



*Out of Time*

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# Prologue

On the pinnacle of Glastonbury Tor, an unusual cone-like hill with a tower named after a saint, a tall, old man stood in the wet English twilight. The wind whipped his long gray hair and beard, and the ragged brown monk's robe he wore trembled like a flag in a gale. The dark clouds above moved and gathered around him. Chalice and Wearyall Hills sat nearby, their shoulders hunched. A battered Abbey beyond listened in silence.

The man cast a sad eye to the green landscape, spread like a quilt, adorned with small houses and shops. He prayed silently for a moment, then pulled an ancient curved horn from under his habit. He placed it to his lips and blew once, then twice, then a final time. The three muted blasts were caught by the wind and carried away.

It was a summons.



“This is a beautiful flower,” Elizabeth Forde said to her boyfriend, Jeff. She lifted the small white corsage and breathed deeply. “It’s amazing.”

They were in Jeff’s old Volkswagen Bug, heading for the Fawlt Line High School end-of-the-year school dance.

*You’re amazing*, Jeff wanted to say, but blushed instead as he looked her over for the umpteenth time. She was wearing a stunning pink gown with the white corsage he had bought for her pinned to the strap. She smiled at him and he wished he had a camera to catch her in that moment: her delicate nose, large brown eyes and full lips, all framed by the long brown hair that she’d taken extra care with earlier that evening. She was beautiful.

“What?” she asked self-consciously.

“Nothing,” he said, blushing again and tugging at the collar of his ill-fitting formal shirt. He turned his attention to the road, which had strangely disappeared. “Whoa!” he shouted.

They had driven into a thick wall of fog. The open fields on both sides of the road were suddenly gone and the road itself was reduced to a sound beneath their tires. Jeff slowed down and, though the sun was setting somewhere beyond their visibility, he turned on the headlights. The beams seemed to hit the grainy whiteness of the fog and bounce back.

Elizabeth gasped. “Where did this come from?”

“I better pull over,” Jeff said — and did, the gravel crunching under their tires as he came to a stop. He left the engine running and the headlights shining into the thick white soup. “Let’s wait for a few minutes to see if it lifts.”

Elizabeth hugged herself and shivered. “This is creepy. I’ve never seen fog like this around Fawlt Line. At least not this early in the evening.”

“It’s strange. But we’re in safe territory.” Jeff pointed just to their right. The fog seemed to spin and swirl around a sign attached to a chain-link fence only a few feet away. *Coming Soon: The Dubbs’ Historical Village*, the sign proclaimed.

Malcolm Dubbs was the wealthiest citizen of the little town of Fawlt Line, the next-to-last member of a family that had been in the area for close to two centuries. Malcolm, a member of the English branch of the Dubbs family, came to America to be the custodian of the Dubbs’ vast estate after a tragic accident took the lives of his American cousin Thomas Dubbs and his wife. That also left Malcolm to serve as the guardian of their surviving teenage son, Jeff.

“I never thought he’d get away with it,” Elizabeth said, referring to the Historical Village.

Jeff looked ahead at the fog. It reminded him of a movie screen right before a film is about to start. “He’s had his share of battles over it.”

It was well-known that Malcolm Dubbs had been determined to create this village the moment he moved to America two years before.

“You know that most of the people in town think he’s insane,” said Elizabeth.

Jeff smiled. “Sometimes I wonder myself.”

“I heard them at the diner the other day.” She put on an accent that sounded uncannily like old Ben Hearn. “Ya know what he’s doin’ with that there Village, right? He’s shippin’ in *buildings*,

I'm tellin' ya. Brick by brick and stone by stone from all over the cotton-pickin' world. Have ya ever heard of such a thing? A museum with a few trinkets and artifacts I can understand, but *buildings?*'"

Jeff began to laugh.

Elizabeth continued her imitation of Old Ben. "Do ya know what they been workin' on over the past few weeks? Some kind of a *ruin* from England. A *ruin*! A monastery or castle or cathedral or somethin'. Why wouldn't he buy somethin' *new*? We got plenty of old stuff around here already."

Elizabeth was laughing with Jeff now.

