

The Haunting of Grovnor Castle

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All characters in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental.



Prologue

For centuries Grovnor Castle had been a lifeless, dormant place, buried in the wood—lost in time, like a ghost castle, out on the edge of reality—on the fringes of what lay beyond.

The inhabitants about the desolate estate, even in the twenty-first century, had inundated their descendants with alarming accounts of evil, mysterious magical forces, and transcendent creatures, dwelling in the woods.

Local newspapers, over centuries, had continuously reported and warned their readers of unexplained occurrences there.

On the 17th of August 1898, of the worst, of the detailed accounts specified, travelers, on horseback, had come upon the mutilated remains of gypsies, scattered throughout the wood, south of the castle, at midnight, and had been attacked and chased, by things with fearful sounds, and swift-moving lights, shifting through the trees.

Thomas Bryson (a renowned and leading research scientist—who had always characteristically disregarded claims of supernatural phenomena), as a teenager,

had stayed at Grovnor Castle (under the ownership of his uncle, Sir Richard Randall), where he had endured a surreal night, on his own, in a central room, listening to extraordinary sounds—like they had been materializing from somewhere – like hell breaking into reality.

Sounds like mischievous demons and unearthly elementals had tormented its confines throughout the night!

Stories of the place being haunted, told to him by the servants, had captivated him throughout his life!

So while he had been returning to Scotland (after he had been working in the United States, on behalf of the British government), and he had found out about Sir Richard's death, he had decided to seize the unique opportunity of investigating what he had only heard there, and one of the greatest mysteries that he had encountered!

Two leading scientists, psychic investigators, from previous psychic investigations that he had tried evaluating, had accompanied him to the castle. And he had slept in the same bedroom, which had been identical to the way that he had left it. Then, incredibly, during that night, the nightmare sounds had viciously emerged once again. But neither he nor the two psychic investigators could unravel what had been occurring.

So, during the next morning, they had brought in teams of eminent and leading scientists (including psychic investigators), and extensive equipment, to begin a decisive investigation.

PART I

The Elementals.

Chapter 1

Grovnor Castle.

The moon probed deep into the dark clouds, radiating the colossal tomb shape of the castle, out of the darkness, like a haunted castle in a film, as the four of them marched along the lane, from the surrounding wood.

It was still evening, but dark, in the middle of winter, in one of the most desolate regions of the Scottish Highlands, and snow was covering the surreal landscape.

They were breathless, and their legs could barely take them fast enough.

The outline of the castle was heavenly and deadly from the black wood.

The place had lingered there, unaltered, and Bryson no longer had the skepticism that he had once had.

He had vivid recollections of his first visit to the castle—with his original emotions—as a youth. It had been one of the most mysterious occurrences that he had ever encountered.

Even to this day, there was still something strange existing there. He had tried to disprove it on many occasions through his life, but it had never been possible. Especially due to his uncle, Sir Richard, avoiding his approaches for another visit.

He vividly recollected learning of his death from the small column in the newspaper, while he had been traveling back from California—where he had been on a confidential military project, as leading scientist, for the British government.

In the outer landscape, he wildly conjured up lurking demons, eying up their prey.

The castle was enormous—and as long as a football pitch, and as high as a five-story building.

It was ancient, weather-beaten, but historical.

Bryson studied pieces of the castle walls strewn about in the grass. They were immense square boulders.

Bryson recalled what he knew of the layout of it.

The castle was surrounded by trees, which went out for miles in every direction. At the front there was only one central door, but at the back there were two. One at the kitchen, and one near the end of the castle, at the right side (from the front).

The front door had a hall that led to the center of the castle, where a long corridor of rooms went from one end of the castle to the other. With rooms on both sides of the corridor (at the front and back of the castle).

The kitchen was in front of the hall (at the back of the castle). In the middle of the hall was one of the two doors to the dining room, located at the right side. The kitchen and dining room corridor doors were almost opposite each other. And the staircase was next to the kitchen, on the left side. The two floors above were almost identical, but without the hall, kitchen, and dining room.

Sir Richard's room had been on the top floor, at the end of left side of the castle, at the rooms at the back of the castle. And the rooms that they were now staying in were below it (on the second floor), but at the front of the castle. And the room that Bryson had originally stayed in, where the sounds were, was just along from the stairs on the second floor, at the central location, at the front of the castle (where the psychic investigators had brought in extensive equipment to begin a detailed investigation).

Bryson glared at Dr Reid, his late uncle's lawyer. He reminded him of a German professor, from his early days.

They had collected him from a taxi, on the road that the lane to the castle led to. And they were to join the others in the dining room, where Dr Reid was to reveal the will.

He listened attentively to Bryson, James, and Robert, with eagle-like eyes staring coolly at objects only directly in front of him. He seemed to be constantly controlling his temper! He clearly did not like something, which Bryson assumed was to do with the late Sir Richard, since that was the reason that he was there. He seemed familiar with the grounds, even in the dark, which he gave a sporadic gasp of fright to.

He thought little of Thomas Bryson, and his modern scientist features and approach. But he occasionally seemed to spot his similar resemblances to Sir Richard, which people often remarked about. He was also famous, energetic, used the same business-like approaches, learned everything that he could, and examined the universe at every conceivable angle.

Their shoes crunched into pebbles, as they drew near the castle.

The shapes of all the vehicles there became visible.

Robert, Robert Randall, his cousin, then started loudly chatting to James, Robert's younger brother.

Robert eagerly joked at Bryson, grinning: "So why do you think the only place to have all that noise is at those rooms then? Where we were—and all of you soon moved to!—I never heard a thing."

For a moment, from his tone, Bryson considered what the others had heard—as he had heard little at the end rooms where he had moved. They could have heard the winter Highland winds making similar sounds. Sounds at night, in such an environment, were only authenticated by scrupulous investigations.

"There're too many mysteries and not enough facts to be certain of anything!" he stated.

"I know a little history about this estate," Robert announced to James, for him to hear. "Few people know it, and I'm sure nobody has kept any written accounts... My father exclusively told me many things about this place..."

James humorously observed Bryson. "So what're your beliefs in 'ghosts'?"

He stopped himself reacting, and glared at him.

"I think that the universe holds many secrets," he muttered automatically. "And so far we haven't had a proper opportunity, and the right means, to prove properly that anything of that nature exists."

Robert glared, with fascination. "Science may not be able to explain many things!

"Things exist beyond this universe—beyond science!"

His views surprised him.

James's enthusiasm for answers was building up.

"What's so special about here? What happened here?"

"I don't believe that anyone has ever been sure," Robert answered. "There are legends that mention things... One of them suggests that it was something to do with what killed some of our ancestors, who'd been visiting here!"

"How did they die?" James asked, with confusion.

"Something slaughtered them, in the trees that once were here... Before they built this castle!"

James's face turned pale, and his eyes glared.

"But surely they had suspicions of what'd killed them? All legends have rough descriptions of...!"

"Nobody knew what they were. But I've heard that it was some form of a witch, and that they still haunt here!"

Robert staggered to the doorway; where he banged at the solid wooden doors, almost bruising his knuckles.

A deep thud appeared from somewhere inside the castle, as they stopped in front of it. And the door wearily creaked out. Heavily perfumed air swept out, heating their frozen faces.

A hunched elderly man, wearing thick round glasses, stood glaring at Bryson, from the dim hall.

Bryson recognized him as a cousin of Sir Richard.

"We've been waiting on you..." he explained.

"Has everyone arrived?" Dr Reid asked.

"Yes! They're all in the dining room."

He led them into the hall, and their eyes fell on glorious paintings, gleaming on the walls. Their ancient views of the estate, and of his ancestors, were enchantingly realistic.

Chapter 2

The Hidden Treasure.

The room slowly grew silent, with the suspense, as the moment drew near, and Bryson adjusted his seat.

Dr Reid stopped at the front of them, and ripped off the top of an envelope.

A glint of amusement appeared on his face as he put his head close, and peered into it.

He observed all the people sitting around the large table in the center of the dining room, and he anxiously took out an old video with a typed label by his fingertips. Then he showed it to them, with a glint of humor, followed by some sadness, and he rolled the envelope into a ball, and threw it into the fireplace.

"Sir Richard Randall requested that you watch this video," he explained blankly.

He signaled the butler, and he keenly took the video from him. Then he gently fitted it into a video recorder, beneath a TV, as though it were an old film reel.

There were signs of deterioration, with its colors making it resemble an old war film.

The shaking camera showed Sir Richard's bedroom.

The picture flickered, and stopped moving. Sir Richard then emerged, and briskly moved to an armchair.

He sat upright, staring directly at them.

"My ancestors passed this estate over to me—including some wealth. So I intend that this estate stay with my family.

"My only request from my family is for this estate to remain in the possession of a member of the family—who is at least capable of looking after it! No matter what the future holds...

"This task has not been easy...

"I've had considerable trouble choosing a successor!

"However, I've chosen Robert—my dear nephew! I wish you, Robert, to inherit the estate. I've left enough cash for you to keep it as I've requested.

"Through the years, I've acquired a vast sum, from careful business transactions.

"Though, through the years, I've learned that I prefer not to use it—and I'll keep it that way!

"I've considered what to do with it—and I wish it to go to the wisest of you, or whoever... Therefore, I've thought of a plan that will give each of you a fair chance to get it.

"I've hidden it in a safe place. All you need to do is find it!

"What I'm saying is that if you are good enough to get it—it's yours!

"I'll give you the first clue, to where it is, and nothing more... You must find the rest yourself!

"The clue is: where the last dwell.

"And I'll give you a week!

"For a week, from the showing of this, the entire estate will legally belong to all of you—and it will be yours if you find it.

"After ten days, it will probably belong to anyone who stumbles upon it."

He stared once, moved away, and the screen turned blank.

"How are we going to get that loot?" James whispered to Robert, for Bryson to hear. "He must have been rolling in it. He even hid it as a treasure!"

Helen, Robert's wife, moved over to them, and muttered: "Let's search the castle from top to bottom!"

Robert looked increasingly more determined to talk everyone into helping. "Our best clue must be that he would not have hidden it out of his sight!"

"So where did he sleep?" Helen asked.

Robert nervously shrugged. "At the top floor, of course!"

Chapter 3

The Top Floor.

At the top floor, Bryson entered slowly, feeling his way along the wall, as if he were entering a sacred domain.

The corridor had to be the darkest place in the castle. Even with the lights on, there were strange dark and gloomy glows.

Robert wandered about, offering everyone that he met a cigarette. He then spoke confidently with them, giving them confidence and his wisdom in carrying out the task ahead—while gently persuading them to do what he wished.

As they passed different rooms, it became clear that the cleaners had not been near there. Cobwebs and dirt shrouded everything!

“What now?” Helen asked blankly.

“We can separately look about,” Robert declared. “We can cover more...”

They split into groups, going in different directions.

Bryson marched straight towards Sir Richard’s room, and Robert briskly moved after him.

The others mainly agreed to search the corridor, and to check paintings and antiques.

The door to Sir Richard’s room at first seemed locked. But Robert knew something, and viciously shoved it, until it screeched open, and dust flew out from it—like he were entering a tomb.

The dimness and dust was shocking. Webs and fungus had already shrouded it.

“He liked a luxurious bed,” Robert moaned, humorously, patting the firm mattress, sending up a dust cloud, while checking his reactions. Bryson smirked!

They then crept around, listening to the creaks and cracks of the floorboards.

Bryson’s attention fell on the bed again, where he had died, and had stayed until a servant had found him: a month later.

When he moved away, he saw the humorous side of what he had been doing – eyeing up his deathbed.

He spotted drawers, and went to them.

They were mostly full of old clothes.

Robert investigated every object that he came to.

“This place turns more gruesome the more I see it!” he remarked, flicking webs away from him.

“Do you believe that he made a mistake allowing us to search here?” Bryson responded.

“He was no priest! He ruthlessly ran his business affairs... I saw a glint of sympathy in those eyes—which could only mean one thing...”

Bryson picked up an old bowler hat, realizing how much things had changed.

“Let’s check somewhere else!”

At another room, they could not help smile at James's methods of searching. He frantically yanked up floorboards, as Sarah, his wife, frowningly held up the carpet.

"Let's try the floorboards in *his* bedroom!" James announced.

Robert stood with his mouth open, realized something, and closed it.

"Good idea!" Sarah replied, quickly dropping the carpet, and they left towards the room.

When they moved into the corridor, Bryson realized that it was a good idea, and slowly followed them.

"I'll see you later," Robert answered firmly, going in the opposite direction.

Once in the room, James quickly pulled up the carpet, and started pulling up rotted nails with an old metal pole.

Bryson wandered about the room, and wondered if Sir Richard had made a mistake somewhere.

"Where the last dwell!" he mumbled.

He went over to the spot where he had been, when the camera had been on him.

He grabbed a seat, from the other side of the room, and he placed it at the spot—and from it, he studied a painting.

A repetitive forceful hammering appeared in the distance, and occasionally interrupted him enough to stop to listen.

While he considered the room from various perspectives, it escalated into a loud rummaging and banging.

Finally, James went to the door, to gaze along the corridor.

"They've found something!" he abruptly announced.

Bryson followed him, as he left.

The noises were coming from a room—where there was a cloud of dust hovering outside.

There were shudders going through the walls, and sounds of rocks crashing down!

Their looks changed to bewildered glances, as they approached it.

Had they found something already?

At the room, he saw chunks of rock and pieces of plaster scattered over the carpet, and the others crowded around an area of a wall, where there was a large hole.

They had discovered something concealed in the wall (perhaps after they had discovered that the wall had given a hollow tone—when they had banged it).

Bryson measured the approximate width of the wall with amazement. It was phenomenal how thick the wall between the rooms was, and he had not noticed it.

Yet it was far older than Sir Richard's era! And why had someone gone to such lengths to conceal it? Was there any connection between it and the disturbances that had occurred at the place?

Robert viciously smashed a heavy metal pole against the thick stone, while chunks of it crumbled away and crashed across the floor.

Robert dropped the pole, and the clang echoed from in it.

Then he crouched, crept over the debris, and climbed in.

Chapter 4

The Mysterious Find.

Bryson's eyes followed Robert moving off, and he swiftly followed.

A deep thud echoed down, from behind, as James entered.

The ebbing radiance of the torch clearly was not enough to allow more than three to go safely down.

He scarcely grasped the concept of why a tunnel was there. Surely Sir Richard had not built it.

By the fact that it was in a castle might prove that it might have been part of its defense against invaders.

Sounds took strange tones, and he strained his eyes more, trying to see further in, but there were no features of anything. The tunnel's small shape (not much larger than his height, and less than a meter in width) vanished into darkness.

As the steps descended sharply, he had to hold himself upright. Its drop almost seemed perpendicular.

He heard distant movements, and their growing surges, and Robert stopped, just ahead of him, with the torch oscillating irregularly. Its light swayed over the stone, and the narrow shaft seemed to vanish at a point.

A stone floor was below, and he climbed down.

A feeble glow came through a crack in a wall, and a faint voice could be heard beyond it.

"Who's that?" Robert whispered.

"I don't know!"

Robert shoved his head close to the crack.

"It's the butler!"

He yelled through the crack.

The startled features of the butler emerged next to it. Then his hands felt the wall.

"Where are you?"

"We are in a passage!"

Robert shoved the heavy mass with his shoulder, making the crack creak and widen.

The brightness from a window beamed out, and they entered the storeroom, at the back of the kitchen.

Someone had made the entrance out of castle stones (put together to hide it). The large cracks between the other bricks hid its shape well!

Chapter 5

Ghost Psychology.

The bedroom still seemed the same, with just the bed remaining there. The psychic research equipment was all over it, everywhere, and they speedily were monitoring it.

The night sky did not seem as dark with heavy snow floating about in it. The faint tread mark of a car was below, under a layer of snow. And the wood remained silent and lifeless.

"Someone seems to have a deep interest in your movements!" Mortimer muttered, at the doorway, glancing sideways, along the corridor.

Bryson knew that it had to be either Robert or James, over at the rooms. But James had been watching everyone! He looked the type that followed his orders to the word.

Bryson examined their thermometers carefully placed at the wall. It was just less than fourteen degrees centigrade. He estimated that the temperature outside was just below freezing point.

"What are the thermometers for?" he asked, for something to say, and to see if he could find out anything, which he did not already know. They were more silent than they normally were.

"Where there have been some manifestations, there have been drops in temperature – discovered before and during occurrences. Although I have never proven to myself that it happens."

"It would be a good way of detecting if there is something near you!" he replied. "So the room should *theoretically* feel cold before it!"

Bryson looked about the room. Most of the equipment was on loan. And, according to Merton, was being used in the field for the first time. (They would be carrying out tests and experiments with the equipment to test its capabilities, which could not be properly done in a research laboratory.)

Some of it he recognized from the work that he had done in the laboratory. In fact, he was sure that he had helped in the making of some of their components.

They would be checking for virtually all known forms of energy and matter disturbances (perhaps, if it was possible, fluctuations in time). Presumably if it could alter temperatures and produce all the effects that he had heard could be done, it could produce effects with air currents, gravity, magnetic fields, radioactivity, scent, sound waves, static, and the light spectrum. Most of the equipment was there to check everything in a degree that had not been done before!

"Why have you so many recorders along here?"

"We're trying to capture the best recording that we can, from here, as well as in the room behind the wall."

Bryson moved over to a different device. "Is this to detect vibrations?"

"Of course, and we've machines here that we'll use to check the different sound frequencies, to show us the exact sounds that are occurring, and what we are unable to hear. This information will be vital. We may be able to acquire some type of insight into what is happening here, with the right information."

"Have you any of your equipment in the room below?"

Mortimer strangely glared at him. "Why would you want to put anything down there?"

"To find out if there are any sounds there! And, if there are sounds, if they are louder or less louder than here. It may help to locate the exact position that the sounds are emerging from."

"That may be a good idea," Merton replied. "But do you think that it could be occurring there...? This room surely had the loudest sounds!"

"I've a few ideas, which I would like to check."

Mortimer moaned: "We wanted to get the right places."

"We can carry out your experiment tomorrow!"

Bryson picked up a glass, off the table, and poured some water into it. "That is perfect! What type of camera are you using over there?"

"That is a video camera to film our experiments. It's the best we could get, in case anything becomes visible. That one next to it is an infrared camera..."

Bryson began to leave. He was getting tired, and he needed the sleep. He silently tried to quench his thirst.

"Do you consider that it will capture anything?"

"Probably not...!" Merton quickly replied.

Chapter 6

Spiritual Manifestation.

Mist shifted about, beneath him, lingering in distant places.

A whisper came from an unseen place.

Radiant rays shone down, from a powerful light in the sky, which neither was the sun nor the moon. Its lunar-like radiance was visible everywhere.

The sky was golden in regions; lights twinkled through thick areas of mist on the horizon. A bright light suddenly appeared, deep in the vapor. It oscillated, and intensified.

A face emerged out of the mist, over its light. It resembled Sir Richard. It was somehow different, and put there by his mind, perhaps trying to control the dream.

A gurgle came from somewhere. He sensed the presence of many mysterious things, which existed about him.

The deep groans of something came from the edge of what he saw. Powerful movements rapidly brought it close.

A creature shape, in a mass of red energy, floated through the mist, towards him...

* * * * *

A loud screech ripped through him! Its unbelievable loudness making him conscious, and open his eyes wide.

The deep blackness of the room completely blinded him; and he stayed where he was, breathing silently.

In the blackness, at the end of his bed, something edged out, and he waited, stunned, for whatever was there to hit him hard.

Chapter 7

Psychic Experiments.

Bryson's anger faded with every stride he took through the empty corridor, heading towards the stairs.

He would always remember that creature's red features, glaring at him from the end of the bed, out of the blackness of the place, before it had vanished, after him virtually dying in disbelief.

Of course, the psychic researchers had only believed in what they had encountered (and preferably at night).

His thoughts turned to their hunt for the money.

The others had been constantly surprising him with their determination to find it. They had branched out, from the few rooms that they were searching, and they were now searching almost everywhere, in the same rigorous way.

They had even persuaded the servants and lawyer to help them. The lawyer had been going to leave, but they had persuaded him to stay around, especially to give them any advice, whenever they required it.

A few people, who he had never seen before, were roaming about, behind him somewhere, going in the direction that he went in.

Their sounds faded into the distance, when he arrived at the room where the psychic investigators were in.

It surprised him how long they had spent in the room.

Mortimer was still checking the equipment, but he stopped, and watched him enter from the corner of his eyes.

"Well, what did you discover?" he asked, settling down.

"We found a great deal!" Merton replied frankly, coming away from the window, where he was standing, glaring at the snow shrouding the landscape.

"But no break through...?"

"No proper leads..."

Bryson walked over to a digital thermometer, and tapped it, seeing if it would change. It then adjusted slightly to his body heat.

"Did the temperature change when it took place?"

"Those thermometers were not accurate enough to detect anything," Mortimer answered.

"Did you capture anything with the cameras?"

"Psychic energy appeared all over these rooms, from many locations ...

"But we never saw anything, anywhere, and there's nothing on the cameras. I don't believe that it will be visible! We had to have recorded what must be the most advanced and highest degrees of psychic fluctuations so far discovered. If we could come up with a way to get visible pictures, and it recorded..."

"Will you be checking the room below? We can establish that its nucleus is around that wall..."

Mortimer stopped what he was doing. "That's good!"

Merton nodded. "Okay, we'll do that!"

"Your uncle must have been raving mad putting you in that bed!"

"So what else did you discover?"

"We found some incredible frequencies from the wall."

"There must be a reason why that is mainly at the wall, and the other equipment is detecting *nothing*!"

"And why is it so loud?" Merton queried. "It produces an effect that it's occurring all about the place, from other locations—as well as it appearing at other locations!—which we detected."

"Can I hear your best recordings?" Bryson asked, as he glimpsed Merton playing with a machine.

Mechanically, Merton activated it, and a few crackles emerged, and chanting loudly came from its speakers.

"That is just before it occurred," Merton called out, with his ear at it.

With utter astonishment, Bryson staggered back, absolutely spellbound, marginally gaining control of his features, while intensely listening to a creature's roar, as though it were happening in front of him.

The sounds and the time that it had occurred were so precise that he knew that it could not have been from anything else except the thing that had been in his dream, and at the end of his bed.

Chapter 8

The Castle Library.

Most of his relatives were sitting in the dining room, chatting excitedly.

The hunt for the money was an exciting game, and he was sure that they were mainly overconfident. But why worry about it! They would either find it or they would not. They had nothing to lose.

Why not have a good time? Who knows! They might get something else of great value in the place. There were many generations of eccentric owners of the castle. Things in it had been there for an immense amount of time. Perhaps some valuable antique existed somewhere!

He lifted his soup spoon, which was far too flat, and managed to consume the small amount of soup on it. He heard the servants giggling, in another room.

He jerked, as two loud crackles came off the logs burning furiously in the fireplace, behind him. The heat from it made his back sweat.

"Well, how are your two friends doing?" Robert moaned, moving into a vacant seat.

"What...?"

Bryson anxiously took a sip of soup, and watched his chunky face smiling at him at the corner of his eye. For a moment, he wondered if he had found the answer to the clue, or something.

"They made some incredible recordings!"

Robert hesitated, and stopped smiling.

Bryson felt the warm air in the surrounding room, and he relaxed against the back of the seat. The corridor and rooms were cold, and he felt the coldness coming from there, through the door.

He lifted his wine glass, and tasted the sweet white German wine.

"That's odd! Did they not find anything else with all that equipment that arrived here?"

"They've not finished."

He lifted his arm, and allowed it to fall to his side.

Robert stretched his arms. "It's time to start work! I was thinking of bringing in some local workmen..."

"That could be a mistake! Even though it seems a good idea. I think we'll have to do more thinking—instead of taking up ever floorboard in the castle."

