

# ***Orange Sound***

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**(Chapters 11 – 32)**

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It was the first Saturday in February, the day following the break-in at the Humes' cottage. Professor Brock and a team of postgraduate students were in Wet Rain Hill to carry out their long-planned exploration of Bell Hollow. It was planned to carry out the explorations of the cave over the course of the following week. The exploration represented, as far as they were aware, the first serious attempt to explore the unusual cave. There were ten people in the team, including archaeologists and geologists. An experienced cave explorer would carry out the actual descent into Bell Hollow. A coil of high-tensile cable attached to a harness was to be used to lower the cave explorer into Bell Hollow. He would also be equipped with special climbing shoes, and a safety helmet with a mounted spotlight and a small video camera. The cave explorer would communicate with those on the surface via a throat microphone and set of headphones.

He would also wear a small pouch containing instruments for scientific measurement, including a digital thermometer, a hygrometer for measuring humidity, and a manometer for measuring atmospheric pressure. Some other specialised speleological equipment was also on hand.

The electronic equipment was linked to several laptop computers, which were located in a tent set up nearby to the cave entrance. The laptop computers would digitally record the data obtained during the exploration. The video camera, as well as the throat microphone and headphones, were also linked to a laptop computer; these would provide live pictures and sound during the descent and exploration. A small diesel generator would supply the required electrical power. One not so hi-tech, but essential piece of equipment they would be using was a paraffin-heater. This would be used for keeping the inside of the tent warm on this cold February morning.

Professor Brock had used a research fund that had been given jointly to the Departments of Archaeology and Geology by a major international oil-company to buy the equipment. One requirement stipulated by the provider of the funds was that it should be allowed to use any publicity generated by the exploration in possible future advertisements, should anything of interest be discovered. This included film shots inside the cave and interviews with members of the team.

Whilst the professor's interest in the exploration of the cave was principally archaeological, the department of geology hoped to get enough data to construct a topological and geological map of the cave. This would help both in estimating the age and in understanding the origin of this anomalous geological feature. The oil-company had particular interest in the geological aspects of the exploration, even though it was thought unlikely that significant oil deposits would be discovered.

The team had started setting up their equipment from about eight thirty in the morning. And by eleven, everything was ready for the first planned descent into the cave. The day had originally started out bright and cold, but then, almost on cue, the notoriously fickle British weather lived up to its reputation. The sun disappeared behind a huge rolling bank of cloud, and the once bright green hue of the hillside was now dulled by shadow. Rain had become a distinct possibility. Nevertheless, the team decided to go ahead on the day with their first planned descent into Bell Hollow.

Thick brambles surrounded the entrance to Bell Hollow. Some effort had been made by the team to cut a swath through the greenery to a point where the cave explorer, Steve Bone, would start his descent. Ironically, this point was right next to the warning sign, which told people to stay clear of the cave because of the dangers it posed. Steve Bone sat on the lowest edge of the entrance to Bell Hollow with his feet dangling over the side. The upper part of the cave was shaped rather like a periscope. The eye-like

entrance directed up onto Menzie's Hill opposite then curved into the near-vertical main chamber of the cave.

The final checks were made to Steve Bone's harness, safety helmet and cable. The cable was attached to the harness, and passed through a series of pegs secured in the ground around the cave entrance. It was supplied by a coil mounted on a stand, which was also securely fixed to the ground and located about three metres from the cave entrance. Two male team members had the job of supplying additional resistive force on the cable, if it was required. Another person had the task of managing the rate at which the cable was paid out according to the instructions given by Steve Bone through his throat microphone. Final tests were also carried to ensure that the small video camera mounted on his safety helmet was correctly sending pictures to a laptop computer, and that the explorer's throat microphone and headphones were functioning correctly. When it was finally confirmed that everything was working correctly, Steve Bone was ready to begin the task of exploring the cave.

He was gingerly lowered over the side of the entrance to Bell Hollow. Then, unable to cling onto the cave wall because of the sheer drop, he dangled for a moment in the air suspended by the cable attached to his harness. He gave instructions through his throat microphone to the cable controllers to begin lowering him into the cave. After a few seconds, he had plunged into a world of absolute darkness. The daylight outside was not able to travel around the bend at the entrance to the cave. There was nothing on the

roof of the cave to reflect any light into the cave chamber. The spotlight mounted on his safety helmet lit up the space in front of him. Eventually, and after some difficulty, he was able to manoeuvre himself so that he was facing the wall of the cave. Steve Bone then began what was, in effect, a backward crawl along a solid surface. The cave was almost completely silent, except for the sound of his hands and feet on the rock surface. On occasions, he sent pieces of shale plunging into the dark void beneath him. The sound of the shale hitting the cave floor echoed around him.

Each requested additional length of cable came in units of one metre. Above ground, Steve Bone's progress was monitored from the images supplied to a laptop computer. With the assistance of gravity, together with his skills as an accomplished cave explorer, he descended, without a hitch, to a depth of about two-hundred-and-fifty metres in the space of only a few minutes. At this depth Steve Bone announced that he was now standing on a narrow rock ledge within the cave. It was estimated that the floor of the main cave chamber was still about twenty metres beneath him.

"This place is incredible," enthused Steve Bone, as he slightly edged his way to a place on the small ledge where he could get a more secure foothold. "I'm amazed how regular the features of the cave appear to be; they hardly seem natural. I've never seen a geological structure like this. The cave chamber is like a huge cylinder gouged vertically out of the earth. The rounded wall surface of the cave is almost unreal." On reaching a relatively secure point on the ledge, he began extracting a sample of the sedimentary rock

from the surface of the cave using a tool similar to a corkscrew. The sample was then placed inside a small plastic container and stored in the pouch attached around his waist. He then took measurements of the cave diameter using an infrared distance sensor, and also noted the local temperature and humidity.

Without having any prior knowledge of the source of the images appearing on the laptop computer, they would be impossible to comprehend. The fawn-coloured and coarse surface of the sedimentary rock, with scattered pinpricks of reflected light from particles of iron pyrites, looked like an aerial photograph of part of the earth's surface.

"Steve, could you move further around?" asked Professor Brock. "I'd like to see some more of the cave wall."

"I'll try to move as far along this ledge as possible," responded Steve Bone. He passed by a narrow band of moisture, less than a metre in width, which clearly originated from the surface. It reminded him of the potential the cave had for flooding. "We've got some ancient life in here," announced Steve Bone, referring to the moss congregating around the moisture. As he edged around, the ledge became wider, which was welcome. Now he could stand up normally rather than press down heavily on his toes. He was conscious of the possibility of the ledge suddenly giving way. Such an occurrence would be disconcerting rather than dangerous, because the cable to which he was attached had been designed to support at least twice his body weight.

At what appeared to be the widest part of the ledge, Steve Bone stopped and tried to take in the image that now suddenly confronted him. “Take a look at this,” he yelled into his throat microphone. Team members above ground gazed excitedly at the laptop screen, and struggled to make sense of the images that were being transmitted by the camera mounted on his safety helmet. “Is this not something special?” he practically screamed.

Set off by the fawn colour of the rock, two animal forms had been painted in various hues of red and black. “This is tremendous, Steve,” boomed the professor’s voice in Steve Bone’s ear, before adding: “Is it going to be another Lascaux?” This question was perhaps rhetorical, and referred to the famous prehistoric cave paintings of hundreds of bulls, deer and horses discovered in south western France.

“At the moment, I can only see these two. I’m now trying to lean back as far as I can in order to make more sense of them. What do you reckon they are Prof?” asked Steve Bone.

“One of them appears very feline,” interjected one of the team looking at the image appearing on the laptop screen. “I agree,” concurred Professor Brock. “It’s a cat, or a lion, lying down with its paws held out in front of its head. And I think the other creature lying beside it is a sheep, or a goat, or maybe a lamb.”

For a moment everyone stared in stunned silence at the two unlikely inhabitants of the cave. The images were recognisable, yet somehow alien. Illuminated by the

spotlight on Steve Bone's safety helmet, the curves, spaces, colours, shades, and textures cast a strange spell as they emerged from out of the surrounding darkness of the cave. The paintings left no doubt as to the high degree of sophistication of the artist or artists.

Steve Bone began carefully scraping the rock surface to gather small samples of what seemed to be ochre pigment and oil used in the paintings. "How on earth they got down here to do this, and then got back up again safely, is something to be marvelled at," he commented, as he worked away on one small section of the painting. Professor Brock responded: "When you have finished, Steve, can you look to see if there any sockets in the cave wall? I'm thinking about evidence of scaffolding." A few minutes later, Steve Bone began scanning the surrounding area in greater detail. His hands searched the rock surface before him. Eventually, he found a series of holes that seemed to have been bored into the rock face. Then he noticed more some distance above. "I think there's a trail of sockets, probably running all the way up to the surface. I must have missed them in the darkness on the way down to this point."

"How about going further along the ledge, Steve?" asked the professor. "There might be more paintings."

"I can see that the ledge gets narrower and then peters out. But I'll manoeuvre myself further along as far as I can," responded Steve Bone. As he moved towards the end of the ledge, he was informed that it had begun to rain heavily at ground level. "Okay Steve. Things are not looking too bright up here. Let's bring you back up for now," declared



Professor Brock. “Wait a minute, Prof,” responded Steve Bone suddenly. “There’s something else. Look! It’s a large niche in the cave wall, and there’s something inside.”

The image that now appeared on the laptop screen was just as startling as the cave paintings previously witnessed. Lying inside a niche in the rock surface, the nearly skeletal remains of two dead animals could be seen. They were immediately recognised as belonging to a cat and a sheep. There was also what appeared to be a wooden carving lying amongst them. “Looks like a repetition of the cat-and-sheep theme,” shouted Steve Bone excitedly into the darkness. “How recent do the remains appear, Steve? You have a better view than we do up here,” gasped the professor, with a hint of impending disappointment in his voice.

“They are relatively recent. The remains are certainly not ancient. Both sets are not yet completely skeletal. I know things are going to be preserved a bit longer down here, but even so, I would estimate that these animals must have been placed in here only within the last few months,” replied Steve Bone.

The professor sighed audibly. “So when I said Lascaux before, perhaps I should really have said Piltdown Man,” he said disappointedly, referring to the great archaeological hoax perpetuated in southern England in the last century. It was at Piltdown where something that was thought to be the skull of the missing link in the chain of human evolution turned out in fact to be a modified ape skull deliberately left at the site of an archaeological dig as a practical joke.

“If the whole thing is just a hoax, then they’ve gone to considerable pains to carry it out,” noted Steve Bone. “This niche has been carved out of solid rock. I’m sure it’s not a natural feature.”

“I must say also that the cave painting didn’t look like a mere daub either; it looked pretty convincing from up here at least” added Professor Brock, less pessimistically than before. “It could be that these dead animals are just someone else’s recent contribution to what was originally here.”

“What you have just said may also apply to this,” said Steve Bone reaching into the niche, and pulling out the carved wooden head of a large-eared cat. “This also clearly belongs to the feline line within the cat-and-sheep theme.”

By the time Steve Bone had been raised back up to the surface, the rain had become torrential. The carved wooden head was placed in a plastic bag, and the pigment samples from the cave painting were carefully packed away. As the team scrambled up a wet and slippery Wet Rain Hill towards the shelter and warmth of Professor Brock’s cottage, an uncommon series of very loud peals of thunder echoed around the surrounding hills, resounding like the venting of an ancient and primitive rage at the violation that had just taken place in Bell Hollow.

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Alan Crawford and his family arrived late in the afternoon in the village of Wet Rain Hill. It was the same Saturday that Professor Brock had begun the exploration of Bell Hollow, and the day following the break-in at the Humes' cottage. The rain was still pouring heavily as Alan Crawford's car pulled up onto the driveway of his mother's cottage. Several cars could be seen parked outside Professor Brock's cottage further down Main Street. Inside Elsie Crawford's cottage, they found Nok helping her in the kitchen. Alan Crawford had already spoken to his mother earlier in the morning on the telephone, and consequently he knew about the break-in next door.

Later that afternoon, the Crawford family had tea together as usual. Nok Hume joined them. No one wanted to broach the subject of the break-in for fear of upsetting Nok. Nevertheless, it turned out that she herself was looking for some kind of explanation, and was eager to discuss the matter. Nok described how she had been awoken suddenly in the early hours of the morning by noises coming from the living room. She went on to describe as best she could in her less than perfect but nevertheless functional English, the details of what subsequently happened. This included the strange hissing sounds, the sound of furniture being moved around the room or pushed over, the terrifying moment when she thought her mobile telephone had given her away to the intruders, and the pungent animal smell that had lingered in the living room afterwards. Finally, she described the horrible sight of the dead cat left in the jaws of the wooden carving of the crocodile, and how the carving had been dragged from its previous position so that it now faced out the front window of the cottage.

