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River of Destiny

Written by Barbara Erskine

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BARBARA ERSKINE

River of Destiny



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For Jon, who keeps the wheels on the wagon

. . . rich swords lay . . . eaten with rust, as they had lain buried in the bosom of the earth for a thousand years . . . the princes who placed their treasure there had pronounced a solemn curse on it which was to last until doomsday: that whoever rifled the place should be guilty of sin, shut up in dwelling-places of devils, bound in bonds of hell, and tormented with evil . . .

Beowulf

Prologue



The woman was watching, flattened against the wall of the house, her eye to a knothole. She hardly dared breathe as she watched the scene unfolding inside.

With the kiss of steam wreathing round the blade, her husband raised his hammer and struck sparks from the iron. The forge was hot from the blazing charcoal and sweat dripped into his eyes. Even she, his wife, could sense his power, sense the magic he was creating as he conjured the alchemy of metal and fire.

'Is it ready?' The thegn's reeve, Hrotgar, stood in the doorway, his huge bulk blocking out the light.

'Not until the gods say so,' Eric said curtly.

'The gods!' Hrotgar echoed wryly. 'Maybe the gods see no need to hurry, but everyone in this village sees clearly why Lord Egbert is so anxious for it.'

'Tell him he'll have to wait.' Eric didn't bother to look up. He could picture the shocked anger on the other man's face. He bent back to his task, his tongue between his teeth, a soundless whistle drowned by the hiss of the fire. At his feet the flames reflected in the deep iron-bound yew-wood bucket

of water. Like most of the tools in the forge he had made it himself. 'You're blocking my light,' he yelled suddenly. 'Get out of here. When it's ready I'll tell you.'

For a moment Hrotgar hesitated, then with an angry growl he stepped outside and disappeared. The forge was lit by torches thrust into brackets on the wall, by the red glow of the furnace, but even so, the sudden low shaft of sunlight through the doorway illuminated the dark corners and spun reflections off the blade. Eric gave a grunt of satisfaction. The magic was growing stronger.

'Eric?' The voice behind him was tentative. 'It is true, you are making Lord Egbert angry with your delays.'

'Go away, Edith!' Eric spun round furiously. 'Out! Now!' Her very presence was weakening. He could sense the carefully built tension in the blade wavering. He could sense it in the air. Only warriors could come near the sword now, new born as it was, in its birthing pangs of fire and water. He muttered the sacred charms, feeling the vibrating waves of Wyrd settle. He wasn't sure how he knew what to do but the smith's magical art was in his blood, in the memory of his veins and bones, handed down to him by his father and his father's father going back into the mists of time. Through that memory he knew the sorcerer was right. There was no place for a woman in the forge or in his bed while he was creating this particular weapon. He had called it Destiny Maker and it was his greatest challenge.

Outside, Hrotgar was standing staring down towards the river, shading his eyes with his hand against the glare of sunlight on the water. Behind him the villagers went about their business calmly stacking the storehouses against the coming winter.

'Is the Lord Egbert improving?' Edith had come up behind him silently, her shoes making no sound on the scatter of bright autumn leaves. For a moment he didn't answer and she nodded sadly. 'Will he live?'

His jaw tightened fractionally. 'If it is God's will.'

The thegn was a comparatively young man, strong, in his prime, but a month ago he had fallen ill and before the shocked eyes of his followers and his family he had begun to waste away, racked by fever and pain. Hrotgar glanced down at her. She was beautiful, the smith's wife. Her long fair hair, plaited into a rope which hung to her slender waist, had broken free of its binding and blew in soft curls around her temples. He felt a quick surge of desire and sternly dismissed it. This was forbidden territory. He looked away, narrowing his eyes as she scanned the river. The sun was almost gone, the last dazzling rays turning the water red as blood. He shivered as the thought hung for a moment in his mind. Then his expression cleared. A fishing boat was rounding the bend, the slender prow breaking up the crimson ripples, turning the wavelets to gold. He smiled grimly as a breeze swept up the river and threw spray across the men bending to their nets, hauling them up on deck.

'Try and make him hurry,' he said at last. 'The thegn wants, needs, that sword.'

'You know I can't go near him,' she retorted. 'It is forbidden.'

He looked at her quickly and then back at the river. 'I know what is forbidden,' he said quietly.

