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LUCIFER FALLING

By The Madd Hatter

Approximately -- words

For my brother.

Your approval is my inspiration

CHAPTER 1

Allen half-heartedly rummaged around in her apartment closet for her travel bag. She knew she would need it someday. Now if only if she could find it. She finally found it and pulled it out. /Damn boss had to put up this trip in such short notice. Today's Wednesday, for Pete's sake! And we have to leave Saturday morning? Damn!/ She kicked her bag into the middle of the room, then proceeded to take her clothes out from her drawers and wondered how much stuff she would need to bring. This was her first trip from the company, as well as her first trip to a different country. She would have to bring at least her camera. The ones Kelly was bringing were just for the company, so she couldn't use those. Those cameras were too complicated anyway. Before she had left work today, she had asked a mutual friend, Kenny Lindsay, who was experienced in traveling around the world, what she should bring. He had told her that the place she was going to, the unknown town (no one really knew what the small towns' name was), was most likely very rural and rustic, and the people there might not even have electricity or running water, though it seemed unlikely in this day and age. So he had suggested that she bring a lot of batteries and hope that her notebook's battery had a long life. She hoped it did. She didn't like writing with pen and paper half as much as typing. Typing was twice as fast. She finished packing most of her clothes and began searching for her notebook's case. She found it under her desk, and decided she would pack that Saturday morning, since she still needed to use her laptop for other things. She would leave it charging for the whole of Friday night. She looked at her watch. She decided would take her mind off of the trip for now by watching a movie she had rented the day before.

* * *

Twenty miles north from where Allen lived, a young man sat at his desk surfing the web. He didn't and wouldn't give a damn about the trip until Friday night came. The place in England would probably be as boring as the other excursions he had taken with the company. He had gone to some community in Canada, and although the pictures and scenery were fantastic, he was bored to death. The writer he had gone with was some fifty year old guy who was more reclusive than talkative, and spent a lot of his free time writing or sleeping. So he had had to put up with the old geezer and mostly went his own way, occasionally taking some orders from him. He had gotten some superb photos of the countryside though. Photographing seemed to be his natural ability, and he liked it. But he sometimes wondered if he could spend the rest of his life taking pictures. Traveling for him was okay, but not his favorite thing to do. In one way, he was glad Allen was coming with him on this trip. At least she seemed a little more talkative and entertaining than the former. And since she was younger, maybe she'd know a bit how he was. He didn't have a clue who the geezer was, and forgot the old man's name already. At least that trip had been only four days. He thought the upcoming trip was too long. /Why the hell we gotta spend twelve days there? How much different is the society there from a rural town in like, Montana or somethin'/? Unlike Allen, Kelly hadn't bothered to ask that many questions about the town. He would later wish he had. He leaned back in his chair and wondered if he should take a nap while the page opened. - Author's notes: What?! No title?! Don't worry, I'll probably, hopefully find something later. Sorry this is such a slow moving chapter, but hey, there's usually one in every book. But unlike some which REMAIN totally boring, this one'll speed up. Hopefully. Ever hear of or watch "The Blaire Witch Project"? Y'know, the one- ah, nevermind. I might explain later. I have to eat something, a Pepsi One AIN'T gonna fill my food-needing stomach.

CHAPTER 2

/At last,/ Allen thought. She was in the waiting room for her 6:31 flight. She had gotten up four in the morning and gotten a limo to JFK. It was 6 am right now, and Kelly still wasn't here. /What the heck is keepin' him? I thought he looked a LITTLE more responsible than that. But, that's his problem. Too bad for him if he misses his flight. But then again...I don't want to go by myself./

She looked around. There weren't that many people around at this time in the morning on this Saturday morning. She wondered how many people would be on her plane. There were only seven other people in the same room as her- eight if Kelly came. She leaned over in her chair and looked down the hall. There were a few people in business suits and casual clothing walking down towards her. She looked for an average-heighted, dark-haired young guy in most likely casual clothes - Schneider had told them it was okay for them to go casual. /Is that him?/

She saw someone that looked a bit like him walking fast towards where she was.

/Yes it is./ she told herself as she recognized his distinctive gait and his looks come into focus. He rushed over to the counter and handed over some cards and papers. She checked her watch- 6:11. /Pretty good at being late, Mr. Kelly./ she wanted say as he started toward her. As he neared her, he paused as the speaker

announced that their flight was early, and that they would be boarding in three minutes. He spun around on his heel and began walking towards the gate. Allen got up and reached for her purse and jacket, as everyone else did the same. She half walked, half ran up behind Kelly and gave him a little shove.

The last two days she had spent at the company, she had gotten pretty much acquainted with Kelly, and wasn't so shy anymore. But still a little bashful. He gave a long side look to her as he started down the hall. It seemed as if he wasn't a morning person like she was. Oh well. She would talk to him when she sat down in the plane. It was going to be a long flight, and everyone would probably fall asleep on the way. She arrived inside the plane finally, and found her seat. To her right was Kelly. This was a small jet, a 727 Allen assumed. The people behind her walked by. Only one person didn't pass- he most likely went to first class. /I wonder why we didn't get first class./

She waited a few more minutes, and after the plane doors and luggage compartments were closed, she leaned over and exclaimed, "You were late, MR. Kelly."

"No, I was early." He replied.

"Are you trying to kid me or something?"

"No."

She resisted the urge to lean over and give him a good one on the side of the face. He really deserved that. But then again, she didn't know what he was like when he was in a foul mood, so she decided she wouldn't push it. "Just don't be like that next time." She said as she eased back into her chair.

"Next time? I hope not. If there's a next time, you can be sure that-" he stopped short as the plane put on a sudden burst of speed and started tilting upwards.

Allen quickly leaned towards the window, this was best part of any plane ride. She silently waved good-bye to her homeland and looked at the rising suns' rays on the skyscrapers in Manhattan. She thought for a moment and wondered if she would miss her office and the people she saw almost every day. The people part she probably would. But her cubicle? ...Probably not. She didn't mind being in small places and being surrounded by walls, she just didn't like being surrounded with deadlines and lists and schedules and etc. But she probably would miss the city as well. She leaned back into her chair with a yawn and decided to get some much needed sleep. She glanced over at Kelly, and he was slouched over with his elbows on his knees in a painful-looking position. /So much for conversation./ she thought. /Not that I really wanted to talk anyway.../. She put her head back and closed her eyes, imagining that the plane was going up into heaven where the angels soar.

* * *

"Why is it so dark here?" Kelly asked.

Allen couldn't resist the urge and slapped him over the head. "It's about 5 hours ahead here from New York retard! Can't you get that in your head?!"

"Dammit woman, I'm driving! For gods sake, you don't know how annoying that is, especially when your mom did it to you all the time!"

"Well stop acting like an asshole, and the least you could do is do some research before you go somewhere you've never been!"

Kelly opened his mouth, but she put her hands up and exclaimed she didn't want to hear any of it. Kelly grumbled and drove on in the dark-lit, bumpy road.

They had arrived at London around four, and it was still bright then. They had then taken a private jet to Plymouth, and there, they rented a four-wheel-drive Land Rover. The little town they were going to was only about fifteen miles west of Plymouth. The reason they took the Land Rover was because the town was nearby the rocky shore, and a couple miles off from the main road. They had been driving for fifteen minutes, and probably wouldn't arrive at the town till another half an hour. Allen worried that there would be no one awake by the time they arrived there. She didn't want to stay in the SUV with Kelly here for the whole night.

/Why are men so dense?/ she thought. /Just because his watch says that it's four 'o' clock doesn't mean it's four 'o' clock here. Can't he get that in his head?/ She cast a glance at him. /...he has a brain but doesn't use it. I could feel sorry for him./ She turned and faced her window. It was dark. There weren't any street lights in this unoccupied area. The quarter moon barely lit the path and trees around them. It was a cool night, and the sound of frogs and crickets rang through the mid-July night. Everything sounded nice; the constant, soft croaking of tree frogs, the muffled chirps of cricket, and the droning of the V-8 engine. If the seats were a little softer, Allen would have put her feet up and snoozed. But they were stiff, and Allen knew her bottom would hurt once she got out of the car. She stared steadily at the passing scenery, and Kelly's voice interrupted her thoughts.

