



FRIDAY 27 OCTOBER 1848

I AM WRITING THIS BY the light of a lantern in a room above the butcher's shop in Great DUNMOW. This is the home of Tobias crowe, who is head gardener at The old Rectory. I am now about five years before the events with Damfino and his terrifying hunstmen.



When I arrived here, I stepped into a terrible storm. No one answered the rectory door, so I headed into town. It's just like it is now, only smaller and there are no cars. Just cart tracks and hoof prints - and everything smells of old smoke. The streets were empty - obviously - so I started knocking on doors, and once I mentioned the rectory they sent me here. The crowe's took me in, gave me dry clothes, and I've been trying to keep from under everyone's feet ever since.

MONDAY 30 OCTOBER 1848

OK, so two weird things happened today. The first was I met a boy who says he's a friend of the man who owns the rectory, Reverend Nathaniel Grey. Grey hasn't been living there for years and when I asked why, he replied, "The good reverend is off doing God's good work. Some mission in Peru."

The boy's name is Tom Darkin and he visits regularly to watch progress on the gardens. He spent ages scribbling in a leather book while the workmen came and went. He says he's all interested in the history of the town and the rectory, but I don't believe him. He was trying too hard to be super-

friendly. He was looking at me a lot and I tried to sneak a look at what he was scribbling but he was careful not to show me.

The second was that I discovered the Devil's stone! Well, that's not entirely true. It was the raven, really. The bird's been harassing the workmen all day, first the carpenters who were measuring for an arched oak door, then flapping about the heads of the men who are firing the red



bricks for the pathways. Tobias was pacing out the boundary hedge and finishing the plans for the underground irrigation channels, and got quite annoyed to be forever chasing off the creature. Plainly he didn't like the bird being around. He kept murling, "I think there's something out work here."

The bird kept squawking and flying back to this one grassy mound. I went to investigate and there found Tom and when I dug down I almost wet themselves when they dug up the earth-fast stone. That's the name they call it. Guess it's better than 'big, old rock'. Tobias says it's an obelisk marking this land as an ancient sacred space. "And what's doubly peculiar," he said, "is that the village children sing a nursery rhyme about a stone." I asked to hear it and almost wet myself when I did. Here it is and you'll see why:

STONE! STONE! THE TALLIS STONE
STAND BEFORE THE TALLIS STONE
ENTER THIS HOUSE THOSE WHO DARE
WHEN THE MOON IS DARK BEWARE!

SOULS! THE JIGGERS FIND YOU THERE.
GOING AROUND THE TALLIS STONE.

see, it's almost the exact same words as The Malison. And there I was thinking crazy kids from school had made it up! Looks like children have been daring each other to enter The old Rectory for a long, long time.



TUESDAY 31 OCTOBER 1848

The mysterious Tom returned today and started asking questions. It's All Hallow's Eve tonight, so everyone's talking about children stolen by fairies or goblins or even worse. He was asking me about where I came from and the stone and the door. Whether or not the labyrinth stood here in times past or not, no one can decide, but Tom thinks the rectory was built on top of an old thirteenth century stone circle (which nobody believes in as this makes it before the time of the Bible).

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Tonight it's the next Dead Moon and I'm going with Tom to the next place on the labyrinth. "Be wary," Tom said before we set off. "Take one too many steps from the path and you will be lost not just for hours or for days, but forevermore." I am sending this with the raven before we set out. But it's obvious that the rhyme, the legends, everything was set in place to keep everyone away when the gate between worlds opens... And tonight we go to do just that!

Letters from the
LABYRINTH
Sam

