

Childish Spirits

by Rob Keeley

Deleted scenes...

Deleted Prologue

PROLOGUE

Along an ancient hall, a child was running.

Hurrying, stumbling, the small figure passed the family heirlooms, the suits of armour and the stern portraits that lined the walls, its footsteps making no sound.

It ran onward. Up and up the wide staircase with its once-rich red carpet, still frantic, still silent, with only one aim – to get out of sight.

At the top of the stairs, the small figure stopped. There was a faint panting.

Hidden from view by the high banisters, the figure turned to look downward to the hall below.

From beneath, three voices echoed up to him.

“Looks like we’re going to have our work cut out, then.” A woman’s voice.

“It’s certainly a challenge.” Another voice, young, male, smarmy. “But at Journeyback we prefer to think of it not as a problem, but as an opportunity.”

“I must admit,” the voice of another, older woman said, “that I shan’t be entirely sorry to leave it all behind.”

At the top of the stairs, the small figure moved forward a little, the better to hear the intruders below.

Had anyone else been present, they would have noticed a slight chill in the air, as a small, pale hand came out to rest upon the balustrade.

Downstairs, the voices continued to echo back along the hall.

“You must have a lot of memories here,” the younger woman’s voice said.

“Yes.” The older woman again. “Not all of them good. Inchwood is a complex place. It has a complex history. It needs a very special... understanding.”

The voices died away.

The hall was empty now. Yet suddenly...

A shadow appeared upon the panelled wall, and lingered for a moment.

The shadow was tall, and proud, and menacing.

It was the shadow of a woman.

Deleted scene Chapter Six

Once this scene was deleted I had to introduce the Site Office in Chapter Eight instead. Spot the mention of admin support – this would have been ahead of introducing Moira, also in Chapter Eight.

“I don’t know what’s wrong with Ellie,” Mum said to Charlie. “She’s been acting strangely ever since we got here.”

They were sitting on the first floor, in a bright and cheerful room with a patterned carpet and a view of the courtyard below. This was the housekeeper’s room that Marcus was now rather grandly calling the Site Office. The extent of his changes was one desk, one computer and one phone, all of which Mum and Charlie had been using.

“It’s all that paint she uses.” Charlie pointed to his temple and pulled what he thought was a mad face. “Getting into her brain.”

“I think I’ll have to have a word with her,” Mum went on.

She broke off as Marcus entered the room.

“OK, troops?” Marcus crossed to the desk. “So, where are we at?”

He studied a spreadsheet on the computer screen.

“Right. Full staff in place by the end of next month. So I reckon we’re looking at week commencing the twenty-fifth for the launch. That’s where *you’ll* come into your own, Judith. I’m thinking... opening ceremony, maybe combine with a family Fun Day, visiting dignitaries... High profile as possible...”

“Out here?” Mum smiled. “It was all we could do to find the place. We drove past it

twice.”

“There’s no room in this operation for negativity, Judith,” Marcus told her. “It impedes the collective creative output.”

“I still think you’re spending too much on catering over three years.” Charlie studied the screen with a knowledgeable air. “Especially for Mum’s events. You could get outside caterers in for the special occasions, at a fraction of what you’d spend for keeping the same people on staff.”

Mum gave him a wry look.

“Spot who’s taking Business Studies.”

“I like it, Chas.” Marcus sounded more impressed. “Fact, I’ll put that to Head Office.”

Charlie smirked.

“New ideas are what we need,” Marcus told Mum. “They’ll take some convincing, unions and all that guff, but if we did that we could give you just what you need, when you need it. You’ll probably need admin support as well.”

Mum laughed. She glanced at Charlie.

“I think I’ve got quite enough support as it is.”

The computer screen flickered. At the same moment, so did the standard lamp that was giving light to the room.

Mum frowned.

“What was that? Did you see that?”

The computer screen flashed brightly – then went blank.

“Ah, no, no!” Marcus made a grab for the computer, too late, as his business plan disappeared.

“Hey.” Charlie looked at his mobile. “My phone’s gone dead.”

The three of them looked at one another as they felt a slight tremor. Then they looked down.

The floor was starting to shake...

Across the room, a picture fell to the floor with a crash.

Charlie blinked.

“It’s an earthquake!”

“An earthquake.” Marcus grabbed the desk phone. “That’s all I need.” He shook the receiver. “And that’s dead, too. What is *wrong* with this place?”

He headed carefully across the trembling floor towards the exit.

“Mum.” Charlie was doing his best to sound calm and grown-up. “What’s happening?”

“I don’t know.” Mum rose from her chair. “I’d better check on Ellie.”

Deleted scene Chapter Eight – this is from the coach party’s visit to Inchwood

“And it’s essentially,” Marcus’s voice said, “about maximising consumer return by ensuring the fulfillment of the long-term historic enjoyment strategy. Which is the primary purpose of the Phase One Events Schedule.”

Of his audience, only the grey-haired man looked interested. The old ladies looked as though they were looking forward to the coffee stage. A bald-headed man was examining the portraits....

The bald man had placed the umbrella he was carrying in an ancient hall-stand that stood close to the main doors.

Ellie stared.

The umbrella was moving.

Unseen by the visitors, who now had their backs to it, the umbrella performed a little dance, twirling from left to right, flying high, though never higher than child height.

Then it made its way back into the hand of the bald man.

He gawped at it.

“If it’s all right, sir,” said Marcus in a voice like golden syrup, “personal belongings can be deposited for the moment in the Site Office, while we take our little tour. It’s upstairs, in the housekeeper’s room. If you’d all like to follow me...”

From the direction of the hall-stand, Ellie thought she heard a momentary titter.

Her eyes narrowed...

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