"Do you know where I'm supposed to turn?"

"Unless you've already passed it, it's supposed to be a fork in the road. You're uh, supposed to take the left one."

"Dattit?" He pointed ahead, and in the misty light beams, they could see a fork in the road. The left path seemed to be deteriorating and the sand and gravel was almost covered over by weeds.

"I think that's it," Allen replied.

"You'd better be a'hopin' I don't get lost missy. That really isn't the clearest path on earth."

/That is a problem,/ Allen thought. "Just don't be a'tryin' to get lost, okay?"

"This' great - at least I'm awake."

/Oh, you'd better be,/ she thought as Kelly pulled onto the weed covered road.

The ride was jolting, and Allen knew she wouldn't be able to get a nap on the way. After a while, they became enclosed in a forest and for a moment Allen thought they were lost, until Kelly convinced her of the path he was on.

/If we get lost, you're gonna get us unlost buddy./ Allen warned mentally. It wasn't her idea to be stranded inside of a canopy of leaves in a foreign country. The only thing that sounded friendly to her was the croak of frogs. She had always liked that sound. She leaned back in her seat and peacefully tried to listen to the ceaseless song. After a few minutes, she started to hear a rushing sound, like the sound of wind between conifers.

"Do you hear that?" Allen exclaimed.

"Hear what?" She let his remark go by her, and said,

"That noise...it sounds like it's getting closer..." Kelly slowed down so they could both hear the resonance. He sped up again.

"Hey, I was trying to figure out what it was!" Allen exclaimed.

"It's just the sound of waves on rocks. ...dumbass."

After a few seconds, she recognized the sound, and wished she could slap herself in the head. Why couldn't she have recognized that a long time ago?

"Don't take me as a fool," was all she said.

"And don't do that," she said, catching Kelly mimicking her.

"This means we're on the right track, by the way. When we reach the shore, all we have to do is follow it up north northwest. Simple enough for yeh?"

"Ooh, I'm just racking my brains with this one my friend." She slid a hand over her irritated face. "And when do we get out of this forest?"

"Right...about...now."

Allen looked up and saw a clearing ahead. Apparently, the moon was higher now and the darkness had made her eyes more sensitive. She also saw the shore.

"I didn't know that they had rocks and cliffs in England." She wished she could take that back.

Kelly said nothing, and at least that didn't make her feel like an idiot. The Land Rover finally trekked out from underneath the forest and drove towards the cliff. The vehicle started to slow down, and almost came to a complete stop before it lurched back to life again.

"We don't need a rest right now Kelly. It's-it's almost ten pm, we don't have time for that!"

"Okay, okay! You don't have to beat me over the head for that y'know!"

"'m not!"

"Look, don't you think we're acting a little immature here?!"

Allen hated to admit that, and she leaned back in her chair and pursed her lips. They didn't have much more to say until they went over a hill. Allen leaned forward in her seat and said, "Isn't that a lighthouse? You sure you took the right way?"

Kelly was equally surprised. "Umm...I'm sure I did...I wasn't expecting no lighthouses though..."

"Well there's one right there. Unless the community expanded or something, or that's not a lighthouse." It wasn't the usual lighthouse everyone thinks of. It was just a faint glow above the water, like a torch, except much higher than a man's height. They could see the faint outline of a tall, cylinder-shaped building on top of a small island about half a mile from the rocky shore.

"But then again, maybe they had that for a long time." Kelly stated.

"May-be." Allen sat back in her chair and thought. /That lighthouse must be near the town, so I wonder if we should walk to the town or just drive in. They told me that the town was primitive, they might only have horses and stuff...maybe I should ask Kelly./

"Hey...you think we should just drive into the town, or drop our car off and walk there? I mean, I assume those people still use horses and stuff."

"Horses and stuff? These people must really hate technology. They're probably stuck in the medieval age while we're in the info age. Yeah, I guess we COULD walk. But if you don't want to, then I'm not. Don't think I really enjoy walking with twenty pounds on each arm."

"It's not my fault you're a photographer."

The light appeared to get brighter as they got closer, and soon, the vehicle was at the shore nearest the island. The two got out of the SUV to stretch their legs and look at the lighthouse.

"Looks pretty deserted to me." Kelly exclaimed. Allen just looked up at the light.

"Looks like the people just use oil or something like that." Kelly walked around the vehicle and leaned on the hood. He stared off at the distance, and Allen kept on staring at the lighthouse.

"Looks pretty old Kelly. Think I should write something about it?"

Kelly was silent for a moment, and Allen turned around. "Whatever you want. See those lights down there?" He nodded towards the valley and up the hill, about two miles off. Allen joined his side and looked.

"Um...I don't really see any- wait! They're bunched together, like- like- like street lights! You think that's the town!" Allen joyously exclaimed.

"Probably." Kelly said without the least hint of amusement, finishing up a stretch.

"Oh don't be so down Kelly! We're here! We're finally here!" She grinned ear to ear and demanded to know why he was so somber.

"I'm gonna complain, okay?"

"Is that why you're so sad? We'll just get our bags and go!"

"Are we going to WALK from here?? Don't you think we should put our car somewhere else too?"

"Well yeah, that too!"

"Hmph. You might not have seen it, but that place has a wall."

Allen turned to look at him. "...Is it?"

Kelly made his face. "Yeah, with a wall that's supposed to keep the wolves out. C'mon. I don't want to stand here all night." – Author's notes: Still no title!! But that's ok...I guess. So this was pretty um...boring too I think. It's gettin' there though. Good night. It's 2:14 am and my mind's not working.

Dumonde: Allen

CHAPTER 3

It was just as Allen feared. The town was as quiet as outer space. Allen had convinced Kelly that they should leave most of their equipment behind in the Rover, since the natives might be a little suspicious of the foreign persons. They had parked the Rover not far from the small town, in the valley hidden among the outskirts of the surrounding forest. They had only carried with them the clothes on their backs, and themselves. They had found the entrance to the town – an elaborate gateway but no door. The dirt road abruptly turned into a cobblestone street. /Reminds me of a medieval village,/ Allen noted.

Kelly and she walked side by side, observing the buildings overhead in the near distance. After a few yards to their left was a building made with stones, and to their right was a building made tutor-style. They couldn't determine what either building was for, and they walked on underneath an overpass.

An eight foot high wall surrounded them and the cobblestone street. It looked more like a highway. The road was wide enough for two cars to drive side by side, and the oil lamps jutting out from the walls dimly lit the street. There were no storefronts. The dark outlines of houses and structures lined the uphill horizon from where they could see. The inhabitants had built this small town right at the ascent of the valley, so all you could see from the bottom of the valley were the silhouettes of the buildings and the forest immediately surrounding it. The two walked on, passing to their right what seemed to be a chapel, and to their left two buildings. They walked under another bridge/overpass, and went around two sharp turns. Kelly stopped as they went around the second turn. They faced a long straight-away, and could see one overpass directly in front of them and a long overpass that created a rather long tunnel ahead twenty yards after the first overpass.

"Um...don't you think this place is gonna go on forever with the walls? I bet that's why they didn't have a gate to this place – this place just has this highway running straight through town with no exits or entrances to the streets of town."

Allen stopped in her tracks and turned around to face Kelly: a figure standing in the middle of the road faintly lit from the oil lamps. He seemed to be right. The eight foot high walls had continued straight through town beside the main road.

A nearby pigeon cooed and a flutter of wings flew across from one side of the road to the other.

"Maybe we should climb over these walls if we want to go somewhere," Kelly said quietly.

The still and quiet atmosphere was getting to him, Allen could tell. Even she felt that she would break the spell if she talked out loud.

