

Possible titles:

The Drowned Cathedral
The Drowned Priest
The Winchester Chronicles
The Drowning Pool

If you dive into the pool I will give you a great treasure....

Peter does not realise he will be time travelling

What problem for Father Hugh is solved by the time travelling ?

Maybe if you are going to play at God you should start by being a half decent man

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Prologue – Winchester, 2015

Secure behind the parapets of Winchester Cathedral, high above the Rose Window, a pair of peregrine falcons look down over the city. Like the citizens below, they have simple needs. To eat, to mate, to breed, to pass their genes on to future generations. And in that short existence, they seek some semblance of pleasure. The rich, plump meat of a pigeon breast or the soapy copper taste of the fresh blood of a baby rabbit. The satisfaction of regurgitating a church mouse’s liver into a chick’s craving beak. The lazy circles in a summer thermal and then the thrilling swoop to lift a basking trout from the Abbey fishpond. The moment of procreation. The peregrines do all of these without conscious thought, living and acting in the moment, as they had always done. They know nothing of and care even less about the human concerns below. The idea of mortgages, a new Mercedes, Council Tax, voting for

your MP, a round of golf and quiet pint are as alien to the peregrines as the bottom of the Atlantic. Yet, had the birds been able to see inside the human minds below them, they would have found a much more familiar world, where human flesh was torn and human blood was spilt, and mere existence was the only prize.

Chapter 1 - The Well beneath the Cathedral, May 2015

Canon Peter moved closer to the South Transept wall as the intermittent drizzle of the last ten minutes started to intensify. Above him, the tower of Winchester Cathedral rose into the early morning darkness. Anya was late. In a moment, the rain was sheeting down and the gargoyles above him gurgled in glee as they spouted the rain onto the stones below. Peter's Canterbury cap, a square hat of limp cloth with sharp corners, did little to keep him dry, as the water simply ran off it and down the collar of his cassock. He wondered for a moment if he should have been a Roman Catholic – then he would have had the benefit of the broad brimmed cappello romano and would not be feeling quite so damp. It was far from the first time he questioned his past decisions. Not about Anya – there he knew with absolute certainty he had done the right thing. But other matters– his failure with Charlotte, his uncertain contract with God, his desire to achieve something, somewhere in his life. Now he had the opportunity to put at least some of these things right.

Finally, Anya was there with him, like some ghost, blown in by the squall.

'Sorry, you must be soaked,' she said.

'It doesn't matter. I'm going swimming in a few moments.'

He handed her the bag with his towels and a range of spare clothes, and then unlocked the Chancel door. She followed him through. To the right was the Lady Chapel, and in front of them the Retrochoir. He turned left, towards the base of the South Transept tower. He felt they should perhaps tiptoe or take their shoes off, but there was no-one to hear their footsteps on the worn flagstones. Well, no-one but the bones of assorted Anglo-Saxon and mediaeval kings, and the souls of their subjects. At the base of the tower another key opened a studded oak door. A spiral of stone steps invited them down into the darkness of the crypt.

'There's a torch in the bag,' he said. 'I don't want to use the lights. Even at this time of night there could be someone outside.'

'Okay.'

She handed him the torch.

After they had descended a dozen steps the staircase opened out onto a small dais.

‘This is as far as you go,’ he said.

He slowly swept the torch beam into the distance.

‘It’s beautiful,’ she whispered.

In front of them was a clear, pool of still water. Thick stone arches rose out of the water, vaulting across the ceiling. The torch light flickered over the surface of the pool. ‘I’ve never seen it this deep before,’ he said. ‘In the summer it dries out and you can walk on the crypt floor, but now there must be three or four feet of water – ‘

‘Stop, shine the torch back over there – I think I saw something!’

Peter swept the torch beam toward the back of the crypt. A tall figure appeared out of the blackness; a figure made of lead, soldered at its joints, smooth and broken, matte in finish yet gently glowing in the dull light. By some hidden mechanism, the water in the pool was being drawn up and overflowing from its cupped hands, flickering and sparkling in the torchlight. It appeared transcendental, but without any relation to religion. The figure seemed to stand like a perpetual sentry entombed under the stone mass of the cathedral. Guarding, but guarding what? They stood, absorbed by their thoughts for a moment. Then Peter handed Anya the torch, and he discarded his robes.

Unclothed, he sat on the edge of the dais and swung his legs into the water, sending ripples like messengers to explore the distant corners of the pool. They made him think of the journey he was about to make. He wondered, if like the ripples, he too would simply vanish into the dark. He eased forward, then pushed off into a breaststroke, resisting the temptation to submerge fully under the dark, subterranean water. The water was cool, cold even, but he felt warm, as if the cathedral was welcoming him into its viscera. He felt his heartbeat slow, his limbs becoming sluggish. He was becoming leaden like the silent statue, as he contemplated the water that passed through his fingers in each stroke. Barely moving, he reached the limit of the torch’s beam. Almost lifeless, his body followed his thoughts as he drifted into the distant darkness at the pool’s far edge.

‘Peter, are you alright?’

He heard her call from the edge of the pool but could do nothing to respond.

‘Peter.... PETER!’

He was secured in the cathedral’s embrace. Slipping away, into an eternal sleep, becoming another soul, a vassal to the bones of the ancient kings and queens, lying in their caskets in the Nave above. But there was pain too, a sharp, stabbing pain in his knee. In the fog in his brain he realised he was floating over the well. His knee had struck the protective

railing, erected to stop careless tourists or their children falling into the well in the dry season, but now hidden in the depths of the pool. This was what he had come for. With sudden clarity he filled his lungs and reached down, grasped the railing's edge and pulled himself down, through the clear, cool water and into the dark, black hole that was the mouth of the well. The brick wall of the well was smooth and regular.

* * *

January's full moon is named after the howling of hungry wolves lamenting the scarcity of food in midwinter. Other names for this month's full moon include old moon and ice moon.

Not for the first time, Father Hugh Longfellow looked up the Norman Cathedral, and wondered in whose praise the stone masons had toiled. God or man? The tower, placed at the centre of the cruciform plan, seemingly reached up to beckon an Almighty presence. Father Hugh indeed thought it a spectacular, awe-some sight and had often said so to his friend and colleague, the master stone-mason Rufus Elinwinson. In private though, Father Hugh also allowed himself to see the cathedral in a different light – a symbol of the Norman yoke thrust upon the neck of English liberty. The new building loomed over the adjacent Anglo-Saxon minster, like a falcon standing over its prey. The fabric of the old Minster would soon be broken down, stone by stone and reused to form a retrochoir in the new Norman Nave. The business of religion and worship would still go on, in more or less the same way, but like the manors, lands and forests in the surrounding diocese, the reins of power would now be held in Norman hands. The dispossessed English, be they abbots or earls, would be no more. Father Hugh sighed. He knew his time was coming to an end. He still had hope though. Hope perhaps in the next generation. A generation that would apparently adopt the new Norman ways, only to rise up at the opportune moment. Until then the old ways must be preserved.

