

MICHAEL C THOMAS



**Book One
of
The Pen Glas Mysteries**



**The
Green Eyes of
DARKNESS**

the past will not let itself be broken...



The
Green Eyes
of
Darkness

Michael C Thomas



Tomser Cat Books

Big Cats Edition

To mothers and sisters everywhere,
especially the ones in my life.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to:

Grey Actual for encouraging me to keep thinking.

Midna for listening.

Gr3yTw0 for demonstrating how to be a big brother.

Llancaiach Fawr for keeping history alive.

Mark Dorey for all your hard work.

Athanasius for letting me borrow your mind.

Nick Jones for your sharp eyes.

Tarkas for being my childhood hero.

The Rejects for teaching me the joys of pedantry and its importance over merely being 'correct'.

And finally, airport delays and long haul flights, without which this book would never have existed!

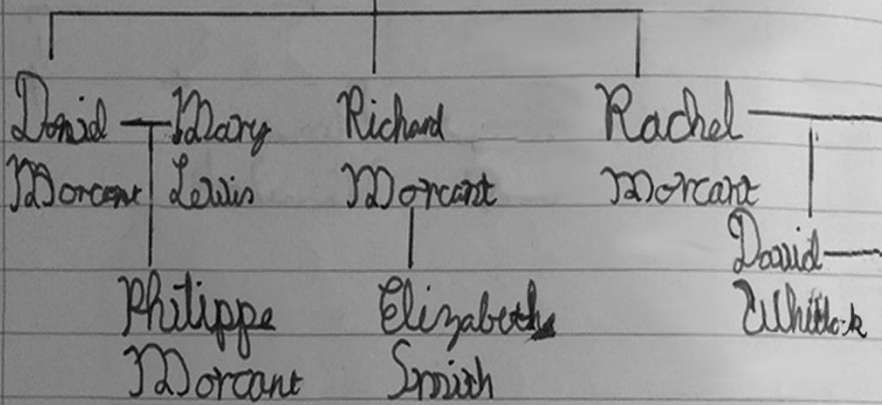
Map of Wales showing Pen Glas, adapted from the 1573 map of Wales, *Cambriae Typus*, by Humphrey Lloyd. Original image available from the National Library of Wales.

THE
GREEN EYES
OF
DARKNESS



Big Cats Edition

General Morcant — Elizabeth Chevalier



Megara Rose

David Whitlock - ~~Anna~~ Chevalier

Luke
Whitlock

Anne
Whitlock

Mary
Whitlock

Jacob
Whitlock

Sarah Jones



Lymnos Ptol.
ynys Enlhi. B.
Bardesey. A.



NICVM MARE

nglis.



Deme: tia.

Penglaz
habet.

A. Herfordwest
Hwlfordh.

R
Flan

quis munda:
xpulsi, ab Henrico
F. missi; in hunc us:
em à Cambris lingua

Talacha:
ru.

L^o Ste:
phan.

PROLOGUE

PEN GLAS
THE BATTLE OF
KNIGHT'S FOLLY 1645

THE CANNON SPOKE.

Its message of hate arced through the summer sky, flying over the green meadow, screaming towards the ruined tower at the end of the field. A barrier of overturned carts had been hastily built across the old broken gateway. The cannonball hit it squarely in the middle, its kinetic energy shattering a cart as if it was made of dry spaghetti. The wood gave no protection to the men taking shelter behind the barricade. They were thrown back by the blast as the fortification was turned from a protective shelter into a hail of deadly shrapnel. The Royalist musketeers opened fire, a murderous barrage hitting the outer wall, keeping the defenders penned in, as formations of pikemen began their assault on the castle.

The cannon spoke again...

and again.