"Have you any ideas about the answer to that clue? None of us have come close to finding anything."

"It's too soon! It's too vague! But there must be an answer, and I shall continue..."

Robert stood up, and followed some of the others out of the door.

Bryson realized that the others were not properly searching the entire castle. They had agreed to concentrate in the right places!

Therefore, it would be a good idea for him to spend the morning wandering about the rooms, looking for anything. Perhaps it would help solve the clue.

He always wanted to search this castle. He had been unable to do it the last time that he was at it as the servants had kept him in the lounge, and had persuaded him not to go anywhere else.

He had the freedom to roam the castle, and he wanted to take full advantage of it before he left.

As he started going through the rooms on the bottom floor, which he had not seen anyone near, he realized that there were too many mysteries, and no noticeable means of solving them.

He stopped to rest at a room window, and realized the hopelessness of such an endeavor. He observed the dark parts of trees sticking out from the blanket of snow.

The snow had stopped, and the sky was cloudless.

Some ravens croaked, and flew up into the air, from nearby trees, as though someone was there.

A gentle breeze blew up some snow on the ledge, like grains of salt.

The furniture, about him, held his attention, as he was unable to determine what its use was. There was no bed. Just furniture—giving it the look of a study. It also had a door at its side, which had not been in any of the other rooms.

Its brass handle was stiff, feeling as if it had been that way for a long time, and he had to give it a hard jerk to make it budge. As it creaked open, a black switch became faintly visible on the white wall. It activated the lights, which flickered and grew bright.

It took a few seconds for the sight before him to sink in, and he stood steady, glaring at shelves of books, covering its walls.

As he approached them, it became clear that it was a small library.

He had dismissed that there were any books, as they'd not been aware of there being a book on the entire estate.

If an answer to the clue existed, he knew that it could well be there! Even though they seemed to be mainly only outdated books on city affairs, which had to have belonged to Sir Richard.

He scribbled down the subjects of the books, and added any interesting facts that he noticed. If he could find out more about Sir Richard, and what subjects he had been interested in, he might be able to discover where he would have been most likely to put it.

Yet, as he went through them, he became aware that they were very old business books, and that he might have changed considerably over the amount of time that he had acquired them to when he had made his video. His business past interests spanned a wide variety of subjects.

Some other books grabbed his attention, but only proved, to his amusement, that he had had an interest in pirates and ships. And, of course, even that somehow seemed to connect to his business interests. He tried to think of where a businessman such as him would have put things, but he could not think of anything.

It was going to take a considerable amount of time to check them in more detail, which could waste a vast amount of his time.

He was starting to enjoy the empty corridors, and vast limits of space, which existed there. His own home, and even the hotels, would never compensate for it. The silence, lack of crowds and city sounds was so unusual and glorious he would surely miss it.

Bryson made his way up to the top floor, listening to the voices there. He glanced about, and saw Sarah, with a mischievous smile. He instantly believed that they had been wrecking the place, to find what they wanted.

The women had rolled up the carpets, at part of the corridor, beside Sir Richard's room. While the men were searching through everything in the rooms further along.

"Has anyone found anything?" he uttered to James, detecting a scent of a perfume, which he did not recognize.

"I don't think so, but we are making good progress," he replied, with a slight smile.

Bryson tried to work out how many rooms they could properly check before the time limit.

They would not even progress close to it, but they were only searching the places where it was most likely to be, and there would be enough time to do that.

Bryson moved over to one of the rooms, where he heard Robert, checking the walls, for any hollow places.

"There he is!" he grunted.

"We were considering trying the outer walls," Robert announced, without hesitation. "What do you think?"

"That's a good idea!" Bryson answered, seeking a change of scenery, and to go outside. "We can have a good look at the castle. There may be something outside that will help us answer that clue."

"Perhaps it's in something on the outside of it!" James revealed.

Robert shrugged. Bryson could tell that Robert was beginning to lose faith in their plans.

He wondered if Sir Richard would have actually hid it on the outside. However, he could not imagine him climbing out to hide it, or putting it at the ground level. Outer parts of the structure were also crumbling away.

“Have you completed searching here?” he asked.

“We’ve searched most of it,” James replied. “We’re searching where we believe it could be.”

James looked about him. “Why did such a rich guy not have anything of value about him?”

“He explained that in ‘his video!’” Robert moaned.

“Even with his views, he should have had things: such as expensive jewellery.”

“Perhaps someone *took* everything out of his room!”

Chapter 9

The Map.

“Here’s an interesting one!” James loudly announced—standing up, and sitting back down—holding a tattered book by his fingers, allowing them to view it.

“It’s about castles!” Robert remarked excitedly, holding out his hand. “This castle may be in it!”

Robert took it, and laid it down.

But it was obvious that there was nothing to see, and he just flicked through the pages.

“Well, it’s a start! There may be some useful books.”

Suddenly Bryson saw a page from it lying on the floor, under the table – which clearly had fallen from it.

He picked it up, and unfolded it on the table in front of them.

“Well, what’s this?” James asked, frustrated.

“It’s an old drawing of *this* castle,” Robert replied.

But Bryson realized that it was more than a drawing—it was an ancient plan. It had far more detail, and it was a map of the interior—drawn by someone. (Something a tourist might use!)

After a few minutes, Robert lost interest.

“Are we going outside?” he announced, with a little hesitation. “What do you think?”

“That’s an idea,” Bryson answered, wondering if Sir Richard would really have hidden it on the outside.

“Good. We’ll go out *later* then!”

Chapter 10

Castle of Horrors.

A bitter breeze blew across Bryson's cheek, through a crack in the window frame. His fingers touched the cold surface of the glass, and he brushed his hand across it, cleaning it.

He left his hand on it, heating the frost on the other side, allowing it to melt enough for him to see out of it. He soon confirmed that it was not bright outside.

The brightness of the room light made him turn, to see Mortimer, with his hand at the switch. Bryson immediately went over to admire a Victorian painting on a wall, with his ears sensitive to any sounds.

The painting was like a view into the past, holding hidden clues to what he had experienced there, and he searched it trying to find clues. There had to be something that would slightly suggest something that might answer the mysteries of the castle.

He was soon racking his brain again, trying to scientifically determine what the sounds had been. He could tell that Merton and Mortimer had checked the rooms along the corridor from that room. The castle's vastness and that the scientists could encounter something unprepared seemed to stop them exploring it further.

Mortimer slightly turned his head from the window.

He had expected some of the others to take some interest and check the scientists and equipment, and give their opinions of what they thought of it. But they insisted in holding to their rule of avoiding there. They only marched past the rooms, taking small glances.

The two psychic investigators had offered no explanations, keeping their views to themselves, and were probably keeping their minds open until they had properly investigated the rooms. With the amount of equipment that they had brought, he was sure that they would shed some light on things.

For some reason, the whole corridor seemed to have dud light bulbs, making it look more dangerous, as well as gloomy. However, he was starting to believe that something had recently damaged the line of lights. It was very hard to imagine them allowing all the bulbs to go dud without replacing any. The rooms had their bulbs working, but he was unsure if anyone had been using them.

As he roamed the dark corridor, listening to the sounds at the other half of the corridor, he still searched for anything that they might have missed.

He wondered if it had been Sir Richard's intention, by giving him that room, to scare him out of coming back to the castle.

However, he considered it plausible that he might not have known it, as he was sure that he had not stayed in the rooms, because a servant had led him to it. Even though she might have been carrying out his commands. There were too many mysteries and not enough facts to accuse Sir Richard of anything.

Chapter 11

Treasure Hunting.

At the front of the castle, Bryson rubbed his hands, and shoved them deep into the pockets of his thick jacket.

He had forgotten how hideous the castle looked from the outside. It had a look of having deadly things behind all its black windows.

The sun faintly shone through gaps in the thick clouds, *edging under the trees*, casting long shadows, through wild eddies of falling snow dust, making the castle resemble a castle out of an old horror film.

Bryson studied a clearing going through the wood, in the mess of vegetation in front of him.

Robert and James finished walking around it, and started to move away to it.

They entered the trees, going through the woodland surrounding the castle, as flakes of snow blew about them.

Robert determinedly stayed in front of Bryson and James, as they marched off.

"Where're we going?" Bryson asked, watching Robert leading them away.

"We want to go over to a structure, out there," he replied, to his surprise. "It's in this direction! We saw it from a window on the top floor. None of us knew what it was! It's in the estate, but not on the plan."

* * * * *

The words of the clue echoed through Bryson's mind, as the structure emerged.

When they finally approached the structure, a blanket of snow started falling. The thickness of it, and the surrounding darkness, engulfing them, covered up the looks of it. And he was only able to get one proper look at it before they reached it.

They rhythmically crunched through layers of snow (reaching up to his knees in places), and as they arrived at it, he thought of it as a type of castle pavilion.

The door surprisingly never had a lock, but it was heavy, solid, and it firmly shut behind them.

Columns of stone went about its interior like a Greek temple, and, in the middle, stone steps descended to somewhere below.

"Let's check the underground chamber then," Robert spoke, not waiting any longer, moving down the steps.

At the bottom, Bryson stopped to watch Robert examine some large tombs.

Robert's dark figure, evidently startled, and strangely crouching, was speedily reading either something small or something hard to understand—but he saw that he had stumbled on something.

Chapter 12

The Vault.

Most of the words carved into the tomb were by all means to do with the clue. Yet, though the most important words were there, they were in a riddle only comprehensible to someone who would have known the things that it suggested.

What had grabbed Robert's attention had been that the tomb, of William Randall, had been the oldest. It had been what he had been looking for, as it was where his ancestor who had built the castle had been buried.

There were mentions of William Randall on surrounding tombs, of immediate descendants—with haunting mentions of him—many years later, as if he had been still around to read them.

"Do you get any of it?" James pleaded to Robert, after he had stayed watching him crouching in front of the tomb for an unbearably long time.

Robert pointed at the final words. "It's that part of it that's interesting: *where sanctuary dwells for the last*," he mumbled.

"Does it refer to him as being one of them?" James asked.

"It doesn't! It doesn't explain... That's what's wrong...!"

"Perhaps Sir Richard just put the money in it?"

"I'm trying to discover what it's referring to!"

"So we're at the same place as before."

The whole event confused Bryson, and it was turning to disappointment. It had made him happy though—at its simplicity. And there it was sitting out here.

Robert moved away, looking slightly baffled, as well as tired, but thinking of it; and James started copying down the words. Bryson was able to take a close look, from next to him. But he knew that they would be lucky to find anything.

What sort of person had he been though?

He decided to take another look at the other tombs, which had been his immediate descendants.

However, by the lack of anything that could suggest any insight, and by the behavior of James, he knew that the chances of finding it there were vanishing. And he could not think of what to do to put them back on the trail.

For a long time, Bryson went from tomb to tomb, and Robert and James did likewise—continuing to read them—until it was obvious that it was the only clue.

"So, shall we look then?" Robert muttered, moving over to the tomb, examining the lid, which obviously was made solid and heavy.

"How would Sir Richard have opened that?" James uttered, staring at it.

Bryson touched its surface, feeling crumbling bits of stone, dirt, and rotting vegetation spread over it, considering what they were doing.

There were no signs that anyone had already opened it—which Sir Richard ought to have done entering it. Had he had people and equipment to help him though? Yet would he have had trusted anyone, and given away that it was there.

He played with bits of vegetation, like moss.

He gave it a quick shove, pushing enough to check if it would move easily sideways, but it seemed firmly fixed in position, and would need much more force to shift it. The lid had to have been there since they built the place.

"Look!" Robert explained, going around it, at the other side. "It has marks on it—at this side."

Bryson saw that someone had entered it after all. The people who had buried him would not have had opened it with a crowbar—besides the marks were more recent.

"Why would Sir Richard have hidden the money in a grave?" Bryson asked, seeing his reactions.

“You may be correct! I know he was ‘eccentric’, but I don’t believe that he would have opened a tomb, to leave his money there—all those years ago—out here. And where some grave robber could get his hands on it...”

“Let’s just open it,” James responded. “We can search for clues! It shouldn’t take long, and we can lift it easily together.”

Bryson moved over to the opposite corner from James, and Robert briskly went to the middle.

It being almost stuck together, combined with its weight, made it difficult, but they managed to budge it, so that it was balancing against the end.

As Bryson rested, his sight finally fell on a skeleton, and he reacted to having the privilege of encountering his great ancestor.

There was little dampness, apart from in the dirt that had fallen from the edges.

William’s height had been roughly the same as his.

Traces of hair on his skull showed that he had had similar looks too.

Robert poked under it, to see if there was anything under there, but it was solid.

Bryson looked for anything that he had not acknowledged, and, as he had predicted, he spotted something.

A pendant buried—hidden away out of sight—between his remaining ribs.

His fingers probed through the bones to fetch it.

The pendant had to be valuable: it was made of gold, with tiny jewels embedded in it. Mostly diamonds!

He wiped it, and fitted it in his pocket. Then Robert and James started moving the lid back around.

“We’ve the words on the tomb,” James stated, holding the bit of paper. “The three of us may find something with some time ...”

He tapped it with his finger, perhaps considering if they could.

“We can have a copy of it each,” Robert replied. “And started upstairs. “And it’s too dark and dingy here to concentrate...”

They marched speedily up the stairs, as it became clear the darkness was completely engulfing the outside.

As they prepared leave, Bryson tapped the floor with his foot.

It was almost absurd! He dismissed the idea, and looked at the dark windows.

Pieces of material had fallen to the ground from curtains that had been at their sides.

He contemplated being buried there, out at the haunted castle.

Chapter 13

From the Depths of Hell.

The pale sunlight had vanished under the horizon. Then the black winter night had rapidly engulfed them, and they had lost their way, as they had briskly returned.

Thick snow shrouded everything, creating a mind-bending landscape, which Bryson was too exhausted to attempt to recognize.

It was shocking how easily they had got lost. They should have stuck to the corridor, but, in the blackness and snow, it had turned indistinguishable—from the other gaps leading into the outer wood. But they knew the general direction, and they were too exhausted to go back.

A peculiar whistle from an unknown place shadowed them, driving him insane, trying to identify it.

Their legs almost became stuck in a deep bog of stinking vegetation, which resembled quicksand as it grew in depth. But Robert insisted that it was not, and continued to take them on through it, as if it only were another small obstacle.

Then, out of nowhere, a light emerged from the undergrowth.

Its radiance pulsed, like a living thing, magically illuminating the snow and trees.

While they silently observed it, loud pounds of something of immense weight rushed out—at them—causing them to scurry away.

They furiously moved their legs in and out of bogs, shifting away to hard ground.

They ran almost blindly, up and down, over humps and rough ground, rushing through thick trees and snow.

The heavy beast sounds furiously chased them.

It was like a strange nightmare!

They were breathless, and their legs could not take them fast enough, and the thing was closing in on them.

The shape of the castle was blissful from the black wood.

Its lights radiated the colossal tomb shape, through the wood, and they forced their legs to go faster.

The appearance of the hideous place, out of the night, amidst the jungle of vegetation, was staggering!

It was like a phantom castle, out on the edge of realism, on the bounds of what lay beyond—and that they were falling into the depths of hell, trying to return there—to reality.

The place looked static, with supernaturally glowing walls.

Branches broke to pieces as they ran through them!

The trees looked as if they were ready to fall to dust, but for the forces of something supernatural.

As though it were suspending the place—within reality!

Behind him, within shifting lights, darting about, through the wood, he saw ghost images of creatures, shifting too, doing hideous things.

Yet all his looks showed him nothing of the heavy monster thing, rampaging towards them—of clearly a hideous nature—as well as proportions.

Their minds conjured up hiding demon creatures, as they entered the edge of the wood—as they were ready to leave it—and they looked for ways to avoid them.

And they rushed across to the castle, and staggered to the doorway; where James banged at the solid wooden doors, almost bruising his knuckles.

A deep thud appeared from somewhere inside, and the door wearily creaked out.

Bryson swiftly recognized Sir Richard's cousin, as moved out from beside the door. And he studied his hunched elderly figure, and thick round glasses, glaring at him.

“Come in! They’re waiting on you...!” he explained, angrily—not even noticing their appearances, or anything!

Chapter 14

A Hideous Death.

The bright light in large dining room made their eyes bulge as they entered, making him look around.

Two men and a woman were sitting silently, while curiously watching them.

Their weary faces showed no recognition of them.

Sir Richard’s cousin pointed Bryson out to them.

One of the men, the youngest and tallest of them, removed a notepad and pen, and the young woman sat upright—and both got ready to help the older man in the middle.

“You’re Thomas Bryson!” he exclaimed, writing something.

“Is everyone here?” Bryson asked, examining their official clothing (that of plain clothed detectives).

“They’re up at their rooms,” the older man answered authoritatively, showing that he was in command, and the man and woman with him were there to help him out.

“They’ll all be back down soon,” the woman replied, helping him to explain.

At that point, the older man, in one swift movement, entered the center of the room.

He stood firmly, with his hands gripping the top of the pockets of his trench coat, covering his suit.

“They’re present,” he explained. “That is... Except for one of the servants—Molly!”

Bryson made two attempts to identify him, but he was positive that he had not seen him before.

“Who’re you?” Robert finally asked, after resting.

“I’m Detective Inspector George Bailey.”

He silently studied Robert.

Robert and James then studied them, as a group.

Just as they finished, Inspector Bailey stepped back.

“I’m Inspector Bailey. I’m investigating her murder!”

“Here!” James asked, startled.

“Yes. Here!”

“Can you prove that you’re Inspector Bailey?” Robert asked.

Inspector Bailey produced his identification, which he grasped, with curiosity.

He adjusted his eyes twice to the light, before he examined it, and handed it back.

“You said that the others would be back down soon?”

“Yes...” Inspector Bailey replied, and suddenly stopped, forcing himself to leave something until later.

Chapter 15

Law and Order.

Inspector Bailey resumed his pacing, leaving a faint trail over the carpet. His expressions occasionally gave away how deeply troubled he was, and that, most of the time, he was not mentally in the room.

Bryson wondered how easily they normally solved such crimes. He was sure that Inspector Bailey was keeping hidden facts that they should know, which were troubling him, and which he probably did not intend to tell to any members of the public, unless forced to.

The others were mainly in the lounge, chiefly watching Inspector Bailey. They were waiting for something to occur, or him to come to some conclusion—perhaps waiting for him to lose his temper, and to argue with them. Then he might give them some information, to enlighten them.

Bryson gave occasional shudders, from the exertion he had experienced in the woods. His lungs felt as if they had sandpaper grated over them. The cold air that he had frantically pumped in and out of him had to have given him some kind of illness.

Robert and James sat at his sides, silenced by the whole event, glimpsing the window, as if something were going to come crashing through.

“How did the three of you manage to lose yourselves...?” the tall policeman inquired viciously—upset at Inspector Bailey not doing as he wished—examining again, trying to discover why they were so exhausted.

“The darkness and snow made us lose our way,” Robert explained, while keeping silent about what he thought had chased them.

The police obviously would not accept the full account, and Robert and James clearly did not wish to be involved in any way with the horrendous crime that had taken place in their absence.

Inspector Bailey turned his back to them—a yellow radiance flickered over the wall from him—and gray wisps of smoke rose from behind his shoulders. He swiftly gasped and blew out a cloud of smoke, from a cigarette.

He gradually turned, coughing into his handkerchief.

“I don’t understand,” Helen argued, “why someone would want to kill one of the servants?”

“Did anyone see anyone having an argument with her?” Inspector Bailey spoke, to Bryson’s amusement.

Nobody moved in the room, and Inspector Bailey continued to pace along in front of the fireplace.

“Where did she die?”

“Oh, the usually!” he muttered nervously. “The killer buried her body under the rubbish in one of the large metal bins, along from the kitchen door.”

“Who found her?” Bryson asked.

“She managed to stay alive until all of you left!

“They realized that she was missing, and searched where they had last seen her. They found strange marks on the floor, and followed them to her body.”

If it had been one of them, and not one of the other servants, who had done it, how could the person have done it? They had been in groups! If anyone had been missing, it would have been obvious.

Had this infernal place a killer? Yet who would want to kill an innocent, harmless, old servant?

Nothing about it made sense—but neither did anything else!—it was completely obvious that they would at least replace her (which was all he could make out).

From the looks that that he caught, he knew that the incident had affected the policemen. Some of them were now argumentative. And he was sure that they had not found any clues.

The killer had to be ruthless... And carefree, to have done it in the way that it had been done. The person had done it under their noses.

One of the policemen, wearing a uniform, who had been at the murder scene at the bins, strolled into the room, and silently conferred with Inspector Bailey. He spoke just out of range of their hearing his whispers. And Inspector Bailey never replied, or showed signs of what he said. Then they left the room.

Bryson touched his sore forehead with his fingers, feeling the coldness.

He saw that it had still stopped snowing, and there was a good chance, according to the forecast, that the weather would stay that way until the following day. Therefore, there was a chance that if there had been anything physically in the woods, chasing them, that the prints would be there.

He was beginning to believe that the place might have turned Sir Richard insane.

He wondered if the killer had an interest in the hidden money.

A vehicle screeched to a halt, outside the window, attracting the attention of the policemen in the other room, making one of them rush by, going to the door, with his walkie-talkie blaring out.

The policeman had a hard time opening the door, and Bryson listened to the woman's voice on his walkie-talkie. She had clearly been communicating with the police in the vehicle outside.

Bryson then spotted the stunned looks of some of the women in the room.

Inspector Bailey remained normal, giving no reactions.

Nobody debated leaving the room, but Inspector Bailey insisted that they should see the body first.

When they entered the kitchen, Bryson turned his head to look in the direction of the open kitchen door, where the wind blew in short rhythmical gusts.

Through a window he saw the dark shapes of police cars, hidden in the dark, about the castle.

The brightness beamed from bright lights off a window, as they entered a room, and he recognized that it was the storeroom, at the back of the kitchen.

Then Bryson's eyes followed Robert's startled glare down to an area of the floor, where there was a body, covered over with a white blanket.

“How did the killer manage to do it?” Sarah inquired. “Surely someone would have seen or heard something!”

Inspector Bailey placed his hands together behind his back and turned away, and strolled up to the window.

"She was on her own. And she then entered the kitchen—then here—to fetch something to eat..."

Bryson looked away, towards the hidden tunnel.

"Could the killer have used that tunnel to surprise him?" he muttered, slightly astonished.

Inspector Bailey walked towards it, examining it, and shoved it shut, feeling the weight of it.

Bryson examined it in more detail, astonished by it.

Someone had gone to a great deal of trouble to make it with the castle stones. The large cracks between all the bricks hid it. It looked as though the builders had just badly built the wall.

"It's peculiar!" Bryson went on, interrupting their examination. "That this secret passage is at the exact location of the murder."

The outer door opened, and a forensic investigator, wearing a white garment over a suit, appeared, and Inspector Bailey rushed over to him.

"So you've not found any fingerprints or DNA!"

The man's face showed only signs of disappointment.

"We've not found anything," he muttered, as he shook his head.

Inspector Bailey's face was cold and empty, showing little of what he was thinking.

A pale blue radiance appeared and flashed over the wall, at the window, from one of the police cars.

Voices of policemen discussed what they were investigating.

Inspector Bailey stopped in front of Robert.

He anxiously attempted to grab his attention.

"I want to stay here, with two of my men, and I want them to question all of you further. Some of you! I want more details on who accompanied whom. And I want who killed your servant!"

"Poor Molly!" Robert whispered.

"If anyone has any information, whatsoever, disclose it now, before it happens again!"

The door swung as a forensic investigator, wearing a white garment over a suit, marched past, and Inspector Bailey rushed out to join him.

Bryson wondered what would happen now. And why he insisted that it could happen again. Would the killer attempt to take the money or wait to see if they found it?

Chapter 16

Strange Encounters.