"It must have cost him a lot of money to ship in this fog too," Jeff added.

They continued to laugh until they heard a high, shrill sound from somewhere outside.

"What was that?" Elizabeth asked, quickly becoming serious and looking around.

"I don't know." Jeff peered into the fog. "Some kind of animal."

The sound came again. This time it was closer and recognizable: the high, agitated whinny of a horse.

"Who'd be horseback riding at this time?" Jeff asked. "And in this fog?"

"I think we should go," Elizabeth said, her voice rising. She was holding tightly onto the dashboard, her knuckles white.

"Bits," Jeff said. "It's only a —"

"I've got this feeling," Elizabeth whispered. Her eyes were wide, panicked. "It reminds me of that feeling I had before."

"Before?"

"Please, Jeff — just go."

"Okay." Jeff put the car in gear and carefully guided the car back onto the tarmac. He hoped that the fog might lift or, of greater importance, that the horse wasn't on the road ahead.

“Does Malcolm have horses for the Village?” Elizabeth asked, making conversation as if to calm herself.

“Yes, but the stables are on the other side of our land.”

“Maybe one got out.”

“Maybe.” Jeff began fumbling in his jacket pocket. “Take my cell phone and call him.”

Elizabeth reached over to take the phone. Jeff glanced at her, then back to the road just in time to see a large shadow take form in front of them. As they bore down on it, a horse — *the* horse — frightened by the sudden appearance of the car, reared wildly up on its hind legs, screaming at them.

“Hold on!” Jeff shouted, jerking the steering wheel to the right as he hit the brakes with full force. The Volkswagen skidded to a stop only a few feet from the horse, which came down on all fours and then reared onto its hind legs again. This time Elizabeth and Jeff heard a shout, and a figure on the horse’s back fell onto the ground.

Jeff and Elizabeth looked at each other, shaking.

“Did you hit them?” Elizabeth asked.

“No.” Jeff pushed his door open. “Stay here,” he said before the door slammed itself shut. He opened it again and reached in to turn on the emergency flashers. “Find the cell phone. I think it fell on the floor when we stopped.”

“Be careful!” she shouted after him.

Jeff made his way cautiously toward the horse, which snorted at him and then dashed away into the fog. “Hello? Are you all right?” Jeff called out.

The fog seemed to part like a curtain, as if to present the figure lying on the road like an actor on a stage.

“Oh no,” Jeff said, rushing forward. He crouched down next to the figure, a very large man. Whoever it was seemed to be wrapped in a dark blanket. The man was perfectly still and his face was hidden in the shadows.

“Hey,” Jeff said, hoping the man would stir. He didn’t. Jeff looked him over for any sign of blood. Nothing was obvious

around his head. But what could he expect to see in that fog? He turned toward his car and shouted, “Elizabeth! Call nine-one-one on the cell phone. And bring me the flashlight from the glove compartment!”

He peered closely at the shadowed form of the man as he heard Elizabeth open her door. She was already talking into the phone, giving instructions frantically to an emergency operator. The shaft of light from the flashlight bounced around eerily in the ever-moving fog.

“Jeff?”

“Here,” Jeff said.

Elizabeth joined him. “Ambulance is on its way. But they’re on the line and want to know his condition.”

He took the flashlight from her and got his first full look at the stranger. He had long, dark salt-and-peppery hair, a beard and moustache, and a rugged, lined face. Jeff couldn’t guess an age for the man. Anywhere from forty to sixty, he figured. The man wore a peaceful expression and could’ve been sleeping. Finally, Jeff responded, “I can’t tell. There’s no blood.”

Elizabeth reported Jeff’s findings to the emergency operator, then asked Jeff, “He’s not dead, is he?”

“I don’t think so.” Jeff reached down, separating the blanket to check the man’s vital signs. The feel of the cloth told him it wasn’t a blanket at all. And as he pushed the fabric aside, he realized that it was a cape made of a thick, course material, clasped at the neck by a dragon brooch. “What in the world — ?”

Elizabeth gasped.