Inside the tower courtyard, Philippe, a boy with dark curled hair lay on his back. His clothes, as dark as his hair, were once of high quality but now they were torn and bloodied. Philippe

PROLOGUE

had been thrown there by the force of the first cannon blast. He stared up at the bright blue sky, a moment of serenity in the chaos all around him. He shook his head as he staggered to his feet, his ears ringing loudly from the explosion. In the mayhem all around him, Philippe stood, his arm and side stinging with shrapnel splinters; the courtyard desolate like the eye of a storm. All around the wall, the ill-prepared rebels tried to return fire with the few muskets they had, but these were not trained soldiers. A cannonball struck the outer wall sending masonry and men flying. Philippe moved forward slowly, the ringing in his ears keeping him off balance. In the debris of the destroyed barricade he spotted the fallen body of his father. Philippe staggered to him, painfully dragging away some of the timber entombing him. His father groaned at the movement and looked up towards his son. Managing a weak smile he reached towards him. Philippe took hold of his hand and knelt beside him, tears filling his eyes. His father had been badly wounded even before the cannonball had stuck the barricade. Bleeding from multiple wounds, there was no way he could survive. He pulled a ring from his hand and pushed it hard into Philippe's palm. It was an odd ring, made of a coil of dark metal, wound around and around on itself.

"Take the ring to your grandmother," gasped Philippe's father, groaning with the pain. "Do not trust your uncle. You must warn the General, warn father, that Richard and the King cannot be trusted. Now run, hide!" Philippe stood up and stepped back, his eyes flooding with tears.

"You!" A rebel soldier staggered towards Philippe. His face was cut and bleeding. All around them the battle raged. Although the rebels were already broken, the Royalist musket and cannon fire continued to pound against the ruined outer wall, and now Philippe could begin to hear the roaring cry of the advancing pikemen. He began to back away.

THE BATTLE OF KNIGHT'S FOLLY 1645

“If I am to die, then so will the cursed offspring of Morcant.” The soldier began to limp towards Philippe, a bloodied cavalry sword in his hand. Suddenly he lurched and fell to his knees. Philippe’s father was holding on to the soldier’s ankle.

“Run my boy!”

Philippe turned and ran towards the old tower in the middle of the ruin. He did not look back. His father would hold the man as long as he could, but it would be a short fight. Philippe took the steps to the castle two at a time. Soon he was through the open doorway and into the dark unlit tower. He swung the old oak door closed behind him. As he was reaching up for the main bolt to slide it home, his pursuer rammed against the door. Philippe was knocked backwards and the door began to open. He pushed back hard, slamming all his weight into the door. Suddenly, a bloodied sword was thrust into the closing gap, stopping Philippe from shutting it enough to bolt it. The soldier charged the door again, forcing Philippe back; he rammed it again, sending Philippe sprawling across the floor. The door swung open, and the soldier stood there framed in the summer sun, sword in hand.

Philippe backed away, not wanting to take his eyes off the swordsman. The soldier approached cautiously, a nasty grin on his face in the half light. Philippe backed into the stone wall behind him, he felt along the wall, hoping for a weapon or another doorway through which to escape. There was nothing. The room seemed strangely quiet, with only the heavy breathing of Philippe and the soldier, and the sharp ting of metal as the ring in Philippe’s hand struck the wall of the tower.

Suddenly, the soldier stopped his advance, a look of horror on his face. Swallowing hard, Philippe turned. A bright blue glow was coming from between the stones of the tower wall.

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The glow began to run along the mortar lines, spreading further, becoming increasingly bright as it did so. He looked at the ring in his hand. It was glowing bright white, and was painfully hot to the touch. Philippe dropped the ring. It rolled across the floor, leaving a trail of glowing blue stone behind it.

Fear hit both Philippe and the soldier as the blue glow grew brighter. A cannonball struck the tower, the impact causing masonry to rain down upon them. The blue glow suddenly faded, plunging Philippe and the soldier into darkness as they dodged the falling stones and fought for breath in the billowing dust cloud around them.

The tower was hit again, and this time it collapsed.