Robert then led Inspector Bailey, two policemen, and them out of the room. They crept up the dim and gloomy stairs, trying not to create any disturbance.

At the second floor, a few lights at the stairs was all that lit the corridor, and Bryson saw a light still on at their rooms, at the end of the dim corridor.

Bryson approached the rooms with noises, in the middle, with urgency, deeply overcome by the hideous place.

He swiftly went past the first room, wondering what Inspector Bailey would think of it.

But he seemed to do nothing else but continually thinking of everyone and their movements.

He recalled his arrival there, a few days ago. The interior of room had been stunning, as he had wandered through, into its realms. Everything had been identical! It had actually been identical to the way that he had left it—as if it had stayed there—frozen in time—waiting for his return...

A painting with some sort of animal (which he still could not identify) wearily hung above the bed.

Its strangeness awe-inspiring, and its similarities to modern paintings bewildering.

Inspector Bailey observed them, staying silent, as they past, almost from a scientific perspective.

At the rooms at the end of the corridor, Bryson entered his room, as Robert gave Inspector Bailey and the policemen the rooms next to it. He then came in his room.

"The strange thing is that nobody seems guilty of committing such a crime," Robert muttered. "And I cannot imagine anyone here doing anything to ..."

"Inspector Bailey must be wrong then!"

"Something else may have occurred."

"Sir Richard's death might have triggered something. Perhaps it affected Molly enough to make her do something stupid, causing someone to commit the crime. History is full of occurrences strangely happening simultaneously."

"Maybe Inspector Bailey knows something else...!" he wearily moaned, and rested on an old seat.

Bryson unpacked things from his case and neatly placed them about the room. And he finished the task by placing a clock at a table beside the bed.

He rested on the bed, observing the room, from different perspectives, giving an occasional nervous listen for anything, and he recalled the events that had taken place there many years ago.

Robert stood, yawned, and marched out of the door.

"We'll see..." he muttered, in the direction of Inspector Bailey's room, and closed the door behind him.

At the back of the table, Bryson spotted a jar of water and two glasses, and he poured the water into one of the glasses and drank it.

He then switched off the light, and stopped at the window to glare out at the dark trees.

In the distance, a haunting glow illuminated, strangely cast around an animal-like shape, through mist, as if the moon were beaming from behind some beast.

The shape randomly drifted through the mist. Its movements roaming, as if searching for something.

He then heard the low chanting whispers that he had heard in the other room, before the other sounds had emerged. As if the wind were blowing gently against all the castle windows. Then as if it were emerging out of nowhere, with no particular source. And as if phantoms were flying about the ancient castle.

With the light switched off, he rested in bed, and glared out at the dark wood at the front of the castle.

He heard a distant croak, like from a rook watching there from somewhere. He could not detect where it was. It was too dark! There were no lights anywhere. It was strange, as there was no streetlight, and no glowing sky of the city.

Chapter 17

Celestial Wonderland.

Specks of light endlessly glittered, as though he were floating in a celestial wonderland, with no thoughts or cares. Finally, free of all his depressing disturbances.

A curtain of mist occasionally appeared beneath him.

A glow illuminated it, strangely casting an animal-like shadow from him, through the mist, as if the moon were huge and beaming lunar rays from behind him.

He had a mild perception of dreaming, but it was like no dream that he could recall. It was so lifelike that he could not even imagine being in bed. He had no real thoughts, and his attempt to imagine things in it failed.

For a moment, he believed that he was floating over the clouds, with the world below.

Low chanting whispers created a hypnotic effect.

In the distance, a shape randomly drifted through the mist. Its movements endlessly roaming about, shifting towards him, as though searching for something.

It was slow, and he was so tired that when it reached him, he did not entirely perceive its presence.

His radiant celestial surroundings filled with shapes, like flying phantoms, moaning and wailing.

While their eerie murmurs grew loud and vicious, a sensation of great danger mesmerized him...

* * * * *

He silently shrieked as he awoke. The darkness of the room instantly blinding him, and he endeavored to pierce it with his weary eyes. However, as he awoke more, he realized that there was nothing there, but there were silent sounds howling through the corridor.

He jumped from the bed, throwing the blankets out of his way, darting at where he remembered the switch was—and instantly clicked on the light.

His mind was full of horror at what he was hearing and from what he had experienced, and he realized that the events had happened again.

A loud knock, from behind him, rattled a chair against the wall.

Bryson unlocked the door. The two psychic investigators were standing in the corridor.

“What in the hell is *that?*” he grumbled, confused, while something resembling a scream wailed out.

They stood together as a thud rhythmically grew, in the distance, shaking his clock.

Merton stood steady. “By the way that they alter and new ones emerge make it certain that whatever they are—they are authentic. But what we are listening to is presently beyond our perception...”

A dark figure edged out of blackness in the passage.

“What in god’s creation is that?” Inspector Bailey disclosed, as he held his trousers and shirt on him.

He wandered about the corridor listening to the distant wails, as if spirits were screaming in agony, burning in the flames of hell.

Chapter 18

Ancient Terrors.

The something screamed in agony—completely panic-stricken, suffocating, or something, in something.

Merton and Mortimer monitored their equipment, while three scientists rushed about activating switches and altering controls, while new sounds escalated.

There were horrors in the shadows, and the outer dark bottom floor corridor now looked like a place that Bryson would rather not be near—even though it would be a more comfortable place to be with its outer silence.

The night had crept by, and he was starting to feel the after-effects of the staying awake and the cold—making him feel drowsy, with a slight headache.

“You were right about it being an active zone—whatever *an active zone* is!” Mortimer grunted towards Merton and Bryson.

Bryson imagined them putting a sign on the door reading: KEEP OUT—RESEARCH PROJECT!

“Is there anything *different* though?” Bryson asked.

“As far as I can see there apparently is nothing... The sounds changing have confused things though, as I’m unable to accurately establish if they are louder here, or, in fact, more silent.”

“We can easily check by going upstairs!”

“Okay, let’s take that up there then.”

Mortimer took a mental note of the levels on a monitor, places that he had put microphones, and he quickly packed it into its case. He then led them out of the door, and carefully marched through the dark corridor, listening to the sounds from the room behind him.

They remained the same, and Bryson noted that he heard them reappear at the same distance away, when they made their way along the second floor.

Once in the room, it was obvious that they were about the same, but Mortimer insisted in setting up the machine in the exact same way.

"It's about the same!" he eventually moaned, still looking confused, but standing with his hands on his hips, carefully considering all the possibilities left (which was not much).

"This explains why there were no signs of anything," Bryson said excitedly. "There were no real temperature changes! And nothing indicating the presence of anything. And, what is more, the sounds never *responded* to us... or to anything that's apparently happening."

"Where is it occurring? There is no noticeable difference in the volume!"

"What'll we do?" Bryson continued.

"Let's leave it! I need time to think ... We need time to think! We can discuss it back at the room, or at some other time ..."

Chapter 19

The Light in the Woods.

Merton stood, glaring in front of him, with his back to a blazing log fire, watching Mortimer, sitting at a small table, directly under the light.

His shirtsleeves were at his elbows, and there was a pair of glasses hanging over his nose. In his hand he held a pair of pliers.

Bryson's entrance briefly disturbed him, but he continued working at the machine, opened up and sprawled across the table.

Bryson strolled over to the window, examining the equipment, and the places that they had placed it.

"There's something strange about this place!" he revealed to them, mesmerized by the blackness outside, at the edge of his eyes.

"Something strange," Merton muttered indecisively, "*about this place.*"

"This place is not like any *haunted* castle that I have ever heard about!"

"It is different from anything I can recall," Mortimer spoke, briefly looking up at the wall, behind the bed.

"What happened over there?" Merton asked, referring to the police cars out of the window.

"Oh! Just one of the servants being killed...!"

"Killed! How did she die?"

"Of course, she was strangled to death—the usual!"

"My god!" Mortimer remarked. "One of the servants was killed somewhere. Where was she killed?"

"Her body was found under the rubbish, in one of the bins, along from the kitchen."

"How did that happen...? How did the person manage to kill someone with everyone about? Do they have any suspects?"

"I don't know. We went out... They do not seem to know who did it... That's why Inspector Bailey and two of his policemen are staying here!"

"We were going to go along there, but we changed our minds."

"That's not all! *Something* chased us through the wood."

"What do you mean?" Mortimer said, looking up in surprise. "What did it resemble?"

"It was too dark! We were returning from a walk in the wood, over there, and some type of disturbance... A beast... Creatures... An entity... It came after us. We escaped from it... By a hairbreadth!"

At the window, he glimpsed something, like a light shining from something, within the depths of the wood. Though it could have been the moon beaming through a gap in the clouds, onto the snow, he knew that it must be the light that they had encountered there.

Bryson recalled, when they fled from the wood, that there were other creature-like noises in the surrounding trees—including the peculiar whistles.

The police cars, hidden in the dark, about the front, were so unreal—as though they were part of the set up of a television programme—as though they were there to create an illusion of realism.

How would they handle the things that took place? They might not bother showing the wall and its sounds. Nobody would believe that they were not sounds created by them—it could come across as a joke.

There were faint voices, then footsteps; and when he did not hear anything else, he looked.

In the light from a police car's headlights, two policemen stood having a discussion, conferring over some particular point.

He tried reading their lips, checking their behavior, noticing any signs of anything, but it was no use. And one of them showed signs of being aware of his presence, seeing him in the light at the window, and then repeatedly turned his head sideways to see him. Bryson eventually just turned his back to them.

What would happen if they told them about the things in the wood? Surely they could not leave it!

How dangerous were they anyway? He was believing that they were paranormal things that not even the army could handle, and that they were best leaving them alone; and just to investigate them. They were doing the police a favor by not involving them. It would only confuse matters further, if they did exist. It also might mean more deaths.

He tried to imagine it as a real, normal thing. And the sounds from living animals.

Would they leave a killer lion roaming freely through the woods, ready maul any people that happened to be passing?

The region was a perfect hiding place for something—if it had the instinct to stay away from humans.

He was determined to leave things, so he could carefully determine what to do, instead of rushing in, and ruining things.

A bang from the car door captured his attention, and he saw the two policemen in the car, in the light in the interior. The one in the driving seat then bent his

head down, observing the key, and the roar of its engine interrupted the outer silence.

Why had it vanished, when they had approached the castle? Why had it not tried to enter the castle, if it had been as bloodthirsty as it had seemed? Why did it not attack them during the day? What was it? What real origins had it?

There had to be a way of destroying it, before something serious occurred. It might someday confront the new owner of the castle.

He could not imagine anyone staying confined to the castle, without going out there.

Bryson could tell that Mortimer was now upset; his behavior gave it away—he restlessly thought deeply, while he worked. He was probably desperately thinking of a way to draw more than just noises from the wall. Not many people these days would believe what they had acquired, with all the sound recording studios and computer equipment available (it would not be hard to produce something like it).

He was sure that it would just be like one of the many hazy pictures of ghosts, Loch Ness monsters, and flying saucers.

Even though it was a fascinating project, beyond their wildest dreams, he was sure that they were losing confidence in anything else taking place. They hardly believed his account of what had happened in the wood.

Merton seemed more satisfied believing that he had exaggerated what it was. He said little, and gave away very little, about what he thought. He stood for a long time, just absorbing the warmth of the fire, occasionally keeping it burning, listening to Mortimer trying to repair some part of the machine.

They seemed to ignore his antics over it, perhaps being professional. They had never heard of the phenomenon.

If he could only think of a way to force their attention onto the phenomenon... He could pretend that he saw a werewolf or something, which would more than grab their attention.

Yet how dangerous was the thing in the wood anyway? Would it be more dangerous to encounter it...? And was there actually a way of investigating it, without it mauling him?

Bryson made them notice him. "If we could just check out that thing," he muttered, "without being killed... We may even save someone's life!"

He suddenly wondered why he was wasting his time.

"If there's something dangerous out there," Mortimer mumbled, "then it should have left traces of it being there. Therefore, we could take a look there, when we go out there tomorrow!"

"That's a good idea," he replied, feeling how tired his legs were. "I'll go and get some sleep."

Bryson left the room, remembering he needed the sleep.

The outer corridor was cold and dark, with a slight musty odor, with a resemblance to the above corridor with the lights off. His footsteps interrupted the silence, and he deliberately made them less obvious, almost creeping past the doorways, vaguely visible.

The rooms were very dark, and he fumbled along, looking for a light switch, while the floorboards creaked and shook under his feet.

He soon found it—much further up the wall than he had anticipated it to be—above where it normally was. A few bare bulbs, shrouded in webs and dirt, on worn wires, lit the whole corridor.

A door gently closed behind him, making him slightly jerk. It was obviously the air current from him rushing past, making the door move in a strange way.

Bryson removed a bottle of brandy from his bag. “Well, we should at least be comfortable.”

He was still going to have as much of a good time at the castle as he could.

He rotated the bottle in his hands, trying to recognize it. It was either so old that it was not made any longer or an import.

Bryson gently poured it into brandy into his throat, putting a slight gurgle into the emptiness.

He sipped more, and he wanted more.

Bryson felt the alcohol warm him.

For some reason, Bryson felt like to questioning Merton—to see what he thought—to find out what his views of the psychic phenomenon were.

Yet, somehow, he believed that he would not tell him very much.

Chapter 20

The Gold Pendant.

Bryson rested on a seat at the window. While Robert stood at the bed.

By his attitude, he sensed something had recently upset him. However, the fact that it was something to do with their hunt for the money made it slightly amusing. Not even a murder, and a vicious killing of a servant, could keep upsetting him. It had to be something preventing them acquiring the money. What else could be so dramatic?

Bryson moved close to the window, allowing the sun and white glow from the snow, covering the landscape, to go over him. And he removed the pendant that he had removed from William Randall’s decomposed remains.

It gleamed under the morning sun, its rays streaming in through the bedroom window, beaming golden shades over the walls.

It swayed beneath his hand, on its chain, wrapped around his hand, as he glared at it, captured by its hypnotic influence.

He disregarded the radiating light, pulsating over his face, and he studied the ancient artifact, with increasing interest. It was the first time that he had seen it in daylight—and not in the dim surroundings of the vault.

“Are all those police cars still parked there?” Robert remarked, moving to look more closely.

“Most of them left, last night. They probably will return though...”

“They should be—it was on someone’s radio—the police are holding a full murder investigation into the servant’s death here. Most of the detectives are coming down from London.”

Was that why he was upset? It might possibly hinder their search.

He felt like asking, but he just left it.

Perhaps the pendant had a value as an even older piece of jewellery. Another ancestor could easily have passed it down to William. Royalty could have bestowed it upon him, or he might have paid a great deal of cash for it. Nonetheless, why would it necessary have a high value just because he had worn it? There were many reasons for wearing such a pendant.

"I would love to see that video of Sir Richard over again," Robert spoke, rustling through objects, in his hand. "What do you think?"

"Why?"

"There may be some clues on it that we have not seen!"

His fingers parted, and he glimpsed a small notebook in his hand. He held a pen to his mouth.

"That's a good idea! But what sorts of clues?"

"I am not sure... Examining pictures and films can reveal things that you originally might not have seen. Everyone was listening to what he was saying—they were not expecting him to announce that he had hidden it—their might have been some clue at the beginning of it, which went unnoticed."

As he played with the pendant beneath his face, turning it around and around, seeking an answer to why he took it to his grave, he recognized a faint indentation over its edge.

Many such pendants opened to reveal inner enclosures, where there were such things as photographs. Perhaps they had drawings in them in those days.

"You're right—we might have missed something. He might have made a mistake somewhere—something that he had not noticed."

At the thought of it being something of value, Bryson became extremely keen to open it. He found that dirt, encrusted in it, was firmly fastening it.

"He could easily have said something that he should not have. I'll contact that lawyer—to have him show it again."

Bryson opened one of his bags, at the table, at the bed, and he removed things that might have things in or on them that he could use to clean it. But the best thing was a needle, inserted in a roll of thread.

He carefully fitted it on the faint crack that went along its edge, without damaging the artifact.

Its gold twinkled at him as though it were winking at him, just asking him to open it. But after many attempts at it—trying to break it open—his impatience increased. And he had horrible thoughts appear of it breaking—and him finding it to be an incredibly valuable instrument.

His fidgeting aroused Robert, who gave slight glances at his figure at the window.

"What are doing?" Robert moaned, trying to see him, in the bright light surrounding him, at the window.

He ignored him, and he made less arousing sounds.

As he thought of William Randall, the cover of the pendent shifted upwards, by a millimeter, giving him the knowledge that it had an inner chamber. The line around it could have been part of the design or there from the way a craftsman had made it, which he had been starting to believe due to its insistence in not moving.

Even though it had lifted, the problem of opening it fully was still there—as something was jamming it. It neither lifted any further nor went back down. It had too much value to break it in any way—especially if it turned out to be a watch (but he doubted that they existed in those days).

He amused himself, calming himself in the process. It had been his ancestor's pendant—and Sir Richard had given them the estate for ten days. If he only could find something valuable, he could show them that the hunt was not a flop.

If he had a few tools, watchmakers used, he could easily open it. He rummaged through his other stuff, with his mind carefully considering individual parts of things—considering them as tools. But there did not seem to be anything else.

As he returned to trying to open it, the lid squeaked and slightly lifted further—making him think of soaking it in oil. There was no need though as it came up, revealing a tattered bit of material.

It then instantly dropped in value, as it was not a watch, instrument, and it was not even solid gold as he had originally thought. It was an empty container, which William might have used to hold things.

He wondered if it could be a lucky pendant, and if it had something sacred in it. He shifted the piece of cloth around—feeling it for anything—touching a lump within it—and revealing a small key.

It was like a jewellery box key, but the end of it was strangely shaped. But was it another disappointment?

He went for the door, and decided to search Sir Richard's room for something it might fit.

"Where are you off to then?" Robert remarked, as he reached the door.

"I'm going up to Sir Richard's room," he replied.

"You don't expect to find anything there," he informed him. "Everyone has been through that room so many times..."

"Well. I found a key, and I want to find out if it fits a lock."

"What do you want to know that for? Even if it does, what use will it have?"

"I don't know *yet*. I'm just *inquisitive*."

"I'm going up there..." Robert announced—looking more determined.

"Let's look there together then."

"Okay. Let's see that key first."

Bryson removed it out of his pocket, and he took it from him, with much interest. But he quickly lost interest in it, and handed it back.

"It could fit something..."

"We are *all* going out there at some time."

"Do you mean everyone...?"

"Yeah—all of us."

"Why are they going out there? You mean that they are going for a walk—like when we went to the vault."

"I never said that we were going to the *tombs*," he moaned. "I meant that we are going out there—into the wood."

"What for?"

"Do you remember when we went out there, that we went to that structure as we wanted to check it? Well, we are sure that there is *another one* out there—somewhere!

“And as I gather: some of them apparently want to look about that wood!”

“Why would they want to look about the wood?”

“They believe that *the last* refers to something that’s there.”

It alarmed Bryson, and he tried not to reply.

It annoyed him more than anything else. He could not imagine them coming up with that theory themselves—even if it did sound insane.

He calmed himself, rationally considering what they were doing, and why Robert had told him it anyway. He had to have told him it for a reason.

“Your investigators seem to have an interest in going there too! Perhaps they are interested in going to the tombs to set up some of their equipment there.”

For a moment, he looked a little surprised at his reply. But he doubted it.

Bryson strolled along the corridor, thinking of how insane it was: them all looking through that wood, with what could be out there—including a “maniac”, probably even capable of killing a group of them, if given the right means to do it.

What would happen if they stayed in this place too long? Would they be picked off one by one until they either sought sanctuary elsewhere or found a way of ridding the place of its awful menaces.

At the window, at the end of the top corridor, a rook tapped rhythmically at the window frame. It gave no indication of seeing them approach it, but it looked ready to fly away from anything that might confront it.

Robert led Bryson to the window, near Sir Richard’s room. And he watched the bird become aware of their presence, and fly up into the air, compelled to make a retreat from the strange giants.

Surprisingly, he watched a few cars approaching the castle. They were full of strangers, who seemed to have a reason for being there, and are full of life and keen to do something.

The car doors swung open, and he listened to them climb out of the vehicles. Banging doors, laughs, and voices mingled.

“James invited them,” Robert eventually confessed, after waiting for him to reply.

“They’re here to help you search!”

“We don’t have a large amount of time left... They may be able to achieve something...”

“Of course, but how much will they be acquiring of it?” he asked out of curiosity, wondering how little James would possibly pay them.

“They will be paid for searching and nothing else,” he replied firmly, mildly surprised that he thought that they would give away such a large amount of money belonging to them.

He examined his face for a moment, and he looked out of the window when Bryson did not budge.

He was sure that they had done it because he believed that if he had not they would not have a hope in hell of finding it. They would help them a lot, and he now could not imagine them going to the lengths that it would take to obtain it on their own.

Bryson turned, and nearly laughed, but saw how serious it was. The room was an absolute eyesore. It actually had becoming more messed up than it had been—and he had considered it to be in its worst state when he had last seen it.

He strolled over to the bed, while he removed the key. He lunged at an old chest, sitting under the bed, at the center of the bed.

"They don't do things by half!" Robert uttered, glaring at the broken lock sprawled over the floor, at the opposite wall (probably thinking of it as competition).

Bryson picked up the broken lock. And he checked if the key fitted it. But it definitely did not fit, even though it almost was the same size.

He now suspected that it belonged to something else.

"Have you tried one of those keys there?" Robert mumbled—crossing the floor—avoiding the loose planks and other obstacles in his path.

"What *keys*...?"

"There they are!" he spoke, grabbing the keys.

Bryson knew instantly that one of them fitted perfectly into the keyhole of the chest, and that his gold key definitely never belonged to a chest.

Chapter 21

No Traces.

Bryson approached the room where Merton and Mortimer were, and Mortimer peered out, hearing his footsteps; and Bryson saw that he looked almost unchanged since he had previously seen him.

Merton stood silently, observing him entering. "Shall we look outside? We may realize something from what is out there—gain an entirely new perspective of this place."

"Good idea!" Mortimer spoke, tiredly stretching out his arms. "And, of course, we can check if that thing, you said chased you through the wood, has left any traces ..."

Merton walked to the window, and allowed one of the scientists there to pass him. "It looks cold out there—we better put on some warm clothing."

They then proceeded to the door.

Once Merton and Mortimer had put on the right outdoor gear, Bryson led them to the door, going out the back of the castle, out of the way of the police.

The sunshine, and white snow, blinded them as they squeezed through the door, partly jammed with snow, piled up against the side of the castle.

Mortimer shuffled through a knee-high layer of snow, moving away, and Merton, at first, could not move, but shuffled after him, tightly wrapping his jacket around him, shivering from sudden cold chills.

The snow thinned, as they went further out from the wall.

At the corner of the castle, Mortimer stopped and waited for them to catch up with him. He did not seem in a hurry to go anywhere – more like rushing to make himself warm. They had been stuck in the dark castle for a long time, without much exertion. Perhaps they should have eaten more than they had. With more sugar and protein, to keep them warm.

“Over there...!” Bryson said, looking at part of the wood, where he had swiftly escaped out of the wood, the night before. “Our footprints are still visible!”

Mortimer approached them. “I see that the three of you were running.”

Merton studied the separated prints, as they moved along.

“Perhaps it would be best to find something to defend us!” Bryson muttered, trying to warn them. “If we destroyed it, we would stop it harming someone someday.”

“It!” Mortimer muttered. “Let’s find their prints first. And obtain some type of insight into what we are up against.”

Bryson examined the snow all around him, keeping his eyes peeled for anything, in the trees. It was hard to believe that he was at the same place as the night before, and that the thing that chased them had even existed. There were no signs that anything had been there.

They strolled through the wood, following their frantically placed prints, and even came across a patch of marked snow where James had fallen over onto the ground, and they had frantically pulled him to his feet.

