

A paranormal fantasy romance about a storytelling emotion-sucking vampire.

Among Other Edens

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The "Legends of Eden" series

Among Other Edens



Guinevere Edern

Among Other Edens



“Bend your blood to my mouth.”

Praise for “Among Other Edens”

"With language as beautiful as it is riveting, *Among Other Edens* is a wonderful tapestry of gothic sentiment and modern day culture. The story is steeped in haunting imagery so vivid you'll feel the dread and longing right along with Evie, page after page."

-Rebekah Hunter Scott, author of *Motherhood Is Easy...As Long As You Have Nothing Else To Do For The Next 50 Years.* www.MotherhoodIsEasy.com.

"*Among Other Edens* mesmerizes and compels the reader to fall soul-first into another world – a world of intrigue, passion, danger and fear. Guinevere Edern’s writing harkens to the days of flowing literary prose, a welcome respite from the terse language generally spewed by fiction writers today. A must-read for lovers of the English language."

-Michael Ray King, author of *Loves Lost and Found*, and, *Fatherhood 101: Bonding Tips for Building Loving Relationships.* www.ClearViewPressInc.com.

"*Among Other Edens* is an edgy, urban-gothic tale told by a very talented story teller. With a literary blend of contemporary and medieval voice, Edern leads readers through time and place at a rapid pace, visiting past, present and alternative time with grace and color. Urban legend fans will love this fresh new voice in the genre and will wait on the edge of their seats for the next book by this gifted author."

-N. L. Quatrano, Author/Editor, www.NLQuatrano.com.

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“*Among Other Edens* is a modern-day gothic tour de force that takes the reader on a thrilling journey through the troubled mind of Evie, whose dark family history holds mysteries both horrific and magnificent. The author brings a beautiful, melodic literary voice to every page and breathes life into a stale genre with a unique character and concept.”

-Jeff Swesky, ghostwriter of
Flight from Fear: A Rabbi's Holocaust Survival Story.
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*Among Other
Edens*

By

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Richardson Publishing
Altamonte Springs, Florida

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Chapter One

April 30th 1999

“*I*n Wales, which was the stronghold of Druidism, the profession of the bard was held in high honour. The poems of Taliesin, Merlin and other bards of the sixth century, still remain...” Evie read.

Picking the lid on an empty pill bottle, Evie considered the poet’s lot when viewed through a curtain of Welsh mist circa 500 AD.

It would suck, she concluded. No puffy jackets, no fleecy boots, no cell phone. In fact, nothing to help trudging through the soggy Welsh countryside seem like a really great adventure. No wonder anyone with half a brain went to Spain or Disney for their holidays.

Turning the book over, she studied the broken spine, ‘History of English Literature, W.F Collier L.L.D.’ Published in 1881, one-hundred eighteen years ago.

“Long dead, mate.” A reference to the dreadful name ‘Peregrine’, scrawled across the inside cover. Evie wondered if he had ever been beaten up for it at school.

But Taliesin, she’d never heard of that name before. Breathing it into voice, Evie let the strange name cross the threshold of her lips and into the quiet room. She quite liked it. Far better than poor Peregrine. In any case, Taliesin could not

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have existed. Every idiot knew Merlin to be a myth; therefore Taliesin fell into the same boat. Surely people in 1881 hadn't been that friggin' stupid.

The book couldn't be blamed. In fact Evie had been quite happy about purchasing the volume from the dusty little second hand shop in the center of Liverpool. She just felt like crap. No big surprise though considering. She picked at the label on the bottle, providing a sort of physical reminder to her anxious nerves.

Ultimately the book attracted her because of its survival and once home, she packed it onto her bookshelf along with an already swollen arsenal of literature from centuries lost to dust.

April 30th, the Eve of May, twelve years ago, she acquired the first volume. Her eighth birthday. Evie recalled sneaking past her mother and grandmother, Harriet-Rose at some Catholic jumble sale. Discovering a table positioned dead center to Jesus, Evie found it full of old books and hovered over the various contents. The click of her mother's heels on the wood block floor twenty feet away assured the child some temporary privacy. `

No time to waste, Evie examined a wobbly stack balanced precariously beneath the Lord's feet, crowned by a red bound history book. Standing on tiptoe, Evie lifted the scarlet cover, its age determined by a nearly faded stamp dating the book to 1907.