PEN GLAS - 2014

The old paper crackled as the white lace gloved finger traced the words on the page. The lady reading the book looked as ancient as the book itself. She sat at a wooden desk in a 1970's padded arm chair, moth eaten and threadbare. The room was dark, lit only by a couple of dim lamps and a few stray beams of daylight that sneaked in past the heavily curtained windows. All around were unbalanced towers of old books and over-full bookshelves.

She looked up. "They will all be here soon. We must be ready."

"Are you sure this time?" questioned a voice somewhere near the floor, behind a stack of books.

"Oh yes," replied the lady picking up an old tintype¹ photograph from the early nineteen-hundreds. "I know them all very well."

¹ A tintype is an old type of photograph made by creating an image on a thin sheet of metal coated with a dark lacquer.

CHAPTER ONE

ARRIVAL

THE BLACK CAR did not so much drive through the rain as nose its way slowly through it, carefully, navigating down the narrow country lane, hemmed in by high hedges on either side. Brown surface water transformed the road into a small stream that ran quickly in the opposite direction to the car.

No matter how hard Jake pushed his face against the back window all he could see was grey, heavy rain and the occasional dark shape that could have been a tree or a house pass by. Jake turned his attention to the inside of the car. Sitting next to him was his older brother, Luke. Luke was sixteen, blond and athletic; everything Jake wasn't. Jake was only ten, but went to school with twelve-year-olds because he was smart; well, that's what he was told. Jake just thought everyone else was dim; as far as Jake was concerned, school work wasn't hard, you just had to try.

Luke was still asleep and had been for the last two hours of their four hour drive from Cardiff to West Wales. His father was driving, unspeaking, either concentrating on negotiating the awful conditions, or his mind simply elsewhere. All Jake could hear was the heavy rain on the car roof, trying to compete with the sound of the car's engine. Jake leaned back and shut his eyes.

ARRIVAL

He jerked awake at the sudden sound of gravel crunching under the tyres of the car. A house loomed out of the rain like some dark monster. The lights in the porch gave the impression of two small yellow eyes, out of scale with the rest of the beast. The car slowed to a stop and his dad killed the engine. All that could be heard now was the sound of rain hitting the top of the car.

“Just be good for your aunt, okay guys? And please, just keep the fighting down, it’s only for a couple of weeks, max.” What started as a stern instruction almost became a plea as their dad’s voice broke. He was tired, not just from the long drive, but also the general strain over the last few months with their mother being ill and trying to keep up with his job. Both had taken a lot out of Dad and the boys both knew it. Luke and Jake shared a glance and nodded their compliance.

Dad reached down and took hold of the boot release catch. “Okay,” he said, with a rare smile. “Let’s grab the bags and do this at a run. Ready?”

The boys took hold of the door handles and grinned. *Evac Six* was an old game they used to play when they were younger, when their mother wasn’t ill. Tension filled the car.

“One, two, three, four, five, *Evac Six!*” Dad pulled the lever and they bolted out of the car.

Jake got to the boot first and held it open as Luke and their father grabbed the bags and ran for the shelter of the porch. The rain drenched Jake in seconds and streamed into his eyes. He slammed the boot shut and ran after his brother. Just as he reached shelter he slipped on the wet stones under his feet and fell forward, his father catching him just before he hit the ground.

Dad lifted him up to his own height, Jake’s feet dangling in the air. “Forty-three seconds... not bad, but I expect you to do better!” Dad’s voice was cross but his face and eyes were

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smiling - it was all part of the game. Jake was just happy to see those old, tired eyes smile. They hugged before Dad dropped him back to the floor.

“It is meant to clear up the day after tomorrow,” said a girl’s voice behind them. Megan, Jake’s cousin, stood just inside the open front door. Older than Jake by just over a year, Megan was so tall it looked more like three. With her brown hair cut so it only just reached her shoulders, her eyes had the same blue with a green tinge as the brothers. “Mum’s in the small study. It’s through that door and then the second door on the right.” Megan pointed at a doorway just out of sight behind her.

