

Malevolent Maine

Episode 24: The Ritual of Fire

Malevolent Maine is a horror podcast, and may contain material not suitable for all audiences. Listener discretion is advised.

INTRO:

TOM: A disturbing encounter with a creature out of this world. A cannibal who chases his victims through the cornfields. And a lighthouse that may be signaling something far more nefarious than rocks. Hey everyone, this is Tom. These are the stories we're working on for the coming weeks.

Malevolent Maine investigates the paranormal, but we can't do it without your help. Join the Malevolent Mob at www.patreon.com/malevolentmaine where for a small monthly fee you'll get all of the juicy extras that don't make our show, plus side stories and other exclusive benefits. Like and follow us on social media. Search for Malevolent Maine. Review the show wherever you listen to podcasts. Most of all, keep telling your friends and family about us. We've come a long way from when we started, but we've still got a lot of growing to do and the best way to do that is to get someone else hooked on the show.

You guys are great and we appreciate all you do for us. We promise to keep bringing you the stories that defy explanation. You know, the ones that keep coming back to go bump in the night? The ones that have burrowed deep in your brain and refuse to get out? We'll keep sharing them, but we can't promise they won't haunt you, like they have us. You've been warned.

The fire burns low and you can just make out the forms dressed all in black. They seem to be moving in and out of the flames in rhythmic motions. They're speaking or singing, you're not sure which, but you can't make out the words they're saying. You don't think it's English... or any other language you've ever heard.

Suddenly one of the black robed figures approaches you and lays a hand on your shoulder. "Are you ready?" the figure whispers and leans in.

This is Malevolent Maine.

Guys, what was that?

I saw it with my own eyes

No, seriously, what was that?

It's just not scientifically possible.

I can't explain it.

Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God.

This stuff is wild, man. It's real wild.

But... what was that?

Check out this one, MMers. It comes to us from Grace Vickery, a student at the University of Maine Machias, and it was so interesting that we had to bump it up in our production schedule.

Machias is the county seat for Washington County in the Down East region of Maine. It's a relatively small town, with just over 2000 residents. Its name comes from the Passamaquoddy tribe and it roughly translates as "bad little falls." It was the home of the first naval battle of the Revolutionary War. It's home to many beautiful buildings built in the 1800s, including the court-house, the jail, the post office, and the custom house. It's also home to the University of Maine Machias.

Originally built in 1911 as The Washington State Normal School, a teachers college, the university became part of the University

of Maine system in 1968. It refocused on science and biology, with a new science building constructed in the 70s. It's a beautiful campus, home to 760 students, and the first university in the state to see the sunrise.

Grace is a sophomore Marine Biology major with a focus in coastal conservation. She's small and slight, standing just a few inches over 5 feet, with blonde hair down to her shoulders and stylish glasses. She was friendly when we interviewed her, though a little reserved. She's the kind of student who most likely goes unnoticed in the campus hallways.

She reached out to us after an event that took place just after the start of the spring semester at UMM. Grace says she's always been a target for bullies and mean-spirited people. In high school kids teased her about her height. They compared her to a mouse and started calling her Vickery Dickory Dock, after the nursery rhyme about the mouse running up the clock. She said she hoped when she went off to college all of that would be behind her.

She had always been a shy girl, and although she had plans to get out of her shell in college she never found her crowd. So she kept to herself either focusing on her school work or reading fantasy novels. She spent a lot of time in the Merrill Library, and formed a close bond with the assistant librarian there, a man she knew as Mr. Davis. She said he was middle-aged, with black hair and a penchant for wearing sweaters.

In the first few weeks of the second semester however, her safe space was invaded by a group of athletes who were on the verge of being put on academic probation and had set up camp in the library. Grace said she never saw them actually studying or doing work, and she assumed it was all for appearances.