Lowering her eyes toward the empty pill bottle, Evie recalled her child's hands pressing the freckled paper. The noise invading her head from the verse her mother and horrible Harriet-Rose sang on their way to the church, impossible to ignore.

*'Evil Evie, Evil Evie
Born on the Eve of May
Pagan Child, Satan's Bride
Tie her up and burn her.'*

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Human slaughter. Acres and acres of wasted flesh rising beside rivers of blood and rotting corpses. Armies of Britons, abandoned by the retreating Romans, hacking the Saxon invaders to pieces. Searing pain, blood, a sword, the deep plunge into flesh, and a dark rise of pure evil. An overwhelming smell of sulphur, then nothing.

Found wandering around the church car park by a woman wearing a pink hat with a plastic daisy, Evie was returned to her frantic mother, book still in hand.

“Where the hell were you?” Her mother gripped Evie’s shoulders hard. “Ten minutes we’ve been looking for you! Ten bloody minutes of you showing me up in front of all these people, and all you can do is stand there with two glassy eyes and a bloody friggin’ nose.”

“My head hurts.” Evie complained then.

Handing the child a crumpled tissue, Harriet-Rose chimed in, “Even on your birthday you have to go and be selfish. Thinking of yourself all the time, you should be ashamed to be alive, you should. God took your sister away; you on the other hand were kept here for the devil’s mission.”

“Destroy us all, you will.” Swept into the car by her mother, a long ride of silence followed, punctuated by an occasional threat.

Even now, years later, Evie could recall a cave of emerald water and frozen crystals but at the time had kept that information to herself, knowing better than to say anything like that.

Evie got the book for free.

Afterwards, she scrubbed the kitchen floor for making an unholy show of her mother, followed by fifty lashes across her back. Harriet-Rose’s son, uncle Colin, drunk, up for anything and very much his usual self didn’t need asking twice.

Stripped to the waist and forced to lie face down across his bed, Evie counted each lash of the belt as it tore her bare skin. Defying tears she willed herself toward the pale waters of a quiet stream instead of the stale sheets heaving against her face.

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Afterwards, when her mother and grandmother left the room a pair of sweaty hands lifted her slowly and glazed, drunk eyes lingered over the small bud of each developing breast. Defiant, Evie stared back, willing him into the pit of hell as he forced her to raise her arms. He reapplied her T-shirt then, pushing it over her head, greasy palms tracing the rise of goose bumps pricking her shoulders.

Watching him thread the hideous belt through the baggy loops around his denim hips, Evie wished him far from Eden Park. Away from the same house he shared with his older sister Maureen, Evie's mother. After the funeral of Elaine and her father he'd been given Elaine's old room, the one with the teddy bear wallpaper, his rent always spent on drink.

Shaking the familiar memories, Evie tossed the book aside. She had come upstairs to die not read or bloody well think. Flinging the empty pill bottle across the dresser, Evie looked toward the window.

The surprise of an April fog diverted her attention from the waiting. Face pressed hard against the glass, Evie observed the quiet mist's descent upon the road. Only the lamps were alert, struggling to light the silence while everything else fell into grey.

"Global warming," muttered Evie to the emptiness. If polar ice caps could turn into a vanilla shake, why not get fucking lost in fog on April 30th?

Not that she had anywhere to go for twentieth birthday, no, God forbid. On the anniversary of her fifteenth year as Hell's Child following the murder, suicide of Elaine and her father, chores must be completed. A detail that included scrubbing the kitchen floor, wiping out cupboards and polishing the brass fire surround. For reasons unknown every afternoon when she came home from that hideous job selling tacky shoes, she must immediately press into action.

Anyway, she had a riot of a headache. The sharp pain extended into her right temple, making it difficult for the girl to hold her head up.

The scent of lavender breathed forward.

It arrived around the same time as her headache, the curious fragrance from her favorite flower compensating for the bitter tang of bleach from the grey cleaning cloth wrapped around her hand. Passing the soggy fabric across the kitchen floor until the entire area shone with wet, Evie inhaled the lavender fragrance like a gift. Struggling to her feet, she took a step back and checked for dull areas that would indicate she missed a spot.