Jake’s dad nodded his thanks and went to move past her, before suddenly grabbing her around the waist in a bear-hug and lifting her off the ground. “What? Too big for a hug from your old Uncle Ben?” he growled.

Megan wheezed a response and a smile and he lowered her back to the floor. Ben was smiling but it all felt a bit false after the *Evac Six* game, when the smile had been genuine. Ben headed off to find his sister.

“Your dad’s not quite himself, is he?” observed Megan. The boys shook their heads, deliberately not meeting her eyes. The rain continued to hammer down as the silence between them started to become uncomfortable. “Well,” began Megan, trying to break the sombre mood, “this place is amazing! It’s *huge*... Come on in. Uncle Tom knew some people, who knew some people, who manage the estates. They said we could stay here for a couple of weeks while Mum does some family research. According to Uncle Tom we might be related somehow to the family that built it hundreds of years ago. There are three wings, four floors, an attic, a basement and the house is full of collections the last owner made from all around the world; Egypt, Italy, everywhere! There’s even an American Indian totem-pole... although we’re not meant to go into those rooms.

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There's an old woman housekeeper who's really strict and you'll have to duck around her to keep out of trouble."

This was the Megan that Jake and Luke knew well. She talked at a million miles an hour, blending subjects together, without seeming to pause for breath. The boys followed her through the large double doors into the main house. A huge oak staircase dominated the room rising up, floor after floor, to a high vaulted ceiling. The floor of the hall was large slabs of stone with a red carpet crossing the room. Dark red coiled ropes were strung between metal poles to keep people back from the large tapestries that hung on the walls, and from the old suits of armour that stood in alcoves.

"Wow!" breathed Jake, "it's like a castle!" interrupting Megan's chatter.

"Yes, bits of it are, but you'd best ask Mum for the full history lesson. Other bits are new, some very modern, like our bedrooms, I have a TV in mine. It's really great here, if it wasn't for..."

"*Luke!*" screamed a voice down the staircase from the next floor up.

"...Lucy," finished Megan, under her breath.

Lucy was seventeen and stunningly beautiful. Long blonde hair framed the same blue-green eyes as her sister and cousins. She leaned over the banister and waved at Luke, giving one of her heart shattering smiles. "Luke, have you got a signal on your phone?"

Luke pulled out his phone from the front pocket of his jeans. He held it up for a bit.. "Sorry, Lucy, not even one bar."

"Uhhhh!" snarled Lucy, storming off back up the stairs.

"We've only been here two days, and two days without messaging her friends... she's become a nut job," shrugged

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Megan. “Mum says it’s like being in *The Shining*² - whatever that is.”

“Do you know where we should put these?” asked Luke, pointing to the collection of cases and bags that they had brought in from the car.

“Oh yes... sorry. Your rooms are on the second floor, near mine and Lucy’s. The housekeeper, did I tell you her name? Well, she’s called Mrs. Sterling. I think I overheard Mum call her Alice, but we have to call her Mrs. Sterling. Here, let me carry that case for you.” Megan picked up a small brown suitcase next to Jake and started up the stairs, continuing to talk without a pause as she did so.

“Now, Mrs. Sterling wanted us to share a room, to reduce the housework I guess, but Lucy and I insisted on having separate rooms, so she has done the same for you, although Jake is in the smaller room at the end of the corridor. They all have double beds and the bathroom is just across the corridor from Jake’s room. Here we are.”

They’d reached the top floor. Luke easily carried two large rucksacks, one over each shoulder as Jake struggled with a large blue suitcase almost as big as he was. Megan kept talking as they walked to the end of the corridor, pointing out whose room was whose. The corridor was narrow, the floor worn, dark polished wood, floorboards creaking gently as they passed.

“Sorry,” Megan said, as they came to what was to be Luke’s room. “I know I go on a lot, but it’s been quite lonely with just Mum and Lucy. Mum keeps mainly to her work, and although Lucy can be fun, all she does at the moment is stress over her phone and not being able to talk to her boyfriend.”

