the only local resident of slight wealth. Fate was on my side, as James was able to give me the address of one David Broomford, the brother of Katherine. By the bye, I ended up promising James that I would contact him once I had heard news of Jonas, for I had purposely not mentioned his untimely death.

Thankfully David Broomford did not live too far from Shire Hall. Under normal circumstances I would have been fairly hesitant to knock at a strangers door, however I was worn out from the short journey and was adamant for it to prove worthwhile. The door I knocked at was answered by a middle aged man, who much to my relief, believed my lies, greeted me with hospitality and welcomed me inside. I delayed stating the purpose of my visit, as I was not sure how to word the proposal I wanted to put to him. A prolonged silence played out, and a feeling of unease steadily grew within me, thankfully he in time interjected and started talking about his late sister. He spoke of how she was the most approachable person he had ever known, and was a good church going Christian. All of which made me feel more relaxed, for it was clear that he was close to his sister, and thus probably shared many of my view points. I put caution to the wind and asked him if he would help me meet with and question Joseph Welbeck about his brother. He was more than willing, for he longed to bring to light the miscarriage of justice he felt his sister suffered.

Mr. Broomford borrowed a carriage from a friend, and appointed one of his servants as driver. For most of the time we spent together, he either talked about himself or his sister, but when his words ran dry on the journeys to and from Ipswich, he asked about my life. I wormed my way out of answering many of the questions, for fear of our partnership turning sour. However he seemed to be the type of person that doesn't listen to those he engages with. For I felt I was merely given the chance to speak, to allow him to think of what next to say. It would have been far simpler if I had used my pregnancy as an excuse to take a nap more often than I did.

We arrived in Ipswich sometime after noon as the weather was just beginning to turn for the worst. Grey clouds canopied the sky and an awkwardly fine rain showered down on us. The address that James had provided was for a conveniently placed, well kept town house, which seemed a close clone of Mr. Broomford's. We knocked with little hesitation, not realising how rash it was to do so, it didn't matter though, for no one was in. We took shelter in the carriage and discussed the matters at hand. What must have been two hours passed before Joseph Welbeck returned home, yet we remained as clueless as ever as to how we were to get to question him about his brother. In the end we simply hoped he would look upon my pregnant state with reverence, and thus accommodate our inquisitiveness.

Even though I had not formed a mental image of what he would be like, I was taken aback by the person we met with. He was handsome like his brother, but that was the only similarity that could be drawn. The two brothers had met after the eldest had been dismissed from battle, due to an amputation. I didn't want to bring up his infliction, almost as much as I didn't while in his presence. The two of them ended up having a heated argument, and haven't spoken since. Joseph Welbeck referred to his younger brother as being the black sheep of his family and labelled him as an arrogant narcissist. He has no doubt in his mind that the experience and superior judgement, that his brother claims to possess in regard to witch-finding are unsubstantiated. While several cups of tea were brewed and enjoyed, Mr. Broomford and I were given a glimpse into Francis Welbeck's life. The witch-finder's father was a highly respected priest, and at an early age he took up the training required to follow suit, but he soon lost interest and ceased his studies. After years of not knowing whether he was dead or alive, his family finally received a letter, which informed them he was well and was involved in an apprenticeship in Denmark. When his business and political studies came to a close he moved back to England and attempted to set up a business adventure. He tried to emulate one of those he had seen abroad, but in spite of his motivation and scrupulous nature, he failed. The political climate in the years preceding the war, simply did not permit such an adventure being a success. Following the declaration of war, he used his father's name and the training that he had had as a child to secure himself a place in the church. He remained in his appointed position less than a year though, for he labelled himself a witch-finder and then went off on his confounding crusade.

Dear my child although your father was a burly man, he had a gentle and caring side. This one time he brought home a young distressed shrew that he had found by the riverbank. It could not have been more than a couple of days old. Jonas reared him into a young adult, by which time the animal was far too domesticated to be allowed back into the wild, so we kept, and together named him.

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## **Witch-finder's pamphlet**

Prov. 17.15 "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the lord."

Query 1: Is there really any need for your work, is witchery not but a superstition?

Answer: The scriptures prove that witches and wizards exist, and to dispute the word of god is the work of the devil and his followers. The scriptures also clearly detail the dangers of their practices, Chron. 33.6, Isa. 47.9. It is also clear that it is gods will that we should do away with them, Exod. 22.18. Levit. 20.27. If we look back to last year when Jonathan Corwin was bewitched to death, and their sinful practices were known to be taking place within our churches, it is clear to see why. Despite the efforts that have been made, there are still reports of their gatherings taking place. No true Christian would be content with allowing the insult they cause the Lord to continue.

Query 2: How can one locate these witches so readily, without themselves being in their league?

Answer: In my youth, misfortune led me to encounter a group of devil whores. Motivated by the abhorrent scenes that I saw, and aided by the insight provided, I sought out and studied further activity. I unearthed numerous accounts of heathenism in and around my town, and in each instance, delivered the persons involved unto the appropriate authorities. Thus it is experience that has tuned my judgement and instincts to enable me to successfully identify so very many witches.

Query 3: How can those convictions which have only a confession as supporting evidence be made with certainty?

Answer: I do not use, nor have I ever used methods of torture. My associates and I merely, use practices which are but mildly uncomfortable to seek out incriminating information and evidence from the accused. The practices implemented, include watching, whereby it can be noted should the facade of the accused slip to reveal them as a servant of the devil. While body searches are done to locate devil's marks on their person, and the swarming test, to determine whether or not they have denounced their baptism.

Query 4: How infallible is the evidence used against witches?

Answer: As it is written by King James I "Witches suckled Imps and familiars, not just to feed them, but more to aggregate a witches damnation." To be certain that natural skin inflammations and irregularities are not mistaken as being teats, I employ experienced physicians and implement the use of the prick test to successfully distinguish between the two marks. As the priests who were once involved in law enforcement across much of England would point out, the swarming test is an invaluable tool for judging a person's

purity. For like the criminals that the practice previously judged, witches have denounced their baptism, and so all water supernaturally repels them.

Query 5: Is the money that you demand for your service not simply a bid to make profit?

Answer: Commission is sadly a necessity, due to the expertise and travelling demanded by our work. The payments are used for purchasing and maintaining horses and the hiring of specialist consultants.

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## 14th April 1645

It feels as though I am due to go into labour any day now, for the muscle spasms are coming and going with more frequency. I am filled with an excitement far greater than that which I could ever hope to describe, but am also filled with a fear, which sadly is likewise. The thought of what could happen if there is a complication brings a taste of sick to my tongue. If I were to survive and my child died, I do not think I would have the strength to carry on. I have been wading up hill through a tunnel that is perpetually dark for far too long. I have held on and held my head up high for as long as I have, as I felt I had an unshakeable duty owed to the life that grows within me. My world has crumbled away, peril has dug its claws deep into the country, my lover has been slaughtered, and so too has every close friend I have ever known. My child is the only thing that I have left. Though how could the gods ever be so cruel as to take him or her from me as well.

I am utterly terrified of going through what is ahead alone. Cylvia and Mercy have been brilliant, they regularly come around and keep me company by telling entertaining stories of what I am missing, or rather not missing, while I am house bound. All of which is slightly awkward as I was never really that close to the two of them before. However I don't have anyone else to turn to when looking for help. It goes to reason that their situations cannot be too dissimilar from my own, and in these testing times we should hold no shame in turning to one another for condolence and support. I hope they will agree to be my birthing aids, for I am adamant that I do not want the brutes at the hospital handling my child. What is more, I do not want to risk arriving there and finding that I have been put in a room, from which that abhorrent tree of corpses can be seen.

I put some thought into choosing a possible girl's name today, and after much deliberation I have managed to decide on three. My favourite is Ann, which I believe originates from the Hebrew name assigned to the mother of the virgin Marry. Admittedly its origin is regrettable. An other possibility is Priscilla, which apparently means ancient in Latin. Lastly there is the name, Alice, which is an amalgamation of two German words and is linked to the well to do. This would be the wisest choice, if only to help counter prejudices. I wish that my emotional response was the only thing to consider.

At around noon, Mr. Broomford made a visit. As it would appear he has grown somewhat fond of me. He brought with him some rather disturbing news, for yet another new-born child has been stolen away. In this instance, as with the previous, it happened but a day before the child's planned baptism. The vileness of such an act is astounding. I vow to never let such a thing happen to my child. The characteristics of the crimes suggest they were both committed by the same person. The worst thing is that the villain remains at large, for no one has yet come across a useful lead.

Saving me from sheer sorrow, he also had some auspicious, yet somewhat confusing information about the Witch-finder. Thomas Preston and Francis Welbeck were witnessed having an argument near the abbey about some seemingly irreconcilable difference. The liberty was then taken to turn the tale into an epidemic. Naturally, the various accounts that exist regarding what happened differ considerably, but the one thing that is featured in all is that Thomas Preston, Welbeck's trusted right hand man left Welbeck's service after having learnt that he sought advice from a witch. I am indeed curious. The dissolution of the partnership between a religious fanatic and a charismatic narcissus, who is motivated solely by money, can only be seen as good news.

Following these revelations I felt urged to perform a divination and note down what was revealed. A grave miss-justice will come to pass, the guilty party will be honoured as the blame is miscalc, and the innocent person named shall be shamed until this wrong doing is three hundred and fifty-six years in the past. People will abhor the victim while they adore the assailant, and will demand that the scapegoat be burnt at the stake. Several years after this, once reformation is accomplished saint Edmund's bones will be re-homed, and the town from which they came shall acquire a new name.

A common cause will arise to unite one and all, wars will be settled and empathy rekindled as selfishness dwindles, but a relapse will be close at hand as bitterness grows in those that had to sacrifice the greatest.

A harmonious existence is at last reached, no longer are the mistakes of the past destined to repeat, and the gods once worshipped by man become shamed by man's many masterful feats. However the utopia does not last, for it will be breached, and the leaders will not notice for they will be filled with conceit. People's thoughts regarding life will gradually grow to be ever more bleak as their knowledge of life, the world and their place within it becomes near to complete.

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## 17th April 1645

Her beauty is astounding. It is remarkable that such a thing could have come from me. Since the birth my life has been but hers, and it looks set to be that way for several years to come. I have slept at every available moment, but I presently find I am wide-awake. Everyone else is asleep, which is nice for it gives me some much-needed alone time. Cylvia and Mercy are clumped up in uncomfortable positions in the corner of the room. I only vaguely remember the details of the birth. It seems as though it happened an age ago. My main recollection of the labour, is how seemingly endless it was. Cylvia, Mercy, and not to mention the way that I presently feel, tell me that it was far from unproblematic. In time I intend to listen to the account of what happened so as to document the miracle that is Alice's being.

Mothers are forever claiming they can see a resemblance in their children's countenances. I can see no such thing in Alice, she merely looks like beauty, although she does have Jonas's eyes. Even though I feared for Alice's well being long before her birth, my fear seems to have taken on a new form. I have always been somewhat of a pacifist, however today it seems as though my blood boils at every given chance, and with the recent stories of babies being stolen circulating the town, there is more than enough to fuel my temper. I have more than once today wanted for the culprit of those abominable crimes to choose me as his or her next victim to allow me to let out my anger. Truth be told, it is best such a confrontation remains a fanciful scenario.

Because I have never really shown any interest in motherhood, due to having been consumed by my love for writing and reading, I am largely ignorant of what is required of me. Thankfully I have Mercy and Cylvia for guidance. The two of them were somewhat alarmed to learn that I had not acquired blessing from a local priest. As Mercy informed me, the formality is most advisable for otherwise, due to most people being ignorant of the signs of pregnancy, it may be assumed that I was trying to keep the child a secret because of an infidelity. Which is reasonable enough, for after all I should not have been permitted to see Jonas nine months ago. I am sure those who were not aware that I was with child will be surprised, for many thought I was barren.

Cylvia went off to try to get a priest's blessing in my stead. She informed me earlier today, her quest was not without its difficulties. One father Harkwrite, who had been newly stationed at saint James's church, was her first point of call. She told him that the delayed announcement was due to the pregnancy having come as a surprise. The priest requested to see me, but since I was by then already in the early stages of labour, it was impossible to acquiesce. The two of them wrestled in argument, but no concession was made. She then approached a clergyman at St. Mary's church, even though I was not part of the parish's catchment. The priest she met refused her request outright and even went on to call me a name, which I will take the liberty to omit. With no one else to turn to, Cylvia returned to the first priest she spoke with, and after a tiring battle of wills got him to agree to announce my pregnancy and give his blessing during a church service. However, the agreement was on the condition that I met with him after the birth and pay his parish double the standard baptism tax.

While Cylvia was away, the labour progressed substantially. I had thought I would be able to remain calm and meditate the pain away, but the extent the contractions intensified took me by surprise. Mercy played an angel and made me some tea out of dried Motherwort leaves to help ease my anxieties. She spread hay on the floor and crafted an area for me to lay. Despite her efforts to make it comfortable, I ended up plagued with cramps and rashes, some of which still remain. She covered up the windows and the cracks around the door, lit candles and made some warm spiced wine, which Cylvia was able to enjoy just before it cooled.

In the final stages of labour, just before the crowning occurred, it felt as though I was being scalded. A while later Mercy noticed that the umbilical cord was preceding the child, and that in places it appeared marginally lacerated. If I had been at the hospital my midwife and gossips would have surely sent for a male doctor. We had no one with better experience at hand, but as the health of Alice and I testifies no such person was needed. None of us knew the caesarean procedure, so all my friends could do was to aid Alice with her perilous journey into the world. Because there was so little that could be done, Mercy and Cylvia did not tell

me the severity of the situation, lest matters were exacerbated. To help achieve the quick delivery, which was desperately needed, I was given some Lobelia. I was quite faint after the birth, so was unaware that Alice was not breathing. Mercy had to massage her heart with two fore fingers to bring her round. When Alice let out her first cries, Mercy and Cylvia, followed suit with elation. I however, could scarcely smile as I was in a state of fragile lucidity, for the nine gruelling hours that had passed had taken near to all I had to give. I do not think that I can ever fully appreciate how close I came to losing Alice, however I can and do appreciate how lucky I am to have her.

When Alice stopped being the subject of conversation, I learnt from Mercy that the person referred to in the argument that had been over heard between Welbeck and T. Preston was Aubrey. Welbeck had apparently been inquiring about performing a so called, black mass. Which is strange, for to my knowledge and that of those I know, such a thing does not exist. Though on occasion we will label our ceremonies and practices, black masses in a jest, with the intention of poking fun at the Christian variety. I find it disturbing to think what may be on his mind, especially now that his abhorrent enterprise has been on the decline, since the ban on swamming and his ill decision to condemn a priest. Welbeck's bizarre inquiry, span my mind back several months to when I had suspected him of having obtained the book of Levine. All the tragedy that occurred then after, had overshadowed the matter. Cylvia and Mercy do not know where the book is, but both presume that it had been found and burnt by the church. History helps substantiate such a speculation. However after all I have learnt, I feel that the book would be something Welbeck would prize, for I can envision him seeing it as a means to personal gain. Because of his up bringing, I am certain he is literate in Latin, and thus is able to unlock many of the book's secrets. I find that a worrying thought, for those mysteries could quite literally include anything and everything in between.

There does not seem to be any way of verifying or disproving my suspicions. I doubt that David Broomfield can be of anymore service, which leaves me with the problem of how to get rid of him. I hope his interest in me will simply die down as I go through my rest period. If I cannot find someone to look into Welbeck's activities in my stead, I may see what can be achieved with the art of letter writing and deception.

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## 6th May 1645

In the morning I went with Mercy to saint James's church for the Baptism. I had Alice strapped up in a sling, which proved both convenient and comforting, at least when she was in an agreeable mood. It was just the three of us, for Cylvia had a prior engagement, or rather that was what she claimed. I think she simply did not want to go, which I can sympathise with. I felt uncomfortable being in the church from the very outset, so much so that I felt the need to keep the exit in my line of sight. The priest was rather confused by the lack of turnout. I explained the situation away with words which were not too far from the truth. My unease was made worse by the fact that I was mistakenly ill prepared for the ceremony. More than once I had to hazard a guess at how to respond to the father's words, and more than once I was embarrassingly wrong. Each time I made a mistake or hesitated, I received a scolding look. Thankfully Mercy looked out for me, by countering every one of the accusations he was too coward to voice. I am certain the two of us did not leave a very good impression, but provided neither of us end up getting lynched, I care more for my spit.

Alice looked adorable dressed in her near white gown. As the priest drew a cross on her head with cold water, she scrunched up her face and flailed her hands as if in protest. I could not help but giggle, but was soon silenced by one of the priest's looks. At least Alice will not end up being stigmatised now that she has been baptised. Once the proceedings were over, the priest marked Alice's name in the church's oversized record book, and asked for the Baptism tax, which I cannot yet pay. I duly made note of how he took far more care in noting down my debt than when he had scrawled down Alice's details. I do not know how I will get the money, for my main source of income dried up when the witch hunting campaign started pummelling the town.

Though there was no real call for it, since I hold no value in the baptism rite, Mercy and I staged a de-baptism ritual for Alice. The act will hopefully dispel all the worries I have in the recesses of my mind, due to what a baptism is said to represent.

I knew Mr. Broomford would eventually pay me a visit, and when he did it was just as uncomfortably awkward as I had predicted. The first thing he asked was when Alice's Baptism would be, to which I delivered a fumbled lie. I bet that if I had asked him, I could have got the money needed for the baptism tax, but I would probably end up getting tangled in the strings. I eventually managed to turn his attention away from me and on to the excuse that he had for the visit. As it would appear the anonymous letters outlining my

suspensions about Welbeck had had an effect, for Mr. Broomford tells me that an inquiry into whether he is guilty of practising witchcraft has begun. The word ironic seems utterly insufficient. Nothing was lighted when his quarters were searched, but he does not strike me as being the sort of person who would act recklessly. There is one place that comes to mind where he would be able to function clandestinely. The prospect of securing his fall from grace is most tantalising.

I told Mr. Broomford I wished to end our joint inquiries, so as to devote myself to Alice, however he did not seem all that concerned. Evidently he was no longer interested in redeeming his sister's honour. He then asked whether he could still see me, though his body language asked much more. More than once, I was forced to voice disapproval of his creeping hands. He then painted an image of the life that his money could buy, and told me how much I would be cherished if I married him. It was surely one of the most uncomfortable experiences of my life. I could not prevent myself from blushing, which he probably thought was a promising sign, however the truth was that I was embarrassed for him. I could never wed a man that had long lost all of his youthful veneer, and cannot understand why so many young women do. If I were ever in such a marriage, I think that I would turn to the comforts found in firewater far more than is socially acceptable. I reminded him I was a married woman, told him his behaviour was inappropriate and then bade him good-bye. He did eventually leave, but only after several desperate comments and pleas. I hope he does not prove to be a problem, but if he does I could always try to place a hex on him.

After having spent near to a month resting up, while falling even deeper in love with Alice than I thought possible, I have developed a mild sense of claustrophobia. Rather than seeing my home as a sanctuary, I now see it as a thing to abhor. If I stare at the walls for long enough they seem to encroach in on me. I long to go out at every given chance, not for any particular purpose but purely to regain my sense of freedom. Which is why I am currently trying hard to persuade Mercy and Cylvia to let me be more independent.

While at saint James's church, it was learnt that the bodies on the tree that has colloquially been named, the revulsion, were finally to be taken down. It had been planned for quite some time, but since the bodies were so badly decayed, it proved hard to find persons willing to do the job. Both Mercy and Cylvia showed no interest, but I wanted to go and watch, for I saw it as being of great symbolic importance. I left Alice with Mercy and Cylvia, both of whom were only too happy with the charge, and in the allotted window of time went to saint Mary's graveyard. When I arrived there was already a small gathering of people. It had been so long since I had gone near the tree. There were so many corpses hung from its branches that it bore little resemblance to nature's design. Some of the bodies that no longer had identifiable faces were so decayed and fragile that their heads and limbs fell off as they were being taken down. A clearing was made to one end of the graveyard, where the bodies were taken and burnt. Along with most of the others, I left as soon as the fire was lit, for the resultant smell was stomach wrenching. I did however give myself a moment to take in the sight of the oak tree looking as nature intended.

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## 14th May 1645

Alice smiled for the first time today, it was a truly beautiful sight which spurred feelings I cannot possibly try to describe. As I now recall and hold close fragments of the experience, I find it in a way terribly taunting, for it acts to amplify the shame I feel due to my foolish actions. My heart is in a wretched state, and sadly it is unavoidably set to worsen, since I have not yet been parted from Alice for even a day. My emotions plead me to omit this entry, but it is a day I would be foolish to forget.

At around noon, for what was the fourth time within a week, some men came to the house and demanded immediate payment for the over due baptism tax. The visit was different from the previous, for they had razors in their eyes. As a result I ended up promising them that I would have the money within a day, of course I had no idea as to where I would get it. Not only has the demand for my trade died out, but now that I am a single mother, working the fields to get extra money is simply not possible. I could have asked my friends for help but I would have felt ashamed, for they have already done so much for me. I thought that stealing from the church would have been an easy and worry free source of funds. The only, yet significant difficulty was to gain entry, for the doors have been locked at night ever since the Corwin incident.

I went around to Cylvia's house in the evening, and shortly after I arrived we were joined by Mercy. Once we had finished swapping stories, I asked the two of them if they could look after Alice, whilst I went out for a while. I crafted an explanation, and even though I tried to be as clever as possible they clearly saw it for what it was. As I left, Mercy simply told me not to do anything foolish, sadly I was not wise enough to heed her advice. As I thought back to having been there, I began to doubt that I would be able to find anything of

much value in saint James's church. William Dowsing and his henchmen stripped the place of most of its gold and silver. I remember their crusade quite vividly. All across East Anglia, stain glass panels were smashed, paintings burnt, riches seized, and I believe a priest and a few nuns were hung in Norfolk. It was beautiful to see the social injustices done away with, but I would like to know where exactly all that wealth went.

When I arrived at saint James's church it was not yet dark, but it was clear that it was soon to be. As I began to look around the building as inconspicuously as possible, I began to think about just how ridiculous my scheme was. I had absolutely no idea how I was to gain entry, for every one of the entrances were securely locked. I was not prepared to give up and so took another look, with the extra nerve that the increased darkness gave. I noticed that the door of the eastern entrance was considerably blighted. Although it was not ideal, it proved to be my best chance of gaining entry. I picked up a piece of flint that had a crude point and began scraping and chipping away at where the door's bolt was housed. Though the wood was weakened, digging through it was no mean feat.

I probably should have checked saint Mary's church to see if it was easier to gain entry to, but I had in my mind, already decided to stick with what I was doing. By the time the moon had traced an eighth of its journey through the sky my arm ached, but it was worth it for I had successfully exposed the door's bolt. I then went through numerous sticks as I tried to lever it back into its mechanism. I was nearly at the point of giving up trying when, out of frustration, I gave the door a forceful shove. To my surprise it broke open. Though I was terrified that someone had heard me, I remained standing there on the spot as I tried to decide whether I should continue with my plan. I did not fancy turning away after all the effort I had invested.

I lit a black match with the sparks from the flint I was using, then hesitantly stepped inside and shut the door behind me. Once I had swapped my temperamental match for a lit candle, I began my search. There were not merely as many ornaments as I remember there being as a child, but I was hopeful that a treasure could be found. To get rid of the items I did find, I didn't know whether I would have to melt them down or sell them on the black market, let alone how I would do so. My concerns were eventually negated when I discovered the parish donation box. I tricked open the simple lock mechanism with a pin, took what I needed and then made ready to leave. Looking back now, I was ridiculously foolish not to have taken anything else, and not just for the obvious reason.

