

# WYCHETTS



AND THE  
TOME OF TERROR

The fourth book in the *Wychetts* series

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## Prologue

Night. A storm rages. Howling winds stir wraith like clouds across the moon. Jagged forks of lightning rake the sky, and bellowing thunder echoes through the empty hallways of a large, castle-like building.

In a room lit by candles, a girl sits hunched at a table. She writes hastily, her quill scratching inky lines across the pages of a hefty book.

From below she hears a terrifying cry, the primal shriek of a wolf.

The candles gutter. The girl raises her quill, pausing to draw her cloak tighter around her shoulders.

She knows he is coming, and that she must finish what she has started. For she is the last of her line, and only she can save the name of her family.

The girl continues to write, her quivering lips moving soundlessly as she mouths the words.

There is another baleful cry, much closer now. Then a mighty crash, an explosion of splintered wood and shattered stone that shakes the floor beneath her.

He has breached the main hall doors.

The girl's hand moves faster, her quill gouging the pages of the book. Ink splashes onto the floor, the droplets glistening darkly like splattered spiders.

She hears padding footsteps, and something scratches at the door to her room.

She is almost out of time.

The girl picks up the book and runs from the room, ascending a winding staircase that brings her out onto the tower rooftop. She hears another crash from inside the tower, followed by a chorus of angry bellows.

He has her scent.

She is still writing, her hand trembling from fear and the chill wind that whips at her as she hurries across the rooftop. She reaches the battlements and turns round.

Three wolf-like forms scamper onto the roof, their yellow eyes burning into her. Then they merge into one, and the one shape becomes that of a man.

A man clad in grey.

His face is hidden in shadow, but his eyes reflect the flashing lightning as he strides towards the girl.

The girl finishes writing, and holds the book before her as she backs away from the man. She clammers onto the battlement, still clutching the book as the storm seethes around her.

The grey clad man reaches out to her, his gloved hand beckoning. The girl shakes her head, and glances over the wall of the tower. It is a long way down, certain death if she should fall. Then she sees the gloved hand lunging at her. She recoils, and tumbles from the battlements...

There is a flash of lightning and a deafening thunderclap. The book thuds onto the cobbled courtyard, followed moments later by a fluttering empty cloak.

The grey clad man looks down from the tower, silhouetted by the moon as the storm fades...



# 1

## Just a Hobby

Centuries passed, and kingdoms toppled: the Normans came and conquered, King John signed the Magna Carter, and Henry the Eighth married his six wives. And all before teatime.

Sitting at the kitchen table, Edwin put down his textbook and ticked the box marked “history” in his homemade revision planner chart. Geography was next on the timetable. According to his schedule he wasn’t supposed to start until six thirty, but he decided to be a devil and sneak in an extra half hour. That’s as long as he wasn’t disturbed...

“Ahem.”

Edwin glanced up and saw a mouse sitting on the table next to his pile of textbooks.

“What is it?” grunted Edwin, scowling at the mouse.

“Tea time,” said Stubby.

“That’s not for another half an hour.” Edwin had factored such details into his revision timetable.

“That’s human tea time,” said Stubby. “Mouse tea time is different.”

“Mouse tea time seems to be all the time,” reflected Edwin. “Whenever I look at you, you’re always stuffing your pointy little face.”

“That is because mice have a high metabolic rate,” explained Stubby. “I must consume half an ounce of food for every three and a half ounces of body weight every day. In terms you’d understand, that’s two thirds of a toasted cheese sandwich.”

“That’s basically my whole tea,” pointed out Edwin.

“Very kind of you to offer,” said Stubby.

Edwin shook his head. “I’m not giving you my tea. I need food to help my brain cells grow.”

Stubby’s nose twitched disdainfully. “Dare say there’ll be plenty of room in your big fat head for both of them.”

Edwin ignored Stubby’s observation. “We also need to conserve food. We’re having to rely on Mum’s wages because Bill still hasn’t got a job.”

“That doesn’t surprise me,” tutted Stubby. “Has he tried the local zoo? I hear there’s a public facing position going that would suit him perfectly.”

Edwin frowned. “They need a new keeper?”

“No,” said Stubby. “But he’d get free food, fresh straw every night, and his very own hanging tyre.”



“It’s not Bill’s fault he can’t find a job,” said Edwin, sounding more charitable to his stepfather than he actually felt. “It’s just that he hasn’t got any qualifications. And I won’t get any if you don’t let me revise.”

“I could help you,” suggested Stubby. “In exchange for two thirds of a toasted cheese sandwich.”

“You help me revise?” Edwin exhaled a derisory snort. “What do you know about anything except mousey stuff?”

