



THE
CHALICE
WELL

The title is rendered in a classic serif font. The word 'THE' is positioned above 'CHALICE'. The letter 'C' in 'CHALICE' is significantly larger and features a decorative flourish that loops around to the left. The word 'WELL' is positioned below 'CHALICE'. The letters 'W' and 'L' in 'WELL' are also decorated with symmetrical, leaf-like flourishes extending outwards.

SB POSTLEWHITE

I wait.
Through tilt and wheel, cycle, hour.
As eons roll their relentless passage on
I wait.

I watch.
Horse, then steam, oil, power.
The progress of century's achievement
I watch.

I know.
What was and what will be.
The promised once and future. He comes
I know.

CHAPTER ONE

FOSSICKING FOLLY

Simon had found nothing but empty dirt lately, and frankly, he was sick of it. He kicked at the soil and sighed.

‘Nothing but natural.’

Archaeology was his first love; as a child he had watched Indiana Jones fight his way around the big screen and he had been hooked. Now he lived for the thrill of the chase for knowledge. Searching the past for answers, picking away at them like an itchy scab. But he was done. Weeks of scratching around in ground as hard as cement hadn’t turned up anything significant. They had surveyed, dug test pits. Even the detectorists searching the spoil heaps had come back empty-handed. If it hadn’t been for the sense of awe he had for this place, he would have packed it in already.

Glastonbury Tor rose behind him, a physical reminder of why he was here. He had worked with Pippa and Tom Bennet last summer at Tintagel while still a student. When he heard they were heading up the team at Glastonbury, it seemed a natural progression to work with them there. So after finishing his degree last year, he had applied and joined the team at The Well dig.

Glastonbury. The name itself conjured mystery. Its origins shrouded in the unproven suggestions and folklore that over the centuries, had become blended with its actual past. To work on

a dig here was an archaeologist's dream. The chance to uncover something that proved one of the stories to be true was not to be missed. Besides this, he'd scored tickets to the festival.

Simon looked at his watch. 'Eleven thirty; lunch time.' He dusted off his trowel, wiping it back and forth across the leg of his army store fatigues before stuffing it, trowel end first, into his right back pocket. Picking up his bucket, he walked to the spoil heap and dumped its contents unceremoniously on top. The heavy chain inside his shirt irritated his chest hair, and he scratched at it absentmindedly.

'Hi Simon.'

He jumped, quickly securing the chain deep inside his shirt once more.

'Hi Darcy.' He grabbed her up in a big bear hug. Loving the clean, fresh smell of her hair as it tickled his nose. 'How ya been, lover?' He released her slowly.

'Yeah, good. You?'

'So, so.'

He shrugged. There was something in his eyes. It was far away at the back, but as fast as it was there, it was gone. He smiled down at her.

'Hey, I have something for you,' said Simon.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a slip of card, passing it over to her. His smile changed into a grin, almost from one side of his face to the other.

'What's this?' Darcy took the card from him and turned it over in her hand.

2002 GLASTONBURY MUSIC FESTIVAL.

1 ADULT ADMISSION. ALL STAGE PASS.

'Will you go with me?'

'Go with you? This is amazing! Of course. But are you sure? Wouldn't you rather take someone else? One of your uni friends?'

‘No. I can’t think of anyone else I’d rather be there with.’

‘Okay, well, that’s it then. You’ve got yourself a date.’

Simon’s grin widened.

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Pippa looked into the rust-coloured water of the well, trying to focus her mind. She could not keep either it or her body still. She returned to pacing back and forth.

She’s late. What’s keeping her? Why doesn’t she ring me?

Ever since Darcy’s accident two years before, Pippa had smothered her daughter. Perhaps in an attempt to make up for any shortcomings Pippa imagined she must have as Darcy’s mother.

Darcy had finished high school last year and had since been at a college in Exeter. She had sailed through her AS year. Tom and Pippa were thrilled by her straight A’s in all subjects and a commendation in History.

Pippa stamped her foot, banging her clenched fists against her sides.

Where was she?

‘Mum?’

Turning, Pippa looked up into the frowning face of her daughter.

She had got so tall.

‘Oh! It’s wonderful to have you home.’

Pippa’s arms flew around Darcy’s neck, and she held her tightly for a long moment before stepping back. Scrutinising Darcy for anything that might suggest she was in less than perfect health, Pippa’s gaze was drawn to Darcy’s bare midriff.

‘You’re so thin. Are you eating?’

Darcy rolled her eyes. ‘Yes, Mum. Of course, I am. Right now, I could eat a mouldy donkey. Where’s Dad? He does know we’re supposed to be meeting for lunch?’

‘Yes, he does. I reminded him about it only this morning. He’s just gone to have a quick word with Simon.’

Darcy’s frown deepened. ‘Why? What’s the matter with Simon?’

‘We’re not sure. He’s distracted. Not himself.’

‘I’ll talk to him.’

‘Why do you think you would have any more success than your dad?’ Pippa smirked.

‘Because Dad is clueless when it comes to anything other than archaeology. You know that.’

Pippa laughed.

‘You know I’m right Mum.’

‘Yes love, I do.’

Darcy and Pippa heard footsteps on the gravel behind them.

‘Hello gorgeous. You look great.’

Tom Bennet smiled and hugged his daughter tightly.

‘She looks thin,’ said Pippa.