Neither spoke for a long time, both watching the fishermen with exaggerated concentration. At last she stepped away from him. 'I have to go.'

'To an empty house?'

'To an empty house,' she echoed.

He watched her as she retraced her steps across the hard-baked ground. In another day or so the rain would come. He could smell it in the air, and this place would become a quagmire. Further up the hill the thegn's house and the great mead hall were on quick-draining soil on the edge of the heath. They would stay reasonably dry, at least for the time being. He sighed. For how long would it stay so quiet,

so calm? As the thegn's health failed so the restlessness had grown. The warriors were watching, waiting, his brother and his two sons keeping their counsel; the brother, Oswald, was hungry, the sons, Oswy and Alfred, too young yet to do more than hope and strut and dream. He glanced up at a flight of birds heading up from the river, arrow straight towards the thegn's hall. Gulls. White winged. No sinister message there.

In the age of the Anglo-Saxons it is the year AD 865

In the age of Queen Victoria it is AD 1865

And it is today . . .

1



The river was thick with mist. It lay like a soft white muffler on the water between the trees, hiding the mud banks and the lower woods. Above, where the cluster of old barns stood on the edge of the fields, brilliant sunshine touched gold into the autumnal leaves, still holding some of the warmth of summer. Zoë Lloyd was standing at the kitchen sink of the oldest and to her mind the most beautiful of the three barn conversions, gazing out of the window down through the trees towards the river. She shivered. The room had grown suddenly cold in spite of the sunlight. A huge sail had appeared, hazy in the fog, sailing slowly up-river towards Woodbridge. It was curved, cross-rigged, straining before the wind, decorated with some sort of image; she couldn't quite see it behind the trees. She watched it for several seconds. There was no wind, surely; it had to be moving under power. If she were outside she would probably be able to hear the steady purr of an engine. She gazed at the trees, which were motionless, and then back at the sail. The mist was thickening, wrapping itself ever more densely over the river. In a moment the vessel would be out of sight.

'It's there again. The Viking ship. Look, Ken,' she said over her shoulder to her husband.

There was no reply and she turned with a sudden stab of panic. The kitchen was empty. But she had heard him seconds before, felt him, sensed him behind her, sitting at the table in the sunshine. She looked at the empty chair, the unopened newspaper and she groped with shaking hands for her phone. 'Ken? Where are you?'

'Still down here on the boat.' The voice broke up with a crackle. 'Did you want something special?'

'No.' For a moment she wondered if she were going mad. 'Ken? Did you see it? The Viking ship going up-river. It must have gone right past you.'

'I didn't see anything. The fog is thick as porridge down here on the water!'

'OK. Don't worry. See you soon.' She switched off the phone and slowly put it down. Of course he hadn't seen anything. Out on their boat on the mooring, with his head no doubt down in the engine compartment as he tinkered with the motor, he wouldn't have seen or heard the entire Seventh Fleet. Glancing out, she saw that the sail had gone. Rays of sunlight were slowly breaking up the mist. Her momentary panic was subsiding.

It was a couple of minutes later as she hung up the dish-cloth and turned to walk through into the high-beamed living space which formed the greater part of the building that she paused and looked back into the kitchen, which had been constructed in what had once been a side aisle of the barn. The house was empty. There was no one there. If Ken had not been sitting in the chair at the table behind her, who had?

It was barely three months since they had moved into the barn conversion overlooking the River Deben in Suffolk. Part of a group of medieval barns, theirs, somewhat prosaically

known as The Old Barn, was the closest to the river. Below them the ground fell away steeply across mown lawns and through a narrow strip of woodland towards the water. Looking through the huge picture window to her left, Zoë watched as a small yacht appeared, moving steadily upstream towards Woodbridge, the morning sunlight reflecting through the trees onto the gently curved sails. The mist had lifted as suddenly as, in the evening, it would probably return. It was moments like this which reassured her that they had done the right thing in moving to the country. The view was utterly beautiful.

It had all happened in such a rush. They had been sitting late over dinner with some friends in London, just after Christmas, discussing their mutual plans for the summer. Both couples were childless and Zoë sometimes wondered if that wasn't one of the main things that held them together. 'We're not having a holiday this year,' John Danvers had announced. He and Ken had been at school together some twenty-five years earlier and there was still an edge of competitiveness between them which their respective wives alternately ignored and gently mocked. 'We're moving out of town. Can't stand the pressure any more. And anyway, why not? What's keeping us? With fast broadband we can work from anywhere. We're going down to Sussex. Just think of it, Ken. Sailing every evening if we want to, no traffic jams, no rushing down at dawn on Saturdays and crawling back into town on Sunday evenings. Just fresh air all the time.'