“Mousey stuff is very important,” insisted Stubby. “Mice have played a prominent role in all aspects of history, art and science. For example...”

“I don’t have time for this,” sighed Edwin, fearing he was in for another prolonged mousey lecture. “Please be quiet and let me get on with my revision.”

“I’d be better off in a zoo,” said Stubby. “At least I’d get regular food.”

“Maybe.” Edwin nodded. “But you’d have to put up with people staring at you all day. I wouldn’t like that.”

“Thought you’d be used to it by now,” said Stubby. “But I’m sure it would stop if you wore a label.”

A disgruntled Stubby settled down for a nap inside Edwin’s pencil case. Grateful for some peace at last, Edwin picked up a pen and recommenced his studies.

But the peace only lasted a couple of seconds.

A terrible screech rent the air. Edwin dropped his pen and clamped his hands over his ears, grimacing as the noise got louder. If he didn't know any better, he'd have thought a cat had its tail caught under a steamroller. But unfortunately Edwin did know better, and he knew that nerve-shredding screech was actually the sound of laughter.

Edwin's stepsister Bryony entered into the kitchen, accompanied by the cause of the noise.

Saffy and Jaz were the prettiest, coolest and most popular girls in the school. Edwin knew that because Bryony had told him about a million times. But Edwin wouldn't have called either of them pretty. Saffy was tall and skinny, with curly blonde hair and a mouth that seemed too big for her face. Jaz was shorter, with spiky black hair and rather large ears.

Whether Saffy and Jaz were cool or not was something Edwin would never be able to fathom. But all the other kids hanged around them at school, and they were always laughing about something. Normally the less popular pupils. Like Edwin.

Edwin guessed they were laughing about him now. And he guessed right.

"What's your dweep of a brother doing?" Saffy stared mockingly at Edwin whilst twiddling a coil of her curly blonde hair.

“I’m revising,” said Edwin, thinking it was obvious.

“What’s revising?” said Jaz, wrinkling her nose.

“Search me,” said Saffy, looking equally confused.

It didn’t surprise Edwin that neither Saffy nor Jaz knew about revising. They never did any study at school, and spent most of the time winding up the teachers. Now Bryony had started to join in the high jinks, much to Edwin’s disgust.

“I know what revising is,” said Bryony. “It’s something dweeps do instead of hanging around with friends.”

Dweeps. Edwin hated that word. Firstly because it wasn’t complimentary, and secondly because it wasn’t a proper word (he’d looked it up in numerous dictionaries without success). Of the two reasons, the second annoyed him more.

“Your dweeepy brother doesn’t have any friends,” said Saffy with a disdainful toss of the head.

“I don’t need any friends,” muttered Edwin.

“Good job too,” sneered Jaz. “Because you’ll never have any, being such a dweep.”

Saffy and Jaz laughed again. Then Bryony joined in, trying her best to match the grating screech of her friends. Wincing, Edwin put his fingers in his ears. He guessed he should be used to it by now, but it still hurt when Bryony laughed at him in front of Saffy and Jaz.

Edwin and Bryony had started their new school together last term. Edwin had never been good at making friends, so was glad that Bryony was there with him. Everything had been all right at first, then Bryony latched on to Saffy and Jaz. And that's when she had changed. She never spoke to him at school now except to poke fun, and that was only when Saffy and Jaz were around. At home she ignored him entirely, preferring to spend all her time gabbling to her friends on the phone.

What annoyed Edwin most was that Bryony seemed to be getting away with such bad behaviour. Under normal circumstances his mum, being a teacher at the school, surely would have noticed; but last month she had taken on a new role as acting head teacher. This meant she spent all day stuck in her office doing paperwork, and now she'd started bringing it home to deal with. Edwin had tried telling her about Bryony's behaviour, but Mum had said he'd have to make an appointment to see her and that she was fully booked up for the next fortnight.

Eventually the screeching subsided, and Edwin took his fingers out of his ears.

"Can't you go somewhere else?" he suggested, trying his best to sound reasonable. "I need peace and quiet to study."

“Why don’t you go somewhere else?” countered Bryony. “Saffy and Jaz came round this evening to hang out with me. They don’t want you around dweeping it up.”

“Oh I see.” Edwin nodded. “It’s a verb.”

Bryony screwed her face up. “Uh?”

“Dweep is a verb.” Edwin smiled. “He dweeps, they dweep, you dweep...”

“No, you dweep,” snarled Bryony. “And you’re doing it again now. So go do it somewhere else.”

“I was here first,” said Edwin. “Why don’t you go up to your room?”

“No way.” Bryony lowered her voice to a whisper. “I’m not letting Saffy and Jaz up there. They’d rip my wardrobe to shreds.”