Bryson looked at every place he had heard the things, and every conceivable place that the thing could have been; but there were no traces of anything.

They finally gave up when they reached the place where the light had been; and Mortimer then led them back.

It astonished Bryson that the evidence of them being there, which should have been completely visible, was not anywhere. It was absurd believing that there was a chance that the snow had covered it. Why would it *only* have covered it...? They had their prints there! And there would be a larger level of snow.

At their approach to the back door of the castle, Merton stopped and looked at him.

“Your encounter might have been with an entity!”

“It had to be a floating one!” he joked. “But why was it so loud? I heard it crashing through the wood, charging towards us.”

“It might have created the sounds itself. Or like the sounds in the castle: they might have manifested from elsewhere!”

Bryson considered the facts from different angles, while he and Merton cleaned away the snow from about the door, before entering. Mortimer seemed to be doing the same, behind him, but, when he observed him, he saw that he was checking something further out.

After a few minutes, Mortimer crouched down to study something, on the snow. And they followed his path through the snow—to where he was—where the snow thinned out.

Suddenly, almost like magic, Bryson saw shoe impressions appear, going through the snow, leading away from the castle, and he rushed towards Mortimer.

“Whose shoe is that size?” Mortimer instantly asked.

“I don’t know!” Bryson answered.

It was impossible to tell, from the vague marks.

“They look as though they were made at about the same time as my prints were made—over at the wood. They could not have been made earlier, as they would be covered over with snow. And they could not have been made later, as they would have no snow on them.”

"Someone left the castle, at about the same time as you entered it! And they went off into those trees over there."

"But nobody left! Everybody was in the castle when we arrived back. And who would have left in the dark to go over there?"

"We better tell Inspector Bailey about it!"

"I'll go and find him?" Merton spoke, leaving them.

Mortimer finished examining it, and he stood with Bryson. It did not take long for Inspector Bailey's heavy voice to appear from the castle – and rapidly come towards them. He was intensely questioning Merton.

He turned silent as he emerged from the castle—slightly shivering—observing the blinding snow.

He carefully examined everything about him. Merton walked past him, and two policemen came out.

They all moved over to them, and stood beside Bryson.

Inspector Bailey looked as if he wished to pace back and forwards, but saw the print and depth of the snow. He eventually satisfied himself by putting his hands at his hips, while chewing his lip.

The two policemen analyzed the prints, considering whether to start brushing away snow from one.

"Have you been over in that direction?" Inspector Bailey asked, looking at their trail going along the castle.

"No!" Merton replied swiftly. "We were over there..."

"Let's follow them," Inspector Bailey announced, setting off, going along the side of the prints. And they followed him, leaving the policemen at a footprint.

As they increased their distance, forensic investigators emerged out of the doorway, glancing at them and at the prints going off into the distance.

"This is a hell of a place!" Inspector Bailey mumbled.

It gave the impression that he had always been saying such things, but Bryson knew that it was something different to him, and he was handling something beyond what he normally had been dealing with. It surprised Inspector Bailey that there had been someone at the castle, and that the person had made such a dramatic exit.

The marks gave the impression that the person had rushed away. Perhaps the person had calmly strolled through the castle first. They were spaced further than normal, and unevenly separated, going in a slightly altering course into the trees.

"It might have been one of the servants taking a short cut!" Bryson asked, to see what he would say, and break the silence between him and them.

"You have to be kidding! None of the servants would walk out here during the day—never mind at night—at this place! The new owner may have to replace them now."

He increased their pace, determined to arrive quickly at the trees.

They only slowed as they entered the first trees.

Crows, barely recognizing humans, flew up into the air, from above them, sending snow spraying about them, melting on their faces.

Mortimer led them deep into the wood, where it was more lifeless and still. There were no signs of anything.

The sun faintly shone, like the moon, through a thin cloud vapor.

Merton and Mortimer bored of searching for nothing, just copied Inspector Bailey, searching about the trail for clues left there. And Bryson intensely checked the undergrowth and branches, which went about them—in case the person had left anything, while going through the wood, in the dark.

To their disappointment, a small farm road emerged across their path, and the prints vanished into the heavy tread marks going along it.

“Where does this lead to?” Inspector Bailey asked, trying to recall something like a map, studying the prints going onto the road.

“The village,” Bryson answered. “The person must have walked there, or used a car...”

Bryson realized that it had been a daft idea. The path would not have directly led to the person! The person would have to have been raving mad!

He was glad that they did not have to follow it any further. Because he wanted to return to the castle, as the lawyer would probably be arriving, with the video. And he had better and more urgent things to do.

Chapter 22

Direct Action.

A policeman soundlessly guarded the dining room, with an occasional subdued degree of confusion—surely considering things told to him by Inspector Bailey.

On Inspector Bailey’s nod, he automatically turned off the lights, and the chattering dispersed.

The butler turned on the video, and as the picture appeared, Bryson watched the lawyer look nervously at Inspector Bailey, standing near him. He was sure that the police had realized something. Yet many of their reactions could be put down to a number of things. And he did know that Inspector Bailey for one wanted to move out of the castle as soon as he could. But he was considerably determined to solve the case first.

Some of the police, in nearby rooms, sounded as if they thought that the showing of the video was amusing. Their remarks, coming through the hall, were loud mutters, as someone had told them to speak silently.

When the video was started, Sarah and a few of the others sat with pens and pieces of paper, ready to record any valuable information, like tourists on a treasure hunt. Yet when it got under way, they did not write much, to his amusement.

It became apparent that Sir Richard had planned the video in more detail than they had been imagining. He seemed to have thought over every second and every word, like a good businessman, and no longer looking as insane as they had recently been thinking of him. (He avoided mentioning anything that was not to do with his speech!)

Bryson suspected that he was hiding things, and that the whole speech was an elaborate plan, carefully concocted to achieve something. When the video ended, and they had the lights on, he wondered if the old guy had actually done what he

had said after all—and if it had been his *last vengeance* for something, perhaps at that time, which Robert had once suggested. Even though they had not done anything to him!

“Well, what are all of you going to *do* now?” Inspector Bailey uttered, looking at no one in particular.

“If any of you need *me*, I’ll be back tomorrow,” the lawyer swiftly spoke, as he removed the video from the machine himself – opened his briefcase, and dropped it in. He fixed his glasses on his nose, and made his way towards the door.

Bryson saw the policemen react strangely at the doorway, before the lawyer arrived there. The others in the nearby rooms stopped talking, as though to listen to the lawyer.

The lawyer’s eyes bulged out, from behind his glasses, as he went around the door. And he held his head down, and rushed forwards, ignoring who was at the door.

A policeman finally summoned Inspector Bailey, and he crept out to the door.

As soon as he heard voices, coming from outside, it was evident that the media had arrived. However, as they continued talking, they all became interested, and he followed Robert and some of the others to the window.

To his amusement, he saw a large group surrounding Inspector Bailey, and two policemen.

News programme cameramen and newspaper cameramen rushed about filming him from every angle, while microphones were being shoved in front of him. They obviously were all part of the national news media. And they seemed very interested in the castle, with its haunted castle look, which they vigorously tried to capture on film.

“Is there anyone famous there?” James inquired, from the side of the room.

“I recognize two of the women with microphones...” Robert muttered.

Bryson and the others shifted back into the room, and sat listening to Inspector Bailey, with a little astonishment, almost transformed by the experience.

“So did anyone discover *anything* from that video?” Robert asked, standing in front of them, slightly copying Inspector Bailey—who was at the same time now loudly giving a speech on how he would solve the case soon.

Their ears in the room mostly shifted from side to side, verifying their suspicions.

“I think we should now check the castle ourselves!” James uttered loudly, from the side of him.

“What...?” Sarah moaned, bemused, at what he meant.

“I don’t trust anyone any more!” he argued, losing his temper at something, confusing everyone.

Sarah made a stupefied grin. “What do you mean?”

James jumped to his feet, and paced about in front of them. Then he stopped in front of the television screen, giving indications that he was going to come out with an embarrassing speech about something, or argue with them.

“There is nothing mentioned there that says that we could share the search. It said that the person who finds it could have it!”

Instead of everyone in the room arguing with him, as Bryson expected would occur, a few of the women suggested that they believed that he was wrong, and the rest agreed, and they all ignored him.

Robert just laughed, and remained silent.

When the room turned silent, Robert moved beside James. "What do you think you are doing...?" he argued.

Bryson noticed that the women in the room now had worried looks.

Sarah glared angrily at James. "You search on your own then!" she grunted, sounding slightly drowsy.

"What's wrong now?" Inspector Bailey spoke, smiling, as he entered the room, looking content at finally handling what he had been doing. Some vehicle doors banged outside, making him stop to listen.

Bryson heard them leaving, at the front.

"Has someone discovered anything?" Robert uttered, glancing about him. "There's still a good chance of finding it."

Bryson looked about him, but nobody said anything.

"Look!" Inspector Bailey vented, seeing the other policemen losing interest, and leaving. "Try looking less on your own more—in whatever groups you want to be in."

Robert agreed, and James rapidly agreed with the idea.

They accepted the arrangement, and Inspector Bailey left to go to where the other policemen had gone.

Chapter 23

Faint Traces.

When they entered the library, through the darkness, Bryson sensed something unusual. But he only grasped that there was less snow on the ledge.

Yet things still seemed different.

It was thoroughly black outside, and they all grouped about the table, on seats, sitting on the floor, or standing at walls, becoming familiar with their new surroundings. Most of them were the people whom James had brought into to help.

Bryson then realized that there had been one difference in the room—the door to the library had been slightly open, and he had firmly shut it. It was strange, as even if it were not open, as he remembered it to be, he could not realize why it was unusual. Powerful drafts were capable of pulling as well as pushing objects around.

He examined individual objects in the room, from different perspectives, trying to see if there were anything altered—and it was apparent that different bits of furniture about the room were in different positions.

"Where are they?" Merton moaned, as he arrived, at the outer door.

"They are in here." Bryson called out.

Snow sprayed across the window, creating a feeling of warmth, from being in the warm and sheltered confines of the room.

Before Bryson spoke, Merton and Mortimer entered, and, with some satisfaction, glared over at the books.

"There has to be something here!" Merton declared, following Mortimer in the doorway, looking all about it.

"There's a lot..." Mortimer muttered, trying to see their titles. "But why would they mostly about business?"

"Where will we begin?" Merton asked.

"At the start!" Bryson announced, getting a smile from some of the others sitting or standing in the corner, near to the books. And he reached out, to grab a handful of books.

Merton just randomly chose a pile of books, and put them onto the table, next to him, and sat beside Bryson. He quickly confirmed that the first book was what he believed it was, by examining things in it—until he lost interest in it.

They were soon flickering through pages, trying to speed up the process. Nonetheless, it was apparent that it would take them a long time to look through them.

"There's a fireplace in there," Merton explained, standing up, feeling the cold. "If we fetched some logs, built a fire in it, and shut the outer door, we could make it warm in here."

"Good idea!" Bryson answered, with some of the others agreeing, and following Merton to the door.

Bryson considered helping, but did not bother. However, he removed two bottles of wine and glasses, which he had brought with him.

He gave everyone a glass, and returned to work.

He sipped the wine, while relaxing into the seat.

He turned the pages of books sometimes confused at the contents.

Sometimes having to dust the edges of a book, and hold back a sneeze.

"There does not seem to be very much to see in these!" he finally admitted to himself out loud, thinking of ways to cover the whole library.

He picked up many books, astonished at how little they had to interest him. The temptation to flicker through them increased, and he occasionally glanced through the titles.

Once the wood was freely burning away in the fireplace, heating the room, and not filling the room with smoke, or, as far as he could see, setting the chimney on fire, he added more wood; and he retreated to the books.

He recognized Merton and Mortimer's behavior and that they intended to stay late into the night. However, he did not know how long he would stay there, as he was tired already.

James was flickering through pages without observing them, as Bryson carefully checked the options open to him.

"Here's an interesting book!" Merton announced—standing up, and sitting back down – holding the tattered book by his fingers, allowing them to see it. It looked old, and from around the First World War.

"It's a book about castles!" Mortimer remarked, hold out his hand.

"We've seen it!" James answered.

"This castle may be in it!"

Mortimer took it from him, and studied its contents.

It finally became obvious that he did not see it, and he started flickering through the pages.

Bryson felt the warm air from the fire slowly surrounding them. It now felt more like a proper library.

"Well, it's a start." Merton muttered. "There has to be more books like it, and luckily there will be one that will be of use."

Mortimer nodded his head.

Mortimer finally examined it on the table.

Bryson removed the map that he had found in the book, and showed it to Mortimer, telling him how he had found it.

Mortimer carefully unfolded the tattered piece of paper on the table, as they watched on, trying to see what it was.

"Well, what is it?" Merton asked, frustrated after waiting, watching him examining it.

"It's an old drawing of the castle."

Merton took it, and held it over the table.

He and Bryson considered the faint lines for a moment. It was a map of the interior—drawn by someone. Perhaps something someone visiting might have drawn.

After some consideration, Bryson was sure that it had not been made by Sir Richard, and that he had not drawn it when he had inherited the castle.

Yet he realized that he might have put it in the book, and perhaps even forgot about it.

He tried to realize what he had been like. What had he actually been like younger? And what had he thought of the castle?

There was a chance that he might have stayed the way that he had been, in many ways, and he might have always had a dream of hiding his money, and had thoughts of it being a good idea, for some reason.

He might even have obtained the idea of where it had been best to hide it from his first searches of the castle. It could be more valuable to them than Mortimer had assumed.

Merton studied it from different angles, and became uninterested in it. He obviously wanted to know why he was so interested in it.

"That looks like a faded cross marking this library," he muttered.

Bryson viewed it, with much interest, realizing that he had forgotten about it. The library was older than he had thought. It even looked strangely marked on it.

This interested him, as he wondered where the original books had been put. So far he had not seen any of them. He randomly searched through the titles for them. But he only saw the books that Sir Richard had put in it.

What did he do with the original books—which must have been there? On the other hand, he might have thrown them away over the years, especially if they had just been unwanted books from the previous person.

Once he spotted Merton had lost interest in it, he swiftly took it away from the table, and put it in his pocket. He then pulled over the book that it had been in, for a close look at it.

Chapter 24

The Treasure Hunters.

Mortimer became more interested in observing the room.

"How do you know that Sir Richard never invested his money in something?" Mortimer suddenly remarked. "He could easily have concealed it somewhere—without it being noticeable."

"Such as that bottle of wine!" Sarah joked, and Bryson stopped piercing the cork with the corkscrew, to smile back to her.

"Bottles of wine are not worth that much," he joked, checking the label, and continuing with the operation.

"He was a businessman... You kept saying to us. Businessmen like investing in things... Perhaps there's an item that he expected to grow dramatically in value."

"Such as one of the paintings," Bryson commented, making them look at each other.

"What about the paintings...?" Mortimer muttered, turning around, looking at the painting behind him. "Has anyone checked the value of this one?"

"We would have noticed a valuable painting," Bryson replied, taking the glass of wine, and gently sipping it, to taste it first.

"That's not that valuable," Merton responded, remembering he had been checking them. "They are all over the castle. They are mostly only pictures of the estate."

"But there may be one somewhere else... Hidden!"

Bryson considered the idea again. "You may be right—there may be—we have not even been in some of the rooms yet. I cannot imagine any of the furniture and antiques that I've seen being worth that much. There would have been a serious risk of someone damaging it, not realizing its value—or even future owners just discarding it. It has to be something that would not have been damaged, and be in a place where it would have been safe."

"That's could be correct," Mortimer replied.

"I think that we should just continue to search objects about the castle as we go along."

"Let's have another look in here..." James replied.

Sarah lifted part of the carpet, at the corner of the room. And James grabbed a loose plank, and pulled it up. Then he placed it against the wall, and used a torch to observe under the floorboards.

They removed more, and examined the stone of the original floor under it, under the thick layer of dirt and old pieces of building materials accumulated there – mostly from when they had built the upper part (built when they had installed the electricity into the castle).

James tapped the foundations, and original castle floor, trying to realize how thick it was. It obviously was very thick and solid, like the walls.

Bryson considered if Sir Richard could have cut a hole in it and buried it in it. However, if he had put it in a place such as that, it would almost be impossible for them to find it, without taking apart the castle bit by bit to find it. The immense amount of places that he could have put it was tremendous—especially if he had cemented into one of the walls, giving it a thick outer shell enough to stop them detecting it as a hollow zone.

He vaguely wondered how safe the castle about him really was. Ancient craftsmen, with only a basic knowledge, had built it. Who would know if they had designed it to last a few decades, or something? Yet if it had stayed up the amount of time that it had, it must be strong enough not to collapse. They could have easily built it to last! He had only seen derelict castles crumbling away, and he had never heard of one such as it falling down. However, he had heard of *parts* of modern structures collapsing.

“If we could just obtain some more *information* about Sir Richard!” Merton suggested, looking at the books, with interested.

“What do you think...? Is this Sir Richard’s personal library...? We’ve only searched through some.”

“How many of them are there,” Mortimer replied.

“It’s a large amount.”

“They seem to be mainly business books, but I have not thoroughly checked them.”

“Let’s search for an answer to the clue...”

Bryson shifted out of his seat. “There is a large collection, but we may be able to check them without wasting time.”

Chapter 25

Uninvited Guests.

Robert’s face showed signs of strain, so Bryson promptly sat along the table from him, not wishing to displease him. The stress causing it was not in any way evident. There were no signs of anything taking place, or having occurred in his absence.

Nonetheless, he just took it that he was running out of proper ideas—the many other problems—and the grim reality of the situation.

The others stayed almost silent, as they had been, only conferring in mutters, in their groups, which they were working in; with their discussions noticeably avoiding talking about their search.

Robert placed his head in his hands, tightly pressing his elbows against the table, which had already marked his jumper. Now he knew why they used those ridiculous elbow patches.

Robert eventually removed one of his elbows, looking slightly sleepy, making an effort to be sociable.

Bryson fought to rectify a smile, which emerged on his face, while Robert pulled his chair over to him.

"Do you know that the police have not found anything?" he spoke, shuffling a napkin around, and folding it.

"They're doing their best!"

"They're carrying out their investigations at the village," he continued, almost yawning.

"I didn't know that."

Bryson checked Mortimer, Merton, and Helen sitting silently, in a line, going along the opposite side of the table. They occasionally took something to eat.

His watch told him that it was later than he had imagined, and that they would not be there long, before they would return to the library, to continue their search. He was still positive that Merton and Mortimer were planning to stay there until it was late, to continue to conduct a proper research of the castle.

"Where's James?" Bryson asked, trying to find some more information about him, knowing that Robert had been closely watching him, almost following him around—perhaps to see why he had been so obsessed with working on his own. Most of the others seemed to have been working near him, as if he now had magnetism.

"He returned to his room, just before I came here," he instantly replied, giving a slight venomous grin.

"So was he annoyed at not finding anything?"

"He was arguing, but I don't know if it had anything to do with him not finding anything. Why...?"

Bryson saw that the others were growing restless.

"Let's have another look in the library."

"Good idea!" Bryson replied, leaving with him, observing the pictures on the walls, once again.

Bryson could not see any sign that there was anything of value. But there could be a connection between something and the clue. The answer to the clue could be in one of the scenes of the paintings.

At the door to the library room, Robert turned silent, looking startled for a moment, holding his composure. He proceeded in, creeping, not making any sounds.

Bryson saw the door partially open, and that the light was on.

He stuck out his head, and promptly shoved the door wide open.

Bryson, in one movement, shifted in front of it—instantly seeing James, sitting himself, at the table.

"Did you just come in here!" Robert asked, moving into a seat, surprised that he had been there.

Bryson watched him. "Did you move the furniture in here?"

He sighed. "I was looking around."

Bryson saw by his tense attitude, as well as his replies, he was annoyed. Perhaps at being questioned.

Sarah emerged at the doorway. Her face showed some surprise at seeing them.

"Are the rest of them coming back then?" James asked, curiously.

"Apparently not." Robert voiced, watching him become happier.

"Who relit that fire?"

"We did," James confessed.

Sarah stood where she was, staying away from them, as though waiting for James to continue, and perhaps somehow sort out a problem.

“Look!” Bryson moaned. “We are searching together.”

James and Sarah suddenly moved out of the room, and started whispering.

He tiredly turned to them. “We’ll share it...” he replied.

“We agree!” Robert swiftly answered, humorously. “But you’ll have to find something first!”

They vaguely smiled at each other, with slightly embarrassed expressions.

“Of course,” James muttered, “they’re just useless books, and we are wasting our time looking for anything.”

They began where they had been searching, before leaving to have a meal. Bryson and Robert built up the fire, so that it was heating the room more. It now seemed colder. It might have been the amount of people in the room, actively moving around, that had been there.

Bryson watched James and Sarah return, and saw that the agreement between them would last. And that they were in complete agreement over something else.

He occasionally observed them, from the edge of his eyes, trying not to look at them too much. He watched them to see what he was missing.

They were just examining the covers more than the contents. It was all that he needed to know, to realize that they would not find much.

He had occasionally walked along examining them, without removing them off the shelves.

It was noticeable that Sarah did not fully know what she was looking for, and was going out her way to please James. He did have a good idea of what he was looking for, and was insisting on looking for it in particular—especially in the titles.

He was sure that if the map of the castle had not fallen on the floor, that they would not have found it.

There was something about hunting for hidden things that he did not like. There were too many things suggesting where things could be. The mind could almost turn anything into looking like a clue, just by staring at it for long enough, if it wanted to find something badly enough. They could follow false clues to the day that they left if they were not careful. He was sure, that if they had not already been doing it, that they would start doing it as soon as they had checked the main places at the castle—and had no real ways of finding it.

Here they were searching a library for the answer to a clue that could be anything. The amount of things that the mind could associate with it was vast. He doubted if the treasure seekers that he had seen in films, who had chased after clues, could have answered the clues, which they had solved, in real life. Why had he never heard of anyone chasing after treasure? As far as he was concerned, the people who had found things had been looking for them in things like ships, which people had recorded as having treasure, and which something had sank in a specific region—not by solving strange riddles! People found them with machines and knowledge.

They would need a great deal of luck. People customarily only found treasure, searching the places that ships sank.

He realized that he now did not believe that people following clues, from things like Egyptian sites, ever found anything. They endlessly chased after the Holy Grail, Golden Fleece, and Egyptian treasures. The people who had found such things had been lucky – to have been in the right places, doing the right things, which had led them to find the things. Many people had found things while looking for other things. And he could not recall hearing of any of them finding what they had been looking for. However, he had not heard about that many searches.

He tried to compare their circumstances with what he had heard, but he could not recall anything.

He was sure that most people would have no real reasons to report finding anything. Why would they want to? Why tell that people had actually gone about hiding treasure, leaving maps, and riddles?

Would real treasure maps, which people drew, be incomprehensible to everyone else? They surely would try to stop someone else putting their hands on it. Why would they write down obvious places and names that they knew? If someone found it, the person would take it—if the person knew what it was (especially someone with an interest in it).

They could easily use codes and words that other people would not be able to understand. Perhaps they would miss out and muddle up things on it, so that other people would not be able to establish things, and if numbers were coordinates or paces. They could put in false clues, and easily remember the real ones.

Furthermore, the clue that Sir Richard had left could be incomprehensible everyone on the planet—apart from him—without him having even realized it. He might have based it on something that people from his era would have answered off the top of their heads.

Bryson was beginning to believe that James knew something, and it would not take long before they found out about it.

Chapter 26

The Real Library.

As Bryson thought of where the best place to look was, as an alternative to flicking through endless empty books, he remembered the plan of the castle.

Then he watched James measure the floor, and he removed the crumpled map from his pocket. It was more damaged. But the plan on it was in the same condition. It slightly surprised him, as he expected it to have dulled lines and blemishes to the faint marks, because of its already bad condition and ancient age.