The athletes and their girlfriends weren't content with just being rowdy, though. After a few weeks in the library, making rude jokes and showing each other loud videos on their phones, they began to whisper under their breaths whenever Grace walked

by and then laugh once they felt she was far enough away. One time a large football player pushed back his chair at just the right time to bump into Grace and she ended up falling to the ground and losing all the papers and books she had been carrying. They all made a big show of helping her up, but they were snickering the whole time Grace said. "It was so disheartening," she told us "It was the one place I felt at home at UMM. I wasn't bothering anyone, but as soon as they started coming there I felt like they zeroed in on me as the butt of their jokes."

One day Grace couldn't take it any longer. She rushed off to a back shelf in the reference section after the boys made a particularly nasty comment directed towards her. She says she was looking for a place to cry in private.

She thought she was alone but after a moment, Mr. Davis came out from behind a row of books and placed a hand on her shoulder. He tried to comfort her, telling her that the athletes who harassed her were awful people and that he warned them if he ever saw or heard anything like that from them again he would have them banned from the library. Grace says she pleaded with Mr. Davis not to do that. She was worried the harassment would only get worse.

"I had always liked Mr. Davis," Grace told us. "He was a cool guy. He was the one who introduced me to the Joe Abercrombie books." She says he smiled knowingly at her and nodded. He seemed to study her for a moment and Grace was just beginning to feel uncomfortable for the first time around Mr. Davis when he motioned for her to follow him.

He led Grace through rows of books, past shelves that all looked the same to her. "I want to show you something," he said as he led her on. They reached a set of stairs that went down to the lower level where study spaces could be reserved and where some of the school's historical texts were stored. "There are ways of getting even Grace, ways to make people like that regret how terrible they truly are," he said as he continued down some

silent rows of books, turning right and left seemingly haphazardly.

They descended another set of stairs and were now in some sort of sub basement. Grace says she had never been down there before, and hadn't even known it existed. It was dark and cool down there, and the shelves seemed more spaced out. There irregularly shaped books and boxes of parchments, paintings and works of art. In the furthest corner of the sub basement, Mr. Davis stopped and pointed down one dimly lit row of books.

"It takes some studying but I know you are good at that," he smiled, "but maybe one day one of them has a freak accident, one comes down with an illness, one is mauled by a rabid dog. These are things we can do with the right words, the right books."

Grace says Mr. Davis stayed at the end of the row. A single yellowed bulb hung, suspended from the ceiling in the middle of the row, throwing a circle of light that Grace says felt more like candlelight. Her breath caught in her throat, and with feet that felt like they were miles away, she began down the aisle, scanning the shelves.

The shelves were filled with books, ancient books, many of them without titles. Grace looked back, but Mr. Davis was there, smiling. He gestured her own, urging her to take a few of the books down and look through them. When she opened the books up a lot were in a weird script that she still hasn't been able to identify. It wasn't Latin; Grace had studied Latin and she was sure it wasn't that. It didn't appear to be Arabic, or a system of language like Japanese or Chinese. She was at a complete loss as to what language these books were written in. Grace describes some books as bound in thin paper-like leather that looked as if it had blue veins running through it, other books had blood stained pages.

"It was weird," she told us, weeks later, in the conference room at our office. "It was so quiet down there. I couldn't even hear myself breathing, but the further down the aisle I got, the more

I felt like... an energy around me. Like hundreds of voices whispering to me. Not about me, like the bullies, but to me. Like they were telling me a secret."

It occurred to Grace at some point that what Mr. Davis had been referring to was magic. Not the wizards and sorceresses of her fantasy books, but real and actual magic. She should have scoffed at the idea, and maybe under normal circumstances she would have. But there, in the silence and dim glow, surrounded by dozens, maybe hundreds of old books, the prospect suddenly didn't seem so ludicrous.

"Perhaps that one would be a good place to start," Mr. Davis said, suddenly standing right behind her.

She pulled out the book he indicated and opened the cover. Written in that strange language she couldn't make out, were words and a diagram. At first she couldn't make any sense out of it, but suddenly it swam into focus. Meaning flooded her brain, and she realized she was looking at a ritual to inflict minor pain.

