

Mortlake

By Colin Garrow

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'Mortlake' is Book 2 in 'The Maps of Time' - a series best read in numerical order, starting with Book 1 - 'The Architect's Apprentice'.

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Chattels

Dark. Cold.

The light from the door startles the boy. He takes a step back.

'Stay.' The voice is low and sounds less harsh than before. The boy wonders if perhaps this is someone new, someone who might let him leave this place and go home.

But no.

A pause, then the figure moves into the room, the familiar kerr-slap, slap of his footsteps leaving the child in no doubt who the man is, and giving him yet another reason (as if he'd needed one) to fear for his continued existence. Shuffling his feet, he moves back to the space where he's been standing for the last few minutes.

The man with the long nose holds the candle close to the boy's face. 'Still ere, then?' He sniffs and wipes a sleeve across his mouth. 'Feel anyfing?'

The boy shakes his head.

The man pulls a piece of paper from a pocket and looks at it. 'Right, take a pace forward.'

The boy does so.

'Now, shift this way a couple of inches...'

'Towards you?'

'Just do it, will yer? An remember, same as before - if somefing appens, take one step forward then one step back so's ye're in the exact same place ye started from, right?'

The boy nods, his lower lip trembling. He moves two inches closer and a second later he's gone, leaving only darkness in the space where he stood.

Long Nose holds up a finger. 'One, two, step. Three, four, step...' The empty space remains in its vacant state. The man closes his eyes, sighs and mutters 'God's sake...'

'Lost another one?'

He turns and raises the candle. 'Oh, back, are ye?' He casts a last glance at the dusty footsteps on the ground, then walks to the door. 'Waste of bleedin time.'

The other man hands him a tankard. 'That's enough for tonight. We can talk about it in the morning.'

Long Nose sniffs. 'No reason ter talk about it - I know what we need.'

'Another child?'

'Indeed. But this time one that knows what he's bleedin doin.' He sniffs again. 'An I know just where to find one.' A smile slides across his face. 'Several, in fact.'

Ruins

It is a full minute before she dares to breathe.

Sliding one eye open and resisting the urge to swallow the blood in her mouth, the woman in the chair carefully turns her head towards the corner of the room.

Listening hard, she strives to hear the whoosh of the updraft. But there's only the gentle tick of the clock on the mantle. He is gone. At least, for now.

Looking down at herself, she blinks hard, tries to clear her vision. A white handkerchief is spread out across her chest. For a moment, she can't work out what is keeping it there. Then, turning her head slightly from one side to the other, she sees the two beautifully ornate daggers that skewer the material at the uppermost corners, their thin blades piercing through her skin, effectively nailing the fabric to her shoulders. Seeing the wounds, she again becomes aware of the throbbing pain. Casting her eyes downwards, she can make out something written in blood (hers?) A name she has heard before. She bends her head towards the floor, gasping at the hurt from her arms and chest. Trying to follow the line of the ropes, she searches to see where the knots are, but her bonds are too tight to allow further movement.

Gingerly leaning back into a position that's as comfortable as she can hope for, she fixes her gaze on the cupboard door and prepares to wait. Whoever arrives first will be either her saviour, or her executioner.

Chapter One - Taken

It's not that he's ungrateful. He really isn't. After all, they've been more of a family to him in the last few days than anything else he's ever known. No, this isn't about them - it's about work. I mean, he muses, when you get used to something, you ought to keep doing that thing, whatever it is. And Charlie, well, he's used to work, isn't he? Hard work.

Letting himself out of the front door, he recounts the instructions he's been given. Crossing the lane at the end of Church Square, he judges he can get to Mister Deacon's offices in a few minutes if he's quick. Shouldn't take long to pick up the documents and then he can get back to the house, safe in the knowledge that today, at least, he has done something to earn his keep. Staying close to the buildings on this side of the lane, he weaves around the carts and barrows that push their way through the narrow lanes to wherever their owners need to be.