"Yeah, maybe you're right." Allen replied.

She watched as Kelly walked over to the wall on his right – where the pigeon had flown from – and looked around to see if there was anything he could possibly stand on. The street was empty, and Allen walked up to him.

"Scale this wall?" She whispered. Kelly nodded, and since Allen was the shorter one, Kelly gestured her to go first.

The walls were made of what seemed like a smooth stone, and after her first slip, Kelly impatiently boosted her over the wall unexpectedly. Allen stifled a little 'eek' as she landed on her back hard. The ground was soft, the grass was damp. Like it had rained all day past. She got up quickly, hoping Kelly wouldn't come tumbling on top of her. She brushed herself off and looked around. Enough trees and darkness surrounded her that she couldn't see beyond the trees. She looked up at the sky. The dark navy and twinkling stars solemnly glittered back. She saw a black figure thump down on the ground behind her.

"Thanks for the comfortable landing," she hissed at him. She thought she saw him shake his head and then slowly crept behind him as he headed for the trees. /Bet this guy never thinks before he does anything,/ Allen thought.

Kelly silently stole up to the trees. He didn't know what he would see when he pushed away the brush. He hoped nobody was up at this time of night. Somehow, ever since he'd walked into this small village, his blood had started to crawl. He

didn't know why. He just didn't like this town – it was giving him the creeps. So he was secretly glad no one was around in this town.

He pushed away the bushes and looked around. The cobblestone street was there, although this one was narrower, and looked nicer and more well-kempt since it wasn't walled in. From what he presumed, they were facing another church, and to his left, the road split into a Y. There were two to four story tall buildings surrounding it. Kelly stared at the church for a moment. /Why the hell does this place gotta have so many churches?/ he wondered as he stepped out from the trees onto the street. He heard the faint rustling behind him of Allen walking out. Somehow he was glad she was there with him. The fact that someone "normal" as he was with him made him feel a little more at ease than if he were by himself. He stood, waiting for Allen to make the first move. He impatiently turned around and faced Allen.

"Well? Aren't you planning to go somewhere, now that we're in the town?" He whispered.

"Umm..." Allen looked around. Apparently she had no clue what to do now either. She looked towards the Y section. "Um...why don't we take the right fork?" She suggested.

"No prob," Kelly replied. He began walking towards the Y and took the right bend. He noticed that the left fork would have taken them onto the overpass over the main road. They passed the church, and ahead he could see a four-way. The two walked single file in the middle of the street, each examining what they were interested in. /These people probably do use horses and carts,/ Allen observed as she looked at the cobblestone street. The streets were maintained wonderfully; the only things on the street were lone boxes and barrels here and there. /Man, this place really feels like the Dark Ages! These people were probably either real ignorant and stuff or just plain unaware of the stuff happening around them. I could change that! I could really help these people!/ Allen proudly contemplated as they reached a four-way.

"Where do we go now?" Allen asked Kelly.

"...across?" He proposed.

The two crossed the street and walked on.

"Another friggin' church!?" Kelly exclaimed.

"Shh! They'll hear you!" Allen shushed.

"Damn, this place gives me the creeps!" Kelly said hoarsely. This church was bigger than the second one they had seen. It had more splendid stained glasswork, and the details on the building were immaculate. Allen looked at in awe while Kelly looked at it disdainfully. In a town like this, he could stand maybe one church, but three churches, all within less than a few blocks – that was too much for him. /This place has too many churches...it's freaking me out...must be why this town feels so messed up./ Kelly mused. Allen interrupted his thoughts.

"Y'know, don't you think we should be like, mm...getting acquainted with these natives? So we could like, find a place to rest?"

"You know?" Kelly said. "I think I should go back to the car and get my sleep there – YOU can go find a place to stay. I don't think I really want to mess around with this town as much as you do."

"C'mon, don't be so rotten Kelly. I don't know what is bothering you, but don't let your personal issues mess up my enthusiasm. ...That's it! You don't have any

enthusiasm in the stuff you do, right? Hell, why am I even asking you that? I'm supposed to be the leader here, just follow me!" Allen exclaimed.

For a moment, Kelly was silent. /Fine, let her fuck around all she wants. I don't care. Actually, why don't I let her become the leader? I don't feel like directing things I don't like. Yeah, Allen can direct, and I'll just sit back and let her do all the work./ "Fine, go ahead. When you come up with a huge problem though, don't come crying to me like the wuss you are when you get stuck in a rut or whatever."

Allen looked at him disgustedly for a few seconds then turned away. She'd let him be a follower for all she cared.

"Fine, just be glad I'm not pissed at you right now," she said. She began walking, this time in the lead. She noticed that the buildings after the church didn't have any signs by the front doors. /Are these houses I see?/ Allen thought. Her glances proved correct as she looked up and down scaling the houses. Everything was dark and silent, except for the hum of crickets and pigeons. /Something's not right here.../ Allen mused as she paused in her walk. /Why are all the windows dark, like no one's living here?/ She knew this couldn't be true, because she could recollect the oil lamps burning in the main street, and some candles in the store windows. They don't just light themselves after dark. She looked around, and the only light source came from the moon's own shining light. She looked behind her and saw Kelly prowling around in a bush--she decided to not get involved--and the overlooking view of half the little village, since this neighborhood seemed to be elevated, going up a hill. She was just about to start observing the streets, trying to memorize where everything was, when she heard a hoarse voice.

"Hey!" She turned her head quickly, looking towards the directions of where the voice was coming from. It was Kelly, but she couldn't see he was.

"Where are you punk?" She hissed back. She saw a hand appear from the bushes where she last saw him, except he was much farther down. "The hell is he doin' down there," she muttered as she started towards the bushes. She stooped down low and crept towards where she saw Kelly's crouched body. She made it over to him and began growling at him. "The hell you make me crawl over here I ain't in my hiking boots you know--"

"Sh!" Kelly interrupted. Allen was about to open her mouth when she heard something. It sounded like a deep humming of voices, something like a chant, but not exactly. "You hear that?" Kelly breathed.

/Of course I hear it you asshole!/ Allen wanted to snap, but her curiosity had the better of her and she settled with nodding her head.

"Where's it comin' from?" he asked again.

Allen looked at Kelly. /How dumb can this kid get?/ she wondered and began shuffling towards where the sound was coming from. She couldn't see too far ahead of her, the bushes were much foiled. She pulled aside a branch and saw nothing but a bare wall. "The hell...?" she exclaimed as she slowly stood up. The wall was higher than she could see over it--again --and she turned to her left. There was a tutor style house not too far from where she was standing in the bushes, and she turned around.

Her heart jumped up to her throat when she saw a figure standing right behind her.

She muffled a shriek and her fear turned into anger when she recognized the shadow as Kelly.

Kelly ignored the steam coming out of her ears and rustled past her.

"Hey, if you'd let me up, I could see whoever's making that noise," he whispered.

Allen jolted around and turned him by the shoulder. "Why don't I go look? You don't even have your camera anyway, so it'd be no use." She whispered back.

Kelly looked at her for a second, then turned back to the wall. She put her foot in his folded hands and grabbed for a holding in the stone wall. He hoisted her up /Thank God she probably works out,/ Kelly thought, and Allen's not-so-perfect hair began peeking from the top of the wall. Allen's eyes appeared over the stones, and her eyes widened with alarm at what she saw. --Author's notes: Yes that's right, I've found a temporary title for my little story here...Dumonde's the name of the /series/...? And Allen's the name of the book...? Reason for question is because I'm not sure. Alright, so a little more caricature build-up in this chapter...things seem to be going at a faster pace in this chapter, but I get this bad feeling it might slow down again. That's not cool.

Dumonde: Allen

CHAPTER 4

"The hell is it?" Kelly asked as he looked at the fallen Allen.

"I have no idea --you go look," she said. Kelly looked at her and shrugged.

