

The Witch Hunter

By : Matthew Bissonette

A witch hunter in the middle ages has doubts if what he is doing is right. But during a murder investigation in the small English town of Dover, he will find redemption.



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by Matthew Bissonnette

The age of the witch hunts began during the early modern period in Europe. Europe was controlled by despotic kings who ruled over the land from their stone fortresses; but there was also another authority which also ruled over much of the land, the church. A small nobility enjoyed a lavish lifestyle while the common people toiled in the fields and served in the armies as kings waged war upon each other. This was an age where superstition and belief in the dark powers of evil still spread fear amongst the people. But this belief in superstition and the power of the church would come together to start a period of history where thousands of women and men would be put to death for the practice of witchcraft and conspiring with the devil himself. So began a time of fear and paranoia which spread across Europe and led to the witch trials.

The witch trials had their roots in the 13th century where the church harshly persecuted a number of heretical Christian sects, most notably the Cathars and the Knights Templar. The Cathars were a group of Christians in France who believed it was not God who created the world but the devil instead. Such beliefs naturally attracted the interest of the Catholic Church who decided to crush this heretical group. The pope, Innocent the Third, wanted the Cathars converted to the traditional view of the Christian religion, but this was difficult for the Cathars who were protected by some of the nobility of France. But this proved fruitless and the pope called for a Crusade, and the knights and barons of France hunted the Cathars, what followed was a short period where many of this religious order were tortured, murdered and even raped. This was only an example of what was to come in later centuries.

The first true witch trial occurred in Ireland, which was under the control of the English monarchy. A French Bishop had been appointed on the island in 1317, a man by the name of Richard Ledrede, who in later years became involved in a dispute with an influential family in Ireland. Richard Ledrede then accused a member of the family of witchcraft, a powerful woman named Alice Kyteler. The Bishop had one of her servants tortured, to death, who before his demise claimed that Alice had been in the service of the devil. She fled to France and the situation had raised the concerns of some Irish nobles who respected this family, Richard Ledrede's activities got him excommunicated by the Bishop of Dublin. Though this attempt to have someone punished for the crime of sojourning with the devil and his minions was unsuccessful, later trials would succeed.

The height of the witch trials would reach its climax during the Sixteenth century, as fear and suspicion spread across Europe. Communities across the continent began to proliferate rumors of their neighbors taking part in black sabbath, a secret meeting of witches where they would blaspheme God's son and partake in orgies with demons. So-called witch hunters, either servants of the church or private citizens, would go to towns and hunt for those who engaged in maleficium, harm committed by means of magic. Suspects were tortured to get confessions, and once obtained, would be executed; the most common method was being burned alive at the stake. For the span of three centuries, this witch hysteria would come in waves, countless souls would lose their lives.

Our story begins in the year 1578 as a man, notorious witch hunter Geoffrey Hall, began to doubt that he was doing a service of God.

The town of Banbury was a secluded community to the north of England near the border to Scotland. It was a village of simple wood homes surrounded by several farms, in the center of town was the small stone church

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and the town square. During a frigid morning in Autumn, the towns people had gathered at the square to watch a woman named Chelsey White be burned alive at the stake. The simple peasants, dressed in cloth garments, stood around a pole to which the woman, a young blonde with fair skin, was tied, at its base was a pile of lumber. The crowd cheered as a man dressed in a black robe approached the pole with a blazing torch in his hand. Chelsey cried and continually professed her innocence.

“ I am not a witch,” she screamed, “ I serve God, not the devil.”

Someone in the crowd yelled, “ burn, burn for lying with the devil!”

Chelsey began to pray as a guilt stricken Geoffrey watched from behind the crowd.

Geoffrey Hall was a tall, muscular man with prematurely gray hair though he was only of the age of 37. He was dressed in black clothing and a gray cloak which flapped about in a mild wind from the North. His piercing hazel eyes betrayed the guilt he felt, for he looked both melancholy and sad.

Beside him was his portly servant, Clayton Smith, who said, “ so master, we have rid the world of another witch.”

Geoffrey looked sympathetically at Chelsey and replied, “ no, we have sent another woman to her death.”

Clayton asked, “ what is it with you lately, you seem to feel sorry for these criminals.”

Geoffrey said nothing, but watched as the executioner set the pile of wood at the base of the pole on fire as Chelsey began to scream. He turned away when her clothes caught fire.