The sun is warm, even at this early hour and Charlie revels in the splashes of sunlight as he passes each corner or gable end. Even the pushing and shoving and occasional knocks that any pedestrian must endure in these busy streets, does nothing to upset his cheerful outlook. Nothing can touch him in this new life - a life that has pulled him from the depravity of the gutter and the horrors of Arthur Batts and his villainous connections. Nothing, that is, except the knowledge that one of those connections may still harbour a wish to do him harm. Simply thinking about the man with the long nose sends a shudder up his spine and he breaks into a run to shake the hideous thoughts from his head.

The doors to the architect's office are open and Charlie hurries up the stairs, then recalling Deacon's directions, turns to the right.

The young man who greets him at the door seems in a rather dour mood.

'Another one of Deacon's urchins, eh?' Godber stands for a moment, staring at the boy. Charlie simply smiles back. Godber steps into the corner and reaches for a bundle of papers from a high shelf. Holding out the bundle, his sneer wider than a cat's whiskers, he waits for the boy to come to him before handing them over. 'And if anything happens to these, I shouldn't bother to come back.'

'Thank you sir,' says Charlie, taking the papers. 'They'll be safe wi me, ave no fear.' He smiles up at the young man, hoping a morsel of his own happiness might somehow spread to this sour-faced fool.

'Oh, don't worry, the 'fear' as you put it, shall be yours entirely if anything happens to these documents.' Godber steps to the door and jerks his head, indicating that the boy should leave.

Charlie steps onto the landing and turns to thank the man again, but the door is already shut. 'Suit yerself, then.' And with that, he tucks the bundle under one arm and hurries down the stairs. At the door, he looks out into the busy street for a moment, before beginning his journey back to the house.

Less than twenty yards away, two men note the boy's progress.

'Not the one I would ave wished for,' mutters the man with the long nose. From his position at the corner of the lane, he watches the boy skipping away. 'But he'll do for now.' He turns to his companion. 'Go an get the cart an leave it where we agreed. I'll make sure he takes a short cut home.'

The other man nods. 'Don't take all day.' He moves off down a side street.

Following at what he considers to be a suitable distance, Long Nose pulls the hat down over his eyes. The boy is walking fast, but he's no match for his pursuer. It takes less than a minute to get close enough to reach out and touch him, but he doesn't want to alert the boy. Not yet. Better to wait until they're near the agreed place, so he can ensure things go the way he wants them to.

Charlie stops for a moment to watch a man and a boy setting up a puppet theatre at the junction of two streets. The gaudy stripes of the booth are inviting, but Charlie knows he can't linger too long, or Deacon and the others will wonder where he's got to. He stands for a moment, as the young puppeteer begins to run through his repertoire with one of the marionettes. The gaily-coloured toy dances a jig on the grimy cobblestones, oversized wooden feet clattering and tapping an infectious rhythm.

Charlie taps his foot in time to the puppet, enjoying the spectacle. It is only when the man behind him touches his shoulder that he realises his mistake. Even before he turns to look up into the stranger's face, he knows who it will be.

'Ello, Charlie,' says Long Nose, in that quietly menacing voice he does so well. 'Goin somewhere, are ye?'

Charlie runs. Knocking over the puppet booth, he catches his foot in the strings of one of the marionettes and falls to the ground. But he's up again in an instant and with the angry shouts of the owner ringing in his ears, pelts through the crowd and down the nearest lane, skipping around the rickety cart that's waiting for its very special guest.

Even though he sees it coming, Charlie has no chance to avoid the darkness. Whatever it is that's thrown over his head, the boy can say with some certainty that this isn't the work of some street magician showing off his latest disappearing trick. A pair of strong arms enfolds his body and he feels the bundle of documents sliding out of his grip. A hand presses the sacking over his mouth, making it difficult to breathe. The stench of rotten potatoes fills his nostrils and the rough fabric scratches his face. He becomes aware of being hoisted upwards, momentarily floating through the air like a bird diving for its prey, before the hard floor of the cart hits his head and darkness ensues.

Tom stops what he's doing, aware of that feeling again, that sense of being watched. He can almost see it - hanging in the air, tainting the atmosphere like a familiar but unwelcome smell.