"Alright," and he turned towards the wall. He looked for something to stand on, since the wall was only six inches higher than he was at his height of 6 feet. He found a log nearby and stood on it. What he saw amazed him, but didn't freak him out like it did to Allen.

/What the fuck is going on around here?/ he thought as he looked in front of him. There was a clearing after the wall, but after about 30 feet, the surrounding forest began. In that clearing, there seemed to be some circle made by black-cloaked figures --there had to be at least 30—all encircling a fire, and there seemed to be some kind of activity in the center of the circle as well. Kelly couldn't identify what through all the figures, but he could see a cloaked figure, bigger than the rest of the other figures, standing in the center as well, and he seemed to be leading the group. After a few moments he decided he had seen enough and quietly and slowly sank back down to the ground. Allen had already gotten up and was looking at him.

"What is it?" She asked quietly. She seemed to be sobered up from what she had just seen. Good.

"I dunno, but I'm getting outta here, this place freaks me out." He stated, then promptly got down on his hands and knees and began crawling back underneath the bushes.

"Oh no you don't," Allen under toned and reached down after him. She grabbed his foot and pulled it back.

He turned his head around.

"Hey what are you doing? I wanna get outta here!" he hissed.

"No you're not! If I stay here, you have to stay here too!"

"I bet you're just scared to stay in this messed up place by yourself," he threw back at her, then shook her hand off his ankle and began his runaway trek again.

Allen thought for a moment, then decided she would argue it off somewhere where these people wouldn't hear them.

She crouched and tried to make it through the bushes as fast as she could. Yes, those people in black cloaks did freak her out. /What kind of place is this? Damn they looked like some kind of Ku Klux Klan kind of thing,/ she shuddered.

She caught some brush in her hair but made her way out of the bush and got back up on her feet again. She looked around for Kelly and saw him sprinting down towards the town.

"The hell is your problem," she muttered, and started after him.

In high school, Allen had been on her track team for all four years and she was still conditioned because she still worked out every day, but Kelly seemed to be going faster than she could catch up. She ran down the road and spotted Kelly suddenly swerve into an alley between two buildings.

/The hell...?/ she thought, then stopped abruptly when she saw a shadow of someone appear from the crest of the road between clotheslines. Panicked, she ducked behind a nearby barrel.

By the time she would have made it between two buildings to join Kelly, the person would've already seen her, so now she was stuck behind a barrel.

She crouched into the corner, hoping to God that he wouldn't look around and see her when he passed.

/Geez, why the hell am I hiding? I came to this town to get to know the people, not to hide from them,/ she mused.

She slowly peeked her head from the side of the barrel. Since the moonlight was from behind, she could barely see the man's face, but he wasn't wearing one of those black cloaks.

He had a long stick with one end lit in one hand, and she watched him light an empty lamp that had died a few minutes ago.

/So he was the guy that lit the lamps all night,/ she mused. /We don't have to hide from him, that's stupid./

But she pulled herself behind the barrel anyway.

She could tell this town had something that it was hiding, and she wanted to know what was behind it. She looked down at her watch. /12.28?! Wow where does the time go?/

She looked up around her for any lamps that had gone out, and to her dismay, a lamp a few feet behind her had gone out. /If that man looks around, he's going to see me,/

She wanted to check where he was, but she could already hear his footsteps coming nearer. She pushed herself farther into the corner hoping the darkness would hide her and that the man wouldn't see her. She silently looked to her left, and saw the man appear and walk towards the smoking lamp. She looked up at his face, and his wrinkles only seemed to accent his tired appearance. He lit the lamp and walked off. Allen sat in frozen silence-- she was now bathed in the soft glow of the lamp. After a few seconds, she scrambled onto her feet and dashed away from the barrel.

/Hope no one's looking out their window at this time of night,/ she prayed as she resumed her search for Kelly. He was no where to be seen.

She wanted to be angry but now she seemed to be overtaken by worry. /What the hell? I hope he's still in that alley or something.../ she sprinted down the hill and

stopped when she reached the alley. She peered in, hoping that she'd see him crouched in the corner.

The alley was empty.

/Shit./

She looked up the street.

Of course he wasn't there.

She ran up the hill, almost tripping as she went and looked down over the crest.

She was looking down over the Y and she could see where they had come from behind the thicket of small trees. She looked for any movement, but couldn't see any. But he had probably gone back in there, and she headed towards the trees. She pushed aside the branches and walked into the darkness.

Her eyes adjusted, and she saw Kelly sitting against the wall.

"Don't you ever do that again!" she tided.

"Well I wanted to get outta there. I'm not scared of those kinda things, but I'm not hanging around them either. Just let me sleep in the car for at least tonight," he pleaded.

"I mean seriously, what've you got against sleeping in the car tonight? We'll just start off the new day getting acquainted instead of barging into sleeping houses."

/He has a point there,/ Allen mused.

"But Boss wanted us to get acquainted on the first day - we don't have all the time in the world to do this," she contradicted.

"Yeah sure, you just want to be right, that's all," Kelly exclaimed smugly.

Allen fumed. "You shut the fuck up, that's not true," she threw back at him.

Kelly had no problem accusing people. That's what he did the most of besides talking anyway.

"Denying, huh? That's only a sign of fear and anger. You just don't want to be wrong because you're too proud. You're such a bitch, I think you already know that," he stated.

Allen started raising her voice. "I am /not/ a bitch, you're just trying to get yourself out of this mess you pulled us into!"

"/I/ did? What're you crazy? You're the one that wanted to come down here in the first place!"

Allen clenched her fists and turned around.

"Yeah? Where're you going?" Kelly taunted, getting up from his sitting position. "You don't like me anymore? You just don't want to be left alone right, so now you're gonna make up sorry. Well it don't work that way, miss."

Allen stomped out from the trees and into the moon-lit street. She turned back around when she heard Kelly's taunting voice come out from the trees.

"And what gives you a right to yell at me?" she yelled back at him. Kelly opened his mouth, but nothing came out.

Allen saw his eyes drift around to something behind her, and she swirled around.

"Oh fuck..." she breathed and her heart did a flip she thought was never possible.

One of those black-cloaked figures was running towards them.

Allen stifled a scream, but Kelly could not, and Allen jumped a foot in the air when she heard him.

Jerking them back into reality, the two scrambled back towards the trees, but Allen tripped over Kelly in the process.

Allen looked back towards where the figure was running towards them was and saw the person slow down.

She wouldn't have been surprised if two glowing red dots appeared underneath the shadows beneath the hood.

/Was that ceremony thing already over?/ Allen wondered.

She watched as the figure neared and slowed to a walk and then stopped altogether in front of the two foreign-looking people lying on the ground.

"Um...hi," Kelly said tentatively.

"Who are you?" a feminine voiced from underneath the hood. Allen and Kelly looked at each other.

/What were they going to tell it?/

Allen had forgotten about that part.

"Might as well tell them the truth," Allen mouthed.

"We just came here to visit," Kelly replied.

Allen jabbed Kelly in the stomach with her elbow.

"Ow, that was so uncalled for," Kelly exclaimed as he jumped up onto his feet.

Allen followed.

The person in front of them was not much taller than Allen, which was not very tall.

"From where?" The person asked.

"Um...somewhere else," Kelly answered.

Allen groaned inwardly and decided she wouldn't say anything and see if Kelly could do something right for once.

"And where is that?"

"Why do you wanna know?"

Allen could cry.

"Because."

Allen noticed a thick, almost sort of primeval English accent in this girl's voice.

"Where are you going?" Allen finally said.

"Home" was the answer she got.

"Where's home?" Kelly questioned.

The girl was silent.

Allen and Kelly stared back at her.

She slowly raised a sleeve toward where they came from.

Kelly looked back to where her arm directed to and Allen decided she had had enough.

"Hey, I'm sorry about my friend here, but we're new here and we were wondering-"

"How did you get here?" The girl interrupted.

"Um, we climbed over that wall behind those trees..."