Father Hugh turned round to see his novice, Will Wickham approach, ready for his evening instruction. Unlike Father Hugh, whose substantial beard was turning white, Will was clean shaven in the Norman fashion, and did not yet wear the Benedictine tonsure. Nor did he have the black woollen cloth scapula worn by Father Hugh, nor its substantial cowl. Instead, as he wore a simple grey woollen cassock, to mark his novice status.

‘Follow me,’ instructed Father Hugh.

They walked in single file, Father Hugh leading, past the refectory, and through the cloisters and then to the priory dormitory. Here, Father Hugh led Will through a side door and into the Father’s cell, a prerogative earned from more than 30 years of seniority in the Benedictine order. The privilege brought little benefits though and had the distinct disadvantage that in winter he no longer had the shared body warmth in the adjacent dormitory to keep him warm at night. The room just contained an oak chest, and a rough table with two stools. A couple of bolsters, leaking straw, formed a crude bed in a corner. A yew cross stood in a small alcove.

‘Sit,’ said Father Hugh, placing the bundle of cloth he had been carrying on the table.

Will dutifully sat and said nothing. There was a long pause. Father Hugh was considering the wisdom of his next move. He trusted Will, as much as he trusted anyone. Will’s grandfather had been the Earl of Wickham and had fallen at Hastings nearly 30 years before. Will’s father held the Earldom for less than a decade before he too had been brought down by the Normans. Now his son had a Norman name and no land or title – plenty of reason for Will to help Father Hugh with his plan, then.

Father Hugh gestured at the bundle.

‘Unwrap it.’

Will dutifully did so.

‘In the name of the blessed Mary!’ he exclaimed.

The contents of the bundle belied its coarse cloth wrapping. Will had only seen gold once before, the previous year when the Norman Cathedral had been consecrated. Here though, there was gold, silver and precious stones in abundance. Amber and amethyst encrusted a fine gold cross, while in the centre of the blanket gold with diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires, enamel and pearls adorned a regal gold crown. But it was the silver chalice that sat partly hidden in the folds of the cloth that most fascinated Will. He looked at Father Hugh:

‘May I touch them?’

‘By all means. You will be among kings and princes.’

Will paused, uneasy about this unexpected promotion, then slowly uncovered the chalice and raised it front of him. The silver was worn with use, but Will could still see the decoration around the rim. The motif was the five senses, each being depicted several times over, with kings, princes, abbots, saints, warriors, monks and plain men in various poses. In the centre of the bowl of the chalice an engraved figure kneeled with clasped hands, in silent,

penitent supplication. No matter which way Will rotated the chalice, the eyes of the figure looked directly back at the drinker.

‘Many of the kings of Wessex and of England wore this crown at their coronation, and drank from that chalice. More than rest now in the Minster. These are the lifeblood of the English, this is our past, our heritage. It is in our promise to those who have gone before to hold and cherish these things, in readiness for a new time. They were hidden in the grave of Saint Æthelwold after Harold’s fall at Hastings. But the Minster will soon be no more. It is our responsibility now to keep them safe.’

‘Tell me what I must do, master,’ said Will, his gaze still fixed on the chalice

* * *

The February full moon shone down on the two churches as two figures flitted from shadow to shadow. Each breath they took hung around them, frozen like white smoke in the cold air. Then they were inside the cathedral. The moonlight filtering through the crude glass in the southern windows was enough for them to find their way to the entrance to the crypt. As ever, Father Hugh led the way. Will followed, carrying the cloth bundle, now waterproofed with candle wax and tallow and sealed in a leather firkin. Father Hugh reached into his cassock and drew out a short, stump candle and a simple wooden candleholder.

‘Here, light this at the altar,’ he said.

‘Shall I say a prayer, master?’

‘Two.’

Will was quickly back, the flickering candle throwing its shadows up on the stone walls around them. In a moment they were down in the crypt. The winter rains had flooded the water meadows in the Cathedral grounds outside and the water was a foot deep in the crypt. Father Hugh quickly slipped off his cassock, took the leather parcel, and a lead weight manufactured from an offcut of flashing from the new roof, and strode out into the water. He left the dim glow of the candlelight behind and the darkness gradually enveloped him. At the distant end of the crypt, he could just make out the low circular stone wall marking the well’s position. He intoned:

Send thy light, O Lord, into the dark places of our hearts. In thy love, discover to us the snares set by our enemy in the hours of night, that, saved by thy protection in soul and body, we may deserve again to see the morning light. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

After one brief look back at Will he stepped over the wall and sank into the depths.

* * *

Peter swam down and down and down, and then he was no longer swimming, but drawn down by an unseen current, further and further into the arteries of the cathedral. He could feel, no, he could hear the pulse in his head as his lungs started to burn? The cool, clear water was turning red in front of his eyes, even when he screwed his eyelids tightly shut. The cathedral caressed and held him in its embrace as he lost consciousness.

* * *

Anya continued to shine the torch into the distant recesses of the pool after Peter disappeared. The disturbance caused by his descent had long died away but the reflections of the beam on the arched roof of the crypt were still dancing, dappled shadows. After a moment, she realised that the water falling from the leaden statue's hands was sending out a sequence of regular, ever expanding ripples across the surface of the pool. The figure's hands seemed now to be cupped in supplication, as if it was praying. She was increasingly anxious and wondered if she too should pray. Peter had been gone for several minutes. She did not know quite how long, but she was increasingly sure he could not have held his breath for all that time.

* * *

Wet. Cold. A dim light. Peter was floating again, now relaxed both in mind and body. For a moment, his eyes would not focus. Then, he gradually began to perceive the stone arches vaulting over his head. He was still in the crypt. But a strangely different crypt, now crowded with lead and stone caskets, carefully arranged on stone columns rising out of the water. Peter realised he was not really floating but more lying on the stone floor of the crypt. It was now only covered with six inches of water. He rolled onto his side and looked into the distance for the source of the light.