Head hurting to the point of tears, Evie chucked the dirty water down the stainless steel sink then rinsed the cloth before heading upstairs.

Now Evie closed her eyes and resting her head against the cold windowpane drew the fragrance into her center, letting its touch fall amongst her senses. An image rose, a vibrant cluster of lavender spilling out from the base of that oak tree in the four acre meadow behind the house. Remnants of the three thousand acre Orchard Farm and the Georgian Eden Hall a mile away.

Another image rose from the fog, a cathedral rooftop and an intricate lacework of tiny gothic arches. A feather spiraling lazily downwards and a child's curious eyes, bewildered, following the soft descent until at last she saw and understood the vanishing of Elaine and her father.

Opening her eyes Evie refused the disturbing scene and the memory of arms that embraced her sorrow, perfectly invisible, stalling her desire to follow.

Seven fifteen.

"Christ, I should be friggin' dead by now."

Shouldn't something be happening? Evie's hands fluttered against her chest. Nothing, she didn't even have a bloody heart palpitation. Twenty minutes since chucking five little white pills back with a glass of hideously warm tap water from the bathroom. So far though, she couldn't even force a yawn.

Nervously, Evie touched her throat and traced the thin edge of a silver chain circling her neck. Stopping at the tiny pendant with the ruby center, she tugged at it, letting the sharp tip from an apple leaf dig into the top of her thumb.

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The silver fruit had been slipped into the palm of Evie's hand courtesy of her paternal grandmother Evangeline. Evie had been forced to observe her father and Elaine's funeral from the parking lot. The evil girl had caused all this, and under no circumstance should a devil's disciple be allowed into the House of God. Having been told to wind down the window by Grandma Eva, the simple gesture as it fell against the child's cold skin explained how she should not blame herself for the death of Evangeline's son. That it could not have been prevented by Evie or anyone else.

Even now the origin of the pendant remained a mystery to Evie and without a clue regarding where it came from before the chain fell around her neck, the child accepted the secret gift as an unspoken acknowledgment between them, that in the Evil Evie Campaign, the girl at least had one ally. She had always loved Evangeline.

Five years later when Evie's allergy to apples really became apparent by the ripping pains tearing through her stomach whenever she ate one, the ruby fruit became the object of macabre amusement between them both. The idea of keeping the very thing that could harm you, close to your throat, provided something of a private joke for the two.

Three months after that, Evie's champion companion caught pneumonia and died, making the necklace one of the most sacred things she possessed.

Evie never removed the pendant from her neck.

Now though, beneath the dark red jewel, her throat felt tight, made anxious by the fact that she was obviously not going to die, as hoped. Searching for some clue as to what she might have done wrong, Evie re-read the instructions squeezed onto a tiny piece of paper wrapped around the bottle. "Take two with water."

Yeah, well she'd done that with five, counting them carefully into the palm of her hand. "May cause drowsiness."

"No shit!" She spoke into the empty room, "they're friggin' sleeping pills."

She felt sick.

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Waiting for hell, the anticipation alone should have killed her.

A ribbon of silver mist dipped beneath the window. Lazily Evie wondered whether or not the thing was closed properly. The fog might have been reaching in, breathing toward her, like that dream of fog and mist from the night before.

She'd been asleep, at peace. A jewel of a river shimmered at her feet and she stepped into it, invited. Loved beyond measure she heeded the calm instruction to retrieve something, with no idea what it might be.

Evie shook her head to banish the dream. God, her head still hurt.

Perhaps she should lie down.

Invite death in.

She would be discovered here, carried into sleep. Arms crossed against her chest, a float of dark hair fanned carefully across her pillow, transformed in death to the texture of silk instead of its usual frizzy mess.

Ophelia's drift downstream.

The print was tacked to the wall across from her bed, Millais' portrayal of the young girl's madness. Evie stared at it now. An ethereal pose amongst a drift of delicate flowers, leaving Hamlet to the drama of his tragedy. And, Ophelia to her peace.

Evie stared at the small collection of prints picked up from the Walker Art Gallery. They were trophies of a sort, obtained on a rare free Saturday afternoon spent in town, when the kitchen floor sparkled and she had been allowed out of the house.

