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Henry keeps the camera rolling as Jameson lifts a hand, stilling his audience in an instant. “Old Mrs. Blackmore,” Jameson whispers. A shrill gust of wind trails his voice, and the girl in front of me squeals. Jameson turns to dart her a look before repeating the words. “Old Mrs. Blackmore,” he says, drawing it out with a ghoulish flair.

I nudge Henry. “Since when did this become a Jameson O’Sullivan documentary?”

Henry swats an elbow at me, camera still aimed at Jameson, who has the entire crowd hanging on to his every word like he’s some sort of prophet. “Old Mrs....” Jameson’s head snaps to the side. “Did you guys see—”

“Oh, come on!” shouts Diego Rodriguez, who shouldn’t even be here because he’s only a junior.

Jameson laughs and adds in a barely audible purr, “Blackmore.”

Then he points a meaty index finger toward the window. Before we can look, he clutches at his throat, throwing his enormous body to the floor with a thud.

The room bursts into laughter.

Henry attempts to tug me along, but I stand my ground. “Hold on,” I say. “I really think we should stick around for the part where he falls through the floor.” To behold such a sight would be worth more than two hundred bucks. After the way Jameson, Diego, and the rest of that group have treated me over the years, I hope he gets stuck below the floor and has to live out the rest of his life down there.

Henry takes the camera on a tour of the place as I wait for my dream to materialize, only to watch a very pleased--with--himself Jameson pick himself up off the ground. He dusts off his pants and turns to meet my gaze. “Hey there, Stafford. Surprised to see you here.”

“Why’s that?” I ask, trying to look bored.

“Just a spooky place is all,” he says. “And you come from a family of cowards.”

My fists curl at my sides as I charge over the cracked bathroom tiles straight for him.

I only make it a few steps before a hand grips my bicep. “Whoa, whoa,” says a deep voice.

I wrench my arm away, spinning to stare down my new target. Except I have to stare up, because my target is Caleb Durham, an irritatingly gorgeous boy with a soccer player’s physique.

He’s also someone I despise with my whole being. Caleb is just as bad as Jameson—probably worse, because as kids, he made me believe that he and I were best friends. And the second my dad bailed, Caleb joined Jameson and the rest of those jerks in making my life a living hell. Every year it got worse, from stealing my lunch in grade school to spreading a rumor that I copied Jameson’s math test in eighth grade. Like the guy can even *add*, much less solve linear equations.

“I don’t think you want to do whatever you were planning,” Caleb says, voice as cool as his expression. His charcoal--gray hoodie is pulled up over his dust--brown hair, casting his face in shadow. I make out only a vague outline of his perfect nose and strong jaw, but those hazel eyes glimmer through.

“Are you threatening me?” I ask, glaring at him.

“No,” he says, lifting a hand and taking a step backward. “I was trying to help.”

He’s pretending to be nice, so I won’t see it coming when he and Diego trip me or barricade me inside one of these godforsaken cottages. All the girls in school swoon over Caleb, but I’m done falling for his act. His charm makes him all the more diabolical. Like a handsome, hazel-eyed anti--Christ.

"Instead of *helping* me, you should go do the stupid chant so the old lady can feast on your soul."

"Eden," he starts, but Victoria Whitlock, junior class president and last year's sophomore homecoming princess, steps in between us, holding a can of beer.

"Let her go," Victoria says, turning to give me a once-over. Her long shiny dark hair falls in smooth waves despite the humidity, and she grins at me with perfectly painted red lips. "Eden versus Jameson is a fight I want to see."

"Isn't it past your bedtime?" I snap at her. Like Diego, Victoria is only a junior. But it's typical for the two of them to show up at senior things. The clique members barely function as individuals. And from the way Victoria's fingers are trailing over Caleb's arm, there's obviously something going on there too.

For a slice of a moment, her eyes narrow like I've hit a nerve. But she takes a swig of her beer and lowers it with a smirk. "Like I'd miss the last chance to do this."

"Do *what*, exactly? Get wasted or murdered? Because I think we could probably arrange bo—"

"Eden!" Henry interrupts from the far side of the room, camera poised. "Do you even want this job?" He crosses the room, still filming as my classmates proceed to drink and chant into the murky glass.