² *The Shining* is a horror novel by American author Stephen King.

ARRIVAL

Luke's room was modern, with white walls and white Victorian mouldings. The floor was covered in a light brown short fibre carpet and the bed was a simple wooden frame from some department store. All the furniture was in a matching pale wood. On top of a chest of drawers sat an old fashioned TV with a big back to it. Luke checked the back. "No HDMI, but it can take SCART at least. Jake put the case down here." Jake dropped the case and popped it open, resting the lid against the chest of drawers. Inside was a games console, a ton of games, and miles of cables. "There's no Wi-Fi or internet, but we can still have some fun, Jakes."

"Oh," sighed Megan, looking downcast. Now she would still be here by herself with a grumpy sister, a reclusive mum, and two boys shut up in their room. 'Well, maybe they will explore with me a little,' she thought hopefully. "Jake's room is next door."

Luke picked up one of the rucksacks, and with Megan still carrying the small brown case they headed to Jake's room.

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HIDDEN MESSAGE

AT THE END OF THE CORRIDOR was a window, made of small diamond shapes of glass crisscrossed with a lead edging.

The door to Jake's room opened into a small world of the past, its silent atmosphere rolling over them like a wave. The floor was polished wood and the walls were deep blue, covered in hand painted vines and leaves. Insects were detailed here and there and birds were painted in fantastic detail. The bed was old oak and covered in a worn Welsh blanket of dark blue crossed with an even darker purple. A small window let in light, but even on the brightest day it could not have taken away from the darkness of the great wardrobe. It was made of dark wood and took up one entire side of the room. Double-doored and over six feet across it reached right to the ceiling; its doors and mouldings were carved, but with no constant pattern. Closer investigation revealed it was not made up of single large pieces of wood, but many, many small pieces joined together; all different types of wood, dyed to look like dark oak. It was like it had been put back together after a giant explosion. It didn't look like a wardrobe that would transport you to a magical land full of talking animals; instead it looked like something that would take you to some dark sorcerer's bedroom.

Luke broke the spell of silence and opened the wardrobe door. Inside it had a built-in set of small drawers and empty

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hangers hung from a bar of wood across the middle. He leaned his head inside and sniffed, over loudly, while making a funny face. “Smells a bit funny...” The look of concern vanished from his brother’s face and turned into a smile. “Unpack your stuff, bro’ and then let’s all, meet downstairs in the hallway in ten mins. Then we’ll find Dad.”

Megan and Luke left Jake alone, their voices receding as they went to their own rooms. Jake opened his rucksack and started throwing his stuff into drawers, except for his trousers and shirts which he left in the rucksack before hefting it into the wardrobe. Jake closed one door but kept the other open - it looked less scary that way.

Jake put the small brown case down on the bed. Kneeling down he opened it and took out a small blue Bible and a picture of his mother. She looked happy and well in the picture. It had been taken a couple of years ago, before she had started treatment. They had been flying kites that day and the wind had messed up her hair. She looked so alive, not like when he last saw her at the hospital, pale and grey. Dad kept saying they would all be back together in a few weeks, but Jake knew deep inside that this was not a certainty. He said a prayer for his mother and, kissing the photo, he slid it into his Bible and put them under the pillow. Shoving the case under the bed, he stood up to go and find Luke. Jake heard a quiet whisper, like a voice behind him. The hairs on his neck prickled down his spine to the base of his back. Then a slow creak began, increasing until the door of the wardrobe suddenly crashed shut. Jake froze. Forcing himself to breathe again he turned around, at the same time taking a step backwards towards the bedroom door.

The room was empty, the wardrobe closed.

On the floor was a pair of underpants. He must have forgotten to put them in the wardrobe. He couldn’t leave them there. What if Megan or Lucy saw them? He inched forward,

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bending down quickly, all the while not taking his eyes off of the wardrobe. Slowly he reached out his hand and taking hold of the wardrobe door handle, flung it open. Apart from his clothes, it was empty.