While I was making my way back to the forced door from the far side of the nave, I heard a creaking sound. The noise was fairly quiet but as it had broken total silence, it snatched my full attention. I heard another crack, then another. My heartbeat doubled in speed. I hid behind a pillar that was a short way away from the sound, and blew out the candle I held. While unaware of what or who was the source of the noise, I grew terrified. Within the church there was a dull reddish blue glow, created as the moon shone through the stain glass windows. This proved enough to allow me to see a region of tiles in the central aisle rise up and reveal a trap door. I then nervously watched as a man clambered out. He looked and acted as though he was just as fear stricken as I, and as he got further out of the passage I thought it to be father Harkwrite. I foolishly lent out from behind the pillar I was hiding for a better look, and in doing so was sighted.

He hoarsely cried out and called me a harridan. I fought back my crippling fear, and the two of us entered into a bizarre stand off, which eventually ended when I saw a light by the main entrance. I turned and ran to make my escape, as I assumed persons were coming to investigate the disturbance. Just before I left the nave, I heard a dull thud followed by a deathly silence. Though there were no fast approaching footsteps, I did not look back, and because of which my curiosity is now biting at me.

I ran back home, grabbed my diary, some garments, a few other select items and then went to Sylvia's house. After waking them, I told Sylvia and Mercy I had to leave. I instructed them to hang a white sheet from a window to signal if it was safe for me to return. I gave them the money I had stolen, told them to find a wet nurse for Alice, and then briefly explained what had happened. I then gave Alice a kiss and started my journey to Thetford forest, while entertaining the thoughts of a masochist.

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## 30th May 1645

Today a large search took place which involved near enough the whole of the town. It was planned and led by the clergymen, in the hope that some information regarding the recent string of disappearances, would be unearthed. Thickets were scoured, people questioned and alcohol drunk. In what proved to be my saviour, father Harkwrite mysteriously went missing a fortnight ago. More recently so too has a male youth, bringing the total to four accounts. It is entirely logical to assume they are related, for such things are unprecedented

in our provincial town. A mystery it is indeed, but I dare not let my imagination search for reasoning. Sarah's mother did offer to baby sit for me, but as much as I wanted to help the others, I could not bear to part from Alice. I am still recovering from the heartache I experienced during the ten days I was separated from her.

It is beyond fortuitous, the way in which father Harkwrite's disappearance has acted to cover up my crime. I was to say the least, frustrated when I learnt my precautionary leave had been unnecessary. Clearly the gods have plans for me still. What happened in saint James's, both worries and perplexes me. I long to know where the trap door leads, who was the person that bore the light from which I ran and what was the noise that shortly followed my flight. If I had looked behind as I fled the scene then perhaps my mind would now be in a state of peace.

The streets have been oddly quiet for several months now, but when everyone left to take part in the search, the ambience dropped further still. Because of which, the commotion that was to arise stood out all the more. Initially it was just a hand full of voices, but it soon swelled and gained energy. I became increasingly irritated, and found myself repeatedly checking on Alice to see if she was stirring. I am usually careful to keep out of my neighbours' business, as I hold the mentality that if I do not bother them, they will not bother me. Since my child seemed set to be roused, I went out into the street to investigate. A strange sight met my eyes. About a hundred yards or so up the road stood a man who was clearly in discomfort. He was struggling to even stand up, and yet in front of him were a group of people firing him insults. It was so upsetting to witness, I intervened, but only after I had checked on Alice. As I got closer to the crowd, the peculiarity of the situation became truly apparent.

What I could make of the wounded man's appearance from a distance was curious, but it did in no way prepare me for when I saw him up close. He was wearing nothing but a dark loincloth, which was soaked with the blood that had dripped from the shallow lacerations that tarnished his chest, arms and lower face. He had a muscular physique, which begs the question what or who attacked him. The most striking aspect of his appearance were his eyes, or rather the absence of them. All that one could see were pieces of blood stained cloth that had been stuffed into the sockets, presumably to stem the blood that had streaked down his cheeks. It was a horrifically singular sight, but did not warrant the reaction it received.

The crowd's appearance was almost as strange as that of the man who was accused of being, amongst other things, a devil's imp. Since most people were involved in the search, those in the crowd were either elderly, poorly or pregnant. Some were shouting taunts, some commanding him to leave, and calling him an abomination of the lord. Some were making use of the rosaries around their necks. Others were throwing things, but most were just spectators.

I braved the stares, insults and stones, tried to talk the crowd down and learn more about the situation. The crowd's aggression did lessen, but I sense it was solely for my benefit, as I had purposely taken up a position between them and the stranger. My mind turned to Alice, which caused my anger to grow out of control, as I longed beyond words to go back and check on her. I acted in an alien manner and shouted at the crowd. In short, I told them that the man was clearly in urgent need of medical attention, and then belittled them for lacking empathy and entertaining idiotic superstitions. I probably went a tad too far, for I seem to remember telling them their beliefs were the blight of the modern world. At the climax of my outburst I can recall there being a hint of terror in the faces of my audience. I ran back home as fast as I could, but Alice seemed utterly unaware of my absence. I spent a moment watching her have an adorable yawn, then left her again reasoning that it would be safer for her where she lay. When I went back outside I was amazed to find that the crowd had thinned considerably. I offered the stranger some comforting words and then led him away.

The wounded man barely even had the strength to follow me to his rest bed, and but a moment after he had laid his head down, he closed his eyes and fell into a deep sleep. He is fortunate to have come to my attention, for I can't see anyone else being able to secure his recovery, owing to the vast array of medicines I have at my disposal. I spent most of the night cleaning, treating and dressing his wounds and trying to get him to drink. I used a paste made from the bark of Vervain on his cuts, and a similar paste made from the root of Yarrow in his eye sockets, to aid the healing process and prevent infection.

I have never thought myself squeamish, but I found many of his wounds unsightly. Waves of pins and needles greeted me as I took the crude blood soaked dressings from his eye sockets, and saw the extent of the damage. I did all that I could do for him, yet cannot say whether his chances of survival have at all improved. Time will tell. I have not heard from Mercy or Cylvia, and so do not know if the search they partook in lighted any leads, or dare I say it, a body.

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### 31st May 1645

Mercy and Cylvia were both confused and amazed by the extent of the stranger's injuries. They unanimously came to the pessimistic conclusion that he would not make a recovery, and made wagers on when he would pass away. They bleakly predicted he would live no longer than a day or two. I should have been offended, for their predictions showed little faith in my abilities as a healer, but part of me thought their pessimism reasonable. He had clearly lost a lot of blood, and had made barely any movement since he laid himself down. Mercy and Cylvia repeatedly said that I should pass him over to the hospital, however I wanted to try to do more for him. It was clear that the two of them did not want to pass the day nursing a stranger, who they perceived as being as good as dead. I thus insisted that they left me and did as they willed, for I was more than content nursing my patient.

Once I had cleaned him up, redressed the wounds that required it and had lit some fresh eagle wood and Henbane incense, there was little more I could do for him. I thus turned my whole attention to Alice. We spent well over an hour making faces at one another, as I repeatedly tried to make her smile. To the point at which it is almost noticeable, she is learning and growing everyday. Although it is upsetting to think she will all too soon become independent, it is exciting and beautiful to think that I can watch her grow into who she is set to be. Our playtime was brought to an end as I heard a deep breath being drawn by my patient on the other side of the room. I do not know why, but I was slightly frightened by the thought that he was waking.

When I finally remembered my duty, I placed some smelling salts to his nose. He immediately started to stir with more vigour, and gradually began to gain lucidity. He remained fairly dazed and weak, but he had enough strength to sit up. I boiled him some red cabbage and spinach and gave him the last of my wine. He was very well mannered, but I suppose anyone in a vulnerable position who is dependant on another, would be. I reminded him of how he came to be in my house, as his memory of yesterday was hazy at best. He then unexpectedly burst into tears, repeatedly claimed to not be deserving of my kindness, and spoke a series of incomplete and jumbled up sentences.

"I wanted to repent, I was going to change my ways."

"How could a man not be tempted?"

"He said that the ends would justify the means."

"Heaven has surely closed its gates on me, I am beyond redemption."

Though I could not make sense of his words, they made me feel unnerved. I attempted to reassure him by pretending that he would be able to find forgiveness for what he had done, providing he was truly penitent. In the moments that followed my worries turned into horror and then a crippling fear. As I prepare to write word for word the words he said, chillingly, I can in my head hear his voice saying them.

"I have done truly terrible things, innocent lives, angels without wings who were yet to sin, have lost their lives because of me."

My heart plummeted and I felt faint as he spoke, for it seemed clear that he was the tyrant being hunted. Tomorrow will reveal all. I had welcomed the very person that I had to protect my child from, into my house. Despite him being in a weakened state I still feel that I am lucky to have eluded him. With retrospect I acted foolishly, but in my defence it was nigh impossible to remain calm and collected following such a revelation.

I asked him whether he was the one being looked for and whether he was responsible for the kidnappings. He did not deny my accusations, he merely told me to wait after sensing I was backing away. He reached out and grabbed me by the leg. I kicked my way free and drew back as he again told me to wait. He pleaded more than commanded, but even so I wanted to get away from him as fast as possible. I grabbed hold of Alice, went into the kitchen and threw my entire supply of Valerian root on the dying fire. Though I had heard him in pursuit, the tyrant never made it out. With Alice in my arms, I then watched as a thin white smoke filled up the downstairs of the house. I recall feeling anxious about having potentially killed the man, not that he did not deserve death, but because I am curious to learn his story.

While somewhat shaken, I went off to find Cylvia. Thankfully she was at home and was of much comfort. Naturally, after having told her what had happened, she wanted to go and see what state the wounded stranger was in. So once I felt fit enough to do so, we made the short walk to my house. By the time we arrived, much of the smoke had vented, but even so the inside still stank of Valerian root. Cylvia went and opened up the doors of the house and used a shawl to help the air circulate. We sat in a shaded region of the garden for an hour or so, then relocated inside. Unbeknown to me, Cylvia had taken the initiative to tie the wounded stranger up, and had been over cautious to the point at which it was funny. His head was near enough the only part of his body not tied down, and that was only because it was impractical to do so. Mercy called round in the evening, and along with Cylvia decided to stay the night for precaution.

At the time I thought it unnecessary, however right now I cannot but be thankful they did, as I cannot imagine what would have happened otherwise.

Mercy was the first to stir, after having heard the front door squeak, as it sometimes does when slowly drawn open. Which in a way reflects badly on me, for as the newly made mother I should have been the one sleeping lightly. She sat upright, not fully understanding why she had awoken, but was then reminded as another noise sounded. Being the admirably fearless woman that she is, she got up to see what it was. She went through to the front room and saw a darkened outline of a man, then called out and ran back to us. Alice instantly began crying, while Cylvia and I got to our feet and followed Mercy's lead. After having seen the figure for herself, Cylvia quickly went to check on the wounded stranger who she found just as we had left him. Then somewhat savagely, the three of us fought the intruder into retreat. The ferocity of our attack was well documented by the mess left for us to tidy.

The intruder was dressed in black and had on a hat and scarf, which covered much of his face so we are clueless in regard to his identity. All that I can say on the matter is that it was most strange that someone should try to burgle a prosaic house that has nothing worth stealing. Such a thing is unheard of. No one was harmed though and no real damage was done. Life goes on.

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## 1st June 1645

Once we tired of having repetitive conversations about last night's incident, the morning passed rather slowly. Cylvia took to standing guard by the wounded stranger, which was typical of her overcautious manner. However, no one was by his side when he woke at around midday. He started to cry out and struggle in his restraints, and only became subdued when he heard my voice and had the situation explained. Strangely, despite our firm convictions of his guilt, we could not help but to address him in a civil manner. The ease we felt in his presence was no doubt partly due to Cylvia's rope work. He introduced himself as one, Avery Stokes of Manningtree, and we enjoyed a moderately filling lunch together. Afterwards the mood grew sombre, he again thanked us for our kindness, stating that it was far more than he deserved. Then for the first time, he outwardly confessed that the accusations I had put to him were true. Though I needn't have had verification, I felt uneasy when he made the confession, and I could tell that the others did too as they gave me uncomfortable looks. Avery then spoke earnestly, desperately trying to say all that he had in his mind before we interjected.

"I deserve to be sent to the noose for what I have done, I do not deny that, I cannot bear living with the burden of my actions. I find myself longing for a painful death so that I can feel I have suffered for my wrongs. People have due cause to call me vile names, and say all that they will, I do not deny that. I deserve no leniency, but I ask two things of you, the first being that you let me die with the alias I have given. I plea that one of you will certify my identity in court, thus preventing further investigation. For I wish to spare my hard working honest brothers and their families from shame. Furthermore, nothing just is as there is always a cause for the observed effect. I plea you listen to my tale, but you may well not believe it for it is fanciful. I pray that you and others do though, after all what reason is there for me to lie. I have no honour to protect and will surely be dead by the end of the week. I just want to know that my story has been heard, because I fear that once I have made my confession to the officials, no one will care to listen to what I have to say. It is of the utmost importance that somebody does listen, for I am not the only one to blame."

When he related his narrative I duly noted it down, with the intention of getting him to sign it so it could be presented to the appropriate officials. Much to the annoyance of Mercy, Cylvia and I, he insisted on telling his entire life story, still it was bizarrely entertaining, although at times tiring to write. In the mid afternoon Sarah called round for her reading and writing lesson, which had completely slipped my mind. I feel quite disappointed with myself, for it is the second week in a row that I have let her down. Though my neighbours have probably already spread extravagant rumours, I thought it best not to mention what had happened, lest it came to light that I harboured a criminal longer than his recovery period required. I thus made up an excuse about having to go and add Alice's name to some record book at Shire Hall. I apologised and then promised that I would make it up to her.

Because Avery was in a weakened state he failed to finish his tale, and what was worse was that he drifted off just before the part we were most eager to hear. We had expected he would not finish, for on several occasions he struggled to get his words out. On one occasion, it was only after we had eased a herbal tea down his throat that he had the strength to continue. When he did pass out Mercy and Cylvia tried to reawaken him but I stopped them, under the pretence that I was concerned about his health, but the truth was

I could no longer bear to write. It is strange, I know Avery is a tyrant yet I seem to be warming to him. He seems truly penitent, despite it being in vain for his crimes are of the kind that can never be forgiven. There is definitely more to his story than we suspected.

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## **The narrative**

I had a relatively privileged upbringing as my father owned some land, but it was the cause of his wealth rather than a product of it. My father was a hard working man who bread horses for a living. His horses were once regarded as being amongst the best bred in East Anglia, but that matters not now. As was the case with so many other families when the black death hit, ruin came in tow. When my father died, my brothers and I tried to carry on with his business, but despite our best attempts, we were forced to give up and sell everything off. During times of true hardship, all men are equal, all except the sovereign and the sinfully wealthy. My mother did not take to poverty well, for it is horrible to have something and then have it taken away, as you are left with haunting memories of what once was. She was utterly miserable, and so I felt compelled to try to regain the wealth she had been used to, and which she rightly deserved. My brothers did not share my vision. They both went into apprenticeships, obtained respectable jobs, and came to label me as a worthless dreamer. I designed my own course of study to rise to the challenge I set myself, and as a result was looked down upon further. Though this in a way played in my favour, for only with success could I have regained respect.

With the weight that my father's name still carried I managed to acquire some capital from the local baron. The money was not substantial, but with careful planning I was certain it was enough to lay the seeds for my scheme. I then set about finding persons willing to work with and for me. It was not too great of a challenge, for many people were just as desperate to find hope and prosperity as I. Out of the group of six I selected to work with, I chose the two that were best educated and motivated as my partners, and together the three of us worked out a business plan. We were all excited about what the future potentially held in store, which was at times distracting. Once our plans had been finalised, we placed our faith in the adventure, sold everything we owned and then brought passage to the new found land. The journey inadvertently resulted in us becoming experienced deckhands.

We arrived in Jamestown and then travelled inland to a fledgling town called Williamsburg, which was where we were to settle. Once we obtained permission from the local lord and brought some land, which ate up the bulk of our finances, the six of us set about setting up the tobacco plantation we had for many months dreamed of. We had hoped to experience the success, which was enjoyed by those that had set up such plantations in the previous years. We knew that competition would be fierce, but we did not bargain on it being quite as fierce as it was. Many of our competitors were violently opposed to novices coming into their country, and attempting to take a share of their market. One year, half of our harvest was lost as a rival burnt down our airing barn, and on numerous other occasions sizeable amounts of our crop was trampled. It was terribly disheartening, and things only seemed to get worse. Much of the time we lived a hand to mouth existence, but sometimes, in part due to the lack of an established infrastructure, we went without. Within a year the toll of enduring such hardships began to tell, as two of my colleagues died. While those of us that remained saw our drive peter away.

We knew very little of what was happening in England. We knew that war had broken out, but that was basically it, we knew nothing of how bloody or how far reaching it was. Nor did we know how the lives of our loved ones had developed. I did not know that my mother had passed away, or that prior to her death the baron that sponsored me took her house as rebate, out of being frustrated that his investment had yet to bear fruit. My counterparts and I thought that there was more going for us in England, also we were beginning to hate our surroundings. Eddington wanted to try to obtain some honour by fighting in the war, but the rest of us simply wanted to get back to true English soil as quick as possible. We sold off our estate, as well as everything and anything that we could. The clothes on our backs were the only exception. We burned with shame as we drew a line under our joint adventure. Our state of affairs were so pitiful that we couldn't afford the price for passage back to England. We were thus forced into buying three tickets and then stowing away the fourth member of our party.

When I arrived back I foolishly thought that my luck had a chance of improving. Once I reached my home town, and learnt what had happened to my mother I was utterly distraught. I had nothing, I had no one, and what was worse I could not see how my situation could improve. I knew that for someone like me who had never touched a musket or sword, or even for that matter seen one up close, going to war would have

been plain suicide. I had strength, but it simply stemmed from innumerable hours of manual labour. I know my cowardly actions are shameful, I fully deserve to be looked down upon because of them, but ask yourself this, how many people who signed up to fight ended up wishing, longing, pleading that they had not? What differentiates them from me is that I was true to my convictions, and was also somewhat deluded.

With all my bridges having been burnt, I had little to no prospects. I thus resorted to leading the life of a drifter, and to add even more shame to my already shamed self, I turned to stealing. Initially I merely took what I needed, but with time I became less concerned with the possible consequences and effects of my crimes. I ended up stalking the Ipswich to saint Edmundsbury road as a highwayman. After years of bedevilling people, I began to hank for an honest living to escape the uncertainty, long hours and general wretchedness of a life of crime. I ended up loathing myself for stealing and as a result became sloppy with my work, which ultimately led to me getting caught.

I was taken to the Ipswich gaol and there I endured an agonising two months of limbo. When I finally stood on trial at the Suffolk assizes, the judge offered me the chance to go to war in the stead of serving a sentence, but only on the condition that I pleaded guilty to the charges against me. In a blind idiotic stubborn act I pleaded not guilty, and so was sentenced to death. While on the way to the noose, something happened which I would have happily labelled as an act of god, if not for it having been so bloody. The prisoner that I was travelling with was, to say the least, a handful. He routinely tested the guards and even though each was twice the size of him they seemed intimidated. However I sympathised, for that which the man lacked in strength was more than made up for with gall.

Some way into our journey we came upon a coach driver struggling to control his horse, much to the annoyance of his beautiful, but vocally vulgar female passenger. Our driver did the gentlemanly thing and stopped to offer his help. Though we were only stationary for a mere moment and I was clasped in irons, freedom was at hand. The convict I was travelling with somewhat miraculously managed to overpower both of the guards. He elbowed the one he was sitting next to in the face, then lunged forward and head-butted the other in front of him. My face simultaneously became painted with blood and terror. The guard beside me was near lifeless after the attack, though I suspected he was very much conscious. The other, however did not forget his duty and so a vicious struggle broke out. When a crazed man is pitted against one of strength, the latter will always lose, as one adheres to the rules whereas the other doesn't even comprehend them.

While the two of them were occupied, I noticed that the ratchet for unclasp my irons had fallen to the floor. I took it, unbolted my shackles, busted free from the carriage and then ran as fast as I could. During my flight, I was far more concerned with escaping my fellow convict than the law, for his wrath seemed the one to fear. I would have assisted him escape, but I did not quite like the thought of him being a free man. I saw what had happened as a new start, and a chance to change my ways. However, Lest someone were to take a chance on me, I would either have to take up arms or fail. Before I was to decide on my path I wanted to first repent my sins. I travelled to saint Edmundsbury, thinking that there, there would be little chance anyone would recognise me.

I arrived on the second of April, and I remember it clearly, owing to the damnable man that befriended me. When I stepped into saint James's church, night was closing in and there was not a single parishioner inside. The only one there was a priest on the far side of the nave, who looked as though he was in some sort of hurry. It was rude of me to have disturbed him, and I have long since wished that I had waited for another clergyman, but I was at the time excited. What was more, I had made a long journey and did not take kindly to the possibility of having to wait till morn to be seen.

I politely commanded the priest's attention and asked if he would take my confession. He seemed in a way confused by my request, so I questioned whether he was in fact a priest. After which he directed me over to the booth. I have never really been an active Christian, and before that day I had never made a confession, even so I knew that there was something not quite right about how matters proceeded. The priest was far more nonchalant about my sins than I thought he would, and I suspect, was meant to be. He was uncaring and often tried to speed the process along. However, once I had spoken the bulk of my tale and had divulged how desperate I was to obtain forgiveness, he suddenly appeared much more interested in what I had to say.

I was played for the sad fool I am. A wiser man or better Christian would have been able to see through his games. He first told me that which I least wanted to hear, or rather, he vocalised all the thoughts I had hidden in the back of my mind. With words that were stripped of the wishful thinking my thoughts were sweetened with, he told me my crimes were deplorable and described the fate that I potentially had to look forward to enduring. Then as we were parting company he gave me the hope he had withheld. Now that I know him and am familiar with his methods, I am certain that every word he said was clearly planned out, and intended to both lure and fool me into helping him with the vile deeds he had in mind.

He told me there was a chance all was not lost, and that he would personally guide and help me obtain redemption. We were to meet the following day at a quiet location. That night I slept restlessly, in part due to my bed being some undergrowth, but also due to foolishly thinking things were auspicious. I had no reason not to trust him, he was after all a priest. I did what I thought was the right thing. It was the first time in years that I had done anything that was not for money or personal gain. He told me of how he had taken up a crusade to save the children of heathens from enduring Limbo, which was set to be their fate should they die without having been baptised. I was told that saving souls in this manner would win me favour with the Lord and redeem me. With money that he gave me I took a lodging in the nearby village called, saint Genevieve, and was instructed to keep to myself and speak to no one about our collusion. I agreed to his terms as I was indebted to his charity, and was after all a wanted man so I needed to keep a low profile. We met again on the evening of the eighth of April, and I was assigned my first task. He gave me the address for a family of supposed heathens, and I was instructed to secretly steal away the child I would find there in the dead of night. I was assured that he would baptise and then immediately return the child. He told me that aiding him would be my road to salvation. I thought that I was doing the right thing, and knew nothing of his true vile intentions. On the evening of the twelfth, he came to me and again I did what he asked. I was absolutely ignorant of what I was taking part in, however, the same cannot be said about the male youth that went missing. I shall spend eternity on the fiery sands of hell for the part that I played in his death. Nothing I can do will absolve me from that fate. Regarding the murders of the infants, my only crimes were that of trust and foolishness, though in the circumstances they proved dire.