Geoffrey Hall was of noble birth, gifted athletically since youth, he had been a knight in service to a baron. He had fought in two small wars and had gained the reputation as a fierce warrior, though when the baron had asked him to help root out witches in England, he turned in his sword and armor and began to hunt those who had given their allegiance to the devil. In the beginning he believed that people were involved in witchcraft and were serving Lucifer, and had sent many to their end. But even then he did not engage in acts like torture against the accused, but would simply act upon accusations made by neighbors and friends of the guilty. But he had witnessed tortures perpetrated by others of his trade and it had always made him uneasy. But as the years past, he came to the realization that he had never once seen any genuine use of maligned sorcery or the presence of demons on Earth. He had only seen people accused who would only confess after the most brutal forms of torture, and he began to doubt that there were any witches at all. He began to believe that he was having innocent people murdered, and it made him feel like he was more of a monster than the individuals that he was hunting.

He had arrived in Banbury after Chelsey White had been imprisoned by the local authorities. He had questioned her but she maintained her innocence and he believed that she was guilty of nothing but being someone who the people of Banbury hated. He had prevented the authorities from torturing her, which was risky since those who were moderate in witch hunting were often accused of witchcraft themselves. But he could not spare her, the local nobleman was adamant she be put to death. As he watched her being burned alive as the villagers cheered, he began to hate who he was and what he did. This was not the work of God, it was the work of evil he came to believe.

Geoffrey bluntly asked, “ Clayton, how many witches have we sent to their death?”

He thought about his masters question then said, “ around twelve.”

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Then Geoffrey asked, "had how many times have we ever seen sorcery or demons with our own eyes."

Clayton then said, "master, your words could have you and I put to death ourselves. I know you doubt that the devil is working his evil influence in these lands, but it must be true if even the king believes it."

Geoffrey replied, "and even a king can't be wrong?"

Clayton seemed worried. "If you have doubts, keep them to yourself. I do not wish to hear them."

Chelsey, covered with burns and her hair now aflame, stopped struggling and then died. The crowd was in a frenzy, they seemed to relish in this woman's torment and death.

Geoffrey turned away and began to walk towards the stable where his steed was housed. He said coldly, "let's get the hell out of here."

The baron whom Geoffrey served, a man named James Robinson, lived in a large manor outside of London. Geoffrey had arrived the next morning after a days ride having received a summons from the baron. He rode atop his black steed, his faithful horse he had named Shadow, galloped into the courtyard. He dismounted his horse and a servant of James Robinson led the steed away. Geoffrey looked at the manor, a lavish building made of red stone and covered with stained glass windows. He took a second to ready himself and entered the manor.

As usual, Robinson was in his chambers sitting in a large oak chair in front of a roaring fire place, his face covered with the dim glow of the flames. The baron was a large man dressed in expensive robes with curly red hair. He was in his early fifties yet still seemed younger than his age.

When Geoffrey entered the room quietly, the baron turned and looked at his long time friend and dutiful knight. The baron jovially said, "so you have returned. How was your time in Banbury?"

Geoffrey seemed stone faced and unemotional. "I did as you asked. The White woman was put to death yesterday."

Baron Robinson looked at Geoffrey's face and asked, "are you OK old friend, you seem bothered by something?"

"Nothing I care to trouble you with sir," Geoffrey replied.

The baron resumed looking at the fire. "I am not a fool Geoffrey, I know doubt has crept into your heart about what it is you do."

"Baron," Geoffrey said, "I wish to serve as a knight again. I prefer battle to hunting for supposed witches."

Baron Robinson looked at Geoffrey again. "You prefer to risk your life in war?"

"Yes," Geoffrey replied, "there is honor in battle, I see no honor in what I do now."

The baron said, "both the king and the pope are convinced that the devil has many servants in this country, and to doubt their convictions is dangerous. I know you feel compassion for the accused witches, but do not let others discover this for it will put you in great risk."

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“ I have seen many people tortured, people who have done nothing in my opinion, and my conscience is weighing heavily on my mind. Please baron, have me serve in the army again, I never want to see another woman put to death.”

The baron looked towards the fire. “ I will grant you request Geoffrey if you do one last task for me.”

Geoffrey asked, “ and what is it that you would have me do?”

Baron Robinson told him, “ there is a convent outside of a village called Dovercourt, it is run by a priest named Vincent Wilcox. I wish you to ride there tomorrow.”

“ And what is it I am to do,” Geoffrey asked.

The Baron explained, “ the people of Dovercourt are convinced that there is a coven of witches in the area. It would be the usual task of finding the guilty, but this situation is different. There have been several murders, people have been discovered who seemed to have been ritually sacrificed. They say words in some unknown language have been carved into the skin of the victims. This time, there is a certainty that something evil is afoot.”

“ So why do you ask me to go to this convent and not Dovercourt,” Geoffrey said.

“ Because,” the baron replied, “ a nun in this convent is said to be possessed by a demon. I am sure that these two events are linked. Go speak to Vincent Wilcox and interrogate this possessed nun, discover who is committing these murders and what evil is at work in Dovercourt.”