Alan Crawford did not say this at the time, but his thoughts immediately turned to Mr William Avon who had fled the village just under three months ago. Avon had shown an interest in the Humes and their cottage. The fact that the only thing that appeared to have been stolen was the wooden carving of the Siamese cat, brought in from Thailand, was surely of significance. Why was it only the wooden carving of the Siamese cat, and nothing else, which had been taken? If they could have done so, would those involved have removed the carving of the standing crocodile as well? Did this not in fact happen because whoever was responsible had been disturbed by the sound of Nok's mobile telephone being switched on, and so were unable to finish what they had intended? But then, what was the significance of moving the crocodile to the front window, and placing the remains of a dead cat in its mouth? Was there some meaning in this gesture? All of these questions passed through Detective Sergeant Alan Crawford's mind as he listened to Nok Hume.

Alan Crawford asked Nok if her husband was now aware of what had taken place in the cottage. She replied that Jack Hume had been told about the break-in when he had telephoned her earlier in the day. He had called to that say he had arrived safely in Saudi Arabia, but on hearing the news had said that he wanted to return home to Britain immediately. Nok, however, had persuaded him that this wouldn't be necessary. Elsie Crawford had also spoken to him, and had promised to get Stanley Jackson, who owned a

hardware shop in Hexham, to repair the patio doors permanently and securely, as well as to install an alarm-and-intruder system in the cottage.

After tea, Alan Crawford and his son accompanied Nok next door to her cottage. She had not yet touched the wooden crocodile, which was still standing by the front window. It looked incongruous, standing upright on two short back legs with its front legs outstretched like a pair of stunted arms. “And poor Katy, the Jacksons’ cat, was just found hanging out of its mouth?” asked Alan Crawford looking at the carving.

“Yes, I feel very sorry for the Jacksons. It was a very terrible thing for them to see. Very sad,” answered Nok.

“Where is the cat now?” asked David.

“Mr Jackson took it home with him. I think he has buried it.”

“If you don’t mind, Nok, can you tell me something about how you came to buy the two wooden carvings?” inquired Alan Crawford.

“I chose this carving because I like crocodiles. In Thailand we have many crocodiles. Some people think that crocodiles are bad. But you cannot say that they are good or bad; they are just different. They are strong and powerful, but they are also quite shy. In some parts of Thailand there is a tradition that the crocodile can protect you if you learn how to respect it.”

“Is that why you originally placed it by the patio doors?” asked Alan Crawford.

“Yes. But it was there together with the Siamese cat. They were like a married couple.”

Nok Hume bent down and picked up from the floor a fragment of the strip of tinsel that

had once symbolically bound the two animals together, and then she continued: “Jack and I saw them both together in a shop in Bangkok. Jack especially liked the crocodile carving and he wanted to buy it immediately. But I also liked the Siamese cat, and told him that we should buy it as well. This was because I remembered a story I had heard as a child. It was about how a cat and a crocodile became good friends. The story goes like this. One day, the cat and the crocodile were walking past a village, when the cat noticed that a thief was stealing gold from a temple. On hearing this, the crocodile chased after the thief and eventually caught him. The crocodile then returned the gold safely to the monks who lived in the temple. The monks were so pleased that they said the crocodile and the cat could live in the temple grounds if they wanted to. The two animals lived there happily together for a while. But one day, a monkey, which the monks had also given permission to live in the temple grounds, played a terrible trick on the crocodile and the cat. Whilst the crocodile was away bathing in the river, the monkey suddenly pounced on the cat and tied it up. It then took the cat to a secret place. When the crocodile returned to the temple, it was told by the monkey that the cat had gone to the river to look it for it, and had not yet returned. The crocodile then returned to the river and searched for the cat. But even after several days, the cat could not be found. Meanwhile, the monkey went back to the place where the cat had been hidden away, and told the cat that the crocodile had now falling in love with its reflection in the river and would never return. And from that story, we can see why cats hate rivers and water and why crocodiles are always found on riverbanks. So, you see, I wanted the cat and the

crocodile to be together in my house, happy, just like they were in the temple grounds before the monkey played a trick on them,” explained Nok Hume.

“An amazing story, Nok” responded Alan Crawford. “And I would really like to know who the monkey is in this case.”

Alan Crawford began examining the wooden carving more closely. There was something on it that had apparently not been noticed before. “I suspect that there is a cavity in this carving,” he said, crouching down and pointing at a part of the crocodile’s stomach. “Look,” he said pointing. “A rectangular chunk has been cut out, thinned right down and then it has been glued back again into place. Its surface is flush with the rest of the carving, but you can see a thin trace of glue all the way around the piece.” He ran his finger around the rectangular trace.

“There’s another,” said his son, pointing to a place on the crocodile’s back. “And this one’s got a crack in it, and I can see something leaking out.” Small traces of a white powder could be seen around the crack. Alan Crawford had immediate suspicions as to what the white powder might be. “Don’t touch it, son,” he ordered.

“What’s wrong?” asked David, as Nok looked on in silence.

“It might be an illegal substance, and I wouldn’t be surprised if this animal in fact contained drugs. The Siamese cat that was taken could have packed with them as well.”

Alan Crawford turned to Nok, and asked: “Nok, what can you remember about the packing and shipping of these wooden carvings from Bangkok?” For a moment, Nok

looked at her questioner in stunned silence, as the realisation of what had been discovered dawned upon her.

“Jack took care of the packing and shipping. We used a company that had been recommended to Jack,” she answered. “But please believe me. We don’t know anything about drugs.”

“I do believe you, Nok. But I suspect that someone has been using your possessions to smuggle drugs into this country. I will speak to Jack in Saudi by phone later and will tell him about this. Can I have his number, Nok?”

“Yes, today he gave me a number where I could contact him,” responded Nok.

“The Thailand connection with our friend Mr William Avon, formerly of Flat 2B, Church Lane, begins to make a little more sense now,” observed Alan Crawford. “I think we can see why he might have decided to come to the village of Wet Rain Hill.”

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Over the course of the subsequent week, Professor Brock’s team continued to explore Bell Hollow. The professor now referred to the cave painting that had been discovered on the first day of exploration, as ‘the Lion and the Lamb’. This name came from the familiar pairing of animals in the Old Testament scriptures of Isaiah, which many thought of as symbolising reconciliation between two natural adversaries. One of the team had not so seriously objected to calling the painting ‘the Lion and the Lamb’ on the grounds that the cat painted in Bell Hollow did not have a mane and was thus not very



lion-like. Professor Brock countered this objection by quoting a verse from Isaiah, Chapter 11, which went: “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid.” He thus showed that the original reference in the Bible was in fact to a leopard. And then pointed out that, allowing for scale, the features of a cat are indistinguishable from those of a leopard, especially a black panther, which is a leopard with no spots.

The analysis of the ochre pigment and oils that had been used in the painting was not yet fully complete, but the results regarding the dating had been obtained and were very intriguing. The surface pigment of the painting appeared to be very modern, possibly even originating within the last few decades. Further examination of the painting carried out on subsequent visits to Bell Hollow, however, revealed traces of a much older pigment lying beneath the currently visible top layer. The painting appeared to have been touched up at different times, with the older pigment possibly as old as three hundred years.

The discovery of the carcasses of a cat and a sheep inside Bell Hollow had given rise to some wild speculation within the team. The fact that the animal carcasses were clearly not contemporary with the older layers of the cave painting effectively ruled out the possibility that what had been discovered in Bell Hollow was just an elaborate hoax. It had been suggested by some that they might have come across the den of a secret occult group. This outlandish proposal, however, presented some difficulties, because the

evidence suggested that such an occult group would have to be Masonic in its span of the centuries.

During subsequent descents into the cave, Steve Bone went beyond the ledge where the cave painting had been found and reached the floor of the main chamber lying at a depth of two-hundred-and-seventy metres. Here, there was a passageway running approximately northwards towards the village and sloping down into the earth at an inclination of approximately forty-five degrees to the vertical. The exploration of the cave had now become potentially much more difficult and dangerous. But even before the exploration of the more constrictive deeper reaches of the cave had begun, another remarkable discovery was made. A cast-iron bell, roughly one metre both in height and base diameter, was found standing upright within the entrance of the narrowing passageway. The positioning of the bell appeared to have been deliberate, because it was impossible to move any further along the passageway without first removing the bell. To the extent that it could be seen, the outer surface of the bell was remarkably clean. There was no moss or dirt, and no significant signs of corrosion on its dull, lustreless surface. If this was the long-lost church bell that had given the cave its name, which was what everyone in the team assumed, then it was clear that it could not have been preserved in its present location for around three hundred and fifty years. The bell would have deteriorated standing alone in such a position, given the passage of time and the tendency for Bell Hollow to flood. The perplexing conclusion that had to be reached was that it had been placed at the entrance to the passageway relatively recently, and now stood like a

palladium, a protective deity, a warning against those who would try to venture more deeply into this realm.

The witnessing, via the helmet-mounted video camera, of Steve Bone's discovery of the bell had been a cause for jubilation by the team above ground. That discovery by itself was stunning, but the team had given a collective gasp of astonishment when the spotlight on Steve Bone's safety helmet illuminated one particular feature of the bell: Cast in relief on the surface of the bell was, once again, the lamb lying down with the lion. The cave painting higher up was clearly an imitation of this image on the bell. Furthermore, and only partly visible because of the positioning of the bell at the entrance to the passageway, the image of Christ, the Lamb of God, being crucified on the cross was also cast in relief on the metallic surface.

On the next descent into Bell Hollow following the discovery of the bell, ropes, pulleys and pegs were brought down into the cave. With great care, using force supplied by the team above ground, the bell was dislodged from its position at the entrance to the passageway. It was then relocated a short distance away so that it no longer hindered further exploration of the cave. No attempt was made yet to lift the bell up and out of Bell Hollow.

Crawling on his hands and knees, protected from the jagged rocky interior by gloves and kneepads, Steve Bone proceeded further into the low and narrowing

passageway. The space through which he travelled eventually shrunk in cross-sectional area to about one square metre. Then he noticed that just ahead of him, the passageway opened up into a large chamber. But as he moved towards a point from which he would be able to see more clearly what lay beyond, an object in the passageway caught his eye. The object was a rudimentary cross measuring around thirty centimetres in length, with the crossbar measuring about ten centimetres. It appeared to be made of two separate pieces of carved bone bound together by a type of twine. Lying on the floor of the passageway, the white bone cross shimmered in the light of Steve Bone's spotlight.

After some discussion with Professor Brock and the other members of the team on the surface, it was decided not leave the bone cross in situ, but to bring it up to the surface. Steve Bone removed his gloves, and carefully picked it up. The temperature in the cave was around fifteen degrees Centigrade, much higher than was currently being experienced in the cold February day above ground, but the bone cross felt unnaturally cold when touched. After inspecting the cross, he placed it inside a small rucksack that he had brought with him. Suddenly out of the corner of his eye, whilst repositioning the rucksack onto his back, he thought he saw something move in the passageway ahead of him. He formed the impression that he had seen a dark form moving across the entrance to the chamber that lay ahead. Fear took immediate control of him. There was now no wish to discover what really lay beyond the point he had reached. He became seized by all the primeval fears of darkness, confinement and the dark terrible unknown that lie submerged beneath the rational conscious mind. To the consternation and bewilderment

of the team on the surface, Steve Bone yelled, screamed, into his throat microphone that he was getting out of Bell Hollow immediately. He turned, and began to crawl as fast as he could back through the dark narrow passageway. As he crawled, he knew for sure that there was something behind him. It was following him. Not daring to pause or look back, he used his bare bloodied hands to pull himself even faster out of the passageway, past the bell, and out into the chamber.

He worked frantically to reattach the cable from the surface to his harness in order to begin his ascent. Repeated inquiries from the professor as to what was happening in the cave were responded to with feverish, panicky, unintelligible gasps. Once the cable had been reattached to his harness, Steve Bone pleaded to be lifted back up to the surface at once. A few minutes later, he emerged from the cave, cut, bruised, exhausted and terrified. It was assumed that he had suffered a panic attack, brought on by the claustrophobic conditions within the passageway. From the video and sound feed taken from the cave, there was no immediate indication that anything abnormal had taken place.

Because of Steve Bone's distress, not to mention the minor injuries he had suffered, it was inevitable that the exploration of the cave would have to be suspended for a while. He was taken away for medical attention. Later, a meeting was held in the professor's cottage that same Thursday afternoon. In the discussions, the professor emphasised that as far as possible there was a need to restrict the spread of information

about the discoveries made in Bell Hollow. It was expected that the team would carry out further explorations as soon as possible. But in the mean time, attracting unwelcome attention to Bell Hollow before the work had been satisfactorily completed was something to be avoided.