They expected to see a shirt or a sweater or a coat of some sort. Instead he wore a long vest with the symbol of a dragon stitched onto the front, a gold belt, brown leggings, and soft leather footwear that looked more like slippers than shoes. The whole outfit reminded Jeff of the kind of costume he’d seen in a Robin Hood movie. At his side was a sword in a sheath.

“Is it Halloween?” Elizabeth asked.



At the high school, the dance was just getting under way. Dry Heaves, a rock band from nearby Hancock, warmed up for their first number as the sound engineer tried to get the volume just right.

Malcolm Dubbs, dressed in a tux and looking all the more dashing for it, stepped into the converted gymnasium and winced at the cacophony of heavy drums and rapid-fire lyrics coming from the stage. *I'm getting old*, he thought. A handful of students mingled in the middle of the dance floor and along the walls. Streamers and balloons blew gently in the rafters above. A banner wishing the students a good summer rustled over the scoreboard.

*What was I thinking?* he wondered. *What possessed me to allow Jeff and Elizabeth to talk me into chaperoning this dance?*

A tap on the shoulder took his gaze from the dance floor and into the round face of Sheriff Richard Hounslow. The sheriff was in his uniform — Fawlt Line Police Department's traditional beige shirt and trousers. His only official equipment was his badge and a walkie-talkie strapped to his belt; he never wore a gun unless he had to. "I need to talk to you," Hounslow mouthed over the music and hooked a thumb toward the door.

Malcolm nodded and followed him out. They walked down the passageway until the music was just a throbbing bump on the other side of the walls.

"What can I do for you, Sheriff?" Malcolm asked. He braced himself, not for bad news, but for trouble. Hounslow was fairly open with his dislike for Malcolm. Why the sheriff didn't like him, however, was something Malcolm couldn't figure out.

Hounslow hitched his thumbs in his belt and looked at Malcolm from head to toe. "You're a regular James Bond, aren't you? Put a woman on each elbow, sit you at a gaming table, and you're good to go. Go on, say the words."

"Words?"

“The name’s Bond, James Bond.”

“Honestly, Sheriff — ”

“You’ve got the accent for it. Go ahead.”

Malcolm sighed. “Is there a *legitimate* reason you asked me to leave the dance? They were playing my favorite song, you know.”

Hounslow raised an eyebrow. “Have you checked your cell phone lately?”

Malcolm looked puzzled and took the small phone out of his jacket pocket. It was on — but with all the noise, he hadn’t heard it ring. The message symbol flashed, and the screen indicated that he’d missed several calls from Jeff. He looked at Hounslow with alarm.

“Jeff and Elizabeth are okay, but you need to come to the hospital. Apparently they had a near miss with one of the workers from your so-called historical village.”

“What kind of near miss?”

“Apparently the man came racing off of your property on a horse — right in front of Jeff. Worse, he doesn’t speak a word of English, just some gibberish. That’s why I need you to come.” The two men started walking down the school hallway toward the parking lot.

“Was anyone hurt?” Malcolm asked, still concerned.

“No. But Doc McConnell wants to keep him overnight for observation.”

“I can’t imagine how the man could be one of my workers,” Malcolm said, surprised. “They’re off for the weekend. Are you certain he’s from my village?”

“He has to be. No one else would wear an outfit like he had on.”

Malcolm turned to the sheriff with a quizzical expression.

“You’ll see,” the sheriff said.



“Are you two all right?” Malcolm asked Jeff and Elizabeth as he approached the hospital room.

“A little shaken — but okay,” Jeff said.

Malcolm paused to look at Elizabeth in her formal gown. “You look lovely.”

“Thank you,” she said with a slight blush and a smile.

“You don’t have to stay here,” Malcolm said. “Go to the dance. I’ll take care of things now.”

Jeff and Elizabeth glanced at one another, and then Jeff spoke. “Not a chance. We want to find out who this guy is and what he was doing.”

“And why he was wearing those strange clothes,” Elizabeth added.

Malcolm nodded. He would have reacted the same way.

“In here,” Sheriff Hounslow said.

Malcolm followed him into the room, which was lit up by fluorescent lights overhead.