Bryson glared, partially blinded by the illumination from the sun, and its powerful glare from the snow. However, when it decreased, he saw much more detail—than he had seen before under the room's light—and faint lines that had faded, and that had not been visible before.

He studied the things on it, astonished at missing them. And he saw something at the small cross at the library. The cross was so faint that he could easily have taken it to be a badly drawn mark or correction rubbed away. But he knew that it was something, after some consideration on that it was some form of indication!

Yet its size was not big—it looked too small to be significant—and it was not just a bad drawing, as it had been *carefully* drawn there. Why had the person gone to such lengths to draw it so well into the sketch?

Bryson stood up, and started helping James to measure the room, who took it that he knew what he knew.

They paced across the library room—from the furthest wall into the outer study. Then they left the room, and they paced along the corridor, to the same distance.

At the door to the next room, they saw that there was a large distance between that room wall and the library wall. And the room wall did not sound as thick when they tested it, and it was not as thick a stone wall as in the other rooms.

It had to be some type of cupboard where they had once stored things, and they had no longer used. If so, someone had hidden it, like the secret tunnel leading to the kitchen.

Had Sir Richard known that it had been there? And had he been the one who had marked it on the old map, and had forgotten about it?

Nonetheless, how could they check it? Where could the entrance to it be? It could be sealed, but there could be a way to climb into it.

Bryson considered it for a moment, remembering the last time that he had been up at the top floor, and the hole in the wall that they had made to enter the tunnel. Did James intend to knock a hole in one of the walls?

Robert's face showed puzzlement, indicating that he had not realized what it was. There was something in the book in front of him that interested him more.

* * * * *

"I'm not sure," Bryson replied, removing some books, and tapping the wood, listening to see how hollow it was. There obviously was not any stone behind it. He was sure of that!

"Why would someone put library shelves over an empty area?" James replied. "They normally put them on a wall—attaching it—making it secure! – using the full amount of room available for it."

"Which looks small to me!" Robert answered.

James marched over to it, and tapped it at various places. "It's hollow!" he firmly confirmed.

Robert dropped his book onto the table, suddenly looking more energetic—gaining energy from the thrill that there was another discovery about to be investigated.

"It would be a shame to ruin this library," Bryson explained, considering the tunnel that he had made. "If there's nothing there – we could make a hell of a mess!"

"How can we check what's behind it then?"

"We'll need to tug at it," Robert replied. "Then we may be able to find out what is holding it in place."

“They had to have fixed it to the roof, floor, and walls. How else could they make it stay fixed in place like that without it?”

“Let’s check it first, before we come to any conclusions.”

The three of them went to different places at the shelves, and they synchronously yanked at it—feeling its weight and that it was thick, heavy wood.

Robert’s side then slightly shifted outwards—proving nothing was holding it there, and that it only had something stopping it going further into the hollow section behind it.

“Let’s pull Robert’s section out,” Bryson uttered, “and see if we can shift it any further.”

When they grabbed and heaved at Robert’s side, it shifted easily—and they continued pulling it out in stages—like a giant door.

There was no sign that anything kept it there. Its weight was enough to hold it. And Bryson looked for what had been stopping it moving further inwards, and he found a dark space had opened up behind it.

Large webs stretched across it like a giant veil.

Bryson allowed James to go into the gap, pulling away the layer of webs. At a position where the blackness engulfed him, he fumbled about with a cable on the wall.

Suddenly, the whole wall shifted outwards, and Robert automatically pushed it, until it was near the window—revealing a hidden section behind it, full of books.

“It’s another section of the library!” James uttered first, looking confused.

“Someone must have put it there to fit in more books,” Robert uttered excitedly, looking at the cable.

Bryson traced the cable, while they watched.

It went into the wall that the corridor was behind. It had to be connected to something to open it, in the direction of the study.

“That’s crude,” Robert observed. “I’ve never heard of that before. Perhaps it’s a Victorian invention... They had such contraptions...!”

Robert glared at the books with much interest. “These are a lot different...”

Chapter 27

The Diary.

Bryson observed the whole inner library, as he entered it, from a distance, seeing what would become noticeable. His sight instantly fell on an old black book.

For some reason, he could not determine why it seemed as if it had been placed there!

He soon realized that it was not a normal book: it was a diary, and it had events scribbled through it with a quill pen.

“What do you have?” James asked, with interest.

“It’s a diary...”

Bryson conjured up images of one of his ancestors, wearing giant ancient clothes, at a desk, at it, giving their daily thoughts...

Yet the more he read it the more important it became, and it then gave him details of hidden treasure.

There was no doubt about it, and he dropped it on the table not caring if it damaged it.

It was an authentic diary of one of his ancestors, who had stayed in the castle during the Victorian era, and who had been the daughter of the owner. It gave extended accounts of the woman, the activities that she had taken part in, and the things that had happened to her. It was so personal in places that he was sure that it had not been supposed to have been read by anyone except her, and that she had written it to herself to look back on at an older age.

The references in the journal to a treasure began with mentions of tales that had been passed down to her by her father, who had insisted that the family had passed the information down to him (as they had done since the construction of the castle).

"So what is it?" Robert remarked, observing his strange reactions.

"I think that there's another fortune hidden here!" Bryson uttered, astonished, dropping the book again, producing a bang. "This woman's father told her about a treasure that their ancestor who had the castle built had hidden here..."

"There's a page missing!" he announced, frantically looking for it.

He then lost interest, and read more, trying to find something that would prove him right.

"Do you know," he explained aloud, "that William Randall hid the remains of his vast fortune..."

This finally grabbed Robert's attention.

"It actually says that?"

Bryson turned it about, pointing at part of the text. And he took it, and read it for ten minutes.

"It does: it says William Randall hid it in case any of his enemies attacked the castle. It mentions that he intended to capture the castle back, and that he died with it still hidden..."

Chapter 28

Perilous Endeavors.

There were no clouds in the morning sky. The snow had stopped at around midnight.

Bryson lifted the previous day's newspapers from the floor, below the bed, and recollected the weather, just before he came to the weather forecast. There was a worsening forecast for the rest of the week.

The servant's death, on the front cover, was startling, but he had known and expected to see it. What it surprised him about was how far they described where the castle was.

He did not know why the reporters and other media people were taking such an interest in the place.

But it was the twenty-first century. People, even about this region, would not take news events, even happening around them, very seriously—and take that much notice. However, he was sure that they would have noticed this story, with a murder occurring.

It made him fully realize how out of the way the place was.

Bryson lifted the sheets, to climb out of bed, and gave a spontaneous shudder, as he felt the coldness of the room—with a slight draft blowing through it, from the door to the window.

He dressed himself quickly, and instinctively, ignoring it, trying to think of a way to warm the room. Then he moved over to the window.

From the snow, there were no signs that any cars had entered or left the castle—also proving that the servants had not arrived yet.

He considered how they would arrive at the castle if the snow blocked the road, as it probably would.

It was just like Sir Richard to die in the middle of winter—while blizzards were tormenting the landscape.

Bryson filled a bag with some things that he wanted to take with him. He cleaned his winter jacket, and folded it over his arm. It felt slightly damp though, which could prove that some dampness had entered the room.

He wanted to go out before it snowed.

He unlocked the door, and closed it at the outside.

There were no sounds from the other rooms.

None of them had even suggested seeing the hidden library, and it surprised him that they had not found it—considering the amount of ground that they were covering.

As he wandered through the silent corridor, towards the library, and to Merton and Mortimer, he considered what to do. There were two main options, which he could see: they could stay in the library or they could keep looking in the rooms.

He glanced into some of the rooms, to see if there were any doors similar to the door on the library room.

At the library door, he heard vocal tones from inside. They sounded very awake, and that they had gone in there not that long ago—rather than them being there for many hours.

But they usually were more awake at late and early hours.

They usually needed to stay awake to check things satisfactory. Even though many investigators set up their equipment and left it—and checked the results later.

They enjoyed their work, and the thrill of the encounter. But he was unsure that they had *fully* accepted that there were real dangers.

One look in the library, and at them, confirmed that he was right—they were active, cleaned up, and ready for action.

What they were thinking of doing was not quite clear though, and he could not imagine that they were excited about sitting in the library.

The books were at their feet, and they were studying opened books, all over the table.

“Did all of you have anything to eat?”

“Yes!” Mortimer replied. “And we had a good meal last night – with Inspector Bailey.”

“Did you find anything here?”

“Nothing significant!” Merton replied, looking slightly guilty. “There are Victorian books on psychic research, which are very interesting, for our normal research, but there is little to do with here. Other than the fact that the books show that someone here was interested in explaining what was occurring here.”

What did they think of the castle now that they had read the stuff and had conducted their experiments (besides being confused about certain things)? What sort of ghosts went rampaging through woods?

If the local stories were correct, it was capable of smashing to bits a horse carriage, and it could knock over trees.

Its strength must have limits, or the entire wood would have trees strewn about it, as though a hurricane had been through it.

However, when they had checked the wood, there had been no prints from it, and there had been no noticeable trees turned over. But it might be able to do it under the certain circumstances (which could mean that it could change its strength). Perhaps it could change its speed, making it even more dangerous.

It could be an entity with a type of computer intelligence, programmed to attack humans.

But who had programmed it?

“We would like to see those tombs you mentioned!” Mortimer declared, smiling— instantly grabbing his attention—producing thoughts of it smashing him to bits.

Bryson hesitated for a moment, and steadied himself—calming his mind.

They obviously had a good reason for wanting to go there. Even though he did not know why it was so important.

It even managed to overshadow the sounds of that room—perhaps for the first time in his life.

What would his life have been like if he had met with those things in the wood...?

“Why do you want to go there?” he answered.

“There are numerous reasons...” Merton stated, obviously avoiding answering his question. “We want to look around—as part of our research!”

“Nothing should happen during the day,” Mortimer continued. “It only manifests at night...”

“So all the stories say! If you want to go there, then I’ll take you. But I would prefer to go now, if you do not mind. It becomes dark pretty early here. There’s also a chance that it may snow today.”

“Perfect!” Merton replied.

Bryson walked over to the window, to look about the trees. A few crows flew over them, indicating that there was food or something near them—and they were hungry.

Suddenly, he saw something moving to the castle, through the wood.

The figure of the butler emerged, on the road going to the castle, which was attracting the attention of the birds.

The rest of servants appeared, with the butler leading them towards the castle. He was sure that they had walked from where they had parked their vehicles. They

more than likely had left them at a place on the road that would not be covered over in deep snow, under a thicker part of the wood, where they could reach the main road from.

He was not aware of how dangerous it was. Why had nothing happened to them before? Surely people had walked through there, in the dark, countless times, over the years. The place would have had the same weather conditions—the climate had created many blizzards over the years. Could the place somehow be out of reach of the things in the wood? Moreover, had he come across it by accident—being incredibly unlucky? Its haunts, according to the stories, were at distant and unpopulated regions of the estate. There was no noticeable logic to this logic!

He listened to the servants enter the building, laughing at a joke. He realized that they might be able phone the local council, or where the snowploughs were, for the region, to ask them to clean the road.

“Let’s go...” Mortimer muttered, moving to him.

Merton and Mortimer led him to their room—where they put on some thick jumpers and jackets.

Once along the corridor, they increased their pace towards the back door. However, as they moved outside, and they saw the depth of the snow, they walked at a normal speed, trying not to become too tired.

On their entrance to the trees, he looked for anything suspicious in front of them. There were no footprints or anything like that, but he saw a few marks that looked as though something large had been there, but it became clear that it was just the wind blowing through some trees.

Distant screeches of crows appeared and vanished from ahead of them, and he listened for any sign of anything. He realized that it was the complete absence of normal things, and the unusual silence, which hid everything there. (Sounds did not seem to carry very far, and the crows were probably screaming, communicating.)

His tired eyesight was all he had to detect anything there, and the vast amount of shapes and shadows, constantly changing about him, was too vast to search. There could be someone behind any of the hundreds of trees. If they had a dog, it would have helped immensely.

He wondered if humans had been losing senses that could put them in danger in such places—which all the other animals seemed to rely on, for their survival.

What captured his attention, more than anything else, was that Merton and Mortimer were in a rush to see the tombs. They were not just tombs to them—they were something important.

Had they come upon something that had told of something, which told them that something existed out there, which could perhaps show them why the place had something haunting it, or perhaps solve part of the mystery? However, if the others had affected them enough, it might be something to do with the money. But where would they have found that information?

As they went deep into the wood his curiosity grew, especially because Merton and Mortimer refused to speak about it, and trudged on, determined to complete their mission. He tried in vain to slow them.

“What is so *important* about going there?” he finally groaned, walking beside Mortimer, who had perspiration over his brow, and was breathing deeply.

"It interests me," he replied, making Bryson smile.

"Does it have to do with: finding the money here?"

"That as well!"

"Perhaps I can answer your queries first—since I have been there and looked around there—and you will not have to wait to acquire the information!"

"That's an idea!" Mortimer replied, finally slowing down, to a reasonable speed, allowing him to think.

"What's the main thing that you wish to know?"

"We really want to look about there, to see if we can find out anything—especially from the writing that we were told is on the tombs. And we wish to see if there is any clues about the occurrences..."

"And, by chance, do you think that Sir Richard hid the money away out there—*at the tombs?*"

"They were considering that clue—*where the last dwell*—and they think that it refers to *humans...*"

PART II

Lost in Time.

Chapter 29

Mysterious Discoveries.

"You may be correct about it referring to humans," Bryson explained, "but none of my ancestors, in the tombs, were the last...!"

"We believe that it may have something to do with your ancestors in the tombs," Mortimer carefully answered. "They could have believed that they were *the last!*"

Bryson smiled, and thought about it once again. From their angle it was slightly astonishing. The reason that he, and probably the others, had not believed that it had been true had been because they had not been the last—there had been as many of them as there ever had been. But they might have believed that they had been the last! Or, for some reason, one of them could have believed that the family would not have any descendants, or something like that, and had something written on one of the tombs.

"So you believe that there may be something mentioning the clue on one of the tombs!"

Merton clapped his hands, congratulating him, on his reply.

"Nonetheless, we just want to look around, for anything of interest—especially to see the tombs."

Bryson was sure that there was more, and just accepted their reasons, with interest.

"We should have brought torches ...!"

"Why do we need torches?" Merton anxiously inquired, shoving his way through a deep area of snow, moving next to him.

"There are stairs running down—to the tombs, and there are no lights—in the underground chamber."

"Therefore, we'll have to go back!" Mortimer grumbled, coming to a standstill.

"No! It has light. It would have been better..."

"My key ring lighter should be good enough," Mortimer replied. "If we need it to read them."

Bryson worked out the position of the road, and where the place was where the servants would have left their cars. It was further away than he had thought. This part of the wood was more isolated.

Even though the wood held many hiding places, where anything could be—including where the killer of the servant could be lurking, it was far from being as bad as it had been at night. At the most distant parts, as far as he could see,

through all the gaps in the trees, he imagined the dark shapes of the trees, branches, and undergrowth as black figures, dwelling there.

They had correctly timed it, as the sky had hardly changed since they had left—except it growing brighter.

When he had told them that it was best to go there before it was nightfall, he had not meant to race there. If anything did appear, it would surely kill them. They would not now be able to run properly. The snow was thick and rugged, and it was too hard to keep a reasonable speed going through it.

Merton instantly halted, removed a cigarette out of his packet, and handed him one. He quickly lit them, before he moved away from him. But he persuaded him to go slow, while they smoked. Mortimer eventually noticed that they had dropped behind him, and waited for them to catch up. He then walked slowly along with them.

The pace did not last long, and Mortimer soon had them going after him again, but at a more controlled pace.

There were hardly any differences to the wood, even though he was looking for prints of creatures anyway. It now seemed even more stranger thinking of them, and the murder of the servant and footprints from the castle.

Why had there been a stranger there at the castle? How many people would have entered the wood? Had the person walked there, or had the person arrived by other means. Nobody had seen the stranger, according to the police. The person had to have been watching the place.

Why had he not left as soon as he had committed the crime? He had been in the castle when the police had arrived. Had he been hiding somewhere, perhaps doing something, until they had arrived there?

The trees had slightly sheltered the area that they were in, from having too deep snow, but in areas, it had patches of thick snow, fallen from the branches over it.

As they approached the building, Mortimer went further out, in front of them. Bryson recalled seeing something in it that resembled a stone seat, and just increased his pace.

Mortimer only stopped to rest when he reached it.

Bryson led them around it, cleaning some of the snow and dirt away from the windows that he passed.

Some had small cracks in them, from something. But it must have been there for centuries.

Mortimer hesitated, as he crept through the door, vaguely surprised that it opened. Bryson nodded his head, and went straight to the seat in it. Even though it was more like a block of stone than a seat, and was there for decoration—like the columns, urns, and other articles.

Merton sat beside him, and Mortimer strolled around its walls.

“It’s dark!” Merton confirmed.

“What do you think?” Bryson asked. “Do you still think that it’s here?”

“You have a point...” Mortimer moaned. “Who would put it away out here! Your uncle would have to have been very eccentric to put it here. Or really determined to hide it from everyone.”

Bryson was still convinced that Sir Richard would have had the money close at hand—making it safe—with it there if he needed it.

In fact, it could even be the best clue that they had, as he was sure that he would not have left it for such a long time anywhere else. He would have to have known that he would never need it, and put his trust in the fact that nobody would have found it.

The interior had much more light than the last time. He was positive now that they had used candles to light it, and he saw places that they could have placed them. It did not have such a bad design, which made the vault under them too dark.

"Do you think that this place is haunted?" Bryson joked, out of curiosity.

"Have you heard anything about it...?" Mortimer instantly inquired.

"No, but it's in *this estate*... I wonder if anyone has ever checked it! I cannot even imagine any sane person staying out here in the middle of the night, especially with those things rampaging about the wood."

Bryson observed the interior, and the windows in more detail. It was in good condition for its age, but it would need a large amount of cleaning to remove the stains from the stone, done by years of wear and tear, especially from the bad weather conditions.

"We can check it!" Merton explained. "We can set up some of the equipment at some other time..."

He wondered if they would run if the things in the wood attacked. They did not seem to see that there was any deadly danger.

Yet he had only heard the things, and seen the light.

He did believe it to be a good experiment—leaving their equipment there—but if it led to them staying in it, and those things turned out to be like what he had been imagining them, then it would be the worst mistake that they could make.

After five minutes of silence, and a proper rest, Mortimer went towards the steps.

Bryson waited until Merton followed him until he joined him.

The steps showed signs that water had recently made it into the building, and had flowed down into the vault, but it had not reached very high at the bottom. They had compensated for leaks, from the door allowing water entering into the structure, as the tombs were far above the ground.

The building also was on a small hill, on slanted ground, which would not allow it to become flooded.

It was a strange design; apparently designed more for its looks... What else would they have wanted...? It hardly was a place, where people would want to stay.

The original castle had been a castle, and a type of fort, as castles tended to be—so there were few leisure places in its originally structure.

The area with the tombs was large, and many areas had remained empty, ready for more tombs. Bryson wondered if there would be any more, and if the next owner would copy Sir Richard—and not bother.

The more he saw the tombs the more he wondered if it proved that the person who had it built had been religious. However, he might have only wanted a respectable place, and for people to remember him for many centuries.

Merton copied things from a tomb onto a piece of paper, while Mortimer just read them, and thought about what the words meant.

Chapter 30

The Tombs.

Mortimer's attention remained on the tomb of William Randall—the oldest there—the person who had built the castle—and he had been the most likely to have known why the supernatural disturbances were taking place.

"It's just as Robert said, and definitely to do with your clue!"

He looked slightly annoyed, when Merton disturbed him, and he could not make any sense of it as an answer.

"So we're still at the same place as before," Bryson muttered.

The whole event confused Bryson.

Mortimer stopped, and Merton started copying down the words from other tombs. Bryson was then able to take a close look, with Mortimer's key ring light.

What sort of person had William Randall been? Bryson examined the features of his tomb, all the tombs, and the vault that he had built.

However, he knew that their hopes of finding it there were little.

For a long time, Merton and Mortimer went from tomb to tomb, and he did likewise—continuing to read them—until it was obvious that they had everything there.

Merton eventually lit a cigarette.

Bryson lifted his bag from the ground, noticing that dirt was beneath it.

"If the others thought that they all were the last of something," Merton theorized, "it could be in any of the tombs."

"That's a good point," Mortimer moaned. "That writing on the tomb could just refer to it. Or it could be something to put people off. Was your uncle as *crafty* as that?"

"He might have been—I do not know. He had been a ruthless businessman, who made a fortune. But he seemed to like games—hiding his money like he did..."

"How obsessed was he at doing it though?" Merton asked.

"That's what I want to know."

"So let's assume that it is in one of the other tombs," Merton continued. "What one would it be?"

"I don't think it's in any of them."

"None of the others do either," Mortimer replied sincerely.

Bryson tapped the floor with his sole, almost putting a grin on his face. It was absurd! Who would want to bury it in a burial site?

He ignored it, and walked about, feeling restless.

Pieces of material had fallen to the ground from veils that had been at the sides of the walls. The place had a morbid look.

"It might have been your uncle," Mortimer muttered, "who thought that your ancestors in the vault had been the last of something."

Chapter 31

The Intruder.

Bryson stamped hard, with his sole, into the vault floor—listening for any variations in tone, and for any hollow regions.

Even as he walked to new spots, he continued listening and feeling for any movements.

Yet if it were buried below, it could be drenched in water. And he was sure that Sir Richard would have had to have found a place above the ground.

He banged and tapped parts of the wall, as he walked around it.

They could be there all day searching, for nothing. It was no use—it was not there!—and he was growing tired.

“Let’s take the information and go,” he finally announced, annoyed. “We’re wasting time! We can find out what that tomb meant elsewhere.”

Merton and Mortimer instantly agreed, and they speedily followed him up the stairs, while he still instinctively listened for anything beneath his feet.

The bright warm sun was glorious, and the building was dull and gloomy.

Mortimer strangely never rushed on, and seemed to have reached a conclusion. He was leaving with what he had wished to know.

They were just content to walk in the warm sunshine.

Sparrows flew about the trees, about them, knocking the snow down, making Bryson consider why there were so few. He had been taking it for granted that it was the freezing conditions, altered winter landscape, expelling the wildlife.

The last time that he had been there, it had been at a different time of year, and he recalled that there had only been crows about the wood.

The place would make a good golf course: if they removed most of the trees...

“What’s that...?” Merton revealed, wandering into the nearest trees. “Someone’s...!”

“They’re fresh footprints!” Mortimer exclaimed, arriving there before Bryson.

Bryson crouched near them, and measured their size.

“They look the same as the prints that we followed from the castle,” Merton declared.

“That killer could be out here...!”

“And I’ll bet that they were not there when we came here,” Mortimer remarked.

“Let’s follow them!”

They trailed away into the undergrowth, in roughly the same direction as the castle.

“Where do you think he is?” Merton asked suddenly.

“Somewhere over there,” Mortimer said, pointing at a slight angle to the castle.

“He’s gone outwards...”

“He must have seen our prints, and decided not to go across the path—to avoid leaving a trail.”

What sort of person would have done the murder, which had been in all the newspapers (with accounts of the police investigations), and coolly appear after it?

Was the killer unsatisfied with what he had done?

He must be desperate to do something, or not that good. If the police had found those prints that night, they might have caught him.

The person could be insane though!

Yet how had he hidden?

He must be watching the place!

Had he killed Sir Richard? It was possible, of course, and he could be doing it because Sir Richard had done something. As a ruthless businessman, he might have made many enemies over the years.

There had to be a good explanation for it!

Perhaps the police could watch the wood, and as soon as he did something, they could capture him.

"Let's fetch the police!" he announced, stopping, not considering their plan any longer. "He must be heading for the castle! And he's already killed someone."