He peers into the crowd, searching the ruddy faces of customers and marketeers, but there's only the usual weekday throng of ordinary people, talking, shouting, pushing and shoving, going about their daily tasks. Even so, there's an ominous, unsettled mood around him, as if the community as a whole has something on its mind. His gaze slides over individual faces, assessing their expressions, noting tone of voice, sharpness of eye, searching for anything not right, not usual. Then, as his eyes fall back towards the stall in front of him, something stirs in his peripheral

vision. Between two large women and their screaming offspring...a face. Eyes small, skin dirty. The nose -

But then it's gone. He blinks. Or was it even there?

'You wantin this or not, son?' The fat man behind the stall glances round nervously.

Tom nods, 'Yes please, Frank.' He drops a small bag of coins into the man's outstretched palm and takes the long package from him, but as the boy begins to move away, the man grabs his arm.

'Watch yerself.' The voice is low and Tom is instantly alert. The man leans forward. 'He's here.' And his eyes shift upwards to somewhere above the boy's head. At the same time, a hand clasps Tom's shoulder and he whirls round to stare up into the shadowy face looming over him.

'Liable ter get your throat slit walkin round wiv that in yer and,' says a gruff voice. Tom steps back, ready to run.

A familiar chuckle emanates from beneath the dark fabric and Martin Deacon throws back his hood, revealing a wide smile. 'What d'you think Tom? A rare disguise, eh?' He nods a thank-you to the stall-holder then signals that Tom should hide the package from view. Taking the boy's arm, he leads him to the other side of the lane, away from the crowd. 'I'd rather we were not in public view for too long. In any case, we have a dinner appointment.' He begins to stride away but a tug on his sleeve draws him to a halt. He half turns. 'Tom? You look troubled...'

Tom looks into the throng of people still milling around the market.

The architect nods. 'He was here?' His voice is low, cautious.

Tom shrugs and bites his lip. 'I keep seeing him...think I keep seeing him.'

Deacon sighs. 'It's only been a few days. It is to be expected. You had quite an ordeal, and the possibility that he may return...' His voice tails off and he tries a smile.

'He'll come back. I know he will.'

Deacon rubs a hand over his face. 'Perhaps, Tom, perhaps. But not, I think, before Mrs Wooton serves dinner.' He slides an arm around the boy's shoulder and leads him away towards the top of the lane and round into Church Square.

The man with the long nose watches them depart. 'See? Told yer they'd be here.' He spits a gob of phlegm onto the ground and rubs it into the dirt with his foot. 'Fat Frankie must've been keepin it for im. But if Deacon finks he can solve is problems wiv a bit of paper, he's got anovver fink comin. Anyway,' he sniffs. 'I'd like ter bet he don't even know what's on it.'

'Never mind that,' says the other man. 'You promised me gold, and gold I intend to have.'

Long Nose gives him a sidelong glance. 'Gold? That's just an expression, ye stupid git. What I'm promisin ye's wurf more than any gold.' He sneers. 'Don't fret, we'll get what we're lookin for, one way or anovver. Anyway, we'd better get back to the cart afore our guest wakes up.' He turns and looks up into his companion's face. 'An if anyfing appens to im, we'll just pop round an pick up anovver one.'

The meal is a jolly affair, with Sarah and Emily helping to serve the food while Mrs Wooton, as usual, hurries around them like a mother hen.

'And don't ye be givin these two gentlemen a load more than either of em can eat, neither,' she scolds, scooping up two potatoes from the four on Tom's plate and transferring them to her own. 'Eyes bigger than belly, I think, Thomas, an afore ye say anythin, we'll be taking any leftovers to my old mother, so there.'

'What about my parents, Martha? They'll be home late.'

Martha Wooton shakes her head at him. 'Don't ye know us better than that, young man? We're ahead of ye on that one, we are.' She points to a smaller pot on the stove. 'We made another, specially.'

Tom laughs and reddens slightly at his misjudgement.

Deacon waves a chicken leg in the air. 'Never let it be said this household ignores the hungry.' He takes another huge bite and smacks his lips loudly.