* * *

Father Hugh felt as if something was burning the linings of his lungs. Even with the lead weight of the leather package he had not been able to reach the bottom of the well. He had

tried to grasp the brickwork of the well with his one free hand and push himself down. But the water beneath seemed to somehow be holding him up, supporting and caressing him, showing him, directing him back upwards. His breath exhausted, he dropped the leather package, and allowed himself to be borne back to the surface.

* * *

Peter could see a candle dimly burning in the distance, set down on the floor. As he stood up, he saw that he was beside the well. The protective railings had vanished and now a small stone wall marked the well. Other things were different too. For one thing he was naked. He reached up and touched his face only to discover a luxuriant beard. His hands were no longer smooth and white – now they were larger, rougher, stained with soil, with dirt under each fingernail. He looked into the distance again and saw a thin, clean shaven man in a grey cassock crouched by the candle. Easing himself up, he started through the water towards the light...

* * *

Borne up by the cool water, Father Hugh floated on his back over the well mouth. He was still light-headed and gasping for breath, his vision blurred by the water and lack of oxygen. It took him a moment to realise that something had changed in the crypt. Then he realised the water was much deeper now – he hadn't be able to float freely in the pool before. The light was brighter too – and he could hear a woman's voice in the distance, calling:

‘Peter – PETER – is that you? Are you all right?’

He rolled onto his front and tried to put his feet down. How deep was the pool? He found he could stand, half in and half out of the water. As he turned towards the voice, he stumbled and nearly fell back as a tall man appeared to loom out of the shadows. He thought the figure was accusing him, clasping its hands forward, pointed at his naked body. But it did not speak, nor did it move. He looked towards the light, beyond the immobile apparition, and saw a woman, standing on a stone platform, holding up a dazzling lantern. She was beckoning him towards her. He felt dazed, unsure how the crypt could have changed in such a short time. As he skirted the leaden figure, he intoned

*In martyrio martyrum,
In uirtute iustorum,*

*In formis spiritalibus,
In diuinis sermonibus,
In benedictionibus,
Deus tuarum protege me.*

but the figure remained unmoved, immobile, continuing its fixed stare towards an unseen horizon.

The woman pointed at a bag containing cassock and a rough towel.

‘Benedicite! You are welcome here,’ she said, averting her eyes from his naked body.

‘Dry and clothe yourself, Father Hugh, and then I will explain.’

* * *

As Peter reached the figure by the candle the enormity of his task became clear. He had no idea who this person was. Indeed, he had no idea who anyone was in this new world. He had certainly been told about Anglo-Saxons, and Normans, monks and abbots, barons, vassals, jesters, peasants and knights in secondary school. But this was hardly adequate preparation for actually meeting them. Mostly though he remembered being told that life in medieval England would have probably been dirty, dangerous and short.

<<- the next problem to solve is that Peter needs to find a way of writing the manuscript that will eventually appear back in the 21st C, so that Peter can find it there and then kick the whole story off. But since Peter has no detailed knowledge of Father Hugh's life this could be tricky – eg where does Father Hugh sleep, eat – where can he find some manuscript ? >>

Anglo Saxon Lord's prayer and in modern English.

Fæder ure þu pe eart on heofonum,
si þin nama gehalgod,
to becume þin rice,
gewruþe ðin willa,
on eorðan swa swa on heofonum,
une gedæghwamlidan half syle us todæg,
and forgyf us ure gyltas,
swa swa we forgyfað urum gyltendum,

and ne gelæd þu us on costnunge,
ac alys us of yfele sopllice.

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
Amen.

Chapter 2 – St Alfred’s, September 1982

Driven by the October easterlies, the rain sheeted down under grey skies. It fell with unwavering determination onto the equally grey Warren Drive, on the edge of the Winnall trading estate in the northeast corner of Winchester. At number 23 Peter looked out of his bedsit window, wondering how the others in his undergraduate year were faring. In reality, his room was much more bed than sit. A faded pine single bed was pushed up against one wall and occupied a good portion of the room, while a matching wardrobe, which apparently needed a little help to remain upright, lent against the opposite wall, tilted back by small third wall, a 1960’s gas fire hissed quietly next to a meter which also supplied a single gas ring. Peter had never seen such a fire before and was convinced it had seen many more birthdays than he had. And the fire certainly seemed to be wearing its age rather less well than wedges under its front legs. On the Peter. Next to the meter there was a small sink. A tiny cupboard above contained exactly one plate, one cereal bowl and a single saucepan. A few pieces of cutlery concluded the inventory. The room’s contents were completed by the table and the chair at which Peter was sitting. They seemed somehow familiar to Peter, and after a moment, he realised they were made of the same veneered plywood he had seen in a TV program showing what life had been like after the second world war.

He could hear the murmur of the landlady’s TV in the sitting room below through the thin carpet on the floor. He wondered if that room was as meanly furnished as his, but he did not think he would ever find out. She had made it clear that morning, on his short

introduction to the house, that he was expected to remain in his room and only make the briefest of sorties to the bathroom or his shelf in the fridge.

The raindrops continued to beat a rhythmic tattoo on the window. He looked out at his bicycle, checking that it was still chained to the railings that separated the well-tended garden from the road. He considered an escape into college, but the sodden saddle and the thought of the twenty-minute ride in the rain quickly dissuaded him. Besides, he knew no one who actually had rooms in the college and, considering the particularly steep streets of Winchester, that journey seemed too much of a hill to climb, at least for the moment.

He found he had been holding his breath as he pondered his isolation. He exhaled with a deep sigh and turned to the first chapter of 'The Geography of European Agriculture.' His studying only lasted a moment as he kept recalling his headmaster's words,

'Go to University, my lad. You should try for Queens - best college in Cambridge, I had a tremendous time there when I was demobbed! Hardly went to a lecture, spent most of my time on the river – when I wasn't in an eight, I'd be punting up to Grantchester. Of course, that's the advantage of a Classics degree – you'll probably have to put in an appearance at least a few of your lectures if you're doing engineering.'

Well, Peter had tried for Cambridge – and even done quite well in the entrance exam. He knew that though he had messed up the subsequent interview. It was the first time he had been away from home on his own. He put it down to nerves, mostly. It had been a complicated train journey, with three changes, and he was late as he had had trouble finding the college. Then, slightly overawed by sitting in front of two college Fellows, each wearing gowns, and offering him sherry, he was totally silent when asked:

'If the second law of thermodynamics says that you can't unscramble scrambled eggs, what would you have for breakfast if you wanted to increase your entropy?'