"Hey!" Kayla Díaz shouts at him, covering her face. "You can't film me, De Rossi! My mom will flip if she finds out about all the laws I broke tonight."

Henry ignores her, stopping at my side. "We're heading out," he tells me.

"Aw," Victoria says. "You two are so cute together. The job is...what exactly? Pretending to be your girlfriend?"

Henry turns the camera on her. "Victoria Whitlock, Fairport High junior," he says in his deep reporter's voice. "What brings you to these cursed grounds tonight? Does this mean the seniors failed to keep their secret under wraps?"

Not one to miss a camera opp, Victoria shoves her beer into Caleb's hand and runs her polished fingertips through her hair. "Oh no, your secret is very safe. Trust me, I don't want parents or cops showing up any more than you do. I just have my ways of finding out stuff. And with this being the last chance to repeat that horrible night ten years ago, I had to be here. I mean, come this time next year, this entire place will be a brand--new resort."

Ten years ago, the Fairport High senior class held the first overnighter here in the ruins. That was when the first alleged victim of the curse was found. Farah Palmer. She was three days short of her eighteenth birthday when they found her in one of these cottages with her skull smashed in. "Aren't you nervous though?" Henry asks. "After what happened to Farah? After what happened to Esther Lamb?"

Esther was the second and most recent victim. Only two years ago, at just sixteen, she was found murdered, just like Farah—only more injuries had been inflicted upon Esther's body, which lay crumpled and bruised just outside the Village fence. Like she'd been killed and then tossed back over.

"Hell yeah, I'm nervous," Victoria says with a laugh. "Isn't that the point? Two kids died after stepping foot inside the Village ruins. Any of us could be next."

A thread of guilt spins in my gut. I know this documentary is important to Henry, but it's starting to feel very wrong. People laughing and making jokes about all this when Esther was a friend and classmate. When her younger sister, Naomi, who's been through hell and back, is a fellow senior.

"So then, you do believe in the curse?" Henry asks, bringing me back to the task at hand.

Victoria shrugs. "I might become a believer by the end of the night."

"Or you might become dead," I mumble under my breath.

I hear a chuckle come from beneath Caleb's hood, but when I glance over, he's back to eyeing me icily.

Henry lowers the camera. "Great. Thank you, Victoria. I'll cut the beer out of the beginning—you know, *if* I use this footage." He snaps his fingers. "Eden, the form."

"The what?" I ask, still savoring Victoria's open--mouthed expression at possibly being cut from the documentary.

"The consent form. You got everyone to sign one, right?"

Oh. "Uh, still working on it," I say, digging out the forms from Henry's bag.

"Well, hurry up. We haven't seen any of the key locations yet."

"Right."

By *key*, Henry means the places people died. He made me study up on those too, not that I needed much studying. Every kid in this town grew up whispering about the murders at sleepovers. Eavesdropping at beach barbecues when our parents' conversations inevitably turned that way after one too many drinks. We even covered the murders as part of our local history unit in fifth grade.

The first location was the Blackmores' personal residence, the mansion set at the edge of the cliff. That's where they found seventeen-year-old Nicolas Blackmore twenty-five years ago. The story goes that Hazel Blackmore, the boy's mother as well as the founder and owner of Fairport Village, slit his throat that cold December night. Mrs. Blackmore had been slowly losing her mind, they say. The town saw it. Fairport Village guests saw it too. Even the woman's husband had called the police on occasion before that fateful night, when he'd failed to calm her out of a fit.

I finish collecting signatures from the kids in the cottage, a couple of whom decline permission. I can't say that I blame them. Sure, Henry says the most you can get for trespassing around here is a small fine. That he can even change the names and do that freaky face-altering technology if participants request it. But taking part is a risk, especially with college on the horizon for many of us. And the school year starts in three days, so we're just in time for some hefty suspensions.

I shove the forms into Henry's bag and squeeze past two girls huddled beneath a blanket on the decrepit porch steps.