Because news struggled to reach the quaint village in which I was staying, and I kept to myself, I was for a while at peace. However, everyone soon came to be talking about two infants that had gone missing in less than a week. When I heard the general details of what had happen from a local elderly man, I became overcome with numbness. I felt sure that something monumental was amiss. Parallels as striking as those which I drew between the man's words and my actions, can never be seen as coincidental. I prayed that there was some reasonable explanation, and longed to question the priest I had conspired with.

For over a week or so, my questions weighed on me and tested my sanity. I made daily trips to saint James's church, and stalked the grounds for the priest I had business with. I did not once see him, and what was worse, I could not even ask about him, since I only ever referred to him as father. While if I had made curious inquiries with but a physical description, I would have risked being recognised and thus having my past catch up with me. The priest finally called round to my lodging on the twenty-fifth. Looking back now I should have put faith in my instincts and fled the county. Looking back now, I see that there were many things I should have done differently. Sadly, I was weak, whilst that which he was to entice me with was strong.

I was furious at how I had been left in the lurch. I put question after question to him, but he answered none of them, he merely instructed me to follow, which I sadly did. As we walked I again attempted to question him, but still he gave no answers. Thus I became increasingly worried as to what his intentions were. He took me to the remains of saint Saviour's hospital near the northern gate, and then we went eastward to a wooded area. Before entering, we stopped for a moment as he retrieved a lamp that had been concealed. I thought this strange as it was barely noon. Our path took us back into the open, along the edge of several allotments and then again into a wood. We stopped at an inconspicuous dead tree stump. Within the hollowed out centre of which, he rummaged amongst the moss for the end of a rope which once pulled revealed a narrow wooden clad shaft. The thought that he was to kill me crossed my mind, but since I still had some faith in him, I brushed it aside. After passing over the lantern, he ensured me that if I were to follow and trust him then he would reveal all. He had a preposition which he claimed was too good to turn down.

Once he had precariously lowered himself into the hole, he held out his hand for the lamp which he had asked me to light and then disappeared. I stood there for a while uncertain whether I should follow, but like the fabled cat I yielded to my curiosity and there were dire consequences as a result. Descending the shaft was most awkward if you did not face the right direction, as it bent around to meet a tunnel, which I believe extended southwards. Once I had met up again with my guide he pulled a rope, which acted to extinguish the meagre light that reached us from the outside. As I stood ankle deep in the muddy pools of the tunnel, my mind further swelled with questions. I did not voice any of them though, for I was preoccupied by my fear and curiosity regarding what lay ahead.

I was led to a chasm, and once all the oil lamps that were placed around its walls were lit I saw that it was used as some sort of crude laboratory. I pray I never get made to go back there, for it's the place where I sold my soul to the devil. In the centre of the space was a long table, a free standing cabinet, and a large post that

was dug into the ground. I never managed to learn how they got down there as he only ever told me that which he thought I needed to know, and that never amounted to much.

On the table sat a vast array of implements, which managed to glisten in spite of the gloomy setting. I soon learn that it was owed to the fact that their owner prized them dearly, and would clean, sharpen and polish them meticulously, whenever he was at a loose end. It was a spine shiver inducing, miserable, horrid place. If I were a stronger man I would have ran away and alerted the officials as soon as I suspected what had gone on down there. The various stains on the table, the trays with sickly clumps of the material they once contained, the metal instruments, the vials of liquid on the cabinet's shelves and the laboratories hidden location, all help to paint an incomplete picture that the mind was more than capable of finishing.

I became increasingly alarmed by what was set out before me, but the priest was as deaf as ever to my words. His attention was fixed on his surgical instruments, as he was attempting to reposition them into the manner which they were already positioned. As his perplexing queer behaviour began to calm my mild state of hysteria, he commanded my silence by getting a large book out from the cabinet and dropping it on to the table from a height. It was not the resultant noise that silenced me, but rather the dirt that was caused to rain down from the ceiling. Once he had dusted himself down, he searched for a specific page in the book, and then spoke words which I recall with clarity.

"You are in part responsible for the death of two children. Regardless of whether you knew of your role a jury will surely see you are sent to the noose. So I ask you this, do you want those murders to have been in vein?"

I spent a moment making sense of his words, and then looked to him with a look that evidently portrayed my answer, as he then started to tell me the history of the book that was before him. He claimed that segments of it had come from the book of Cleritine, which had been commissioned to be written by Pope Markson II. All those in Christendom who were learned in hermetic magic were called on to compile their knowledge. For it was feared that the heathen's witchcraft had survived the ages despite the early Christians having destroyed the library of Alexandria.

My attention was directed to the open page of the book, and I was told that it supposedly outlined a means by which to obtain immortality. While its, want for a better word, magic, was not the same as those he condemned, since it was based on the sound views of Plato and various Hermetical philosophers, which the early Christians rightfully saw merit in. He then proceeded to justify what he had done, claiming that it was for the greater good since centuries worth of knowledge could be gained, which could then be used for the security of ones own country. I found it strange to see him speak so freely and with such passion, for he was generally a man of few words. When he finished, I asked him what had become of the children. While bringing a taste of sick to my lips, he told me that they had been dispensed for the realisation of what was written on the page before him.

The spell needed for one last sacrifice, which was argued to me as being justifiable considering the outcome, but I exclaimed that it was evil. I do not know what I expected to encounter when I was told I would have all explained to me, all I can say is that the horror I met with was far more horrible than anything I could have imagined. My distaste toward what had been done, posed a difficulty, and it became clear that one of two things was to happen. If I chose not to agree to the proposal I could sense was to be made, I was either to be killed or imprisoned. I knew there was absolutely no chance that he was to let me go free. My defiance resulted in me being overpowered and eventually restrained.

Though I was probably marginally stronger than he, I did not once feel in charge while in his presence. He had a strange powerfully seductive and commanding nature, which only a remarkable man could best. Once he finished securing me to the wooden post that I had been previously confused by, he left. I was told that I could make use of the oil that still remained in the lamps, as though it was something I should have been grateful for, and was assured that there was little point in trying to escape. His words infuriated me. In spite of his warning, as soon as he exited via a tunnel opposite to the one through which we had arrived, I wrongly felt that my freedom was within my grasp.

It was a terrible place to be left alone in, not only due to its absence of comforts, but also for the journey that it ever so cruelly led your mind on. It was cold, damp and generally wretched. I was deeply unnerved by the thought of what may well have gone on an arms reach from where I sat. Needless to say I did not sleep. Till the first of the oil lamps had burnt dry, I frantically tried to dig away at the base of the post I was tied to. Though my efforts were in a way pathetic, I figured that they would eventually add up. Be it due to clarity or depression I eventually gave up trying to escape. With my mind thus unoccupied I came to focus on the tunnel via which my captor had left, and became obsessed with the thought of what potentially lurked beyond the darkness. With retrospect my fears seem foolish, for there could not have possibly been a horror any worse than that which had taken place in the room I was in. The only cure for my irrational fears proved

to be time. When the said fears disintegrated, I started to think more and more about the implications of gaining immortality. As shameful as it may well be, I thought of the glory and power that could ever so easily be grasped. I thought over the arguments that I had listened to. I began to see how there was a greater right to the wrong and how it could prove invaluable to the English empire. I was tempted, I admit that, and even though I eventually agreed to help him, in my mind I never actually thought I would. I had hoped that I would find the strength to escape the fiend.

When he returned, I proclaimed that I wished to help with his vile scheme, but I was simply ignored. He gave me some water, and then went on his way, in a seemingly preoccupied state of mind. When he came back the following day, or at least what I believed to have been the following day, he brought with him food and fresh oil for the lamps. After an hour under his unyielding gaze, he untied me. I was amazed by how self-assured he acted, for he did not appear the slightest bit concerned that I could have lashed out and tried to escape. It seemed as though he could read and preempt me. I found that unnerving, but what was more so was how pleasant he was that day. He waited on me while I ate the meal he had prepared, and offered apologies for his previous behaviour. He told me more of the act that was to be performed, such as it was a male youth that was needed for the sacrifice. It shames me to say, but I did not find what he was saying to be quite as repellant as humanity requires one to be. I guess I had been seduced by the notion of immortality. The two of us agreed that a nuisance child should be chosen, for we both wrongly believed that such an individual's disappearance would go unnoticed. That evening the two of us went to the haunts popular with trouble-making youths, in search for a suitable candidate.

My mind was made up once I saw some of the atrocious things those children were doing. This did not seem to surprise my chaperone in the slightest. When we returned to his hide later that evening, we talked over what was to happen and he taught me how to subdue another by causing anoxia. Again, I spent a night restrained in that vile place. I was assured that it was a mere precaution, but that did not make me feel any better about it.

The following day, as darkness was beginning to fall, I went to the South gate mill and waited there till the boys that were playing started to disperse. I approached one of the straddlers under the pretence that I had knives to sell. When I came face to face with the child, I felt unable to go through with what had been planned. I could not bear the thought of being responsible for the boy's untimely demise. My selfishness, cowardice and conscience mixed and resulted in indecision. The fiend in me wanted to go through with the plan, but the other, which at that time was slightly more dominant, commanded me to walk away and leave saint Edmundsbury for good. I saw that the boy was in all likelihood destined to lead a life of crime like I had, and thus it would be for the best if he was taken out of society, yet I recognised that his life deserved to be cherished. I was seduced by the thought of what the boy's death promised, but was put off by the daunting task of having to inconspicuously carry his dead body across town.

As you may imagine, my mental turmoil showed through in my behaviour and confused the boy. The lie I had used to approach him, fell through when he expressed interest in making a purchase. I became lost for words and started to grow ever more embarrassed. My mind eventually received the new point of focus that it craved for, as I noticed a carriage travelling in our direction on the nearby road. While the boy fired names at me as unruly children often do toward strangers, I came to realise just how undesirable the carriage's presence was. My nerves almost got the better of me, as my fear that the carriage would pull up beside us, was realised. Even though the driver's face was hidden by a wide brimmed hat and a dark handkerchief, I knew who it was as soon as he looked my way.

While I had been focused on the carriage, the boy turned to run. I was commanded to stop him, and so did without question. Before the boy had any chance of crying out for help, my partner in evil came forward and tightly clamped the kid's mouth shut. In the distance we could see that some of the boy's friends had noticed what had happened, however they were simply too far away for us to be concerned about. We hastily pushed the child inside the carriage and then went on our way. Afterwards, I was ill composed and shaken. My heart was beating double its usual rate, sweat poured from my brow and my hands shook as though I was fitting. My state was one of complete contrast to that of the carriage driver.

The child was taken to our abhorrent hide away, and tied to the post in my stead. I was thus allowed to return to my lodging in saint Genevieve. Shamefully, rather than having a night haunted with thoughts of the imminent sacrifice, I slept soundly, as I cherished the chance to be back in a bed. No doubt the kidnapped boy had a torturous night. I received a cruelly early wake up from my conspirator, and due to the bags around his eyes, I suspect he had stayed up to keep an eye on me. After having scarcely a moment to adjust to consciousness, the two of us were on our way to Newmarket town to buy the provisions required for what was planned. Namely, oil for the lamps, salt, herbs and some spices to be made into incense. We also brought a couple of dove tails and a pig's heart, which we cooked for our dinner.

The thought of messing up and having the sacrifice orchestrated a second time, was the only thing I feared more than it itself. I thus insisted that everything was meticulously outlined and practised. This was all done in front of the boy, who no doubt found it horribly torturous. I am sorry for that, I truly am. I am not looking to justify what I did but, when it comes to sinning, much of the shame and morality that acts as a deterrence, is tied up in the act of going out of one's way to be deviant. Understandably, it is a lot easier to resist blowing up a church if you know that you have to go and get the fire powder, secretly position it, lay the fuse and then light it. Whereas, if the powder and all had already been set up, a lit candle conveniently positioned next to the fuse, and assurances that you would get away with the crime made, it would take strength to resist. Such a designed circumstance could easily differentiate the virtuous from those unworthy of paradise. I just happen to be one of those unworthy, as I am sure a large proportion of Christendom are as well.

Once I felt sure I had taken note of everything I needed to, I was worn out and longed for a sleep, even if it was a mere hour. Though I thought the circumstances would not have permitted it, my dreams took me far away from that cold, damp and gloomy place. I awoke a while later, mildly panic stricken, for a stranger was standing before me. The man's presence was hastily explained by a whisper in my ear, though I remained alarmed. I learnt that the stripped, tied, gagged and blindfolded stranger was a priest, who was to play a pinnacle role in the proceedings. Although I was annoyed, it was not the first time I had been fed half truths.

There were few preparations to be made until all that was left was the act itself. Lord have mercy on my soul. A symbol which was representative of the name of god, was drawn onto the table. It consisted of a pentagram and something that looked similar to the Greek letter, tau. Either side of which was placed a bowl of incense and an oddly shaped, strange smelling candle. The boy then had some brown powder massaged down his throat that made him become unnervingly placid. After which he was untied from the post and the defrocked priest, made to take his place. Part of my charge was to direct the priest, and even though I made sure that he was turned away from what was happening, my partner was extremely cautious around him. He would keep his back to the man and when forced to communicate, resort to hand gestures or whispering in my ear.

Once he had got comfortable in whichever other worldly place he had been taken to, we helped the boy up onto the table and positioned him over the symbol that had been drawn. I found it disturbing that he made no objection to our will. Two chalices were then put below where his arms hung, the table encircled with a sprinkling of salt and the incense lit. Finally, the blindfold was taken off of the priest, and he was instructed to read a passage from the book that I held before him. I do not know what the passage said, but I reason it is best if I remain ignorant, for it made the man cry. Two deep incisions were then made in the boy's arms, each one starting at the wrist and ending just below the elbow. As I watch the knife slide in and tear through the flesh, pins and needles shot across my body and my heart seemed as though it was absent from my chest. What made it all the worse was that the boy remained calm with an unnerving smile etched on his face. I soon turned away as I did not have the strength to witness the evil I had helped create.

Half way through the reading of the passage, the strange candles were lit. Soon after which, the boy fell backwards off of the table and onto the floor. I was not the only one to be taken by surprise, but the proceedings did not stop for even a second. Once the priest had finished reading and had again been blindfolded and gagged, the boy's blood, which had been collected in the chalices was drunk. I found it disgusting, truly vile, whereas my counterpart seemed almost to find enjoyment in its taste. All in all it was a very anticlimactic event. I do not know what I had expected to happen, I just thought that there would have been some sort of sign or something, something to signal that the spell had worked.

I tried to express my concerns, but was motioned silent in an instant. Uncomfortable looks were then shared, as the two of us vainly strove to relate things which were wise not to speak of in the presence of our captive. However, the awkwardness was soon missed, as once the priest had been dressed he was led away via the tunnel I had not explored, and I was left alone with the boy. It proved to be the most torturous experience of my life. I felt shamed as I uncomfortably watched his body gradually fail. I did not stick the knife in and plough it up the boy's arms, but I may as well have. When he who had yielded the knife returned, he carried with him a rolled up cloth I presumed was a shroud. I did not ask what he had done with the captive, as there were more pressing matters at hand. Neither of us felt any different, but we both had misguided faith in the spell. He had not for a second considered that it would not work, for he was arrogant enough to believe that his intellect would not fail him. Whereas I was foolish enough to trust what I had been told. In truth, what we did together was nothing other than a series of obscene murders, and that will soon be verified beyond doubt by my mortality.

We eventually decided that some sort of test should be administered, however it became apparent that my partner had already laid plans. He unwrapped the cloth he had brought back with him, revealing that it



concealed a rapier. He then asked me whether I thought immortality meant that one would be impervious to harm. My inability to answer tried his patience, but I doubt he really cared for my opinion. He took hold of the sword and launched an attack at me, I could see the disappointment in his eyes as I backed away, overcome with pain. The attack soon became a vent of his frustration, as he strove to mutilate as opposed to kill. When he eventually calmed, I pitifully tried to nurse my wounds and mop up my blood with the cloth that had masked the sword. I nervously kept my eyes locked on my attacker till he addressed me and caused me to cower. I was told never to speak of what had been done, never to try to contact or seek him, and to never revisit the hide. After an awkward moment had passed, he ominously stepped toward me, lifted my head up to meet his own, and then dug his thumbs deep into, and through my eyes. I cried out in pain for some time, but soon realised that no one was there to hear me.

After having tripped over the sacrifice and fumbled my way to the wall, I used my memory of the layout to find my way out. When I made it into the day light, the light breeze cut into my wounds, and though I tried, there was little I could do to avoid it. By putting my faith in my remaining senses I found my way to the North gate of town and in time, to a saviour.

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### **3rd June 1645**

Though we should have been wise enough to know that it was in vain, Mercy Cylvia and I mapped out the day's events down to the nearest hour. Since Mercy was feeling tired it was agreed that she should remain at home to watch over Alice and Avery. It was planned that in the morning I would go to Shire hall, speak with James May about what had happened, and hand over Avery's signed account of events. Then if that did not have the desired outcome Cylvia would, in spite of herself, make council with someone at saint James's church. We hoped that once Avery's narrative had been read he would be taken off of our hands, Welbeck would be identified as his accomplice, and they would both be sentenced for their vile crimes. Due to a very real fear that the book of Levine would again at some point prove too dangerous for man to possess, I secretly intended to see if it was still in the underground hide, with the intention of destroying it. The thought of being able to get on with life and attempt to put the recent horrors out of mind, was a beautiful one.

When I arrived at Shire hall, James was no longer on duty, and sadly I was mistaken to think that it did not much matter who I spoke with. Unfortunately the person I dealt with had sympathy with the witch-finder and took offence to the accusations that I put forward. I could not believe how unlucky I was to have encountered such an intolerable character. For the vast majority of people have come to decry the supposed witch trials. I retracted my words, and merely referred to the monstrous man from Avery's narrative as an unnamed priest. As I strove to be listened to, I thought of how foolish it had been not to have had Avery give a detailed description of the individual. Mercy, Cylvia and I simply presumed we knew who was being spoken of, and thought that Avery would in time verify our suspicions by identifying Welbeck's voice.

As my exchange with the clerk was heating, one father White, who is stationed at saint Mary's church joined us in the reception area. I knew he was an agreeable man, so I soon redirected my case to him. I handed him the transcript of Avery's narrative, but he returned it in an instant, and told me that it was useless as evidence, especially so due to the stature of the accused. Father White requested to see and speak with Avery in person. While we walk to my house, the line of conversation led me to learn that the outcome of the investigation into Welbeck and his alleged activities, fell in his favour, and that his perception amongst those who matter is all the better for it.

The journey to my house was at times painfully awkward. When father White mentioned that he had never seen me attending church, I fumbled an excuse, something about sitting in the back and not liking crowds. Now that I think about it, it seems he may have been trying to trick me, for he must have known that the North part of town where I live is saint James's catchment area. When we arrived, I told him to wait outside as I intended to bring Avery out to meet him. The house was scarily quiet. Alice, Cylvia, Mercy and Avery were nowhere to be seen. There were a few things strewn on the floor, but no conclusive sign that anything out of the ordinary had taken place. When I started to call out for my friends in a state of mild panic, father White joined my side. I explained the situation and then he helped me try to shed light on what had happened. However, he soon seemed more interested in the vast array of peculiar ingredients that were located off to the side of the cooking area. He started to ask me probing questions, made a comment about how he had not seen a single crucifix in the house, and mentioned how Jonathan Corwin had always suspected me of misdeeds.

Due to the growing fear that I had for my child's well being, my temper broke its restraints and I aggressively ordered the priest out of my house. I in time began knocking on neighbour's doors, asking whether they knew anything of help. Just as my feelings of sick and worry seemed set to consume, I saw Cylvia walking up the road toward me with Alice in her arms. I ran up to them, and though I wanted to, I couldn't be angry. Soon after I had left, Alice had been sick and had begun relentlessly crying, so Cylvia took her to a wet nurse. We were eventually also joined by Mercy, who had taken refuge with a relative that lived nearby. The reason for which was painted across her face. Her right eye was extensively bruised and she appeared shaken.

Mercy had been guiding Avery back from the outhouse when a man, hiding his face with a scarf, intruded into the house. She was knocked into a daze and when she came round Avery was gone. None of us felt it safe at my house anymore, and so Alice and I have become entirely dependent on the kind nature of my friends. While we gathered some of my belongings, I told Mercy and Cylvia about my attempt to pass on Avery's confession. Cylvia then did as planned in the case of my failure, but she had no better luck than I. However her trip was not a waste, for on the way back home she learnt from a congregating crowd that a male disfigured body had been found in a nearby wood. Since we had little planned for the evening we went to find out more, and though we caught but a glimpse of the corpse, we knew in an instant it was Avery Stokes.

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#### **4th June 1645**

Even though Alice had been considerate enough to let the night pass peacefully, I barely slept. It had nothing to do with sleeping in a bed that wasn't my own, I was merely annoyed that yesterday things had not gone as desired. I was sickened that Welbeck was not yet set to endure an excruciating death. Part of me felt that I had not done all that I could have, and out of that thought was born a determination to make someone listen and take action. When it became intolerable to allow my thoughts to remain as such I got out of bed and anxiously waited for the sun, Cylvia and Alice to rise. Once they had, I gave Alice her morning feed, and then left the house, without issuing explanation.

The day started unseasonably cold, but it could have been thundering down with rain for all I cared. Since it was relatively close by, I decided I would look for the entrance to the underground hide near the North-gate, using the vague directions from Avery's narrative as a guide. I wasn't intending to venture down there, I simply wanted to see if the entrance actually existed. Even though the picture painted by Avery's account seemed to tie in with things that were already known, and even though he came across as being trust worthy, there was no sound evidence that his words could be believed. After walking by the edge of some allotments and then entering into a wood, I blindly searched the nearby area till I eventually found what I was looking for. However the entrance was a far cry from how it had been described, since a fire had recently been set on top of it. There was no way of telling if there had once been a tunnel there, but leading off to the south was a sunken stretch of ground, which gave the impression that an underground structure had caved in.

My thoughts then turned to saint James's church, and the mysterious trapdoor that I had seen. For I had for some time reasoned that it was in some way linked to what had gone on. My intention was to bring the seemingly unknown feature to notice, and then demand to be listened to. As I made my way up town I was soon reminded that the annual summer festival was taking place. The streets were packed while in contrast the church was deserted. Though it was understandable for its appeal was pitiful compared to that offered by the choirs, musicians, entertainers and exotic stalls in the town centre. This was in part a blessing, for it meant that I could set about trying to locate the trap door undisturbed. If somebody had seen my behaviour they would have thought it incredibly strange. I tested the floor of the central aisle for a revealing sound, but found nothing and so resorted to getting down on my hands and knees and feeling for a seam. I found what I was looking for but it was wholly by chance, for it could not be seen by the eye and could barely be felt. Since the church remained empty a foolish notion entered into my mind.

I decided that I would venture through the trap door alone, mainly because I wanted to make sure that it was of importance. It could have simply been the entrance to some forgotten store that father Harkwrite had had some business with on the night that I broke in, but I was right to suspect more. I took a lamp from the vestry and then levered the trap door open with the edge of my blade. It proved to be a lot heavier than I had anticipated, and it took almost all of my strength to open it wide enough to slide my body through. Due to its weight I grazed my back and right leg as I did, and failed to close it quite as gently as I had hoped to. From

what I saw, the door seemed extremely well crafted. I suspect it had been added to the church when Catholicism was outlawed, and priests needed for such elusive hides.