Perhaps it was not surprising then he had abandoned doing Natural Sciences and had settled for Environmental Sciences at King Alfred's College in Winchester. The college originally specialised in teacher training and had only just started expanding to provide 'proper' degrees under the supervision of nearby Southampton University. Maybe the need to fill their extra places was the reason he had got in. He was really only there because his friend John had already applied to St Alfred's to do Geography. Peter was not sure he wanted to be a teacher. Maybe he would look for a job in TV? But first he would have to get through the next three years.

‘A pity I didn’t know the College was strapped for money,’ Peter thought. If he had, he would have known that that St Alfred’s had yet to complete the funding of its expansion and had found it expedient to place its first-year intake in various lodgings and bedsits provided by the more permanent residents of the town. Maybe he would just drop the idea of a degree, but he had no idea what to do instead.

‘If only my surname had begun with F instead of G,’ he thought. ‘Then I would be next to John in the allocation list - with a bit of luck we could have ended up in the same house.’

‘Bugger!’ he said. He put another 50p in the gas meter and started to make some toast.

* * *

<< more to come here - Peter’s first week at college, how he meets Charlotte and how they become friends >>

Chapter 3 – St Alfred’s, Easter Break 1983

Blue. So many blues. That’s all Peter remembered later. Not only the pale, washed watercolour blue of the evening sky that quickly deepened into ultramarine as dusk fell across the moor, or the cold chilled blue of their breath in the April air as they bathed in the valley stream, washing the mud and sweat off, scrubbing days efforts from their bodies. No, it was mostly the deep azure blue of her costume, the silvery cobalt shadows in her hair that, the dark cherry blue of the bruises on her right thigh, where she had ridden under an unseen oak bough in the woods and the cornflower blue of her irises, with their little flecks of steely blue determination that remained as burnished prizes in his memory. Those, and his recollection of the kingfishers they had seen earlier, flashing and flaunting their blues and browns as they darted and dipped over the water, a thrilling, ephemeral moment of colour. They had ridden across the downs, and deep amongst the valley woods and chalk streams – the viridian and

emerald greens, the burnt umbers and siennas would fade in future memories into distant greys – until only the blues, so many blues remained.

Each of the five days in that trip had the same simple rhythm. If they were camping in a farmer's field, then it started with a simple bowl of cornflakes or bread and jam, then pack the tents and load up the bikes. Otherwise it was bacon and eggs in the relative splendour of a Youth Hostel. Then a morning's ride over the downs, and ham or cheese with bread bought in some village shop, washed down with beer or coke. Then another few hours until they arrived at that night's rest. Maybe a shower if they were in another Youth Hostel or a splash under a farmer's hose, or even a swim in the local river – it just depended on where they were. But they always finished in the pub.

'What will it be then – a dry cider?' he asked.

'Yes, please.'

She had taken her windproof off and was sitting on a bench next to the fire, when he brought the drinks. The rest of the group were still milling around the bar. There was no table to put the drinks on, so she took them, cider and bitter in each hand, while he took his gilet off. As he sat down next to her, and she still had her hands full of glasses, he lent across and kissed her. She did not pull away, but she did not respond either. He thought maybe he saw her cheeks flush, or perhaps it was just the fire.

'What was that for?' she said.

'Was that a bad thing to do?'

'Just unexpected. Maybe even surprising.'

'Maybe I should surprise you more.'

'Maybe you should.'

He felt he had said something, or done something important, but he could not decide what. The kiss was something, but there was something more. He thought he could taste candy floss in the brief kiss, sweet, but melted and gone as soon as it reached his tongue.

He realised she was still looking at him, waiting.

‘It was your swimming costume – it was so blue.’

‘What?’

‘I don’t know – when we were swimming in the river - it seemed such an achingly, wonderful blue.’

‘Blue,’ he said again, and then was silent, unsure what to say next. In truth, he was a bit surprised he had kissed her too. The idea been in his mind for most of the day. But then a kiss was an easy message, there and gone in the moment. Putting something into words, that needed a lot more effort.

He thought back to the afternoon, when the group had ridden in single file along the bridlepaths that wound through the woods at the river’s edge. She was leading, as she often did. He followed, admiring the curve of her shoulder, watching the gentle sway of her body, as it moved in harmony with the rhythm of the pedals. He had realised then he wanted to kiss her. It was rather a novel feeling and he quite liked it. They had come in a group of a dozen largely insolvent students, loftily calling themselves the University Riding Club’s Official Easter tour, underwriting the cost from the University’s Social Club’s coffers with some traditionally dubious student accounting. Even then, they had had to borrow tents from the University Officer Training Corps. The week had been quite a success until on the third morning he had thought it would be fun to see what would happen if he encouraged one of the farmer’s geese into the girls’ tent. There was a gratifying burst of frantic honking, hissing and barking from the goose[ds1]. But then he realised he had not fully thought the plan through. An equally loud squeal came from the tent:

'Where did that bloody goose come from? That bastard has shat all over my sleeping bag!'

Well, that was a bit unfortunate, he thought to himself, a bit unlucky really – it should have been okay - a one in six chances with six girls in the tent – hard luck it happened to be her sleeping bag. He kept a low profile for a day or so. It was only on the last afternoon of the trip that he decided he wanted to kiss her. He was fairly sure she did not know he was responsible for the goose. No-one had actually seen him do it – and as he told himself, the goose was not going to grass him up. Smiling at the thought of a blabbermouth goose, he was abruptly brought back to the present, as he realised she was still waiting for him to say something.

<<In the next chapter, two or three years later, Peter and Charlotte are in the middle of a casual student love affair:>>

Chapter 4 – The Coffee Shop, January 1984

Despite the double skinny [latte] on the table in front of him, Peter's mouth was dry. He looked up for the ninth or tenth time, and finally saw Charlotte walking across the courtyard outside the college coffee shop. She waved when she saw him. A moment later, a lemon and ginger tea in hand, she sat down next to him.

'Hi there,' she said. 'How was the lecture on the population and politics of the Baltics?'

'It was an absolute thriller – I spent most of the time reading the paper in the back row. Callingham had done Estonia, Latvia and was half-way across the Polish border before she spotted it and made me put it away.'

Charlotte smiled in sympathy and sipped her tea. They sat in silence for a moment

Peter was looking down at his mug and had clasped his hands on his lap. He was slowly rubbing one thumb on top of the other. She knew that meant Peter wanted to say something, but she had learnt that it was best to wait for him to bring it up in his own time. [DS3]

[DS4] Eventually he made a start:

‘There’s something I’ve been thinking I would like to say.’