Sussex. Chichester harbour, where both couples kept their boats, moored near Bosham. Looking at Ken's face, Zoë had felt a sudden sick foreboding deep in her gut. Their base was London. She loved London, she adored their life there. She enjoyed her job. Although they had often sailed together as a foursome and Zoë did enjoy it on a relatively calm day when the others were there, sailing was not her thing.

Zoë's relationship with her husband's passion for sailing

was complex and slightly ambiguous. She enjoyed being in the boat. She loved pottering about at the anchorage and often found herself wishing she had a suitable hobby, sketching perhaps, or bird watching, to employ her while Ken endlessly played with his boat's engine or the rigging or the sails. Her enthusiasm dimmed somewhat, however, once they cast off the mooring and headed out into the open water. It had taken her a long time to realise it but finally on one of their voyages out of the harbour and into the choppy seas of the Solent she had forced herself to acknowledge the fact that she was scared. When the boat was gently heeling before the wind, with the ripple of water creaming under the bow, she was perfectly happy, but the moment something happened – the wind changed, the boom swung over, the sails momentarily thundered and snapped, the speed increased – she began to feel nervous. She didn't like the unpredictability, the sudden veering, the water lapping dangerously close to the rail. And here, on the Deben, there was something else; for all its beauty and comparative calmness in good weather, the river under cloud and rain and mist had a thick opacity which frightened her; inexplicably it seemed deeper and more sinister and far more dangerous than the seas and harbours of the south.

Because of her discomfort it became the usual practice, more often than not, that Ken would sail on his own or with John, or occasionally with someone else as crew, while she and John's wife, Amanda, would take the car and retreat to Chichester and the Sussex hinterland in the quest for antiques and picture galleries and soft country villages out of the reach of the stinging salt air of the coast. She had come to love Sussex, but not as a full-time home, centred on sailing, no.

There was no point in arguing. There never was. In the wake of Ken's enthusiasm and determination she was swept away like some helpless duckling in the wake of a passing speedboat and he had convinced her that she too wanted

more than anything to leave London with all its noise and pollution and crowds. It was not as though they hadn't discussed it before. They had. And now, he insisted, was the time to invest in the country.

As it turned out, he agreed with her that they couldn't go south. Not to the same place as John and Amanda. Of course not. That would be too obvious. Nevertheless, their flat was put up for sale, and within weeks was under offer and a decision was made on the strength of the property pages in a couple of Sunday papers. Suffolk was the county Ken favoured. Far enough away from London for the property to be good value, but not so far he couldn't get on a train and be there in less than two hours. Beautiful, unspoiled, far less crowded than Sussex. It was worth some exploratory visits, he told her, nothing for certain, just look, just test the water, and she had agreed, had gone along with it. Why? Why had she given in so easily? It was only now, from time to time, that she asked herself this. Was it that she was too tired to argue, or was she also, at base, tired of London, and therefore, following the axiom of Samuel Johnson, tired of life? They had spent just four weekends house hunting, and viewed the barn conversion in March. He had fallen in love with it on that first viewing.

That had been her chance, the moment she could have said no. She hadn't. Instead, she had felt two emotions, she realised later, one a faint stirring of excitement, the other a strange sense that some unavoidable fate was reeling them in. And there was another reason for coming to Suffolk, a reason Zoë barely acknowledged, wasn't sure about, had never been able to prove. Anya. It would remove Ken from Anya's orbit: 'A wife always knows,' Amanda had said to her once, when Zoë reluctantly had confided her suspicions.

'But I don't know, that's the point,' Zoë had replied, frustrated. 'I don't even know her name for sure. One of his colleagues mentioned someone called Anya once and I remember how shifty Ken looked and I wondered then. But

apart from that he's never given me any reason to suspect him. No lipstick on the collar, no panties in the glove box.' She had shuddered. 'No unexplained calls. It's just a feeling.'

Amanda had frowned thoughtfully. 'It wouldn't surprise me. He's a dark horse, your husband. And very sexy.'

