

The Well In The Crypt

Synopsis

In 1982, Peter Green and Charlotte Townsend are students at Winchester University. Peter is an orphan, and brought up by an austere and religious aunt, who made Peter take a regular participation in the Anglican Church, even though Peter had little faith. Peter and Charlotte become lovers, but she finds him dull and needy. Rejected, Peter meets a shadowy religious figure in Winchester Cathedral, who tells Peter to wait for an instruction from the Bishop. Peter is deeply impressed by this meeting. After university Peter drops out and falls into becoming a gardener. His Aunt dies in 1988 and with the inheritance he buys a run down house in Parchment street to do up slowly and starts a small nursery/garden centre in Otterbourne, just outside Winchester. Meanwhile he becomes involved in the religious life of the cathedral, eventually being appointed as a Canon.

In the late 1980s, the church has been arranging homes for Yugoslav war orphans in the UK. In 1989 the shadowy figure reappears with instructions to Peter to go to Yugoslavia (which is currently in the throes of a civil war) and to rescue Anya Jovanovic, a war orphan, and bring her back to Winchester. This involves significant bribes to various officials in Yugoslavia - the money being provided by the church. With the Bishop's help, Anya is adopted by Charlotte (who is now married). Anya has a normal upbringing and becomes a software engineer.

In the late 1990s Peter meets Rachel Johnston and falls into a lackadaisical marriage. Rachel has no knowledge of Anya. They remain childless. By the 2000s the marriage is exhausted but neither Peter nor Rachel have the energy to end it.

In 2010, Peter and the Bishop are still transporting orphans from various war zones, using church missionary visits, to be legally adopted in Winchester. They fund this by fraudulently manipulating the church's books, with the help of the church accountants.

In January 2010 Rachel is the Winchester Oxfam shop manager and receives a package of old books from the bishop's assistant and finds documents revealing the fraud inside one of them. She, against Peter's advice, says she will attempt to blackmail the Bishop. Peter uses Rachel's keys to get into the shop at night to try and find the incriminating documents, but only finds the 'dive in the well' document in the Bishop's books. Peter and Rachel's relationship finally breaks down and Peter moves out.

Three months later in May, Rachel, still living in Parchment street, receives a misaddressed letter. On a whim she opens it. It is a letter from Katerina to her lost daughter, Anya, who is not an orphan after all as Katerina survived the war. (Katerina has sent the letter to Peter's old address in the hope it will find its way to Anya). Rachel, who is depressed after the breakdown of her marriage is moved by the letter and Katerina's need to find her daughter. Rachel writes back to Katerina impersonating Anya without thinking about the long-term consequences. But her attempts to please Katerina do not make Rachel happy.

In June 2010, the Church's accounts are hacked (ironically by a Eastern block criminal gang), and Anya is assigned by her software firm to recover the problem. She discovers the fraud and confronts Peter. He shows her an old book, from the Bishop's Oxfam donation, that describes the drowning pool in the Cathedral crypt. The manuscript, written in 1093 by Benedictine monk, Father Hugh, says that pool, which is actually a well, is a portal in time. The manuscript also mentions a priceless artefact hidden in the pool. (Father

Hugh originally dived in the pool in 1093 to hide the original Anglo-Saxon crown of King Arthur from the Normans. Father Hugh's hope is to preserve the crown for a future Anglo-Saxon who will expel the Normans and restore the Anglo Saxon kingdom). Peter dives in the pool and exchanges consciousness with Father Hugh. In 2010, Anya persuades Father Hugh (in Peter's body) that he should, when he returns to the 12th century, rebury the crown in the walls of the then new Norman Cathedral. In 1093 Peter (in Father Hugh's body) writes the manuscript that Peter will eventually find in 2010 and which will tell Peter about the diving pool. Peter (in 1093) and Hugh (in 2010) dive in the pool once more and reinhabit their original bodies.

Peter and Anya recover the Anglo-Saxon crown in 2010 from the Cathedral wall. It is sold, and the proceeds used to finally balance the Bishop's books. When Katerina travels to Winchester, Rachel has to admit she does not know where Anya is. However, together Katerina attends the cathedral and recognises Peter from 20 years before and Katerina and Anya are reunited.

Anya and Rachel have a heart-to-heart talk, and Anya persuades Rachel that blackmail is a sin, and Rachel agrees to stop the blackmail. Peter decides to take one last dive in the well to visit Hugh (as he promised) and tell him how the plan worked out. The novel ends with Anya waiting for Peter's body to resurface from the pool. It never does.