“He had caused such a ruckus when they brought him in — shouting, trying to get away — that the doctor had to sedate him and strap him to the bed,” Hounslow explained.

The room was basic, with the bed, various monitors, a small end table, and institutional wooden closet. Dr. McConnell stood next to one of the monitors, checking the numbers on a clipboard.

“We had to give him three times the normal dose because of his size,” Dr. McConnell said softly, as if he was afraid of waking the man.

Malcolm looked closely at the unconscious figure. He was big, all right, stretching the length of the bed. “I’ve never seen him before,” Malcolm said.

“He was riding one of our horses,” Jeff stated. “Bullet — the black stallion.”

Malcolm cocked an eyebrow. “I’ll have to talk to Mr. Farrar, my groundskeeper. He lives in the cottage next to the stables.”

“Already done,” Hounslow said. “He was watching television. Didn’t hear a thing. He was surprised that one of your horses was gone. So, if nothing else, you could press charges against the man for horse-thievery.”

Malcolm shook his head. “I’d like to find out more about him first.”

“Well, good luck. We couldn’t get anything out of him. He kept yakking away in some gibberish and was pounding his chest and calling himself Rex or Regis or something like that.”

“King?” Malcolm asked. “Rex — or Regis — is Latin for *king*.”

“I told you,” Elizabeth said with a jab at Jeff.

“I didn’t say you were wrong,” Jeff replied defensively.

Dr. McConnell said, “The words and phrases certainly reminded me of some of the Latin I picked up in medical school.”

“He was speaking Latin in entire sentences?” Malcolm asked.

“I suppose so,” Dr. McConnell said. “But I’m no expert.”

Hounslow pulled at his belt. “I called the mental hospital in Grantsville to see if they’ve had any escapes. None.”

“Just because he speaks Latin doesn’t mean he’s mentally disturbed,” Elizabeth said. “My dad speaks Latin.”

Hounslow looked as if he might say something unkind, but decided against it. Instead, he said, “Fine, but what about *this*?” He went to the closet and opened the door. The stranger’s clothes were hung inside on different hangers.

Malcolm walked to the closet and looked at the robe, the tunic, the leggings, the cape, and the belt. “This is what he had on?” he asked, surprised.

Hounslow nodded. “That’s another reason we figured he was from your village.”

“I told him we haven’t started hiring character actors yet,” Jeff said.

“The construction workers are still building,” Malcolm said. “I haven’t hired any of the staff yet.” He fingered the fabric of the

robe and tunic, making a mental note of the dragon insignias. He picked up the soft leather shoes and looked them over. “Amazing. The outfit looks so authentic. And I don’t mean authentic like a well-done replica, I mean it looks *worn*, like they’re his real clothes.”

“Maybe he’s one of those homeless fruitcakes who just happened to wander into town,” Hounslow offered.

Dr. McConnell folded his arms. “It’s hard to imagine this guy being homeless and just wandering anywhere with that sword.”

“Sword?” asked Malcolm.

“Here,” Hounslow said and reached farther into the closet. With both hands he pulled out a long sword encased in an ornate golden scabbard. He cradled it in his arms for Malcolm to inspect.

“Good heavens,” Malcolm gasped, running his hand along the scabbard. “Is that real gold?”

“Looks like it,” Hounslow said.

Malcolm examined the handle of the sword, also golden, which had a row of unfamiliar jewels imbedded along the length of the stem. Even in the washed-out fluorescent light of the room, it sparkled as if it reflected the sun. “May I take it out?”

“Yeah,” Hounslow said, “but be careful. It’s heavy and *sharp*.”

Malcolm grabbed the handle with both hands and withdrew the sword from the scabbard. It was heavy, as Hounslow said, and Malcolm imagined it would take a man the size of the stranger to wield it with any effect. It was even a strain to hold it up. The blade was made of thick, shiny steel with an elaborate engraving along the edges of what looked like thin vines and blossoms. “It must be worth a fortune,” Malcolm said as he slid the sword back into the sheath.

Dr. McConnell agreed. “So what’s a derelict doing with a Latin vocabulary and a valuable sword?”

“That’s what I’d like to find out when he wakes up,” Malcolm answered.