

The Keykeeper

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Chapter 1

Finlay parked his car at the back of the small English cemetery and slipped into the grounds through a gap in the hedge. Immediately he felt his skin crawling and had to suppress the urge to turn back. He walked along the path that led past old tombstones and benches with name plaques towards the edge of the cemetery. The scent of climbing roses and fresh earth was enhanced by the late spring sun, but he was oblivious to the lovely surroundings. He stopped in the shadow of a towering statue of a winged angel and looked around. This place would do.

He had deliberately arrived half an hour early to find a suitable spot. From there, he could observe the funeral and the mourners without being seen. Impatiently he tapped his fingers against his leg while he waited. He thoroughly disliked cemeteries, even if this one featured a beautiful landscape and a little medieval church. But cemeteries made him feel things he didn't want to feel. Irritating energy jolts, deep-seated jitters and....

'Snediam Enin.'

With a jerk, Finlay turned his head to see who – or what - had appeared behind him. *Damn it, not now.* 'Go away.' He turned around, wishing with all his might that the appearance would disappear.

From where he stood, he saw the arrival of funeral director's car. Six bearers hoisted a mahogany coffin onto their shoulders and walked slowly to the open grave. In the procession that followed, he recognised the parents, co-workers and some friends. His gaze passed slowly over all those present and stopped at one of the two young women walking directly behind the coffin. *There you are. Finally!*

It had surprised him slightly that this small cemetery had been chosen for the burial. He had expected it to be at the new crematorium near Cheltenham and a lot further away from this village. That seemed to better fit with the impressions he'd gotten off the man and his relatives.

However, he hadn't yet spoken to the deceased's wife, the most important member of the family. Much to his frustration. He suspected she was the one who had chosen this village cemetery in the Cotswolds where she'd lived with her husband. And where he had died. He studied the woman he'd been looking for intensely.

'Snediam Enin.'

Sighing deeply Finlay glanced over his shoulder. He squinted in the sunlight to get a better view of the appearance. He didn't know the man, or what was left of him. 'I don't know what you're saying. Leave me alone.' He didn't have time for this. He was not in the mood for this!

'Snediam Enin!' The shape responded with obvious frustration.

'I don't understand you. I don't know what you mean. Please, just go and find someone else.' He turned back and, to his dismay, saw his anger ripple off him in small blue flames.

The woman he was observing looked his way, but Finlay knew - hoped - that he was too far off to be noticed.

Robyn loved days like this: one of those soft, sunny days in spring of which there were never enough of. Days when she was tempted to put on her walking boots and go for a hike through her much beloved hills. Growing up in flat Holland, her calf muscles hadn't been prepared for the landscape in which she now lived. She almost smiled at the memories of those aching muscles so many years ago. Almost.

The church bells rang. And standing so close to the church, everybody stopped talking for a moment. She counted the chimes: eleven.

Eleven o'clock. Where was I this time last week? When everything still could have gone differently? When I still had the opportunity, the choice, to prevent this?

Her sister's arm tightened slightly around her waist and she became aware of her surroundings again. Once more, she felt the familiar tingle slide down her spine. She had first felt a tingle when she walked into the cemetery, but she'd ignored it. Wanted to ignore it. Without moving, she scanned her surroundings, searching for the origin of that tingle. She recognised the familiar pulses of energy radiating from her sister, her friends and colleagues standing around her. But just outside her field of vision, she felt something else. Something she

couldn't quite put her finger on, and which made her very uneasy. She looked towards the edge of the cemetery, where a blue glimmer of energy was visible.

She sighed wearily and stopped probing. *One thing at a time. For heaven's sake, let me face only one thing at a time today.* She had hardly articulated that thought when she noticed someone coming up behind her.

'Snediam Enin!' The voice rang clearly through her mind.

Ah, a Halfway. That explained the tingle. And a new one, judging by the muddling of the words. Relieved and without turning round, she tried to sense who, or what, it was.

'You'll have to wait,' she spoke back telepathically.

'Snediam Enin!'

'You really have to wait. I can't help you now.'

Her sister looked at her questioningly, apparently sensing that she was distracted.

Robyn shook her head and fixed her gaze on the mahogany coffin that was slowly lowered into the ground by six of her friends. She wholeheartedly hoped it wasn't her husband standing behind her. The husband who now lay dead in that coffin.