Allen was not one to lie. She continued. "And well we were wondering if you guys had some kind of hotel...or...motel...um...an inn or something..." She trailed off, noting the puzzled look on the girl's face.

"Well..." the girl looked around. "We don't get visitors here very often."

"We'll leave then," Kelly piped in.

"Did anyone see you?" The girl asked.

"No," they both replied simultaneously, then looked at each other surprised.

"Good," she said. "Leave and don't come back," she pulled up the sides of the black oversized hoodie she was wearing and began walking away. "Just some advice...don't say I didn't warn you!" She cried off into the night, disappearing over the side of the hill.

"Should we follow her?" Allen turned to Kelly.

"Hell no!" He exclaimed, turning around back to the bushes.

Allen sighed dejectedly. /Oh well. It's late anyway, we got ten days ahead of us to explore,/ she turned and followed Kelly back over the wall.

The two stuck close to the shadows, aware now that there was something quite fishy about this little town planted on the side of the hill.

"What do you think she meant by not coming back?" Allen questioned as soon as they regressed the soft lights of the town.

"That that's our queue to go back to America and tell the boss that the town was torn down and that we couldn't get a story."

"That bullshit, we can't go back with our hands empty!"

"Wanna find out?" Kelly threatened.

"Quit acting like a sissy Kelly!" Allen fired back at him. She could see the Rover sitting quietly in the wood ahead. "Let's at least try one more time tomorrow - there'll be more people around."

"More weirdos you mean," Kelly corrected.

"Look, maybe it was just some druid cult that just stopped by for tonight," Allen proposed.

"Stopped by?! You're ridiculous!"

"Just tomorrow? Please? For me?" Allen didn't know how much that last part would hold for him.

Kelly sighed.

"Oh fine," he said suddenly after a few moments of suspense.

"...Thanks," Allen replied.

They arrived at the Rover and climbed in. Allen was smaller so she decided to curl up in the back seat while Kelly uncomfortably reclined as far as he could in the front seat. Just as a precaution, they locked the doors and wished that they could somehow make the truck magically disappear into the surrounding foil.

Allen took a final look at the silent village sleeping peacefully ahead of them, then lay back down and let the soft chirping of the crickets lull her to sleep. If she had looked out a moment longer, she would have noticed a lone dark figure creep out from a hidden door in the wall and silently slink its way across the valley toward their vehicle.

CHAPTER 5

“Hey!”

Allen felt someone shoving her shoulder.

“Hey, you know what time it is?”

/Oh yeah!/ Allen suddenly remembered where she was and jolted up.

“Whoah, easy there,” Kelly stated.

She glanced over at him. /Looks like he’s been up and gone and done his business./

“The sky was overcast – not unusual for a typical day in Great Britain – and it looked like a light drizzle had already come through the area.

“Um...so you ready to go?”

“Yeah...yeah, just give me a second,” Allen replied.

They got their things together: Kelly only took a hi-tech camera and hung it around his neck – with technology these days, he could take pictures the entire day and still have enough battery life and memory space for another. Allen took out a mini tape recorder and a small pad and pen and the two made the hike back down to the village in silence, not knowing what to expect.

A few hundred yards before the front gate, Kelly spoke up.

“I’m guessing you didn’t notice,” he said somberly.

"Notice what?" Allen replied, about to say something snappy but deciding against it, noticing his tone.

"The stuff in the woods around the truck this morning?"

"No, what stuff?"

"Like..." Kelly paused for a moment. "Like little voodoo stuff."

"What?!" Allen stopped mid-stride. "Why didn't you tell me?" She put her hands on her hips.

"Oh, and you know all about voodoo and the like?" Kelly challenged.

"Well what if I did?"

"Hmph...weirdo." Kelly walked away and after a few moments, she caught up to him.

"What'd they look like?"

"Little dolls and upside down crosses and stuff...they were made out of...oh here just look at this." He picked up his camera off his chest and turned it on and gave her a preview of what he saw as he was taking his morning leak.

"Strange..." Allen mused. "Voodoo eh? I don't know a whole lot about that stuff..."

"Shame," Kelly retorted and switched his camera off.

They were in the town now. It didn't seem so creepy and morose as it did the night before.

They walked a little farther this time, going through the long underpass and reaching the end of the village walls, not seeing any visible way into the actual town. Once in a while they would hear the muffled voices of the townsfolk from above, but the people never talked too loud.

"What the hell is up with this place?" Kelly asked, not expecting an answer.

"Let's just go back in the way we did last night," Allen suggested.

So they made their way back – the town couldn't have been more than a mile and half long, two at the most.

Allen's landing wasn't as harsh as it was the first time. Through the brush she could see a few people milling around.

"Wait till they move on," Allen proposed.

"I was gonna say that," Kelly exclaimed.

They only had to wait a minute or two and the people dissipated. Allen and Kelly emerged from the shrubbery looking like two tourists in a foreign country. Allen pulled out her pad and looked around. The nearest inviting store looked like a clothing store down the street a ways.

"Well, we could look like the people here at least," Kelly said. Allen nodded and they made their way down the street not seeing a single soul.

The door jangled as they stepped in. A lone man stood behind a counter at the end of the store. Racks of dull earthy tones lined the walls. The owner looked at them, expressionless.

"Good day," Allen started, making her way to the counter.

The man said nothing as his eyes perused over her appearance, then meandered to Kelly who was inspecting an ochre-colored cloak.

Allen smiled uneasily and opened her mouth once more.

"I'm Catherine Allen, and this my friend Greg Kelly." She didn't notice Kelly pause, look their way, grimace and shake his head. The man remained stoic. "We're here on a ...well, you could call it a business trip – we work for a company who does articles on different cultures – have you heard of the National Geographic?" The blank expression on his face said otherwise. "Well...no big deal. My boss heard about your town and sent us to do an article on your town. May I uh...interview you?"

The man raised an eyebrow.

Allen looked at him for a moment and jumped when Kelly thumped some wool robes on the counter.

"I'm interested in seeing how these fit," Kelly said.

"Will you excuse me, I'm trying to interview someone?" Allen seethed.

"No you're not," Kelly reminded.

The clerk fingered through the clothes and spoke.

"We don't sell to strangers."

Kelly slammed a fifty dollar bill onto the counter. "Now you do," he said triumphantly.

"This is?" The man picked up the piece of paper.

Flustered, Kelly grabbed the bill out of his hand and shoved it back in his khaki pants. "Never mind!"

"I'm so sorry," Allen apologized. "We'll uh, we'll be going on our way." She turned around, grabbed Kelly's arm and walked out of the store. The muted jangling quieted as Allen spun around.

"What do you think you're doing?"

"I'm just trying to fit in what?" He whined

"Stop making me look like an ass!" She hissed.

She stomped off. Kelly shrugged and followed her, pulling the cover off his camera and snapping some pictures. He stopped midway on the bridge.

"You hear that?"

Allen grudgingly halted.

"No."

Kelly shook his head at her and leaned over the bridge. "It's coming closer..."

"What do you think you're doing?"

"I'm just trying to fit in, what?" He whined

"Stop making me look like an ass!" She hissed.

She stomped off. Kelly shrugged and followed her, pulling the cover off his camera and snapping some pictures. He stopped midway on the bridge, distracted by something.

"You hear that?"

Allen grudgingly halted.

"No."

Kelly shook his head at her and leaned over the bridge. "It's coming closer..."

They leaned further and it didn't take long until they realized what the buzzing was.

"Hm, so they have an autobahn that runs through this place," Kelly mused. "I'd like to talk to one of those guys."

"Yeah, okay," Allen replied sourly and turned away. But she did make a note of it in her pad.

Kelly eventually got over the sights of the Maserati and exotic Ferrari racing through the underpasses and moved on pursuing Allen's footsteps. He snapped some more pictures and eventually caught up to her. Allen would stop every few minutes and mark a note on her pad, then walk on.

"What'ya writing?" Kelly exclaimed once her caught up to her.

"I'm just making some observations; I hope you've been taking pictures?"

