

The Wildstorm Curse Eve Wersocki Morris

Prologue

Not all stories bring good to our world.

Some tales will fester, like weeds in a wood

Like thorns, bring darkness and block out the light Beware the shadow that clouds your mind

– And beware the one who conjures it.

Chapter 1

Kallie Tamm was never meant to arrive at Wildstorm Theatre Camp in the dead of night. However, after two missed trains, a broken-down bus and five stale sandwiches, it was dark when Kallie and her mum finally reached Littlewick-on-Marsh station. All Kallie knew was that they were somewhere in the Gloucestershire countryside and she was further from home than she had ever been before.

The darkness outside the taxi windows was thick as smoke. Kallie peered out, nervousness bubbling in her stomach, searching for some clue to the place she would be spending her summer holiday. The night gave nothing away. The occasional flicker of light from a cottage window was all that disturbed the blackness.

Kallie's mum sat beside her, leaning forward every ten minutes to remind the taxi driver of the address: Hollowstar House in the village of Merricombe. Kallie had never even heard of Merricombe before a month ago. She liked the name, though – saying it felt like chanting a spell.

At thirteen years old, teachers sometimes mistook Kallie as shy. She could often be quiet but that was only because her head was buzzing with stories and speeches for plays. Kallie's mum said she had a gift for daydreaming. But it was a gift that sometimes made it hard to make friends. And Kallie would know no one at the theatre camp. The thought made her insides plummet.

'We're here,' the taxi driver grunted.

Kallie looked out of the window. She could see the outline of a tall house, so wrapped up in plant life it could have been part of the hedge. There was a brass star above the front door. Kallie's mum prodded her out of the taxi.

'I think this is the place,' muttered her mum, looking up at the shadowy windows. There was no one around.

Kallie glanced up and down the lane. There were no street lights. No moon. The road ahead vanished into pitch black. It was as if the house was the only thing in existence and if Kallie took two steps forward, she'd fall off the earth into nothingness.

'Look – what's that?' Kallie stepped a little closer to her mum.

A light had appeared, like a single glowing eye. It moved swiftly closer, growing larger, until Kallie realised it was a torch.

'Kallie Tamm? I thought it might be you,' came a voice.

‘We’re here for the theatre camp,’ Kallie’s mum called back.

A figure stepped into the taxi’s headlamps. Kallie recognised her from the website: Jackie Masters, the director of Wildstorm Theatre Camp. Black-haired and uncommonly tall. She looked forbidding.

‘You’re late,’ Jackie observed, her mouth a thin line of disapproval.

Kallie was always very interested in people’s voices. Jackie had a hard voice, like a hammer knocking on nails.

‘We’re so sorry. We missed the change at Reading,’ Kallie’s mum stammered. ‘I’ve got to get the last train back to London. Early shift tomorrow.’ She turned to Kallie. ‘You’ll be OK, won’t you?’

‘Yes.’ Kallie nodded, but her heart was racing painfully. ‘I’ll – it’ll be fine, Mum. Don’t worry.’

Her mum squeezed her shoulders.

‘Have the best time, babe,’ her mum whispered, giving Kallie a final hug. ‘I’m so proud of you. Love you.’

Then she was gone, the taxi headlamps sweeping away into the blackness. Kallie stared after it, panic rising inside her. Everything was happening so quickly.

‘You’re too late to meet the rest of the cast tonight,’ said Jackie, scooping up Kallie’s bag as if it weighed nothing. ‘You’ve had a long journey. You need a good night’s sleep.’

Kallie felt light-headed and empty, as if half her body had been whisked away with her mum. Maybe this hadn’t been a good idea after all. Dazedly, she followed Jackie into Hollowstar House.

The house was a muddle of wooden beams, sloping ceilings and cushioned cubbyholes. Kallie almost forgot her nervousness as she stepped over the threshold. There were paintings and old maps lining the walls and mountainous bookshelves full of playscripts.

Despite her great height, Jackie moved quickly through the rooms and low doorways. Kallie hurried to catch up, breathing in the dusty warmth. She was just starting to get excited when Jackie spoke.

‘The house is off limits to the cast,’ she said briskly. ‘You’ll eat your meals out here.’

Her heart sinking, Kallie followed Jackie into the dark garden. A trail of fairy lights marked a path heading away from the house. Kallie would have found it beautiful had it not been for the darkness and the silence, still pressing in all around them. Jackie set off between the lights.

‘The Wildstormers camp in the meadow,’ said Jackie, with a jerk of her torch.

‘I don’t have a tent,’ said Kallie, half hoping Jackie would send her back to Hollowstar House.

‘That won’t be necessary.’

Kallie never considered that the theatre camp would involve actual camping. She’d never slept in a tent before.

At the end of the garden there was a hut with an orange lamp outside. This was the bathroom and shower – thankfully it had an electric light – and Jackie waited outside while Kallie hurriedly brushed her teeth. The night felt even darker when she emerged.

‘Everyone must be inside their tents at ten,’ said Jackie, gesturing to the meadow beyond the hut. ‘I advise getting your rest: putting on a play is hard work.’

Kallie could make out the spectral outlines of several tents. There were torches moving inside them, darting like fireflies, and the low rumble of voices. Kallie's throat tightened. She was glad she wasn't meeting the other kids tonight. The beam of Jackie's torch picked out a tent at the far end of the meadow.

'You can take that one. It's small but you'll fit. Here.' The director placed her torch in Kallie's hand. She paused, then gave her a surprisingly kind smile.

'You'll get used to our ways soon enough.' Jackie gave her a curt nod. 'Welcome to Wildstorm Theatre Camp, Kallie. Sleep well.'

And Jackie strode away, leaving Kallie alone in the dark.