Zoë had glanced at her and smiled. 'He is, isn't he.' But if he and Anya had been having an affair, he appeared to have turned his back on it without regret. Unless she had dumped him. Was that part of the reason for leaving so abruptly? Perhaps it was better not to know. The important thing was they would be starting afresh.

The sale was completed in May, clinched by the fact that a mooring on the river was part of the deal, and they moved in at the beginning of July. Ken's job as an IT consultant could, like John's, be done anywhere as long as there was good access to the Internet and to London if necessary. Zoë's as an assistant in a Bond Street art gallery couldn't; didn't count, apparently. 'You'll find something to occupy you,' Ken had said airily, giving her one of his bear hugs. 'There are galleries and antique shops all over the place up here, you saw for yourself. Come on, sweetheart, you're going to love it. It will be absolutely perfect. And when we're settled in we'll ask John and Amanda to come and stay.'

Was that it? Was that the reason for the entire move? To impress, even upstage, John and Amanda? Had she caved in and agreed to her whole life being turned upside down on a whim, to try to compete with their best friends? Drying her hands on a towel Zoë gave a deep sigh and turned back to the window. Of course she had. Did it even matter? Probably not.

The fact remained, though, that try as she might she had not settled in; the faint excitement had worn off, the feeling that some dire fate was winding them round with sticky threads had become stronger than ever. She still thought of the house as a barn, not a home.

It was an exquisite building, with huge, full-height living space, the massive beams cunningly spot-lit for full effect, and a large woodburner as the focal point of the room, as was of course the enormous window looking down towards the river. Above there was a broad galleried landing and off it two large bedrooms, also with incredible views. Ken's office was at the back, at the end of a short passage off the landing, looking down over the fields, a quiet rural outlook which Zoë secretly feared would be unbearably lonely and bleak in the winter. The two other barns in the group were slightly to the side and back, out of her immediate sight from this window. The Threshing Barn was occupied by a retired couple, Stephen and Rosemary Formby, and The Summer Barn, so they had told her, was owned by a large and noisy family which appeared to use it as a holiday home and, as far as they could see so far, weren't there all that often. From her kitchen window she could see part of the communal gardens and the river, always the river, tidal for its first dozen or so miles from the sea, quite narrow here just round the bend from the lovely old town of Woodbridge, where it broadened, then narrowed again as it changed character to meander through the gentle Suffolk countryside. From here they were looking across towards open country and off to the left of the barn towards a fourth house, The Old Forge, much smaller than the barns and the only building of the group with a large private garden which, from what she could see of it behind its neat hedges, was pretty and productive. She gathered it was occupied by a single man, another passionate sailor, so she had been told, but she had yet to set eyes on him. He was, according to her neighbour, Rosemary, her source of all information about the other occupants of the small select community, something of a recluse, which turned him into a mystery.

A loud knock made her jump.

'Zoë, dear?' Rosemary Formby put her head round the

door. She was a small woman, somewhere in her late sixties, her iron-grey hair cut boyishly short, her face, devoid of make-up and weather-beaten, highly coloured, which served to emphasise eyes which were a brilliant Siamese cat blue. 'Steve and I are going into Woodbridge. I wondered if you needed anything?' Coming in, she dropped her shoulder bag and car keys on the table in such a way that Zoë understood she was on the move and wouldn't be stopping, something for which Zoë was secretly pleased. Their new neighbours were friendly and hospitable but perhaps a little too enthusiastic and in your face.

The woman glanced towards the window. 'Is Ken down at the boat again?'

Zoë nodded. She had already put the memory of the mist and her strange attack of panic behind her. 'He's making the most of every moment of this glorious weather.'

'Well,' Rosemary was already scooping up bag and keys again, 'don't let him turn you into a sailing widow. There are enough of them round here already.'

Zoë shuddered. It was just an expression but nevertheless it was an unfortunate turn of phrase.

As Rosemary headed back to the door she paused. 'I see Leo's back.'

'Leo?'

'Our elusive neighbour.' Rosemary inclined her head towards the window. She hesitated. 'He can be a bit touchy, Zoë. Don't go rushing in there. Fools and angels, you know.' And she had gone.

Fools and angels? Zoë stared after her. Then she went to look out of the window again. Sure enough a thin stream of blue smoke was rising from the chimney of The Old Forge. Zoë loved a mystery and as this man was the nearest thing to it in her life at the moment he intrigued her. It was very hard to resist the urge to make a neighbourly call.