Throwing his pants in a drawer, Jake started to close the wardrobe when something caught his eye - a small hole in the side of the door. There was something in it. Poking his little finger into the hole he pulled out a small piece of old yellowed paper. It crackled to his touch. There was something else behind the paper, hard and metallic, but even with Jake's little finger pushed right into the hole he couldn't reach it to get it out. Jake closed the door, turning his attention to the paper. It was so aged that small pieces flaked off as he unfolded it. The note fitted into the palm of his hand. There was some faded writing that was hard to read. The letters were written in strange curly handwriting:

*Be brave
Do not fear
Help me Jake*

Jake ran out of the room, down the corridor, into the hall and straight into the back of Luke who was talking to Megan.

"Hey, watch it, squirt!" Luke barked angrily at being hit by his human cannonball of a brother.

"Luke, look!" Jake opened his hand to reveal the note only to find it in small broken fragments in his clenched fist.

"What are you on, Jakes?" glared Luke, still angry from being hit.

HIDDEN MESSAGE

“Children, your respective parents are expecting you in the kitchen.” The voice was harsh and stern. It came from a woman behind them on the stairs. She was tall, thin and dressed in black. She wore her grey hair tied neatly back off her face. Her eyes fixed first on Luke and then on Jake, where her ice blue stare lingered.

“Yes, Mrs. Sterling,” said Megan, grabbing hold of Luke and Jake’s hands and pulling them through a doorway towards the kitchen.

“Who is that?” asked Luke.

“I told you, Mrs. Sterling the housekeeper; she is always turning up like that out of nowhere. She scares me. She’s so stern, although she isn’t exactly shouty. She looks old but she doesn’t move like she’s old, not like our Gran; she’s old and moves like she’s old.”

Mrs. Sterling listened as their voices faded down the corridor. She crossed over to where they had stood, and stooping down she carefully picked up some of the fragments of the old note Jake had found. She looked at them closely, then, rubbing them into dust between her fingers, she smiled.



The kitchen was quite a long way from the hall, at the far end of the East wing. It was a large open space with many side doors to pantries and larders. A large, rough wooden dining table filled the centre of the room, and along the far end of the room was a monster of a black woodburner and stove. Ben and Aunt Joanne sat at the table drinking big mugs of coffee. On the table was a selection of things to eat, a light supper. Lucy sat next to her Mum, helping herself to a plate of chocolate biscuits. Megan dived into the same plate of biscuits, drawing an annoyed glance from her sister.

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“Help yourself,” said their mother. Luke and Jake pulled up chairs and tucked into some cold chicken sandwiches. The kettle on the stove began to whistle and with only a little protest Lucy went and made tea for those who wanted it.

“This looks like a great place to stay,” said Dad, as though he were trying to convince the children they would have a good time.

“Hmm,” grunted Lucy disagreeably.

“Yes, it is,” agreed Aunt Jo, ignoring her eldest daughter. “Ben, you should come back with Beccy when she’s better. Tom said the Trust of the estate would let us come back again.”

“Tell them about the house,” said Megan, her mouth full of biscuits.

“Well, there are records of a large house here since before Norman times, and it’s one of the few places in Wales referenced in the Domesday Book. Do you know what that is?”

Luke nodded, but Jake was eager to show off his knowledge.

“Yes, it’s the record that William the Conqueror made of all the things in England, so he would know what he had won after the Battle of Hastings.”

“Yes, more or less,” said Aunt Jo pleased that a ten-year-old knew their history. “Well, the house has been rebuilt time and time again. Wars and fire have taken their toll, but some of the house, mainly the cellars, are that old. Most of the house you can see is Edwardian and Victorian. There was an extensive rebuild in the Industrial Revolution. The house has, in theory, been in the ownership of one family until the last of the family died. His name was Philip Dupont - Morgan. Dupont is derived from the French, meaning the bridge, but it is the other side of the family that your Uncle Tom thinks we may be related to.”