‘Well so long as it’s not a litany of Balkan population stats, then I’m all ears. Or was it something from today’s paper?’

‘No, nothing like that. A bit more serious, I think. I’m not sure you’ll like it though.’

Good grief, she [DS5]thought. Surely, he’s not dumping me? That would be a turn up for the books...

‘Go on, then,’ she said.

Peter drew a crumpled piece of paper out of his jacket pocket and read:

How should I expresso my love for you [DS6]?
Should I melt your frosty look in my affogato
or cup the warmth of your steamy Arabica
and then bury my nose in your heady aroma?

Let me drink the creamy froth of your latte.
Enraptured, my tongue savours the way
your liquid smacks my lips
and I taste the sweetness of your hips.

Your caffeine fizzes and jolts in my veins
as a tsunami of heat carouses in my brain.
A thirst, now quenched, will soon restart
and desire will regrow while we are apart.

He saw her cheek flush. He took it as a sign of encouragement and started to reach for her hand.

‘Peter, that is so ridiculously needy – give yourself some self-respect. You’re like a spaniel, sitting there with big round eyes, tongue out, desperate for a kind word or a biscuit.’

[DS7] He let his hand drop back onto his lap. She was right of course. All of his life he had

been in need. What was wrong with him? Why wasn't it working with Charlotte? They had been sharing a flat for 6 months now. Well more of a large bedsit. The first few months it had been all 'pasta and passion' evenings, sharing a large pizza from Pizza Express and washing it down with cheap Italian wine, or maybe an unauthentic lasagne with cider in the Baker's Arms with and then walking home to share a bed. As time went on, they gradually fell into a comfortable, companionable, efficient partnership - studying together, sharing a sausage casserole, increasingly sober as their exams approached. Had he just become a convenience to her until she was ready to move on? She was right though, he did need the relationship with her, or at least some sort of relationship with someone. He could not think of what to say in reply.

'If you feel like that, I'd better go,' he said. But he did not move. She pursed her lips as if she was about to say something but she remained silent. Instead of getting up, he reached across and grasped her hand.

'Why did we stop having sex, do you think?'

'Wow, that came out of the blue. I don't know. Maybe we just became friends?' she said.

'Is that what we are now?'

'I think it just gradually faded away,' she said, releasing her hand. 'And then when you're sharing the same flat and you're not having sex, then you're no different from any other couple of people that are friends. Once you stop having sex with someone, they stop being the one special person in your life, they become just like the hundreds of other people in your life.'

'You know it wasn't really just me that stopped the sex. Not really,' he said. 'I seem to recall being quite keen at the time. You were too as I recall.'

'Yes, I do remember that. But it wasn't really the physical stuff that I started

worrying about – it was when you gave me flowers and I didn't like the showiness of it, or when we held hands in the street, or when you gave me that miniature bicycle necklace. I don't think I wanted that sort of relationship.'

'I never quite knew how to show – well, you know....'

They were both silent.

'I saw a pair of kingfishers today, down by the City Mill,' he said, eventually. 'They were nesting upstream, in the riverbank just underneath the big oak. They caught my eye and made me think. Two little birds – one moment they were perched on a branch, then they were rushing here and there, hurtling along the stream as if their life depended on it. I wondered what they were thinking – why did they choose that moment to fly off downstream? Why not wait a little longer and go upstream? How could they possibly know what would be best?'

'I don't think they do know. They just look for fish. And if they can't see any, then they fly to another perch and look again. Fish, nest, raise their young. They just are – well, what they are – happy, responding just in the here and now.'

He wished he too could be a kingfisher.

Chapter 5 – The Crypt, June 1985

The cool darkness of the crypt settled around Peter as he thought back on the night's events. With their courses over he and Charlotte had arranged to have one final meal together.

'Let's push the boat out,' he said, 'and go to the that new Italian in Great Minster street.'

'Okay, that sounds good,' she replied. 'I quite fancy some posh pasta – I doubt I'll be getting much of that for the next year – might as well make the most of it while I can.'

She had arranged a six-month VSO placement in Mali, teaching maths and English to eight- to ten-year-olds. Then she was going to take a few months travelling down to Cape Town, in a converted Bedford truck with a dozen ex-students and would be adventurers before she came back to a mundane job in a bank. Peter was staying in Winchester, so that he could complete his teaching certificate. The meal would be a going away celebration.

I don't really feel like celebrating though, he thought.

He had enjoyed those last eighteen months, sharing the flat, and their lives. There had been plenty of pasta then, but the pasta and passion meals had faded away. He thought she would see it as a tidy endpoint. After her time in Africa, he expected that if they did meet in future, then things would be different, they would somehow be strangers again. He desperately did not want that to happen. *If only he could have joined her on the Bedford truck.* But he needed a job, he needed to complete his teaching certificate. And Africa seemed a million miles away.

The evening had started well. The Mille Pine provided a suitably Italian menu: tonno con fagioli, cannelloni or spaghetti alla vongole, zabaglione. Perhaps too much wine. Certainly too much honesty. If only he hadn't given her that present.

'I'd really like you to take this on your trip,' he said, as he gave her a small, neatly wrapped package.

'Thank you – how cute – such tiny elephants,' she said, as she slowly removed the wrappings to reveal a small red, leather box. A small jewellery box. *A watch*, she thought. *Or some jewellery. Or perhaps something less practical, more romantic, even reckless and ill-judged....*

'Oh, I really don't think....,' she said and then stopped as he took the box out of her hands and opened it to reveal a small brass compass.

‘Just keep going south – if you start seeing penguins then you’ve gone too far.’

‘That is such a nice thing, so thoughtful, and, well, so really nice,’ she said. She put her arms around him and gave him a squeeze, ready to accept a kiss. But as she closed her eyes and waited, he pulled away^[DS8].

‘I can’t believe it,’ he said. ‘Look, the wretched thing is broken! North is that way, but the needle is pointing the other way.’

‘I don’t understand,’ she said.

‘They’ve screwed it up - painted the wrong end of the needle red,’ he replied. He wanted her to carry it and think of him. But it was useless.

She said something like it didn’t matter reall^[DS9]y – it was a kind thought, but he did not need to give her a present at all, really.

He looked at her for a moment and then slowly reached into his pocket, saying

‘Well, actually, that was not my first choice – I did have an alternative and, er....’

At this point he gave her a very similar sized box, again wrapped in elephant paper.

‘Wow, that was good contingency planning then,’ she said, trying to lighten the tone and knowing that he would be pleased that she recognised his effort.