By the following Saturday evening, however, Professor Brock had himself been forced to partially break this code of silence. He had bumped into Detective Sergeant Alan Crawford and his wife in the Blackbird public house. Alan Crawford had mentioned to him the break-in that had taken place over one week ago at the Humes' cottage. Because of Alan Crawford's description of what had been taken from the cottage and how it appeared to have been used in a drug smuggling operation, the professor felt compelled to mention one of the discoveries made in Bell Hollow. He described how a carved head of a large-eared cat had been found inside the cave, and how it appeared to be part of a much larger carving. Later that same evening, the professor showed the discovery to Alan Crawford and Nok Hume where it was confirmed that the carved head did indeed belong to the Siamese cat carving stolen from the Humes' cottage.

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Professor Brock did not profess to have any religious beliefs. The death of his wife had, however, made him think once again about what might be called the fundamental questions of human existence. Is there a God? Is there a meaning to life? Is

there a life after death? And also, is there, in fact, a meaning to the previous questions? He had felt bitter and angry after the accidental death of his wife three years ago. This bitterness and anger was made all the worse because it did not have a specific object at which it could be directed. There was no one specifically to blame for the death, except perhaps his wife herself for not taking greater care. She had slipped and fallen in the bathroom whilst he had been away at work, and had lain all day in a pool of blood, eventually dying some time during the day from the injuries sustained. He had then come home in the evening from the university to find her dead on the floor.

Negative feelings eventually gave way to resignation, and ultimately to some kind of acceptance of what had happened. Complete acceptance, however, would never come; he was sure of that. She still visited him in his dreams. He could still hear her voice and smell her hair. There were even times when he would still talk to her; perhaps relating to her what he thought was a particularly amusing or curious incident. He had already told his wife about the discovery made in Bell Hollow of the church bell.

The professor was thinking about his wife as he attended the Sunday morning service at St George's in Wet Rain Hill. Doubtless, she would have found it highly amusing to find him sitting in a village church singing, or at least pretending to sing hymns; the likes of which he had not sung for about forty years. Neither of them had been religious. When they had been younger, they had jointly professed a degree of almost militant atheism. This had been tempered in their later years together, to become a sort of

tolerant agnosticism. He had even taken to reading the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, which he had come to respect as a majestic and mysterious document, rich in history, folklore and psychology. All of it couched in grand and nebulous language. He had found it inconceivable, however, that the Old Testament represented the word of God.

But the professor was not attending church as the result of a sudden and dramatic road-to-Damascus conversion to Christianity, or indeed out of any other spiritual need. He was here out of curiosity. Something was intriguing him. The discoveries made in Bell Hollow the previous week and the conversation he had had with Detective Sergeant Alan Crawford in the Blackbird public house the previous evening had given him the sense of being caught up in something very strange. He had no clear idea of exactly what it was, except that there were events and circumstances that were displaying a perplexing degree of interconnectedness. Crime, namely drug smuggling, appeared to be one aspect of what was happening. But his discoveries in Bell Hollow suggested that there were other more mysterious aspects as well, and he could not deny that he felt slightly thrilled at the prospect of solving this grand puzzle. At the same time, however, there was a sense of danger ahead. The sign at the entrance to Bell Hollow had, after all, warned of this.

After the church service had finished, the professor hung behind so that he could speak with the vicar. The two men knew each other only by sight. When the congregation had finally all left, the vicar approached the professor who was still inside the church



apparently admiring the stained glass windows. “They never fail to fill me with anything but awe,” said Geoffrey Adams. “They really are astonishingly beautiful, aren’t they?”

“Yes they are,” agreed the professor. “I especially like this pastoral scene with the lion and the lamb.” Geoffrey Adams looked up at the window to which the professor was pointing and added: “A very moving symbol, don’t you agree?”

“Yes. And very vividly represented,” replied the professor.

“Anyway, you are very welcome to St George’s. I believe this is the first time you have attended a service here?”

“Yes, it is. But I have walked around the church graveyard before. You have had some very interesting history take place within these hallowed grounds.”

“Indeed, but not so much pre-historical, which I believe is your field.”

“Who knows that for sure?”

“I concede that may be true. It is silly of me to be so presumptive. Anyway, I’m very interested in your work, Professor Brock. I’ve read some of the things you’ve written for the local press, and have seen and heard you on television and radio several times.”

“Some aspects of my work seem to attract the interest of the media,” acknowledged the professor.

“Well, I see that you have had a team from your university on the hill this week, exploring Bell Hollow. I would be fascinated to hear about that.”

“Actually vicar, that’s precisely the reason I’ve come here. You see, I’ve discovered something in Bell Hollow that you will without a doubt be interested to hear about. In confidence, vicar, I need your help.”

Geoffrey Adams smiled. “This sounds intriguing. I would be delighted to help in any way I could. As you say, in confidence. I certainly won’t go blabbing to the media. You have my word on that.”

“Thank you. Being a man of God, I’m sure that I can hold you to that promise. Anyway, I’m meeting Alan Crawford in the Blackbird for a lunchtime pint. I think you know him, and I also believe that you yourself drop into the Blackbird occasionally. If you don’t have any objections or other plans, would you care to join us for half-an-hour or so?”

“It would be my pleasure. What time precisely?”

“It’s now twelve-thirty. What about one-o-clock?”

“Agreed,” said Geoffrey Adams.

Professor Brock looked up once again at the stained glass window he had been admiring earlier. “This one seems to fascinate you,” observed Geoffrey Adams.

“Well you could say that the lion and the lamb has been something of a recurring theme for me recently,” explained the professor.

**\*\* (15) \*\***

The Blackbird public house was usually busy during Sunday lunchtimes and today was no exception. The smell of lamb chops, Yorkshire puddings and roast potatoes drifted in from the kitchen. The steady hum of conversation was mixed with the occasional clatter of plates and the tinkle of cutlery. Professor Brock was the first to

arrive, followed a few minutes later by Alan Crawford. Finally, about fifteen minutes after the arranged time, the vicar, Geoffrey Adams, appeared.

“Please accept my apologies for being late,” said Geoffrey Adams, as he rather awkwardly offered his hand in greeting to both men, before finally sitting down at their table in the corner. “Can I get you a drink?” asked the professor, noting that the vicar had sat down without first buying one. “That’s kind of you. An Irish whiskey would be just fine.”

A few minutes later, the professor appeared with the vicar’s drink. “I was just explaining to Detective Crawford my reasons for being late,” said Geoffrey Adams, as he took the drink. “You see, I was quite excited by what you said, Professor Brock, about having made some discoveries in Bell Hollow”. Then the vicar hesitated for a moment. He quickly looked around to make sure no one was listening, before continuing in a low voice. “After I spoke to you, Professor Brock, I took the opportunity to look over again some of the old church documents and records that I’d been sorting out for some time because of my own interest in the history of St George’s.” Once again, Geoffrey Adams paused. In a manner that was decidedly conspiratorial, he looked around the room to see if there had been a response to what he had just said. But no one else in the pub could have possibly heard what he had just said. Moreover, no one was paying the slightest attention to the cabal in the corner. “Have you found the bell?” He blurted the question out in a hushed, but excited voice.

The professor was very mindful of the meeting that had taken place with his research team where it had been agreed not to disseminate information about the discoveries made in Bell Hollow. But subsequently, it had turned out that he had been compelled to tell Alan Crawford not just about the discovery of the wooden Siamese cat head, but of all the other discoveries made in Bell Hollow. After all, some of the discoveries appeared to have a connection with events in the village over the course of the past few months, albeit an unclear one. It was now clear that the vicar would also have to be taken into confidence. As the custodian of St George's church, it was only proper that he should know about the apparent discovery of the long-lost bell.

"Yes, vicar," replied the professor. "But we haven't removed it yet. Here are some pictures." He handed the vicar some enlarged digital photographic stills taken from the video footage of the cave exploration. "Good heavens," responded Geoffrey Adams looking at the photographs. "Well, who would have believed it?" he commented after examining the photographs in detail. "Absolutely incredible," he continued. "This must be the bell. There can be no doubt about it. But to think it has lain there undisturbed for all these centuries, and is still in such a good condition is truly remarkable. It's something of a miracle don't you think? Rather like when they opened the tomb of St Cuthbert in Durham Cathedral several centuries after his death, and found that his body was still perfectly preserved."

"Do you have any records, vicar, describing what the original bell in St George's looked like?" asked the professor.

“Yes. There are some descriptions of the bell amongst the old documents in the church. Although the records in question post-date the removal of the bell by about one-and-a-half centuries, they do give a description of the bell that was either based on older records or on information passed down verbally. That is why I immediately realised that these photographs were indeed of the original church bell. There is a note, dated June 1823, if I remember correctly, which refers to a proposal that the church parish council raise funds to buy a new bell for the church. This same note goes on to say that the new bell should be identical to the old one. It then goes on to describe the old bell as being distinctive in that when it was cast it had designs, set in relief, of a lion and a lamb and of Christ’s crucifixion. It seems, however, that the council finally decided upon a simpler, smaller and much cheaper bell. And this is the bell we have had in the church from that time onwards. Instead of purchasing a more expensive bell, the money saved was used as a contribution towards rebuilding the village school, which stands just across the road from where we are now,” explained Geoffrey Adams.

“I’m pleased that we have some corroboration that this might be the original long-lost church bell from St George’s,” noted the professor. “But come to think of it, could it possibly be any other? Most people would say that to loose one bell down Bell Hollow would be an accident, but to loose two bells down there would be very careless. However, I’m certain the bell has not lain in its current position since the time that it was first placed in Bell Hollow. It was evidently placed in its current setting very recently. And with due respect, vicar, I don’t think that the reason the bell is in such a good

condition is because of a preservation order issued by God. It must have been maintained over the centuries, and protected from the elements, especially moisture.”

“Protected by whom?” asked the vicar sounding surprised.

“The honest answer is that I really don’t know,” replied the professor. “The masons have been mentioned; or what about some other secret fraternity?”

“The secret fraternity of bell polishers, perhaps” responded Geoffrey Adams laughing briefly, before continuing: “I’m not aware of any thing like that going on locally. But then again, perhaps I wouldn’t. I’m a relative newcomer, really. Some might say an outsider.”

“That applies really to all of us here,” suggested Alan Crawford.

“Is there any mention in the church records of a specific connection between the old church bell and Bell Hollow?” asked the professor.

“Yes, in fact there is. A paragraph in a later parish letter, I think dated June 1835, mentions a proposal that an attempt be made to locate and remove the old bell from Bell Hollow, where according to the same note, the bell was placed around two hundred years earlier,” explained the vicar.

“But no indication as to why the bell was placed there in the first place?” asked the professor.

“I cannot find the reason for the removal of the bell from the church belfry explicitly recorded in any of the old documents. Maybe it was decided at the time not to write down the reasons for doing it. But, as you may well know, the generally accepted assumption is that the disappearance of the old bell is connected with the First English Civil War in the

Seventeenth century. It is said that the villagers wanted to hide the bell. The dates for the removal and disappearance of the bell certainly correspond with that episode,” replied the vicar.

“The dates do correspond, and the Civil War story is a very plausible one,” agreed the professor, taking a sip from his pint of Cuthbert’s ale before continuing. “But you see, I think that the real reason was in fact written down somewhere.”

“Where could that be, professor?” asked the vicar.

“On the anvil-shaped stone that we call Liz’s rock,” answered Professor Brock. “It was written down there approximately six thousand years ago.”

On hearing this, the vicar and Alan Crawford both looked perplexed. They tried to take in the meaning of Professor Brock’s statement and to resolve the glaring inconsistency in dates that it presented.

“You see, I’ve analysed the famous markings on Liz’s rock,” continued Professor Brock.

“And as I have explained to Alan in a much earlier conversation, I believe that the ancients tried to use this rock to block the entrance to Bell Hollow. It was too difficult for them to physically move the rock, so they called upon the shamans to try and use their powers to do it. The shamans implored the rock to move as required. But much to their undoubted disappointment, the magic failed. We have no record of the consequences of this failure for all involved. Now move forwards several thousand years. Once again the powers of the supernatural, of divinity, call it what you may, were invoked; this time, in the guise of Christianity, requiring a different set of rituals. An object endowed with religious imagery, and hence blessings, was placed at the entrance to the narrow

passageway inside Bell Hollow; a remarkable feat, given the resources at the time. But I think that perhaps we have a general tendency to underestimate the ingenuity and resourcefulness of those who went before us. Anyway, in addition to providing a physical barrier inside the cave, the bell also had on its surface what was to the people at the time that most potent symbol of the victory of good over evil, and of life over death: Christ's crucifixion on the cross. The bell also had on it a symbol that perhaps expressed the desideratum of the villagers: the lion lying down with the lamb. The lamb represented the villagers, and the lion represented that from which they sought protection."