Geoffrey was reluctant to agree but asked, “ and if I do this, I may serve as a knight again?”

The baron nodded. “ Geoffrey, do this, and you will never have to hunt for another witch. You may return to battle if that's what you want.”

Geoffrey then said, “ I will do as you ask. I will find who is responsible for these foul deeds being committed in Dovercourt. When do you want me to leave?”

“ Now,” the baron ordered, “ the convent is on the coast to the east. If you ride fast you can be there by tonight.”

Geoffrey turned to leave but said as he left, “ then I depart for Dovercourt immediately.”

The baron smiled. “ Be careful old friend, I fear that this time, you may be in peril. Good luck.”

Geoffrey then left the baron's chambers leaving him alone. Robinson muttered, “ I fear I shall never see you again.”

The baron then returned to gazing at the fire, the flames dancing rhythmically bathing him in their soft glow.

Geoffrey arrived at the convent just before dusk as the sun began to disappear beneath the horizon and night loomed to the east. Geoffrey, atop Shadow, was at the base of a tall cliff overlooking the frigid waters of the English channel. On the peak of the cliff was the convent, a large brick building which seemed to be of Gothic architecture, along the edge of the roof where stone gargoyles were perched and seemed to look at Geoffrey. He felt that there was something dark and unnatural about how this convent appeared.

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Geoffrey looked to the south and saw Dovercourt. It was a large town built on the coast and seemed to be a wealthy community as all the homes and shops were made of fine stone and of elegant design. It was a fishing community as there was a massive series of docks where many small fishing vessels were anchored.

Around the convent and Dovercourt in every direction was thick, deep forests which enclosed this place like a wall. As night fell, the woods seemed engulfed in darkness. The only way to this place was the stone road Geoffrey had traveled.

Geoffrey then rid Shadow up towards the top of the cliff and arrived in front of the massive wooden doors to the convent. A nun was waiting for him, a young woman who was dressed in the garb of a nun. She had a youthful, attractive face though her robes concealed both her body and her hair.

Geoffrey rid towards her then stopped. He said, " I have been sent by baron Robinson to meet with Vincent Wilcox."

The nun smiled. " I am sister Miriam. He is waiting for you Sir Hall, you will find him in the chapel. Have you come alone?"

Geoffrey shook his head. " My servant will arrive tomorrow. He rides by mule, and a slow one at that."

He dismounted Shadow and Sister Miriam took the horse's reins. She said, " I shall take your horse to our stable. The chapel is at the end of the hall beyond the front doors."

Geoffrey approached the doors. " Thank you sister."

Geoffrey came to a large room. Along the sides were ornate pews of polished wood, to the far end of the room was a large stone altar covered with lit candles held by gold, jewel encrusted candlesticks. Along the walls were stained glass windows with the image of saints built into them. The room was entirely empty but for a man in his mid thirties standing behind the altar, he was dressed in the garb of a priest and had long brown hair.

Geoffrey approached him and asked, " are you Vincent Wilcox?"

The man nodded. " Yes, I must be, since I am the only man who lives within the walls of this house of God. So why have you come to our modest convent?"

Geoffrey replied, " Baron Robinson has sent me to investigate the murders in Dovercourt."

Vincent frowned. " Yes, it is most tragic. I knew some of the deceased, good men who deserved a kinder fate. Why are you here instead of Dovercourt?"

Geoffrey told him, " it is said that a woman is here who is possessed."

The priest seemed to hesitate for a moment then said, " yes, sister Adeline. About three months ago she became gripped by some madness. She spits and curses, says the most terrible things. I have had her confined to her room for her safety and ours."

Geoffrey said, " I wish to speak with her."

Vincent seemed reluctant to do this. " I know who you are, you hunt witches and have them killed. I will take you to her, but I want your promise that she will not be harmed."

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Geoffrey replied, " you have my word that no harm will come to her."

" Also," Vincent said, " I do not want the people of Dovercourt to learn of her condition. They are simple country folk and would surely have her put to death if they think she is possessed."

" No one will be told," Geoffrey said.

" OK, I will take you to sister Adeline."

The priest led Geoffrey through the convent up some stairs to the second floor when they came to a small wooden door at the end of a hall. Torches lined the walls and were lit so they could provide light. Geoffrey noticed some tapestries which covered the side of hall, images of strange things embroidered upon them though he could not discern what they were exactly.

Vincent pulled a key from his pocket and unlocked the door. He then stepped to the side as the door swung open. He said, " I will wait here. Call if you need help."

Geoffrey entered the doorway and then was standing in a small bedroom. There was some wooden furniture around the room as well as a mirror on the wall. To the far side of the room was a bed over which hung a canopy which concealed who was laying in the bed.