"We may be able to find him this time," Merton instantly replied.

"He's right," Mortimer agreed. "We'll need help."

"The police may be able to surround the area—before he gets a chance to escape."

Merton suddenly realized how serious the situation was. "Let's go...!"

Bryson took the lead, and marched through the snow, going straight to the castle.

He could have kicked himself for not having a mobile phone. They could easily have contacted the castle.

He was beginning to feel tired again. And the bottom of his stomach felt heavy.

He was sure that the last time that Inspector Bailey had not been fully convinced that it had been him—even though they had been still carrying out investigations at the village.

None of them had realized that he was roaming the grounds.

The police should have been doing what they had made out they had been going to do—and had men watching the woods as well.

The view of the castle, finally emerging through the trees, was a very welcome sight.

When they approached it, he immediately realized that he would be in the surrounding wood watching the castle, and would be watching them go in. And it would be necessary not to show that they knew of his presence.

He wondered if they could have handled the stranger in the wood, if they had confronted him.

Even though he had strangled his victim, of an elderly servant, he could have a weapon, to make sure that he succeeded with what he was doing.

Bryson started to slow, as they left the trees.

There were no signs of anything, and the crows were not there.

Once they were in the castle, he raced through the corridor, wondering why nobody still ever locked the door, where he had sneaked into the castle.

The others were hardly content with the front door being locked, stopping almost anything entering.

Merton then led them straight to Inspector Bailey, knowing exactly where he would be.

Chapter 32

Escalating Irregularities.

The police superintendent had only been in the front hallway for less than five minutes, and already Bryson had learned more of Inspector Bailey than he had learned of him over the whole time that he had known him.

Inspector Bailey was, of course, his best man, and favorite, and put there to handle the job bestowed upon them. If anyone could solve the crime, it was he.

"This means a lot to me," the Superintendent warned, as if fighting to stay calm—under intense pressure.

Inspector Bailey mechanically pleaded: "As I've suggested in my report: this is not a routine case."

"This was why we chose you to handle it!"

He turned about, like an army officer, and marched through the doorway, without wasting any more time, almost glancing at Bryson.

It had to have been important for him to be visiting the castle, with no other intention than to encourage Inspector Bailey to do his job (even though he might have gained an insight into what sorts of problems he had).

Bryson now believed that he had missed things. It left him with deep feelings that they had hidden important information—only known to them.

Inspector Bailey now appeared overenthusiastic to get to the bottom of the mystery, barely stopping himself—with his mind continuing to delve over and over into what he had encountered—trying recognize some minute fragment—in need of anything that could progress things, and stop him being suppressed.

Why had the case been so important and interesting though? And why did they have such fierce intentions of solving the murder of Molly? Surely they had a murder on their patch every so often.

Yet had something put them in fear of losing their jobs? There had been more than the usual suggestions in the newspapers that the government wanted them to reduce the crime figures dramatically.

Merton wandered out of the dining room, chewing hungrily at the last morsel of his meal. "So what's happening now?"

"It wasn't the killer," Bryson answered firmly, referring in the general direction of Inspector Bailey, further along the hallway—still absorbed in his thoughts—not noticing that he was standing himself, staring at an empty wall.

Bryson now knew that the case was not the only thing that he had troubles trying to solve, and he was sure that he might have an illness, such as cancer.

"What did they do?"

"They surrounded the estate, and followed the prints... He was caught by their police dogs..."

"So who was he?"

"They've not said."

Inspector Bailey suddenly became aware of the world about him, and casually strolled in their direction, looking at a form that he had hidden away. He

seemingly realized the conclusion to something, or more than likely put it aside for consideration, for another try.

"Who was it?" Mortimer remarked, trying to capture his attention, as he rushed out of the dining room, balancing a glass of wine – not rocking it enough to spill any on the expensive carpet, which seemed to be the only thing that was not ancient.

"Try and guess!" Inspector Bailey moaned, slightly amused at his antics.

"One of the locals..."

"Your wrong! It was a reporter."

"We were following a reporter!" Merton gasped, slightly taken aback.

"That explains a great deal," Bryson uttered, wondering if Inspector Bailey would ever again take their word for anything.

"It would explain why he hid," Mortimer explained. "And why he never crossed over where we had walked through the wood."

"He had his car parked along the road," Inspector Bailey continued, "and he walked straight through... to the trees over there—where we caught him watching the castle."

"Why would a reporter go to such lengths to photograph here?" Bryson instantly moaned, not understanding the logic behind it—mostly confused about why he had not even imagined it. "The man could have found more driving in here... At the most, he would only have been refused an interview!"

"The snow blocked the road... And from what I gather the young man went for a walk from there—to here. Incidentally, thinking that it was better to photograph here from the wood. Is that clear?"

Bryson gave a reluctant nod, giving Inspector Bailey an opportunity to move away to somewhere.

He had expected them to be defensive, and not as gullible, with high alertness, questioning everything.

Merton and Mortimer headed back into the dining room, aroused by the scents of soup, and the servants taking in more food for them, leaving him standing in the hall. And he just followed them.

"Are you not having anything?" Merton asked, between sips of soup. "There's a plate over there."

Of course, it was a good idea to eat as much nutritious substances as possible; he more than likely would not acquire a chance later. The events had absorbed a large chunk of his precious time. None of them, as far as he was concerned, had properly considered the words on the tomb.

The servants were cleaning up, and, from the outer noise, the kitchen was receiving a final clean. Their antics were now amusing—they sounded as though they were expecting them to provide another body for them to deal with, and that the place should at least be clean to a high standard.

There were suggestions that the recent events were to appear on the news.

He could just imagine them spending the day occasionally taking looks for bodies.

They could even be suspecting them—they had more motivation than anyone else did—they were trying to acquire the money. They could be keeping silent,

believing that the killer would be the one who would be their future employer. He could not imagine working there as a servant for a strangler of a servant.

Chapter 33

Deadly Quest.

A rhythmical patter of weak planks, clattering under their feet, echoed amidst the corridor—reflecting off the thick stone walls.

Bryson and Merton rhythmically copied Mortimer's steps.

Even though the rooms about them were dark, he was sure that they had no damage done to them, and that the others had not been there. It was more than likely that they just did not believe that there was anything there.

His thoughts returned to the recent events, and he wondered why they had not suspected a reporter. Did they judge people by their jobs so much that they could not imagine it being one?

He started to recall the main reason for them having believed that it had been the killer. Originally, he had believed that it had been him, when they had followed him through the wood, because of his footprints being similar to the prints of the person who had been at the castle.

They could have been very much mistaken, and he might have been so cool due to his cover...

He would have experience of the police—how they work—and what he could get away with, being a reporter. He could have been ready to make out that he had been investigating the crime.

Yet, he could see their point, there was no real evidence that it was him, and what sort of reporter did something like that. He could easily be an inexperienced one, working for a relatively unknown newspaper—desperate to give an impression...

The facts sank in—reporters did not do such things, as they would have little reason to do so.

They moved straight to the library—wherever it was—in the corridor (darkened by the early winter nightfall). The light switches were now too distant, to make any sense of using.

He would have expected the whole corridor to have switches along it, which was the most logical idea.

He would continue his search of the books, and trying to find any clues, especially anything to do with the words that they had seen on the tomb.

The library did not have any indications that anyone had been there since they had left.

If Robert had been there, there would probably have been signs of it.

"It would be a good idea to install closed-circuit cameras about this place," Merton sighed, relaxing into his seat, almost fully relaxed for the first time since their hike. "Think of what they could capture from the outer walls..."

"That's an idea!" Bryson uttered, thinking of it.

It would be a good idea for them as well, as they could search through the tapes for any unnatural disturbances.

Bryson went to the window, even though it was dark.

The outside was more menacing than ever, especially with it being on the ground level—where someone could sneak about, at the window, at its hidden regions.

His awareness of danger was high, especially with the amount of danger that they had confronted. What was stopping something from the wood smashing in through the window.

If it had happened before, they would not necessarily know of it. It could easily have happened, and the residents put it down to being something else. People said very little about the castle.

The people who had once lived there might have avoided the lower rooms at night. However, the lights might deter any other occurrences.

What a good idea it would have been if they had installed cameras.

And they only needed a few of them to cover the entrances, and perhaps some of the wood—making it impossible to enter without being filmed.

The snow glowed, in lunar light, from the moon somewhere overhead. While its distorted shapes reflected on windscreens, further out.

The wood illuminated, showing its deadness.

Yet would closed-circuit television do much? Except deter anyone from watching.

But an obscure view of something would be worth acquiring.

Blackness edged against the wood—from thick clouds stretching across the sky—like a thick black curtain.

Bryson strained his eyes, trying to see what he could.

The coldness coming through the window relaxed him, but made him shiver.

A gust blew up the snow from the ground, below the ledge. And he turned, to protect his throat, from a sudden draft from the edge of the window.

He adjusted his clothing, and moved back to where he had been sitting.

He dropped a book onto the table, to look at its tattered cover.

Now it was as if they were there because of their complete lack of information—about anything vaguely related with their present interests.

Had Sir Richard for some reason, having time to spare, made sure that they did not find anything at the castle—rigorously sifting through it—expelling all with slightest suggestion of an answer.

Mortimer spotted his weary facial expressions, and remaining restlessness. “We should try to find out something. And we’ve not properly considered what the words on the tomb mean.”

Mortimer removed his bit of paper, and he stretched it over the table, taking any creases out of it, making it flat and readable. Then he pushed it over to him, and he took it from him. But he saw that he had badly scribbled it, perhaps due to the dark vault.

Nothing sprang to mind... It had to be a riddle, which he had kept imaging it as, and a message to someone.

Merton sat staring over at it. “It might not be referring to people at all!” he remarked.

“What would it be referring to then?” he answered swiftly, seeking facts.

"Spirits of the dead!" he anxiously uttered, in a strange tone, instantly grasping his attention.

"That could be so..." Mortimer continued, with a serious professional expression—thinking deeply, trying to sort out some way of explaining some belief or something. He resembled a scientist unable to conceive the obvious on a subject.

"Many people in the past were eccentrically superstitious... They knew little—about how things work. Unlike nowadays! It could suggest spirits that were believed to be here!"

Bryson considered if they were typical psychic scientists or now down-to-earth people doing the job, trying to find the answer to everything (like him), which had tormented them.

Strangely, they had proven that something was at work, but not what it was. There was no definite evidence to hold any reasonable argument!

"The answer to the clue," Merton spoke loudly, deliberately capturing his attention, "*where the last dwell*, could be referring to where spirits dwell."

"Or where they had once dwelled," Mortimer spoke. "Many things alter—over time—even in a matter of years."

It was a breathtaking thought: it referred to ghosts!

Yet he, and most other people, never knew Sir Richard's beliefs on that subject, or if he would have done such a thing.

There had been no suggestion from him that it had been it, or even a joke. But if he had not believed that there had been ghosts at Grovnor Castle, he might have used it as a joke subject—to suggest something.

"Somewhere that they believed that they dwelled!"

Merton moaned, shrugging to them—identifying that the riddle might be just as complicated, even with them knowing it.

"It could not be where the tombs are..." Bryson moaned, mainly to himself.

"Not necessarily," Merton swiftly replied. "They might have built it on the site of where they were or had been."

Mortimer gave a look of surprise, and briskly thought it over, from various viewpoints. "That could explain why they built it a way out there—where it is not even accurately in front of the castle"

"It may be out of the way for a reason!" Bryson continued. "Most people do not have graves anywhere near where they live. They could have chosen it as it had been out of sight—away from everywhere. At a location where they could reach, without too much strain—but still out of the way.

"Finished!" Merton moodily returned, making Bryson give a smile, and want to quit the argument. "But if it's on *sacred ground*—or a haunted place—it may be what we are looking for."

"But why would they put a burial site on 'haunted ground'? Who would have wanted to have it on ground where there were ghosts?"

"Many people might have!" Mortimer replied.

"Do you think that they would have done it so that they would return as ghosts or something?"

“They could have believed anything! People from the dawn of time have had themselves buried in places that their ancestral spirits have supposedly dwelled. It could have been considered a good idea...

“And why did your ancestor build this castle here, where the legends mention something occurred?”

“He might have,” he resumed, now realizing that there could be some truth in it. His ancestor could have gone as far as that. Moreover, he might have been buried in a tomb where the last, of something, dwelt.

Chapter 34

Unconventional Research.

The sun blazed out, attempting to force life into the wood, which had been pounded out of it. It was as if an unknown element in life hardly existed there.

Perhaps the remains from a forest fire would be enough to rejuvenate it—making it return to its original glory—and pump life into the region. And it could for decades burst out with life, with birds darting about, and creatures such as squirrels hopping from the branches.

Through the trees, far ahead, the unnatural shape of the vault emerged in places, blending into the wood.

Bryson had not noticed that it was possible to see it at that distance. It resembled the other shapes in the dangling branches.

Bryson firmly placed the scientists’ heavy case onto the snow, in front of him, trying to remember what it was. Unsure if it was fragile!

A distant crackle of a branch briefly captured his imagination. What could break them, out here? It had not been as if it had fallen or anything such as that. It had been more like it had broken under pressure, with something heavy going over it.

His eyes scanned snow patches about him, for any traces of clues. Merton, of course, stopped, and shifted back to where Bryson was, as he had done on many occasions with him, throughout their jaunt back into the wood.

There now was something sneaky about Merton now. He was hiding a smile, with a strained face.

He knew very well how heavy the case was. It was by far the heaviest of the equipment that they were carrying, and he was sure that he had intended it to be – for his joke, and to lift the burden he would have had.

Mortimer had taken many precautionary measures, so that nothing like water would damage it. Anything was better than equipment that badly functioned, or never functioned, when needed—and it was not possible to replace it in the near future.

Yet they were going to leave their equipment out here, where they would not go near at night.

If they did have hidden plans, and attempted to stay, they might try to persuade him into doing so. If anything happened, he would never forgive them. It was one

thing carrying out their experiments, where there were only chances of them losing their equipment.

They surprised him at times. They strangely argued about the possible existence of paranormal things, but when he insisted that there could be danger, they insisted that the danger was little, if it even existed.

There was no evidence of anything having taken place in the wood, and he had only witnessed noises, which remarkably similar to the ones at the rooms. It was the fact that he had never seen it, and that there had been no signs left from it. All he had as proof that it ever had been there were his reflections of what he had heard.

“Come on now,” Merton restlessly remarked, “we’re almost there.”

Mortimer showed some agitation, at them stopping so close to where he wanted to be. Yet Bryson wanted to rest, and so did Merton by the looks of him. Perhaps Mortimer would help carry the heavy equipment the next time.

“It’s a good day,” Bryson replied, reassuring him, and removing his radio, from his jacket.

He stood, playing with the frequency, moving it in different directions—locating the right place. And he increased the volume. The gap in the trees surprisingly had not completely cut off the signal.

He then realized that there were no forecasts going to be put on anyway, and he flicked it off and dropped it into his pocket. Then he raced after Merton and Mortimer, who had moved away out in front, with full intentions of leaving him further behind.

He had not heard any forecasts, even though he had been listening and adjusting the stations on it for most of the morning. They seemed to have lost interest in it.

“The weather should stay the same,” he finally reassured himself, trying to sense and detect anything that would indicate it. But he could not, and remained unsure.

He should have bought something that would key into the meteorology center, to give him a constant forecast.

Why did they have to take so much equipment to the vault? It was worryingly starting to resemble a test site, than his ancestral resting place.

The amount of time it was going to consume was unthinkable. They would have been better off remaining in that library—wasting time there. There were possibilities that they could come up with something from one of the books. And they, at least, could complete their search.

Bryson rushed over their trail in the snow, trying to catch up.

He was starting to see the point of view of searching for it at the castle. He was annoyed, as they could have searched many different places—especially places that nobody had searched.

Yet there were possibilities that they could shed light on what that thing had been.

He just did not believe their theories about it being the ghosts of the wood that were the last. And he did not really believe that that anything else that they found there would lead them to the money.

Merton and Mortimer rapidly moved into the small clearing where the structure was, with their eyes darted about searching the ground, for any signs of prints that were not theirs.

When Bryson approached it, he hardly looked, but he listened instead.

He carefully placed their equipment at the entrance, leaving it where they could get it.

He felt better without it, and he wandered about, through a deep patch of snow, allowing the heat of the sun to go over his face.

There were possibilities of the money being in the grounds. Surely it was not in the vegetation though!

Bryson peered into the trees, into brightly lit areas—delving deep, in different directions—fascinated by the prospect that he might have overlooked a possibility. What if there was more here than the vault, as Robert had suggested? What if there was another structure or something here? There were possibilities that Sir Richard had hidden it there.

Why did they take it for granted that there was not another structure? What if there were other things out there? They would not have thought that there was a vault in the wood if they had not seen it from the castle. And they had not even known that it was a vault, and their ancestral tombs. They had wanted to discover what the mysterious place had been.

The people in the castle, in summer, when they had built it, might have openly moved about the grounds—and garden—during the day—having such things as picnics. People in the past never stayed inside builds that much. The wood would have been much younger, and full of life, with animals and birds in vast amounts. He could recall many woods that had changed in a few decades—never mind over hundreds of years.

Most of the trees were nothing like that age. A few giant oak trees looked about the age of the castle though.

They could have had places all about the wood where they had visited. Such as a river.

He would like to give the wood a good search. It had to have more than trees. The more he thought it over the more he liked it.

Merton started collecting the equipment, moderately annoyed about Bryson putting more prints on the snow than he needed to do. Of course, he was right, as they needed to check for signs of anything, especially with them carrying out their experiments.

Bryson moved back over his precise trail, making as little mess as he could.

In the vault, Bryson heard Merton saying that he wanted to survey the upper floor of the structure, while Mortimer wanted to concentrate everything at the tombs.

“It would be a good idea having something here,” Bryson agreed with Merton, pushing away the door, going towards them.

“Why?” Mortimer argued, blinded by some desire.

“For one thing,” he explained, “not every grave in the world has a ghost. In fact, I have not heard of any graves with ghosts, and, as far as I have heard, they usually occur where people die. Beside there are no accounts, anywhere, that there is anything here.”

"You've a point," Mortimer quickly agreed, not really seeing the point. "So, where do you think we should look?"

"If this is the place of the last, mentioned in the clue, it does not mean that they would be down there."

"Okay!" Merton reassured him. "We've video equipment that reacts to movements, lights, and sounds."

"Well, I'd like to have it outside. Perhaps on one of the trees."

"What!" Merton grumbled, expecting him to reply about putting the camera in the upper structure.

"That's interesting," Mortimer replied, slightly smiling.

Mortimer glanced through a gap in the doorway, and at the trees, covered in snow.

"Well, if this is the place where the last dwell, we should have a full view of this whole place, going back as far as possible, into the distance—capturing as much as possible, and the wood."

"If it snows," Mortimer went on, "the weather could damage it though."

"We could leave it at the window," Merton muttered, thinking of his line of thought. "As well as it filming here..."

"Look!" Mortimer argued. "You can check the sound in here, and you can put a camera over there. Then if we do pick anything up anywhere, we can use more equipment at the place tomorrow."

Bryson and Merton nodded, still insisting that they were right.

"But if it does snow," Merton muttered to Bryson, "the water will damage it!"

Bryson removed a waterproof translucent bag for the camera from his pocket, which he had once used before.

"The snow could cover it," Merton continued.

"I'll put it at an area of a tree that the snow will not reach, to get a proper picture."

Merton considered it, and showed a baffled expression, and, perhaps, his thoughts—that it was a daft idea. Then he carefully opened the case to fetch it.

Bryson prepared to head for the door with the camera, but Mortimer decided to show him its basic functions.

"It has various means of detection," Mortimer spoke, showing him various parts of it. "It detects unusual things! It detects various forms of energy. It detects the environment around it, remembers it, and continuously searches for any changes in it, which will activate it. Sound and infrared detection included! It can record the darkest things, which even the eye cannot see, and it can film it in infrared at the same time. And it also records sounds by focusing in on anything that it detects, and it records it in a far better quality and degree than the human ear."

Mortimer demonstrated its functions, showing him how to work it, and the recorded results.

Even though Mortimer had argued about putting it there, he started to think of it as not just being a useless concept. As something worthwhile might activate it. And it might film the light that Bryson had seen in the wood.

Mortimer carefully fixed it up. He was very experienced with such devices, and Bryson wondered if they could find anything if given enough time.

"It runs—and it'll automatically turn off..."

Bryson carefully fitted it into his bag, and he securely fixed it onto his jacket, so that he could easily remove it.

He had found the perfect place for it, but he would have to do some awkward climbing to reach there.

Merton and Mortimer stood at the door, as he strolled over the snow towards the trees.

As he pulled himself up the first branches, lightly gripping them, using his legs against its trunk more, he decided to try to achieve a quick climb.

Its branches were more like a strange ladder, evenly spaced, at a few feet apart. The scent of pine mingling with the snow was overwhelming. The view captivated him, encouraging him to keep going up.

Were they wasting their time? Would ghosts activate this equipment?

It might be useless too, as strong winds and swaying trees might ruin the project. A storm might swiftly use up the memory and battery power. But he doubted it! He was now more interested in if it would do its job in a storm.

He realized that they were using the latest technology available, and that science might have finally advanced far enough to get perfect recordings of ghosts.

He considered adapting other technology to progress further.

Perhaps, as Mortimer had once suggested, one day scientists would be the first to capture a ghost with such technology.

A gust of wind made the tree sway about, causing snow to fall over him, and he stopped until it subsided.

The view from the tree was tremendous—and he saw that he was high enough already.

Merton and Mortimer's figures were in the shade of the building—with their arms firmly folded—looking slightly bemused.

Bryson rested over a branch, occasionally testing its safety. And he spotted a better place for the camera, where it was not observable.

If Merton and Mortimer had not been there, and anxiously waiting on his return, he would stay where he was to rest more.

He considered if there was any primal instinct in his genes to like being in the tree, considering humans had such close genetic links to monkeys.

It was relaxing and interesting!

What would it be like staying there though, in a tree house?

He had seen them out in Africa, with all the comforts that he needed.

Once he had set up the camera, he began descending, shifting downwards, and he quickly arrived at the lower branches.

Mortimer moved down into the lower vault, with his equipment. While Merton continued setting up a sound recording instrument, behind the stairs, next to a window.

At the door, Bryson observed the tree, and instantly noticed how hidden it was, and that he would not see it. If the presence of the equipment altered anything, it might work better.

If anything, it was far more interesting than Mortimer's plan. He could not imagine anything happening there.

His sight fell on the interior of the vault, and he remembered the sounds in the room.

What was causing it?

Everything had a logical reason! Why could there not be anything existing there? Why would there not be anything at the tombs? In other words, he did not fully understand, and he did not believe anyone properly knew, from what he had heard.

Merton finished, and he followed him down the stairs to Mortimer.

What sounds would they find there? He tried to see Mortimer's view, and why it would not be a waste of time monitoring there.

Merton and Mortimer adjusted a machine, and tested its recording ability. It fascinated them—capturing spirits from the afterlife, with such devices.

Bryson removed a bottle of wine, which he had managed to carry, and he poured it down his dry throat. Then he continued to take swigs, as he felt it restore his energy.

He tried to think of a new ways of detecting things.

Mortimer passed him, checking what he was doing, as he went to another place.

Bryson imagined a black shape in the pine trees, through a window at the top of the stairs, resembling a ghost animal. Like some primordial memory of an ape, hidden in its blackness. Like a spirit merged with a yeti.

Why did large creatures not exist out here. Although apes and monkeys did not inhabit such northerly regions, normal bears survived in Alaska. While polar animals liked surviving at unbelievable temperatures.

Foxes and deer had survived—while wolves, bears, and large cats had not.

It was relaxing sitting at such a place.