"What do you think it was that they were afraid of?" asked the vicar. In response, the professor shrugged his shoulders, and then replied: "I don't know for sure, but Alan will remember that I once said to him that the reason the ancients might have wanted to block Bell Hollow with Liz's rock was because they perceived it as the source of something bad, something undesirable or harmful. It may also be true that Bell Hollow somehow has the capacity to bring out a kind of irrational or primitive fear in people: fear of the unusual, fear of the unknown, fear of the dark."

The professor thought to himself about the terror Steve Bone had experienced inside Bell Hollow. A levelheaded and usually very rational person had clearly been deeply affected by the place.

"But whatever the reasons, imagined or real, for wanting to block Bell Hollow in the first place, I still find the idea that the bell has been maintained in such a good condition since that time, very significant" said Alan Crawford.



“As I indicated earlier, one is led to the conclusion that the attention given to the bell started centuries ago,” responded the professor. “And this is supported by the fact that the cave painting relates to one of the images on the bell. I already know from analysis of the pigments used that the painting of the lion and the lamb was first started at least three hundred years ago.”

“Cave painting?” interjected Geoffrey Adams, looking confused.

“Sorry vicar. I was going to tell you about that, but hadn’t got around to it yet,” explained the professor, handing the vicar some more digital stills taken during the cave exploration. Looking at these photographs, Geoffrey Adams responded: “Now I fully understand your earlier comment about the lion and the lamb theme when you were admiring that stained-glass window in St George’s.”

“It is also difficult to avoid making a link between this theme and the disappearance of lions and lambs, or to be more precise, cats and sheep in the area,” commented Alan Crawford.

“It all seems to be getting ‘curiouser and curiouser’, to quote the author of Alice in Wonderland,” said the professor.

“And didn’t Alice’s trip to Wonderland start when she climbed down into a hole out of a sense of curiosity?” recalled Geoffrey Adams.

“And they sat that curiosity killed the cat,” added Alan Crawford patly.

**\*\* (16) \*\***

David Crawford was sitting quietly in the bedroom he used in his grandmother's cottage. He was pondering the discoveries that had been made in Bell Hollow by Professor Brock recently. His father had told him about these discoveries earlier that morning. He had also been told that the head from the wooden carving of the Siamese cat stolen from the Humes' cottage had been found inside Bell Hollow. He also knew that there was an ongoing police investigation into the use of the Humes' wooden carvings to smuggle hallucinogenic drugs from Thailand into Britain. Some people in the village knew that a break-in had taken place over one week ago at the Humes' home. But apart from the Crawfords, the Jacksons, and Professor Brock, no one else apart from the police knew of its possible connection to drug smuggling. Information about a link between the break-in and Bell Hollow was similarly restricted. It was widely known in the village, however, that an exploration of Bell Hollow had been taking place. Those members of the public that had ventured down to take a look at what was going on had been politely requested to stand at some distance away, beyond a cordon that had been placed around the area near to the cave. Professor Brock had told Alan Crawford that he was confident no sightseers were privy to any of the significant findings in Bell Hollow.

David Crawford's mind wandered back to the night in November when he thought he had caught a glimpse of something moving down Wet Rain Hill. He had tried afterwards to convince himself that what he had seen on Wet Rain Hill had been nothing more than shadows and imagination. He recalled how startled he had been later to see the

sketches made by Wendy Newton's grandmother and how this had somehow made it all very real once again. Both he himself and Paul Jackson had certainly seen Avon on the hill, on the night in question, in a frightened state. He had clearly been running away from something, imaginary or real. It was plausible that his behaviour was that of someone under the influence of a hallucinogenic drug. It had also since become clear that Avon had a very specific reason for snooping around the Humes' cottage and that there were good grounds for supposing also that he was connected with the recent break-in. But despite all his attempts to the contrary, he could not avoid reaching the conclusion that there was something extraordinary happening in Wet Rain Hill. Events and themes, past and present, seemed in some unfathomable way to be connected.

His mother and grandmother were sitting watching television in the living room. They had just finished doing the kitchen chores after the family's Sunday lunch. He put on his coat and slipped quietly out of the cottage by the front door. A few seconds later he was knocking on the door of the Humes' cottage.

**\*\* (17) \*\***

William Avon lay in bed watching television in a hotel room in Hexham. It was Sunday morning. Somchai Tantaratana was in the next room with a woman he referred to as his wife. The woman in question was not, however, Somchai's only wife. Avon had met his other wife on several occasions, and she was much older. The wife Somchai had

brought with him to Britain on this occasion was a fairly recent acquisition. She was what is known in Thailand as a ‘mia noi’, or minor wife; and this particular minor wife was aloof and secretive. She clearly enjoyed the wealth and prestige that the position afforded her, but so far had shown little real interest in communicating with Avon during the trip to Britain. Somchai and his minor wife had travelled business class in the flight to London, whilst Avon had travelled on the same flight but in economy class. They had even checked in separately at Bangkok’s Don Muang airport. Somchai had insisted upon all of this as a security precaution, much to Avon’s annoyance. This extra precaution, which in Avon’s opinion was quite unnecessary, had been taken in addition to the fact that he was also travelling under the alias of John Wakes.

On arrival in London, they had hired a car using the name of John Wakes, and had then driven northwards the length of England for over five hours to Hexham, where they had booked into a hotel. In spite of the fact that he was wanted by the Hexham police force, Avon did not feel overly anxious about being in this small Northumbrian town. After all, he was not being sought for murder. There were no wanted-posters pasted around town bearing his face. Moreover, he had been growing a beard in an attempt to make himself less recognisable.

They had now been staying in the hotel for over one week, and had made several reconnaissance trips to nearby the village of Wet Rain Hill. This was in order to check that the Humes still lived in the cottage and that they were still in possession of the

wooden carvings. Great care had been taken during these visits to ensure that Avon was not seen and recognised by anyone in the village. For this reason, it had been Somchai who had done most of the footwork. Avon had tended to wait inside the car, which was usually parked in a lay-by just outside the village. From the hillside behind the Humes' cottage, the wooden crocodile was still visible. There was every reason to suppose that the wooden carving of the Siamese cat was also somewhere inside the cottage, and that no one suspected anything. Moreover, they had discovered that Mrs Hume appeared to be living alone at the present time. This would make their task much easier.

Based on these weeklong observations, it had been decided that the plan to remove the wooden carvings would now be implemented. The cottage had not been broken into on Saturday night, because Avon knew from his time in the village that this was when the cottage next door usually had extra visitors. At all other times, an old woman lived there alone.

It was just before midday when Somchai interrupted Avon's television viewing by knocking on his hotel room door. "William, I think we should go to Wet Rain Hill earlier than originally planned, meaning right now," he announced in Thai after the door had been opened. Avon responded with a vexed look on his face. "Earlier? Why? I thought we had already decided to go later tonight."

“It is going to be done tonight. But there is something else we need to do first of all. Something very important, connected with a place I observed when I was walking on the hill behind the cottage a few days ago.”

“Important? What is important?” asked Avon, barely able to suppress an annoyed tone in his voice. “It is something that will be of great benefit to us in the future,” replied Somchai opaquely.

“I would be grateful if you could tell me what it is you have in mind. It is still broad daylight, and I don’t want to be seen creeping about on that hill, especially by her or by her neighbours. According to what I know, they will still be there until about six this evening.”

“Don’t worry, William, I’ve taken that into consideration. We will park the car in the usual place, and then walk on the hill opposite the village far enough away from everything so that no one will see or recognise you,” explained Somchai using Thai.

“Why didn’t you mention this Sunday afternoon stroll to me earlier? And why can’t you tell me exactly what it is you need to do?” demanded Avon.

“I just realised this morning it is something we need to do beforehand. It is for reasons I cannot explain to a Westerner, to a ‘Farang’, like you, William. Please believe me.”

“Do you have to be so inscrutable?” complained Avon in English.

“Inscut-able?” repeated Somchai, struggling to pronounce the r-sound.

“Sly,” responded Avon in Thai.

No, my dear friend, I’m not being sly; just circumspect as usual,” explained Somchai.

His minor suddenly wife made an appearance by his side. He in turn looked at her,

smiled, and then said: “Why, I haven’t even told my wife yet what it is I think we need to do on that hillside. But believe me; it will be very worthwhile for us.”

**\*\* (18) \*\***

David Crawford stood waiting for Nok Hume to answer the door. Eventually, she appeared, peering warily around the partly open door. He could hear the television on in the background. “Hello Nok. I need to talk with you for a moment; if it’s convenient,” he said quickly. She smiled. “David! Of course, come in.” He entered, and Nok closed the door behind them. “Please sit down,” she said, whilst using the remote control to switch off the television. In the silence that followed, he cleared his throat self-consciously, and then sat down still wearing his coat. “Nok, I hope this doesn’t upset you, but I’d like to talk about the theft of your wooden carving,” he explained.

“No problem,” replied Nok, also sitting down.

“First of all, I’d like to say that I’m sorry about the theft. I’m sorry that such a terrible thing was done in your home. The sight of the dead cat must have been awful. They suspect it’s all to do with drug smugglers,” he said, feeling awkward with both his predicament and choice of words. Of course it was awful, and she already knew about the connection with drugs.

“Don’t worry, David,” she replied staring down at her lap, before adding: “It can’t make them happy. Killing poor animals, scaring people and selling drugs is no good; bad karma for them.”

He had some idea what Nok meant by karma; it was a concept from Buddhism. His interpretation was that whoever was responsible would get their comeuppance, sooner or later; even if it was on a cosmic time scale. “Nok, how scary was the break-in?” he asked, feeling immediately that he had once again said something that sounded nonsensical, silly, or even childish. But his words had already flown. Nok responded immediately. “I was very scared, David. You know that I was alone. I didn’t understand what was going on. I could hear them, dragging things across the floor, and sometimes pushing things over. The noises they made were so strange and terrible.”

“I’ve heard that you said the noises sounded like hissing,” he noted. Nok now understood the meaning of that word: hissing. “Yes, the noises they made sounded to me like snakes hissing.”

“I also heard something about a strange smell that lingered in the room afterwards.”

“Lingered?”

“I mean, the smell, it didn’t go away for a long time.”

“This is all true. They say it was from the dead cat. Why do you mention that smell, David?”

“Because I’ve been thinking about something my friend Paul said to me. He came into this room that night with his father, and when he was describing the events to me afterwards, he said that the smell was like the reptile house in a zoo.” Nok Hume listened intently, and seized upon the last word. “Yes, like a zoo. But like crocodiles in a zoo. I



used to like visiting a crocodile farm in Bangkok. Now, I remember the smell of crocodile farm.”

“Then the smell wasn’t just from the dead cat.”

“No, I think you are correct. It wasn’t.”

“So whoever broke into your cottage smelt like a crocodile?”

“Yes,” said Nok reluctantly, as if she was being led to confirm something that couldn’t possibly be. Then after a pause, she added: “I can also remember the noises made by the crocodiles at the crocodile farm in Bangkok.”

“What did they sound like?”

“Sometimes they hiss like a snake, and sometimes they shout like this,” she said, imitating a roaring sound. Then adding: “But I didn’t see anything. So I can’t explain what happened that night.”

The room felt silent once again. He had something to tell Nok. It was something he hadn’t told anyone else yet. He wasn’t entirely sure why he should now tell it to Nok, and not to his family, particularly to his father, or to Paul Jackson. Perhaps he wanted to tell her because he felt that they both had something in common: They had both had an encounter, however limited in scope, with that central unarticulated mystery at the heart of what was happening now and what had happened in the past in Wet Rain Hill. He had seen it briefly, whilst Nok had heard and smelt it. Wendy Newton’s grandmother had also encountered this mystery. And despite the cruel disorientation and memory loss of

Alzheimer's disease, the encounter in the village had made a tremendous impression on her. Her Grand Guignol Christmas cards were a testament to this.

Finally, he began to speak again. "Last November, Nok, I saw that crazy character, the one who had been bothering you before he suddenly disappeared from the village. He was running away from something on Wet Rain Hill. It was a Saturday evening, and I was standing around the back of my grandmother's cottage with Paul Jackson looking for his lost cat. I think this crazy guy had been snooping, or intending to snoop around your cottage, but something must have disturbed him. In fact, I should say it frightened or terrified him." He paused, looking at Nok. She may not have understood every word he had just said, delivered as they were in quick-fire succession, but she understood the essence of what he had just spoken. "Nok, I think I might have seen what that crazy drugged guy was running away from. And however impossible or strange this sounds, I believe that what broke into your cottage was the same as what I saw on Wet Rain Hill that night. I don't think this guy I mentioned just now carried out the break-in at your cottage, though I'm sure my father thinks he did. I haven't told my father, or anyone else, what I have just told you now."

