

WELCOME
TO
CAMP
KILLER

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*For my past students.
Thank you for everything you taught me.
You're all pretty awesome.*



CHAPTER 1

“Who wants to hear a ghost story?” asked Chad.

Holly laughed as a chorus of groans came from the group. They watched Chad poke the sad little campfire with a branch, but it was drizzling, normal for the north of England, and he was fighting a losing battle. Holly wanted to tell Chad there was no point, but he was her new boss, and she didn’t want to appear rude.

Fionn spoke up instead. “Chad, mate, I think we all just want to get to bed. We have a big day tomorrow.” Fionn’s dark fringe was plastered to their forehead in thick strands and their eyeliner more smudged than usual. “Unless you want to hear a *real* ghost story, that is?” Fionn asked. “About this place?”

“I do!” Rich squealed, his mouth full of melted marshmallow. “I knew this place had to be

haunted as soon as we got here. I mean, there's a suit of armour on the main staircase!"

"I'm afraid that's not original," said Chad. "Just for decoration."

"Listen up then," Fionn said, rubbing their hands together. They clearly relished the way the rest of the group leaned in, looking forward to the story. The fire crackled weakly and Holly stared into the gloomy flames, waiting for Fionn to start. "Once upon a—"

"Wait!" Rich bellowed, jumping to his feet. The group groaned.

"What is it now?" Fionn said, rolling their eyes.

"I need a jumper," Rich explained. "Back in a tick!" He ran over to his cabin and the group started laughing. Rich had taken the spotlight off Fionn, who looked furious.

Holly glanced around the chattering group as they waited for Rich to come back. There were eight counsellors in all, and their boss, Chad. Chad had worked in American summer camps for years and he'd stayed in touch with some of the

British students who had worked at the camps during their summer holidays.

When Chad had the idea to start a similar business in the UK, he had contacted the former students and invited their teenage kids to come and work with him at Camp Miller. Holly had been delighted when her mum told her about the job – not only was she going to earn some money as a camp counsellor, but the whole thing just sounded like fun.

They had been doing some training so they could run the various activities, including archery, rock climbing and kayaking. So far it had all been a bit of a laugh, but things were about to get serious as the first kids arrived tomorrow. Holly wondered if the other counsellors were feeling as nervous as she was.

They were paired up into cabins and she went through a list in her head. Cabin one – Brianna and Ava. Brianna was the most organised person Holly had ever met, and Holly was *organised*. Ava didn't say much, but she constantly fidgeted with a small rose quartz crystal that was currently reflecting the light from the fire. She seemed like a bundle of anxiety, but apparently she was

training for the Olympics. Holly thought that would make anyone anxious.

Cabin two was home to Grayson and Ismail. They both seemed nice and had a gentle sense of humour – Holly knew the kids would love their daft jokes. Cabin four was Fionn and Rich. Holly looked at Fionn, always cool and collected, and tried not to feel totally intimidated by them. Rich was tall and skinny and generally over the top about everything. He and Fionn probably drove each other crazy in that cabin.

That just left cabin three. Holly shared it with Emma, the messiest person alive. Holly wondered what her fellow counsellors all thought of her, then decided she didn't care. Her dad had once said Holly's name suited her because she was pretty but spiky. She still didn't know if that was supposed to be a compliment.

Rich re-joined the group, settling down on one of the benches. "That's better. You may continue."

"Give me a second," Fionn said, and made a big deal of picking up one of the long wooden skewers. They stabbed a bloated white marshmallow with the pointy end, holding it over the fire without saying anything. A few

of the other counsellors giggled as the silence grew uncomfortable.

“Does anyone know the history of this place?” Fionn finally asked. A few people shrugged and some shook their heads. “Well, back in—”

“Wait, I know!” someone interrupted, a hand waving from the other side of the fire. Holly grimaced as Fionn narrowed their eyes at the hand’s owner, Brianna.

Holly was starting to get a bit fed up with Brianna, the Lead Counsellor and general know-it-all.

“It was a rhetorical question,” Fionn said coolly.

It was obvious Fionn was just as fed up. Brianna’s cheeks flushed in the firelight and her hand sank slowly as Fionn continued.

“As I was saying, back in the 1800s, this place was somebody’s home.” Fionn gestured towards the building that loomed over them. It was a greying mansion, built from local stone, and their camp was situated at the back of the house, in what used to be the gardens. “This super-rich dude, John Miller, built it for his wife, Dorothea.

She wanted a gothic mansion and the man delivered – towers, a secret rose garden, the lot.”

“So, what’s the ghost story?” Grayson demanded, sitting up straight and stretching his arms behind him.

He was sitting so close that Holly couldn’t help staring at his muscular arms that peeked out beneath the sleeves of his green Camp Miller polo shirt. She felt her cheeks grow warm at the thought of sitting by the fire with just him. Holly refocused on Fionn, hoping no one had noticed her blushing.

“It starts up there,” Fionn went on. “Can you see the platform around the top of the tower?” They pointed up to the sky and every head around the campfire turned to look. “That’s the Widow’s Walk.”

It was still light, but the building was tall and the black iron railings around the platform were hard to see against the grey sky.

Fionn continued, “Anyway, John Miller built Dorothea this house, complete with the Widow’s Walk she wanted. He was some kind of spice merchant, sailing around the world on a huge ship, the kind you’d see on *Pirates of the*

Caribbean. Dorothea asked for a walkway on top of the highest tower, where she could go and look out to sea when John was due to return. A classic tale, right? Lonely wife sadly awaits return of husband.”

“What happened to Dorothea?” Brianna whispered, and goosebumps prickled Holly’s arms. The rest of the group were quiet, entranced.

“Well, one day she climbed up the tower and onto the Widow’s Walk,” said Fionn. “John was due back that week and Dorothea spent hours up there, waiting and hoping for him to return. Up until this trip, he’d always made it home.”

“So, he didn’t come back?” Rich whispered.

“Oh, John came back,” Fionn said. They watched the edges of the marshmallow turn brown as they twisted it over the fire. “But this time, he wasn’t alone.”

“Damn,” Holly said, leaning back from the fire. “He didn’t bring back another woman?”

“Worse.” Fionn twisted their skewer and pushed it further into the flames. “He brought back a woman *and* their newborn son. Dorothea

had never been able to have children, so John had looked elsewhere for an heir to his fortune. What a guy, right? He expected them all to live together – the mother of his child would work as a housekeeper and Dorothea would raise their baby as her own. Can you imagine?”

“No,” Brianna said softly. “That’s awful.”

“So did Dorothea do it?” Grayson asked. “Look after the kid?”

“Hell no. The situation sent her mad. John and his new family were found dead, and then some hunters came across Dorothea’s body in the woods, by her beloved rose garden. She had crawled out there in her white nightgown, her legs mangled and broken. The legend goes that Dorothea was holding her own funeral flowers – red roses from her garden. There are locals who say she still haunts the place. That the house is cursed.”

“Creepy,” said Ava, who shuddered in the seat next to Grayson.

“Wait,” Grayson said, furrowing his brow. “You said ‘John and his new family were found dead’. You mean the other woman? And the kid?”

Fionn nodded.

“Wait,” whispered Brianna. “Even the baby?”

“Yep.”

“What happened?” Ava whispered.

Fionn finally pulled their marshmallow from the fire, pointing the flaming lump of sugar up to the top of the tower. “The legend says that Dorothea set the house on fire and jumped off the Widow’s Walk.”