'Oh, conduct yourself, Master. 'Anyone'd think ye were a motherless child.' She stops abruptly and looks across at Emily. 'Bless us lovey, we didn't mean anything by it...'

Emily shrugs. 'I know.' She pulls up a chair next to Tom. 'By all accounts, I may not be a motherless child.' She glances at Tom.

'We'll find her, Em.'

Sarah leans over and signs *Don't worry* to her friend. Emily signs back *Thank you*.

Tom watches the girls for a moment, glad to see their friendship developing. It's strange, he thinks, that Sarah still hasn't spoken. He'd imagined that when their father had come home everything would be back to normal, but it isn't. He catches his sister's eye and winks at her. She winks back.

Mrs Wooton ensures everyone has enough to eat then squeezes in-between Tom and Emily. After a moment, she looks up and peers around the table.

Deacon inclines his head. 'Lost something, Martha?'

'Whatisname...' She waves a finger at the empty chair.

Tom tears a piece of bread from the loaf in front of him. 'Charlie?' He glances at Deacon.

'Oh, my fault,' says Deacon, wiping his chin. 'I sent him to pick up a few items from my office first thing. I'd intended sending Tom, but Charlie insisted.' He stops chewing for a moment. 'Although, he really should have returned by now.'

'I shouldn't be surprised if he doesn't come back.' Emily mutters, giving Tom a quick look.

Tom swallows hard but says nothing.

Martha gives him a nudge with her elbow. 'That be a guilty look if ever we did see one, Master Tom. Come along, if you be a-knowin somethin...?'

Deacon raises an eyebrow.

Tom takes a deep breath. 'Well...'

The others fall silent and turn their heads towards him.

'He's been saying he feels bad that he hasn't been contributing to the household.'

'Is that all? I don't believe it's a crime,' says the architect.

'No, but...' He pauses. 'He's not used to being in a...a family. You know, having other people around. I think it scares him a bit.' Tom looks at Emily. 'He's used to the street.'

Deacon coughs. 'And you think he may have returned to what he knows?' He sniffs. 'I admit, I suspected the lad might find the transition a little unsettling, but I'm fairly sure he'll come back when he's hungry.'

'You didn't send im off on some goose chase, did you, Master? Poor lamb's had enough to deal with lately.' Martha gives him a hard stare.

Deacon shakes his head. 'I simply asked the boy to collect some papers - nothing of any great value, but I thought it might help to quell the boy's desire to be useful.' He rubs a hand over his face. 'Now. On another matter, there are questions to be posed and answered. So.' He looks at Tom.

The red-headed boy finishes chewing and takes a gulp of ale. 'I saw Felch at the market.' He glances around the table.

Emily touches his arm.

'If it was him,' says Deacon, 'and while I would not wish to doubt your certainty, I think it unlikely Mr Felch would dare to show his face just yet.' Tom starts to interrupt but the architect holds up a hand. 'No, Tom. We must be sensible about this. There is much to do and we cannot afford to spend time chasing shadows. Felch will make himself known if, and when, he has something to gain. Our first task is to -'

'Find Elizabeth.' Tom butts in. He looks at Emily. 'Before Felch gets to her.'

Deacon addresses Emily and Sarah. 'I confess, I too had expected to see Elizabeth before now, even given her rather bizarre behaviour of late. Nevertheless, I'm not convinced she has any argument with Felch. After all, they are still married...' He looks pointedly at Emily. 'Though, whilst I do not believe Felch will harm her, it may be that someone else poses a threat to her safety...'

'Jack, you mean.' Emily's face is furrowed.

Deacon gives a vague shrug. 'Perhaps, however I still find it difficult to believe he would wish mischief upon her.'

'You don't know him like I do.' Emily meets the man's gaze with narrowed eyes. 'He's done something to her. I know it.'

Deacon's eyes flit across at Tom, exchanging a swift look with his protégé, then the architect coughs and turns away.

They are silent for a moment, then Tom gets up. 'I'll fetch the map.' He pushes back his chair and opens a cupboard in the corner of the room. Dragging a long shape out of its sack-cloth wrapping, he unfolds the parchment. The map is close to six feet long and three feet wide - almost as large as the table. Spreading it out, Tom moves his tankard onto one corner while the others do the same, shifting their plates and mugs onto the edges, keeping the chart reasonably flat.