Nok furrowed her brow and asked: "What did you see, David?"

He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out the photocopy he had made of Wendy Newton's grandmother's sketch of a crocodile, standing upright, and tugging on a bell in a church belfry. After looking at the sketch himself once again, he handed it over to Nok. "This sketch makes it look a bit like a joke, but it isn't," he said as Nok examined it.

“Anyway, the person who made this drawing has also seen something like it. I’m sure of that,” he added. Without saying anything further, Nok turned and looked towards the patio doors where the wooden carving of the upright crocodile had now been placed back in its original position.

**\*\* (19) \*\***

William Avon drove the hire car towards the village of Wet Rain Hill. In his rear-view mirror, he could see Somchai Tantaratana’s minor wife in the back seat staring out of the window at the passing Northumbrian countryside. She hadn’t spoken a word, even to her husband, since they had left the hotel in Hexham. Whether this was because she didn’t have anything to say, or because she had other things on her mind, he wasn’t sure. By way of contrast, however, Somchai had talked almost continuously during the entire journey. He had discussed his business in Bangkok, and how he hoped to move into new and profitable areas. He had even mentioned how he had plans to stand for election as a senator in the Thai parliament, explaining that this was because he had desire to serve his country. Avon responded to this possibility with a wry smile. The one thing, however, Somchai studiously avoided talking about during the journey was the reason why they were going to Wet Rain Hill long before nightfall.

Eventually, the car pulled into a lay-by about one mile outside of the village of Wet Rain Hill. Avon turned off the engine of the car and turned to Somchai. “It’s still

only two-o'clock. There will be another three hours or so of daylight," he commented irritably. "Don't worry, William. This won't take too long," assured Somchai.

From the beginning of their working relationship, Avon had reluctantly decided to tolerate what he perceived as Somchai's eccentricities. This was because he wanted to remain in the employment of the Lucky Bird Export Company. The rewards were certainly more lucrative than working as an English language teacher in Bangkok. He understood that he was working for a man who willingly took advice from street-corner fortune-tellers. And that his boss was someone who made a daily religious offering of a bottle of strawberry-flavoured Fanta together with a bowl of fresh fruit and a clutch of smoking joss sticks to a small plastic deity resembling a bearded China-man who appeared to be living in a birdhouse. But his boss was also a person who had the ability to run a multimillion-dollar operation and who paid his employees reasonably well. It was this last characteristic that Avon appreciated; all his other foibles could be tolerated, even if it was not always easy to do so.

In Avon's mind, there was little doubt that the current visit was being carried out in connection with the performance of some kind of ritual to ward off the evil spirits that had thwarted the last attempt to steal the wooden carvings. He could himself vouch for the presence of evil spirits on the hill that night in November, when he had last come to visit the Humes' cottage. The thing that had suddenly reared up before him had possessed a terrifying verisimilitude. It was a chimerical creature that possessed both reptilian and

humanoid characteristics. He recalled the nodule-patterned and crocodile-jawed head with its dark, cold, probing eyes that suggested more than mere reptilian intelligence. At first, he had seen it lying down on all fours, trying to conceal itself amongst the rocky hillside. Then it had stood upright, about the height of a man, displaying a powerful scaly body with a long lizard-like tail. At this point, he had understandably fled from the hill in sheer terror.

In retrospect, he realised that it had been very foolish of him to take the hallucinogen beforehand. He now supposed that the vision that had confronted him on the hill that night had been no more than a mental projection of the form one of the things he had originally set out to steal: a crocodile. And since that incident, he had not taken any more of the potent hallucinogen. Now, he just planned to make a living from transporting and selling this natural herbal remedy for reality, supplied courtesy of some members of the Burmese Karen hill tribe.

After leaving the car, and walking for about half-an-hour, they paused by the ruined dry stone hut on Menzie's Hill, known as Menzie's Hut. From this point, the village of Wet Rain Hill lay about two miles further to the north. The afternoon was dry and bright. In the distance, the cottage that had been the object of their attention for the past week was visible. And although he had not yet said so, the fact that Somchai Tantaratana was carrying a phial of holy water, given to him by a Buddhist monk in Bangkok, seemed to confirm that the purpose of his visit was indeed ritualistic. He had

pointed out the cave on the opposite hill as their intended destination, where he evidently believed that the evil spirits living inside it needed to be appeased in order for the mission to run successfully later that night.

During the brief rest by Menzie's Hut, Avon decided that he would try to make some conversation with Somchai's minor wife. "Lek, What do you think about here?" he asked in Thai, leaving it unclear as to whether he meant this particular hillside or England in general. "She's happy to be having a holiday with me here on business," answered Somchai in Thai, before his minor wife was able to respond. She forced a smile on hearing her husband's response. But the smile distinctly lacked any joy or warmth. Then, for a split second, her eyes caught Avon's. She radiated fear. He felt unnerved. "What exactly are we doing here?" he asked Somchai, using slow and deliberate English.

"We are here, William, to get the wooden carvings of both the crocodile and the cat that you failed to get last time from that cottage over there," answered Somchai, also using English with uncharacteristic eloquence, and with a noticeable tone of sarcasm.

Avon now felt a surge of anger well up inside him. "I meant: what are we doing on this hill, this afternoon, long before it is dark, when someone might recognise me? Because if that was the case, it would definitely prevent us from getting the wooden carvings stuffed with your magic powder from that cottage over there," he replied angrily punching out the general direction of the cottage in the air. Somchai responded calmly to this using Thai. "No one will see us, William, and no one will hear us," he declared. "We

needed to come out here because I have a feeling about this place, about the cave that I saw some people exploring last week. I think it is a very special place. And if we are to avoid the same problems that you experienced last time, we must ask permission from whatever spirits live in that cave so that we can be on their hill.” On hearing this, Avon’s eyes rolled upwards in a sign of further exasperation.

“If you are only going to sprinkle some of your holy water into the cave, then why did I need to come along?” asked Avon.

“When you took the Karen hill tribe’s medicine, William, you encountered a spirit from the cave. That spirit saw you, and it seems it was displeased with you. You violated its territory. Therefore, it is necessary for you to personally come here to directly ask for permission. I have prepared something that will help.” Smiling, Somchai reached out and pulled his minor wife to her feet. Avon made the decision that nothing further could be gained by trying to reason with his employer. “Okay, let’s get on with it,” he said also standing up.

“It will only take about half-an-hour, and then we can return to the car and prepare for tonight,” said Somchai, evidently pleased that Avon was now willing to go along with his plan.

They began walking down the hill away from Menzie’s Hut, following a path that led towards Liz’s Burn. The dark eye, that was the entrance to Bell Hollow, watched their approach. There were some sheep standing on the small wooden footbridge that spanned Liz’s Burn near to Bell Hollow. But as far as they could see, there were no other people

around. With the exception of the sound of the occasional car driving by on Boldlaw Road to the west, everything was quiet.

Five minutes after the group had left Menzie's Hut and had walked some distance down the hill, David Crawford and Paul Jackson, who had been crouched up and hiding inside the hut, began to breathe more easily. They had heard and understood parts of what had just been spoken in front of them.

"My God!" exclaimed David. "That was William Avon. He's now grown a beard, but I can still recognise him."

"And he is back here together with a foreign couple. I didn't understand most of what they all said just now, but you don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out that the couple must be Thai," responded Paul Jackson, peering through a gap in the ruined hut at the three figures walking away down Menzie's Hill.

"When they used English, they said that they were going to steal the two wooden carvings tonight," observed David. "That confirms everything about the drugs."

"Yes, but what is really weird about all of this is that they don't seem to know one of the carvings has already gone missing," noted Paul Jackson.

"Anyway, we can now make sure that they get a good reception when they try to break into the Humes' cottage," said David.



It had been David Crawford's idea this Sunday afternoon to go and search on Wet Rain Hill for undiscovered clues relating to the break-in. After his conversation with Nok, he had gone across the road and asked Paul Jackson to come along. His friend had agreed.

They had already spent some time at Bell Hollow without making any discoveries when David had suggested that they go up Menzie's Hill and explore Menzie's Hut. Without explicitly saying so, he had wanted to view Bell Hollow from this vantage point. He now felt that the tale about Menzie the shepherd had some relevance to his experience. On reaching Menzie's Hut, they had noticed three figures approaching from the distance. Instinctively, they had then concealed themselves behind one of the derelict walls of the ruin, and had remained there unseen and undetected.

Sheep fled across the wooden footbridge at Liz's Burn as William Avon and his two companions approached. A short time later, three figures stood by the entrance to Bell Hollow, inside the cordon left over from Professor Brock's exploration. As they stood looking into the entrance of the cave, Avon's two companions put their hands together in a prayer-like gesture. Then they bowed in unison before Bell Hollow. One of them took something from his pocket, and a moment later could be seen sprinkling liquid into the cave.

After a while, an argument seemed to break out between the Thai man and William Avon. The latter could be seen gesturing furiously and pointing up towards the village. In the mean time, the woman moved away from the others. The Thai man then crouched down on all fours, and appeared to be continuing his ritual at the cave entrance. Avon stood with arms akimbo looking at him. Suddenly, the Thai woman sprang at the unsuspecting Avon. With the lethal speed of a martial arts expert, she struck at him with her arms and feet. He collapsed, lost his balance and fell forwards over the figure crouched down by the cave entrance. A solitary yell accompanied his fall headfirst into Bell Hollow.

David Crawford and Paul Jackson watched in horrified silence, barely able to comprehend what they had just witnessed. They waited, half-expecting William Avon to miraculously reappear from the dark pit into which he had just plunged. The Thai man quickly scrambled to his feet. The couple looked around to see if anyone had witnessed their act of murder. Hand in hand, they began to hurriedly retrace their steps back across the wooden footbridge spanning Liz's Burn, and up along the path that climbed Menzie's Hill towards Menzie's Hut.

David spoke first. "I'll use my mobile to call the emergency rescue services, and then I'll call the police and my father."

"We shouldn't let those two know that we are here," advised his friend after the calls had been made. The mobile telephone was temporarily switched off as the Thai couple

approached Menzie's Hut. The murderous duo said nothing as they stumbled quickly past the ruin, not suspecting that their evil deed had been observed, and that the police were now after them.

**\*\* (20) \*\***

Alan Crawford had just returned to the cottage from the Blackbird public house when the telephone rang. He listened as his son, calling from just outside Menzie's Hut, described what he had witnessed moments earlier.

Twenty minutes after the call, the emergency rescue services and an ambulance arrived in the village. The police arrived at the same time. Within three-quarters-of-an-hour, a rescue worker was descending into Bell Hollow. David Crawford and Paul Jackson stood by and watched. Alan Crawford had brought Professor Brock down to the scene in case he was able to provide useful information to the rescuers. Everyone knew, however, that the chance of surviving a fall into a cave chamber, as deep as Bell Hollow, was practically zero. But there was still a need to recover the victim's body.

When the rescue worker reached the ledge fifty meters inside the cave, he reported to the surface that he could still see no sign of anyone. He then descended further into the cave and arrived at the lower level of the main chamber. But the anticipated announcement that a body had been discovered did not happen. Instead, the

rescue worker reported that a large metallic object appeared to be blocking off a passageway leading away from the main cave chamber. Several of the spectators knew that the metallic object in question was obviously the church bell. One of them, Professor Brock, also knew that when his team had explored Bell Hollow the previous week, the passageway had not been left blocked off. They had repositioned the bell away from the entrance. The professor kept this fact to himself.

Finally, it was decided to call a halt to the search inside the cave. A search of the surrounding area had also turned up nothing. It had been dark for an hour by the time the police and emergency services withdrew for the evening.

The police interviewed David Crawford and Paul Jackson separately. The stories they told were consistent. The police had picked up a Thai couple waiting at a public bus stop on Boldlaw Road a few hours earlier; they had denied any knowledge of a murder on Wet Rain Hill. They had admitted being on the hill for a walk, and going to visit Bell Hollow, but insisted that they were only tourists. They claimed not to know anyone called William Avon. The police were not able to resolve the contradictions between the two very different viewpoints presented to them about what had taken place that afternoon. This was further complicated by the fact that no body had been found, and no one had reported Avon missing. There was, as yet, nothing to back up the extraordinary claims of the two young men.

