

Malignant Night

The sky was pitch dark. The moon was hidden behind the protruding chimney, its glow barely escaping from behind. It cast slivers of light onto crumbling stone steps, at the entrance of St Dáinn's Hospital for the Ill. The poorly painted wooden door barely clung to its hinges, being pushed gently by a breeze that seemed to stay inside of the building, dissipating around the serrated glass at the many broken windows. The icy-cold blanket of a December night washed over the grounds, icy fingers finding their way to the six teenagers huddled at the bottom of the steps. Their puffed jackets seemed to do nothing to protect from the weather, breath coming out in small clouds from their mouths. They stood in silence, eyes fixed on the daunting building before them.

It was a difficult sight to behold. The hospital was barely standing, the building letting out a low groan or creak every few seconds. What was once a beautiful structure that saved the lives of the sick now stood empty, left by its former owners to rot and blend into the luscious forest surrounding it.

An irritated sigh broke the group's silence as one member detached from the crowd and made her way to the top of the stairs, her fiery red hair standing apart from the dull colours of her surroundings. She stood silent for a moment, taking in the expressions of her companions. "We're all here tonight for a reason. One month ago, Carina's little brother Leo went missing." The speaker's eyes found that of the girl she was talking about, who stared back at her with a rageful fire in her chocolate eyes. "The police did nothing. Barely searched, accused her grieving family of lying for attention. This building...this is his last seen location. We don't know what happened to him beyond these doors, but tonight...we're gonna find out." The group mumbled their approval, slowly trudging inside. The group stalled as one girl, Steph, paused, gripping the wall with a pale fist, mumbling something about feeling ill, before being encouraged inside the creaking doors.

The atmosphere within the building was a stark contrast to how it was outside. Every sound felt like it was absorbed by the walls, plucked away as it was on the tip of their tongues. The group quickly separated, the fiery haired girl and a blue eyed boy staying downstairs, shining phone torches on their surroundings. The girl who felt sick quickly disappeared from view, as Carina thudded up the stairs, her purple box braids swinging with each step. A boy with hair as dark as the sky gripped the hand of the girl next to him, raising their fists up together. "C'mon, Sloane. We should go upstairs. There's so much more to cover up there." Sloane turned to him with a shy smile, nodding apprehensively. "Yeah, sure. Not the ideal date night, huh?" The pair chuckled, carefully making their way up the stairs to the second floor.

Glass crunched under the feet of the two downstairs, keeping far from each other as they looked around. The boy shone his torch towards an aching table in the entrance, instantly calling out to his companion. "Emer. There's something in here." Emer glanced up, walking into the room his voice came from. He stood beside the stairs, torch highlighting a bright blue race car glove discarded on the table. Emer felt her blood run cold, but slowly advanced towards him, tapping the shoulder of someone, most likely Carina, who stood silently in the middle of the room. She felt a spike of hot red pain through her fingers, hissing as she moved quicker towards the table.

"Definitely a kid's glove. I don't really wanna touch it. Looks dirty." His voice dipped at the last part, forcing Emer to move closer to hear him.

"I mean, it could be anyones. Do yo—"

"It's his. His favourite pair. And it's not *dirty*, Eric. Don't be such a coward." Emer was cut short by a voice that gripped every fibre of her attention. It had a gentle rage to it which threatened to leak out at each passing moment. Carina stood on the third step of the stairs, eyes slightly bloated from tears, placing her hands on her hips as she finished speaking.

"Carina. I thought you were behind me?..." Emer spun quickly to where she'd touched the shoulder of the person, a frown forming on her lips. They still stood there, quiet as a mouse, a black cloak making them seem shapeless. The only things visible were cold, dead eyes, drained of colour or emotion.

A veil of silence lay over the group, words being ripped from their throats. She could hear the sudden intake of breath from Eric, could see the surprise in Carina's wide eyes, and feel her own heart thumping vigorously in her chest. All stayed fixed on the figure, thoughts of wonder and fear swirling around in their minds. The person remained still and silent for what felt like forever, before suddenly turning to stare at Carina, opening their mouth wide as a bloodcurdling scream rang from upstairs.

The three flinched, glancing from the figure momentarily to glance up the imposing stairwell. Carina looked back quickly, preparing to confront the figure, but it was gone, as though it had never even been there in the first place. She took note of the blended looks of confusion and terror on the faces of her friends, before motioning them to come over.

"What the hell was that?" She hissed, gripping onto Eric's shoulder to steady herself when he came over.

"Sounded like Sloane ... What if something happened to her? Come on. We have to check." Emer placed her hands gently on Carina and Eric's shoulder, trying to ignore the trickle of fear that rushed through her mind.