He observed wisps of smoke forming ghostly shapes, over the dimness below him, from Merton's cigarette.

A gust of wind entering through the door, soon shifted the shapes, dispersing them through the air.

Merton was now content to remain there. He insisted that Mortimer wanted to put the equipment there without any help.

He recognized some of Mortimer's antics, and that he was going to be there a long time—setting everything up at the precise places and angles, in the way that only he could do it.

Mortimer tapped away at a nail, trying not to make the noise too loud—thrusting it just hard enough to insert it into a crack in the vault wall.

They covered everything—with as much consideration as possible—in the time that they had given themselves. Mortimer still seemed to have thoughts about the camera in the tree. Though he was now sure that he thought that there was a good reason having it there.

The idea had originated from their conversations in the library—that they had built the burial site on the place where spirits, or whatever, dwelt.

Mortimer glimpsed at his watch, and it made him clumsily drop a wire from a machine that he was fitting in place.

Bryson suddenly realized that he was concentrating the equipment around the tomb of William Randall!

Chapter 35

Beyond Comprehension.

Bryson settled down, removed his jacket, and realized that the servants were behaving strangely.

He sensed a disturbing disbelief about something, and that there was something going to occur. Yet there was no indication of what! It seemed, as the servants marched about, doing their regular finishing duties, like they expected them to know or somehow sense it.

It was not only their peculiar reactions, including their rush to escape from the place. Inspector Bailey had a nervous appearance, about something, which seemed above his jurisdiction, and which made him gladly retreat, away to his room.

It had to be to do with the others, and, perhaps, what they were doing to find the money. It almost seemed grotesque, whatever it was.

Were they going to dig up some hideous thing or destroy something that they should not?

Then, as they left the dark and silent hallway, faint murmurs of a stranger's voice began emerging – from within the firmly shut door of the dining room.

Merton hesitated—moved in front of them—and shoved his head into a gap in the door.

"My god!" he whispered, but swiftly calmed himself, realizing the true nature of something, leaving them wondering what the cause of such a reaction could be.

In the deep blackness, within the room, a few glowing faces, near flickering yellow flames, on candles, became visible.

Mortimer glanced in, shut the door, and showed deep concern. "They've a spiritualist!"

"Doing what?" Bryson asked confused, now not recognizing what the problem was.

"They're holding a séance!"

He peeped through the gap in the door, which this time obviously disturbed the people within.

"What do they want with her?" he mumbled.

Robert appeared from the edge of the door, emerging from dimness, and came through into the hall, swiftly closing the door behind him.

"What are they up to?" Merton gasped, thinking of some implications.

"They're trying to speak to the spirits..." he muttered, slightly embarrassed.

"Why?"

He smiled, and put his hand at his hip. "To cut a long story short—after a discussion—they decided to bring in a medium to get more information about where the money is. It sounds absurd! I know... But we're having a great deal of fun anyway!"

Merton and Mortimer stared at each other, giving some hidden communication, making him wonder which of them was the most affected.

"It should be interesting," Merton finally remarked, to Robert, looking at Mortimer. "We don't usually allow people to overshadow us in our detection methods."

"You're right," Mortimer replied firmly, as though talking to himself. "I'd like to see what happens..."

"Has anything occurred?" Bryson stated, and Robert nodded that there had not been. However, it was clear that they had just started.

Robert crept back in, leading them over to a place at the side of the room, where they could observe, without disturbing anything.

At first, the medium, an elderly woman, seemed old-fashioned—dressed suggestively like a fortune-teller—using candles in a dark room—but it became apparent that she was creating an atmosphere.

She obviously was not doing it as an experiment, but like a game, customarily done on special occasions.

The people around the table, sat silently, waiting to see what was going to happen, before giving any hint of their opinions.

Even though James had begun giving an occasional shrug – perhaps explaining how stupid he felt.

The woman's eyes went wide, and she touched the table with her fingertips, feeling for any forces. She showed no sign of knowing what she was dealing with, and he doubted if anyone had told her what could be there.

If they had arrived earlier, they would have been able to explain the situation. She surely must believe in something. What was at the castle might react to her taunts!

Yet it did seem safe: she was just carrying out her procedure. And she did not sense anything different there. Perhaps it would take time though, or it was too early, and that she would need to do it at night.

Her head vibrated, and she shuddered. Then she prepared to do something, which mildly amused James, who now made an absurd expression.

Merton and Mortimer were devoted to searching for anything out of the ordinary. They seemed to signal each other, as it went on, that they were not missing anything.

It did interest and excite most of them, which was what she was concerned with, and he was sure that she would start to act more as soon as they started to become interested in it. She was absorbing their interest—stretching things out, waiting to put in the climax.

Mortimer uttered something to Merton.

Some noises made her open her eyes wide. She looked in their direction, into the dimness.

Her attitude visibly altered. She became serious and cautious about what she was doing, as if realizing that there might be something wrong with what she was doing.

The shadows of the people at the table shifted about, as the candle flames reacted to breezes. The medium used it, as one of her tools, to achieve her goal, to show that there could be some form of presence giving a reaction, and she almost tried to force something into taking place.

Some of the others observed the awesome sight, created mainly by the atmosphere there, not budging in any way, determined to see it through to the end, perhaps to obtain a conclusion (and perhaps receive answers to everything that they had witnessed at the castle, and to where the money was).

Psychics were supposed to be able to solve crimes, but, as far as he was concerned, it was a crazy idea.

Yet the room was cold, colder than he had ever felt it – almost making them shiver.

However, he doubted if he would be able to detect any change in temperature, signifying a real presence, especially with the slight breeze that kept appearing.

A slight click rhythmically interrupted the outer silence, from a wooden clock at the fireplace.

The medium chanted like a witch doctor, provoking the spirits.

Then she looked as though she changed her mind, and she returned to what she had been originally doing. She ignored them, but occasionally checked them.

She seemed to have some beliefs in her powers. She was playing with them, with it as a party trick.

As she seemed to show that she had given up attempting to do it for real, her face tensed, and she reacted, showing she now felt the presence of someone.

Her acting then became worse than ever, and he guessed what she could not do it.

For a moment, it annoyed him: her trying to contact his dead uncle in such a fashion.

Even if they did it, would Sir Richard tell them?

How absurd! How could anyone believe it?

He examined them again, considering how much they believed it.

“Have you any further details to help us find the money?” Helen requested, making James temporary lose control, with an ecstatic snigger.

“You’ll find it,” the medium replied, with a smile, making faces as though something were manipulating her mind. “You should search where your heart takes you!”

Everyone at the table looked either confused or good-humored. It had been what they had been waiting to hear—even if it had turned to an absurd joke.

Bryson sniggered, seeing one of their expressions.

Mortimer pointed to the door, now looking satisfied. And Merton encouraged him to leave swiftly, and Bryson followed them.

Robert stayed behind—with a bemused smirk stuck on his face—with his eyes glued on the medium, waiting to see if she would still do anything. But the medium now was doing a comic act, bordering on the absurd—probably owing to her doing it for so long, and enjoying that more.

She even looked as though she had done it on stage. Parts of it resembled a stage act, which the public wanted for amusement—instead of the real thing. She surely considered herself as a form of fortune-teller.

Outside the room, Bryson listened to Merton and Mortimer talking, and he wondered if they did believe that she could do it.

“Well, that was close,” Bryson jokingly muttered, leading them to the library. “Think what could have happened there, if that had worked...”

"She had trouble!" Merton explained, thinking deeply to himself.

"Do you believe that it works?" Bryson remarked, seeing the opportunity to acquire some more information.

"I did not know, when we went in there! What about you?"

"I hadn't seen it before—except on television. So I could not fully believe or disbelieve it."

"I have never fully checked it either."

"Perhaps we should! We could carry out a proper regulated scientific experiment."

"Doing what?"

"We could meet with her, after they finish."

"To do what?"

"We can invite her to visit that room—later—tonight!"

"What will we do?"

"We can wait until the disturbance occurs. Then we can take her there to hear it—to find out her opinion. And we can carry out experiment, and have her contact what's there."

Mortimer glared at the floor, looking slightly shocked, and he realized what his real beliefs were.

"If she cannot do the task, it will only prove that she cannot contact anything there after all. But, on the other hand, you may have the chance to find out something, if it really works, which you may never get another chance to do."

"I'll ask her. However, I don't really know what she'll pick up!"

Chapter 36

Beyond Their Limitations.

Bryson stood silently in the morning sun, beaming through the window of the top floor corridor.

Robert left what he had been doing in a room, and joined him.

They observed the people that James had brought in to help with the search.

Their heavy voices mingled and altered.

"They're still sure that there's another structure out there—somewhere!"

"And I gather you want to look about that wood!"

Bryson was more surprised that they were thinking along the same lines now.

It slightly alarmed him, and he tried not to reply, before he had considered it more.

Even if it did sound insane.

"We're going out there ourselves, but we're going to the tombs. They've set up some of their equipment out there."

For a moment, Robert looked a little surprised. Perhaps at the scientists checking their ancestral graves.

Bryson thought of how insane it was: all of them looking through that wood with that killer about. But was he capable of killing them in groups?

“We don’t have much time left... They’ll speed up the search anyway.”

Bryson spotted the spiritualist leaving the castle, crouched in the back edge of a car, looking guilty of something in particular.

He acknowledged that he should have guessed the medium’s reactions, instead of imagining her as what she had been portraying.

Merton had to persuade her to check the room with cash, which she had insisted he immediately pay her before she would go anywhere near it.

He had not believed that anyone could do anything there by the time she had left.

Even though when she had started trying to contact what had been there, it had deeply shaken him to see her fall back onto the bed, violently shuddering, making the bed loudly bounce, creak, and bang hard against the wall, as if something like an epileptic fit had seized her.

It had soon become apparent that it had not worked, and that she had decided just to act.

They had been too sleepy to explain anything to her.

He had been wondering if she would have believed it, if they had said what it had been. But he doubted it: she would never have accepted it.

He disregarded the radiating light, pulsating over his face from the sun.

He wondered what results other such experiments would do.

They could find someone else, who to do it correctly. Someone capable of giving them detailed accounts of it, of which they might be able to find some clue to what was taking place.

Perhaps they could find something that could pick up such things—without the aid of humans.

He could imagine vast machines like giant satellite discs receiving signals from the stars, monitoring supernatural disturbances all about the universe.

The corridor, with its silence, became noticeable, and he made slight reactions to it, thinking of what a spiritualist might experience.

The brightness outside sucked his sight away, vaguely blinding him, and he turned.

He pushed back the carpet with his shoe, and properly viewed the full length of the floor.

He instinctively shook a floorboard, to detect what condition it was in.

He decided not to check anything. He did not want to start searching the rooms, as the others were doing. He was sure that they were wasting their time. He would never have found the library if he had just done that.

They should look in all the key places first. And he would insist in trying to find it by other means, when it was possible.

Chapter 37

The Search Party.

People began emerging, and rushing about, trying to search everywhere, like a club outing, organized for a treasure hunt. Their apparent intentions, so it seemed, was to go over the entire wood, in close formation.

Even though they had organized the event together, they were furiously competing to find the money—by searching through the wood in their groups—with some people surprisingly on their own.

The noise was strange, at an outstanding level. Some of the people helping them had even gone out of their way to find more people to help.

Bryson was sure that Robert, or most likely James, had put an offer of a bonus figure for finding anything leading to its discovery.

The emptiness was packed full of action—with shouting, laughing, haggling, and arguing.

It was almost a shame to him that the wood was full of such activity.

The scientists had rushed him away at a tremendous pace—going straight to the vault—making sure that they could not interfere with the delicate equipment.

The rooks sat bemused, listening and observing, overwhelmed, with a hint of amusement. Their strange chants and behavior echoed through the treetops, occasionally making them flutter, and go up into the blue sky, in the golden rays of the sun.

Two men emerged from the trees, closely staring at them, studying their faces. But they were just making sure that they were not any of the others, as they walked straight across their path.

Their agile movements and speed surprised Merton and Mortimer.

They would immediately carry out their checks on the equipment at the vault, and return to the castle with it.

But they also wished to search the wood.

Bryson's hearing was now less sensitive in the wood, listening to the loudness.

He now wished to acquire some of the knack of the animals of the woods at surviving there, with a proper perception of his surroundings, without it being impaired. He thought of commandos, and survival specialists, handling jungle terrain...

It was really a matter of becoming familiar with it—knowing where everything was and was like. South American jungle tribesmen could easily detect a person's presence, deep within the undergrowth.

The rooks were almost useless to him now.

He recalled legends that South American tribes had about the spirits of the woods.

He heard faint familiar tones of Robert's voice, over to the side of them.

The visit to the castle could turn to a disaster, and they might not be able to do anything about it. The killer could be anywhere, out there in that tangle.

Yet there surely were too many people in the wood.

It was risky, but there were advantages in what they were doing. Before he had believed that it had not been feasible to search the wood. Now he was sure that they were doing a good job of it. He could hear some of them running through the undergrowth, just behind them, and they were clearly covering everything.

But another drawback was that they would be leaving footprints everywhere—taking away one of their only detection methods.

At the vault, Mortimer ignored everything and rushed down to the tombs, imagining that he were within minutes of saving the equipment; while Merton and Bryson slowly went to where Merton had left the recorder, on the upper floor.

Nothing had moved, and there were no signs of anything.

Bryson allowed Mortimer time to study the stuff, while he observed Merton checking the machine. After he had played around with it, making sure that it had been working properly, he switched it on. But there had been nothing captured, except for things such as their arrival, at least showing that it had been functioning properly.

"You'd better remove it before they reach here," he warned.

Merton started packing it away, and he went to check on Mortimer. At the top of the stairs, he tried to make out if he had anything, but he did not hear anything; he was doing something. He had expected him to be rapidly moving about.

Once at the bottom of the stairs, he instantly recognized that Mortimer was disappointed, and had surveyed everything the best that he could have, and he began helping him pack things.

It was easier to do than it had been setting up, with the precise work, placing it at key areas, while checking it had correctly been doing its job at the precise precision.

Bryson checked the thermometers—studying their lowest reading, and that they had the temperature that he had expected (at what the weather forecast could have told him had been the lowest temperature!).

He wondered if disturbances did lower the temperature, and the kinds of readings that they supposedly received—and if it perhaps dropped far beyond what it should.

He suggested to Mortimer to rush more, and they were soon heaving it up the stairs.

They then evenly distributed it between them more, to gain the highest attainable speed, and they headed back.

Bryson just left the camera that he had put up in the tree, as there was not enough time, and it was hidden away. He now doubted that there was anything on it, after seeing all the negative results. And another day would only allow the project to be conducted better. Perhaps if any of the others damaged anything, it would capture it.

Merton placed it on the snow, and moved it around to another position, to help him carry it better.

"It should be worth coming back," Mortimer confirmed, struggling to balance the equipment evenly on him. "It'll be worth it just to see what they do, and to find out if there's anything else."

A faint shout came from deep in the wood, and another voice hollered out from near them, surprising them at the closeness of the person, without them hearing anything.

One of them started explaining where they were heading towards to the people in the other group. There was no suggestion from either group that they had heard them moving through the wood, and were listening to them.

A sudden whistle appeared behind them, and he recognized that someone thought that he had found something, which clear was the vault. And the person started communicating to them to come over.

Had James informed them of the vault? He wondered if there was any chance of them damaging the tombs, while opening them. They would if they dropped the lids or something! He doubted if anyone would or would be able to replace them or properly repair any damage.

It became apparent that they had entered the region in the middle of their groups—spread out—as they worked their way through the wood.

“We’ll have to be more carefully,” Mortimer replied, stopping to listen to the others behind him.

“If there’s anything dangerous here...” Bryson moaned.

“Inspector Bailey said it would be safe, and even helped them out on where to search!”

“Why did he do that?”

Bryson could hardly believe it! The same indications continually emerged, implying that Inspector Bailey was playing an elaborate game here.

Chapter 38

Unanticipated Confrontation.

They soon started to return, after they had reached the castle, and had put away the equipment.

Their idea that the last were spirits of the wood could mean that it was anywhere about the castle though. It could be even underground, where they were walking. But the point that they were accepting, which must be the case, was that it would not be anywhere such as that.

He had to have buried it at a specific place. He would not have just placed it at any old place—and expect anyone to find it.

Bryson briefly considered the archaeological equipment available to survey beneath the ground. And that Sir Richard might not have thought along those lines.

If it was outside after all, they could continue the search after the ten days allocated to them.

But he doubted it very much if anyone would bother. They would just be wasting their time.

Mortimer insisted in taking them back to the vault first, and they soon discovered that more of them had entered the vault than they had expected. Groups of footprints came in from many angles. But it proved that they were an efficient force, to count on in properly searching the wood.

He now saw how useful it would be to use them in the castle. They could at least triple the amount of searches, and places that they searched. Though, for some reason, he was not sure if they would continue using them.

He stood at the bottom steps, with his eyes following the prints, going from tomb to tomb.

They mostly went to the most obvious places. And although the lids had all been lifted, there did not seem to be any damage.

Then his eyes fell on the darkest region, where he had been unable to observe, and fixed onto a dark shape, which instantly made his heart race wildly, and chill his blood. A dark figure was there—standing glaring at him!—out of the darkest part of the vault—as if from the depths of hell.

It surprised him—at there being someone there, standing watching him, without him noticing.

What is more, he was on his own, in the blackness, keeping quiet—clearly hiding there. And Bryson stood, frozen to the floor, just trying to see his face, shrouded in obscurity, and not moving in any way.

He could not recognize any of his clothing, which looked much more unusual than what the others had (for them freely and warmly to run about the wood in).

When he pulled himself together, he saw that the stranger stood staring eerily at him—not flinching in any way—as though trying to remain hidden, even though they were standing staring at each other.

“What have they done?” Mortimer called down, from the top stair – trying to see what he was doing. Bryson had been so enthralled that he had not even noticed Mortimer had been standing staring at him from there.

Bryson considered what dangers there were in such a confrontation, and whether he should back away.

He tried to see what he was doing, but the blackness engulfed his sight, and he saw nothing.

Perhaps outsiders from the village, such as poachers, used the wood, or it could be a region where they walked through. There could be trails leading throughout the woods. Even though there wasn’t the slightest indication of it anywhere.

Yet one of the people that James had there might have persuaded someone to look separately from them, to acquire the money for themselves. It could even be someone who had overheard what was taking place there. There was a large amount of cash hidden somewhere.

As Bryson began to back away, he noticed that not one sound came from him, and he sensed that there was much more to it. This person was reacting more strangely than he should, and he did not like it.

Mortimer marched down to him, fascinated by his strange behavior. And all he did was remain there—almost forced to allow something to happen.

Mortimer jerked, glared at the stranger, and walked over to him.

Bryson followed him. And a torch clicked on, and the stranger held it beside his face, as though showing his identity, but doing it so his features were slightly hidden, and not clearly recognizable. He saw only his blank expression, with no sign of any emotion.

“Did you find something?” Mortimer muttered, to force him into replying.

“No,” a deep voice replied.

“Who’re you with?” Bryson asked.

“I’m a journalist,” he mumbled, moving the angle of the torch near them, ready to remove identification.

“What’re you doing here?”

He made an expression that suggested that they had caught him doing something.

Bryson was sure that he had relied on there not being anyone there. As though he had been listening to them so closely, from a hiding place, that he had believed that they had been all away out of range, and that nobody would have confronted him—not knowing that they would return there to check it for damage.

How could the stranger have observed them so closely and have stayed unobserved? How else could he have so positively have known?

“Are you the reporter that the police caught photographing the castle?” Mortimer asked, startling Bryson. And, to Mortimer’s surprise, he nodded in agreement.

“What’re you doing back here?”

“To continue what I was doing,” he argued, as though continuing with a reply that he had come out with to someone else, which could have been one of the policemen.

“This is private property,” Mortimer warned, forcing him to leave. “You’d better leave now!”

Bryson followed Mortimer to the stairs, keeping the stranger at the edge of their sight—as he followed them out, staying at the same distance away.

At the top door, he watched the man, who now ignored them. His appearance was surprisingly more professional than he had believed. He marched silently and slowly into the surrounding trees, without reacting in any noticeable way. His behavior had been nothing like any reporter that he had encountered.

He did look strong enough to have strangled the servant.

He was up to something, and he did not like it!

Before following Merton and Mortimer into the wood, Bryson closely examined one of his footprints, and it clearly matched the prints of the reporter that they had found. But that was not all what he was looking for: he was trying to establish if it matched the faint prints of the person who had entered the castle. Yet though it did look similar, he was unable to confirm it, making him leave, considering the absurdity of the police at having released him.

Chapter 39

The Cottage.

Even as they rushed through the trees, dodging branches, shoving themselves through thick regions of undergrowth, a deep chill still gripped Bryson. They had confronted the killer in the vault, who had been roaming the wood.

However, if they proceeded with enough caution now, not to make any fatal mistakes, which seemed inevitable with what they were carrying out, they should be able to handle the situation.

They had to check everything that they could, to make sure that this guy never acquired an opportunity to do anything.

What had he been doing? Had he been searching for the money, now that one of them was not going to inherit it? Yet that would mean that someone had been in it with him all along, and, perhaps, was informing him of their movements (probably carried out by mobile phones).

What had he been doing in the castle when he had killed the servant though? Had he realized that she had known something about his associate, at the castle, and had he decided to kill her before it had been too late? But he might have been just trying to hide some clue, which, perhaps, he had left, and the servant had confronted him.

Deep within the trees, he heard cheers, whistles, laughs, and shouts.

They were from a large group. The others had gathered together.

They sounded too cheerful for his liking. Perhaps as they had joined together for a leisure break.

Mortimer took them away to the side of them, but stayed obsessed with his intentions of rampaging through the wood on a straight course.

It reminded him of playing blind man's buff. The wood was too dense, and it revealed very little. And their luck did not seem to be about to change either.

It was surprising how endless the wood seemed. All the woods he had previously been in were not endless—and had visible fringes, and had such things as gaps, and hills that could be used to survey land about it.

Merton and Mortimer still did not seem to have any real ideas on where the spirits of the wood were. He had expected some theories on where or what they actually were looking for to arise, and they seemed more to be waiting for something just to appear.

A bright patch appeared in the vegetation at their side, where there were shapes moving about.

Bryson felt how tired he had become, but decided not to slow; and he noticed that Merton was doing the same.

It annoyed him—when he thought about it—that Mortimer was just taking them somewhere the others would go. Did he think that they knew where they were going? And was he planning to join them?

He had expected him to change their direction.

Nothing that he heard from the others made any sense (seemingly meaningless conversations), but he heard tones of water, which mainly were splashes.

He was sure that it was only a small river, from sounds of water rushing along, as they could be normally heard a great distance away.

In the trees, at the center of a clearing, he saw the river leading through, with a pool that they were at.

Their presence drew the attention of some of them.

He spotted Robert, next to James, sitting in the middle of the group.

"If we could hire a helicopter," Merton stated, "we could properly search all of this wood."

Merton swiftly lit a cigarette, and blew out puffs of smoke, enjoying its intoxicating effects.

"Where's the nearest place that they have them?" Mortimer continued.

Bryson watched Merton draw in smoke, trying to gain something from it. "Perhaps the police have one that we can get hold of."

Merton and Mortimer nodded to disagree, disapprovingly.

"What's that?" Mortimer discoursed, turning left.

Bryson only noticed a faint shape of light, glowing in a spot of dark green.

"There's a wall—in all that jungle..."

Bryson peered, but accepted that his sight was now better than his.

"I see it," Merton admitted, stubbing his butt into the bark of a tree, as sparks blew out into a gust of wind.

Bryson stared again, not seeing anything.

He glared into dimness, as they shifted position, to a slightly different angle, and he saw what had looked like rocks was really some form of wall. It resembled the remains of an ancient house.

As they made their way there, Merton became excited about what it could be, and constantly glared.