Finally, the police were forced to release the Thai couple after questioning them for several hours. The couple were able to provide the address of a hotel in Hexham, which the police verified by telephone. In addition, it was established that there was no guest at the same hotel registered under the name William Avon. The police advised the couple that they would need to be interviewed again sometime during the following day, and that they should keep the police informed of their whereabouts.

Later, the police found what appeared to be an abandoned car in a lay-by nearby to Wet Rain Hill. A check revealed that the car was on hire to a Mr John Wakes, with an address in London. By late evening, still no one had come to collect the car. The police had to leave the car unguarded in the lay-by overnight. By morning, however, the car had gone. It seemed that John Wakes had come to reclaim the car during the night.

That Sunday evening, Alan Crawford and his family had stayed on in Wet Rain Hill instead of travelling back home as usual. Despite the fact that there was nothing yet to corroborate their story, Alan Crawford knew that his son and Paul Jackson were telling the truth. It was simply out of the question that they would make up a story like this. Moreover, the presence of a Thai couple near to the village in the middle of February was surely more than coincidental taking into account the origins of the wooden carvings and the background of William Avon.

**\*\* (21) \*\***

Monday morning arrived. There was a slight covering of frost on the ground. Still cloaked in darkness, the village gradually began to stir. A man was out walking his dog along Main Street. He turned and walked up Church Lane, but noticed nothing out of the ordinary. Understandable perhaps, because he wasn't particularly expecting anything out of the ordinary. Moreover, his dog, which was rather old, was only interested in sniffing new scents on the pavements and roads. It was even harder to catch any this cold winter's morning. The milkman had come and gone already, and he had not noticed anything especially different. But then again, his delivery round did not cover the entire village these days. Less and less people took delivery of fresh milk from him. Similarly, the postman had walked his route and made his deliveries, and had not seen anything remarkable.

Soon it was time for the children to start making their way to school. The younger children attended the village primary school, whilst the older ones travelled by bus to the high school in Hexham. This busy period lasted until around nine-o'clock; and nothing out of the ordinary was observed. But of all the mornings of the week, and especially a cold wintry one, it is surely a Monday morning that is the most subdued and least observant. A morning characterised by head-bowed resignation to the start of a new week. It was a time, perhaps, for mulling over of the events of the now expired weekend.

And so it was left to the vicar, Geoffrey Adams, to make the profoundly shocking discovery. Emerging from the vicarage at a quarter past nine, he walked along the path that led to the entrance of the church. On arriving, he unlocked the large doors and entered the church. His footsteps echoed on the old stone floor as he walked up the central aisle towards the altar. In front of the altar, he quickly made the sign of the cross and uttered some brief words of prayer. Then he walked over to the pulpit to look for some papers, including an announcement of the upcoming church gala, which had been left after yesterday's church service. He knew that even if only a minority of the villagers attended his services that at least many more read the church notice board situated by the lich gate facing onto Church Lane. An announcement regarding the event had been made during yesterday's church service, but he had forgotten to place a copy of it on the notice board after being distracted by his talk with Professor Brock. Moreover, after meeting with the professor and Alan Crawford in the Blackbird pub, he had then travelled by car to Morpeth to visit his mother for Sunday tea. The excitement at hearing about the discovery of the bell in Bell Hollow had proved to be something of a distraction for the rest of the day.

Now he found the announcement printed on a piece of green A4-size paper amongst other papers on the pulpit. Holding it, together with some drawing pins, Geoffrey Adams left the church and walked through the graveyard towards the notice board. The frosted gravel crunched underneath his feet. White frost covered the headstones and clung on to the plants and trees around them. The wintry morning sun sat

low in the cold blue sky. He felt in good spirits. The return of the lost bell of St George's could be the centrepiece of the church gala. This was something that would surely bring in the crowds. There would be new interest in the church, and possibly in his ministry as well. The discovery of the bell could surely be taken as a sign, an indicator of change; ringing out the old and ringing in the new.

As he approached the notice board, the sight that lay before him stopped him dead in his tracks. Beside it there was the large wooden cross that had been recently installed in preparation for Easter time. But hanging from the cross was a naked and bloodied figure, bearded and Christ-like. Its head drooped forwards; the arms were attached to the cross bar by twine; and the lower legs were bound in a similar fashion to the cross's vertical column.

In response, Geoffrey Adams took to his heels. Shocked, he fled past the figure, through the lich gate and out into Church Lane. Making it to Main Street, he immediately caught sight of Detective Sergeant Crawford standing on the driveway of his mother's cottage. With his heart and lungs working away in quite an unaccustomed manner, the vicar yelled at the familiar figure before him: "Murder! Murder! There's been a murder. A crucifixion! A crucifixion!" Alan Crawford looked at the figure approaching him in astonishment, and recognised straightaway that it was the vicar. His first thoughts were that maybe the vicar was putting on some kind of mawkish religious street theatre to impress the village; a 'Passion play' about the crucifixion of Christ. Or maybe he was



having some kind of nervous breakdown, induced by religiosity. “Who’s been crucified?” asked Alan Crawford as the vicar drew nearer, half expecting him to answer that Christ had been crucified. “I don’t know,” gasped Geoffrey Adams, steadying himself on the wall at the front of the cottage before continuing: “Someone. It’s awful...head and face covered in blood ... in the graveyard!”

Alan Crawford quickly followed the vicar’s route back up to the church. Whilst the vicar halted nervously outside the lich gate on Church Lane, Alan Crawford continued into the graveyard, where he was confronted by the apparition that had so shocked the vicar. “Jesus Christ!” he exclaimed with unintentional irony at the sight of the bloodied and battered figure on the cross.

It was immediately clear that in this particular crucifixion there could be no resurrection. Alan Crawford steeled himself, and walked closer to the cross. Despite the terrible injuries suffered by the victim, he was still able to recognise who it was. He recalled his son mentioning that William Avon had now grown a beard. The figure on the cross clearly hadn’t died as the result of being crucified: he had been murdered yesterday after being pushed down Bell Hollow. After his death, the body must have been brought into the graveyard of St George’s and displayed on the cross in the manner of the crucifixion.

Alan Crawford quickly returned to his mother's cottage and called the police. He told them that the body they had searched for in vain yesterday had now turned up hanging on a cross in the graveyard of St George's in Wet Rain Hill. Then he returned to the graveyard to find Geoffrey Adams now sitting inside the lich gate, staring vacantly at the ground. "Why don't you go inside where it's warm, vicar? I'll wait here for the police to arrive. I'm certainly not going to allow another Crawford to be embarrassed by the disappearance of this corpse."

**\*\* (22) \*\***

Because of the unusual circumstances surrounding the discovery of the body, a post-mortem examination was carried out quickly that very afternoon. It was discovered that Mr William Avon had died as the result of multiple injuries consistent with a fall from a great height onto a rocky surface. The estimated time of death was consistent with the reporting of the murder by David Crawford yesterday. Additional injuries, however, had been inflicted on the body post-mortem, and could be seen around the arms and feet. These clearly resulted from the body having been suspended on the cross from between six to nine hours. Strangely, the body also appeared to have been punctured and clawed by some unknown agent at several places; these injuries were also inflicted post mortem. None of the victim's clothes had yet been found.

Hexham police had already begun a murder investigation. Following the discovery of the body of William Avon, they had immediately tried to take the Thai couple interviewed the previous day back into custody. However, when inquiries were made at the hotel in Hexham where the couple had been staying, the police were told that the couple had already left. According to the staff, three guests had checked out of the hotel together, late last night. These three people were named as a Mr and Mrs Tantaratana, and a Mr John Wakes. One of the hotel staff recalled seeing all three leave together in the same car. Further probing by the police revealed a discrepancy in the description of the Mr John Wakes who had originally checked into the hotel over one week ago compared with that of the Mr John Wakes who had finally checked out. A receptionist described the John Wakes that left the hotel last night as aged around forty-five years, dark-haired but greying, clean-shaven, stocky and of medium height. His namesake that had checked into the hotel was of a similar age and height. But he was described by some of the hotel staff as dark haired and was not noticeably going grey. Moreover, he was said to have had a trimmed beard, and to be more slimly built. The hotel bills had all been paid using cash.

Detective Sergeant Alan Crawford had been given special leave from his usual police duties to assist with the murder case. His knowledge and insight into the case were considered to be important. In addition, he was in the rather unusual position of having a son as one of the chief witnesses in the murder.

A meeting for all the officers involved in the case was held very late in the afternoon. During which, Alan Crawford reviewed what he considered to be the background to the case. He decided to start with how Avon had been overheard just before his death briefly discussing the Humes' wooden animal carvings with the fugitive Thai couple. He explained how the carvings had been shipped from Thailand, and recalled how the theft of one of the wooden carvings, namely the Siamese cat, had taken place over one-week ago. He mentioned how he had then realised that the carvings had probably both been used in drug smuggling, describing how this fact came to light after the remaining carving, namely the crocodile, was found to contain a quantity of a potent hallucinogen packed inside plastic bags. He detailed how the bags of drugs had been removed from the crocodile and taken away for examination; the wooden carving, however, still remained at the Humes' cottage. The discovery of the head of the Siamese cat together with the remains of a real cat and sheep in Bell Hollow was also mentioned as relevant; another bizarre detail in an increasingly strange set of circumstances

Alan Crawford put forward his conviction that the Thai couple were deeply involved in the smuggling, and had for some reason decided to get rid of William Avon. The existence of at least one more probable accomplice in the smuggling operation, namely John Wakes, was also postulated. He also emphasised that it could not be assumed, however, that those involved in the smuggling operation had actually stolen the wooden carving of the Siamese cat. As he pointed out, this had clearly been one-half of their aim. But based on what had been overheard on Menzie's Hill, it appeared that those

discussing the planned theft had not been aware that the carving of the Siamese cat had already been removed, and that only the crocodile remained.

Finally, the circumstances surrounding the discovery of William Avon's body on the cross in the graveyard of St George's were discussed. Alan Crawford said that in his opinion it was not likely that the vicar was involved in the murder of Avon or that he had somehow just discovered the dead body and had then arranged a gruesome recreation of the crucifixion. In fact, Alan Crawford suggested that this discovery might not have any immediate connection at all with the original murder, but perhaps bizarrely was in fact carried out by some unknown third party. He also decided at this stage that it would be better if he did not elaborate too much on a possible wider connection with Bell Hollow. Consequently, he did not mention what he knew about Professor Brock's other findings and thoughts related to the cave. For the time being, he believed that the correct emphasis should be on the crimes of murder and drug smuggling, and not on the relatively minor crime of misusing a corpse or on the mysteries of Bell Hollow.

**\*\* (23) \*\***

In the failing light of that same afternoon, the police organised a second search of Bell Hollow. Professor Brock was once again called upon to assist the police in the search because of his experience with the cave. But again, the search revealed nothing of relevance to the murder in the main cave chamber. It did, however, result in the decision

to now remove the bell from the entrance to the narrow passageway and ultimately from Bell Hollow. This course of action was taken in case the bell was concealing something relevant or was preventing the discovery of any evidence relating to the murder.

Using heavy lifting equipment that had not been available to Professor Brock's exploration team, the bell was to be lifted to the surface and placed on a secure spot nearby to the cave-entrance. The vicar still shocked by his discovery that morning had been invited to witness the recovery of the bell. Many villagers, as well as members of the press and the local television station, originally alerted by the murder story, had also turned up to watch the spectacle.

As the bell was pulled upwards towards the surface, suspended by ropes, it began to ring out as it rocked back and forth. Its peals resounded through Bell Hollow and echoed around the surrounding hills. Finally, the bell emerged from its underground belfry to the accompaniment of gasps of amazement and a round of enthusiastic applause from the gathered spectators. Images of the lion lying down with the lamb and of Christ's crucifixion leapt from the surface of the bell, illuminated by spotlights and rounds of camera flashes. One of the reporters present asked Professor Brock if he thought this was indeed the 'long-lost bell'. The professor replied saying that he would examine the bell and report the findings in due time. He knew, of course, that this surely was the bell in question. Amongst a fusillade of other questions, one reporter from a local newspaper frivolously asked the professor if he could comment on the possibility that the Holy Grail

might also be inside Bell Hollow. The professor smiled, shrugged his shoulders, and responded in kind by saying that he hadn't yet ruled out the possibility of finding that the Loch Ness Monster had in fact moved to Bell Hollow. One thing the professor did know for sure, however, but which he didn't articulate, was that Bell Hollow would never be left in peace again from this day onwards. Its days as a relatively neglected curiosity were over.

In the darkness and bitter coldness of the evening, the bell was touched, stroked, banged, knocked and photographed countless times before it was eventually covered in a protective sheet. A crime-scene warning sign was stuck on the bell informing the public that it should not be touched.