Grace admitted that there in the dark Mr. Davis showed her how to perform the incantation. They practiced a few times, and then Grace says she performed the ritual herself. She says she won't tell us the words she spoke or the movements she made; she says she can't even properly recall them now. She says when she completed the ritual - again, that's what she called it - she says she felt a surge of energy course through her. She said it was like a bolt of lightning shot out of her. And that was it. Mr. Davis led her back out of the sub basement.

Grace says two days later one of the athletes who had been harassing her fell down the stone steps of Dorward Hall and broke his ankle, effectively ruining his upcoming baseball season. Grace says it could have been an accident or a coincidence, but in her heart she knows it wasn't. She knows she did it.

The aforementioned baseball player declined an interview with us and asked that we not use his name in our show.

Grace says she went back to the library and met with Mr. Davis a few more times. Each time he would lead her down to the sub basement, back to the darkened section where the books of spells were kept. They would practice spells each time. Some were rituals for bad luck, some were for good fortune. Grace said she never saw the results as strongly as she did with the baseball player who had been harassing her, but she believed in the spells' power.

One day, while they were practicing a spell, Mr Davis mentioned how far Grace had come. He said there was a sort of gathering or group that met to discuss the books in this section, spells, and other things regarding the power they were harnessing. Davis invited Grace to join them the following Thursday night at midnight . He told her a certain door would be unlocked and that she could make her way down to the sub basement. He showed her a room where the group would be.

Grace returned a few nights later and found the door unlocked just as Mr Davis said it would be. She made her way through the reference section down to the sub basement. She found the door and with only some minor trepidation, she opened it.

Grace told us that the room was lit with the ruddy glow of flames. A fire burned in a large metal bowl in the center of the room, though it gave off no smoke. There were maybe twenty people in a loose circle around the fire. Twelve of them were dressed in black robes with hoods up over their faces. There were several people wearing regular clothes like her. They looked around her age and she tried to see if she could recognize any of them but it was too dark. In the center of the circle Grace said she was shocked to see a woman, naked except for a black mask across from her eyes. Attached to the mask was a veil of what looked like woven branches. Tucked into the branches were candles, thirteen of them, circling her head.

Before she could respond she felt a hand on her arm. It was Mr Davis wearing one of the black robes. He smiles from beneath his hood and Grace said there was a devilish glint in his eyes.

"You're just in time," he said. "The Betrothed is just about to start."

Mr. Davis led Grace to a spot in the circle. Grace said the nude woman in the center began walking around the fire, chanting something in a strange language. The hooded black figures chanted back at her periodically. Grace said she began to feel strange, lightheaded and a little sick to her stomach.

She said the fire intensified for a moment as if something had been tossed even though nothing had. When it died down again a second later, the naked woman began speaking in English.

"Mother. Mother of fire. Mother of all. We evoke you. With the Dance of Flames, with our promise to you, we seek your guidance. Dark Father who watches from the towers in the East, we ask that you come into your loyal Betrothed and grant her your power."

The gathering chanted back at her in ancient words Grace could not comprehend.

The naked woman, the Betrothed, walked around the group.

"My beautiful children," she said. "We have completed the Ritual of Fire. Brother Matthew and Sister Kimberly burned the sacred offering at the spot the Master revealed to us. They watched it burn until it stopped moving, then stopped breathing, then stopped living as per our ancient rites. We offer up our blessing, Master. We offer up our blessing, Mother Maker. We show our love by sharing our communion."

Grace said at that point the group removed their black robes. They too were naked. Several of the members turned to the young people in street clothes, approached them and kissed them on each cheek. Grace said Mr. Davis approached her.

"Are you ready?" He asked her.

Grace told us the growing unease she had been experiencing got worse and she began to shake. The naked members of the coven began to ritually remove articles of clothing from the young newcomers.

