The truth no one wanted you to hear

THE GHOSTS OF GREY TOWERS

THE NIGHT HOUSE FILES



Dan Smith

Illustrated by Luke Brookes


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CLASSIFIED

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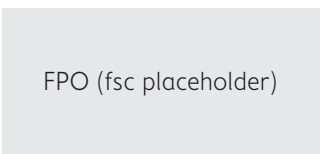
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For the Nightwatchman

The Night House Files

Officially, the Night House does not exist. But it is real. It is an old and secret organisation that investigates the truth behind strange events around the world. Events that include the paranormal, the extra-terrestrial and the bizarre. Events that governments do not want you to know about. The findings of these investigations are filed and kept safe by a mysterious entity known only as the Nightwatchman. Once a year, the Nightwatchman delivers a file to me. My job is to turn the contents of the file into a story so that you may know the truth. That is the Nightwatchman's wish, and I dare not disobey.

The following story is taken from File SN251: the Ghosts of Grey Towers.

Everything you are about to read is true. The names of people and places have been altered to protect the innocent.

Author's Note

30th October 2024

There are no roads that lead to Grey Towers. It doesn't appear on any map, and you would only ever find it if you knew where to look.

But I know where it is. I've been there. After reading the Nightwatchman's file, I wanted to see it for myself. So I travelled as close as I could by road, then left my car and hiked across five miles of difficult moorland.

What I found will forever haunt me. There is something wicked within the walls and gardens of

Grey Towers. I felt it as soon as I saw the decaying building standing on the moor, its stones rising black as night against the clouded sky.

A terrible silence existed there, as if no living thing wanted to be part of that place. There was no hint of birdsong, only the deep moan of the moor's lonely wind. Heather and gorse refused to grow within its grounds. There wasn't even a nettle.

Instead, the gardens around Grey Towers were overgrown with plants I recognised as hemlock, devil's parsley, blackthorn and belladonna. Deadly plants that flourished there despite the bitter autumn cold.

As I came closer to the imposing ruin, my unease grew stronger. A darkness lived there – something unspeakable that hung in the air. But I found myself drawn to the foot of the grand steps leading to the front door, where I sensed the deep and terrible sickness that is soaked into the stones of Grey Towers. And I tried to imagine how Damien

Cooper must have felt the night he arrived all those years ago. Abandoned, alone and afraid.

There was a storm that night.

Monday, 1st October 1990
The first night

Damien Cooper stood hunched in the rain at the foot of the grand steps. His black hair was plastered against his head, and his jeans and jacket were soaked through. He stared at the sign in front of him, illuminated by the car headlights:

Grey Towers Boarding School for Boys

Lightning flickered, flooding the moor with a ghostly silvery-white until the greasy darkness closed around Damien once more. Thunder rumbled.

Damien shuddered and glanced back at the

small car on the gravel driveway. The engine was running, and the window was up. Cold, hard rain lashed against the steamy glass. Damien could make out the shape of his father inside.

When the shape moved, Damien dared to hope that his father had changed his mind, that he was going to open the door and call Damien back. But instead, the window jerked downwards, and his father looked at him. His eyes were sunken shadows in the grim night.

"Go on," he said. "They're expecting you."

Damien bit his lower lip and let the rain take his tears. He turned and climbed the steps, carrying his small overnight bag in one hand. When he reached the top, he paused beneath the large stone porch.

Lightning pierced the sky once more, revealing the huge wooden door in front of him. In the centre was a knocker shaped like a fist. Damien reached out to take hold of it.

It was cold and damp to the touch.

Thunder crashed as he lifted the knocker and brought it down against the striking plate.

Once.

Twice.

Three times.

Before Damien could knock a fourth time, the door swung open to reveal a tall man. He wore a pinstriped suit over a white shirt and black tie. The man was thin, with long limbs and thick grey hair swept back from a receding hairline.

He studied Damien with watery blue eyes, then looked out at the car driving away into the storm. He cleared his throat and said, "Well then. I suppose you'd better come in."

The tall man closed the front door, and the outside world was gone. The only sign of it was the sound of the storm raging across the moor.

Inside, the cavernous hallway was lit by dim chandeliers hanging between dark beams in the high ceiling. The bulbs flickered gently, as if they were shining their last light.

The tall man stood before Damien like an undertaker observing a dead body. He licked his thin lips and watched the boy, half closing one eye as if to see him better, then held out one hand.

"My name is Mr Grady," he said. "Headmaster of Grey Towers." His voice was softer than Damien expected.