A search of the immediate area close to the entrance of the passageway in Bell Hollow, which had been once blocked by the bell, had revealed no further clues for the murder investigation. Finally, the police ended their operations for the evening, and together with the crowd of onlookers began to make their way back up the hill towards the village.

**\*\* (24) \*\***

Alan Crawford's wife and son had decided to stay on with him at Elsie Crawford's cottage and not return home. Later that evening, whilst having a late tea with

his family, his mobile telephone rang. On answering it, he was informed that the Thai couple had now been arrested at London's Heathrow airport trying to check in for the late evening Thai Airways flight to Bangkok. Their accomplice, John Wakes, however, was still at large. The London address, which he had used when hiring a car, had turned out to be false. After the call, Alan Crawford told the rest of his family about these developments.

David Crawford was aware that the body of William Avon had been found that morning in the graveyard of St George's, and that this vindicated his claim to have witnessed a murder. Needless to say, he had not been allowed to view the staged crucifixion, but had heard most of the details from his father. All of the family were quieter and more subdued than usual as they ate. After the meal, they sat watching television. The local evening news carried a report about the 'long-lost bell' being discovered in Bell Hollow. In the report, Professor Brock's exploration team was not credited with the original discovery, but instead it was wrongly claimed that the bell had been found by the police after they had gone into the cave in connection with a murder investigation. The report also stated that the body of the murder victim in question had been found earlier in the day in the graveyard of St George's church. The gruesome circumstances in which the body had been found were, however, not mentioned.

The news report about the murder in Wet Rain Hill reminded Elsie Crawford of the time the family had sat together and watched a similar story. It was the murder of the



young woman in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, back in November last year. This prompted a question to her son. “Alan, did anything come of the investigation into the murder of that young woman last year?” she asked. “Because it seems to have disappeared from the headlines.”

Alan Crawford sighed, and then replied: “As far as I know, mother, there are no new leads in the Karen Hill murder case. The only thing those investigating the case have established is that a ring with her name on it is missing, presumably taken by her murderer. But they are no closer to catching the murderer than they were three months ago. Unfortunately, it’s sometimes like that with murder investigations, which can be frustrated for years, and even for decades in rare cases, before there is a breakthrough. Having said that, and unless the murderer happens to die in the meantime, it often only takes one slip-up, something said or done in an unguarded moment, and the secret begins to worm its way out. For example, in the case of this stolen ring, all that is needed is for the murderer to show it to someone else, or to allow it to be seen, possibly even by another criminal, and then he is no longer as secure as he once was. He is now vulnerable. But why do you ask about that particular case?”

“This murder in Wet Rain Hill just put me in mind of it; that’s all.”

“You don’t think they could be connected, do you?” he responded.

“Everything is connected, I suppose, in one way or another,” she replied. “It’s just a question of how close is the connection.”

**\*\* (25) \*\***

The Crawford family finally retired for the night. For some time afterwards, Elsie Crawford lay awake in bed, immersed in deep, troubled thoughts. Upstairs, Rhoda Crawford was also having difficulty sleeping; she lay wide-awake, worrying about the impact the horror that had unfolded in the village would have on her son. Beside her, Alan Crawford feigned sleep. But in reality, his mind was working ceaselessly trying to make connections between events, as well as trying to make sense of them. In the next room, sleep eluded David until long after midnight. Finally, he managed to fall into a shallow, fitful sleep, where the mysteries and demons of Wet Rain Hill dominated both his dreams and their punctuating moments of consciousness.

Meanwhile, Professor Brock had stayed on at his weekend cottage in Wet Rain Hill instead of returning as usual to his home in Durham. He felt greatly annoyed and frustrated by the day's events. As far as he was concerned, the removal of the bell from Bell Hollow had been premature. This had then been followed by the half-baked local news report on television, which in his view had stolen the thunder from his team's discovery of the bell in Bell Hollow by attributing it instead to the police; this had angered him. He had spent the remaining part of the evening on the telephone speaking to his team members. The reasons why it was no longer an option to keep the discoveries under wraps, at least from the police, were explained. And after finally retiring for the night, he lay awake unable to sleep, as wave after wave of questions concerning Bell Hollow rolled endlessly through his tired mind.

Across the road in the vicarage, Geoffrey Adams was preparing to go to bed. It had been quite the most upsetting day of his entire life. The shock and horror he had experienced was something that could never be forgotten. Still traumatized, he had checked and rechecked all the locks, knowing that whoever, or whatever, had carried and placed the body on the cross would surely have been aware that someone was staying in the vicarage.

As he climbed into bed, he knew it was going to be a difficult night; one that would have to be endured. In the near darkness, he felt like a child once again; afraid of imagined forms conjured up from inanimate objects. He could see faces in the bedroom curtains. Unfamiliar aspects of the furniture in the room alarmed him. The apparent movement of shadows on the wall perturbed him. The roaring silence that swirled around him as he lay motionless in bed seemed pregnant with the possibility of some imminent and horrifying manifestation. And if he slept: what of his dreams? In his mind's eye, there were already images of death and injury cast as blasphemous parodies of an event central to his beliefs: Christ's crucifixion.

Geoffrey Adams said his prayers as usual. He then tried to counter the horrors of the day by conjuring up a picture of Nok Hume, sure that he could be forgiven for having such a fantasy in the circumstances. His thoughts, however, soon drifted to the telephone call he had received earlier from his mother. She had become almost hysterical on

hearing about the murder, even more so after finding out that it was her son who had found the body of the victim in the graveyard of St George's. She believed her son to be in imminent danger, and had told him to leave the village immediately. After all, the murderer was still at large in the area. He had tried to explain to her that it was not appropriate for him to leave his flock, as he put it, at this critical time. Nevertheless, her words had alarmed him. He felt that there was some truth in what she had said. The words: 'Deliver us from evil' had had a particular resonance this evening when he had recited the Lord's Prayer.

But those with evil intent were already moving towards the village of Wet Rain Hill that night. John Wakes, hunched over the steering wheel of his car, drove aggressively along the dark winding country roads. He complained bitterly to his companion about the imminent end of the Lucky Bird Export Company. He ranted about how he had tried to make the managing director of the company, Somchai Tantaratana, see sense; how he had tried to convince him of the dangers, in the current circumstances, of going immediately to the airport. Wakes knew that in all likelihood the police would be waiting for all of them to try and fly out of the country. He had even suggested that they take a ferry to Northern Ireland. But the Thai absolutely would not listen to any of these arguments. He was in a foreign land, and had misjudged the situation and panicked. Here, there were no connections to be exploited, no favours to be asked and no officials to be bribed. After some heated arguments, Somchai had insisted on trying straightaway to catch a flight home from Heathrow airport. After refusing to join them, on a flight out,

Wakes had hung back as the Thai couple attempted to check in for a flight. He had been right. The airline check-in desk had already been alerted. He watched as the police arrived almost immediately and arrested Somchai and his minor wife. After this, he had slipped away from the airport unnoticed. Now he was going to take what was the only remaining course of action left open to him if he was to at all profit from his final involvement with the Lucky Bird Export Company of Bangkok: he was going to take the wooden carvings of the cat and the crocodile from that cottage himself, this very night, before their precious contents were discovered.

John Wakes turned to his companion sitting on the front-row passenger seat, and said: "Pass me a sweetie, will you Snaz?" His companion opened the glove compartment and pulled out a packet of boiled sweets. "How long now?" asked Snaz, handing him a sweet. "I reckon half an hour. It's been about seven hours since I left Heathrow. I spent two of those hours persuading you to join me on this venture, followed by five hours driving the length of England for the second time in less than twenty-four hours. Not surprisingly, I'm beginning to feel buggered." Snaz fiddled with the car radio, and eventually found a station playing the song 'One night in Bangkok' by Murray Head. "That's one cool song; kind of appropriate too. That's where I'm headed after this business is over: Bangkok, oriental city, where the something-or-other don't sleep and the girls are pretty."

"I thought it was where we were both headed after this," commented Wakes. Snaz creased his pocked face into an unaccustomed smile and then said: "Sure it is!"

**\*\* (26) \*\***

The pockmarked face of the full moon reflected light from the now hidden sun onto the darkened landscape around Wet Rain Hill. A figure stood by the church bell at the side of Bell Hollow, and gazed up at the night sky. These were indeed not the easiest of times to be out from the protection of the earth, and away from the life-sustaining warmth of the inner sun. But these were not normal times: these were special times, portentous times. These were times of mysterious offerings, of visitations and of visions. But these were also times of violations. Was the time of change, which had so long been prophesied, nigh? When the two very different worlds would come together, and live together, once again, in harmony and equality. That time when fear would disappear from the hearts of those who had remained hidden for aeons in the darkness of the inner world.

The figure moved towards the entrance of Bell Hollow, and beckoned to three others waiting just beneath the surface to join it. They duly climbed out of Bell Hollow up onto the hillside. Standing on this alien surface, their prominent reptilian eyes reflected images of the full moon above. But these sons of the earth felt vulnerable under the luminescence of this cold night-sun. They also felt fearful. But there was also pride. They felt pride because they had been chosen to be amongst the first to begin the great task.

Moving up to that most sacred of objects, they removed the sheet covering it, and stood for a while stood touching its hard mysterious cold surface. Their breaths rasped and hissed in unison, expressing their profound religious fervour. And in time, after the signal had been given, more sons of the earth appeared under the night sky. They came out from Bell Hollow and out from other large gateways around the village that connected the two domains.

**\*\* (27) \*\***

Jack Hume had arrived back in the United Kingdom a little more than one week since first departing for Saudi Arabia. He had suddenly decided to break his contract and to return home over concerns for the safety and welfare of his wife. He especially felt the need to do this after hearing what had taken place in Wet Rain Hill since his departure. Capriciously, he had decided not to tell his wife, and to surprise her by simply turning up at the doorstep of their cottage. On arriving at Heathrow airport in the late afternoon, he had hired a car for the approximately five-hour drive from London to the north east of England. But the traffic around London had been far heavier than he had anticipated. And he soon realised that he would be arriving much later in Wet Rain Hill than he had originally planned.

During the journey, there were times when he almost relented and made a call to his wife. But in the end, he stuck to his original plan, even though he now estimated he

would arrive in the village around midnight. He had a key to the cottage and had already been told by his wife that the security code she had selected for the newly installed alarm-and-intruder system corresponded to his date of birth. He imagined how thrilled she would be when she saw him. But because of tiredness and fatigue, he took a wrong turning off the main A1 road travelling northwards through England, and found himself driving frustratingly around the city of Leeds for half-an-hour before he was able to rectify the mistake. As a result, it was nearly one in the morning before he finally arrived in Wet Rain Hill.

He could see that there were no lights on in the cottage. All the homes along both sides of Main Street were also in darkness. His car pulled into the small driveway in front of the cottage, and he waited for a moment to see if the noise of his car engine had woken up his wife. But no lights came on. He stepped out of the car, and quietly closed the door. After entering the cottage, he quickly keyed in the security code and gently closed the front door behind him. After using the downstairs bathroom, he went straight into the living room. There were still no signs of his wife stirring. On reflection, this did not surprise him. He had heard that his wife had started to take sleeping pills after experiencing sleeping difficulties following the break-in. He tried his wife's bedroom door and was not too surprised to find that it had been locked from the inside. Not wishing to frighten her, and because of the lateness of the hour, he decided that it would be best to wait until morning before letting her know he had arrived.



He placed his wallet and car keys on the mantelpiece and then sat down on the sofa. The central heating system was as usual turned up to its maximum level. This was because his wife was used to experiencing what he regarded as stifling heat. She was still not able to tolerate even the slightest hint of a chill. He took off his coat and draped it over the back of the sofa. Then he remembered that he left all his cases and gifts inside the car. It would be a nice surprise he thought if the first thing Nok saw when she got up in the morning was all her gifts set out on the table. But before he had managed to go back outside and unload the things from the car, a combination of accumulated fatigue and the snugness of the room overcame him and caused him to nod off to sleep whilst still seated on the sofa.

Jack Hume had not turned the alarm-and-intruder system back on again after he had entered the cottage. Now only the carved wooden crocodile, visible from the outside by moonlight, stood between the partially closed curtains around the patio doors at the back of the cottage on sentry watch, just as Nok had intended.

**\*\* (28) \*\***

Professor Brock leapt out of bed like a man possessed. Guided only by the moonlight that flooded into the bedroom, he struggled to quickly pull on the clothing that lay folded over the chair by the side of his bed. His bedside lamp remained deliberately switched off. Then he heard the sound again. It resembled a muffled metallic clank.