Grace suddenly felt like she couldn't breathe and began shaking her head. She backed away until she hit the door. She bolted through it and out of the library.

She said she didn't sleep at all that night. She had been invited to and nearly initiated into a witch's coven. She didn't understand everything she had seen and heard but she knew it was wrong. Grace says she hasn't been back to the Merrill Library since that night and after two days, she came home to Westbrook. She has since left U Maine Machias and says she has no plans to return. She doesn't know what the coven burned or what they were hoping to do but she can no longer be a part of it. She regrets ever going with Mr Davis into that sub basement.

After a story like this, we knew we had to investigate. Lucas and I took a trip up to Machias to look into Grace's claims.

LUCAS: we got to UMM and made our way to the library. It's a brick building, low to the ground. Inside was light and filled with the soft hush of pages being turned. We went to the front desk and asked to speak to the assistant librarian, Mr. Davis. The student aide working at the desk seemed confused, and said he didn't know Mr. Davis. He did offer to get the head librarian and ask her. Debra Murphy was younger than one might expect from a librarian, but she was helpful. She mentioned she had heard of our show, but hadn't had a chance to listen yet. When I asked her about Mr. Davis, she frowned. "There isn't anyone here with that name," she told me. I described the man as best I could based on Grace's descriptions, but she didn't seem to recognize him. When I asked if anyone had ever worked here

with that name she told me she would have to speak to the college's president before answering any more of our questions.

While Lucas dealt with Ms. Murphy, I made my way through the library. I talked with several students and community members who were there, either reading or studying. None of them knew a librarian named Mr. Davis, but a few of them recognized the description. They said they had seen a man like that in the library several times, but didn't know who he was.

LUCAS: In the end, once we explained our purpose, the college president acquiesced. Ms. Murphy explained that as far as the campus records indicated there had only ever been one person named Davis who worked at the library. That was Dortha Davis in 1974.

This so-called Mr. Davis used a false name, but the head librarian didn't seem to recognize the man, and it would appear he never worked at the library at all. Grace says she saw him behind the desk, however, and that he helped her check out books multiple times. Now it is entirely possible that Ms. Murphy could be lying, of course. Or Grace could be. But perhaps something more nefarious is going on.

LUCAS: We asked the librarian if we could explore the basement. She agreed and told us the basement is open to the public. She explained that there were study rooms down there, plus some of the books they kept out of circulation. I asked about a sub basement and she seemed confused. She said that was only used for building maintenance and no one went down there. She said she was the only person in the library on a daily basis who had a key. She agreed to let us look, but she promised us we wouldn't find anything.

We went down through the basement, which was similar to how Grace described it, and Ms. Murphy led us to the door that went down to the sub basement. She said we were free to poke around there for a few minutes, but she would have to

get back to work soon. Together, Chris and I went down the stairs to the sub basement.

The sub basement was nothing like Grace had described it. It was mostly empty, with simply metal shelves containing various parts for the upkeep of the library - heating system pieces, old boxes of tile and rolled up sections of carpet, there were cases of paper towels and toilet paper, and large bags of ice melt. All of it rather mundane. There were no boxes of manuscripts or wrapped up artwork, and there was no section of long forgotten grimoires.

LUCAS: The sub basement was completely different than Grace had described it. At this point I was seriously beginning to suspect she had made the entire story up. We do get stories like this from time to time. Most of our listeners are open and honest with what they've experienced, but every now and then we get someone who is so desperate for attention or to have a paranormal experience that they fabricate one all on their own. This case was looking like one of those, but then Chris found something as we were getting ready to leave the sub basement.

Towards the back of the area there was a door set in the wall. It was a metal door. The kind that wouldn't look out of place in an old hospital or school. There was nothing distinct about it, only that it didn't match the wooden door Grace has described. Still, we wouldn't be very thorough investigators if we didn't see what was on the other side, especially in light of Grace saying she went through a door in the sub basement to the room where the smokeless fire burned.