I was wearing my white linen dress with the black ribbon trimming, which could not have been any more inappropriate for what laid ahead, and no less because it was a favourite. To say I was scared seems an understatement, however my want to certify Avery's words, and see Welbeck disembowelled was more powerful than my fears. As I manoeuvred myself for comfort in the crawl space I had entered, my hand fell on the opening of the tunnel I had hoped to find. As I ventured through it I found myself uncontrollably shaking, partly due to fear and partly because the temperature down there was well below what it was in the sun. The width of the tunnel continually waned, and at times it was only barely passable, but I pressed on and eventually came to a point where it split. I had the choice of either continuing straight or following the tunnel that went off to my left. Because I had thought I had been travelling north, even though it was quite impossible to tell, I stuck to the path I was on.

The tunnel seemed never ending, though my perception was probably altered by my fear and hesitation. My intention was to make a discovery, but when I made one it was almost too much for my nerves. My heart began to pound loose from its housing, as I saw something ahead of me move. I tried desperately to calm myself with logical lines of thought, and continued edging forward. As I moved the shadows backed away from my lamp to reveal more detail of what was ahead. It was Peter Harkwrite, he was blindfolded gagged and tied to some sort of frame. Had we not previously met in such singular circumstances, I would have struggled to recognise him. I cut him free and told him to go, which in retrospect was ridiculously stupid. However, when you meet with a restrained captive, setting them free is almost a natural impulse. As we went our separate ways, we kept eye contact for as long as the light allowed. I then began to press on with more confidence, but it was only because I had become accustomed to my fear. My body remained as prepped for flight as ever.

The tunnel eventually opened up and I found myself in the scene that Avery had described. The markings, blood stains and the circle of salt remained intact. Moreover the body of the boy that had been murdered, lay on the floor in a position that looked to be the one he had taken upon death. While I stood there I began to feel that the adjective heavy descriptions I had heard were somewhat conservative. I wanted to leave as soon as I could, so promptly began searching for the book of Levine. My daring had not been in vain for I found it sitting amongst some curiosities. Once it was in hand I then hastily backtracked through the tunnel. Fear had obviously effected my ability to reason, for I failed to realise that by setting Peter Harkwrite free I had laid myself a trap. Getting caught in such a compromising position would have spelt my doom. Though it did not seem as such at the time, what happened next was remarkably fortuitous. For I cannot think of how else I could have escaped. I was making my way back to the church, unaware of the danger I was in, when I saw a light ahead of me. Due to the manner it was cast, I worked out that the bearer was approaching from the nearby adjoining tunnel. I was sure that whoever it was had seen my light as well, so I turned and ran. When I looked behind me, I saw that I was being chased. I thought that I was done for, and so threw down my lamp so the darkness could be my aid. As the lamp smashed it created a small pool of fire, which lighted just how dire my situation was, for there were persons further behind the pursuer I felt sure was Welbeck.

As I ran I grazed against and bounced off of the walls, before careering into the frame Peter Harkwrite had been tied to. I was flung onto the floor, but managed to keep hold of the book I had reclaimed. In any other circumstance I would have been writhing in pain, but I didn't have such a luxury. I got up and ran for my life until I, quite literally hit a dead end. I was at the caved in entrance by the North-gate. The soil was loose and so I began to dig through it with the book and my hands. The anticipation of being caught up was excruciating, and though I could hear distant voices, no one came for me. Despite making good progress, it was not enough, and my time soon ran out. I clambered into the crude tunnel I had made in the hope of being able to push my way through the remaining layer of soil. There was some give, but I did not have the strength to break through to the surface. I kicked away at the opening of my tunnel, in effect burying myself alive.

There must have only been a thin layer of dirt covering the bottom of my skirt and feet, but evidently it proved enough. As I started to hear voices at an ever closer proximity I stifled my breathing and wished for whatever was to happen next to happen quickly. After hearing part of an exchange which explained why no one had come for me, things fell silent. I stayed in my space far longer than needed, since I did not know what I would find upon exiting. When I finally built up enough nerve to get out, I found the far end of the tunnel brightly lit up, but there was no one in sight. I thus continued digging until I broke through to the surface. I saw my implausible escape as a sign that the gods had a purpose for me, and I felt sure I knew what it was. After having brushed off the layer of dirt I was coated in I walked to Sylvia's house. As I

answered the anticipated bout of questions, I started to feel like a reckless fool. I felt even more so later on when I learnt that my house was being searched by officials.

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## **18th July 1645**

Alice does not interact with me as she once did, which is a clear and sorrowful sign that she has started to forget me. It breaks my heart but it is the way it has to be. It is best for her if we part, for she would be denied a normal life otherwise. I once made many promises, regarding all that I would do to ensure Alice had the best life possible, but it now seems I have broken near to every last one of them. She was a miracle that I never deserved. I know that Mercy and Cylvia will give her the love and devotion that she needs and that is of great comfort. I would love to see her at least once when she is older, not to edge my way into her life for that would be selfish, but merely to see who she blossoms into. I want to know whether she will look more like Jonas or myself, for at the moment it is impossible to tell.

Welbeck will not stop until he has tracked me down, for only when I have been captured and tried for his crimes, will he finally be able to rest easy. With both Father Harkwrite and White damming my name, there is near to nothing I can do to avoid the noose. The only hope of vindication is a story signed in a false name by a dead criminal that nobody but my friends and I can vouch for. There are witness accounts to be found that place Welbeck with Avery, however I can't see them as being much help tying Welbeck to the crimes he committed.

I have had several close calls during the past six weeks I have spent on the run, but what happened yesterday was by far the most notable. I could have all too easily ended up at the gallows, and the reason for which was that I was taken wholly by surprise. I was busy tidying the house I hoped to be able to call home, when two authoritarian looking men burst their way in. Despite being taken by surprise, I instinctively ran toward the buildings back entrance. There was a horseman waiting for me outside who barged past and knocked me down before I could make it to the River Lark. My entire body ached, but I forced myself to my feet and pushed forward to the river's edge. However no sooner had I taken a few steps, I was on the ground again. A boot met my face, stretched and tore away the flesh from my cheek, and span me off of my feet. While on the floor, I saw five additional horsemen closing in around me and consequently making my escape seem ever more unlikely. I got to my feet and attempted to reach the river a third time, and by sheer chance managed to succeed. I tumbled down the bank and into the water, then once I had resurfaced I swam to the other side, while leaving behind a hazy trail of blood.

The bank was too steep for the horses, but none of the riders dismounted to make chase. I suspect that they were unwilling to get their fancy clothes wet. Once I had reached the other side, Welbeck made his way to the front of the riding party and arrogantly told me things I already knew all too well. In a roundabout manner that was beyond the comprehension of his fellow riders, he as good as admitted his crimes. Then just before I disappeared into the woods that lined the side of the river I was on, he threatened that he would soon tire of playing by the rules. I did not quite understand what he meant by it but I found it gravely unnerving.

I do not know how Welbeck found me, but the fact that he did has taught me the important lesson that as long as I remain in the region, I cannot afford to be complacent. The thought that someone may have sold me out is unsettling since I heard nothing but warm welcoming words from my neighbours. I chose to move into their community since it was close to saint Edmundsbury, and I had hoped that I could in time set up a line of communication with Mercy and Cylvia. It seems that if I am to find peace I am going to have to move counties and start a new life. I doubt that whatever that life turns out to be, it could ever come close to filling the void that has been created. After having decided that I would move away from the South East, I could not help but risk seeing Alice one last time. When I make my tearful departure tomorrow, I plan to leave behind my journals so that if Alice ever comes to want to know her father and I she could do so wholly.

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## **Welbeck's pamphlet (the death of a witch)**

Moments before Mrs Dessery Lontine's death, she denounced her damnable sorcery, and appeared remorseful for her prior lewd and abominable endeavours. Let this be a warning to any person weak enough to be seduced by the devil. His promises to provide one with means of seeking revenge and or worldly commodities, are hollow. Such persons who are swayed by these temptations should know that this woman

walked the same path as you, only to have the fear of god driven back into her moments before her death. Though she was right to repent her sins, doing so was clearly an act of desperation. Neither she nor those like her can escape the eternal suffering in hell that is waiting to be endured.

Mrs Lontine confessed to me that malice and unfounded envy were amongst her delights long before she sold her soul. Under the cover of darkness the devil appeared to her on several occasions in various forms. Before her recent pregnancy, those that knew her generally believed she was barren. I was informed that this was far from the case, for during her husbands absence she secretly conceived two children with her visitor. However, as soon as they were delivered they transformed into abhorrent forms, and ran away to never be seen again.

Mrs Lontine would often have help in carrying out her accursed acts from six Imps that would come to her in various forms. There are none that make a covenant with the Devil that do not have from him a private mark, and hers remained unhealed and hidden under her wedding ring. One of her most abhorrent crimes was to partake in the bewitching of Father Corwin. With those who she is now reunited, she called forth spirits from inside saint James's church and directed them to torment and ultimately kill the good man. Though her most recent ill deeds took place in an unholy underground hide, we are all too familiar with them. For they called for the death of, the infants Matthew Lockard and Simon Withers, the male youth William Samson, the mutilated unnamed stranger who is suspected to have been her accomplice and the kidnapping of father Harkwrite. All of which were done in honour of her detestable Lord, who had made her empty promises. All this may seem unsettling, but I strongly believe that the South East of England is now safe from the Devil's whores.

If not for an anonymous tip, Mrs Lontine might not have ever been brought to justice. Along with an honourable man, I rode out to a cottage where it was claimed she could be found. The instant we entered the property we were ejected back out by a demonic scream. As we were regaining our footing, we caught sight of the she-devil exiting from the rear of the building and entering into the nearby wood. We mounted our horses and quickly caught up with her, but she used her damnable tongue to call forth the wind and the animals for protection. We were forced to unsaddle and were close to being driven into a retreat. My partner got knocked down by his horse, but as I mistakenly thought that he could handle himself, I pressed on. I overcame everything that Mrs Lontine through at me and ended up grappling with her. I eventually unsheathed the blade that I had on my person and with god's guidance, managed to slit her throat. She continued fighting on for a while but soon became faint. When she finally realised that the devil had forsaken her, she confided in me while I nursed her till she finally died.

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## **One last diary entry**

Dear mother, I wish that there was some way you could read these words I write, listen to those I say or look in on the thoughts I have. I pray to always retain the hope that there is a way, but what I wish for more than anything else is that I have become who you hoped me to be. My desire to read your writings spurred me to master the English language, so in spite of the travesty that prevented me from being able to truly know you, I feel as though I do. Your accounts of braving danger and adversity make me overwhelmingly proud to be your daughter. You pushed on when others would have turned away, ran or hid, and so I find it frustrating that I am unable to openly share said pride.

You need not have punished yourself for acting when others did not, for I only resent your actions in a selfish sense. You did the right thing to take the risks you did. Somebody had to at least try to reveal Welbeck's villainy and initiate his fall from grace, even if it was a vain aim. Your writings have lighted many traits that we have in common, but sadly I cannot claim that I have the fearlessness and strength that you frequently displayed. Also I have no prowess in the field of herbalism, and my attempts at divination have proven utterly hopeless. Mercy and Cylvia are amazing for they often go above and beyond to look out for me, and I know that it has on occasion been hard on them. We are a family in the truest sense of the word. Sadly Mercy's husband never returned from war and her sons seem reluctant to visit, but Cylvia and Charles seem set to have many children.

Most people are aware that I am your daughter and those fools that happily eat up any story that is fed to them have on occasion made my life difficult, but I can rise above them. It is those that offer sympathy and support that truly hurt me for I can read the unspoken hatred they hold toward you. Mercy and Cylvia have often said that they would be prepared to uproot and move town for my benefit, but I do not want to run from my troubles. The war is long since over, with the long parliament rising to be the victor, so I have not, and

hopefully never will have to face the hardships you Mercy and Cylvia had to struggle through. Of course I know no different and so am content with the age I live in, but I am told it is not the peace time many are familiar with. Tensions are high as Oliver Cromwell insists on running an authoritarian state. I guess I am too young to understand such matters, Cylvia and Mercy on the other hand understand things well and condemn the man's leadership. They insist on calling him every insult that is in the English language. What I do know is that we are not merely as free as we all hope to be. It saddens me that I have never, and probably will never experience the festivals, celebrations and gatherings that I have heard tales of. It is a travesty that the cultures, which do not fit with the one backed by the state are being slowly erased from England's lands.

As the years pass by there will be less and less hope that the miscarriage of justice you were victim to will be lighted. For in the pages of books history is made. With the advent of literacy, customs became gospel and in certain aspects it was to a damming effect. As things stand there seems to be little that can be done, I could scream I could shout, I could torture a magistrate but my voice would not be heard. However, I feel ashamed for not trying all that I can, for I have a sense that should the roles have been reversed, you would have gone to much greater lengths than I. There is sure to be a person with influence out there that is willing and more able to act, and in whose hands Avery's testimony could be put to good use, but finding them will prove a challenge. Your death changed everything, Welbeck is now revered as though he is some sort of mythical character. He has somehow come to be seen as a source of hope and security. In a way I am thankful that you are unable to see this day, as I would imagine that witnessing his canonisation would be like having salt rock cutting into your wounds.

Mercy and Cylvia believe there was something suspect about Welbecks canonisation, and though their words are littered with bias, I cannot help but side with them. It is hard to say which is more palatable, him being legitimately selected after having been grossly misjudged by the masses, or him having brought influence to obtain the title after death. His new status can be seen as a consolation for his failed attempt at gaining immortality. Mercy and Cylvia often bring to attention that a petition for him to be made a candidate for sainthood began a year or so before his death, which is exceptionally unorthodox. The man's ills aside, it should not be forgotten that Welbeck did have the compassion to commission several new wings to be added to the local hospital. Though the construction probably only corresponded to but an iota of his total wealth.

I was warned to stay away from the celebrations arranged to mark the Vatican's passing through of the sainthood, however my curiosity got the better of me. Every available space in and around saint James's church was lavishly decorated with red, white and dark blue tulips and roses. The sight of beauty was contrasted by the hurtful sight of crowds of people showing their esteem. I took solace in the belief that their were persons about me that found the scene just as repugnant as I.

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## 2nd Night

"There he is." said Fea.

"You missed out. You should have been here an hour ago." said Imogen.

"It's all right though."

"We've got a recording."

"What did you do?" said Jarath.

"It is nothing bad." said Fea.

"There is a new priest at saint Mary's church, so we thought we'd have some fun. Well, Fea had the fun." said Imogen.

"Is this your confession dare rubbish? I thought better of you Fea. I didn't say anything the first time you did it for I put it down to peer pressure, or rather Imogen pressure, but..." said Jarath.

"I hate priests." said Fea

"Me too, well only the old and ugly ones. This one..." said Imogen.

"Why do you hate them? They are just doing a job." said Jarath.

"Exactly, they are men on a power trip. They might be dressed up as being righteous, but like most men they are merely searching for self importance. Men are annoyed at women for having been charged with life giving, whereas their charge, your charge, is one that science will soon steal away." said Fea.

"I don't like how they're always happy. You never get a broody priest do you. Normal people aren't that happy, well English ones aren't. You know that something is not quite right. Every last one of them is bound to have some kind of lewd secret." said Imogen.

"Maybe, but they do provide a valuable service. If people did not have specialists to help them interpret the books of deities, there would be a lot more idiocy in the world. I swear the only people that should be allowed to read said books are historians and linguists." said Jarath.

"I swear they should burn..." said Imogen.

"Let me hear this recording then."

"It's good, not as good as mine mind."

"Really?"

"Fea goes all philosophical and the priest doesn't for a second suspect anything is a miss."

"Maybe that's because she doesn't say ludicrous stuff like you."

"Here, listen to it. I hate hearing my voice I always..." said Fea.

"Play it." said Imogen, and so Jarath did.

"How may I help you my child?" said the Priest.

"I have been stealing things, only small things though. I am told that it is wrong, but I don't agree." said Fea.

"How so? Your actions may be rewarding and exhilarating, but can you not see the negative effects that they have? Try to envision what it would be like if somebody were to steal away one of your prized possessions."

"I do not care about the victim. As far as I am concerned they should have been more vigilant. I feel that stealing, both the ability and the desire is an inherent survival trait. Just as you have those that have the compulsive need to be productive, surely you can have people that have an inbuilt desire to steal."

"Everybody can change. Everyone can lead the honest moral life a peaceful society calls for."

"People seem to be striving to obtain a utopian society, but I think that is gravely foolish. The way that our consciousness reacts to emotion is possibly the only thing that is unique to humanity. So I feel that the watering down of but one of the emotional elements in our lives, would be a big mistake. I am equally grateful for those that bully..."

"I bet he is saying a prayer to himself to get her to shut up." said Imogen.

"...those that love me and those who make me scared to walk the streets at night."

"Could it not be possible to live a harmonious life, and then if need be turn to art to replace whatever may be missing." said the priest.

"When was the last time you read a book that came remotely close to competing with a real life experience?...Recently I have found myself fantasising about committing an armed robbery. I was thinking that I might use a big knife, or maybe even a gun."

"Child, I pray that you take time to think long and hard about what you are saying. I don't know how you formed your views, but I am sure that if you look at them with a rational mind, you will see why they worry me so."

"I disagree. I am a thief by nature, and there are people that depend on me being as such." said Fea, while forcing out a cough.

"Was that you running out?" said Jarath, as he stopped the recording.

"Do you think my one was better than hers?" said Imogen.

"How would you have got out of the situation Jarath?" said Fea.

"My confession was better than hers wasn't it."

"Your one was just ludicrous?" said Jarath

"Finding and getting off over a boyfriend's collection of rappee videos, is completely plausible."

"You are too young to have such extreme tastes."

"You are too young to be that desensitised." said Fea.

"Besides, the priest clearly did not believe you Imogen, and since this immature prank is more in your comfort zone than it is in Fea's I say she's winning."

"I don't exactly feel all that proud."

"Well, I'm still to have my second go." said Imogen.

"Jarath, did you get the transcript that I dropped off around your house? It is not the whole of the diary, my cousin merely picked out the entries of importance."

"Wait a second, how come she knows where you live?"

"Yeah I did. If it is to be believed, it is amazing." said Jarath.

"Why won't you tell me where you live?"

"Because you scare me Imogen."

"I read about one saint William of Norfolk. The story goes that some Jewish elders abducted and used him in a sacrificial blood libel. However, after looking into the incident it was discovered that the supporting evidence, was written a hundred years afterwards. Something similar may have happened here." said Fea.

"The commonly known story that saint Welbeck brought a powerful sorceress to justice, is almost just as far fetched as the legend of saint George."

"The diary is pretty far fetched too, although it does have a degree of realism to it."

"Why are you scared of me?" said Imogen.

"Who is the saint Edmund that our town was originally named after?" said Jarath.

"I believe he was an East Anglian king that led an army against invading Danish forces and refused to surrender." said Imogen.

"Now that is better than what saint Welbeck and saint George did. Still, leading a fighting force hardly makes one worthy of being a saint."

"I say we do something about it, maybe..."

"Also saint George was not even English, he was a roman soldier based in Libya or somewhere." said Fea.

"I bet there are fools that actually pray to these frauds." said Jarath.

"What are we going to do about it then?" said Imogen.

"You cannot just believe something because you want it to be true."

"You said that the story the diary tells is more plausible than the commonly known one."

"How could we verify what is written?"

"How can we revenge this Dessery?"

"Obviously, we could look up the names in the record office and see if the dates match up." said Fea.

"Surely people would have already done that." said Jarath.

"Didn't Dessery go into hiding though. There are probably no records concerning her later life or her descendants." said Imogen.

"Did you even read the diary entries Imogen?"

"It is clearly noted in the diary that Alice's name was recorded at saint James's church. We just have to search all the baptism entries relating to 1645." said Fea.

"Unless of course her name was edited out."

"Why would someone do that?" said Jarath.

"Imogen has a point, the entry could have been tampered with to save the daughter from being associated with her mother." said Fea.

"Let's go to the record office tomorrow."

"Verifying whether the individuals are real or not, still does not substantiate the story." said Imogen.

"In the entry that Alice makes at the end of the diary, she mentions there being doubt about the legitimacy of Welbeck's canonisation, which means there may be a paper trail, albeit a dusty one." said Fea.

"Are you going to write to the Vatican?" said Jarath.

"We could try to locate the underground hide, it's bound to still be there, and may even contain evidence of what went on." said Fea.

"Well, regardless of whether finding them helps or not, I want to walk through those underground tunnels." said Imogen.

"Dessery's diary alluded to there being at least three different entrances to the tunnels." said Jarath.

"One in the cellar of Moyses hall, one somewhere near saint Saviour's hospital and one in the crawl space of saint James's church." said Fea.

"There is a labyrinth of tarmac and concrete around where saint Saviour's is so..." said Imogen.

"We could break into Moyses hall, but it would take a lot of effort, no doubt too much effort."

"Why don't you just give the diary to a local historian?"

"Fea, we are not going to break into a church." said Jarath.

"Dessery did."

"Did she though?"

"It is not like we would do any damage or steal anything." said Fea.

"Imagine partying in saint James's church, I bet there is wine on tap." said Imogen.

"Should we find evidence that the diary is to be believed, what then?"

"Strip Welbeck of his sainthood and maybe change our town's name back to saint Edmundsbury." said Jarath.

"We could make up a new name. What about..." said Imogen.

"Will people care enough though?"



"They must, we will make them care. If the diary speaks the truth then Welbeck's sainthood is like having a shrine dedicated to Harold Shipman." said Fea.

"I am sure some insurance companies considered doing just that."

"How exactly will you go about changing our town's name?" said Imogen.

"Well, we could try to force people to read this thing."

"Oh, if only." said Jarath.

"We could use the Internet."

"Nobody reads anything on the Internet, let alone something that is fifty-thousand words or so." said Imogen.

"We will have to abbreviate it." said Fea.

"We should write a letter to the council officials and or put together a petition." said Jarath.

"People would still have to read the source material, so how about making copies of the transcript of the diary and putting them on display in the library, along with a synopsis."

"Even though our Library is tearfully bad and hardly anyone goes there, that sounds like a plan."

"Vandalism sounds like a much better plan. Fea, you should do an epic graphic on the side of saint James's church." said Imogen.

"That is a damnable sin, the church is far from the most illustrious, but it is beautiful nonetheless." said Fea.

"We have got to at least do something to the statue of saint Welbeck. It is asking for it. Let's decapitate it."

"As much as I would like to have a bronze arm in my bedroom, I do not fancy spending a whole night sawing one off." said Jarath.

"We have got to do something, if the man has blood on his hands."

"Let's literally paint blood on his hands." said Fea.

"Just cover the whole statue in blood." said Imogen.

"Where exactly are you going to get the blood from?" said Jarath.

"I'll get it."

"In vampire movies they always visit the abattoir."

"I am sure you can order it from a butcher's shop. After all, meat eaters use sheep's blood in black pudding." said Fea.

"I'll get it." said Imogen.

"No offence, but I do not trust you. I can see you buying or stealing a pig and then bleeding it."

"That does sound appealing."

"I am sure we could get hold of some blood. We'll meet here, paint Welbeck's statue and then have a private look around saint James's church."

"As long as it is not Thursday, Sarah is having a gathering that night." said Jarath.

"Who?"