‘What is it?’

Maybe another survival aid, she thought, or maybe a Swiss Army knife perhaps, or a portable mosquito net, that would be useful, or

‘Oh. I’m sorry....,’ was all she could say as she gave him back the ring^[DS10].

The cool darkness of the crypt seemed to Peter like a soft cocoon as he laid down, trying to find a comfortable position on the hard stone flagstones. He had left the restaurant an hour before, telling Charlotte he needed fresh air, to go for a walk, that he would see her later. In truth the thought of returning to the flat was too much to bear. He had wandered around,

staying away from the High Street and emptying restaurants, looking for somewhere to sit and think. Across the green he saw there was light behind the stained-glass windows of the cathedral, and he was drawn, moth like, towards it. As he approached, he could hear a faint thread of organ music, drifting back towards him, in the late night breeze. Finding himself in front of the great West door, he tried the wrought iron handle. No luck, it was firmly shut. The music continued, growing in volume as it appeared to swell towards a conclusion. Then it stopped in mid phrase. *Just like tonight*, Peter thought. The music restarted and stumbled again. Then the same phrase was played again, slowly this time. And then again, a little faster, as if the organist was educating their finger muscles. Eventually, the music flowed at full speed and continued seamlessly on. Practice makes perfect, he thought, definitely unlike tonight. I wonder if there is a side door open, though. Maybe I could go in and sit down.

He clambered over the waist high fence that kept the public out of the area immediately surrounding the cathedral and starting walking along the North Walls. There was no obvious way into the building until he had worked his way round to east side of the north transept. Here he found a path that led from the Dean's House to a small door let into the Cathedral wall. He gently tried the wrought iron handle, and the door swung back. He slipped inside, quietly shutting the door behind him, even though the music was now reaching a final crescendo. To his left, a stone stairway led downwards. The music stopped. *The organist has finished his practice – or he will have soon*, Peter thought. He descended the stairs and found himself in a vaulted space, faintly lit by the moonlight from a few windows along the north wall. This must be the crypt he thought, there should be bones or coffins or some such. But there were none. Ah, well, this is good a place to spend the night – if I get locked in, I can probably sneak out early, when they open up tomorrow.

* * *

It was still dark when Peter woke. The flagstones were hard and cold and their dense bleakness had seeped through his thin clothes, chilling his bones. The full moon shone through the high windows of the crypt, turning the warm browns of the sandstone to shades of grey. He stood slowly, waiting as some semblance of feeling replaced the numbness in his limbs. It was not enough. He needed to walk, to stretch, to pump the blood through his veins. He climbed the stairs back up into north apse. The silence of the vast space seemed even deeper in the slivers of moonlight that found their way through the cathedral windows. But after a moment, Peter realised the cathedral was not completely quiet. Somewhere in the distance, he could hear a deep, resonant voice. It seemed to come from his left, somewhere on the other side of the cathedral. As he walked toward it, he gradually started to make out individual words, though he could still not make out the meaning.

Yfel biddan êow, hâlgian Ælfheah ac forþi god ys hihtan on drihtan, and eadige^[DS11] ealle þa þe truwiap on hine, mid gepance and mid lichaman, and gode and þe nyþerastreht mid eadmodre estfulnesse milde mundbyrde þine sancte pater

He entered the south transept. But the voice was behind him now. He turned, and saw a small chapel, set into the chantry wall. A single candle threw an erratic light on a cloaked figure, kneeling before a simple altar, surmounted by a wooden cross. Peter was surprised to see that the walls of the chapel were painted with bright colours, that stood out even in the dim moonlight. The figure continued its prayers:

Rogamus autem ego sanctus Alfritham. Sed quia bonum est sperare in domino et beati omnis qui confidunt in illum, mente et corpore, et domino et tibi prostratus supplici devotione piam paternitatem tuam sancte pater. Amen.

Although the words still made no sense to Peter, he recognised the rhythms and sounds – it was Latin of course. He heard the figure speak again:

I beseech thee, St Alfrith. But because it is good to have joyous expectation in the lord, and blessed are all those who trust in him, with thoughts and with body, prostrated – a supplicant with humble devotion to you in the conscientious parenthood of your holy father. Amen.

The figure appeared to have finished. The cathedral was silent again, a deep silence, in which neither Peter nor the figure seemed to want to move. Although there was no sound in his ears, Peter heard the deep resonant voice say:

It is the night of the wolf moon^[DS12]. January's full moon is named after the howling of hungry wolves lamenting the scarcity of food in midwinter.

The figure stood and beckoned to Peter. Peter did not move. *The figure lowered their ^[DS13]owl.* Peter could see it was a man, with a substantial greying beard. His hair too was turning white although most of his head had been shaved to form a large bald patch. The figure beckoned again, then turned back to the altar and knelt as before. Peter slowly walked over and stood by the figure, who gestured that Peter should kneel beside him. He heard the voice again, although the man's lips did not move.

Come and join me, my son.

Peter found he too was kneeling, even though he had no recollection of doing so. He clasped his hands in the manner of the other figure. The voice spoke again:

The garden is twice hidden. Encircled by trees and shrubs, ^[DS14]rhododendrons, camellias, larch and birch, it is also sunken a coffin's depth below. A subtle path meanders through the undergrowth leading the visitor from the bright lawn into the gloom to find an arbour, crouched close to a carp pool. The clean, fresh, green smell of the lawn cannot follow you - here the aroma is of damp leaves, moss and decay. Onside the sunken garden the summer sun has lost its power and fails to warm the grey sandstone flags under your feet. The birds have fallen silent, held under the spell of the white noise of a waterfall feeding the pool.

A dead carp floats on the surface of the pool, horizontal, mouth open and eyes wide but dull. You sit on an oak bench in the arbour. It bends softly under your own

weight and you pick some of the fibres out of its slats. They feel clammy, cold and wet, the decay staining your skin as you crumble the wood between finger and thumb. The taste of the air reminds you of a dark cellar, catching the back of your throat, making you cough with a dry hack. You look expectantly into the dark browns and verdant greens, half expecting to see the black eyes of a rat or worse looking back at you. This is a good place, a good place to bury our thoughts in the rough brown soil.