"Of course, fool. By the way, haven't you noticed that no one's out here?"

"Come to think of it...I wonder why," Allen trailed off, tapping her pencil to her lip.

"It's 'cause we're here," Kelly replied rhetorically. "Fool."

"Hey listen; I didn't come here to listen to you mock me, alright? So could you just relax for a few days? Honestly?"

Kelly huffed and rolled his eyes. "Sure, whatever."

More aggravated than convinced, Allen marched off again, leaving Kelly to keep clicking away for his amusement. Every quarter of the hour, bells sounded off eerily from every direction. The sky was overcast – not allowing for any spectacular shots for Kelly. It looked like it would drizzle again with the way the clouds above seemed to be in turmoil.

The two were on the western side now, winding through the streets. Every structure was tutor style and at least two stories high, only a few feet apart. The cobblestone streets twisted left and right; Allen would occasionally go off a fork in the road. Kelly sensed they were going southward. His shots were starting to look the same, as they had left the commerce section a few blocks back, and it looked more like a residential district. He flitted back and forth from one side of the street to the other, trying to get an interesting shot without luck. He walked backwards for a bit, taking a random close-up of the thatched roofing against the graying sky. He stopped short as he collided into an unmoving body. "What the..." He turned around. Allen was standing stock still. Kelly looked around, tried to see what Allen was staring at, but to no avail. "Hey, you okay?" A tinge of concern was in his inquiry.

Allen's mouth opened, but no sound came out. She suddenly snapped her mouth shut and shook her head quickly.

"It's nothing."

"Oh please, what the hell did you see?"

"No one, I mean, nothing!"

She started walking again, a bit more brisk than before. Kelly paced up to her.

"Seriously, tell me what you saw," he implored.

"Just thought I saw someone."

"Um...okay," Kelly looked at her like she had six eyes on her head and continued walking alongside her.

A slight breeze rustled through the fauna decorating what little open space the neighborhood provided. A woodpecker rattled relentlessly a couple houses down. Kelly tugged his jacket closer to himself.

"Hey, let's check on the truck. I think it's gonna rain...these people here aren't too friendly so I wouldn't count on someone handing us an umbrella or anything."

"Well you show me the way out of here then!" Allen snapped back unexpectedly.

"Whoah! Chill out chick! What's your deal."

"Nothing, this place is...it's not what I expected it to be."

Kelly ignored the statement. "Oh I get it, you're frustrated because you got us lost. Great. This town isn't that big, I mean come on! How could we be lost?"

"Well my sensometer isn't telling me very much right now. We should've been back at where we started by now. I can't even see the wall holding this place in!"

Kelly looked around for a moment. A rather chilling breeze swept through, rougher this time. Allen's hair tumbled across her face and she pulled it back irritably.

"You're right. Man, this place is evil," he remarked. As they passed the tree being hammered away by the woodpecker, they felt the first drops of rain patter onto their overcoats. "Fuck," Kelly groaned. He turned back and stood beside the trunk of the tree. Allen grudgingly followed his lead just as the raindrops began pelting the ground.

"Dammit!" Allen exclaimed, stuffing her pad inside her jacket.

The sky rumbled slightly in the distance and the rain proceeded to get heavier. A moderate wind picked up gradually. The woodpecker finally gave up and flew off squawking away to the north above the thatched roofs toward the cragged valley peak ahead.

"Well, sucks to be having an autobahn in the rain," Kelly commented. Allen wasn't too comforted by his attempt to brighten things up. Her hair was almost drenched when she heard a creak of a door from the two-story tutor structure behind them.

"Psst!"

Allen quickly turned. She recognized the girl's face as the same one they had met the night before.

The girl waved at them, beckoning them inside as she opened the door slightly wider. Kelly turned his head as he heard Allen rustling away and he bounded after her.

The girl quickly shut the door. She ran over to the single window that faced the front of the house.

Allen looked around in wonder. The houses were definitely narrow, this one probably only being about thirteen feet wide, but like an apartment, it was long and narrow. The entire floor was one room, the kitchen and dining area occupying the back part of the room. The stairs were in their typical location, a few feet in front of the front door. A fire blazed to their right and two stiff-looking armchairs

encompassed the hearth of the flames. Furnishing was meager, merely a side table, a small bookcase, the two armchairs, the dining table and chairs and the kitchen. A scratchy throw rug divided the living from the dining room. A few paintings of ancient landscapes, a family portrait, and a portrait of a young man in a blue lacy outfit with a tri-hat rested above the mantle of the fireplace. What the girl had pulled down as a shade was only a thick woven sheet tied onto a crude curtain bar nailed above the window.

"It's really to keep the draft out," she stated as she tucked the corners of the yellowed sheet into the recesses of the window sill.

"Thanks for taking us in," Allen said gratefully. She could hear the rain coming in torrents outside now. The wind had definitely picked up, too. /Maybe that's why no one was outside...they knew the rain was coming./

Kelly shook off his jacket, paused midway, then ensued on peeling it off of himself and held it out draped over his arm. Allen did the same with hers. The girl stared at them for a moment then hurriedly informed them of a coat stand in the corner behind the front door. After the two hung it up, she motioned for the two armchairs.

"Thanks," the two tourists murmured and uncomfortably took a seat, exchanging a curious look with each other, their eyes wondering why she was being so hospitable. Kelly obviously didn't care as much as Allen did as he turned to the fire and rubbed his hands together. Allen looked up at the girl. Her inquisitive expression abruptly turned into a scowl. She looked as if she were about to speak when she paused for a minute, appearing to be listening for something. The wind was at a howl now, whistling through the firs that lined the houses across the street. Allen then heard what the girl was listening for: a muffled snore gargled through the stairwell. The girl, probably not older than fourteen, immediately huffed and put her hands on her hips. She clearly acted and talked older than she looked.

"I thought I told you two not to come back!"

Kelly turned around and stared at her tone.

Allen intervened. "We're just journalists, we're working for a company that wants to do an article on this town," she attempted.

"Why didn't you listen to my advice? It's for your own sake!" Her last comment sounded more like a desperate plea than a statement.

"Well um...we're getting paid for it,"

The girl squinted her eyes. She looked confused.

"Basically, we're taking pictures and writing stories of this place...Norchisburg it's called? That's what some guy told us."

"Yes..." The girl looked as if she were about to add something, but changed her mind at the last moment. She sighed and walked away to the dining room.

Allen and Kelly looked at each other and shrugged. The rain continued to drum on the window.

"Glad she put that thing over the window," Kelly said quietly. "'Fraid to see what'd be wandering out there right now," he finished with a wink.

Allen glowered back at him.

The girl came back dragging a chair with her, promptly sitting down after setting it between the two guests.

"You do realize you can't go back to wherever you're from?"

"Say what?" Kelly exclaimed before Allen could even put in a word.

"This is Norchisburg...My apologies, I didn't introduce myself. I am Aubrianna Pickering."

The guests exchanged their introductions, and Kelly interrupted Allen once again.

"So this is fucking Norchisburg, what's the big deal? Why can't we leave?"

Aubrianna winced at his sordid language, but said nothing. "This is Norchisburg," a look of compassion mixed with pity stared back at them. "Few come to this place, and no one leaves...alive, anyway."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" Kelly remarked, ignorant to the native's impartiality.

"Norchisburg...the Village of the Damned." She whispered the last part.

Kelly opened his mouth, but stopped when her answer sunk in.

Allen sat stupefied. /What the hell did we get ourselves into? Old folk tales...fantasy worlds...time travel, what the fuck is going on?/ A million questions clouded her mind. Suddenly her business instincts kicked in and she pulled out her pad and pencil and jotted down a few things. Aubrianna looked at her curiously.

"So," Allen started. "When you say the Village of the Damned-"

"SHH!!" Aubrianna waved her arms intensely and looked to the front door. The driving rain pounded the face of the structure, its vibrations shifting from the gusts of wind. "Don't say that out loud!" She hissed.