"Sarah Shylow. She goes to your school."

"How do you know her? I never heard about a party." said Imogen.

"That is probably because she doesn't like you." said Fea.

"I hang around with her."

"She asked Jessica and I to play a set." said Jarath.

"I have not heard you play yet." said Fea.

"Well, you can hear us on Thursday."

"I'm not going, they won't want me there."

"I should be going." said Imogen.

"You both are coming, if I am on my ones there will be no way I could put up with the people." said Jarath.

"We could bring Dessery's diary." said Fea.

"I doubt that anyone there would be interested..."

"What is that man over there doing?" said Imogen, while pointing to a nearby bench.

"It looks like a tramp trying to get some sleep. You two are definitely coming on Thursday. If you do feel out of place Fea, you can do so with Jessica. She is only doing half of a set with me, and I doubt that it will be her scene. She is straight, celibate, religious and pristine."

"You are working with her because?"

"You will see for yourselves on Thursday. She stilled my heart and gave me pins and needles the first time I heard her sing."

"Jarath, I don't think you could sound any more ridiculous than you just did."

"If she were not such a nun I would definitely be interested."

"I'll go then. Imogen, what about you?...Are you all right?" said Fea.

"Yeah." said Imogen.

"Where does Sarah live?"

"I don't know, I'm getting a lift with Jessica. Her mother is a friend of Sarah's. I suppose you two can share the ride." said Jarath.

"Aren't you going to take any gravestone rubbings today?" said Imogen.

"No, there are several more I would like to take, but I didn't bring my materials...What grave are we sitting on today Jarath?" said Fea.

"That of one Elizabeth, the daughter of Abraham and Sarah Maling who died, 11th March 1778 aged 1 year and 6 months." said Jarath.

"I kinda feel bad for disrespecting her by sitting here."

"She is dead. She's nothing more than mush and bones." said Imogen.

"You are heartless."

"We are probably close to where the bodies were said to have been burnt in Dessery's Diary." said Jarath.

"No one cares about the nameless victims of the numerous massacres committed by the English, Germans, Hungarians and so on. At least this child has a gravestone for persons not to visit." said Imogen. The conversation continued on until it became sickly stale and the desperately needed change of topic was found.

"I kind of want to ask that tramp over there if he would let me draw him." said Fea.

"You are not." said Jarath.

"Why not?"

"He might be dangerous. If I was homeless I would probably be pissed off with the world, and hence, dangerous."

"That is it, I'm going over there simply to prove you wrong."

"You sound like Imogen."

"Hey, that's not fair, although I probably would do that." said Imogen.

"You two are going to be here so..." said Fea.

"I think that she should go. Let her go Jarath."

"If anything happens, we are not going to come to your aid." said Jarath.

"So if he stabs and quarters me in preparation for an evening meal, he would have otherwise forgone..." said Fea.

"Here take this." said Imogen, as she handed her a taser.

"What the hell...where the hell did you get that?" said Jarath.

"My mother gave it to me."

"Does it work? What does it feel like?" said Fea.

"I don't know what it feels like, but it does work. I accidentally killed my cat with it."

"You killed your..."

"Try it on me." said Jarath.

"What, you are..."

"OK then." said Imogen.

"You are not going to..."

"He'll be all right. This thing is meant to be used on humans."

"It is meant to hurt humans."

"Where do you want me to do it?"

"I guess the torso would be the best place, but don't do it over my heart, do it there." said Jarath.

"OK."

"Snuff, ah, snuff, stop, stop, ah..."

"It works pretty well."

"I want one, where did you get it?" said Fea.

"My mother smuggled it back from one of her trips."

"How did she get it past customs?"

"Let's just say she used her creativity."

"Ah, ah..." said Jarath.

"I would feel safe as houses if I had one of them." said Fea.

"The same cannot be said for everyone else around you though."

"Are you two going to come with me?"

"He is not going to be happy with us disturbing him like this, not that I care." said Imogen.

"I will bring the candles then shall I...I really don't think this is a good Idea." said Jarath.

"You are such a wimp."

"Why are you so scared of people? You will happily perform in front of a small crowd, which to me seems horribly daunting, yet you are reluctant to engage in harmless conversation with strangers." said Fea.

"He didn't like you saying that, Fea."

"I thought that I was shy, but in a way you are sort of worse than I am."

"What's so strange about not wanting to go up to a stranger in the middle of the night... Have you still got your taser out Imogen?"

"You are such a baby." said Imogen, as the three of them made their way over to the tramp.

"Get away, what do you want?" said the tramp.

"He's scared of teenagers and yet he doesn't even have access to the media." said Fea.

"Do you have any drink?" said Jarath.

"Shut up."

"Are you still hurting?" said Imogen.

"My side is slightly numb." said Jarath.

"We are sorry for intruding, and I am sorry for my friends, but I was wondering whether you would let me draw you. Here, I will give you some money...two pounds and...twenty three pence, if you will let me draw you." said Fea.

"Do I look like a commodity? Go away." said the tramp.

"Wait, I've got some money. Would you let her draw you for three pounds, seventy-eight pence and a butterscotch?" said Imogen.

"OK then."

"Do you spend a lot of time here?" said Jarath.

"I sleep here occasionally, but I spend most nights in the Priors Estate graveyard. Graveyards are peaceful."

"How did you come to be homeless?" said Imogen.

"Imogen!" said Fea.

"Well, I was a soldier once, but I would rather not talk about it." said the tramp.

"How long were you a soldier for? Where have you toured?" said Imogen.

"I was in the army for most of my life, but like I said I would rather not talk about it."

"I bet you have got some amazing stories to tell."

"Imogen!" said Fea.

"That sucks. You fought for the queen for all of those years only to end up on the streets." said Jarath.

"Yeah, but you know what, Imogen has a massive house and there's probably plenty of room for you."

"Really?" said the tramp.

"Shut up." said Imogen.

"Five bedrooms, three bathrooms..." said Fea.

"Shut up."

"I don't appreciate being the butt of a joke." said the tramp.

"You aren't. I am serious, she is a wealthy bitch that needs to learn how to share her money. We'll tell you where she lives later." said Fea.

"That's not funny." said Imogen.

"It is a bit." said Jarath.

"He could be your father figure." said Fea, unintentionally prompting Imogen to walk off.

"I'll go after her, actually, Fea will you come with..."

"I seriously doubt she wants to speak to me."

"I think, you should come."

"Thanks for your time mister, see you around." said Fea, as she and Jarath walked off in search of Imogen.

"I seriously hope we don't see him again, we have to put up with enough peculiar smells in saint Welbecksbury as it is. It is probably best if we split up, but stay within shouting distance."

"Again, you are such a wimp, and besides there is hardly anyone around."

"Humour me."

"She's probably just gone home."

"If she hid away at her house then she wouldn't be able to get the attention that we both know she's looking for. Plus, you know better than I that she rarely goes home. In a quarter of an hour let's meet up by the Norman tower."

"I don't have a watch. Just call out for me."

Due to the accuracy of Jarath's judgement, it did not take long until Imogen was found. Fea found her looking solemn and standing under the stairwell at the base of the Norman tower.

"I thought you would have gone home. You know that I am sorry right, what I said was out of order...Let's get out of here. We can sit down and talk things out, or just forget and move on." said Fea.

"I kinda like it here." said Imogen.

"There is a pool of sick to your side and there...is that a needle?"

"Rank, saint Welbecksbury's junk is disgusting."

"If we are going to stay here, can we at least move to a nicer area...Shall I call Jarath over?"

"No."

"I should at least tell him that I have found you. He'll be out there looking for you all night otherwise. He cares about you, you know...You are going to stay here right."

After having parted with Imogen and dusted off the dirt her clothes had picked up, Fea began calling out for Jarath. He quickly rushed to her side, almost as if he had thought she was in peril.

"I found her." said Fea.

"Is she annoyed?" said Jarath.

"She seems somewhat fragile."

"Fragile, really?"

"I am going to try to clear the air, then we'll probably head home. It is sort of a one on one thing so you may as well just go."

"I'm not comfortable leaving you two here, I will count gravestones or something."

"No, just go. Besides Imogen has her taser."

"In that case I'm not comfortable with you two leaving me alone."

"I will phone you sometime in the week if we are to do anything."

"All right then." said Jarath, as Fea left his side to rejoin Imogen.

"Are you sitting? Are you sure that it is wise to? Are you all right now then?" said Fea.

"Yeah I'm over it. What about you though, it wasn't really like you to make such a cutting comment." said Imogen.

"I was just being passive aggressive. It's nothing really, well..."

"What?"

"It's just that I overheard some people talking about my father today."

"Well, they are just idiots for being so insensitive around you. You should be admired for living through what happened, and for handling it so well."

"I'm so paranoid about what people might be saying, that when I am exposed to their words it effects me more than it should."

"The people I hang around with aren't all that concerned about what happened, I don't even think most of them know your name."

"Oh, great."

"You know what I meant...How is your mother?"

"She is a little shy from being a full blown head-case. She is like a zombie sometimes and I cannot stand it. I just want to violently shake her out of it, or something to that effect. She mourns him you know."

"No offence but your dad was snuffed up, seriously, snuffed up."

"Why on earth would I be offended?"

"It was just a pleasantry...What is Jarath's address?"

"He told me not to give it to anyone. He likes his space."

"Yeah but it's me."

"Exactly. You are not going to do anything stupid with it are you?...I will give it to you tomorrow at school."

"Nice, let's rock and roll."

"Look it is our tramp friend."

"He is probably looking for us in hope of taking up the offer that you made him."

"Don't say that, that is really unnerving. Can we please wait until he passes."

"Hey!"

"Shut up Imogen!"

"You know if he was cleaned up, given a close shave and a fitted suit I don't think I would have much objection to him playing..."

"Shut up Imogen!"

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### 3rd Night

"What were you doing over there Jarath?" said Fea.

"You often loiter about there." said Imogen.

"What is over there?"

"Nothing, I was just..." said Jarath.

"How was your day?" said Imogen.

"How much did you get?"

"Four pints." said Fea, as she opened up her bag to reveal it's contents.

"Icky...what is it?"

"Pig's blood."

"Is that not a bit weird, you being a vegan and all?"

"I find nothing wrong with eating meat, I merely choose not to. Humans are omnivores for a reason."

"I'm going to find a grave for us to sit by." said Imogen.

"I would love to see a vegan try to survive in Greenland for a year."

"Only if you make sure their settlement is by a large flock of caribou." said Jarath.

"I am against the wastefulness and intensive nature of the live stock industry, which is criminal when resources are being stretch by overpopulation..."

"Over here looks like a good spot. The grave's for one Mary Ranson who died 21st Feb 1949 aged 25 years." said Imogen.

"Where did you get the blood from?" said Jarath.

"It was not that hard, I ordered it from a butcher's shop." said Fea.

"Not from St. Welbecksbury?"

"Have some faith. I went to a butchers in Stowmarket. I said that I needed the blood for an art project."

"How did you like being in a butchers?"

"Well, Imogen was..."

"What time is it?" said Imogen.

"It doesn't matter what time it is, it's still light and we're not going to do anything till dark." said Jarath.

"Who knows how to pick a lock?"

"I know how a lock mechanism works, so..."

"What is the actual time?" said Fea.

"Twenty to ten."

"Lights are still on in the church. It will be a lot easier if we just hide inside, and wait for everyone to leave."

"It would be really awkward if we were to get caught though."

"Where would we hide?" said Imogen.

"So you two would rather break and enter, than face possible embarrassment." said Fea.

"Yeah, pretty much."

"I sympathise, but at least you could make up an innocent explanation, unlike if you had been caught breaking in."

"I suppose you are right. I want to be as cautious as possible for I've already got a police record." said Jarath.

"You have a record...for what?" said Imogen, as the three of them began walking toward saint James's church.

"It was stupid, just forget I mentioned it."

"Don't give us that, you brought it up so obviously you want to tell us about it...We are not going to judge you anymore than we already have, after all I seem to remember you saying that only idiots get caught by the police."

"I was an idiot, I...was found with some drugs."

"That's amusing."

"You take drugs Imogen."

"Yeah, but that is completely different."

"How exactly?"

"I am a social druggy."

"Everyone has done things in their past that they regret." said Fea.

"You know I could get you whatever you need."

"Get lost Imogen." said Jarath.

"Can we please stick to the matter at hand." said Fea.

Once they had reached the hall of the church they clumped up against the door that was slightly ajar, to peer into the nave where a small service was taking place.

"Where are we going to hide then?" said Fea.

"There will be loads of places to hide, it's a church." said Jarath.

"Under the pews?" said Imogen.

"I reckon you could see under them from the aisle."

"What is behind the red curtains?" said Fea.

"You two have probably been in here more than I have, but I think it might be a font."

"I say that's the winner, it's simple yet effective."

"I am sure there'll be enough space for me, but then I am the slimmest here." said Imogen.

"No you're not."

"Imogen does actually raise a good point." said Jarath.

"We should wait till the parish leaves before we do anything." said Fea.

"That will literally take ages, these are hardcore worshippers. Who goes to a mass service on a Wednesday evening?" said Imogen.

"Who goes to mass at all nowadays anyway. As for a plan, all we need is a distraction." said Jarath.

"Imogen." said Fea.

"Yeah."

"Hey." said Imogen.

"Fea and I will sneak behind the curtain, while whichever chosen distraction is in play, then should our presence be seen some sort of signal could be made. If all should work out I trust Imogen will then be able to use her words, to buy some time to join us."

"We will have to put Fea's bag somewhere first." said Imogen.

"Fea, have you gone to the record office yet?"

"Yeah I did. I don't know why I didn't tell you when I phoned."

"Wait a second, you have a phone, and you have his number. Why haven't I got your phone number?" said Imogen.

"I don't...what..." said Jarath.

"I'm going to get that number."

"I found Alice's baptism record and Dessery's too. What is more, the woman working there said that she might be able to find more information on Dessery, since I mentioned I found a reference to her having attended a local monastery."

"What did you say you wanted the information for?" said Jarath.

"A history paper that was part of a university application...It's possible that I may be a descendant of hers. Either that or a relative of mine was close to one of hers or something. It's cool to think that I may be related to such a central figure of our town's history."

"It would be cooler if you were the descendant of a deranged sorceress, rather than someone thought to have been one."

"Let's roll." said Imogen.

"Wait, the mass won't be over for some time yet." said Fea.

"They all look zombified. I swear no one will take notice of what we do."

"I'm with Imogen." said Jarath.

"You wish...Let's go already."

"Wait, you cannot just..." said Fea.

"What about the plan." said Jarath.

"What about my indifference." said Imogen, as she shoved Fea's bag behind a display stand, and then slipped behind the curtain at the back of the church.

"As if nobody noticed her, and you can't tell she's there can you?... Come on Fea." said Jarath.

"No, I do not think we should."

"Like Imogen said, no one will notice what we do."

"So much for your plan." said Imogen, once Jarath and Fea had joined her.

"Do you think anyone saw us?" said Fea.

"Well, we will soon find out. What should we say if we get caught?" said Jarath.

"That we are playing hide and go seek." said Imogen.

"With who?"

"God."

"If that were true I doubt a church would be the best place."

"These places were Rome's creation not the Christians, and anyway I don't think we should be talking." said Fea.

"This is going to be really boring isn't it. Why are we even doing this?" said Imogen.

"Curiosity." said Jarath.

"Why don't we just give the diary to a historian?"

"Because our days will be far more interesting if we keep it."

"Shush!" said Fea.

"If we can light anything, our pictures may end up in a national newspaper."

"I hope not!"

"That sounds good." said Imogen, before what proved to be an uncomfortable, long and silent wait.

"We have been here for an age, someone should have a look at what's out there." said Imogen.

"I'm not going to, what if there are people still there." said Fea.

"We heard them leave, and besides the lights are out."

"Yeah but the lights could still be on in the apse, and we would be none the wiser, there could still be people out there." said Jarath.

"For heaven's sake." said Imogen.

"Wait..."

"It's really eerie out here."

"Go and get the torches out of Fea's bag. I couldn't find one to bring in the end."

"Well, I forgot to bring mine and Imogen didn't bring one." said Fea.

"You are joking. Well, its no problem at least we are in a church, there..."

"Damn it." said Imogen.

"Shut up."

"Someone will hear you." said Fea.

"There should be some candles at the far end of the church, but be..."

"Give me your lighter." said Imogen.

"We should do our best not to move anything." said Fea.

"All right, but now what?"

"I don't know."

"Wouldn't it be amazing to watch or play a gig here? It is utterly criminal that only a minority of our town is allowed access to this space." said Jarath.

"What are you doing?"

"Putting lipstick on Jesus." said Imogen.

"You are such a kid, but it does look pretty good on him. He looks like a glam rocker." said Jarath.

"I know, doesn't he just."

"What are we going to do now that we are here?" said Fea.

"Do you reckon that the trapdoor mentioned in the diary is still here?" said Jarath.

"There is no way that these are the original floorboards, plus this place was renovated recently."

"Don't you think that you two should have talked about this before we decided to come here?" said Imogen.

"Well, Fea we should try to think of something to do quickly, otherwise Imogen will start getting out her blusher." said Jarath.

"I guess we should explore the place." said Fea.

"That is if we can, they might have locked the inner doors."

"I am starting to think that maybe this was not the best of ideas."

"I know exactly what you mean, but at least we will get an anecdote out of it...Imogen, we are going to check the doors. If you want to help, pick a corner."

A short while later, after several rattling door handles had sounded, Fea came upon an open door which duly attracted the others.

"What's it lead to?" said Imogen.

"Ah, I keep splashing wax on myself." said Jarath.

"I guess it is some sort of chapel." said Fea.

"A chapel within a chapel...which leads to another room." said Imogen.

"I can tell this will lead to something good."

"Is that because of your psychic abilities?" said Jarath.

"The door is locked." said Imogen.

"I say we pick it, can we?" said Fea.

"The lock looks pretty old, so it should be doable. I just need a pick and something to use as a lever or wrench." said Jarath.

"I've got an ice pick." said Imogen.

"What, why? Did your mother tell you to carry that as well?...No...I can't use that it's far too big. I need something like a paperclip."

"I might have a hairpin."

"How about a paper clip and a safety pin." said Fea.

"Perfect." said Jarath, as he set about trying to pick the lock mechanism. It proved to be an exceedingly tedious task.

"I thought that you said you could do this Jarath?" said Imogen.

"I never said that I could do it, but I reckon I can, I just need some space and time to concentrate." said Jarath.

"This is boring, I say we leave."

"Give it time, this might lead to something." said Fea.

"Something boring."

"I've managed to push back three of the lock's pins, but the last one is a bit tricky...Could one of you give me some light." said Jarath, and so Imogen joined his side with a candle to provide additional light.

"Ah, snuff, Imogen you properly just murdered my left eyebrow." said Jarath.

"No I didn't. Oh...it is pretty bad." said Imogen.

"Let me see." said Fea.

"No, let me see, it's my eyebrow. Bring me a mirror. It stings as well." said Jarath, as he inspected his new look with the mirror Fea handed him.

"Imogen, all that I can say is that pay back is going to be sweet." said Jarath.

"Do not be a loser. It was an accident and she said sorry." said Fea.

"Well, actually I didn't, but I am, sorry...We could draw it back on or something." said Imogen.

"No, it's all right, it'll grow back, maybe I'll wear a cap or something." said Jarath.

"Does this mean that you will have to start again with the lock?" said Fea.

"No, let's just rock and roll." said Imogen.

"Wait, the lock is at a skew. I swear I did it. Turn it anticlockwise, anticlockwise!" said Jarath, as Imogen unlocked the door.

"Hats off to Jarath." said Fea.

"What do we have here then? Jackpot." said Imogen.

"It's no doubt really cheap and nasty economy stuff." said Fea.

"Does it really matter? It is red wine, and wine is wine. Crack one open Imogen...What are we going to use as a corkscrew?" said Jarath.

"You don't need a corkscrew." said Imogen, before using her teeth to pull off the cork of one of the wine bottles.

"Nasty, don't do that again." said Jarath.

"You know that this is stealing." said Fea.

"Hey, I went to church hundreds of times as a child, and I didn't once have the wine, mainly because I didn't want to put my lips on something a hundred old people had before me, so I figure I'm owed at least one bottle."

"It's not all that bad." said Imogen, as she took a drink from the bottle.

"Let's have some Jesus blood." said Jarath.

"That communion malarkey is quite sexual."

"How?" said Fea

"How exactly?" said Jarath.



"Relationships encircle around the desire to be one with another, and in extreme instances that can result in cannibalism. Parishioners that wish to be closer to Jesus do something very similar, they metaphorically drink his blood and eat his body." said Imogen.

"It stands to reason that Jesus must have been really fat, if millions of people eat part of him every week."

"It all sounds pagan to me." said Fea.

"It sounds stupid to me."

"Give me the bottle." said Imogen.

"Do you think we have a chance at proving or disproving what is written in Dessery's diary?" said Fea.

"Possibly. I read the thing a second time." said Jarath.

"If you can't market the diary as being factual, with Gabriel's permission of course, you should try to sell it as a work of fiction." said Imogen.

"I doubt anybody would want to invest their time in reading it." said Fea.

"I did, twice, we all did." said Jarath.

"Yeah, but that is different. It is bound to appeal to saint Welbecksbury residents, as for everybody else..."

"Are you seriously going to drink the whole bottle?"

"If I can." said Imogen.

"I am starting to think you would be more at home hanging about a bus shelter...When Dessery supposedly visited saint Welbeck's brother in Ipswich, she learnt that Welbeck had attended a business school in Denmark. There might be some documentation about him there, something like a character assessment. It wouldn't hurt to pen a letter."

"Well, you two can do that."

"Are you really going to write a letter in Danish or pay somebody to write one?" said Fea.

"Imogen I think you have had enough wine...Everyone seems to speak at least a second language in Europe, so I am quite sure we could get away with writing the letter in English." said Jarath.

"I was meant to write a letter to the mayor."

"Do you want to meet up at the library tomorrow after school? We could draft and then write up both of the letters. Hopefully we'll have enough time left to get ready for the evening."

"Sure, it sounds like a plan."

"Pass another bottle." said Imogen.

"Do you want..." began Jarath, before being interrupted by a strange noise that originated from the nave of the church.

"What the hell was that? It sounded like a bell tree or something." said Jarath.

"Ha, did you jump?" said Imogen, just before letting out a piercing scream.

"Ah." said Fea.

"What the hell?" said Jarath.

"I put my hand on a drawing pin." said Imogen.

"That was a bit excessive."

"It went all the way in."

"Still."

"Well, let me drive one into your hand then."

"Did you really drink the whole of this bottle, Imogen?" said Fea.

"Why did you cry out Fea?" said Jarath, just before a loud bang sounded along with its predictable response.

"Right, can everyone stop screaming." said Jarath.

"What was that noise?" said Imogen.

"Probably those who were roused by your screams, and are about to walk in on us."

"Don't say that." said Fea, just before another loud bang sounded.

"There is no way a person made that noise." said Fea.

"What do you suppose it was?" said Jarath.

"I bet there are a lot of lost souls wondering about this place"

"Knock once for yes, knock twice for no." said Imogen.

"Knock once if Fea is being ridiculous." said Jarath just before knocking on the wall.

"I would expect many of the spirits are in foul moods." said Fea.

"I am not scared of ghosts."

"You look pretty scared to me."

"You do you know, and your heart is racing." said Imogen.

"At least I didn't scream. I am not scared of ghosts because they don't exist, so if I am scared it means that it can't possibly be a ghost making the disturbance." said Jarath.