* * *

Leo Logan was standing in his garden staring down at the river. It was a view of which he never tired. Whatever the light, whatever the state of the tide, the water fascinated him. The sages knew. You can never step in the same river twice. The sunlight was catching the soft cinnamon-red bark of the pine trees, warming them, dancing on the trunks, painting them with ever-changing shadows. He heard the latch on the gate behind him and scowled. He had already guessed who it was. He had seen that they had moved in. He knew someone would eventually buy the place but it had been a blissful few months of peace while it was empty. He took a deep breath, nerving himself for what was to come, and turned round.

It was the woman. She was tall and slim with short wavy blonde hair, artfully streaked to look as though it was sun-bleached. Her eyes were intriguing. Amber. And nicely shaped. But her smile had frozen into place as he knew it would the moment she saw his face.

She swallowed and held out her hand. 'Hi, I'm Zoë Lloyd. Your new neighbour. I just thought I would say hello.'

'Hi, Zoë. Leo Logan.' He grasped her hand momentarily then turned away to give her a moment to compose herself. 'How do you like it here?'

'I'm reserving judgement.'

Her answer surprised him. He had expected her to gush nervously and head for the gate. As it was she held her ground and even more astonishingly she confronted him at once. 'What did you do to your face?'

'Accident in a forge.'

'God!' She came to stand beside him, also looking down across the hedge towards the water. 'What a bugger.'

'An irony, isn't it, considering I'm now living in one!' He gave a bark of laughter. 'And before you ask, I do not wear a mask like the Phantom of the Opera. One day I will probably have plastic surgery but at the moment I can't afford it

and the insurance money, if there is any, will probably not come through until I am in my dotage and no longer care. I try and present my best side to strangers. You took me by surprise.'

She smiled. 'I am sorry. Given the option I nearly always manage to do the wrong thing.'

'How refreshing.' He folded his arms. 'So, is there a Mr Lloyd? Lots of little Lloyds? Dogs? Cats? Horses? Boats?'

'Hasn't Rosemary given you our life history yet?'

He shook his head. 'Rosemary and I are not bosom friends. As it happens, I have been away for a while, but also, I value my privacy.'

'I see. And I have barged in, I'm sorry. I'll go.' She turned away, rebuffed. 'For the record,' she added over her shoulder, 'there is a Mr Lloyd and a boat. The other things, no.' Her voice sounded, even to her ears, strangely bleak as she said it.

She half expected him to call her back as she headed towards the gate, but he said nothing. A quick glance as she unlatched it revealed a resolutely uncompromising back view, taut shoulders beneath the denim shirt, an air of concentration as he studied the river.

Fools and angels indeed.

Pushing open the kitchen door she came to an abrupt standstill, staring round. 'Ken? Are you there?'

Again she was aware of the eerie sensation that there was someone around, someone who had just that second left the room. 'Ken?' She knew it couldn't be him. Once he was down on the boat he would be there until lunchtime if not later. She glanced at her mobile, still lying where she had left it on the antique pine table, and shook her head. She was not going to call him again.

'Zoë?' The voice from the doorway behind her made her spin round. It was Leo. He had followed her across the grass. 'Sorry. I was rude. Can't help myself. It wasn't intentional.

Peace offering?' He held out a wooden trug. In it was a selection of vegetables and on top a spray of golden chrysanthemums. He put it on the table and glanced round. 'This has the potential to be a nice place. I'm glad you've got rid of the chichi blinds.'

She smiled, looking round, seeing the kitchen through his eyes. It had been well designed and expensively fitted, a country house kitchen with soft lavender-blue walls, a cream Aga, a refectory table and old chairs which she had found only weeks before in a shop in Long Melford. 'There weren't any blinds when we arrived. They must have gone with the previous owner. They didn't stay here long, did they?' Without her realising it there was a touch of anxiety in her voice.

'No, thank God.' He began to unpack the trug, scattering earth across the table. 'I'll take this back, if you don't mind. There is one thing I will mention while I'm here. You need to kill those damn security lights. They illuminate the whole area like a football stadium when they come on. They destroy the view of the night sky for everyone for miles around. Do that and I would be eternally grateful.'