Often, when the house lay in its final darkness, Evie would think herself into each picture, a life one hundred times better than this one. They'd been nirvana to her anxiety, wrapped in cellophane; they'd helped control her nail biting anxiety. The quiet presence of the pictures harnessed her breath away from the inevitable doom the end of 1999 and the commencement of a New Millennium was about to unleash.

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Looking at them now, her nerves felt raw. The inexplicable panic of something unknown jumping into her throat.

Inhaling the lavender room, Evie turned to the mythical castle. It didn't matter about the stupid friggin' Millennium crap and the breakdown of all things electric. Better instead to think about the amber stone rising from the pink wallpaper and the shore of a misty sea. The maiden Psyche, in the foreground, thoughtful and minus anything electric, sitting among the grounds of her lover Cupid's *The Enchanted Castle*, the painting's namesake. Inspiration for one of her favorite poems, Ode to a Nightingale.

And finally, this one. She would stare at this as she died tonight. When the fog had cleared and the moonlight rose at last into the sky above her house, it would be the knight's turn. Emerging from within the trees, each stride transformed the rose pink wall into the clearing of a secret forest. A girl waited quietly, hand stretched forward, beckoning him toward the siren of her beautiful face. The seductive length of her hair pouring over her dress spilling onto the soft grass beneath.

In the silence, Evie imagined his voice, the soft, careful words and the exchange taking place between them. The gleam from his silver armor breaking the enchantment of darkness. It wouldn't take much to transport herself there, it never did. Drawn into this otherworld, beautiful, fragile, worthy of interest and protection.

"La Belle Dame Sans Merci." Slowly, Evie mouthed the title of the painting named after a poem of the same name by her beloved poet, John Keats.

"And there I shut her wild, wild eyes, so kiss'd to sleep"

Evie whispered a line from the verse, willing as she did, for herself to disappear, to dwell within the darkest depths of the hidden forest. To sleep eternal. She would do so, clutching the small volume of poetry snuck into the house the previous Sunday afternoon after its discovery in a box of junk at a church sale.

On the cover, and embossed against the worn surface; a single word read simply, Poem. Peering closer, Evie had

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traced the missing letter ‘S’ faded into the tattered cover, Poems. A wreckage from the past, tossed against time. It had been enough to qualify as a rescue book.

Keats, 1817. She hadn’t known until arriving home. The tragic poet, his quest for the soaring mystery of the senses over flat logic, all hijacked by a death in Rome at the tender age of twenty four. Consumption, the dramatic curse of any artist worth their salt back then.

Laying it on top of her bed, Evie carefully pried open the delicate leather binding, its dry layers cracking beneath her hands. She had discovered the fluid penmanship then, each dark stroke marking a peculiar inscription across the center of the first page. In ebony ink, it read.

*To Evelyn,
‘Your Dreams Are My Survival’
The Storyteller. 1848*

At the time she had been excited at the thought of someone else with her name, even if by now they were nothing more than a skinny box of maggots and bones.

Skipping to the back of the book Evie then attempted to locate another inscription or message. Unfortunately she found nothing.

Nevertheless, in the dull headache of a week that followed her find, better to imagine who this Storyteller might have been.

A poet, bearing gifts in narrative and rhyme before disappearing into a labyrinth of shadows. Soft echo of his voice treading the quiet dark.

Disappearing into darkness.

How perfect an idea.

She’d thought of the pills then and the beauty of a long sleep, eternal.

Now, clutching the little book of verse, Evie settled against her pillow.

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Lavender floated across the quiet room, making her warm against the strange curl of mist crossing the surface of her skin.

Evie inhaled once, then again, obeying the urge to gather more of it into her senses. Taking the feeling deeper a single name drifted into her thoughts, possessing the image that came.

A solitary figure lifted each word from the page, drawing them gently toward her soul.

Behind the ruby apple, the name lifted into her throat.

“Storyteller”.

Beneath the slow intoxication, beneath the image taking form calling her name to itself, Evie waited for the final sleep to fall.



Chapter Two

He slips from between shadows, charging the memory of a dream to my soul.

A boy beneath a tree, lying and still, like death while the rain fell in a veil of grey-white mist. He needed it I think because as the rain continued to fall his mouth opened slowly, as though wanting. I waited, curious and from a distance, quiet behind passive folds of sleep.