"That's stupid logic." said Fea.

"What are you afraid of then?" said Imogen.

"Getting attacked, stabbed or raped." said Jarath.

"Who is going to rape you?"

"Hey, I'm an attractive young man, and besides if there are people out there that are willing to rape old age pensioners, surely I have due cause to be concerned."

"Yeah, but that is a whole fetish area."

"Rough."

"Men are messed up. I bet that there is scarcely a fetish that does not exist. I bet there is eel porn out there somewhere." said Fea.

"There is such a thing as eel porn, it's a Japanese invention."

"No way."

"Seriously."

"In that case I bet that a can of out of date dog food should duly be concerned about being raped."

"I'm slightly disappointed Imogen could not shock us again...I don't really feel scared anymore."

"I was never afraid, I was just taken off guard." said Imogen, just before another loud bang sounded.

"Well, that was short lived." said Jarath.

"What the snuff is it? I want to get out of here."

"What if there is someone or something out there?" said Fea.

"I say that we elect Jarath to go and investigate."

"That is a loose use of the word elect, but I'll go, leaving you both here, alone."

"Let's all go."

"Take the empty wine bottle, and try to put things back how we found them." said Fea.

"Screw that, you can't see jack in here."

"I know it's hard for you Imogen, but put some effort in." said Jarath.

"Wow head rush, nice."

"That is all we need, she's drunk isn't she. I'll try to keep her controlled, while you finish up."

"What about the door, are you going to re-lock the door?" said Fea.

"Forget that, let's just roll."

"I think we should blow our candles out, just in case there are people out there."

"Are you kidding?"

"No, I am serious."

"I'm going to have my lighter prepped in my hand though."

Imogen and Fea huddled behind Jarath by the door of the chapel, as he set about mentally preparing himself to look within the church.

"I really don't like this." said Jarath.

"Do you want me to hold your hand?" said Imogen.

"You are holding my hand."

"Is there anyone there?" said Fea.

"No one is there."

"I really wish I didn't watch quite so many horror movies."

"Imogen are you all right, you are awfully quiet."

"Yeah, I'm fine, are you? Your palm is awfully sweaty." said Imogen.

"The candles we lit and moved are still there...we best get rid of them."

"No one is going to take any notice if they find a couple of burnt out candles in the middle of the aisle. Can't we just go?"

"It's not that much hassle. Go and get those over there."

"Ah."

"Ah." said Fea.

"There's a snuffing bat in here...It's a pretty darn big one too."

"I don't like this, I really don't like this. Someone could have easily overheard us."

"Can we now get the hell out of here?"

"With pleasure...Oh my, that is a pretty big bat." said Jarath.

"Why can't you just swear like normal people?"

"Wait, what about the make up that Imogen put on Jesus." said Fea.

"Screw the camped up Jesus...You have got a pretty powerful scream Imogen."

"Thank-you, does it turn you on?" said Imogen.

"How exactly are we going to get out of here?" said Fea.

"What." said Jarath.

"Well."

"I really, really don't like this. Every door, check every door."

"We have already done this. The doors will still be locked." said Imogen.

"Please, Imogen keep your voice down. People are probably already making their way here."

"Let's just wait for them. We could get out the same way they get in."

"Forget that. There must be a window we can escape via." said Fea.

"The side chapel maybe."

"I can't remember if there was a window in the storeroom. It was dark?" said Jarath.

"It would have been dark either way, with or without a window, it's night time." said Imogen.

"What? You're drunk aren't you." said Fea, as the three of them made their way back into the side chapel.

"The window here looks pretty small." said Jarath.

"I could get through that." said Imogen.

"It doesn't matter if you think you can get through it, for we all have to. Things would be so much worse right now if we got split up."

An attempt at forcing Imogen through the window was made, but after meeting with difficulties which led to unwelcome suggestions, it was abandoned. Jarath and Fea ended up having to pull Imogen by the legs, to free her from the window frame. Had she not still been partially drunk she would have lashed her razor edged tongue as her skin grazed and tore. However, nothing was said until the three of them collapsed in an awkward heap when Imogen finally came free. Jarath was the first to his feet, but he didn't remain standing for long as he was punched to the ground following a feeble attempt to revenge his pains.

"Are you two finished?...Now what, what are we going to do?" said Fea.

"There has got to be another window we could try, a bigger window." said Imogen.

"What for?...So you can get stuck again."

"I don't like this." said Jarath.

"You keep saying that."

"I am not going to spend the night in a church."

"You are going to have to try to pick another lock." said Fea.

"There has got to be an easier way."

"What about the roof?...We could get down from the roof. There must be a maintenance hatch." said Imogen.

"That's actually a really good idea." said Fea.

"Hats off and all, it sounds like a plan, but can we please rock and roll already, because I really..." said Jarath.

"Really don't like this. Can't you say anything new, you sound like your words have been scripted." said Imogen, as she and the others made their way to and up the bell tower's stairwell, which they had previously paid little attention to.

"Here it is, it's got a small pad lock on it though. You can pick that can't you?" said Imogen.

"No point, let's just break it off." said Jarath.

"What will we use?" said Fea.

"We need something heavy that has an edge or some kind of lever." said Imogen.

"We are in a church though." said Jarath.

"There'll be something there's always something, a fire extinguisher for instance." said Fea.

"Ah, I did it again."

"Jarath, must you lay a Hansel and Grethle like trail of wax?" said Imogen,

The party promptly began searching for a suitable tool. Fea and Jarath only found frustration, while Imogen, in spite of her poor effort came upon a sceptre which seemed perfect for the job. Once they returned to the hatch, Jarath positioned the end of the thing through the loop of the padlock and then applied all the force he could muster. His face soon grew red for more than one reason, as he fail to break the padlock. Imogen thus stepped forward and insisted on having a try. Using Jarath as support, she climbed onto the precariously positioned sceptre and then bounced. The rod bent slightly and it, the lock and Imogen fell to the floor creating a bizarre and loud ruckus.

"Somebody would have definitely heard that." said Jarath.

"Whatever..." said Imogen, as Jarath picked up the sceptre and made a telling look regarding it's deformation. He then hurriedly returned it to whence it came and met up with the others on the roof.

"I don't think anyone has ever been so glad to have got out of a church." said Jarath.

"What about those who got out of the, Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God cult, just in time, or early Christians in a strict Jewish society."

"Scandinavian parishioners in a town where a black metal music festival has just begun." said Fea.

"All right, your points have been made. I am glad is all." said Jarath.

"Is there anyone about?"

"No, but I swear it won't be long until people turn up."

"Shut up Jarath, no one is coming, stop being paranoid. Now how are we going to get down?" said Imogen.

"How high up are we?...It must be about fifteen foot. We'll jump."

"You can but you're going to have to get a ladder for me." said Fea.

"I'll go first, then I could sort of catch you."

"You catch like a girl, how are you going to actually catch one?"

"You can't use your own gender as an insult, you just end up insulting yourself... Right, let's do this. It's not going to be that bad."

Jarath began tentatively lowering himself down against the side of the church. He continued to do so when his hands were but the only thing in contact with the surface of the roof, believing that a centimetre or two would make a difference to the fall that awaited. After a deep breath then another, and several others, he let himself fall. He landed gracefully, but the grace did not last for he ended up writhing in pain.

"I am not doing that...Imogen?" said Fea.

"Don't know, but I sure as hell don't want to stay up here much longer. He has promised to break our falls, so it won't be that bad." said Imogen.

"He looks hurt, really hurt."

"Are you hurt?"

"It's not that bad." said Jarath.

"Yeah right...Catch my bag, but be careful. I don't want pig's blood spilling over my stuff." said Fea.

"You're going to do your best to break my fall right." said Imogen.

"Yeah, but lower yourself down first, don't take a run up or anything." said Jarath.

Imogen appeared fearless as she positioned herself for the drop, for she reasoned that regardless of whether Jarath could catch her, ploughing into him would be enough to break her fall. She was right as afterwards, she quickly got to her feet while Jarath was left hurting on the ground.

"It really isn't that bad...Are you all right?" said Imogen.

"Not really." said Jarath.

"Well, come on Fea, don't be a baby about it."

"No way I am doing that." said Fea.

"There's two of us now to catch you. Lower yourself down and then jump backwards. It will hurt us more than it will hurt you, just hurry the snuff up." said Jarath, who then had to hide the dread he felt as he saw that she was about to prepare for the drop. Once she had finally found the courage to peel her fingers from the roof, and various expletives had been voiced, Jarath urged they leave the scene.

"Wait, I am not going back home with this blood in my bag." said Fea.

"Are you snuffing serious?" said Imogen.

"People are probably on their way." said Jarath.

"Do you not think that they would be here by now, and yes I am serious." said Fea, as she took three bottles of blood from her bag.

"All right we'll do this thing, but let's be quick about it."

"It really smells." said Imogen.

"Snuff, you properly just splashed me then."

"We should write a message."

"Write murderer on the stone slabs." said Fea, as she and Jarath began coating the statue with blood, and Imogen readied herself to do some finger painting.

"All right, all right...Snuff it, I missed out an r." said Imogen.

"You wrote it in Scottish." said Fea.

"Squeeze an r in and let's roll." said Jarath.

"Done." said Imogen.

"Put the bottles in here." said Fea.

"This is disgusting, I don't suppose you brought a hand towel with you." said Jarath, as he took hold of the bin bag he had been handed, and turned to flee the scene.

"Did I tell you two I tried to commit suicide again the other night." said Imogen.

"Get lost you did." said Jarath.

"Seriously. I tried to hang myself."

"I bet your maid walked in on you, am I right?" said Fea.

"No, the rope broke."

"Oh come on, what type of rope did you use? Let's see the rope burns then." said Jarath.

"No."

"Yeah, let us see them." said Fea.

"No."

"You are not even serious about it are you. If you really wanted to kill yourself you would Swan dive off of the multi-storey car park. There is absolutely no way anything could go wrong there...If you are really serious about killing yourself I could help you." said Jarath.

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## 4th Night

"I really don't think I should have come. Nobody is going to want me here." said Fea.

"It'll be fine. You may even enjoy yourself tonight, just don't be quite so paranoid." said Jarath.

"I go to school with most of these people, so I know they're not going to want me here."

"She speaks sense." said Imogen.

"Ignore her. You need to have more faith in people Fea, not everyone is a jerk like you make them out to be." said Jarath, as he knocked at the door of Sarah's house, and waited for the two guys that were to answer his call.

"Who invited the lesbian witch?" said one of the guys.

"You were saying." said Fea.

"Sir, are you drinking tonight?" said Jarath.

"Yeah." said the guy.

"Word to the wise, don't drink enough to be rendered unconscious, because you might just find yourself coming too struggling for air."

"Who the hell is this guy?" said the guy's friend.

"Are you looking to start something?" said the guy.

"Don't start something that you can't win." said Jarath.

"Jarath!" said Fea.

"I'll make you acquainted with the floor." said the guy.

"I'll rip out your eyes and use them as stress balls." said Jarath.

"I love this, he is fucking psycho." said the guy's friend, as he unintentionally disarmed the situation.

"I was looking forward to them fighting." said Imogen.

"I hate the whole chest out, testosterone ape thing." said Fea.

"Imogen, get over here." said a guy from within the house.

"You're not going to help us set up the equipment then...OK... Jessica, you might find yourself wanting for some Dutch courage, for this doesn't look like the best of crowds. I say we keep together in a close knit group, that way we won't have to speak to any of these fools." said Jarath, as he and the others made their way into the house.

"How surprising, but it's fine with me, not that anyone will want to talk to me." said Fea.

"I think I'm going to leave straight after we have performed." said Jessica.

"If you would be willing to wait, I will welcome a lift once I've played my solo set."

"Take me too please." said Fea.

"No worries whatsoever, but don't take too long." said Jessica.

"I'll do my best, but if I go off on one you can look to Fea for company." said Jarath.

"What time are the rest of the people getting here?" said Fea.

"Well, Jarath and I will start playing at eight thirty, so..." said Jessica.

"I reckon I'll start playing before then though." said Jarath.

"I feel out of place already, yet I still have you two for company. I cannot imagine what it'll be like when I'm left alone, well I sort of can, and that's the problem." said Fea.

"What about Imogen."

"What about her, she barely even acknowledges me at school, so there is no chance that she will tonight."

"What! Why the hell do you hang around with her?"

"We are not actually that close, we merely hang around with one another as we can share things we'd rather not with anyone else...I think I might just go home."

"Can't you at least sit in a corner and watch Jessica and I perform...If you stop worrying you might just enjoy yourself. Just do what everyone else does."

Fea followed the advice she was given, but since she unwisely chose to imitate fools, Jarath had to step in to prevent her making a faux pas. He suggested she try to get to know Jessica better, however Fea could not see what to talk to her about other than how much they despised one another's beliefs. Though he wanted to, Jarath could not stay with Fea for long as he needed to go off to the mirror in the bathroom to speak with his oldest friend.

"I have great courage. I will overcome fears. I am content with who I am regardless of other people's opinions. I am an attractive, intelligent young man with good prospects. I have great courage. I will overcome fears. I am content with..." said Jarath.

"Jarath is that you?" said Imogen, from the other side of the bathroom door.

"Don't..."

"What the hell were you doing?"

"What."

"You were building yourself up, what is that all about?...Is this your pre gig ritual? Oh my god, you are such a geek?"

"This coming from somebody who sees a psychiatrist. Don't criticise me for trying to sort my problems out, especially when they probably warrant the time of a specialist more than yours. I've known you for a while now, and I've seen Jack wrong with you. What do you talk about at your sessions?...Do you talk about how you never got that birthday present you asked for?"

"Snuff off, I was just joking about."

"No, you were being insensitive."

"Jarath wait."

Imogen chased after Jarath in hope of reconciliation, and although the two of them found the words exchanged impactful, they weren't merely as so as ones then being exchanged in the downstairs hall.

"It's Fea isn't it?" said Sarah, who was the evening's host.

"Yeah...I hope you do not mind me being here. I only came because Jarath said it'd be all right to." said Fea.

"Don't worry, the more the better right...I mean as long as you brought something."

"What was I to bring?"

"You didn't bring anything!"

"Bring what?"

"Heather come over here, Fea didn't bring anything. What do you say we should do about that?"

"I say she goes and gets something now, it's only fair." said Heather.

"I agree, she should definitely go and get something." said Sarah.

"If she leaves now she may be able to get back in time to see the end of the performance."

"Right, let's get your shoes Fea, I bet these are yours."

"Wait, wait I need to..." said Fea.

"No, no you're fine."

"Let me tell Jarath, I am meant..."

"We'll tell him."

Sarah edged Fea out of the house, and then slammed the door on her. Fea was left slightly confused by what had happened, but everything became clear as she listened to the exchange that took place on the other side of the door.

"Who the shag invited her? She is a freak." said Heather.

"I think she came with Jarath." said Sarah.

"What is Jarath hanging around with her for?"

"I know...He's all right isn't he?"

"Yeah, but Louise told me he told her he is gay."

"Well, that explains a lot."

Fea's anger burnt like a psycho's unfaithful wife. She debated whether she should wait outside for her friends or just go home, but it proved a waste of time. As when she heard the first muffled notes sound from Jarath's Japanese electronic instruments, she knew she could not bear to remain there.

"Imogen, have you seen Fea?" said Jarath, as a well received sequence loop was playing out from his keyboard.

"No." said Imogen.

"Well, could you look out for her."

"I'm loving the music you are playing, when you're done I'd love to hear what your inspirations are." said some self-assured pretty boy.

"I'm straight."

"Oh."

"Are you though?" said Imogen.

"Yeah, are you?"

"I'm sure. It would have to be someone fairly special to turn me." said Jarath.

"I'm special."

"Walk away!"

"Where is Jessica?" said Imogen.

"I think she is doing scales in the bathroom. I'm sure she'll join me soon."

"You are holding your own pretty well."

"I will take that as a compliment."

"When you are finished...I would love to hear what your inspirations are."

"Get lost. Imogen, wait, look out for Fea. I think she is feeling a bit out of place."

"That would be because she is, she never should've come."

"You never should've come. You are only here because I invited you."

"Snuff off."

The mantelpiece in the sitting room steadily became lined with empty bottles of cheep vodka, while the ambience was prepped for memories to be made. Jarath played out general electronic chaos and Jessica layered her classically trained voice over the top. They toyed with the crowd as they ventured through a landscape of high notes, heart contorting builds and infectious rhythms. It was only those such as Imogen, who for some reason found people more interesting than music that were disinterested.

"Where the snuff did you get that from?" said Imogen, to a guy in the kitchen space.

"Get what from?" said the guy.

"Let's have some, I'll pay you back. My supply has gone on holiday."

"What?"

"Wait!" said the guy's friend.

"What the fuck is she doing?"

"You idiots, what the snuff is this stuff?" said Imogen, while coughing and spluttering after having snorted some of the white powder on the work surface.

"It's icing sugar...The box is right there."

"What did she think it was?" said the guy's friend.

"What do you think she thought it was?"

"Are you some sort of junkie?"

"What, no, I was just joking around." said Imogen.

"No you weren't."

"Anyway, I believe the correct term is a sleigh rider. What the snuff are you doing with the icing sugar anyway?"

"We're trying to make a bomb."

"Oh dear, Is this what school shooters turn to in a country without guns?"

"We just wanted to see if we could make one." said the guy's friend.

"Idiot's that aspire to be nerds, that's a new one."

"We're looking for fertiliser."

"The nitrates were taken out of household fertilisers years ago. Look for some peroxide, or react bleach with something to redox the chlorine, try toilet..."

"Imogen, how do you know Jarath?" said Sarah, who just then walked into the kitchen.

"Sarah, you should probably know these fools are trying to make a bomb."

There was cause for Sarah to deal out punishment, but she missed the opportunity due to the drunken stupor she was in. She was set to be on the receiving end instead, as elsewhere Fea was plotting revenge with a clear, albeit daft, mind.

"Here it is...Right...Spells for the scorned...Bring sins to a persons name. That will no doubt have little if any effect on the bitch...Cause blindness...That is probably going too far, but she has had it coming for a long time now...Perhaps not, it requires a feather from a bird of prey, some rosebay petals and a depiction of a meaningful memory...To cause the onset of madness, sounds promising...Requires the hair of a loved one, tears of the scorned and some flesh of the guilty one. I doubt I would be able to get some of her flesh, at least not without a G.B.H. charge...This is literally perfect...Cause one to fall from favour. It's fairly simple to do too...Requires plum tree blossom, tears of agony and a depiction of the victim...Cause hair loss...Requires lavender incense, elm tree leaves and forty-nine hairs of the victim. I bet her friends are shallow enough to turn their backs on her if she went bald. Two spells for the price of one. Am I going to do this...She does deserve far worse." said Fea.

It didn't take Fea too long to come to a decision, so once provisions had been gathered she set off back to the party, where Jarath and Jessica had just finished playing their set.

"I got pins and needles at least twice during that. You were great." said Jarath.

"Thanks, we'll have to do it again sometime." said Jessica.

"Yeah, I would like that."

"Are you going to have a break before you carry on?"

"I want to try to keep this crowd, well group of people going...Would you do me a favour?"

"Sure."

"It's just that I haven't seen Fea for about, ages. Could you go and see if she is all right?"

"Sure."

"Jarath!" said Sarah and Louise, as they walked over to him, before pulling out the master output cables from his equipment.

"What the hell, what are you doing?" said Jarath.

"Are you straight or gay, because Ryan says that..."

"What are you?" said Louise.

"Uninterested in anybody here." said Jarath.

"He's gay." said Sarah.

"Jessica, have you found Fea?"

"She went home an hour or so ago..."

Jarath was saddened by what Sarah had told him, but he need not have been, for Fea was soon to arrive back at Sarah's house. Once she arrived she snuck her way into the deserted summerhouse, and then made herself at home. Why she had acted so furtively was a bit of a mystery, for it was only a matter of time till her activities came to attention.

"What are you doing? Are you meditating? What the hell are you doing?" said a girl who walked in on Fea.

"Please go away, I'd prefer to be alone." said Fea.

"Tell me what you're doing first."

"Well, before you rudely interrupted me, I was trying to do a spell."

"Cool, can I help?"

"As long as you take it seriously...This is not playtime."

"No worries. What is that for?"

"It is not so much about the instruments and the ingredients, but rather directing your desire."

"Well, what do you desire? What is the aim of the spell?"

"I'm trying to make Sarah go bald."

"That would be funny. There are certain people who only look attractive because of their fancy hair and clown makeup. I'm pretty sure Sarah is one of them...Well, what did she do to you?"

"Nothing much really, she just has it coming. Karma seems to have paid little attention to her."

"I hate people like that...I read somewhere that humans are the only animal that exhibit the emotion spite. Doesn't that make you feel proud?...What can I do, what do you want me to do?"

"The best thing you could do is to simply will the spell to work. Envision Sarah's long blond hair falling out, and all the misery that it would bring her. Imagine it in such detail that it seems real...Hold my hand."

"What is going on in here?" said a guy who just then walked into the summerhouse.

"We are casting some sort of spell...She is like a witch or something. We are trying to make Sarah lose her hair."



"Really, I want in, can I..."

Fea's activities proved too much of a curiosity to those that passed by, so they soon drew a sizeable crowd, which left those that remained in the house somewhat confused.

"Jarath, where is everybody?" said Sarah.

"People keep going into the summerhouse, perhaps to smoke or something...I would be annoyed that people weren't paying attention to me, but I'm having too much fun to care...Imogen, what is everyone doing outside?" said Jarath, as Sarah left his side to go outside and Imogen just then joined it.

"Fea is doing..." said Imogen.

"Fea is here, I thought she went home."

"She did...I think she is trying to make Sarah go bald with one of her stupid spells."

"Sarah is now going to see what is happening...Could be awkward, or..."

"What are you all doing in here? Jarath is slightly pissed off you know." said Sarah after having entered the summerhouse.

"Nothing." said Fea.

"She is trying to make you lose your hair." said a girl.

"What?" said Sarah.

"She is some sort of witch or something." said a guy.

"Who?" said Sarah.

"It's Fea isn't it" said a girl.

"So you managed to get some alcohol then."

"Yeah, I got enough to swim in." said Fea.

"What is it you are trying to do?"

"Do you think they are going to fight?" said some girl.

"We can only hope." said some guy.

"Well, well I, I overheard what you said about me and I was slightly annoyed, so I thought I would exact my revenge." said Fea.

"Go the fuck on then, I will even help you." said Sarah.

"This is going to be good." said a girl.

"It won't work properly if you partake. You will disrupt the energy flow." said Fea.

"What are you all doing in here? She is clearly not right in the head." said Sarah.

"I reckon she is going to hit her." said a girl.

"You can at least tell me what you're doing."

"Well, I crushed some elm leaves to create a paste that I'm now drying out..." said Fea.

"Is that my hairbrush?"

"This is going to be good." said a girl.

"You thief."

"I needed forty-nine of your hairs...I hope you don't mind." said Fea.

"You are going to make me bald aren't you, so why the fuck should I mind if you steal my hairbrush?"

"The paste has dried out enough, so now I need something flammable..."

"Here." said some guy as he handed over some perfume.

"Yeah, that should work."

"If this works, not that it will, but if it does I expect you to buy me the most fucking expensive wig I can find."

"Now I read this passage and set alight to...this."

Meanwhile, Imogen was in the upstairs bathroom, conjuring herself a very different type of spell.