The voice was silent now, but Peter did not feel inclined to move. Although he knew he did not yet understand the meaning of the words he had just heard, he knew he would in time. He felt serene, and a deep calmness. He was warm now, and his limbs felt warm and supple. He heard the figure speak again, and he found himself speaking too, somehow joining his words with those of the figure:

Fæder ure þu pe eart on heofonum,
 si þin nama gehalgod,
 to becume þin rice,
 gewruþe ðin willa,
 on eorðan swa swa on heofonum,
 une gedæghwamlidan half syle us todæg,
 and forgyf us ure gyltas,
 swa swa we forfgyfað urum gyltendum,
 and ne gelæd þu us on costnunge,
 ac alys us of yfele soþlice.

Our Father, who art in heaven,
 Hallowed be thy name.
 Thy kingdom come.
 Thy will be done
 on earth as it is in heaven^[DS15].
 Give us this day our daily bread.
 And forgive us our trespasses
 as we forgive those who trespass against us.
 And lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.
 Amen.

As he stood, the figure laid a hand on Peter's shoulder as if in encouragement, and then softly walked away into the distant darkness.

* * *

When Peter awoke, the soft yellow light of the summer dawn had already lit the sandstone walls of the crypt for more than an hour. The flagstones felt hard and cold underneath him, but he felt refreshed. The events in the restaurant from the night before seemed like a dream now. But the figure, that he was not so sure about.

<<< *should Peter discuss his experience with Charlotte? Could this be the final breakup?*

>>>

Chapter 6 – Yugoslavia, 1992

<<Peter and Charlotte break up, Peter yearning for a feeling of belonging, joins the Church and ends up supporting the NATO effort in the Yugoslavia war>>

Chapter 7 – Winchester, 1992

<<Peter brings an orphan, Anya, back from Yugoslavia, illegally – he uses Church money to do this. The bishop helps Peter find a home for the orphan with Charlotte and her husband and is therefore complicit in the crime. The orphan, Anya, leads a normal childhood and eventually becomes a software engineer.>>

Chapter 8 – The House in Parchment Street, 2010

The [DS16]postman was glad he was on Round 17. It was his favourite for a number of reasons. First, it was in the centre of Winchester, not far from the sorting office. So no need to take a van, just a letter trolley and not even a long walk. Second, he could step into the ‘Little Toastie’ for a quick cuppa or even a fried egg sandwich. But most of all he liked the mix of houses he delivered to. He liked to speculate over the fate and aspirations of the generations of different occupants of each house. Often, he was allocated the outlying districts, new building estates or little suburbs of retirement bungalows. There was little history in those places. But here in the centre of Winchester, inside the plan of the Roman walls, there was plenty of variation and interest to keep him occupied as he walked from door to door. A few Georgian mansions were jostled by later Victorian terraced upstarts. Half a dozen pubs, each dating back hundreds of years vied with a similar number of Churches for the accolade of the oldest building in that part of the city, though everyone doubted the Royal Oak’s claim. [DS17]Maybe there still were fragments of the original building, dating from 1002, when it was a residence of Queen Emma. But it was debatable it was a brewhouse until the 1630s and only by 1677 was it known as the Royal Oak. And after all, there were

dozens of Royal Oaks across England, all claiming dubious royal association, so why would you believe what they said?

Parchment Street was one of his favourite [DS18] parts of the round. He had read about its history in the little museum set into the west wall of the city. Some days he thought he could smell the barrels of boiling leathers [DS19], goat, deer and pigskin and picture the figures hunched over stretched skins, scraping away the remnants of the animal's flesh. Of course, those days were long gone, and the original buildings were now replaced by terrace of Victorian back to backs. A Methodist Church, now occupied by the Salvation Army added sobriety to the street, and gently competed with Oxfam, a little further along the street. A few other shops provided Antique clocks, books, paintings, sculptures and jewellery. It would be possible to live your whole life without leaving Parchment Street, he thought, apart from the occasional trip to Sainsbury's fifty yards away to refill your larder. He rather fancied that lifestyle.

In number 15, Barbara Johnston [DS20] heard the flap of the letterbox go 'thuck' as the post arrived. She looked down, wondering whether to finish her slightly burned toast and half cold cup of tea or fetch the post. It hardly seemed worth bothering, it would only be a bill or some unwelcome advertising flyer. Before her husband had died, she would have been interested in new curtains or sofas, or maybe even an offer to re-mortgage her house ostensibly hidden behind the suggestion of a holiday or a new kitchen. But now she did not need or want anything. The post did seem mildly more interesting than her burnt toast though, so she gathered her dressing gown around her, and went to see what had arrived.

There was just one letter. An airmail [DS21] letter addressed in a hand that she did not recognise. It had clearly had an eventful journey as the address was partially smudged, perhaps by a short dip in a roadside pool. She brought it back to the breakfast table, glancing

across at the mantelpiece clock. Nine thirty. Maybe she should do the breakfast dishes first, to make the moment of opening the letter last a little longer. Or maybe even get dressed first. Well I've got nothing much on this morning, she thought - smiling wryly to herself at the double meaning. She looked at the letter again and decided she would get dressed first, then do the washing up, then open the letter.

She showered, and then dressed. As she was brushing her hair, she felt her curiosity rising, so when she went downstairs, she just pushed the dirty dishes into the sink, adding a new layer over last night's take-away, and turned her attention back to the letter. Looking at the envelope, she could not see any return address. The handwriting still looked unfamiliar. She could not quite make out her name, amongst the splodges on the address. It read 'Ms *ohns*n, 1* Parch**ent St, Winchest**, Hampshire, SO21 9XD. The writer had not used her first name, or even an initial. The only clue was a Canadian postmark advertising 'Ski Alberta, the BIG outdoors.' She sat down when she saw this, momentarily saddened, thinking of her own past skiing trips to the Alps with her husband. Finally, there was nothing left to do but to open the letter. She started reading:

My Dear Daughter

I am struggling over how to begin this letter to someone I hope will let me back into her life. I say, "back into" because once we shared the most intimate of connections, when I was carrying you. How I wish I could take you back - in my arms. How I wish I could kiss that squishy cheek and then freeze the moment to last forever. How I wish I could look into your deep blue eyes and touch that soft, soft skin. I know those moments are gone now, gone forever, but I want you to know that what I did, I did out of love for you, even though it was the most awful thing a mother could do. For that I am deeply sorry. I think about you every day and I hope you can feel my love. I worry that your life has not been a good one. I pray that it has, but whatever happened, I hope you will let me know you now.

You probably want to know why you came to be adopted - I hate even writing those words. I will say little about your father. It was early summer 1991, and I was a Romanian refugee in Yugoslavia. He was a soldier, an officer. It lasted a little more than a month, but he left me pregnant, and alone. I won't tell you the story of the following months, but I was determined to keep you safe, to bring one fragment of joy out of the anger and hate around me.