Damien looked at the man's hand. It was slender, with delicate fingers and perfect nails. The thought of touching it made Damien's skin crawl.

"It is customary for gentlemen to shake hands," Grady said.

Damien nodded and swallowed hard. He wiped his rain-damp hand on the hip of his jeans and stared with dread at the man's fingers. Sometimes

a touch was all it took for him to see things he didn't want to see.

"Well, boy?" Grady's eyes darkened.

Hesitantly, Damien forced himself to extend his hand and slip it into Grady's. As soon as he did, Grady closed his grip and held Damien firm.

"I'm pleased to meet you, Damien Cooper," Grady said. "I trust you will become a perfect pupil at ..."

A dark vision flooded Damien's thoughts like ink spreading through water. Wild eyes stared at him from dark shadows, and he was filled with an overwhelming mix of anger, fear and shame. And amid that swirl of emotions, Damien heard voices screaming and the *swish-crack* of something being struck over and over again.

Then Grady released his grip, and it was over. The vision slipped away and was gone.

Damien blinked hard.

"... even listening to me, boy?" Grady was saying. "Hmm? Because I suggest you pay attention.

If you do, you will flourish here." He lowered his chin and glared at Damien. "But if you refuse to listen – if you refuse to *behave* – you will get what you deserve."

Monday, 1st October 1990
The first night

Full of fear and hopelessness, Damien followed Grady along the scuffed wooden floor of the great entrance hall. Their footsteps echoed around the dusty stone walls as they passed pieces of old furniture – a dark walnut table topped with a vase of filthy fake flowers, a small bookcase of faded leatherbound books. None of this gave any life or colour to the house. Nothing made it feel welcoming.

"Boys are not allowed to use the front door," Grady said as he strode along the hallway. "Nor are you allowed to use the main staircase."



At the far end of the hallway, Grady stopped and turned so that his back was to the large, sweeping staircase.

"This way leads to the east wing." He indicated to his left, where a dark corridor ran off from the main hallway. "But the east wing is out of bounds. Do you understand?"

Damien nodded.

"I need to hear you say it, boy," Grady told him. "And you address me as 'sir'."

"Yes, sir."

"Good. And this way," Grady indicated to his right, "leads to the West Wing. Follow me."

Grady turned on his heels and headed into the west-wing corridor.

Damien stayed where he was for a moment and stared into the darkness of the east-wing corridor. It was darker than dark in there. Blacker than black. But if he squinted, it looked as if there was something in that darkness. A shape that was lighter

than the shadows. Was that a person standing there? Or perhaps a statue? But then it moved and—

"Come along, boy. We haven't got all night," Grady called.

Damien snapped his head round. He blinked hard and hurried to catch up with Grady. When he glanced backwards, there was only darkness in the east-wing corridor. No sign of anything else.

Unsettled, Damien followed Grady, half-listening as the tall man pointed out the dining room, the TV room, the prep room.

At the end of the corridor, they reached the foot of a narrow spiral staircase. Grady pressed the palm of his hand on a large white button, and a light clicked on somewhere further up the stairs.

"These switches are on a timer," Grady said as he started upwards. "They will switch off behind us, so don't dilly-dally."

The stone steps were worn down in the middle, no doubt by the hundreds of feet that had used them

in the past. Every twenty steps or so, Grady pressed another large light switch to illuminate the way ahead. Behind them, the timed lights turned off with a click that echoed in the stairwell.

"We currently have sixteen boys boarding at Grey Towers," Grady said as they climbed. "Seventeen now that you are here."

They passed the first and second floors, and when they reached the top of the stairs, Grady pushed open a heavy door. He led Damien onto a dimly lit landing with a yellow-and-brown patterned carpet. There were three doors leading off from the landing. The first door on the right stood open, giving Damien a glimpse into a large room with a row of white baths against the back wall. The second door on the right opened into a room of toilet cubicles.

Grady marched to the far end of the corridor and stopped in front of the final door. It was made of dark wood with the word "ONE" carved into it.

"The junior dorm," Grady said. "Your bed is in the corner by the window. Your uniform is in the bedside locker. Make sure to be quiet – the other boys are sleeping."

Grady pushed the door open and looked down at Damien. He tightened his thin lips and half closed one eye.

"We have rules at Grey Towers," he whispered. "You will learn them soon enough, but know this – there is no talking after lights out. And there is no getting out of bed. Failure to obey these rules will result in punishment. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

Grady nodded. "Good. I think we're going to get along famously."