"Jackpot...Side affects include, nausea and drowsiness, long term use can result in infertility...maybe...Side affects include, impaired vision and drowsiness, long term effects can include blindness and hair loss, no thank-you. Next...short-term effects may include, drowsiness and fatigue, long-term use may result in headaches. Next...side effects can include loss of appetite, long term effects may include memory loss...my favourite so far...With long term use side effects may include paranoia...OK...Three blue pills, two capsules and one, no four white pills...Maybe I'll take a couple more capsules." said Imogen, before swallowing down her selection with a glass of neat gin, and then making her way down stairs to have a broken conversation with Jarath.

"Jarath, why are you still playing? You have an audience of two, well three now." said Imogen.

"I'm just relishing the opportunity to be able to play loud." said Jarath.

"You know that I am sorry about earlier don't you, I should have known better...More so than others."

"What, oh, don't worry about that, I'm over it, but thanks. I am, however slightly disappointed that you didn't look after Fea."

"What happened between her and Sarah?"

"I don't know. I keep trying to peer outside, but...I think Fea is making friends."

"No."

"Back to what I was saying, why weren't you looking out for Fea?"

"We're not actually that close."

"That is exactly what she said."

"Well, we're not."

"The two of you seem close to me."

"We're not, we only hang around with one another because there's certain things that I can only speak to her about, and likewise."

"Like what?...Why?"

"It's all to do with where we met."

"Where?"

"We met in a psychiatrist's waiting room."

"Fea, really? I can't see her ever going to one."

"She was made to go, for four months."

"What, I barely know you two...What did she do?"

"It's not so much what she did...You do know about what happened with her father don't you?"

"No."

"If you're serious you must be the only person in town that doesn't."

"I'm serious. What did her father do?"

"Well, he sort of tried to carry out a murder suicide."

"Snuff, I heard about that, but I didn't..."

"It was pretty major...I can't believe you didn't know."

"How did she get through that? Is she through it?"

"She says she is. She says she's found a means of coping, but I think she should...We should change the subject, Fea and the others are coming...Don't act any different around her."

Fea had finished her so called witchery, and was making her way to the house along with persons who suddenly seemed interested in her.

"Well, that was fun." said a girl.

"Really? I found it rather anticlimactic." said another.

"What is wrong with you? I was being sarcastic."

"Fea, do you do this sort of thing a lot?" said some girl.

"Not really." said Fea.

"It was a bit of a let down wasn't it." said some guy.

"Nothing was meant to happen, I was just putting the curse out there...If it works it will..."

"Well, it was interesting." said a guy, who sported some telling body language.

"Fea, why do you cover yourself up so much? You have a pretty face. You shouldn't hide it so much...You should definitely show more skin." said some girl.

"I wouldn't feel right if I covered myself up like you...Here, let me..." said a girl, as she tried to adjust Fea's dress..

"No, don't." said Fea.

"Trust me."

"Don't."

"What is up with your arms?" said some guy.

"Fuck!" said a girl, as Fea pulled away, covered herself and then rushed into the house.

"Fea, what's..." said Jarath.

"Fea." said Imogen.

"I..." said Fea.

"What did they do?...Those dogs...What the hell did you do to her?" said Jarath, as he turned his attention to those in tail of Fea.

"We were being...We were getting on. We didn't mean to upset her." said some girl.

"What did you do?"

"I told her she should show some skin. I was being friendly about it. I pulled..."

"And?" said Imogen.

"What?" said Jarath.

"Her arms are completely covered in scars...She is a pro self-harmer." said some guy, who unintentionally sparked off a melodramatic affair concerning Fea and her whereabouts. It was only when certain intoxicants had begun to take full effect that there was a shift in focus.

"What is wrong with her?" said a guy.

"Ah..." said Imogen.

"What the hell has she taken?...Who gave her this? This is not good." said Jarath.

"What do we do? Shall I call an ambulance?"

"No, there's little point if we don't know what she has taken."

"Well, what do we do then? Like you said, this is not good, not one bit."

"Who here is bulimic?...Look I know full well a good half a dozen of you are, statistics dictates it so...I need someone to make my friend throw up...She's taken something. Someone, please!"

"I can help, I'm not bulimic though." said a girl.

"I couldn't give a flying fuck if you aren't...Let's try to be quick about this yeah."

"Outside, outside take her outside." said Sarah, who suddenly became interested in Imogen's condition.

"OK."

"Where are we going?" said Imogen.

"Imogen, what have you taken?"

"Three blue pills, four capsules and a white pill...Alice said it would be all right."

"Who is Alice? Get Alice!"

"There is no Alice here, nor was there ever...She is off her head." said some guy.

"Imogen, we need you to help us make you throw up."

"No."

"You're going to have to be fairly heavy handed with her. Put your fingers to the back of her throat...I will wrench her stomach." said the girl helping.

"This isn't going to end well is it." said Jarath.

"Shall I call an ambulance?" said some guy.

"No, this should work a treat." said the girl.

"When she gets out of this I am going to slap her silly, metaphorically of course." said Jarath.

"Here we go."

"Ah, rough...She's unconscious."

"Clear out her airway."

"Hey, why do I have to do it?"

"If I'm...going to...put my...mouth to..."

"Oh, thank fuck for that."

"What, she's conscious. I'm on the phoned for an ambulance though." said some guy.

"Give the phone to me...Sorry but it was a false alarm...What...yeah...She is wide-eyed and perky."

"I can't believe you were whining Jarath, I had to put my mouth to hers. Would you have rather done that?"

"Imogen, how are you feeling? I'll get some water."

"Are you two close?" said some guy, as Jarath was on his way to the kitchen.

"Sort of, well, not really."

"I don't know how you can put up with her. She is like a head injury."

"I kinda know what you mean by that, but I'll give her this, any time spent with her always seems to be in some way memorable."

Since the near overdose of a girl is enough to kill the essence of even the most debaucherous of gatherings, people soon started to make their way elsewhere. Jarath was thus able to nurse Imogen outside in peace.

"Do you want me to call you a taxi? You look better, are you?" said Jarath.

"You're like my prince. You saved my life." said Imogen.

"Can you not see the irony in the comment you just made? Besides it wasn't just me, it was some girl called Kat, Catherine or something, that did...Wait, what the hell are you doing?...I appreciate the sentiment and all, but the last thing I want to do right now is kiss you."

"...How are you going to get home?"

"I was just going to walk."

"Can I walk back with you?"

"Sure, but are you all right to do so? You did just have a near...death experience."

"Near nirvana experience."

"If that was meant to be near nirvana then there are millions of Buddhists out there wasting their time."

"Were they not wasting time anyway? After all is that not the literal English translation of the word?"

"Are you sure you're all right?"

"I'm perfect."

"Would you let me leave my stuff at yours? I don't think I trust leaving it here."

"Sure, you can leave yourself there too."

"So, were you trying to kill yourself again?"

"No, I just wanted to get high."

"Really, because snuff, it would've been safer to try to get high by stealing drugs from a liverpudlian dealer, or by bleeding yourself... Why do you do it?... For that matter what's your explanation for the hanging incident, the other overdose and whatever else you may have done?"

"I'm saying jack."

"I really think you should talk though. Clearly your psychiatrist is a waste. I know we haven't known each other for that long, but I thought that we had built up a degree of trust."

"...If you use anything that I say against me, I promise I will chisel your teeth out in your sleep... I am used to people getting bored of me and then eventually leaving. My family did it, my friends and I'm sure that you will too."

"I can't comment about your parents, and while I do not wish to offend, I feel that sometimes you try too hard, and so people can find you overwhelming. You have several sides to your personality, it's like you have a mild bi-polar, or rather tri-polar disorder. During the time we have spent together I like to think I have seen the real you. I like that person, she is loveable and considerate."

"I know my flaws, I truly do, I count them daily and I try to change, repeatedly, but I always seem to fail. I guess I don't really want to change. I guess I find some sort of comfort or security in being the way I am. It's frustrating... I suppose that trying to commit suicide is merely an extreme manifestation of my desire to start again. It is strange being aware of this and wanting to change, however being aware of the faults does not change the intensity of the emotion that creates them."

"You need a distraction, something that you can invest your time in and feel passionate about, something that will pull you away from the pattern you are in. You need something or someone."

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## 5th Night

"Whose grave are we sitting by tonight?" said Fea.

"One John Hide, who died 26th May 1781 Aged 61 years." said Imogen.

"I wonder how long it will be till they start building houses on this land?" said Jarath.

"That will never happen." said Fea.

"Course it will."

"Who is going to want to live somewhere built on a burial ground." said Imogen.

"Speaking hypothetically, I don't think people will have to be all that concerned about living on a graveyard that was stuffed full of upper class English people."

"Most of these people were no doubt morally corrupt by today's standards. It would probably be quite enjoyable being haunted by one of these guys."

"...I don't think I will stay too long... Someone told me about this woman who knows about spells and things, and I thought I would get her to look at that spell book I found." said Fea.

"Is she a witch? I want to come. Can we come?" said Imogen.

"Seriously?" said Jarath.

"It'll be better than staying here. There'll be for walls and a roof... She has got a house right? She's not a tramp is she?"

"No, she has a house, and besides I don't think she'll be pleased if I bring uninvited people along." said Fea.

"I think we should come. What if she tries to eat you or something."

"If she looks peeved at us being there, we will leave, no fuss." said Jarath.

"Will we? I want to see what a witch's house looks like."

"All right, but if she looks the slightest bit annoyed, you two are gone." said Fea.

"Whatever, Jarath did you get to see our handy work in the light? As in the bloody statue."

"No, I was going to walk up here to have a look, but since it's a fair way out of my way..." said Jarath.

"It was in the paper."

"I have the print with...Just a second, here. It was disgusting, the statue ended up being covered in flies. The council had to use a jet wash to clean it." said Fea.

"Do you reckon my makeup is still on the Jesus statue?"

"Quite probably." said Jarath.

"We could go and have..." said Fea.

"Have they got any idea who did it?"

"Look...here, they merely say it was vandals."

"Obviously, if there was a robbery I am willing to bet they'd say a robber did it." said Imogen.

"I think we should get rid of the statue all together. We should dig it up and melt it down."

"How?"

"We still don't know if what is written in Dessery's diary can be believed." said Jarath.

"The statue must weigh at least a couple of tons. How exactly would the three of us go about digging it up?"

"We'd obviously get more people to help." said Fea.

"That is a stupid idea. It would never happen. I would bet my life that that would never happen."

"Jarath, have you read the part of the passage where it mentions the strange noises yet?"

"What?"

"Look, here...On the same night as the vandalism, local residents reported hearing ghostly howls and cries coming from saint James's church. I said there'd be unhappy spirits didn't I."

"What, that was us you idiot. We were the ones making the noises."

"...What about the letters we sent? Have you got back any replies yet?" said Jarath.

"What letters?"

"Concerning the diary." said Fea.

"Guess I was absent for that."

"I haven't any replies as of yet, and it's somewhat frustrating. I am starting to think we should've listened to Imogen when she said we should simply hand the diary over to someone."

"The letters probably haven't landed on the appropriate desks yet." said Jarath.

"I know, but still."

"Are we still the only ones that know about the diary then." said Imogen.

"We need to come up with a new plan to make people aware of it."

"I didn't think that we had an old plan."

"I thought that we were to try to certify what is written first...We could for example check through lunar charts to see if the descriptions of the moon made in the diary are accurate." said Jarath.

"Forget that, and anyway I doubt people would even care."

"Those I spoke to at Sarah's house seemed to show interest." said Fea.

"We should collate everything we know so far." said Jarath.

"We don't know anything...What did we learn from the church excursion?" said Imogen.

"Nothing."

"Well, that was a waste."

"You found the baptism record for Alice and some stuff on Dessery, that's at least something."

"Have you heard anything from the lady at the record office, didn't she say she'd..."

"No." said Fea.

"What time are we going to see this witch?"

"I'll head off soon."

"If those Fea spoke to, are genuinely interested there will be many others. I propose we put together a concise research paper that has arguments and evidence for and against the credibility of the diary." said Jarath.

"That sounds like work, besides wouldn't Fea's cousin be doing something similar?" said Imogen.

"I think he's focusing on the linguistics, anyway he's in London so..." said Fea.

"We'll have to do it properly mind. Death of the author and all. None of that pretentious rubbish that gets vomited onto the pages of eighty percent of all historical and biographical texts. We should make our arguments as concise as possible." said Jarath.

"I will do more research at the record office, and look through moon charts." said Fea.

"I'll find out more about the commonly known story of our patron saint, and in spite of it being preposterous, look for supporting evidence."

"What about me? I like history I'm good at history." said Imogen.

"Do you want to help Fea go through the records?"

"No."

"Well, you can do the photocopying then."

"My legs are getting numb I'm going to have to get up and..."

"Ow." said Fea, as Imogen lent on her arm.

"What's up with your arm?" said Jarath.

"What have you done?...Don't be shy, after Thursday pretty much everyone knows you're a cutter...What did you do?" said Imogen.

"I kinda cut a tad too deep." said Fea.

"Let's have a look...Come on."

"Ah, that is bad. I'm getting shivers down..." said Jarath.

"Jarath, what are you doing?"

"Covering up my wrists. Seeing that makes me think of my wrists being slit, and I hate..."

"Fea, you're meant to go down the street not across the road...I didn't see you at school Friday, is that when you did it? You were in accident and emergency weren't you."

"I did it in the early hours of Friday, so I could've gone to school, I simply decided not to..."

"You mean after Sarah's party. Let's see it again...Take the whole bandage off."

"No!"

"How did you...?"

"I was using a dull razor-blade, and applied slightly too much pressure as I tried to compensate. The blade gave way and I nicked a couple of veins, and lots, I mean lots of blood started coming out. It wasn't spurting or anything, for I only severed veins, even so I was unable to stem the flow. I swear my bedspread is now completely ruined. It's partly made of silk, so I can't use biological washing powder on it...I figured I had better get to the hospital. I was going to call a taxi, but as I had by that time lost half a pint or so, an ambulance seemed more fitting."

"What did your mother say?" said Imogen.

"I doubt she even noticed, she's more drugs going in her than Imogen on a Saturday night...I've been ordered to start seeing a psychiatrist again. I'm meant to confront the reason why I self harm, which is pointless since I don't think I'll be doing it again, thanks due to a newly formed fear of sharp objects."

"You may just have stumbled on the perfect rehabilitation technique, though I doubt it'll be approved by the health service." said Imogen.

"In spite of your new fear, surely you still get the feelings, whatever those feelings may be. You should try meditating them away, or turning to your art for release."

"Fea, it's going to be just like the old days...You might end up seeing the same psychiatrist as me."

"I sincerely hope not. Yours shouldn't even have a license."

"He is good at what he does."

"He is good at doing you. I'm not too sure about him being good at his work."

"Hear, hear" said Jarath.

"I'm going to head off now, are you two coming with?"

"What exactly does this woman know?"

"She knows how spells and stuff work, she has loads of old books..."

"She knows nothing. You need a linguist, come historian to decipher what is in that book of yours."

"Jarath, you do not even have to come. I didn't even invite you, and that was mainly because I knew how you would be about it."

"Jarath, you are coming because I'm not going without you. I wouldn't feel safe. Safety in numbers and all. What if she kidnaps and then tries to do things to us?" said Imogen.

"This isn't a German wives' tale." said Jarath.

"She's apparently really nice, and she doesn't just do spells, she does fortune telling too." said Fea.

"The nice ones are the ones you've to look out for, as it's so easy for them to catch you by surprise. However, I do want my fortune told." said Imogen.

"How did you find out about this woman?" said Jarath.

"Someone who was at Sarah's party, who works with her daughter." said Fea.

"Well, where does she live then?"

"Yeah, how far away is this place?" said Imogen.

"Fifteen to twenty minutes." said Fea.

"Is it really worth it?"

Evidently Jarath and Imogen both deemed that it was worth it, for fifteen to twenty minutes later they were standing with Fea outside the so called witch's house.

"Hello, Miss Haden." said Fea, while knocking at the front door.

"Who is it?" said Miss Haden.

"It's Fea, we spoke on the phone. I hope you don't..."

"Why isn't she coming to the door?" said Imogen.

"Is now a good time? If it's not it's no problem, I'll come back another time."

"Is it? Will we?"

"Fade will be home soon, she'll let you in." said Miss Haden.

"Why isn't she coming to the door? Is she epically fat or something?"

"She's agoraphobic." said Fea.

"You are kidding me." said Jarath.

"She can't even go to the front door without breaking out in a sweat."

"This isn't even funny. Are there really no normal people in this town?"

"What do you mean by that? What's normal?"

"Well, someone who doesn't..."

"Her daughter, Fade, should be here soon, she finishes work at nine." said Fea.

"Do we know her daughter? Will we recognise her?" said Imogen.

"Maybe."

"How old is she?"

"She's a couple years older than us."

"Getting back to this witch, how is she going to know anything if she's agoraphobic? Unless she's an elite hacker, which wouldn't even help that much, how is she ever going to have the knowledge you hope she has?" said Jarath, however his words met a silence that near enough lasted till they entered the house. For Fea was well aware that an ill chosen reply could easily result in an argument, and she was not in the mood.

"I am terribly sorry you had to wait. My fears have recently been getting the better of me." said Miss Haden, once she finally met her guests.

"Personally I find it scarier indoors. I'm not claustrophobic or anything, it's just that the dangers seem more potent." said Jarath.

"Yeah, if there's a fire you could get trapped and end up burning to death, or if you've a fire going and there isn't proper ventilation you could die from carbon monoxide poisoning. If a burglar or attacker broke in you could end up..." said Imogen.

"How did you become agoraphobic?"

"Jarath!" said Fea.

"No, it's all right...The blame rests on Fade's father." said Miss Haden.

"What are you going to do when Fade leaves home?" said Imogen.

"Imogen!" said Fea.

"Well, she can't live here forever. She's attractive, so it's only a matter of time before some man tries to wed her."

"I'm not all that interested in boys." said Fade.

"What?"

The purpose of the visit was well known but since the will of the timid is always overpowered by that of the loudly spoken, listening to fortunes being told became the priority.

"Things will get better for you, but not before they get worse. Even though it's hard to believe, everything that is chaotic has a grander scheme and a reason for it to be. The regrettable things in life that test us make us stronger, just like butterflies must struggle their way out of the chrysalis. The hard times will prepare you for whatever lays ahead on the unforgiving course of life..." said Miss Haden.

"Are you listening to this stuff Imogen? It's absolutely absurd. Her comments are vague at best. I could do what she's doing, perhaps even better." said Jarath.

"I'm still going to get a reading...If anything she says does come true, I'll sell my right kidney." said Imogen.

"Why the right one?"

"Everything seems more squished up on that side, so I figure the left one works better."

"... Imogen, I guess it's your turn now..."

"I sense there's sadness and woe in your life, but do not worry for time will be your ally. The normality that you crave is in fact obtainable. The haunting dream that has been with you since your early days will eventually fade, thus allowing you to move on. I see you living a long and fulfilling life, and even though

you may currently oppose the notion, I see you marrying the prince that you secretly seek and..." said Miss Haden.

"I'm actually terminally ill." said Imogen.

"What."

"I've been given two years to live, at the most."

"No..." said Fea, while Jarath motioned her to shut up.

"Child, I'm terribly sorry. My words must have been torturous to hear. The spirits must have been confused, for you are so very young...I must have been describing the life that you should've lived." said Miss Haden.

"What are you suffering from Imogen?"

"I don't really like talking about it. You can understand that, you can respect that can't you?" said Imogen.

"Are you certain your condition is terminal?" said Miss Haden.

"My parents' flaws are numerous, but their one redeeming quality is that they have money, and so I've the best doctors you can buy."

"You make it sound like wealth is a virtue." said Fea.

"It is. Wealth is the avenue by which evolution continues in the human race."

"That's rubbish."

"I hope it's rubbish. No offence, but rich people are idiots. Only fools go after money. You'll never get a billionaire physicist or mathematician. For those people know what truly has merit in life." said Jarath.

"I believe it's your turn now Jarath." said Imogen.

"I don't think so." said Jarath.

"We've done it, why won't you?" said Fea.

"It's scary your first go. People are scared of what they may get told, but don't worry. You won't tell him anything that'll cause up set will you mother?" said Fade.

"He doesn't even believe this stuff works." said Fea.

"Then what is your problem? What are you afraid of?"

"It's not that I don't believe there isn't something there, it's just that I don't believe it has anything to do with the supernatural." said Jarath.

"What then?" said Imogen.

"It's much more probable that Miss Haden's ability is merely an exceptional case of women's intuition. She'll pick up on subtle tells and sift through my thoughts, and I'd rather she didn't." said Jarath.

"Don't men, I mean boys, only have one thought?"

"No, that's you, you only have one thought."

"Why don't I possess this intuition then?"

"Because you haven't reared a child have you." said Jarath.

"Can you take a reading from him from where you are Miss Haden?" said Imogen.

"Possibly, but normally..." said Miss Haden.

"Take his reading...Don't be childish Jarath, stay here." said Fea.

"We could restrain him." said Imogen.

"I don't think we should proceed if he's not comfortable." said Miss Haden.

"Let's restrain him. I want to know what is floating around in his head. Get his legs. I bet it's me that he thinks of."

"You wish." said Jarath, as he successfully fought off his friends. The folly soon grew old and so Miss Haden, Fade and Fea set about looking over Fea's spell book, which left Imogen and Jarath alone in the sitting room.

"Why didn't you let her take your reading? The worst she could've said, was that you were going to snuff it while walking home. In which case you could have simply stayed here for the night." said Imogen.

"No chance, there is no way I'd willingly choose to stay here, I'd much rather risk death. It smells like cats in here." said Jarath.

"I was wondering what that smell reminded me of."

"Cats, it's definitely cats, but there's no sign of one having been here, which makes it a bit weird."

"Miss Haden seems like the type. If there were a profile drawn up for cat ladies, she would undoubtedly fit it."

"I want to know what she does for money."

"Fea and Fade look cosy."

"Fade seems nice, shame about her mother though."

"I swear Fade is flirting with Fea."



"Fea is not like that?"

"Are you kidding? She is the epitome of lesbian."

"No she isn't. It would be far too cliché if she were."

"There's no real point in us being here, let's..."

"I wouldn't feel comfortable leaving Fea here."

"Why? These are her people. It's when she's anywhere else that you should be worried."

"What are they even doing?"

"I've had enough of this. I'm going to say we're leaving."

"Ask about the cat smell."

"...Imogen, we couldn't make sense of the spell book, but can you remember the Dessery's diary entry where it mentions the second child abduction?" said Fea, as Imogen approached.

"What do you think?" said Imogen.

"Well, it features some incoherent ramblings, which we figure are prophecies."

"Oh, wow...Jarath and I were wondering if it'd be all right for us to..."

"I'll read it to you; a grave miss-justice will come to pass, the guilty party will be honoured as the blame is miscast, and the innocent person named shall be shamed until this wrong doing is three hundred and fifty-six years in the past. People will abhor the victim while they adore the assailant, and will demand that the scapegoat be burnt at the stake. Several years after this, once reformation is accomplished saint Edmund's bones will be re-homed, and the town from which they came shall acquire a new name."

"Hey, that is really cool, but is it all right if Jarath and I..."

"Three hundred and fifty-six years is two years from now. Do you not see? We have to succeed. We have to get saint Welbecksbury renamed."

"Because if it is written, then so it shall be? There are some ridiculous instructions in the old Testament. Things that orthodox Jews and fundamentalist Mohammed and Christ lovers don't even adhere to."