I remember that the lily of the valley was in bloom in the Convent garden - its perfume filled the room in the where you were born, at around 11 am in the [DS22] morning on April 30, 1992. Whenever I smell that perfume now, it reminds me of that day. You weighed less than two kilograms, so they took you away to the incubator immediately. I asked the priest to baptise you Anya. As I'm sure you know, Anya means 'resurrection.' You were my hope for the future. It is my sorrow and shame that I never saw you again.

There is much more to tell you. I hope one day you will let me do so in person. For a long time, I felt I did not have the right to search for you - I even hoped that one day you might find me. But then I thought maybe we were both waiting. So that is why I have written, hoping you will want to know me.

I know that nothing can be done about the years that have passed, but I hope that in some way, whatever way you like, we can have a future together. I don't want to step in place of your adopted family, interrupt your life or cause any problems for you. I simply want to know you. I want you to know that however you respond, or even if you choose not to respond, that I loved you the day you were born and will continue to love you always in my heart.

*Katerina,
your other mother who has never forgotten you.*

She let the air rush [DS23] out of her lungs in a little gasp. She took off her glasses and started using the tablecloth to clean them. She had not expected it to be such an important letter. She [DS24] held her glasses up in front of her and squinted through them to check they were now clear, but she must have dropped a bit of butter on the tablecloth earlier, as the left-hand lens was now almost opaque. She fetched [DS25] a paper kitchen towel from beside the sink and tried again. It was better this time and now she could clearly see the photograph of her husband on the mantelpiece. How young he looked. It had been taken just before they were married. She recalled how they had thought then that they had plenty of time. Time for skiing trips, time for summer holidays on the Med, time to work and save for a bigger house, plenty of time for a family. But for some reason it had never happened, there was always some reason to put it off, some reason to say, 'next year....' And then he was gone, a cut from a rusty nail, dug up when weeding the back garden, festered for a week, and

the septicaemia killed him in forty-eight hours. She had all the time in the world after that – but then she no longer needed it.

She picked the letter up and read it again. Who was Anya? Just after her husband had died, Barbara had downsized from a large house in Chilbolton Avenue, on the outskirts of Winchester into the centre of the town. No need for four bedrooms and two bathrooms now, she had told herself, and much easier to walk to the shops. That had been ten years ago. The previous occupant had lived in the house since his youth, but had finally and reluctantly gone into Nursing Home, quite coincidentally, in one of the large houses in Chilbolton Avenue. So there had been no Anya at number 15. Barbara looked at the smudged address on the envelope. Maybe it was meant for number 25? Or number 35 – no, wait – there wasn't a number 35, the terrace only went as far as 28 or 29 she thought. And the surname. That could be her name, Johnston, or maybe Johnson or maybe even Robson. She could not think of anyone living in Parchment Street with any of those names. But then, socialising with the neighbours was not one of her strong points. Well, maybe now was the time to meet a few more people. She would take the letter and go and knock on a few doors and see what she could find.

Subsequent chapters –

<<Peter and the Bishop are still transporting orphans from various war zones, using church missionary visits, to be now legally adopted in Winchester. However, to fund the orphan placement, they are fraudulently manipulating the church's assets. To pay the blackmail, Peter, the bishop, and the church accountants, inflate the value of the church property that is being redeveloped in the centre of Winchester, to secure long loans, which are then used to pay the blackmail. The evidence of this is covered up by the accountants. (It's not clear to me yet how the accountants expect to get away with this in the long term)

The bishop's assistant has sent a consignment of old books to the local Oxfam shop, and the manager, Rachel, finds an incriminating letter tucked into the back of one of them. She tries blackmail Peter and the bishop, and they agree, increasing the pressure on them.>>

<<Anya is assigned by her software firm to recover the Church's accounting system when it is hacked. By examining the accounting software backup tapes, she is able to see the fraud that has been going on but before she visits Peter to confront him. He shows her a very old book, containing a manuscript from the 12th century, describing the drowning pool in the Cathedral crypt, and which suggests that if you swim in the drowning pool, then strange things happen (in fact the swimmer will go back into the body of another swimmer in the pool, but in another time). This manuscript was apparently written at the time the old Anglo-Saxon Winchester Minster was being replaced by a new (in 1093) Norman Cathedral. The manuscript hints that a swimmer in the pool can retrieve a priceless artefact that was hidden in the pool. The manuscript was written by Father Hugh, a monk, who lived at the time the old Winchester Minster was being destroyed, and the new Cathedral was being built. The bodies of the Anglo-Saxon kings are being transferred from the old Minster to the new Cathedral. (In fact, Father Hugh has been helped by Peter to write this manuscript, so that the instructions on how to use the pool can then be passed forward in time via the manuscript for Peter and Anya to find – yes this is a nice paradox). But why did Father Hugh originally dive into the pool and allow Peter to travel back in time and write the manuscript? – the reason is that Father Hugh was trying to hide the Anglo-Saxon crown from his Norman masters as they would not accept it in the new Normal cathedral, even though they did accept the bones of the old Saxon kings from the old Minster). Peter and Anya make a plan to somehow get the artefact from the 12th century (a chalice? The Anglo-Saxon crown of England?) back using the drowning pool. The problem is that there is no physical time travel in the drowning pool, only an exchange of consciousness, so no material can be moved across time directly. They work out though that they can simply retrieve the artefact from the pool, since it has been there for 900 years. But they still need to Father Hugh to write the manuscript in the 12C that will then be found by Peter in the 20C that tells Peter about the drowning pool. So Peter and Hugh need to exchange bodies at least once.

We have already seen in Chapter 1 that Peter dives into the pool and he and Hugh exchange bodies. Anya explains to Hugh (in Peter's body) in the 20thC what the plan is and Hugh agrees. Meanwhile Peter (in Hugh's body) is writing the manuscript and ensuring it will be preserved in the Cathedral. Hugh dives into the pool to return, and both Hugh and Peter are now back in their correct, respective centuries.

Peter and Anya recover the Anglo-Saxon crown in 2010 from the Cathedral well. (How come no-one found it in the intervening centuries?) It is sold, and the Bishop's books now balance. 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. When Katerina travels to Winchester, Peter mediates between her and Barbara – Katerina is overjoyed to be reunited with Anya. Peter decides to take one last dive in the well to visit Hugh and tell him how the plan worked out. The novel ends, waiting for Peter's body to resurface from the pool. It never does.>>

