

The  
Hereward  
Inheritance



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*by*  
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This is a work of fiction. All characters depicted are fictitious and no resemblance is intended to any person, living, dead, or not feeling very well.

To Russell Baggis,  
Nigel F. Barrel,  
and Dusty Aspinall,  
Erstwhile companions  
of my writing hours.

“We have heard the  
chimes of midnight.”



# ONE

*The Abbot was out of sorts. He had been, all day. He had retired the previous night after Compline and had slept fitfully, if at all. Praying had not helped. He expected they would come today, and he knew what he must do. The sky was grey, with billowing clouds. It looked windy outside as well, and occasionally, a draught made his fat tallow candle gutter. He glanced nervously out of the window, and then bent again over his parchment. They would come soon. They were bound to come soon. He wrote steadily, concentrating on the formation of the minuscule letters on the ragged page. When he had finished, finally, he leaned back and reviewed what he had written. Then, grim-visaged, he rose from the table and, picking up a small handbell on the way, crossed to the open door of his office in a shuffling movement, gathering his vestments round him as he went, and rang the bell impatiently, into the empty corridor.*

*By the time had had sat back down, he could already hear the footsteps of Brother Nonemo approaching down the corridor.*

*“Master?” The monk hesitated at the threshold. Abbot Thorketil held out the manuscript to him, and he took it, wordlessly, accepting the folded parchment leaf gingerly, as if it was both toxic and fragile, and might do him harm. Which indeed they might, thought the Abbot.*

*“Brother Nonemo, listen to me. As we discussed privily, some men are coming for me. Bad men. They will bring bad times for all of us. They will want what I have just given you. I do not intend for them to find me when they come, but if they do find me, I will tell them I know not of what they speak, and trust in Our Lady to safeguard me. You will be in the Infirmary, dissembling madness, as we planned. Do you understand this?”*

*Brother Nonemo nodded, dumbstruck, a petrified rabbit.*

*“When they cannot find me, they will search everywhere for that document, and the items it refers to. They will ask everyone, but no-one will know. Only you will know where it is, and they will not ask you, because, although you will be here, your wits have left you, and you will answer as if you have no idea what they mean. Now, know you of somewhere that you can secrete this parchment?”*

*Again, Brother Nonemo nodded, his eyes wide with fear.*

*“Yes, Master, I will –”*

*“Don't tell me, you fool!” hissed Abbot Thorketil, angrily, “just do it. I must never know. If all goes well, I will return and it may be burnt. If bad times do come, you must keep it safe, and only hand it on, on pain of death, to one person whom you love and trust, and only when it is absolutely necessary. Do you understand? Do you?”*

*Brother Nonemo nodded a third time, and the Abbot dismissed him with a curt “Now, go thy ways!”*

*Alone again in his cell, the Abbot took a deep breath and looked around. He wondered when, if ever, he would ever sit at his chair by the window again, with its commanding view of the sweep of the Abbey lawns and grounds. There was no time, though. Quickly, he grabbed a Missal and a Rosary from the coarse wooden table, almost upsetting his ink-pot in the process, turned on his heel, and swept from the room without looking back.*

# TWO

“Have you riddled the fire, Glasson?” Jenny’s voice from the kitchen penetrated the still air which surrounded his temporary reverie. He thought for a moment, crouching by the stove, then replied,

“Yes, I asked it the difference between a bad marksman and a constipated owl. One shoots but can’t hit...”

“Funn-ee. You’ll be telling me next you treated the woodworm!”

“Yep, yesterday we went to the zoo, and tomorrow it’s the pictures.”

“Ho, Ho!” She walked in, uttering the final two syllables at normal volume, as she came barrelling through the connecting door. She had her jacket on, and she was jingling her car keys in her hand, ready for the off.

They had lived in the ramshackle cottage at Filldyke Lode for almost six months, all through the winter. Fred had described the location, when offering Glasson the job, as being “the arse-end of nowhere,

and flat as a witch's tit". He had not been wrong on either account, and there had been some times during the long dark winter nights that year, when the winds came howling out of Siberia, across the north German plain, picked up a little moisture on their way over the North Sea, and the first thing they hit was Filldyke Lode, seemingly.

Jenny had adapted well to their living together, ever since their crazy conversation that day in the pub in Cambridge, when she had agreed to move in with Glasson, the day of his daughter's funeral, no less, and without having ever even so much as kissed him. In one sense it had felt odd to feel his angular, male presence alongside her in the bed, but on the nights when the wind howled worst, she had felt strangely comforted by it as well.

Glasson had proved to be austere, even military or monkish in his personal habits; he didn't leave the toilet seat up, or squeeze the toothpaste from the top. For his part, he accepted her presence gratefully. It had, after all, been his idea, although, if you had asked him, he would probably simply have given you one of his enigmatic stares.

Glasson had suspected initially that Fred had offered him the job, and the cottage, more out of sympathy than anything else, and they were both

pleasantly surprised when, rather than being a passenger in his garden centre and glasshouses, Glasson had turned out to have a natural aptitude for the job and a real affinity with plants in general. The fact that he was hard-working and quick to learn proved to be an added bonus. He fitted in with Fred's existing workforce, such as they were, two middle-aged Irish blokes, twins in fact, Dermot and Michael, who, on account of their fund of outrageous stories from their time when, in a previous life, they worked on IT installation contracts in Mumbai, were known to all and sundry by their self-appointed nickname of "The Bombay Micks"; a few part-timers he employed on a rota at busy times, and Ian, who was a bit of a mystery man in his own right. He came from the old East Riding of Yorkshire, from the picturesque little village of Warter, but he claimed to have spent time living with the Hopi tribe in Arizona, and to have Native American origins, which had led to Fred christening him, one drunken night down the pub, as "Warter Buffalo", and which was quickly shortened to "Buff".