"It's fairly incredible." said Fade.

"It can't be coincidence that we just happened to light Dessery's diary some three hundred and fifty-four years after her prophecy." said Fea.

"Fea, the diary has been in your family for generations, I doubt you're the only one to have wiped the dust off it." said Imogen.

"I kinda think I am. Maybe that is why the book is so improbably well preserved."

"Is it all right if Jarath and I head off...The two of us are just feeling a bit out of place. Thank-you for having us Miss Haden, and Fade it was a pleasure meeting you...By the way do you have a cat?"

"No, why?" said Fade.

"It's just that Jarath thought he heard a noise earlier."

"What were they talking about? What did they say to you?" said Jarath, as he and Imogen left the house.

"Something about a prophecy in Dessery's diary...the innocent person named shall be shamed until this wrong doing is three hundred and fifty-six years in the past..."

"I remember reading that. Three hundred and fifty-six years will be two years from now."

"I suppose it would be fairly eerie if the prediction came true."

"Would it? You can't make a prediction and then tell people about it. By telling people what will supposedly happen in the future you can effect what happens in the future. It is like the fools that have embarrassingly misinterpreted the book of revelations, and have taken it upon themselves to play an active role in messing up the Middle East."

"You mean..."

"No comment."

"Why can't you talk about normal stuff? Rubbish seems to come out of your mouth far too often...What are we going to do now?"

"I thought we were going to your house."

"I wouldn't mind going up the bell tower of saint James's church."

"Saint James's, I'm not going through all that again...When I used to live in the countryside, my friends and I would play insult stargazing. However, with all of this light haze..."

"You had friends?"

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## 6th Night

"I didn't realise you two were here already...So, who is accompanying us tonight?" said Jarath.

"One, Lucy Blomfield, who died March 13th 1832, aged 83." said Imogen.

"Damn."

"I know. She must be one of the oldest here."

"She was probably excessively rich so..." said Fea.

"The nights are definitely getting colder. Soon we won't be able to meet up like this." said Jarath.

"Have you got your research with you?" said Fea.

"Yeah, I pieced together a meaty version of the commonly known account of saint Welbeck's life, but some of it is proving hard to verify."

"You're not going to be chatting about this the whole night are you?" said Imogen.

"Imogen, were you at my house this morning?"

"I don't even know where you live."

"No, I guess you don't, but I could have sworn..."

"I can't even get out of bed to get to school in time, so there's no chance of me..."

"I saw someone with your hair, who was wearing a top like the black and grey lace one you own."

"I'm really in your head if you're starting to see me where I'm not."

"Where were you this morning?"

"Are you seriously asking me for an alibi? I was in bed."

"...So what's been happening?"

"You still think I was at your house don't you. I can't..."

"I had a meeting with the mayor." said Fea.

"Our letter must have been moving." said Jarath.

"It was horrible...not the letter."

"How so?"

"She lacks a spine." said Imogen.

"Don't be so..."

"She's right, it was utterly embarrassing. I don't ever want to do anything like that again. I suppose it was my own fault, for I should have been better prepared. The mayor was barely interested in the diary, she merely wanted to talk about the vandalised statue...I did not foresee that." said Fea.

"She gave our names! Fea, it was a mistake for you to go, you made a mess of it." said Imogen.

"I agree completely. I say that from now on Imogen handles any meetings that arise. She knows how to manipulate people."

"When Imogen said you gave our names, what exactly does that mean?" said Jarath.

"It's not like I said you were responsible for the vandalism...I was being accused, so I merely said that I wasn't the only one who knew about the diary."

"You could have lied your way out." said Imogen.

"I apologise for not being as experienced as you are at deceiving. Besides I said that loads of people knew about the..."

"What did she actually say about the diary?" said Jarath.

"She wants it handed over for analysis. The meeting was not really a step forward, if it was anything it was a shuffle, a very small shuffle forward."

"Does it seem at all likely that our town's name will be changed within two years?" said Imogen.

"Judging by my recent experience I'd have to say no. When I brought the matter up, the mayor spoke of the massive costs that would be involved...It doesn't seem worth it. I'd rather money go on other things than the changing of letterheads."

"Are you going to see her again?" said Jarath.

"She said she'd phone once arrangements had been made, so I should probably try to get the diary off my cousin..."

"What about are plans?"

"Jarath, where exactly are you with your research."

"It's done, sort of. It's just not properly sourced. I got my information from various history books, which intern got theirs from various biographies and other...It's not impossible to find the original sources, but it'll take some time."

"Surely you can trust that the books you used, used accurate sources." said Imogen.

"No, even educational books have the primary aim of making money." said Fea.

"What have you written?"

"Here, you can have a copy." said Jarath.

"Read it out to us."

"Can't you just read it to yourself?"

"It's hell trying to read something in this light. It's better if one person struggles to read it, namely you, as opposed to..."

"This is only a draft. The finished version will be better, hopefully."

"Yeah, obviously," said Fea.

"Francis Welbeck was the youngest child of one reverend Matthew Welbeck, who was primarily stationed in Colchester. It was in said setting that young Welbeck showed himself to be a studious fast learning child, as he managed to complete his studies two years before his peers. At the age of twelve he encountered a group engaged in witchcraft, which he promptly reported to the appropriate officials. Several years later when his father passed away due to natural causes, he decided to take up a residency at the local church. While he was there, he encountered further acts of witchcraft, which provided him with significant knowledge of their practices and habits. Once the civil war broke out, heathen activities became rampant in the South East of England, since stretched resources meant there was little counter activity. Due to the unwelcome fears that were growing in the common god fearing citizens, Welbeck became urged to use the experience he had gained to help stem the heathenism. In the spring of 1645 he put together a band of hands and toured Essex, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk to offer reform and a life of virtue to those caught up in devilish deeds. Meanwhile the death of the inquisitor that was stationed at saint Edmundsbury, meant that the town soon became over run with witchery. This soon came to Welbeck's attention, and while carrying out his duties in the town, he unearthed a vile evil, which centred around a string of loathsome crimes. He duly decided to risk and devote his life to hunting down the culprit. Following his success, he was canonised and saint Edmundsbury was renamed saint Welbecksbury in his honour."

"It's a bit long winded isn't it? People aren't going to want to read all that," said Imogen.

"I'll cut it down."

"Your words paint Welbeck as a saint," said Fea.

"You do realise that he is a saint," said Imogen.

"Fea, I think that you're being a bit too biased about all of this," said Jarath.

"I think that you two are being a bit deluded about all of this. Do you two still think that you can verify what's in this diary, and then bring justice to Dessery's name all on your own? You're going to get nowhere, and you're going to get there slowly. Post the diary transcript to some historian, and I bet you there'd be a documentary in a couple of months."

"Imogen has a point, we aren't really getting anywhere and it is becoming ever more apparent."

"We have to at least finish what we've started," said Fea.

"Fine, you can finish this stupid paper, or whatever it is, and then we can move on and forget about the whole damn thing. I'm really getting sick of it. What sort of name is Dessery anyway? Whoever came up with it must have been..."

"If we're to contact a historian, I'd need to talk to my cousin first."

"We'll finish what we're doing, put it all together and then post it. Is it settled then? Is this the plan?" said Jarath.

"I guess so, for Imogen is right, but I'm going to keep the spell book."

"Next week, let's meet up and post it together, then we can go back to being snuffing teenagers," said Imogen.

"I don't know about next week. It'll have to be whenever..." said Fea.

"Fea, how's the head probing going? Have you seen your psychiatrist yet?"

"Yeah, I went yesterday."

"So who have you got?"

"My therapy is funded by the county and they obviously went with the cheap option this time. The first session was an absolute joke. It was all right for the practitioner, she was getting paid."

"What's the woman like?"

"I reckon I'll be able to take her for a ride, she's only a few years away from county funded care herself."

"How long are you going to have to go to these sessions?" said Jarath.

"Not too long. I like to read their books so that I can give the answers they're looking for."

"What about you Jarath? You're now the odd one out, but you shouldn't be. I seem to remember you saying that your problems warrant attention more than mine. You know very intimate details about us... You know everything about us, and yet we know near to nothing about you. What's your story Jarath?" said Imogen.

"I don't know your story Imogen."

"Parents divorced when I was ten. My father's a work alcoholic living in central London. My mother uses what she won from the divorce and her excessive income, to jet around the world with whatever twenty-five-or-so-year-old boyfriend is entertaining her. Thus leaving me here alone with but a house, maid and an allowance. All of which has resulted in me using my sexuality and extravert behaviour to gain attention in the belief that it will make up for the attention that my parents denied me as a child."

"You're very sure of your diagnosis."

"I don't believe that crap. It's just that it's been said to me so many times, it's now cemented in my mind."

"Jarath, things don't add up with you, we..." said Fea.

"What is it? Are you developing schizophrenia? Were you a childhood killer? Are you in police protection?... You might as well tell us now because we're going to keep nagging you until you speak."

"She's right. We know you've a skeleton..."

"You can't tell anyone." said Jarath.

"Yeah, yeah." said Imogen.

"No, I mean it. I want you to swear. Fea swear on your life, or on whatever god you're currently worshipping that you won't tell a soul."

"I swear on my life I will not repeat what you say to me, to anyone." said Fea.

"Imogen swear on your li...no wait, swear on your parents...no wait. Imogen, just swear on whatever it is that you care about."

"I swear I won't tell anyone. Now talk."

"...You may moan about this town being bad, but in the countryside there is quite literally nothing to do. I was twelve and going through an arson phase. It started out as an innocent appreciation of the smell of burning matches, but it culminated in a desire to start fire. On a dry day in early autumn, a Sunday, the sight of the recently bundled wheat in a nearby field proved..."

"Seriously, is this what has been haunting you?"

"Wait, there's more. I chose a bundle close to the farmer's barn, for it could not be seen from the village. I lit it and got the kick or whatever it was that I sought, and then ran home as soon as smoke started to billow. Thankfully, I did not smell of smoke so when I acted innocent in front of my mother, I gained myself an alibi. A short while later the whole village was roused, as the fire had somehow jumped to the barn to create what I found to be a beautiful yet slightly sickening scene. Fire engines arrived, and everyone..."

"Is that it?"

"It gets worse, it gets a lot worse. Once the flames had been doused, the firemen found a boy's body."

"Fuck!" said Fea.

"I felt gutted, not gutted as in...I felt genuinely gutted. I wanted to speak out and there were several times I came close, but I never...Obviously there was an investigation, and it was torturous waiting to hear the results. It wasn't torturous like being burnt alive, but it was torturous nonetheless. The investigation concluded that there had been no foul play. They concluded that it was an accident, for they found cigarette butts near the boy's person. They got it wrong though, I killed the boy. He was sixteen, with his entire life ahead of him...That bench over there...it's dedicated to him. That's why you've seen me linger. I'm not sure why it's placed there. I think he was a photographer, so maybe..."

"I think you're right, you do need a shrink more than..." said Imogen.

"You do realise it was an accident. It's not your fault, all you're guilty of is a petty act of arson. If that boy was going to smoke in a hay barn it was inevitable that he would end up crispy." said Fea.

"What I don't understand is how he died in the first place. How did he not smell the smoke, or see the fire?"

"I don't know, all that matters is that he did die. The hay was bone dry, so it burnt as if it was soaked in kerosene." said Jarath.

"I say he was an idiot if he didn't manage to escape."

"He wasn't an idiot though, he had prospects. The boy had a bright future and I took it away."

"Damn, I'm sorry about this, but I promised I would be somewhere. We'll talk soon yeah, and Jarath I'm truly sorry about what happened. Remember life goes on...Sadly that is easy to say but hard to take on board." said Fea.

"...Where is Fea going?" said Jarath.

"I think she's grown bored of us." said Imogen.

"Fea is not like that."

"I've known her longer than you, but...What shall we do now?"

"I think I might head off too, I'm getting a headache."

"Don't go, I should have some Paracetamol somewhere...Ah, here we go"

"Has Fea been feeling left out or something?"

"No, I think she left to be courteous and spend some time with her temporary family."

"What do you mean by that?"

"She's been staying with that Miss Haden woman since her mother went missing."

"Wait, when did that happen?"

"It's this big mystery, well I wouldn't say big, but it is a mystery."

"Fea didn't look all that phased."

"Yeah, but her mother is hard work and it's happened before. If you ask me it's...What is wrong with you?"

"I don't know."

"It's probably for the best if she's dead, she's been nothing but a burden on Fea's life. She's probably off her head somewhere...Seriously, Jarath are you all right?"

"I'm not sure."

"What's wrong with you?"

"Don't know."

"Fea needs to keep this development from her shrink, for..."

"Imogen, those pills you gave me weren't Paracetamol were they."

"What, what do you mean?"

"What the hell is this? Did you give me Rohipnol? Are you trying to rape me? What were those pills?"

"What did they look like?"

"They looked like Paracetamol, they were white and pill shaped."

"They're probably just..."

"I think we should go to your house, I don't think..."

Before Jarath was able to finish what he was to say he slipped into unconsciousness. Imogen was not quite sure what to do. If she left him where he lay she reasoned that he may not ever speak to her again, but her house was a fair way away and it would take effort to relocate him. In the end she resorted to dragging him along by the arms. She soon tired but thankfully a passer-by was willing to lend a hand.

"You, come here..." said Imogen.

"What's the matter with your friend?" said the stranger.

"He's had a little too much to drink. Help me carry him."

"Where are you taking him?"

"My house, it's not too far."

"Seriously, what's wrong with him? He doesn't smell of drink."

"I killed him, so by helping me you're now an accessory to murder...Don't drop him! What's wrong with you, I'm barely strong enough to drag him, so how would I overpower him?"

"You could have slipped him a pill."

Imogen responded to the stranger's comment with a scowl, which led to the remainder of the journey being done mostly in silence. Once Jarath had been thrown down into a reasonably comfortable position and several vain efforts had been made to prematurely wake him, Imogen waited patiently for him to rouse.

"Imogen, what happened? Where am I?" said Jarath.

"I took you back to my house." said Imogen.

"On your own?"

"No, I had help."

"Thank you Imogen, you really...Ow, my head hurts...it really hurts...it's bleeding, and my legs hurt. What the hell did you do to me? Did you beat the crap out of me while I was unconscious? Am I to find whip marks on my back?"

"It was not easy getting you here...Now, can I get you anything?"

"Are you joking? I don't want anything off you. I'd be hesitant to drink your tap water."

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## The following day

The sun was barely above the horizon, and the only signs of life that could be seen came from the nearby road. There wasn't even birdsong, although urbanisation was mainly to blame for that. Jarath was alone in the truest sense of the word, but he was not truly alone for he was accompanied, or rather pestered by the unrelenting murmurings of his mind. Even though the multi storey car park was still yet to open, it was

where he was headed. Once he arrived he set about scaling the building to reach the first floor, where he could gain entry. The world around him melted away as he was absorbed by his aim, however when he finally reached the top floor there was a sudden shift in his behaviour. It took him fifteen minutes to do what should have taken but a moment. The ledge of the open-air floor, which he had earlier found to have an intoxicating appeal, was finally seen for what it was. Once he had made his way to it, he took stock of his surroundings. All was calm in the world, sadly the same could not be said about his mental state.

"I don't deserve a moment's peace, it is my punishment that my mind never does cease, but I cannot bear the weight, as it makes me burn with self hate. With that in place, it is inevitable that I am to break. I have honoured Samuel's memory near to every day, yet there has been no change in my state. I do not believe souls exist after death, but Samuel has a ghost that I can't escape. I have done my best to live a penitent life of virtue, and I only have two sins to count, envy and anger, one of which is the daughter of the other. If I haven't yet gained relief then surely I never will. I killed someone, whether it was an accident is irrelevant. A life was lost because of what I did...This feeling will pass, I know it will, as it has come and gone many times before. I'm tired of trying, tired of fighting, tired of trying to stay sane." said Jarath.

"What are you doing?" said some guy, who had just then arrived on the scene.

"I'm having a sit down."

"What are you doing? Come down!"

"No, I like it here."

"What are you doing? Are you crazy?"

"Well, that's a matter of opinion."

"Is this some kind of suicide thing or something?"

"You work here don't you?...You just don't want to have to clear up the mess I'll create."

"You have your whole life ahead of you. Whatever you are stressed out about will pass. Don't do this!"

"There's far too many people on this planet, I really don't think it matters all that much if I happen to snuff it. Within decades humanity will hit its environment's carrying capacity, and so I'll be doing you a favour by jumping...Stay where you are. Look I'm going to jump regardless of what you say or do, so you might as well just leave me be...I told you to stay where you were...one...two..."

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## **This is the end**

"Wait a minute...what the hell is this? What the hell went wrong? I should be...snuff...My shoulder is messed up...Surgery, snuff. If I swan dived off of a building clearly I wanted to die. Couldn't these surgeons get their ego-trip by finding a third world hobby patient like the others do?...I can stand, well, sort of. How on earth did I manage to mess up an urban swan dive? Tis time to get these darn tubes out...One...two...no, no, no. OK, right, ow, ow, ah." said Jarath to himself. Then once he had come to terms with not being dead, he set about escaping and making way to saint Mary's graveyard where he hoped he would find his friends.

"Jarath!" said Fea.

"Where? No snuffing way, what is he doing here?" said Imogen.

"How did he get here?"

"We're so glad you're all right."

"I initially thought you were a crazy who had escaped from an institution."

"Let us not rule that out just yet...What exactly are you wearing?"

"You haven't even got shoes on."

"What is that? A toga?"

"It's the curtain from...I didn't have any clothes, so I thought I'd improvise. I guess people mistook me for a Buddhist, which is probably why no one tried to stop me from leaving..."

"Why did you do it Jarath, why?"

"What?"

"You know exactly what she means." said Fea.

"Well, I was just...I couldn't..."

"You're such a hypocrite Jarath, a dirty filthy stinking hypocrite." said Imogen.

"Jarath, someone or something must want you alive, for it's miraculous you survived. There must have been a one in a billion chance for you to hit that car like you did." said Fea.

"Well, not exactly, I heard the car coming before I jumped, but what actually happened?"

"The car hit you in such a manner that it flipped you on your side and broke your fall. In short, it was close to a miracle." said Imogen.

"Right, now I want to forget I just heard that. Let's get some alcohol in us. Are you up for it Imogen?"

"She's turned sober." said Fea.

"How long was I in hospital for? Have you given up everything?"

"Pills, tabs, herbs, vapours, gases, mushrooms, drink, powders, suppositories and cigarettes." said Imogen.

"You've used a suppository?" said Fea.

"Just the once, well twice."

"You are joking aren't you? I just did a Jesus Christ, surely that calls for some ethanol." said Jarath.

"I'm really enjoying being sober...everything is like, so real."

"Why now?"

"She visited you everyday in hospital." said Fea.

"No I didn't." said Imogen.

"Jarath, what you did messed her up."

"Snuff off it did, that's rubbish. I did visit you a couple of times though, and I met your mother."

"What." said Jarath.

"She's amazing."

"Isn't she just."

"You should try to phone her before the hospital does." said Fea.

"The thing is, it's going to be a bitch of a phone call."

"Too right too, you were a snuffing idiot. What were you thinking?" said Imogen.

"What are we going to do if we aren't going to get drunk?"

"Shouldn't you lay down?...Wait...we could post this." said Fea.

"Is that...?"

"We got it in order while you were recovering from your failed flying lesson." said Imogen.

"I've been carrying it around with me hoping that you'd make a shock recovery...as you've appeared to have done, so we could post it together." said Fea.

"Isn't that sweet."

"Who's it addressed to?" said Jarath.

"We combed the Internet for a historian who seemed appropriate. It contains my cousin's transcript of Dessery's diary, a load of photographs and a tweaked copy of your research." said Fea, as she led the others in the direction of a post box she'd taken care to take note of. Jarath soon showed himself as the most eager to reach their destination, as he hoped he'd find relief from the barrage of questions that were put to him.

"So, is this over with now?" said Jarath, once what had been set out to be done was done.

"It better be." said Imogen.

"I guess so." said Fea.

"It's long over due I say."

"The role of a town or country's saint is analogous to that of a mascot."

"Let's start living then." said Jarath.

"There is just one more thing...wait for me in saint Mary's graveyard."

"Wait, where are you going? Where is she going Imogen?"

"She's just going to meet some people, she shouldn't be too long." said Imogen, as she and Jarath started in the direction of the graveyard.

"Is she going to see Fade?"

"No."

"Who is she meeting up with?"

"Don't worry about it."

"Is she still friends with Fade?"

"Well, not exactly. They're a couple now."

"No!"

"I said Fea was a lesbian cliché."

"What's happened with her mother? Has she been found?"

"No, she's probably a corpse waiting to psychologically damage some kid."

"I thought I saw her on my way over here."

"You've never met her though."

"I know but I recalled what you said, so when I saw a spaced out woman looking lost, I felt compelled to ask...just to make sure. It was some random drunken skank though."

"I think the matter is affecting Fea more than she's making out, for more than once she's made me walk on the shells of battery-farmed eggs."

"What about you? What's new with you?"

"Well, going cold turkey was a pretty big deal, even if you don't think so."

"Yeah, it is, it's a massive show of strength. I just thought I should ask. What about your psychiatrist?"

"Speaking of which, you're going to get made to see one now."

As the pair continued talking, Jarath found he did not tire of the rubbish that came out of Imogen's mouth quite as readily as he had before, possibly due to mild brain damage. Their conversation could've lasted all night, however their attention was eventually stolen away by a curiously large group of people heading their way.

"What are they doing? I think we should get out..." said Jarath.

"They're the people Fea went to meet." said Imogen.

"Why are they...surely they can't be here for me"

"Don't be so egotistical."

"What are they here for?"

"As it turns out a fair few were interested in what was in Dessery's diary. Who would have thought?"

"Still, what are they here for?"

"Quite a turn out isn't it?" said Fea who had just then showed herself.

"Yeah, but where did they all come from?" said Imogen.

"People told people who told people."

"Can someone please tell me what all of this is in aid of?" said Jarath.

"We're going to dig up saint Welbeck's statue."

"You're joking aren't you. You're not are you...You are, you're serious aren't you, snuff."

"If people were annoyed after the pig's blood incident, then they'll soon be furious." said Imogen.

"Imogen, if I remember correctly, you bet your life that this would never happen."

"Yeah, but I was talking rubbish. I kinda like my life now, and besides no one has started digging yet."

"Did you bring spades?"

"Of course we did." said Fea.

"Can I have one? I want to be part of this." said Jarath.

"You haven't got any shoes, so how's that going to work?" said Imogen.

Jarath somehow managed to work just as ardently as the others though, and so it wasn't long till some impressive progress was made.

"How long will this take? It's tiring." said Imogen.

"You don't have to join in." said Fea.

"I didn't plan on doing so, it's still tiring to watch though."

"The police are here." said some girl.

"It'll be fine, we out number them five to one." said Imogen, before nervously watching the officers as they questioned people.

"What do you think they are telling them?" said Jarath.

"I don't know, but they're now coming this way."

"There's no way we're getting the blame for this." said Fea.

"Are you Jarath?" said a policewoman.

"It's Terail." said Jarath.

"Terail, ha, that's not even a proper name." said Imogen.

"What the hell Imogen!"

"So you're Imogen." said the policewoman.

"I presume you must be Fea then." said a policeman.

"Yeah, that's Fea." said Imogen.

"Fuck you Imogen." said Fea.

"Would you three like to come with us...We'd like to have a word." said the policewoman.

"You can..."



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