Then a soft, woman's voice spoke from the other side of the cloth canopy.

" I have been waiting for you witch hunter."

Geoffrey slowly approached the bed and moved part of the canopy so he could see who was speaking to him.

A woman who seemed to be in her early twenties was sitting up in the bed. She was not dressed in her robes but a silk nightgown. She had pale skin, short curly brunette hair and had deep blue eyes which seemed to look right through Geoffrey. Her hands were tied to the headboard of the bed.

Geoffrey, taken aback by this woman's beauty, asked, " how did you know I was coming?"

She replied, " I know many things. I know you have been sent here to find the servants of Satan."

Geoffrey looked at her. " They say you are possessed by a demon. Am I speaking to sister Adeline or the spirit who possesses her?"

Adeline began to laugh. " You are speaking to both."

Geoffrey at that moment did not believe that she was possessed, for he had grown skeptical of such supernatural phenomena. Surely, he thought, she was just mad. But he decided to indulge her delusion.

Geoffrey said, " and what is the name of the one who possesses you?"

" Decarabia," she replied in a deep voice.

Geoffrey asked, " why do you want the soul of this woman?"

Adeline smiled and her pupils rolled back into her head and her eyes were white orbs. " Because I want her, is that a good enough of a reason witch hunter?"

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He then sat on the bed and said, "you know of the murders in Dovercourt?"

Adeline then leaned towards Geoffrey and replied, "people have been sacrificed, an offering to the dark lord of hell."

"Do you know who is responsible," Geoffrey asked.

Adeline then leaned back against the head board. "That you will have to discover yourself, but it may cost you both your life and your soul. Witch hunter, in the coming days you are going to be made to suffer just as you have made others suffer."

Geoffrey stood up, chilled by her words. "You seem to know many things spirit."

Adeline then spat and a wad of spittle flew through the air and hit Geoffrey's cheek. Then she began to cackle and threatened, "you don't know what you are about to go through. I promise you, soon you will wish that you had never come to this convent or Dovercourt. Now leave, you bore me."

Geoffrey left the room and found Father Vincent waiting for him outside. The priest asked, "what did you learn?"

Geoffrey replied, "nothing. That woman, she is mad surely."

Vincent said, "you do not believe in possession?"

"No," Geoffrey told him, "I have spent years in the pursuit of demons and witches, and I have never encountered anything which would leave me to believe in such things."

Vincent then said, "so what will you do now?"

Geoffrey began to walk away. "I will go to Dovercourt," he said, "the answers are surely there. I will learn nothing from this mad woman."

Vincent then quickly approached Geoffrey and stopped him. Vincent said, "please, it is late. You may stay here for the night and travel to Dovercourt tomorrow. You must be tired from your travel from London."

Geoffrey thought for a moment, he was exhausted and in need of sleep. "Thank you Father Vincent. I will sleep here for the night."

"Good," Vincent said, "I will take you to your room."

Later that night, Geoffrey experienced something he thought was a dream. He lay in the bed he had been given for the night, partly asleep in the darkened room. The room was silent when sounds began to come from beyond the walls, at first he couldn't tell exactly what he was hearing but slowly came to the realization that it was the sound of a gamut of women moaning in the distance. And there was a male voice, chanting words that Geoffrey could not identify. It continued for awhile until it ceased and Geoffrey fell back asleep.

It was a chilly morning when Geoffrey exited from the front doors of the convent and found Shadow waiting for him outside. A dense fog had rolled in from the sea and covered the land in a thick mist. Clayton, sitting atop his old mule, was waiting for him.

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Geoffrey looked at Clayton's mule and asked, "I have offered to get you a horse Clayton. Why do you insist on riding that rickety old mule."

Clayton replied, "this mule has been good to me over the years, I could not possibly part with him. He may be old, but he is reliable."

Geoffrey said, "you would have gotten here faster if you walked."

Clayton then asked, "so what are we to do master?"

Geoffrey mounted Shadow and said, "we will go to Dovercourt. A nobleman is the authority there, I will speak to him and learn more about what is amiss in this place."

Geoffrey then noticed a very familiar broad sword hanging from the saddle of Clayton's mule. "Why did you bring my old sword," Geoffrey asked.

Clayton shrugged. "My gut told me that you would need it."

Geoffrey had wielded that sword many times, it was a fine blade; a gift from his father. Many men had met their end because of that sword upon the battlefield, but since he had ceased being an active knight he kept it in his home outside London.

Geoffrey said, "Clayton, why do you put so much faith in your gut; as massive as it is?"

"Because," Clayton said, "it has never led me wrong."

Geoffrey then rode towards Dovercourt as Clayton followed.