A frown, so much like her daughter’s, appeared across her forehead.

‘I’m hungry,’ said Darcy. ‘Feed me.’

She made a face and imitated an animal begging for food.

‘Come on then,’ said Tom. ‘Let’s get going or there’ll be no lunch left.’

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They walked along Chilkwell Street, chatting happily together until, turning into Bere Lane, they found the entrance to the Rural Life Museum and went on through into the Grain Store Cafe.

‘So, what’s up with Simon then?’ said Darcy.

She had been studying the menu but lifted her eyes now, fixing both her parents opposite with a serious stare.

‘No idea,’ Tom said. Darcy’s father shrugged and sipped his glass

of water. 'His heart's just not in it anymore. I talked with him this morning, and all he could think about was the festival. It's like he's lost all interest in work.'

'It is next week Dad. That's pretty distracting for most people. You do know Bowie headlined last year? Thirty years since his first gig there. Tickets are like gold dust.'

'Maybe a week off is just what Simon needs, Honey,' said Pippa. 'He can get whatever this is out of his system.'

A waitress interrupted them, quipping about the state of the British summer before taking their order and moving off to another table.

'I expect he's just tired,' Pippa continued. 'I know I am. This summer has been one long fight with the dirt. I had to take a mattock to a trench yesterday. Hard as a concrete slab it was, I just couldn't shift even an inch of topsoil without nearly breaking my arms off.'

Darcy laughed. Her mother's face was screwed up in an affectation of agony as she rubbed at her shoulders.

'You're just getting old,' said Tom. 'Either that, or you need more practice.'

He poked a bony finger at his wife's shoulder and winked at Darcy. The waitress was back, this time with food and more chatty platitudes. Darcy accepted her plate gratefully, immediately tucking into the pile of pasta. Pippa glanced across the table and smiled as she watched her daughter eating.

'Stop it, Mum.'

'Okay, okay. I have nothing more to say on the subject.'

*

He was freezing. Early morning in the castle's courtyard was always icy, even in the height of summer. He swished water from the trough over his face. The cold and the water only combined to make his lack

of sleep painful. The walls rising around him were even more prison-like this morning. They stole his breath, space, and any chance of peace of mind he clung to. He had to get out.

*

The sun was relentless. Pippa untied the sleeved shirt from around her waist and slipped it on over her red arms and shoulders. She was drawing and labelling the layers of stratigraphy in her trench. This was her thing, and she was great at it. Tom had to admit that his wife's sketches were intricately detailed and beautiful. Much better than his. He looked at her, tutting. She would be very sore later.

Tom bent low and scraped. Yes, it was there, the ever so slightly darker line in the dirt indicating something had rotted away hundreds of years before. He retrieved his water bottle and carefully poured it over the mark. The dark circle became clearer as the water seeped into the soil, just as it had with the others. Later he would try to locate the marks left by rain dripping from ancient eaves hundreds of years before. That would add weight to his substantial Saxon building theory. Right now, though, he was off to look for Simon.

Where had he got to?

Quite frankly, Simon's attitude had been crappy lately. Tom was going to have it out with him once and for all. He'd tried yesterday, but it had been a waste of time. If Simon couldn't do his job, he would have to go. There was no room on this dig for passengers. Everyone must pull their weight.

'Simon! There you are.'

'I was just getting a cup of tea from the shed.'

'You've been gone an hour. It had better be a bloody good cup of tea.' Simon winced. 'What's going on with you. Are you sick?'

Simon shook his head. 'Come on, mate. I'm doing my best here, but you know I'm useless with this sort of thing. Do you need help? Anything?'

Simon just looked at the ground. 'Oh, for god's sake, just tell me.'

Simon started to unbutton the front of his shirt. Tom watched him, astonished. When Simon reached the button just above his waist, he pulled the shirt open, revealing his chest. It was swollen, and great red welts stood up from the skin as if he'd been punched.

Tom's breath drew in through his clenched teeth. 'Bloody hell. What have you done to yourself?'

'I don't know.'

'You need to see a doctor. Make an appointment and go today. And Simon, whatever this is, this thing that's going on with you. Fix it. Have your festival break next week and come back fixed. You understand what I'm saying?'

'Yeah, I hear you. Loud and clear.'

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Simon walked back into the shed. He slammed his cup down on the sink drainer and took the weight of himself on two arms splayed on either side. His breath was coming fast and shallow. Closing his eyes, he gripped the freestanding drainer's edges, squeezing until his fingers were a bloodless white. His breath started to slow, and he opened his eyes again.

His bag lay in the corner where he had left it that morning. Reaching inside, he pulled out the chain. Even in the darkness, it glinted. The compass swung back and forth as he held it. He'd taken to keeping it in his bag soon after the welts appeared; how could he have known he would be allergic to whatever type of metal it was made from? Copper, but what else? He hadn't been able to find out yet.

When he'd found the compass two years before at Tintagel, he'd logged it with all the other finds, lovingly recorded it, and boxed it away ready for storage. But before the end of the dig, he had snuck into the finds room and taken it. Simon didn't know what impulse had driven him to take it, but he couldn't be parted from the compass. He just knew it was important. Nobody even missed it until months later, by which time there was no way of knowing what had happened to it. David, Tom, and Pippa had been devastated. They quizzed everyone, searched everywhere, but it had remained lost.