"Sorry!" Allen replied, making another note on the paper. "Well...how do you mean that we can't go back? Are you going to steal our passports or something?"

Kelly leaned forward and reached behind to ensure himself his wallet was still there.

"No...it's not that. Everyone knows you're here - well, the sensible ones at least," she distastefully looked up at the ceiling. "The governor won't let you leave."

"The governor?"

"Governor...Duke...Prince ...Whatever ye folks call them. He rules this town, Governor Killington."

"I see..."

"So how come we can't leave? Why won't he let us?" Kelly questioned.

"Mm..." Aubrianna was silent.

"Come on, who's it gonna hurt?" Kelly persuaded.

Aubrianna gazed into the snapping flames. Allen waited patiently for a reply as she was used to her customers thinking out their answers before replying; Kelly, not so patiently. Finally, Aubrianna responded, her voice lowered so much that the two had to lean forward to catch her words.

"Most of the people here are cursed...banished here because of a life of crime, their past, whatever makes them the most vile of creatures on earth. This town used to be a small, countryside village. Many merchants used to come to this place trading all kinds of goods. I'm sure you noticed the lighthouse. Yonder this town, there used to be docks and a small section of a village for the trade ships to come in and exchange their wares. That stopped centuries ago."

“And what did you do that banished you here?” Kelly inquired, his voice lowered.

Aubrianna shook her head. “My father and I lived here. We’re cursed involuntarily; we did nothing. My mother died when she gave birth to me, and my father is a drunk.”

Mr. Pickering gave a resounding snore right then as if to confirm her testimonial.

“But I don’t understand why this place-“

Aubrianna put a finger to her lips and shushed Kelly.

They noticed the rain had stopped, maybe just moments ago, as well as the wind. It was still silent though. Aubrianna got up and scampered to the window, adjusting the curtain ever so slightly and peering out of it. She stood there for a moment, then pushed back the curtain and returned to her seat. She stared back at them.

“So um...how come this place is stuck in like, the medieval times?”

Aubrianna’s expression said otherwise.

“Well I mean, you guys don’t use electricity or have running water or anything – I mean granted your’e caved in by forests but the nearest town is about thirty minutes away from here,” Kelly asked, now as interested in the conversation as Allen.

“E-lec-tricity?” Aubrianna questioned.

“Holy shit, you don’t know what it is?” Kelly sat back in his chair.

The dumbfounded look told him ‘no’.

“Uh,” Kelly scratched his head. “Uh...wow...I don’t get it.”

Allen pursed her lips and scratched away on the pad. Kelly was silent and waited for Allen to say something intelligent.

“You don’t even know what an automobile is?” Allen asked.

Aubrianna shook her dark-haired head, her dark eyes questioning. “No, but tell me,” she implored.

“Have you ever gone on the bridges here and seen those fast colored things whiz by underneath?”

“No...”

Allen looked at Kelly. There was nothing else to say!

All three jumped when a rap came on the door.

“Go to the kitchen!” Aubrianna jumped up from her chair and hissed at them.

The two hastily stood up and huddled into the kitchen.

They heard her pad to the door. There was a single knock and four short knocks followed. The door creaked open just as it did for them, then quickly shut.

“It’s alright,” Aubrianna called out, but not loud enough to wake her unconscious father upstairs.

The two came out like two timid foxes. Allen was surprised to see a young man, probably in his early twenties, standing beside the girl. He had the bluest eyes she had ever seen a man have.

“Catharine Allen,” she immediately extended a hand.

The young man looked down at her hand uncertainly and peered back up at her.

"You're not a Lady," he declared. Allen was taken aback.

"Yes I am, I'm twenty-two!"

Now it was Aubrianna and her friend's turn to be taken aback. Aubrianna waved it off after a second. "Let me introduce my comrade, Jesse Addams."

"Did you already tell them about the curse?" Jesse turned to Aubrianna. She nodded and motioned for them to return to their places facing the hearth. They heard the two inhabitants whisper back to each other, then Jesse stepped forward and pulled up the chair Aubrianna had been utilizing. He looked at both of the guests before beginning. Allen couldn't help but stare at him.

"First of all, do you want to live?" He asked.

"Um, yeah," Kelly replied matter-of-factly.

Allen just nodded.

"Well, it's because since ye fools are already in this town, there's a slim chance to nothin' that you'll live to see tomorrow."

"What?!" Kelly sat back infuriated. "What you mean that I won't see tomorrow! What the hell is up with this friggin' place!"

Jesse seemed unmoved by Kelly's reaction. "Your attachment to life is strong. You may make it through tonight...but the night after will be the ceremony. If he doesn't take you by tonight, the townsfolk will do it for him."

"Wait, wait, wait, who is this 'he' you're talkin' about?" Kelly demanded.

Jesse just looked at him as Aubrianna stood silent behind him.

"I'm asking you guys a question," Kelly insisted, looking up at Aubrianna.

"Can't say," he replied.

Kelly sat fuming for a moment until a light bulb came atop his head.

"You mean Governor Killington's gonna kill me?"

Jesse, with a small bit of surprise escaping his expression, nodded.

"Fuckin' piece of...alright, I'm leaving," Kelly stood up. Allen looked up at him, alarmed. Jesse instantly followed his actions and grabbed his arm.

"My apologies, but there really is no way you're going to get out of here."

"Why the fuck not? I came in here myself didn't I? I'll get out the same damn way," he shoved Jesse's touch away.

"I can't let you do that," Jesse intervened. Aubrianna tentatively edged toward the front door. "For your own sake," Jesse beseeched, "you really don't want to do that. Things are worse outside these walls - at least it will be a civilized death here."

"You guys talk like there's no hope! Seriously, come on, there's a way around this bullshit!"

Jesse was unphased by the cursing.

"Please, there has to be a way," Allen stepped in. She had let all this information sink in, now it was time for her brains to plot a strategy.

Jesse shook his head. "You've already been marked. You won't make it far, even if you did escape."

Allen stood in silence. She looked at Aubrianna for sympathy. Aubrianna looked back at her, eyes empty.

"It is still daytime, so you are safe for now...until the sun sets. I hope you believe in the True Spirit."

"...'True Spirit'?" Kelly said disdainfully.

"Yes..." Suddenly Aubrianna turned to Jesse. "The Temple of Good Hope..." She turned back to Allen. "Go to the temple...at least you will receive a blessing."

"A blessing?" Kelly scorned.

"Yes. Go out to the north and make your first turn...Faith Street. There's a temple there...Cleric Darby will give you good words."

Jesse nodded and turned for the door.

"Quickly, before you cause unnecessary commotion."

Allen and Kelly realized that they were being evicted and without a word, stole back outside, Aubrianna quickly closing the door behind them. Her and Jesse peeked out of the window and stared after the departing unwelcome guests.

"Do you think they'll make it?" Aubrianna asked quietly.

Jesse shook his head dully. "It will be the same as it always was."

"But that was seven years ago."

"What is seven years to the past four centuries?" Jesse turned his head away from the window and despondently stared into the fire.

Aubrianna was silent. As the two disappeared past her line of vision, she put the curtain back and sighed.

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The temple wasn't far at all, merely three houses down the road. The two said nothing the entire way. There was nothing to say. As they passed through the front gate – a small white picket fence surrounded the premise of the building – Kelly spoke up.

"Can you feel that?"

"No..." Allen suspiciously looked around.

"I sure as hell can," Kelly frowned and walked on.

"Feel what?" Frustrated, Allen tugged on his sleeve but he ignored her. He pushed through the old doors, whose iron hinges amazingly didn't creak and squeal. The door shut silently behind them and the two stopped and looked in awe.

The interior was darkened save the thin colored light seeping in through the stained glass windows and the candle stands that accompanied every column that rose up high into the depths of the cathedral ceiling. A massive archway separated the foyer from the sanctuary, immaculate detail embroidering every square inch of the walls. It smelled of moldy wood, yet a sweet incense hung in the air, giving it a musty sentiment.