A member of the town watch directed Geoffrey to the home of a nobleman by the name of Edgar Carter who was the authority in Dovercourt. Clayton waited outside with his mule while his master entered. The nobleman lived in a large, extravagant home near the center of the town. A servant led Geoffrey to Edger's office, as Geoffrey walked through the house he saw that it was furnished with expensive furniture and adorned with valuable objects made of gold, he deduced that this nobleman was extremely wealthy.

Geoffrey entered the large office and found Edger sitting behind a large table made from the finest wood. On the table were ornate relics which seemed valuable. Geoffrey approached the table and said, "I am Geoffrey Hall, I am here by the request of baron Robinson."

Edger was a middle aged man, partially bald and somewhat heavysset. He was dressed in an expensive green tunic and wore several gold rings on his fingers.

The nobleman said, "Yes, I know baron Robinson. An eccentric old fool, no offense. What is your business here in my town?"

"I have been sent to investigate the murders which have transpired in Dovercourt," Geoffrey told him.

Edger grunted. "Sorry, but your journey here was a waste of time. We have the culprit and are interrogating him now."

"What," Geoffrey said.

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Edger explained, "a crazy old hermit who lives in the woods, Russel Mason, has been captured. The town watch will surely get a confession from him soon. So you can go back to your baron and leave my community."

Geoffrey asked, "mind if I speak with this hermit?"

Edger shrugged. "I don't see the point. My men don't need any assistance."

"Still," Geoffrey said, "I wish to speak with him myself."

Edger shrugged. "He is imprisoned in the quarters for the town watch down the street, a stone building with bars in the windows. But once you speak with him, I want you to leave Dovercourt."

Geoffrey turned and was about to leave when he said, "thank you for your time."

"One thing," Edger said, "I want you out of this town as soon as possible. The last thing I want is an outsider meddling in the affairs of this community, we don't need your help and to be honest, it is not welcome."

Geoffrey told him, "if this hermit is the culprit, then I will leave by noon."

"Good, see that you do."

Geoffrey arrived at the structure where the town watch, men who upheld the law and guarded Dovercourt, slept and kept prisoners. It was made of cracked, old stone and seemed to be a rather bleak and cold building. He found the captain of the town watch and one of his men in a large prison cell where the hermit was being held. The old hermit, a bearded man who seemed malnourished and fragile, was being hung from the ceiling by a rope, the rope was tied around the hermit's hands which were behind his back. The rope went through a pulley and was held at other end by the member of the town watch. The old hermit was moaning in pain.

Geoffrey asked, "are you the captain of the town watch?"

The captain, a large thick necked man with no hair and wearing chain mail armor, turned to face him and replied, "yes, I'm captain Todd Thomas. And who are you exactly?"

"Geoffrey Hall, sent by baron Robinson. I wish to speak with your prisoner."

Captain Thomas looked at his man holding the rope and made a gesture. The member of the town watch loosened his grip on the rope momentarily then violently jerked the rope. The hermit screamed as there was the sound of the bones in his arms breaking. Then the hermit fell to the floor and moaned in agony.

Captain Thomas said, "ask him anything you want."

Geoffrey then knelt down beside the hermit, who was in agony, and asked, "what do you know of the murders in Dovercourt?"

The hermit, still in agony, muttered, "I know nothing, I am innocent."

Captain Thomas then pulled a whip off the wall and looked down at the hermit. "I will whip you till you either die or I get a confession."

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The old man begged, "no, I know nothing. Please have mercy on a poor old cripple."

Captain Thomas laughed. "I am not known for mercy as you are about to find out."

Geoffrey looked over the old hermit, this man was obviously in extremely poor physical condition, his legs were crooked and lame. Geoffrey got up and said, "this man, I don't think he is physically capable of committing murder."

Captain Thomas raised the whip but before he could strike Geoffrey grabbed his arm and prevented him. The captain barked, "get your hands off me!"

Geoffrey bluntly said, "this man is obviously innocent. He is not capable of the crimes he is accused of."

Captain Thomas yelled back, "sure, he looks like an old man. But the devil gives him the power to do these crimes, he is guilty. Now get the hell out of my way."

Geoffrey frowned and released the captain's arm. Captain Thomas then began to whip the hermit who screamed with each lashing. The captain smiled and seemed to revel in the old man's pain. Unable to watch or listen to the hermit's agonized screams Geoffrey left.

Clayton was sitting on his mule outside the quarters of the town watch, Shadow was beside him. When Geoffrey exited from the building his servant asked, "did you learn anything master?"

Geoffrey replied, "that man is obviously innocent. All I saw was a feeble old man being tortured, the captain of the town watch seemed to enjoy his pain."

Clayton looked around then asked, "so what do we do now?"

Geoffrey replied, "taverns are always a nest of gossip and information. We will go to the local tavern tonight and ask the locals about what they know."