Something was happening to the bell on Wet Rain Hill. The first time he had heard the sound, he had dismissed it as a figment of his imagination. But now he was sure it wasn't. Once he was sufficiently dressed, he drew back the curtains on his dormer bedroom, and looked out into the night towards Bell Hollow. Silhouetted like mythical creatures in a Balinese shadow play, he saw them moving on Wet Rain Hill; they were carrying the church bell.

He closed the curtains, and then stood still trying to comprehend what he had just witnessed. Suddenly, springing into action, he descended the staircase into his living room. He picked up the digital camera lying on top of his dining room table. This was something that would need to be recorded. The discovery of the bell, all of the discoveries made in Bell Hollow and everything he had ever achieved academically, would now pale into insignificance in comparison to the acclaim that now awaited him. He would be the one who took that historic photograph; the one that would signify a milestone, a turning point, in the history of mankind. It would become the most celebrated image of this, or any other millennium.

He closed the door at the back of the cottage quietly. Then holding firmly on to his camera, he crept towards the low stone wall at the back of the cottage and climbed over it. Experiencing both terror and excitement in equal measure, he began crawling on his hands and knees down the cold stony ground of Wet Rain Hill. He felt like

Christopher Columbus splashing and scrambling onto the beach as he made landfall in the New World; terra incognita.

**\*\* (29) \*\***

David Crawford switched on his bedside lamp, and gazed at the alarm clock. It was nearly two. He must have finally drifted off to sleep, but for some reason had been suddenly awakened. Was it because he thought he had heard a noise outside? He switched off his bedside lamp, climbed out of bed and went over to the window that overlooked the garden at the back of the Humes' cottage. He poked his head through the drawn curtains, and peered out. But he could neither see nor hear anything unusual outside. A few minutes later, he returned back to bed.

Finally, he drifted back into a troubled and dreamful sleep. The sound of footsteps and the sound of breaking glass were incorporated into his dreams. But he did not stir again until early morning.

**\*\* (30) \*\***

John Wakes and his accomplice, Snaz, found that breaking into the cottage was far easier than they had expected. The alarm in the cottage had not sounded as they broke

the locks on the patio doors. Although they had managed to find only one of the two anticipated wooden carvings, they had at least been able to also steal a new car. The keys had been conveniently left on the mantelpiece. This partially compensated them for the shortfall in their expected haul.

The car that they had both travelled up from London in had been left in a lay-by just outside the village. They had not started the engine of their newly acquired car whilst they were still within the bounds of the village for fear of waking the inhabitants, especially the one found sleeping on the sofa. Snaz had been eager, as he put it, to finish him off. But Wakes had managed to restrain his accomplice's murderous tendencies, since it would bring, as he put it, additional trouble without any extra benefits. Instead, they had used chloroform and a rag, both of which Wakes happened to have on him, to ensure that no one lost any sleep as a consequence of the theft. After taking off the handbrake, they had pushed the car loaded with the wooden carving out of the village before finally starting its engine and driving the short distance to the lay-by.

Wakes then produced a hammer and chisel, which he began to use to break open the carving lying in the back seat of the car. After a few purposeful blows, one section of the carving split open easily. "That's it, we're in!" shouted Wakes excitedly. Now standing outside the car, Snaz punched the air in celebration at this announcement. But the celebration was premature. Instead of finding dozens of small plastic bags packed with white powder, the hollowed-out section of the carving turned out to be empty.

Wakes began frantically to break open other sections. But the results were the same. It was clear that the bags had all been previously removed. He withdrew his head from inside the back of the car, and stood outside dejected, holding onto the car roof for support. Snaz stood looking at him, and said nothing.

Wakes slumped down in the driver's seat. "I just don't understand it," he said breaking the tense silence. Snaz, still standing outside, his pocked face now a study in brute anger, continued to say nothing. Wakes turned towards Snaz outside and said: "They said it would be there, inside the carvings." Those were John Wakes' final words, as Snaz snatched the hammer from the back seat of the car and struck him on the head with it. He slumped forward in the car seat, wounded and groaning. Then Snaz rained down blow after blow on Wakes' head until it was a mashed pulp of bone, brains and hair, no longer recognisable as human.

He dropped the hammer onto the ground, and brushed off the pieces of gore, bone and hair that had stuck to his clothing; the bloodstains, however, persisted. There was no feeling of horror or regret about what he had just done. It had brought him some momentary relief from the rage that had just overwhelmed him. But as he stood urinating by the side of the car, those feelings of rage began to return again. He decided to return to the cottage and search for the drugs he had been promised were inside the wooden carvings. And this time, he would definitely fix that man sleeping on the sofa and anyone else in the cottage if necessary.

Before setting off for the village once again, he took out a can of petrol from the boot of the car Wakes had driven up from London. He then splashed fuel over the other car now containing Wakes' lifeless body; he would set it alight later and use the remaining car to make his getaway. Glancing at his watch, he saw that it was now just after two-thirty in the morning.

**\*\* (31) \*\***

Jack Hume awoke to the slightly unpleasant predicament of having his face stuck to the surface of the sofa by his own slaver. He felt drowsy and strange, as if he had been drugged. He separated his face from the leather surface of the sofa, wiping himself with his sleeve and the back of his hand. Unsure of his current situation, he sat for a few moments feeling dazed and confused. Eventually, he came around to the realisation that he was in the living room of his own cottage, and that it was still dark outside. But why was he here? He began to recall hearing a muezzin calling the faithful to pray from atop a minaret; he remembered the stifling heat, the rushed departure from Jeddah and then arriving in a cold grey London. Next he recalled hiring a car at Heathrow Airport, driving northwards through England, and finally arriving at his cottage. After letting himself in, he must have collapsed on the sofa in exhaustion and then dozed off. But he had no idea for how long.

It now felt very cold in the room. He shuddered, and wondered why there was a draught in the room. Turning around, he saw the curtains pulled across the patio doors billowing gently into the room; the full moon briefly appearing between them. He leapt to his feet realising that he hadn't switched the alarm back on again before dozing off. The patio doors were now open. He rushed towards the back of the room, struggling to remain steady on his feet. His mind was in a whirl. Pulling the curtains completely back, he saw that the glass had been smashed next to one of the handles and the lock forced. Now he was able to recall being disturbed earlier by the sound of glass breaking, but at the time had not been able to react quickly enough to prevent someone smothering his face with a sickly-smelling rag.

Still feeling less than sure-footed, he stepped outside onto the patio. Steadying himself against the outside wall of the cottage, he looked around. The garden looked bleak and unfamiliar in the moonlight. But there was no sign of anyone, and he returned back into the living room. He began looking to see what had been taken. The wooden carving of the crocodile had gone, and he noticed that his wallet and car keys were missing from the mantelpiece. Through the front window of the cottage, he was also able to see that his hire car was missing. He cursed emphatically. But his concerns about the stolen car were soon pushed aside as a surge of panic swept through his mind. He suddenly remembered his wife. Racing over to her bedroom door, he found to his relief that it was still locked. Whoever had broken into the cottage had not disturbed her. This

was at least one consolation. He would, however, have to wake up his wife after he had called the police. But as he began to make the call, he thought he could hear a sound outside. The patio doors were still open, and the curtains remained pulled back. From where he was standing, he could see nothing. Nevertheless, he still felt compelled to call out: "Is anybody there?" There was no reply. Replacing the handset, he cautiously went outside into the garden to investigate. Once again, he could see nothing. Then he walked over to the wall at the back of the garden, and looked down Wet Rain Hill. Suddenly, a figure sprang up from the other side of the wall. He tried to back away, but something struck him in the face, and then all was darkness.

**\*\* (32) \*\***

Snaz turned the handle on the downstairs bedroom; it was locked. He had already searched the rest of the cottage, and reckoned that if the stuff he was looking for was anywhere then it must be inside this locked room; the one that contained a woman sleeping alone. Of that, he was certain. It was the wife of the man now lying outside in the garden. They had probably had some kind of quarrel, he supposed. That was why he had been sleeping on the sofa earlier. He sniggered to himself; well, he had certainly taught her husband a lesson now. Maybe that would endear him to the woman inside the bedroom. Anyway, he would force his way into the room. He knew that the woman was Thai. It would be necessary, of course, for him to dispose of her afterwards. But this wouldn't be the first time he had killed a woman, even a Thai woman. He had killed that



one who had been with him in Bangkok when he had bumped into John Wakes at the Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant. She had made a joke about his face looking like a pizza, which he had not appreciated. So, at the earliest convenient opportunity, he had killed her. The murder, however, hadn't disrupted his holiday plans. After a few days, he had completely forgotten about it. It was no different from all the other times he had killed. Snaz was not one for allowing such things to prey on his mind for too long.

After trying the bedroom door handle a few times without success, he pulled out a key ring from his pocket. Looped onto it was a small Swiss army knife, which he would try to use to pick the bedroom door lock. As he removed the knife, one of the lady's rings he kept as mementoes on the same key ring slipped off and fell onto the floor where it rolled out of sight. He cursed angrily at his own clumsiness, and went down onto his hands and knees on the floor to search for the lost ring. He combed the parquet floor carefully, but in the poor light could find no trace of the ring. Feeling even more vexed and irritated by this, he no longer felt inclined to simply pick the lock. Instead, he would smash the door open using his hammer, which he had placed on the wall outside so that he wouldn't forget to take it back with him afterwards.

Outside in the garden, Snaz picked the hammer up. As he was returning back into the cottage, he suddenly heard a voice calling out from somewhere on the hillside behind him. It sounded like a cry for help. He froze in his steps, and listened carefully for any more sounds. But there was only silence. He was struck by the possibility that someone

might discover the body of Wakes lying in the car, and consequently decided that it was too risky for him to hang around the cottage any longer.

He thought about the best way to dispose of the man lying outside in the garden. Then he reasoned that since the car containing Wakes' body actually belonged to the man in question, it would be appropriate if his remains were also found in the burnt out wreckage. That would give the police something to think about. It might even fool them into thinking that at least one of the men in the car was responsible for the murder of Karen Hill, whose ring would eventually be discovered inside the cottage. But first of all, he had to transport the body of the sleeper lying in the garden to the car.

After looking around to make sure that he was not being observed, Snaz tried to lift the body. But it was far too heavy. Pausing for a moment, he reached into his inside jacket pocket and pulled out a small transparent plastic packet containing white powder. It was a sample of what they were supposed to have found inside the wooden carving of the crocodile, and had been given to him earlier by Wakes. There was a small white label stuck on the side of the packet resembling the instructions for a prescription. It had been written by Wakes as a joke, and read: 'To Snaz. This is an herbal remedy from the Karen hill tribe in Burma. Take regularly until symptoms persist.' Snaz had no idea who the Karen hill tribe were. When he had first read these words sitting in the car, it had completely unnerved him. Pushed further about what was meant by the words: 'Karen hill tribe', Wakes had mentioned something about a Burmese hill tribe whose female

members elongated their necks by wearing rings on them. But Snaz's paranoia seized upon the words: 'Karen', 'hill' and 'ring'. Had he not taken Karen Hill's ring? Was Wakes not playing with words to show that he knew about the murder of Karen Hill and that Snaz now had her ring?

On the night of the murder, Snaz had been lurking in a secluded spot. It was a short distance from the place where he had arranged to meet the dealer that he was going to accompany back to London. The killing had taken place before the dealer appeared. The dealer could not have seen the body. He was positive that the dealer had no suspicions about the murder. And if he did, probably wouldn't have done anything about it anyway. Moreover, Wakes did not know the dealer in question; Snaz was sure of that. So, how Wakes might know or have any suspicions about this particular murder was a mystery. But on account of his dangerous insights, Snaz had made the decision to get rid of him.

He pulled open the lip of the packet. Slipping his thumb and index finger inside, he took out a pinch of the white powder and placed it on his tongue. Wakes had told him that in addition to its hallucinogenic properties, the substance also endowed the taker with additional strength and vitality. This was going to be one of the new drug's strong selling points, so to speak.

Now utilising his increased strength, Snaz finally managed to pick up the body and place it on top of the garden wall. He then unceremoniously bowled it over the wall and onto the hillside below. The sleeper was still alive because he uttered a groan as he hit the ground. He was then followed over the wall by a wheelbarrow, which had been lying overturned in the corner of the garden. The wheelbarrow narrowly missed landing on top of him by inches. Moments later, the sleeper was being transported in the wheelbarrow away from the cottage along the side of Wet Rain Hill. His intermittent flashes of consciousness were accompanied by agonising bursts of pain. Looking upwards, he felt as if he was journeying through the vast dark reaches of space, occasionally catching sight of the stars and the bright full moon. And it was the very brilliance of this moon that would save ultimately him; a voice in his head kept telling him.

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