The two slowly tiptoed into the sanctuary, still gaping at the massive arches that rose from the columns, illuminated by the flickering candles. When they turned to look at the altar, they inhaled quickly.

Upon entering, they had failed to notice a stream of heavenly pure light beaming onto a statue of the Christ in thorns in the center of the stage.

As they came closer, they noticed a bright blue-tinged spherical aura flitting about the ray of light. Kelly peered upwards and noticed a thin-paned skylight in the steeple above. But he couldn't take his eyes of the sphere of bouncing light.

It came towards them.

"Um...Kelly? What the hell is that thing?" Allen gripped Kelly's arm and took a step back.

"Greetings, my friends," a voice resonated throughout the front chamber of the sanctuary. The dancing flame now circled around them, up and down, and finally stopped in front of them, floating about eye-level and moving slightly, as if breathing.

"Who...what are you??" Allen stammered.

The flare shuddered, as if withholding a chuckle.

"I am the spirit of the Cleric Darby, one who has abode here since the beginning."

"Here?"

"Yes. This is the Temple of Good Hope, my child. If you are in need of shelter, all are welcome here, even outsiders such as yourselves."

"But...how are you – how did – oh I give up!"

This time, the spirit let out a laugh. Kelly stood in stunned silence.

"You are new here," the voice sounded around them. "the citizens of this village may not be so open to you, but you may rest assured here. This is a sacred place; nothing evil can overtake its borders."

"Thanks...can you tell me more about this place?" Allen, although she didn't quite believe it herself, pulled out her pad anyway and whipped out her pencil.

"This village is rich in history and holds many known people, well or infamous. Explore it, discover this village for your own. Just know that this is a safe haven for all."

"How're we supposed to explore? Someone told us we're doomed to die," Kelly finally piped up.

"Ah yes, the curse. I almost forgot. It has been a while since this village has seen an outsider. Seven years ago if I am correct."

"What happened to them?" Allen questioned, scribbling away. /I'm taking notes from a ball of light, this is ridiculous! How crazy can this trip get!/"

"Unfortunate, they were. Alas, many have met the same fate one way or another for a very long time."

"What happens to them?" Allen tapped the pencil on her pad. Aubrianna's words of having only till dusk made her a bit impatient and aggravated. She didn't quite believe it – she didn't want to.

"They departed this world."

"Just tell me they died," Allen grumbled to herself, scribbling something on the paper.

"So who lives here that's infamous?" Kelly asked, seemingly rather fascinated with the flare. "And how...are you what a spirit looks like?"

"Ah, my child," the flare darted closer to Kelly. "You have many questions, yet none has come forward to answer them for you. Stay a while and learn, for few come here to take note of my words."

Kelly turned to Allen. "I'm chillin' here for a bit," he told her, taking a seat as if he was convinced she didn't believe him. "Go on," he waved his hand. "I know you like exploring, go on."

Allen gaped at him, a scowl appearing on her forehead.

"Children," the flare fluttered between them. "This is part of the cause of death. Please, forgive each other, this hostility is futile and needless."

Allen paused for a moment, then huffed.

"Alright. I'm going out to look around then...why don't you take some notes-" she tore off a few sheets of paper from her pad and dropped it on Kelly's lap, "and make yourself useful. I'll come back before sunset."

"Ah, so you think the superstitions are true then, eh?" Kelly raised a brow.

"...no!" Allen cried back. She clutched her pad to her chest and turned around for the entrance. She stopped midway and turned around. "Thank you Cleric Darby."

"The pleasure is mine," it replied. It danced in front of the reclined Kelly, and the muffled voices were muted as Allen closed the front door.

The fresh air hit her like thin air, the stifled temple making her tired and sleepy. Faith Street laid out before her. She could see Aubrianna's house at the end of the street. She decided she would keep a map of where she went, in case she needed to make a run for it back to the temple. Somehow, she felt a little more creeped out now that she was alone.

She cautiously crept around what seemed to be an abandoned open market stand. She no longer felt like a fool sneaking around this pastoral village. There was something definitely wrong with the place, like unseen spirits wandered the streets.

Allen peeked around from all fours around a barrel and found herself overlooking a square surrounded by quaint-looking shops and short stands shaded by low-hanging trees. Just like that, the sun had come out, and besides the glisten of the rain moments ago on the cobblestone, it looked like the prefect spring day.

To Allen's surprise, doors opened at once and women dressed in conservative dresses and aprons trotted out, some with baskets in hand, others trailing young children, and yet more adjusting their bonnets and smoothing ruffles in their skirts and eagerly resuming their position behind stands and disappearing back indoors to finish unfinished business.

"What the hell happened?" Allen wondering curiously to herself. Hoping it was safe, she stood up just in time as the stand keeper where she hid arrived back to his spot. He visibly jumped when he saw her, then quickly averted his gaze.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," he exclaimed.

Allen smiled nervously. /At least not everyone is cold and scared as Aubrianna/ she thought as she opened her mouth. "My apologies, sir," she paused and took a slight bow. When she looked up, he was looking at her as if he had seen a ghost. She continued. "I um, I seemed to have lost my way, I was wondering if you could direct me to a town hall or something like it."

"T-town hall?" He squinted at her like she was insane. "You don't w-want to go there" he sputtered, "go to a tavern...or something...and d-don't look like that!"

Allen dejectedly glanced down at her clothes – what the man was staring at – and managed a smile and a thanks.

She turned around to face the square. No one had apparently noticed her yet. She knew she had no way of bartering anything to get clothes – Aubrianna clicked in her mind and despite the offended shopkeeper, she short-cutted through his stall and made her way back.

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“So how are we gonna die in this place?” Kelly mused.

“Ahh,” the aura bounced back and forth, as if shaking its head. “We do not discuss such matters in this House of Holy.”

“What kind of church is this?!” Kelly proclaimed, insulted.

“A place of good will, uncorrupted like many of the house of worship in this village.”

“The village of the damned?” Kelly quizzed. He nonchalantly observed his fingernail and took a little bite, all the while watching this weird object breathing in space before him. He’s already slipped a few photographs of it, but after it developed and he saw the final image, it revealed nothing but the empty background of the temple. /So I’m talking to my imagination.../

“Yes, it can be referred as that.”

“Why?”

“Many live here, and most are an assortment of the wickedness of mankind from the ages, some you may know, some, not. And then there are the lost souls of those who have had no choice; those are my children.”

“Wicked people? Like who?”

“Why don’t you go find while there is still light?” The aura waved up and down as if enjoying every one of Kelly’s demands.

“Cause I’d rather not.”

“Very well then. What else would you like to know, my curious young man?”

“Hmm,” Kelly pondered for a moment. “So am I gonna be safe staying here tonight?”

The aura dropped a few inches, as if saddened by his inquiry. “You must seek the truth, my child. No substance or material can save your life, but a true heart is sure to keep you from harm’s way.”

“True heart?” Kelly’s brows furrowed and he sat up for a moment. “Quit the gibberish and tell me what I have to do to get out of this place.” He sat back down.

The blue light shook its head again. “Your strength is encouraging, but your anger inhibits you. Take into mind the things I have said. Seek the truth, and it will set you free.”

“Kelly scowled again, obviously not paying attention to the minister’s bidding. “That sounds like you stole that form somewhere. But nevermind, where can I find the truth?”

The aura excitedly flitted as it answered. “Go as north as you can. Never cross to the other side, for there is much danger and strife to the east.”

"Am I looking for anyone?"

"The sons of the north. Faith."

"...Faith?" Kelly muttered. He figured that was his queue to pack his bags.
"Um...thanks."

"My prayers are with you, my son," the aura called out after Kelly before the front doors slammed shut behind him. "North," he mused, tapping his lip and looking around. People were milling about now, and it looked as if nothing had ever happened. Allen...whatever, she can handle herself, he presumed, and headed in whatever direction seemed north to him.