Then it came, gentle and unnoticeable at first. The edge of each white petal touched with a delicate pink blush. But it came all the same, turning pink into something darker, moving up and toward the heart of the flower then falling like perfect tears toward the open mouth, red and welcome.

And he drank and I grew so thirsty, and I despised him, this boy, this slip of a man who remained unaware of my private intrusion.

I wanted to drink, wanted this blood too. Needed its rush against the depth of my veins, filling every sinew with its scarlet path.

Stinging jealously at the peace of his sleep, and the dying of a burning thirst.

Then he turned, not his whole body, just his head, turning toward me in my green rage, staring without accusation,

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without judgment and I became aware of what felt like the inevitable pull of my soul toward his.

A name I wanted to understand but could not.

Stepping from darkness, his presence comes quite matter of fact and without surprise.

My thirst is unbearable and driven from sleep, I slip, quiet from the edge of my bed, each step rattling into my bones and I wonder if I might be catching the flu, such is the ache pressing my head.

Soundless, everything. The night drawing its breath away from my presence. It is so dark, so lovingly dark within this silence that I might be somewhere else, just drifting without the sting of direction.

Am I being watched in my secret walk? Perhaps my quiet tread upon this floor wants to be observed, to be claimed with neither touch nor knowledge of possession.

But let the darkness touch me still, its velvet wrap, a covering across my bare shoulders. Permit me to feel this night whisper against the brush of each eyelash as they fall against the dark air.

Let me love its touch without fear.

As I have before.

A single trail of blood flows beneath my nose, traveling toward my mouth. Vaguely I recall the one who would take this from me, his mouth claiming my last breath.

I recall also, the boy and the delicacy of the blood rain. Thirst, deep and cutting so that it might be dangerous.

He has come for me.

The swift beat of movement against the dark tells me so.

Then stillness.

At last.

My angel, immortal.

I cannot fear this.

He stands before me as one with the night yet separate from it, his features sharp, striking recognition against my eyes.

“Yes, I know you,” I whisper. “Have known of you always.”

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I am no longer thirsty, the thought suddenly occurs to me.

Tall, taller than I, much taller. The breadth of his shoulders hidden beneath the expanse of his black coat. Cashmere, the finest. Instinctively I want to reach out, touch it, be inside somehow. To disappear. It has been so long.

I stare into the face of this being, this entity who understands me as no one else can. Dark curls tossed amongst each other as though he might have fought the raging path of a storm to get here. He stands, green eyes piercing the stillness of his face and I understand that it is he who watched my descent on the stairs, observer of my red thirst.

I wait, my face drawn toward him, wanting what must come next.

A sudden rush and I cannot breathe.

Murder, lies, death, so much of it flashing against my thoughts.

Images, so many, delivering blood from my eyes until they fall like crimson tears to my face. A house lost among the tangle of a forgotten garden, a secret death and a betrayal so old I feel the thrust of its ascent from within the hot stones of the earth and its release into my soul.

There is knowledge I must have and its hunger rips at every cell. I see a path and my tread upon its ancient dust, forbidden. I hear my name called forward, and want to follow.

His hands brace my head and I am against him, feeling the push into my soul, binding every cell to him so he might feel me there again, claiming me for himself.

His tongue floats against my skin, following the trace of blood from beneath my eyes into his throat

“Know me once again, my Evie. Know me in every breath, eternal.”

A faint whisper stalks the side of my face, stroking the fragrant air.

I struggle beneath a sudden pressure against the side of my head, his eyes challenge the pain, making me take this, telling me I need to, that in order to understand, it must be so.

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A final push inwards and another fast image comes; a river, a crystal emerald and its liquid release into a silver palm.

Peace now and the name of one whom I recognize but had long ago forgotten, falls against my breath, but I am permitted to say nothing about it.

The blood and the death have gone. I sigh at last, permitting breath into my throat in thin, exquisite strands.

“Evie, finally.”

My skin trembles against his fingertips as they dance across my throat, making me thirsty, making my soul’s journey rise toward him as he claims each slope of breast and hip with each impeccable touch.

He is within me and I want to cry for the sense of him beneath my skin, my breath coming sharp against the pale flesh of his neck as I am lifted toward the black forever of his coat.

“Come with me.”

Outside it is raining and we move beyond this place, he and I, toward the forgotten orchard and the one who waits.