'Doesn't look much,' says Emily, staring at the dusty document.

Tom peers down at the faded parchment, studying its lines and shapes. After a moment, he looks up at Deacon. 'It doesn't make sense - where are all the names, the doorways?'

Deacon chuckles. 'This was my first map, Tom. I designed it when I became aware of the updraft in the library.'

'And you didn't want anyone to find it and understand what it was.' Emily smiles. 'As careful as ever, Mr Deacon.'

Deacon grimaces. 'Not careful enough, I'm afraid. This is precisely why I have left it in the care of Frank Tellum for the last few years.'

'He's the man that has the candle stall in the market,' puts in Tom, for the girls benefit.

'As I see it, we have two immediate difficulties: firstly, we have to find Elizabeth without having any clue as to where or when she might be. And secondly, since she has not returned, it is likely she has been harmed or...' He glances at Emily. 'Or that her liberty has been taken away. Therefore, we must find her as quickly as possible.'

A grunting noise comes from the end of the table and all eyes turn to look at Martha. She has been silent all through the conversation but now clearly has something to say. 'It's all well and good talkin about goin here and goin there an savin Miss Lizbeth, Master, but ain't you forgettin somethin?' She peers at them all in turn, then 'An we knows we ain't the sharpest knife in the kitchen, but it seems to us that yous will have ter go backwards in time and find her before whatever happened to her...' she stops for a moment and frowns. 'Before whatever happened, happened.'

Deacon seems about to laugh but manages to divert it into a sigh. 'An ideal solution my dear, alas, although my own adventures thus far have shown that Tom here will, at some point in the future, travel to a time in the recent past, we do not at present, understand how such a thing is possible.'

'Oh.' Martha sniffs. 'Better find out ow to make it possible, then, betten you?'

This simple observation quietens them all.

'The problem is,' continues Deacon after a moment, 'the map is incomplete. As you can see...' he points at various markings on the document. 'My knowledge at that time was scant and consequently a few of the passageways marked here were those I imagined might be there, but did not - and still do not - have any evidence to prove they are there in fact.'

Tom's face brightens. 'So we just use the maps in the library - they're more precise, aren't they?'

Deacon shrugs. 'I used to think so, Tom, but your father proved otherwise.' He rests an elbow on the table and cups his chin, massaging his beard between finger and thumb. 'Or else there is some other force at work that we do not have knowledge of.' He sighs. 'Put another way - I don't know.'

Tom, Emily and Sarah gaze down at the document. For a moment, they each study the dusty chart.

Deacon taps a finger, indicating an area south of the river. 'Here, for instance, is a house I visited some years ago. The profession of the building's previous owner was such that I suspected there to be at least one updraft within the house that might be of interest to me.' He clicks his tongue. 'Unfortunately, I was unable to investigate it at that time and my later visits to the property were somewhat haphazard.'

Tom is about to say something, but Deacon continues.

'And here, you see,' tapping on a large shaded area. 'This is a Cathedral...' he chuckles. 'A beautifully constructed one at that, though production will not even begin until long after the Great Fire.' He blows air out of his cheeks. 'My point is this.' He looks at Tom. 'Most of these doorways were the only ones I knew about at

the time I made this map, and the straightforward links between them meant that negotiating them was relatively easy.'

Tom gives him a blank look.

'So why is that important?' Deacon raises his eyebrows again.

'Well...!' Tom frowns and stares at the confusion of lines and shapes in front of him. 'Because...'

'What does any map show?' Prompts the architect.

Emily leans forwards. 'How to get from one place to another?'

Deacon nods. 'Exactly. Using these passageways we can traverse the city's time divisions without fear of losing ourselves.' He taps a finger on the document. 'Which is a considerably more difficult task using my later maps.'

Tom's eyes widen. 'So we can use this to find Elizabeth?'

Deacon inclines his head and smiles.

Tom leans back in his chair. 'What?'

'In which order do we do things, Thomas?'

