

The Way of the River



THE LEGEND OF KELLANDALE WOOD
BOOK ONE

SHAN L. SPYKER

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with Pete Lambros

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Long ago in the country of Eldmoor . . .



Autumn

1

Elinora, Otilie & Sir William's Tower

“Otilie, wait for me!” Elinora’s voice echoed up the dark, circular tower staircase. “I can’t see a thing! Hold the flame up, will you?”

Tillie turned and raised the thick candle, illuminating a door at the top of the stairs. “Hurry up then, we’re almost there. And don’t call me Otilie. It sounds like you’re scolding me!” she shouted back.

“Well, I am. I told you I didn’t want to come up here, *Tillie*.” As she drew closer, her brown eyes, frazzled and frustrated, became visible in the glow of the candlelight; her dress, deep burgundy-colored and practical, contrasted starkly with her pale olive complexion.

“And yet here you are anyway,” Tillie grinned.

Elinora glanced at the old, splintered door that stood between them and the tower bedroom. “All right, you’ve seen where it is; now are you satisfied?” She set her eyes sternly on Tillie. Her hair, pulled back in a tidy chignon, further added to an illusion of authority.

Tillie disregarded her, impulsively stepping up to the landing and turning the handle before she could be stopped, but it was locked.

“Right, there’s no way to get inside.” Elinora drew in a deep breath, then turned and walked down a few steps, hoping her younger sister would follow. But to her dismay, Tillie didn’t take the bait.

Instead, she reached into her dress pocket and pulled out a key. A look of defiance glimmered in her feisty hazel-green eyes.

“Tillie, where on earth did you get that? This part of the manor house has been off limits for ages. You know this room is meant to be left alone. I don’t even know what I was thinking when I agreed to come up here.”

“Oh, stop being so boring. I am sick of how dull it always is around here. Nothing exciting ever happens.”

Elinora rolled her eyes. “Do you ever wonder why I call you Queen of Mischief?”

“Come on, Nor, I really want to see what’s in there!” Tillie replied, her dark blonde, wavy hair swaying in time with her emphatic words.

“It’s just an old bedroom and Father doesn’t want it disturbed out of respect. You understand, don’t you?” She folded her arms and sighed.

“An old bedroom...in a *tower*. You really are dull, aren’t you.” Tillie looked down at the stone landing beneath her feet, sulking, then glanced up.

Elinora was unmoved.

Tillie put her hands to her hips. “Come off it, don’t be such an old lady. You’re only a year older than I am but you act like you’re eighty-five, not fifteen.”

“I’ll be sixteen very soon, thank you very much.”

“Eighty-six then. It’s so frustrating constantly wondering

what's up here. You know you've always wanted to see Sir William's room, too. What else better do we have to do on such a dreary day?"

Elinora paused a moment, then exhaled deeply. "You're relentless, you know."

In that split-second of hesitation, Tillie knew Elinora's resolve was about to buckle; she cracked a smile.

"Ugh, how daft am I to even consider listening to you?"

Her smile widened.

Elinora stood up straight and pulled her shoulders back, trying to appear as though she was still in charge. "Fine. But just for a moment."

Tillie ignored her and turned the key. The hinges creaked as she pushed the heavy door open.

"Promise you won't touch anything," Elinora whispered, as though someone could be there listening to them. "Please," she added.

"All right, I promise." Tillie took her first step into the cavernous room and looked around for a moment. "Oh, Elinora, it's marvelous!" she gushed.

Elinora peered over Tillie's shoulder, surprised by how inviting the room looked. The furniture, exotic and ornate, gave a worldly and alluring air that beckoned her inside. She followed Tillie and they both gazed up at the vaulted ceiling. Exposed wooden beams, tens of feet above their heads, infused the humid air with their smoky, earthy scent. It was the incense of old timber that had baked for centuries in the sun's rays as they streamed through the massive, arched tower windows.

Together they walked deeper into the room, toward the thick, rounded exterior wall. Originally constructed with mason stone, it had been coated with lime wash in Sir William's time. Tillie reached out and patted the wall, which made a satisfying dull thud.

The old turret in which they were standing was one of the last original architectural remains of the manor house, built more than four hundred years prior. The bedroom within it had been cared for through the many generations the Woltons had lived there, even though it had been unoccupied for most of that time. Three large windows looked out over the river, yielding an unobstructed view of the grounds. Elinora approached them, pressing her forehead to the middle window. She had never seen the landscape around their home in quite the same way before and her nervous energy was unexpectedly soothed by the stunning view. “We’re up so high,” she marveled.

Through the steady rainfall and haze she could see everything surrounding them—the expansive terrace and the lawn far below, the sprawling gardens that grew alongside them, and beyond that, the rushing river that ran behind the property. In the distance to the left was the old stone bridge leading to the town of Waterbridge.

Tillie came to her side, setting the candle down gently on the windowsill. She stood on her tiptoes and peered out, then teasingly nudged her sister’s shoulder with her own. “See, aren’t you glad you listened to me for once?”

Elinora cracked a dry smile. “Look at the garden,” she pointed to the right. “And over there, I can see the entrance to the forest trail.”

They stood looking out the window together, taking in their world from this new perspective.

The forest, at the height of the leaf-turning season, seemed to go on forever, the fiery autumn hues stretching on for thousands of acres. They had only ever experienced the shallow perimeter along the edge of the woods, as they were strictly prohibited from going into what their parents dramatically referred to as the malevolent forest.

“I can’t believe we’ve never been up here. What a silly waste of a beautiful view. The forest is lovely, and I hate that we’re separated from it. Maybe that’s why they don’t let anyone up here—they’re afraid of anyone thinking it could be anything other than haunted. We’re five stories up and it’s as though I can see the whole world from here—I feel like I could grab it all up in my arms,” Tillie said with a sigh. “And I see it’s still raining. I hope we can take a walk later. I’ll be utterly miserable if we don’t.”

“Mmhhh...” Elinora mumbled, distracted as she continued gazing out the window. She absently twirled her hair between her fingers, an unexpected twinge of curiosity consuming her thoughts.

Tillie stepped away from the window so that she could continue exploring, and headed toward an old writing desk. “Just look at all of this. It’s like walking back through time. I wonder what life was like for Sir William.” She let his name float through the air as she looked at his old quill, still lying in its dried-up bottle, then quietly peeked inside a drawer, hoping to find an old notebook or something that might have been written on by that very same pen.

“Sir William,” Elinora echoed. “His father, Sir Edward, was our fifth great uncle. It wasn’t called Kellandale Manor until over two hundred years ago when it was given to him,” she said, searching her memory. “Sir Edward’s brother, James, inherited it after Sir William died.”

“Oh no, don’t *you* start with the history lessons. All they do is tell us about Sir Edward, or Sir William this, or Sir James that, and don’t go into the forest because it is treacherous, and on, and on,” she grumbled, mindlessly picking up an old spyglass sitting on his desk.

“Tillie, you promised you wouldn’t touch anything. And the deep forest—how do we know if it’s haunted or not? No one has ever gone out there. What if it is?”

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...once upon a time, the end. - PL

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Shan Spyker is an artist, graphic designer & writer, among other things.

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