The only tavern in Dovercourt was an old inn known as The Anvil, a large two story building outside of the town. As night fell, Geoffrey and Clayton arrived and found it packed with many of the local men. They tethered their steeds to a post outside the tavern, the din of men talking and laughing bellowed from within The Anvil. Clayton remained with Shadow and the mule as Geoffrey entered the establishment.

Geoffrey stood at the doorway and surveyed the room. The air was smoky as many men were smoking pipes, they drank ale while some of them sang and they all seemed to be indulging in merriment. The room was full of round tables which the locals sat around as they drank, and they seemed to be completely oblivious to Geoffrey's presence. To the back of The Anvil was a long counter, behind which was the burly bartender who served drinks to the patrons. Geoffrey approached him and sat on a stool before the counter.

The bartender approached him and asked, "what will you be having?"

Geoffrey replied, "it is not drink I seek, but information."

The bartender then scowled at Geoffrey and said, "you, you are that Witch Hunter. Everyone is talking about you, they say you are soft on servants of the devil. I won't tell you anything."

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Geoffrey then pulled a small bag tied to his belt and dropped it on the table, several gold coins rolled out from the bag and the bartender looked at them greedily. Geoffrey said, "I'll make it worth your while to talk to me."

The bartender, still transfixed on the bag, asked, "what would you like to know?"

"In my experience," Geoffrey said, "the barkeep is usually the most knowledgeable man when it comes to what goes on in any particular village or town. Would you know anything of the murders in Dovercourt?"

The bartender picked up the bag of coins and stashed them under the counter. He then said, "three murders, three men who I knew were found dead. All in the same place, the edge of the woods to the south of town. The last victim, Marvin Taylor, was a close friend of mine. He was buried only two days ago. The bodies, they were all found on the day after the full moon. Hearts and eyes cut out, archaic words carved into their skin."

Geoffrey asked, "what else do you know?"

The bartender continued. "The murders, they have everyone in town scared. Nothing like this has ever happened in Dovercourt before. But now the culprit has been killed, this will all stop. That hermit always rubbed me the wrong way."

Geoffrey said, "anything else you could tell me?"

The bartender replied, "you might want to speak with Drake Wilkinson, he is a hunter. He has been telling strange stories about something he saw, he is a drunk, so no one believes him. But I know him, and I don't think he is lying."

Geoffrey asked, "where can I find this hunter?"

The bartender pointed to a table in a corner of the bar. A man dressed in brown garments sat alone at a table and drank a mug of ale. He had a hunter's cap on and seemed somewhat more restrained than the jovial rabble who filled the tavern.

Geoffrey walked across the bar and approached the man. He asked, "are you Drake Wilkinson?"

The man nodded and asked, "who wants to know?"

"Never mind that for now. I was told you may have witnessed something involved with the murders plaguing Dovercourt. Can you tell me what you saw?"

Drake drank deeply from his mug then said, "sure, you won't believe me anyways."

Geoffrey told him, "what did you see?"

Drake then began to tell his strange tale. "The night of the last full moon, I was in the forest to the south. I had laid some traps and was seeing if I had caught anything. But they were all empty. I was going to go home when I heard these strange noises coming from deeper within the forest. As I neared I could see a massive fire in the center of a clearing. The noise was of a lot of men and women chanting, I cautiously hid at the edge of the clearing and watched. Two men and many women were dancing around the fire, they were dressed in black robes so I could not see who they were. As I watched they took off their robes and were

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completely nude. Then they all started to engage in carnal relations with each other as I watched. They became a massive pile of flesh as they all made love with each other. Then a man appeared in the clearing, but he was not a man. I know it sounds crazy, but he had the head of a goat with two large horns coming out of his head. He was naked but fur covered his legs. Then those people indulging in the sinful behavior stopped and started chanting. I got scared and ran, I didn't stop till I was home.â

Geoffrey knew the man was claiming to have witnessed a Black Sabbath, he had heard many stories of supposed orgies with the devil but grew to doubt they took place. But something about the way Drake spoke convinced him that he was being genuine.

Geoffrey said, â thanks.â

He then left the bar and found Clayton waiting outside. His servant asked, â discover anything master?â

â Maybe,â Geoffrey said, â when is the next full moon?â

Clayton replied, â three days from today. Why?â

Geoffrey told his servant, â we will remain in Dovercourt until the next full moon, maybe we will find the perpetrators then.â

Geoffrey and Clayton rode to the convent. Father Vincent had offered them lodgings during their stay in Dovercourt, but when they arrived they found the priest waiting outside for them. Geoffrey and Clayton got off their steeds and approached Vincent.