“You mean we may own this place?” exclaimed Jake.

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“No,” laughed his aunt. “That’s all owned by the estate’s Trust, but it would be nice to know some of our family history, don’t you think?”

“Yes, it would,” said Ben, “but I need to head home.”

“Are you sure you won’t stay?” asked Aunt Jo.

“No Jo, I need to be at the hospital tomorrow. I promised Beccy.” He put down his empty coffee cup. “Come on, lads, come and see me off.”

They all got up to leave, Megan stuffing one last biscuit into her mouth. Jake noticed a blackboard on one wall. Written on it were the words:

*Welcome Luke and Jake
to Pen Glas Manor.*

“Who wrote that?” Jake asked Megan as they left the room.

“Oh, I did,” she said. “I wanted you to feel welcome.”

“Oh, thanks,” said Jake, but really he was thinking about how she had written the message - in strange curly handwriting.



They waved Dad goodbye. For the first time that day the rain had actually stopped, but the sky was dark with rain clouds that made the evening look like night. Dad drove off. Only one of the car’s tail lights was working, and a solitary red eye made its way down the gravel driveway, disappearing into the trees at the edge of the estate. Every now and again the eye continued to wink at them, until it finally vanished from sight.

Luke and Jake began to feel down. They trudged back to the kitchen with Aunt Jo leading and chatting about the house and

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its estates, in that way adults do when they're trying to get children interested in something they love themselves. Luke and Lucy were not too bothered about the history of the old house. Megan and Jake however were interested in what Megan's mother was saying. They listened intently, learning how the house owners had owned the land for miles around and that Jo had once seen the decree, supposedly signed by William the Conqueror, giving the property to someone known as Le Chevalier Gris.

"That means the Grey Knight in French, who was probably a bastard son, which was why he was referred to as grey."

"You would never know Mum was a history lecturer at university," whispered Lucy to Luke. They walked more slowly than the rest and talked between themselves about school and the other things that had changed in their lives since they last met at Christmas.

Mrs. Sterling was in the kitchen and gave all of them, including Aunt Jo, a review of the rules: where they could and couldn't go, what time the doors would be locked and that they should not be opened unless in an emergency. The whole house was alarmed as there were many rare antiques and paintings. The alarms would be turned on at 10pm and off again at 6am. As long as they kept to their bedrooms, the hallway, kitchen and the passages between, then they would be fine, otherwise the alarms would sound and the police would come. At that, Mrs. Sterling raised her voice and eyes as if that was the worst possible thing ever. She then went on about where they were allowed to go inside and outside the house; mainly they were allowed in the areas that were open to the public on special occasions – and nowhere else.

Megan shot Jake a glance which suggested they had heard this speech before. Mrs. Sterling ended her talk with the words,

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“Unless it is yours, then you are not to touch it, while you stay here! Is that understood?”

Nodding their understanding, they finished their supper. They tidied up the kitchen, washing and drying the dishes by hand. This seemed to impress Mrs. Sterling a lot, her attitude to them losing some of its stiffness.

“Okay little bro, you ready to rock?”

Jake’s face lit up. “You bet fire-team leader!” This was Luke’s way of asking his brother to play computer games with him.

Jo raised her eyes. “Go on then, I’ll get back to my books.”

As they went to leave, Jake suddenly stopped, remembering the letter and the wardrobe. “Aunt Jo, are there any ghost stories about this house?”

“No, none that I have heard of, which is odd for a house so old. Mrs. Sterling have you heard of any?”

Mrs. Sterling looked aghast. “Ghosts, such as dead people? No! Nothing so disrespectful here.”

Jake relaxed, and the children turned to leave.

As they walked out of the door, Mrs. Sterling added, “No, no ghosts. Only the living haunt this house.”

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*THE
GREEN EYES
OF
DARKNESS*

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