Tom rolls his eyes. 'In a precise order, sir.'

Sarah bangs a hand on the table and signs *What you mean?*

'He means,' says Tom, looking at his Master, 'we have to think logically.'

Deacon nods. 'We shall attempt a series of excursions, visiting places and times that are relevant to our recent expeditions - such as Boo Lane, the Fennel household and so on. When we have covered all probable locations, we may then explore each one again, in a different time division.'

'You mean go to every place you think she might be? And then go again, and again?' Emily's face is a picture of astonishment. 'But that could take years.'

'Indeed.' Deacon slides a finger through the gravy around the edge of his plate and licks it noisily. 'In which case, we had better make a start.'

In the library, the children spread out on the floor and using Deacon's later maps to cross-reference their route, they start to make a list. Beginning with those places nearest Deacon's house and continuing in increasing circles outwards to those furthest away, Tom writes down each address as it's called out by one of the others.

Emily suggests several houses belonging to friends of Jack and Elizabeth, along with the offices of everyone connected to Jack's work as a magistrate. Sarah signs to Tom that they mustn't forget the shop across the lane from their own house on Cheap Syde, since Jack might have known that Deacon used this place to watch the Fennel family.

Within half an hour, the list has grown to three pages.

'We'll never get through all these,' says Tom.

'Ah, but we can discount a few.' Deacon is on his knees. He leans forward and points to a number of the names listed. 'Here, see? Busy neighbourhoods, and here - the possibility of being overlooked would be too much of a risk.'

'Like Jack's office on Aldersgate?' says Emily.

'Yes, and here - Grayes Inn.' Deacon makes a face. 'Hmm. It's likely there'll be several individuals who might feel obliged to offer him a hiding place.' He rubs his chin. 'But that is not quite what we're looking for.'

'So what are we looking for.' Emily raises an eyebrow, mimicking Deacon.

'Ah, well.' He picks a morsel of bread from his moustache and pops it into his mouth. 'Somewhere isolated.' He shrugs. 'But maybe not. I should not want to attempt to second guess what our enemies might do.'

Sarah taps Tom's arm. She signs something too quick for the boy to catch.

'Sorry, Sez, he's what?'

Sarah scowls and signs again, her slim fingers moving more slowly.

Deacon looks up from the papers. He glances at Tom, who is staring at his sister. Deacon gives the girl a quizzical look. 'Sarah? You have a suggestion?'

Sarah nods at her brother. Tom pauses for a moment, thinking it through. Then, 'What if Jack isn't using the updrafts? What if he isn't even moving in time?' He glances at Sarah, confirming this is what she meant.

Deacon straightens up slowly, his eyes flitting about from side to side. 'In our own time, you mean?'

Tom nods.

'Doing, in fact,' Deacon says, 'the exact opposite to what we would expect?' Tom nods again. The architect gives a short laugh. 'I think we owe you a large slice of applause, my dear.' He touches Sarah's shoulder. 'You may have hit the nail on its proverbial.'

Tom picks up the sheets of paper. 'But where should we start?'

Deacon's face is grim. 'In the obvious place - Spittle Feyldes.' He struggles to his feet and strides out into the passageway. In a moment, he's back, armed with his pistol. 'Just in case. Now, Tom, find Nesbitt. Ask him to bring the coach round. Martha will sit with your sister til we return.' He kneels down in front of Sarah and takes her hand. 'I'd like you to stay here.' The girl starts to object but Deacon's voice is firm. 'Your parents will be back shortly and I need someone who knows what's going on to tell them what has happened.'

Sarah nods solemnly.

The coach trundles through the dimly lit streets and on towards the house. As they pass through Spittal Feyldes leaving the small community behind, the cold night air seems to close around the vehicle, compelling its passengers to pull their cloaks around themselves for warmth. Though the moon is full, any useful illumination is muted by erratic clouds, creating a night that is, for the most part, horribly dark. Deacon checks his pistol again, while Tom and Emily huddle together in the seat opposite.

'We must waste no time,' says Deacon. 'If Elizabeth is there, it is likely she will be in one particular room.'