Jenny had even found the transition from the leafier suburbs of Glasgow to the flat bleakness of the Fens to be easier than she'd expected. Disposing of her flat had been the most problematic aspect of the move.

Apart from that, all her remaining possessions – at least all that she was interested in bringing down with her – had fitted easily into her small car, once it had been repaired. Not wanting to sell the flat at the bottom of the property market, she'd gone via the University network of people who knew people who knew people, and had managed to find a reliable tenant for it, which saved her the problem of having to deal with estate agents at a distance. When she had remarked on this to Glasson, he observed rather mordantly that in his opinion “at a distance” was the best, indeed the only, way to deal with estate agents.

Work had been more difficult. The structure of the archaeological establishment meant that it wasn't possible simply to leave an archaeological job in Scotland and walk into one in Cambridgeshire; or anywhere else, for that matter, with scarce funding being cut back even further. The local archaeological scene was sewn up, and devoid of any opportunities for newcomers – at least paid opportunities, and she didn't want to cramp her own style by volunteering beneath her current career level. After a rather bleak period of a few weeks when they looked at all sorts of options, including stacking shelves at the local supermarket or crop-picking, the job at the Visitor Centre at the Abbey had come up, and a glowing

reference from her former boss at Strathloan, Allan Dakin, had swung it in her favour.

Glasson had asked her, in bed one morning, if she had ever regretted the decision she had made on the day of his daughter's funeral, when they had both sat in that busy city-centre pub in Cambridge, amongst the clatter and the bustle, and she had given him permission to tear up her hitch-hiking sign that was intended to take her back to Glasgow. They had both laughed afterwards about the theatricality of the moment, when it had dawned on them that Glasson's gesture, and her assent, in any case, had been potentially only symbolic, because although her timescale had meant that it was imperative she hitched down to Cambridge, in order to get there in time for his daughter's funeral, she could actually have gone back on the coach or the train, which would in fact have suited her much better.

They both knew, however, that it had also been much more than symbolic; or rather that it had been symbolic, but on a much deeper level. When they had eventually gone back to Glasson's rooms at Emmaus College that afternoon, she had been prepared to make love to him, to allow, finally, the physical consummation of that attraction they had both first felt during that summer evening when they had sat in

the long grass amongst the standing stones of The Nine Quines.

But, in the end, although they had gone to bed (after talking long over a couple of bottles of nondescript red wine) it had, in the end, merely been to hold each other, turning in on each other like the labyrinths of a seashell, while the CD which Glasson had put on, Thomas Tallis's *Spem in Alium*, played over and over again on repeat. She had been surprised how easily their bodies fitted together in physical intimacy, like two spoons on a drawer.

Eventually, when evening had fallen, she had risen gently from his side, leaving him sleeping, wrapped herself in his ratty old dressing gown, which she had discovered hanging on a peg behind the door, softly touched her hand to the button of the CD player to quieten it, and then, after investigating his food cupboards and meagre kitchen, brought them both a plate of hot buttered toast with Gentlemen's Relish and - despite the incongruity of the hour - a steaming pot of English Breakfast Tea, back into the bedroom, on a tray.

They had nibbled and sipped their way through the repast in relative silence, while watching the dark sky outside the window and the first stars begin to show over the Quad. Then slept again.

Early the next day, Glasson had called Fred Goodison and accepted the job at the nursery, and from then on, life for both Glasson and Jenny had entered a whirlwind of transition, which had only recently come to an end. Glasson had only been back to Cambridge once, on Lucy's birthday, to visit her grave. He'd gone alone, despite Jenny's offer of accompaniment, and had planted out some flowers which he had been propagating specially, on her grave. Other than that, he had not acknowledged in any way to any living soul that he was undergoing the rigours of grieving.

The cottage itself, though not in the best of nick and in need of some renovation, had been surprisingly large. Though described as a "cottage", it actually post-dated thatched roofs, pargetting and low, beamed ceilings. "Cottage" was, in fact, poetic licence for "Artisan's Dwelling". Such beams as there were had been machine-cut by Victorian and Edwardian carpenters, rather than hand-hewn by the Jacobean. The walls were redoubtable industrial brick, probably from as near as Peterborough, and the presence of the solid-fuel-burning stove had meant that they spent a cosy winter, and to all intents and purposes, spring brought with it the cheerier prospect of building on what they had achieved so far. Basically, they had to admit that, by and large, all things considered, they

were, more or less, happy, given of course that no-one really knows they have been happy until the moment has passed, and been replaced with something less appealing.

“Are you ready, then?” Once more, Jenny’s querulous tone interrupted his thoughts. There was no escaping it, he had to help her with the shopping, indeed, he had offered to do the shopping, not wishing to appear genderist, and she had refused, having already worked out that she was the more practical and useful part of the relationship, at least when it came to preventing them from starving. On the dig at the Nine Quines, she recalled, if she hadn’t made the coffees, some of her more useless male colleagues would undoubtedly have perished from caffeine deficiency. She hustled him out of the front door, and locked it briskly behind them.