Chapter Three

Emerging from the gloom of the urine-soaked subway, Evie caught a taste of decadent spring air. Expelling the inside of her nose from the sharp smell of ammonia, she blinked hard against the death of an afternoon in May. Delicate pearls of apple blossom burst from the trees lining both sides of the street, their pale shimmer vibrating beneath a contrast of storm clouds threatening to steal the precocious little buds from their dance.

Rain or not, she'd better be home within the next five minutes or accusations would fly. Yeah, like she'd really snuck the fuck off to that maligned Orchard Park estate to shoot heroin or have raging sex against the perimeter wall. Even if she knew what to do, hell could have a friggin' blizzard before she'd let someone rip her knickers off against a backdrop of burned out cars crashed into the scarred concrete.

Checking her watch, Evie climbed the two flights of concrete steps, inhaling the sweet apple blossom fragrance. Once at the top she had the hill on Eden Park Avenue to descend and she would be home. Once there she would be told to clean the toilet. She always did on Saturday evenings.

Struggling with a plastic shopping bag housing a ten pound bag of potatoes and three loaves of bread, Evie watched

as the first puff of apple blossom lifted toward their storm captors, each flurry chasing the other like tiny breaths of snow.

The music came next.

Behind her and on the other side of the road, it became an unmistakable sound. The hard, bellowing rush travelled in her direction, down the hill and towards her home. No one else was about, leaving Evie alone to hear the bagpipes.

At her side, the piper kept pace with the girl, and staring straight ahead, seemed oblivious to the peculiar disturbance he caused.

Facing the curious figure with the dark hair, Evie confronted him with a hard stare, willing the stranger to notice her. But he continued, marching toward the struggling sun falling behind the distant marshes, oblivious to his audience of one.

She had never encountered anything like it, this person dressed as though he might have walked all the way from the Scottish Highlands.

She couldn't believe his clothes. Evie observed his white Jacobite shirt worn full through the sleeves and body. She could see it was secured by a set of ties criss-crossing at the open neck, the sleeve cuffs fastened tight around each wrist by a set of ebony buttons. Over the shirt, he wore a black doublet.

The bagpipes fascinated Evie, their vast noise, resonating from both sides of the street, bullied the air in a hard blast as each finger pressed against one of the four black pipes, ornately trimmed in silver.

Still, he appeared oblivious to Evie's attention.

Near the bottom of the hill and close to the opening between two houses, the breach accommodated an overgrown footpath tangled with six foot high weeds, thorny brambles and ancient litter. Weaving across the backs of several houses it broke onto an unkempt part of the golf course where it yielded to the expanse of forgotten fields, remnants of what remained of Eden Hall.

Twice the year before, Evie challenged herself to cut through the place. Apprehension finally yielded to curiosity

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and the desire to face her fear before the overpowering reach of the path's green life trembled against her strangled nerves.

Both times she regretted her decision at the same place along the path; halfway through, too far to run back and too far to go forward.

But she had gone on anyway, running breathless, chased above and below by the sinister reaches of thick branches and angry nettles that did not forgive those who trespassed against them.

“Surely to God, he won't go down there!” Evie freaked.

Eyes screwed against the bright contradiction of sun and storm clouds, Evie squinted as the figure turned onto the path, an anonymous left shoulder first to disappear before his full body made a quick sacrifice to the darkness.

The music stopped.

Crossing the road, Evie hurried down the remaining hill and to the mouth of the footpath, bag of potatoes banging against her legs. The bread would be well crushed by the time she got home, but right now she couldn't care less.

No trace of the piper. Perhaps he had stopped playing, catching his breath while picking his way through all that undergrowth. He hadn't, realized Evie, taken a single pause during his entire descent down the hill. Perhaps that explained the silence.

Surely he wouldn't walk across those deserted fields with the marshland and hidden streams taking him dangerously close to the hideous Orchard Farm Estate. Segregated from Eden Park by that concrete wall, he would need balls of steel to walk through there dressed like Rent-a-Piper.

Jogging up the path after him, one of the handles on the plastic bag snapped causing a loaf of bread to tumble onto the ground, narrowly missing a pile of dog crap.