Geoffrey asked, â is something wrong Father Vincent?â

â Adeline, she seems to have regained her senses. She says she wants to speak with you.â

â For what purpose,â Geoffrey said.

Father Vincent replied, â she will not say. Please, go to her.â

Geoffrey turned to Clayton and said, â take our mounts to the stable. Vincent will show you to your room.â

Clayton did as he was asked as Geoffrey went to meet with Adeline.

Geoffrey entered Adeline's room and found her sitting up in bed, her arms no longer restrained. She looked at Geoffrey and weakly smiled, she then motioned for him to come closer. Geoffrey approached and stood at the foot of her bed.

Geoffrey said, â I was told that you have recovered.â

She nodded. â I think I am better now. I think what ever had possessed me left for some reason.â

Geoffrey told her, â I am pleased to hear that. Now, why did you wish to speak with me?â

Adeline explained. â I have barely any memory of the last few months, all I do remember was you. I think you are responsible for my recovery, soon after we met I felt what ever it was possessing me leaving my body. I wish to thank you.â

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Geoffrey said, "no need for gratitude."

Adeline looked into Geoffrey's eyes. "I think you were sent here to help me, like a guardian angel."

Geoffrey shook his head. "I am here merely to find a murderer, that is all. If I may ask, what was the last thing you remember before your illness?"

"I was in the woods," she said, "sometimes I like to walk alone at night. I don't remember what I saw, but I know it was responsible for my possession. And I know that I am in danger."

Geoffrey asked, "what kind of danger?"

Adeline replied, "I don't know, but I do know you are here to protect me."

Geoffrey told her, "it is late and I need rest. We can speak at some other time."

As he left Adeline pleaded, "promise you will protect me."

Before he exited through the door, he said, "I will let no harm come to you. I promise."

Then he left and Adeline was alone.

Geoffrey lay awake in his bed as Clayton, on a cot to one side of the room, snored loudly.

Geoffrey thought about Adeline and another woman named Elise Cook, the first witch he had ever discovered once he was tasked with witch hunting. She was a young woman who looked much like Adeline, and often lately Geoffrey thought about Elise. Of all the witches his actions helped condemn to death, he felt most guilty for her execution. He knew she was innocent and that he was guilty of a terrible crime which he thought he could never be forgiven, either by himself or any higher powers that may exist. But as he thought that night, he promised himself that he would protect Adeline if she was in danger. Maybe if he did this, he reasoned, then maybe he could forgive himself for the lives he helped end.

Before he finally drifted off to sleep, he hoped that he could redeem himself for what he had done.

Geoffrey awoke the next morning to find Clayton still asleep in his cot. Geoffrey stood over him and ordered, "Clayton get up."

The servant slowly awoke from his deep slumber then groggily asked, "what do you want master?"

"I think," Geoffrey said, "we will rest for today. But I do have one task for you Clayton."

"What do you need of me?"

"I want to acquire a shovel," Geoffrey told him.

"Why a shovel," Clayton asked.

"Because," Geoffrey said, "tonight we will go to Dovercourt's graveyard and exhume the body of Marvin Taylor."

"For the sake of God why master," Clayton asked.

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Geoffrey replied, "I would like to inspect the body myself. Now get out of bed and do as I said."

Later that day Geoffrey found himself walking around the grounds outside the convent. He came to a small patch of land the sisters had turned into a meager vegetable garden. He found sister Adeline, in her black nun's habit, kneeling down in the dirt working in the garden. He approached her and she took no notice of him.

"May we speak sister Adeline," Geoffrey asked.

She, startled, turned around and said, "oh, Mr. Hall, didn't see you there."

Adeline got to her feet and wiped the ground from her nun's garment and asked, "what would you like to speak about?"

"Just some questions," he said.

"OK," Adeline told him, "walk with me."

Then she took his hand and she led him to an empty grassy field and they talked as they walked across the grass.

"So what would you like to ask," she said.

Geoffrey replied, "while at the convent, have you ever noticed anything unusual happen?"

"Well, I've been here a year. My parent's where of noble birth, but when I had a relationship with a young man they sent me here to become a nun. At first everything seemed normal, but I have noticed some odd things."

"Such as," Geoffrey asked.

"Father Vincent, he has a lot of private meetings with nobleman Carter as well as captain Thomas. They meet privately in Vincent's quarters and on a few occasions they have argued, though I know not what of which they spoke."

Geoffrey frowned at the mention of Captain Thomas's name, Adeline noticed and asked, "what is wrong Geoffrey?"

"Captain Thomas," he said, "that man reminds me of all the things that are wrong with this world. I watched him whip a poor old man to death, and he enjoyed doing that."

Adeline looked at Geoffrey for a moment and asked, "Geoffrey, you don't seem like a man who would hunt witches and have them put to death. Why are you involved with such a grim profession?"