The room on the other side was small, perhaps ten feet on a side. At one time it had perhaps once been an office of some sort or a separate storage area. There was nothing in the room at all, just cold concrete floors and walls. We were about to head back up when I noticed something carved into the wall. It was a triangle maybe an inch/inch and half tall. It had been carved into the concrete, etched in with something sharp. It

could possibly be dismissed as something benign or accidental, but the lines were too perfect, the cut was too fresh.

An equilateral triangle, with the point up, is a witchcraft symbol for fire. Grace had said the coven she encountered had performed something called the ritual of fire. It couldn't be a coincidence, so Lucas and I began looking closer.

LUCAS: Before we go any further, we should be clear, what we believed we were dealing with. When we say witches, we are not talking about modern day wiccans or white witches. We are talking about a Satanic cult of witches. Again, not modern Satanism. We know and respect these separate groups. We work with Wiccans and members of the Church of Satan on a frequent basis. We are talking about practitioners of black magic, people who follow ancient evil rituals and rites to perform supernatural feats. This distinction is important to us as we continue with our investigation. We believe the people Grace encountered are dangerous and should be approached with caution, if at all.

A further review of the small room in the sub basement revealed two more carvings, both at the base of the wall, close to the floor. Both of them were symbols for memory. They had lines drawn through them, though these seemed intentional, a part of their construction.

We hadn't seen these specific configurations before, but in previous cases we've looked into, these slashes or lines often represent the opposite of the sigil they are drawn through. Therefore the symbol for fire with three lines drawn through it represents "not fire" and is used to help protect something from burning. With the lines drawn through the memory sigil it could imply that a ritual was performed to make someone or maybe many someones forget.

Is it possible that after Grace's defection, the coven that was operating in the basement at the Merrill Library performed a ritual to make everyone forget. Magic is a tricky thing. In our

line of work we have seen plenty of things that defy explanation, but magic - as in the casting of actual spells - is something that is hard to verify. Grace said she performed a spell to cause a minor injury to one of her bullies and a baseball player fell and broke his ankle. Was that magic or was it a coincidence?

So the question, is it possible that a spell was cast that somehow erased all - or nearly all - proof that this coven existed on campus, is a difficult one to swallow. It's hard for us to definitely say yes or no to that. Instead, we focus on what we can prove. There were three symbols carved into the walls of the sub basement associated with Satanic or demonic witchcraft.

We researched Grace's explanation of the rituals she claimed she witnessed. There were several things that seemed specific and could be telling. The first was that the leader of this group referred to herself as the Betrothed. The second was the so-called Ritual of Fire. We'll talk about both of those, but first Lucas will explain what he found about the title "Betrothed."

LUCAS: Betrothed means the person to whom one is engaged to marry, as in Brad's betrothed, Sandra, works at the vet's office. In many religions priests or priestesses commit themselves solely to their god. For example, Catholic nuns are considered married to God. This coven referred to the Master and the Dark Father, both terms which in many witchcraft circles refers to the Devil. In this case, the Betrothed would appear to be engaged or married to Satan. This is the first time we've seen the high priestess of a coven referred to as the Betrothed. It's an interesting piece of information, but one that didn't help us identify anything specific about this group.

The second thing we wanted to learn more about was the fire that seemed to burn in the middle of the room without any smoke. We want to unequivocally state that an open fire in an enclosed

room is extremely dangerous, and yet Grace and the others seemed to suffer no ill effects. Grace said she didn't see the fire give off any smoke, nor did she see anyone adding any wood or other fuel to the fire. Now this could have been an optical illusion, some sort of special effect designed to trick the new initiates, but we have come across references to something like this in our research. The books refer to it as The Devil's Breath, and it appears to be an incantation that witches in Satan's grace are able to conjure. According to one source, the flames need no fuel because they are a direct conduit to Hell and they offer no smoke because they don't burn wood, but the souls of the damned.