Zoë was taken aback by his vehemence. She had barely noticed the lights; all the barns had them. When she had, it was to enjoy the shadowed views they cast across the lawns. She decided it was better to ignore the comment for now, say nothing and respond later if he brought it up again.

'This stuff is very welcome,' she said. 'Ken isn't a gardener. It was one of the attractions of this place, that most of the gardens are communal and are mown by someone else.'

'And you?' He scanned her face enquiringly. 'Don't you garden either?'

She shrugged. 'I've never thought about it. We lived in London before.' She was watching his hands. They were strong and well formed; his nails were filthy.

'So why on earth have you come here?'

'Ken wanted to live in the country, and he adored the idea

of having a mooring for the boat at the bottom of the garden.' She didn't realise that she hadn't included herself in this statement; that she was distancing herself from the decision.

'And he couldn't find a mooring nearer London? What does he do?'

'IT consultancy.'

'And you?'

'Nothing at the moment.'

'A lady who lunches, eh?' Was there a touch of scorn in his voice?

The colour flared into her face. 'No,' she said defensively. 'Hardly. I don't know anyone round here to have lunch with. And anyway, I shall be looking for a job.'

'Which would be?'

'I worked in an art gallery.'

'I'll bet it was a posh one. Bond Street?' There was no touch of humour in his voice.

She didn't dare look at his face. 'Yes, if you must know.'

His laugh was soft and, she realised, sympathetic. 'Some friends of mine have an antique shop in Woodbridge. I can ask them if you like. They might know of something which would suit you.'

'That would be great.' She risked another glance at him. The scars, now she knew they were there, weren't so bad. There was an area of red, puckered skin and tight silvery marks from his temple down across his left cheek almost to his chin. His eyes, she realised, were blue, not the bright almost harsh blue of Rosemary's, but a deep misty colour. 'Leo –' She paused for a second, then took the plunge. 'Our other neighbours. In The Summer Barn. Do you know them?'

'Indeed.'

'They don't seem to be here much.'

'No, thank God!'

'What happens in the summer?'

'Usually they go to Marbella or somewhere like that. Suffolk is too quiet.' Leo gave a throaty chuckle. 'Don't worry. We don't have to contend with that. And if they come down for Christmas at least they keep the doors shut.'

'Is it possible,' again a moment's silence, 'is it possible that one of the children might come in here, and somehow hide, move things around?'

He smiled. The scars affected his smile, gave a strangely quirky twist to his mouth. 'Anything is possible with them. But I think it unlikely. They live somewhere down near Basildon and the kids seem to think coming up here is the next best thing to parental-inspired torture. The youngest, Jade, is almost bearable, she's about eleven, but she would be at school. And there would be all hell to pay if she wasn't, so we can rule her out. One thing Sharon and Jeff are fanatical about is that the girl should get her education. The boys are, I fear, beyond hope.' He put the empty trug down by the door. 'I take it you have had the feeling there has been someone in the house?'

She nodded. 'Stupid. It's just taking time to get used to the place. It's so big after the flat and it's so quiet here.'

He glanced round. 'There's no need to be worried about it. This place has always had a strong feeling that there are things going on. Not the kids next door, not real people. Just echoes.'

For a moment she said nothing. 'Is that why the people before us left?' She walked over to the window, fighting the tightening in her chest. He was going to tell her it was haunted. That was all she needed. 'It's a new conversion,' she went on. 'Hardly anyone has lived here. No one has died here, have they? It can't be ghosts.'

He frowned. 'This building is hundreds of years old. Surely you realise that.'

'But it's a barn. Nobody lived here,' she repeated firmly.

'No. Nobody lived here.' Whatever he had been going to

say, he changed his mind. 'Don't worry about it. These old buildings creak and groan with every change of wind or temperature. You'll get used to it. In the end you won't hear it any more, or if you do you will feel it's like a conversation. My place is the same. I can tell what the weather is like and which way the wind is blowing just by which beam creaks in the morning when I wake up.'

She smiled. 'That sounds positively friendly.'

'It is.'

'I'll keep the security lights in mind,' she said as he stooped and picked up his trug.

'Do that. They desecrate the night.' He turned towards the door. 'Right. I must go. You must introduce me to Mr Lloyd one of these days.' And he had gone.

Zoë clenched her fists. There was no ghost. There could not be a ghost. Just a creaky house with a past as a farm building. She could live with that.