“Why would they do that?” Edwin frowned. “I thought they were your friends.”

“It’s what friends do,” hissed Bryony through gritted teeth. “But you wouldn’t know, being a dweep who hasn’t got any.”

“How about the dining room?” suggested Edwin.

Bryony shook her head. “Your mum’s in there doing her paperwork.”

“Have you tried the lounge?”

“She’s doing her paperwork in there too. Apparently the dining room isn’t big enough to hold all the paper. So you’ll have to shove off. While Saffy and Jaz are here, this kitchen must remain a dweep free zone.”

“But I’m revising.” Edwin was determined to stand his ground. “And you should be revising as well. It’s the end of term exams next week.”

“We don’t care about exams,” sniffed Saffy.

“You should care,” said Edwin. “Everyone at school has to take exams. It’s the rules.”

“Rules are for dweeps,” said Jaz.

“But exams are important,” insisted Edwin. “If you don’t get your school qualifications then you won’t get a decent job when you grow up.”

“We’re not going to get a job when we grow up,” said Saffy. “We’re going to be celebrities.”

“That’s right,” said Bryony. “And we already have all the qualifications we’ll need for that.”

“You’ll never be a celebrity,” Jaz sneered at Bryony. “You’re not the right shape.”

Bryony frowned. “Are you saying I’m fat?”

“Not fat,” said Saffy. “Just fat shaped.”

Saffy and Jaz threw their heads back and laughed again. Once more Edwin was forced to protect his eardrums, and as

he sheltered beneath his science textbook he noticed the pained look on Bryony's face.

"Bryony isn't fat," he blurted, struggling to make his voice heard above the screechy girly laughter.

"Oh how cute," said Saffy. "Bryony's dweeepy little brother is sticking up for her."

"Perhaps Bryony should be his friend," suggested Jaz. "Instead of ours."

Bryony was horrified at the suggestion.

"No way. I don't want to hang out with dweeps like him. I want to be your friend, that's why I asked you round this evening. So what do you think of the house?"

Today was the first time Saffy and Jaz had visited Wychetts. It was an event Edwin had long dreaded, but he suspected Bryony wasn't totally relaxed about it either. With its crooked walls and wonky floors, the old cottage wasn't everyone's idea of what a home should be, and Edwin got the impression that Bryony's friends were not overly impressed by their surroundings.

"Are you sure this is the kitchen?" Saffy wrinkled her nose as she looked around her.

"Surely you can't cook in a place like this," said Jaz. "My parents have a fully fitted kitchen with integrated appliances."

“We’re getting those,” said Bryony, although Edwin doubted if she knew what integrated appliances were. “We’re getting a whole new integrated appliance next week.”

Edwin knew that was a lie, and by the looks of it so did Saffy and Jaz.

“But how can you afford a new kitchen?” said Jaz. “I heard your dad is still out of work.”

Bryony’s face twitched. “He’s not out of work. He’s just... between jobs.”

“I’ve heard he’s been between jobs for over a year,” said Saffy.

“He’s been busy,” said Bryony. “Doing the house up.”

Again that was a lie, but Edwin couldn’t blame Bryony for not telling her friends it was really magic that had restored Wychetts.

“You should have seen this place when we first moved in,” continued Bryony. “It was falling to bits, and only had half a roof.”

“At least that would let some air in.” Jaz stood fanning her nose. “It’s a bit stuffy in here.”

“That’s Edwin,” said Bryony. “But don’t worry, there’s only another six months until his next bath night.”

Neither Saffy or Jaz laughed this time, and Edwin sensed he was no longer the focus of their critical attention.



“I bet you have lots of spiders,” said Saffy.

“And rats,” added Jaz. “This place must be infested with pests.”

“Only Edwin,” said Bryony.

“Eek!” Saffy screamed and jumped. “There’s one on the table.”

“I told you,” said Bryony. “That’s Edwin.”

“There it is,” screeched Jaz. “Peering out of his pencil case. A rat!”

“That’s no rat,” said Edwin, scooping the offending animal into his hands. “It’s my pet mouse.”

“Please do not refer to me as your pet,” said Stubby. “As you are fully aware, my role is more advisory in nature.”

“It spoke,” gasped Saffy. “The ratty mouse thing spoke!”

“That was just Edwin mucking about,” said Bryony. “Wasn’t it, Edwin?”

“That’s right.” Edwin didn’t feel like co-operating with Bryony, but knew he couldn’t tell her friends how Stubby could talk. “I’m a ventriloquist.”

“A ventrilly-what?” Saffy swapped a puzzled look with Jaz.

“A ventriloquist,” repeated Edwin, more slowly this time. “It means I can throw my voice.”

“I’ve always said he should be on stage,” said Bryony.

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