“Fucketty friggin' fuck.” Evie muttered irritated. Grabbing the bread she flicked at the bits of dirt decorating the paper wrapping, knowing the kind of trouble she'd get into if she were caught here. Her grandmother was right, she really was good for nothing.

Fog? How? She had glanced at the bread wrapper for a split second to clean off the bits, so where had the stuff come from?

But it could be smoke, Evie decided. From the grey mist, an overpowering odor of charcoal and sulphur had emerged. The pungent mix stung her eyes. Blinking from the assault, tears ran onto the girl's face. Evie's throat hurt.

Slowly now, she approached the vast open space ahead of her with extreme caution, somewhere there might be a fire, and music man had walked right into it. He would head back this way, Evie reasoned. Whatever was going on down there, it wasn't the place play the bagpipes.

Tempted further into its grey presence, the silent air stroked the sides of Evie's face, beckoning the girl further into its domain.

"Evie." But that was the breeze, it had to be.

"Eeevviee." Her name drifted through the trees.

Shivering against the sudden chill, she cast a glance toward the canopy of oaks, leaves stretching toward spring. Through the mosey branches she could see the sky, a tumble of storm clouds pressing the remains of an afternoon, nothing more. But down here, down here was sulphur.

"Come and see Evie. Come and see it, Evelyn Edern, come listen."

There were the bagpipes again.

Amazing Grace.

They had sung it at church a couple of Sundays ago. Mrs Bellows, the ancient pianist, played the notes to a different tune as she always did. Nobody ever had the heart to tell her.

"Come on Evie, hurry. It's here Evie. For you it is here."

This couldn't be happening. It just wasn't possible, the familiar child like voice sewn into the breeze, clear against the strange music and the acrid smoke. Elaine.

She should be gone from here. Every part of her said that she must leave.

Yet she had to know. She would spend her life wondering otherwise.

Was any of this real?

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Pressing further along the path Evie arrived at the opening to the expanse of fields and marshes. The smoke was thicker here, yellow.

She needed to be sick.

“Evie.”

That voice again, playing through the bagpipes, Her name, harsh, tinged with brittle laughter.

“Come in Evie. You belong here, with us.”

The shadow of a man walking forward, bearing the bagpipes with ease.

“Dad?”

Tears stung the corners of her eyes.

Her father was here? In this place, living here all along? She had seen him go, had watched his flight into nothing.

Her fifth birthday.

Hers and Elaine’s.

How? Her father never even played the spoons. But it was him though. Dressed in the same dark suit he wore when walking off the cathedral tower; smiling, holding Elaine’s hand as though the pair were simply strolling into thin air.

Which is essentially what they did.

“Dad?”

But it couldn’t be, not like this. He was cremated, they both were, reduced to ashes and scattered across the Welsh hillsides where the family loved to walk.

He was coming straight for her. Amazing Grace resumed.

Turning swiftly, Evie spun around but already he stood ahead of her, pipes blasting her ears.

And then he transformed into a man in a mud splattered overcoat, its tattered reach trailing the damp earth. In the silence raging toward her, his mouth pulled back into a thin smile, mocking the girl’s frozen presence. His neck too, lay at a strange angle and Evie noticed how it had been broken. Acknowledging the conclusion, he cracked it straight.

A thin blue veined arm withdrew from the frayed sleeve of the ruined coat, his purple hand, fleshy and swollen indicated a cluster of trees standing to her back. Hardly daring to take

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her eyes from the horrible spectacle, Evie turned stiffly around.

A flash of a noose, a dead tree, then nothing.

Gone. The sulphur had cleared and she stood alone, at the edge of the path. In spite of everything she had witnessed, she might never have walked onto it in the first place.

She could barely stand from the fear of it all. What she had seen, her father who wasn't; her sister's voice. Five year old Elaine, childish; fifteen years into the past.

Shaken to the root of her soul, Evie dragged herself back toward the street, legs barely able to carry each step. She wasn't a pothead but she could be one now. Evie wondered how many bags of weed it would take to get the last few minutes out of her deranged mind. Straining her ears toward the silent fields, she made futile attempts to make sense of the impossible, searching, listening for something, an audible glimpse of what had just been.

But only the breezes returned, falling around her ears, mocking, caressing, and daring her return.

A paranormal fantasy romance about a storytelling emotion-sucking vampire.

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