The three of them ascended up the stairs, casting their torch lights around the rooms. They passed through a rubble filled doorway, and instantly the torches flickered to a stop. Eric kept to the front, with Carina in the middle and Emer trailing behind apprehensively. They kept close to each other, ducking under stray wooden beams and tiptoeing over glinting, crimson covered glass shards. The low wind whistled by their ears, sending a shiver down each of their spines.

Suddenly, Eric jolted to a stop. Pressing against the wall, he peered through the doorframe and let out a breath he didn't know he was holding. "She's on the ground. There's someone just...standing over her. What the.. what the hell?" He moved forward slightly, his jacket squelching with the movement. A frown tugged at his lips, and he turned to face the two girls in confusion. "The wall is like...wet. Like it's been painted."

"Who the hell would be painting the wall? It's an abandoned building. Why would this one, out of them all, be painted?" Carina stepped away from the wall, glancing back at it. Emer followed behind quickly, thumping her phone until the torch light flooded back. Instantly, she froze. The wall was dripping with streaks of crimson, trailing from beyond where the light touched. Fear took a hold of her, begging her not to move the light upwards, but she couldn't help it. Shaking, she moved the beam of light upwards, to be met with the lifeless eyes of Steph. Her face was twisted into a silent scream, eyes wet with tears. A scream ran through Emer's body, dropping her phone to the ground and falling alongside it. She could barely feel the tears run down her face, barely feel the near-comforting hug of Carina as she rushed to comfort her. Her vision was blurry with tears, and she tried blinking as fast as she could to banish them from her sight. Carina gently pulled her to her feet, pulling her in once more for a tight hug. Eric paused to watch them, saying nothing as he entered the next room.

Sloane lay there, letting out a low groan and moving her hands to cover her eyes. She could feel a pair of eyes staring at her, and it felt as though they were seeing past her body and into her mind. It was as though they were secretaries, searching through a cluttered filing cabinet. The feeling of being sorted through was suddenly whisked away as heavy footsteps rushed towards her.

"Sloane!" The worried voice of Eric floated in her ears encouraging her to peel back her hands and look at him. "Sloane, what the hell? What happened? Where's Richie gone?"

Eric slid to his knees beside her and eased her into a sitting position, greedy eyes searching for an answer on her face. "It was Leo. I... I saw him. He was with this tall guy, in a patient's outfit. They ... they were dead. They looked in my brain, rattled it, and sent me into shock. They killed Steph right in front of me. The second he saw them, Richie ran. Didn't even try to bring me with him. Just ran straight out of here. Hell of a boyfriend I found, huh?" Even in a moment where she was barely clinging to the life she had left, Steph still found it in her to make a gruff remark.

It forced a chuckle that lacked humour from Eric, who quickly brought himself together to ask the obvious question. "Dead? What do you mean dead?"

She rolled her eyes, leaning over to use his shoulder as an aid to stand shakily.

"What do you think I mean? Perished. Gone. He said the people here...the...spirits, they took him. He said they want to take more. That's why they got Steph, and came for me. They need three. Leo is one, Steph is two, and I should've been three. So we need to get the hell out of here before we give them the chance."

He hesitated, which resulted in a gentle smack from a highly irritated Sloane. She gripped his arm and pulled him to his feet, letting herself shift some of her weight into him. Eric kept a tight grip on her, dragging the girl into the room he had been

previously. Sloane and Carina had barely moved, still holding onto each other for dear life. Carina instantly went to rush her concern onto Sloane, who held up a single, bloody hand. "No time. We need to run. They want another."

The two girls barely had time to question the latter before a sudden sound of heavy footsteps filled the room, as well as small hisses of whispers flooding their ears. "Run!" Carina yelled, pulling Emer quickly as Sloane and Eric ran by them. They thundered down the stairs, doing their best to ignore the ever growing number of whispers, doing their best to ignore the sudden angry faces that appeared before them as they ploughed on. Seconds from the door, Sloane felt a bony finger graze her ankle, tripping forward and barely avoiding the second skeletal hand that moved to pull her in. Eric and her burst from the hospital, stumbling and rolling down the crumbling steps and landing on the ground.

They stood quickly, wide eyed staring into the dark opening of the hospital, fear and adrenaline pumping through their veins, transferring into delight at their freedom. They rushed to hug each other, sobbing into each other's arms mixed with hysterical giggling, and danced for joy.

This all stopped when a hair-raising scream echoed from the house just as Carina jumped from the door and rushed to a stop just before the steps. She was alone. Fresh blood splattered her cheek, hollow eyes meeting the gaze of her final two companions.

The silence returned as the sun slowly rose overhead, casting its bright glare onto the forever alive building of St Dáinn's Hospital for the Ill.