Which leads us to the Ritual of Fire. Fire is one of the four elements and is important in many sects of witchcraft. Fire represents destruction, but also rebirth, like a phoenix rising from the ashes or how farmers sometimes burn a field to help replenish the soil. Fire is an important part of witchcraft, so it should have been easy to find this specific ritual.

And it was almost too easy. There were dozens, maybe hundreds of Rituals of Fire. None of them seemed to fit the exact description of what Grace referenced, but we did find a few that seemed close. Often in these kinds of rituals a living sacrifice is consigned to the flames. By feeding a living essence to fire, the coven is offering the Devil living energy to exact their will. Typically these are small creatures - snakes, frogs, even insects or spiders are often used. It is believed in certain black magic circles that the larger the sacrifice, the more impact the ritual will have. Therefore, sending a frog to the flames will not be as powerful as giving it a cat or dog. Grace seemed to believe that something important had been sacrificed to the fire. We studied the local papers and social media groups for postings about missing pets, and after that didn't turn up much, we widened the search to any people who had gone missing during that time period as well. As of now, we haven't had any success in determining what the coven sacrificed.

Which brings us to *why* they would perform a ritual like this. Here's Lucas, again.

LUCAS: So these kinds of rituals are typically used for two different purposes. The first is a cleansing, to purify or sanctify a certain space. This is typically done to excise spirits or things that might cause the coven difficulty in performing future rituals. The other reason Rituals of Fire are often performed is to mark or charge an area. It's like focusing a lens. By charging up a certain location with energy, it makes it easier for the coven to perform more complex rituals.

It is also important to note that February 2 is the witch's Sabbat of *Imbolg* [**Im'molg**], also known as Cadlemas. This is a rite of renewal and rebirth. It is also a fire ritual. A Sabbat is a pagan festival or ritual, a time for witches to gather, to perform great rites, and harness the energies of the world for their black magics. As near as we can tell, Grace was invited to the coven meeting in the sub basement of the library right around this time.

So what do we know? Very little. What do we suspect? We believe Grace. Her story is too complex to have been fabricated. She was able to provide specific details that would be difficult to make up. Then there are the symbols or sigils we discovered in the basement of the library at U Maine Machias.

So we believe there is a coven of dark witches operating somewhere in the Machias area. They performed a ritual prior to Grace joining their meeting to empower some location, possibly in preparation for another ritual to come. What that is, we simply do not know at this time.

Before we left the campus, we did just a little more investigating. Grace said she saw several other co-eds at the coven meeting. She didn't recognize them, but we asked around, trying to see if anyone knew more about this. Were there students who had begun acting differently or seemed newly

interested in occult things? We spent several hours in the student commons but everyone we asked seemed unaware of any such activity.

LUCAS: We did find several more witchcraft symbols drawn on buildings around campus. These could have been coincidence or the doodles of bored students, but we took no chances. We wiped away as many as we could. We don't know what the coven was planning, but we imagine it wasn't good.

Which brings us to the portion of our show where we need to warn our listeners. Maine doesn't have a large population of black or evil witches. There are plenty of wiccans and white witches, but by and large these people are harmless. This group appears to be something quite different. We're still combing through all of the evidence, but the symbols we saw, combined with what Grace told us, seems to point in the direction of a more aggressive, potentially dangerous group. If you're in the Machias area and you notice an increase in strange symbols appearing in odd spaces on buildings - over doorways, beneath windows, thresholds - or you notice charms or other strange tokens appearing in places, please reach out and contact us. We don't know what this coven wants, but we suspect it isn't good.

Stay safe out there, Maine.

Malevolent Maine is Lucas Knight, Tom Wilson, and myself, Chris Estes.

If you'd like to read more about our investigations check out our website at malevolentmaine.blogspot.com/

While there, don't forget to check our merch store. And, if you're so inclined, support us on Patreon at patreon.com/malevolentmaine

Thank you for listening to Malevolent Maine.

And as always, stay safe out there, Maine.