The children nod silently, each of them remembering the last time they were in that bare room at the top of the house.

As they approach, Tom leans out, peering up at the imposing structure. Tall and wide, and with three large mullioned windows on either side, the house stands alone, no other dwellings are close by. Even the small orchard that lies on the approach to the house - usually bright and welcoming at this time of year - gives the place an added layer of eeriness, its leafy branches casting strange shadows.

Deacon orders Nesbitt to stay by the coach with a lantern.

Tom is in front, holding the larger oil lamp, but as they approach the front door, he stops abruptly - it is open. Deacon holds out a hand, keeping the children back. Grasping the pistol in one hand and taking the lantern in the other, he pushes the door fully open.

Inside, the hallway is in darkness. Deacon lifts the lamp and moves forward, the sputtering flame making scant impression on their shadowy surroundings. Half-turning, he puts a finger to his lips. 'Stay alert.'

Tom and Emily crowd in behind him, their heads turning this way and that as they make their way through the gloom to the staircase. Moving slowly, the three of them begin to climb, the sporadic creak of the treads causing them to stop and listen every few seconds, before restarting their journey to the top of the house.

On the final landing, the door to the attic room stands partly open, light from the small window transmitting a long beam across the floor. As they move forward, Tom feels his boot slip on something. Looking down, he squints, trying to make out the dark stain smeared over the carpet. Whatever it is will have to wait. He follows Deacon to the door and watches as the architect pauses for a second, then steps into the room.

The sudden shout of anguish makes Tom jump. Emily grabs his hand, dragging him backwards, but he pulls her on. Whatever is ahead of them must be faced together.

A chair stands in the middle of the room.

Deacon picks up the ropes, examining their ends. He looks up. 'Cut.'

Tom glances around the room. As always, it is quite bare, only the bed on one side and the books, as before, scattered on the ground near the cupboard. Emily goes to the cupboard and flings it open. She stares at the space inside.

'Whoever it was, left in a hurry.' She points to the shelves, piled in a heap on the bottom of the cupboard.

Deacon nods. 'Or came back in a hurry.' He glances at Tom then turns to Emily. 'If you found yourself in danger in this house, where would you hide?'

Emily doesn't have to think about it. 'In the linen cupboard.' She takes the lantern from Deacon and heads back out onto the landing.

'Wait.' Tom catches Emily's arm and stops her in the middle of the carpet. 'Look.' The girl peers down at the dark stain, now clearly illuminated by the lantern's wide beam.

Tom nods. 'I thought so - blood.'

Emily gasps. 'Oh, my Lord.' She stares back at him, her eyes wide. 'Quick.'

The linen cupboard is through the maid's room on the right at the top of the staircase. Emily stops, leans forward and pushes the door open. It swings wide and clatters against the wall behind, startling the three friends.

Tom takes Emily's hand and they walk into the room. There are no curtains at the window so it isn't difficult to see that this room too, is empty.

The bed has been stripped of sheets and the small chest that should have contained the maid's clothing stands empty, its drawers pulled half-way out, as if its owner packed her belongings hurriedly.

'This way.' Emily continues to the other side of the room, through another door and into a narrow passageway. On the left hand side is a latticed door. The girl tries the handle. It doesn't move. Her voice is soft. 'That's not right...' She looks at Tom. 'There's no lock on here, but it won't open.'

Tom tries the handle. 'Maybe it's jammed?'

Emily shakes her head.

Stepping between them, Deacon tries the door, then moving back against the opposite wall, he lunges forward, throwing his whole weight against it. However, it isn't the door itself that gives way, but the frame, as the hinges burst out of their holdings, shattering the wood.

For a moment, they stand there, peering into the narrow space beyond. A small window allows enough light to see the lower parts of the shelves on either side, the nearest ones laden with sheets, blankets and spare pillows. Deacon steps forward, stamping over the broken door. Tom and Emily funnel in after him, peering around the tiny room.

Whether it is some small sound that alerts him, or simply a feature of their collective unease, Tom isn't sure, but whatever it is, something causes him to look up, just as the body of a woman slips from the top shelf and falls on top of them.