"That is a long story," Geoffrey told her.

"I would like to hear it if you don't mind."

Geoffrey told his story. "I did not always hunt witches. For most of my life I trained and served as a knight, a member of the court of baron Robinson. I fought many men, slew many foes with my own hands but never once did it make me feel guilt. Actually, when I was in battle I knew that it was what I was meant to do. But I returned to the baron after having fought in a great battle, and he asked me to root out witches and those who

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serve the devil.â

Adeline said, â you don't believe in the devil or witches do you.â

Geoffrey told her, â once I did, when I first found and helped have witches put to death, I was sure that it was a just thing that I was doing. But over the years I never once saw proof of the unnatural. Now I just believe what I've seen with my own two eyes, and I know now that I have sent innocent women to their ends because of what I've done. I killed more men than I can remember in battle, but never once did it weigh upon my conscience, but those women, I know I am guilty of a crime for which I fear I will be punished.â

Adeline held his hand, â you don't seem like a bad person to me Geoffrey, just troubled.â

Geoffrey pulled his hand away from hers and turned away. â Adeline, I sent twelve women to their death, because of what I did they were burnt alive at the stake. Do you know how horrible it is to see someone meet their demise that way?â

Adeline put her hand on Geoffrey's face and turned his head so they were looking at each other again. â Geoffrey, you at least feel guilt, there are so many these days who are so quick to accuse their neighbor of witchery and have them put to death and never once do they question the morality of what they do. You Geoffrey, just from your eyes I can see you carry a heavy weight on your shoulders which cause you much pain. You may have done something horrible, but you know that it is wrong, that is more than most people these days.â

Geoffrey felt a rush of warmth cover him as her hand touched his face. He put his hand on her's and said, â Adeline, you seem like a very sympathetic soul.â

Then from the distance in the direction of the convent, a small bell rang. Adeline then started to walk towards the convent but said as she left, â Vincent is calling us for mass. I look forward to speaking again Geoffrey.â

He watched her leave, and came to the realization that he harbored feelings for Adeline which he could not understand. As he saw her walk away, he knew that she was important to him for some reason. He vowed that he would let nothing happen to her no matter what the cost.

It was night as Geoffrey and Clayton entered the cemetery. A mile beyond the town was a small stone church beside which was a large, ancient graveyard where marble statues of angels stood between the graves. The moon was nearly full and bathed the land with soft light.

Geoffrey and Clayton, who carried a shovel, left Shadow and the mule outside the cemetery, and now were walking amongst the rows of headstones. It took them awhile to find the grave of Marvin Taylor. They looked down at the freshly dug up ground for a moment.

Clayton asked, â what do we do now master?â

â Start digging,â Geoffrey replied.

For the next hour Clayton dug down into the ground, Geoffrey watched as he stood a few feet away. Already the servant had shoveled his way five feet down into the earth and there was a mound of dirt beside the grave.

Clayton stopped digging and wiped the sweat from his brow and asked, â why are you not digging master?â

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Geoffrey flatly said, "when you have your own servant, then you can get him to dig."

Clayton then returned to shoveling when the shovel hit something and there was the sound of a small thud. The servant used his hands to brush away the dirt and now was standing atop a wooden coffin. Clayton climbed out from the exhumed grave and stood beside his master.

Clayton said, "do what you must, I do not want to watch."

"Clayton, stay close, I may need you," Geoffrey ordered.

Geoffrey then jumped down into the grave and looked momentarily at the lid of the coffin. He then used his massive strength to pull off the lid of the coffin revealing the body of Marvin Taylor.

The man's body was surprisingly fresh even though he had been dead for almost a month. The corpse's skin was a greenish white, but the skin of his exposed chest and face were covered with symbols carved into the flesh with some sort of blade. His eyes were open and Geoffrey was looking at the eyeless sockets which were gawking at him. Also there was a hole in his chest from which his heart had been removed.

Geoffrey looked more closely at the symbols when Clayton said, "master be quick, this place scares me."

Geoffrey replied, "I will leave when I have what I came for."

He inspected the symbols when he came to the realization that it was ancient Latin, the body had been covered with symbols and words; incantations which were meant to enslave the soul of this victim to his killer.

Clayton, unable to look directly at the body, asked, "discover anything?"

Geoffrey grimly replied, "necromancy."

"What," Clayton said.

"Necromancy," Geoffrey said, "an ancient form of pagan magic which is meant to give its practitioner control over the bodies and the spirits of the dead. These men were murdered so that their spirits may serve whoever was responsible for their deaths."

Clayton asked, "OK, can we go now?"

Geoffrey climbed out of the grave and stood next to his servant. Geoffrey said, "we have learned enough for tonight. Let us return to the convent."

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