"Did you see that?" one of them squeaks, pointing at the rock wall on the beach side of the resort. The blanket shrouds the girl's head, so I can't tell who she is.

"I think so," the other one whispers. "You want to just go?"

"Mm--hmm," the first answers. They stand, blanket still draped over them as they hurry down the porch and back toward the busted fence.

I shine my flashlight at the place the first girl pointed. I only see rocks and the palm trees dancing in the breeze.

"Coming?" Henry asks, which makes me jump. "I think I want the thirty-five for this," he says, and it takes me a second to realize he's asking for his other camera. I locate it inside his bag and we swap. He doesn't say another word before striding ahead, camera filming. I follow, wondering if I should tell him about the girls who left—and what they said—before someone tries to pin their disappearance on the curse.

Overgrown weeds and shrubbery consume the cobblestone path, forcing us to step over broken cement, gravel, and some mystery terrain that squelches and bubbles underfoot. I aim my flashlight ahead until it lands on something at the edge of the property that makes my insides drop, like the final roller-coaster plunge.

The Blackmore mansion, the family's residence. Formidable, even in its decrepitude, it looms over us like a ravenous creature. From the minimal research I did for this gig, I know the house was constructed back in the 1920s. When the Blackmores purchased the property, they focused on building the cottages, neglecting the paint and new windows their own home desperately needed. The porch pillars were tilted and patches of shingles were missing from the roof, but the Blackmores never got around to renovations before the murder.

Now, there's hardly a roof to speak of, and the pillars look like they could simply topple over and plummet into the ocean with one strong gust of wind. The mansion is visible from down on the beach, but this is the first time I've seen it up close. In the thick darkness, it takes every ounce of my willpower to not drop Henry's bag and turn around.

"This mansion is where the legend began," Henry narrates, his voice slicing through the stillness. "When the police showed up, they found Nicolas dead, his sister hiding, his father weeping, and his mother covered in blood. They dragged Hazel Blackmore away in handcuffs. Several Fairport Village guests had awoken and made their way to the mansion, where they witnessed the woman screaming and thrashing like an animal. By the time her case was set for trial, the Village had shut down, and her husband, Silas Blackmore, and their daughter had moved away to avoid publicity."

Moonlight pierces the clouds, illuminating the dilapidated manor sitting on its sandstone throne. "The town of Fairport and the media had questions," Henry continues. "For example, why did she do it? What happened to the murder weapon? Mrs. Blackmore never answered any questions and never proclaimed her innocence or guilt. The first time she ever spoke publicly about the case ended up being the last. When she was moved to the county prison preceding trial, handcuffed and clothed in prison garb, she proclaimed to the gathered reporters at the top of her lungs, 'From this moment on, anyone who sets foot inside Fairport Village will die!'"

The words, though familiar, hit me like an icy wind. "That night," Henry says, voice quieting, "after settling into her new cell in the county prison, Mrs. Blackmore slit her own throat with a stolen razor. The case never went to trial."

Even from outside the building, I can picture the blood spattering the foyer where that boy was found. I try to imagine his last minutes. Had he seen it coming? Had he known he was about to die at his own mother's hand?

When I agreed to help Henry, I knew I'd have to go inside that house. But now I'm not sure I can do it.

"Hey, Henry," I say, still inventing my excuse, "what if we—"

"This way," he says, heading toward a gravel path instead of the house.

A whoosh of relief floods me as I hurry after him over the path that snakes between two cottages. We reach a courtyard with a monstrous fountain at its center—a headless stone mermaid surrounded by murky sludge. Nearby is a crooked picnic table with an inverted bench on one side, its legs sticking straight up like impaling posts.

I'm about to ask where we're headed when the bushes off to my right rustle. I turn, Henry's bulky bag knocking my arm and startling me half to death.

My gaze darts over to the bushes, its leaves swaying with the coastal breeze. Of course it was nothing. Just some stupid legend.

That's when I catch a flutter, quick as feathers.

I watch as a figure rises up behind the shrubbery. Like a shadow, it swells and pulses, stretching tall. Shivering silver--black in the glow of my flashlight.

Her.

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