If they had found something, they would be lucky.

He started to wonder again if Mortimer knew something and had discovered something in the library—such as a map of the grounds, showing another structure. He had insisted on taking them straight there.

Bryson listened to them to see what they made of it, before he examined it in more detail.

He saw that Mortimer was unduly inquisitive about it. It was a small structure in the trees, branches, bushes, long grass, and plants.

Moss and vines made it almost impossible to see in that denser region of the wood, and they had to shove their way into it.

It seemed remarkable how Mortimer had seen it.

Chunks out of its walls were sprawled about them. But it did not have any large holes.

"The roof seems intact," Mortimer announced, glaring upwards, pushing away the thick vegetation, as they moved around it.

The walls had thick blocks of stone identical to the castle, firmly cemented together.

Most of the slates were still there.

He heard the voices of some of the others moving on.

"Well," Merton uttered to Mortimer, "do you think that it's anything to do with that clue?"

"It seems be as old as the castle, but I don't see anything..."

The voices of the others grew.

The door was almost rotted away, hanging from rusted bolts.

Mortimer shoved it away, making it screech over the floor instead. The interior had some dampness and rot, and with loose and weak upper beams.

The inside was as gloomy as it could be. Little light emerged through an old broken window, covered over in green slime.

Smells of rot came from places that they passed.

Through the window, Bryson spotted one of the others moving past, looking in a frontal direction.

"Well," Merton spoke, smiling, "their group never saw it..."

"But is it of any use?" Mortimer continued.

“Who would want to stay out here?” Bryson muttered. “It would be astonishing if anyone managed to survive one night—with what those legends told...”

“It doesn’t have any notable signs that anyone lived in it. Why is there no fireplace, or anything, which a cottage or farm would have...?”

It did have an unusual design. He felt the texture of the stone. It was perfectly smooth as though it had been cut by a machine. The window, under the muck, was ancient, and made of thick glass, which had many warps.

Perhaps the thick walls had protected the occupants from the things in the wood, and they had designed it to withstand their powers.

Bryson helped Merton and Mortimer to sift through the rubbish, scattered in a thick layer over the floor.

“I can’t see us coming to a conclusion over what the clue means,” he confessed, as Mortimer moved past.

“At the moment, I cannot imagine finding it out. Or anything out here! There still is a chance that the answer could be in the library. Have you considered the fact that there could be other books, or even places where things could be written...?”

“Like a local cemetery?” Merton announced, as though he had been thinking over the matter for some time. “There has to be other graves! If we could find other graves from the same era, which have the same type of writing...”

“Even if there’s another structure out here, I cannot see it having anything...” Bryson resumed.

“If there is,” Mortimer replied, “the others may not realize much from it. But they’ll tell us about it!”

“That’s good enough though...!”

“So let’s not waste any more time—let’s go.”

Mortimer moved for the door, and jerked backwards.

A face emerged at the edge of the door. It was one of the others, who looked as though he had decided to check where their prints led.

As they left, Bryson noticed that they had split up again, and that their voices came in low tones from about them. And that they would have found the cottage anyway!

“Back to the castle then,” Bryson informed them, spotting another three of them already moving in their direction. It proved that they were doing their job, and that they would have a good chance of finding anything else—for him to investigate.

They moved out of the area, and Bryson frequently turned to listen.

He watched a hare hop past, looking terrified. It also looked as if someone else had recently been near it, and had scared it.

It shifted nervously from place to place, and as if its subconscious mind were only making it move past. It was lost without a place to hide.

It did not seem to realize that it was capable of running faster than them. It perhaps took their size to be a sign of how powerful they were at running.

It was interesting walking through the wood, instead of along the path. It gave him the feeling that they now had an advantage, and that they could watch things occur without being noticed.

Other animals were now visible. And his eyes were accustomed to the darkest places, where they passed, and he seemed to be able to notice everything about them, as well as recognize vague noises, which he had not understood before.

Then, incredibly, he spotted distant prints of the reporter, stopping behind a tree, where there was a distant view of the vault—and he saw that the reporter had returned to the tombs.

Chapter 40

The Village.

Bryson led Merton and Mortimer along a grassy trail, over to a small graveyard, while they reluctantly followed, still wishing to continue with their previous investigations, but realizing that their chances of finding any conclusions there were vanishing.

They would have, of course, entered the village church to observe its interior if they could have.

The vicar had beat a brisk retreat though, over at the medieval church, bowing his head, as if ducking to enter an extremely low doorway, as he vanished into a side door, and going back to sanctuary.

Merton and Mortimer had spoken with such ease to him that it assured him that they had done it before (working at such locations on their investigations).

He had only suspicions on whether they had any religious interests. Even though it could hold some vital information that he never knew—especially on why they had such an interest in psychic research, and such things—almost dedicating their lives to researching it.

Why had they gone to such lengths to achieve their almost impossible goal? There was no suggestion that they were chasing large sums of cash doing what they did, and he had never heard of anyone succeeding. It was interesting though, and he doubted if anything that he did would come close to it. They were modern explores! They went on assignments in remote places, searching for fascinating freaks of nature.

He wondered if it was their first treasure hunt.

Even though Mortimer had once been an archaeologist. Perhaps that was another reason why they did it, and they used hunting ghosts as a cover to investigate places where there were chances of them finding valuable artifacts, or evidence of their existence.

At the door of the church, the elderly vicar emerged, and walked out, looking shyly at them, trying to focus on them – hesitating and tempting himself – with some hidden compulsion.

“Gentlemen,” he called, “if you wish to look around the church, please do, but I’ll not be able to join you, as I have my work.”

Bryson watched him creep back into the church, wondering what he had reacted to, as he had not said anything.

“What will we do now?” Merton muttered.

“He doesn’t have any information,” Mortimer replied first, explaining how much of a waste of time that was.

“I’d just like to check the graves,” Bryson confirmed, watching to see if Merton had lost interest.

The graveyard was on a hill, in an open space, surrounded by the rest of the village—where they had traveled to from the opposite side.

Bryson studied the peculiar effect of the scenery looking immense, with it being on a hill, and the landscape not having so many trees. The sight of endless trees filling the horizon had altered his inner perception of a normal landscape, and he expected to see trees, but only saw emptiness.

He realized how safe it felt, and that he had returned to a natural place, holding a clear view of everything.

Yet they probably could not find more solitude than back at the castle.

Sparrows squawked hungrily, some savagely fluttering their wings, and others hopped from hedge to hedge, making expressions resembling growls at them, at attacking their territory. They looked desperate—the snow covered most of the countryside, and the hedges and ground looked empty of the things to eat.

Many shifted fast, staying warm, moving from their positions, as they approached, and looked forced into accepting their intimidations.

There were no signs that showed that anyone had been near there in a long time.

The graveyard shrouded in snow took the appearance of heaven, with its brilliant whiteness. The castle not being there also gave him feelings of it.

They struggled through a jungle of withered weeds, buried in thick snow, going between the graves, giving brief glances at their dates and words, and occasionally stopping to look at them in more detail—at things of interest.

Mortimer now looked moderately happy there.

The taxi driver had taken them to the right place after all. It was the oldest church, and most likely graveyard to have what they wanted.

The taxi rested beyond the church gates, with the driver still flicking ash out of the window, giving them nervous glances. He occasionally glared directly towards them, thinking of some fact—true or imagined.

As Bryson read the engraved phrases on a grave, almost buried in moss and dirt, he realized how much the driver had astonished him.

He knew that it was not his normal reactions, and that he was reacting to them being in his presence, because they were from the castle.

He had not known how to start communicating with them. He had been more than likely thinking of many things that he had wanted to say and had not known where to start. He seemed to be considering warning them of something! He had suggested that he knew of things that they ought to know. It had been more like a joke though.

He realized that he might know legends. He seemed to know people that lived about the estate.

He had given many suggestions that he had wished to obtain information from them – on what was happening there, with it being in the news.

As Bryson observed the driver, at a distance, as they examined different graves, he caught his attention more.

What would it be? Yet Sir Richard might have affected them, or had persuaded people to do it for him—to scare away outsiders. But he doubted it! And nobody had ever said that he had done anything like that.

“This one has the same date as William Randall’s grave,” Mortimer announced, over at his side, grabbing his attention away from the distant landscape, where his eyesight kept falling.

Bryson crouched in the long grass. It was someone who had been at the village at the same time, but there were few words there—mentioning things that were not what they were looking for. He knew by Mortimer’s reactions that he had already finished with it.

And Bryson realized that Mortimer had lost confidence in there being anything there.

Their stroll gradually increased to a fast walk, with them only glimpsing at dates and names.

Then they returned to the taxi.

The driver was patiently waiting on them.

“Did you find what you were after?” he called back, watching their faces in the mirror, and looking about the road ahead, checking it going into the horizon.

“No,” Bryson replied, since nobody else was going to reply. “We are looking for more stuff about the castle. Do you know if there’s somewhere else, like a library, where we can get it?”

A loud squeak came from his seat, making him turn his head, and look very alert.

The vicar then stuck his head out of the church. Then, as the taxi engine burst into life, he shut the door, and the taxi pulled away.

“I cannot help you – as you will find very little about it... I’ve lived here all my life...”

He glanced at him in the mirror, and adjusted it slightly, to a precise position.

Bryson saw that he had changed from what he had been like on the way there, and he did not want to say any more.

Chapter 41

Deadly Blizzard.

The taxi raced down the dark road, through the heavy blizzard, going deep into the thick wood, and skidded on the snow as it went around a bend, while the new driver tried to catch up with some police cars.

The deep snow glowed brightly in the light from the headlights, beaming out, and Bryson saw many more police cars parked along the road.

It was night, and he was tired from the evening spent at the village, and the sudden confrontation on the small road, just as they were about to reach the castle, was unwelcome.

The car approached the police cars and skidded to a halt, behind them, and they jumped out.

In the distance, from where the taxi had come from, he saw three more police cars, and what looked like two normal cars, all racing towards him.

Inspector Bailey was standing playing with a loudspeaker.

“Let’s spread out!” he hollered, through it, with it blaring out at full volume. And he stopped to turn the volume down (looking like he wanted to throw it away instead).

Another policeman took it, and started use it to speak for him, telling them to come over to him.

“What happened?” Mortimer asked desperately—now not understanding the situation—and then noticing that they were not really listening.

“If we search along this stretch of road, all of us should easily find their trail.” Inspector Bailey firmly announced.

Inspector Bailey played around with the loudspeaker again, making sure that he did not touch the volume.

“We’re going to search along this road,” he muttered to Mortimer. “So look for any footprints!”

Everyone started clambering through the snow, going along the road, in different groups. Bryson searched the inner wood, while the others around him looked about the road – generally searching places that they believed the others were not searching.

The other cars reached the cars, and the policemen in them started climbing out, chatting loudly, about what was happening.

Eventually, a distant shout came from behind them, and all of them made their way to there.

Bryson took the opportunity to question him further.

“What’s happened? Who’re you after?”

“Has the killer struck again?” Mortimer continued.

“Are you chasing him?” Merton tried to resume.

“We could be! We’re searching for some of the women. They’ve vanished! And there’s a possibility, according to the others, that they’ve come up against him.”

“Or they’re lost out there—in this blizzard!” Merton continued.

Bryson listened horrified! He knew one of the women was Sarah by their reactions. And he started to prepare himself for what was to come.

“So spread out,” Inspector Bailey shouted, “and tell us immediately, if you find them.”

The policemen were entering the wood, with their torches jumping about, lighting up the dense trees. And Bryson’s heart pounded, as he waited for them to yell that they had found their mutilated bodies.

But their lights vanished into the wood, and their voices grew faint, until he could not hear them. By the time Bryson, Mortimer, Merton, and Inspector Bailey reached where they had been, they were deep in the wood, and increasing their speed.

Bryson examined the footprints at the side of the road, untouched by them. They definitely were theirs. Sarah’s shoe mark was there! Moreover, all three were women’s shoe marks, and that was the correct amount of prints, for the group that she had been in.

Bryson raced after them, through the trees.

This time it felt as though the rest of their walks had been training.

In minutes, they were rushing through branches, dodging trees, in almost complete blackness—with the vague lights jumping about everywhere, in front and behind.

Bryson received bruises and cuts everywhere. His lower legs were soaked, in pools of icy mud and water.

Heavy breathing, and clouds of steam, poured out of their mouths.

He became sure that they were going to find something ahead of them, as he could not see them going at the pace that they were going at for very long; but he had not heard anything to confirm it.

When they continued on and on, he started to doubt that they had anything, and that they were either wrong or desperate. However, after he had seen the situation in front, he took it that they were just racing.

Did they actually know how long ago the prints had been there? He had been sure that they could tell fresh prints. But he doubted it, and they could be miles away, lost in the wood, trying to return from some other angle.

They had all day, but they had obviously been strolling through the wood.

Nonetheless, had they become so tired that they could not make it back?

Bryson slowed as some of the policemen in front got more and more exhausted, and finally allow them to pass.

Their pace finally started to slow, at the front, as the wood went dense. And they continued at a more normal pace, almost as if the ones at the front had finally realized what they had already known—that they could be going through there for hours.

Bryson was now able to move himself to a position near the front, where he stayed watching the policemen at the front of the group rushing on—not fully knowing what they were doing.

Bryson stayed at his position, not really knowing the policemen, and having no real need to get involved.

He remained at a distance that he could see the footprints that they came to.

Bryson spotted the policemen stopping, and he slowed.

The prints went off in another direction, directly to their left.

He believed that they had not fully known where they had been.

How could they be lost with their prints always being behind them? They had to have had some idea where they had been going—and that they would not have dramatically changed their direction, to go over there, if they had not had a reason.

Yet they might have become too tired or something, to return. If one of them had injured her leg, what would they have done?

He observed everything in detail, but saw little. But he was sure that they would have returned to the road...

Yet, later on, they might have later become so tired and far out that they might have gone somewhere to shelter.

At this moment they could be even trying to return here, if they had not found any shelter.

Bryson was confused, and no longer really knew where they were, as nothing was ahead of them, and they were endlessly going on; and he came to the

conclusion that he did not fully realize what they had been up to—going this far into the wood.

What were they expecting to find? Why had they not just stayed in the radius of the castle, where the rest of them had been? What sort of information would they have expected to discover? What would Sir Richard have been doing out at this place? The hunt was turning to a disaster before his eyes.

He tried to imagine what sorts of ideas had been running through their heads. But he could not imagine any of them having come out with such an idea unless they had found something that had given them definite proof that something was in this region.

To his sudden horror, the policemen stopped dead. Their behavior showed that something had occurred.

Bryson blindly shifted to them—waiting to witness a detestable sight.

But he could barely see in the dimness, and he listened to hear the voices of the police grow to an audible level, as he moved near.

“We can go back now...” the policeman moaned.

Then he heard one of them using a radio or mobile, communicating with someone, while the others listened.

“What is it?” Mortimer called, from behind his back, proceeding fast to him.

The policeman turned towards them. “They’ve found them—at a location over there—near the village. They made their way over there, and they are staying at a hotel.”

Bryson felt like falling over. They had gone to the village instead of going back to the castle. It was illogical! It was far more distant.

Why had they wanted to go there? And why had they not phoned the castle.

He was annoyed, but happy that nothing had happened.

“Why are they staying at a hotel?” he grumbled. “They could have returned in a taxi, or have phoned someone.”

Mortimer could only shrug his shoulders. “They might not have had a phone.”

“A hotel without a phone...!”

“It’s probably a small bed and breakfast, without a public phone.”

It was hard to believe that they had made it to a hotel. They had strolled there, over hours though. It had been earlier in the day.

Chapter 42

Escalating Aspirations.

The bedroom was more silent, empty, and cold now, but he slept better.

It had the effect of making him even wake late.

He stood at the window, and studied the outside.

Now where should they begin, and concentrate their investigations?

He felt about in his pocket for a piece of paper, where he had scribbled the clue Sir Richard had given them beside the writing from the tomb of William Randall. Then he studied it, to try to jolt his mind.

If they had found something, he would have been deeply surprised, he now realized. Not just because he, or the others, could not think of anything, with all the things that they knew now, but because the clue had little to do with anything, and because of the way that Sir Richard had behaved on the video. They would need to be lucky to answer it, and he was almost certain.

He even sensed that he was missing something about Sir Richard, which he could not quite grasp (something that he had not acknowledged had been true). He believed that he would actually have to hear it in the right way before he would accept it as being something.

And why would he have even hidden it near him? The theory existed because they had mainly believed that he would have wanted to make sure nothing happened to it. But it was now clear that he could have done that and have put it almost anywhere.

He now realized how hungry he had become, and how cold the room was out of bed.

He watched the clouds roll past. And he pushed his feet into his shoes, remembering why they were so sore.

He had desires to leave the castle.

He picked up his radio from the table and fiddled with the dials, trying to receive a clear signal.

He felt his cuts and bruises, including his sore feet again, trying to recall where he had acquired them—remembering the night before in vivid detail—realizing how serious and determined they had been.

Suddenly, he saw the door vibrate, and a knock emerged.

He opened it, and Merton and Mortimer entered.

“Incredible!” Merton uttered, looking out the window at the wood.

“Do you remember us discussing that your uncle could have invested the cash in something?” Mortimer suddenly remarked, recollecting something he wished to say, before he forgot. “He could easily have concealed it somewhere—without it being noticeable.”

“Somewhere!” Merton resumed.

Bryson considered the idea of a painting being hidden. “You may be right—there may be. We’ve not even been in some of the rooms yet. And I cannot imagine any of the furniture and antiques being worth that much.”

“There would have been a risk that someone could damage it, not realizing its value—or even future owners discarding it.”

“Then perhaps it’s something that would not be damaged, and be in a place where it would be safe.”

Yet he realized his previous thoughts, and that he could just about hidden it anywhere.

“I think that we should stay quiet about it,” Merton uttered, making sure that someone would not be able to listen from along the corridor.

“That’s a good idea,” he replied, wondering what they were trying to suggest.

“Well, we were having a look for it,” Merton explained, excitedly, “and I think we found somewhere.”

“Or something else!” Mortimer said, calming him.

“What?” Bryson replied, wondering what they meant.

Merton indicated to him to follow them, and they led him down to the room next to the library, where Bryson and James had heard the wall was thinner, and they had realized that the inner library could have been behind it.

Mortimer lifted part of the carpet, at the corner of the room, next to the wall. And Merton grabbed the planks of wood up, which were loose.

They examined the stone of the original floor under it, from when they had built it (built when they had installed the electricity in the castle).

Merton randomly tapped the lower floor.

Bryson heard parts of it were hollow.

"I've not seen anyone near here," Merton spoke silently to Mortimer.

A faint crackle came from Bryson's radio, in his pocket, which he had left on. And he responded by listening to the background sounds from it. Out of all the devices that there was available, he had to have brought only a radio!

He should have found and got a mobile phone—at the village—if any of the small shops sold them.

He did not know if the others were going to continue their search of the wood or what. He was sure that some of them had lost interest in it. There was nothing out there but endless trees. The other legendary building, which Robert had spoken of, did not exist, as far as he was concerned. Or was it that cottage or whatever?

There was something about hunting for "hidden treasure" that he did not like, even though it really was his first time. There were too many things suggesting where things could be, which were dead ends.

Though many people had actually found things while looking for other things.

He stretched his tired limbs, and thought of going to the window.

"Well, what do you think?" Merton asked Mortimer, with a definite tone, looking sideways, at the fascinated face of James, at the door.

"What...?" James grunted, amused, looking as if he had lost an argument, and that he had not expected them to be there.

Bryson noticed how much James was like the way that he remembered him—when he had been younger. He felt like smiling, but he was too tired, and he wished that he had stayed in bed longer than he had done.

"What are you looking for there?" James voiced, to their amusement, probably trying not to look daft.

Mortimer observed him, with a bewildered expression.

"Something is hidden down here!" Merton confessed, when he moved in the room.

James grunted, and briskly stood at the window.

Bryson smiled intensely, and studied the floor.

Another look at Mortimer showed him that he also had been up too long.

"It's already becoming tiresome staying in here," Mortimer confessed to him, slightly surprising him with his sudden openness.

Merton ignored him, sleepily hunched over the floor.

He tapped the floor, listening to see how hollow it was. There obviously was not any stone behind it, and he was sure of it.

"Why would someone put anything down there?" Bryson asked.

"Which looks kind of small to me!" Mortimer spoke.

Mortimer dropped down on his knees, and pulled up a handle, hidden in the rubbish—at the center of the hollow region.

He suddenly looked more energetic.

“How can we check what’s down there?” James said, smiling.

“We would need to tug at it,” Merton replied. “Perhaps we can find out what’s holding it in place.”

“It will be all that rubbish,” Mortimer assumed.

“Let’s check it, before we come to any conclusions.”

The three of them went to different places around the handle, and they simultaneously yanked it—feeling its weight, and that it was thick and heavy wood.

Mortimer’s side of it slightly shifted outwards first—proving nothing was holding it there, and the rest of it came out simultaneously.

As it shifted out, it became clear that it was a trapdoor, covering something.

There was no sign of what was in the darkness beneath it.

Small, ancient webs stretched across the corners of it.

James helped Bryson to squeeze into the gap, swiftly pulling away the layers of webs for him.

At a position where the blackness engulfed him, he fumbled about at the wall.

“Another tunnel!” Bryson revealed, looking down a line of stone steps, vanishing into darkness, somewhere beneath the castle.

“I’ll go and get a torch,” Mortimer said, going away towards the kitchen, leaving him studying its interior.

When he returned, Merton shrugged, and took the torch from him. He played with its switch, seeing how well it worked.

Bryson firmly took the torch, and shifted down the steps, stretching down to a point below.

Mortimer secured his feet, on the steps, making sure that they did not wobble, and that he would not fall.

Bryson watched the torch, making sure that it would not pack in when they needed it. But it had enough power, and it would last.

Mortimer climbed down, turning his head from side to side—as he approached the bottom—seeing nothing but webs shrouding a wall.

Dirt fell over them, but it seemed to be dry. Though a stale odor suggested the contrary.

It had the look of being just a cellar, which someone might have just added to the castle.

It gave him a light shiver, realizing what they could be dealing with though, as he glanced about him, exploring its depths, in the dim light. Had the haunting been coming from down here?

He heard faint sounds, which sounded as if mice were being strangled by a large bird.

Yet, if it did exist, and they could just find something that would prove to the world that there were supernatural phenomena, and solve the mysterious haunting of the castle, it would be worthwhile.

He considered if supernatural elements were part of the universe after all—and not just flaws in it! Their existence could have helped create the universe, and

made it function—by a means, perhaps, that no human, alien, or computer would ever fully comprehend.

Perhaps the universe had supernatural dimensions and powers that it needed to exist. If the dangerous powers of the suns never existed, there would not be habitable worlds.

He considered what he would have thought of what he was doing now, when he had first visited the castle.

Mortimer glanced at him, and stared at him, tiredly, with the torch at his face, making it glow in the dark.

“Your passage seems to be a dead end,” James teased.

Mortimer nodded at him. “I can’t see why it ends...”

“They might have built it for another use,” Merton muttered. “Such as to hide in, if invaders attacked the castle. They would never have found it!”

“What’s that...?” Mortimer uttered, keeping his voice low. “Do you see something...?”

He stopped, and pointed downwards.

“It’s a lever!”

Mortimer crept forward.

The light was strong enough to illuminate it. And he strolled towards it.

On his approach, Bryson perceived that there was not much to see. It was so vague that it hardly looked like anything. Yet it was part of the structure, and he knew that it had a gap leading into somewhere.

Mortimer yanked the lever, and the wall slowly shifted, with a machine-like noise, to reveal a gap.

“We’ve found something!” Merton uttered with excitement.

Bryson watched Mortimer rushing into it.

Bryson jumped through afterward, plunging into blackness. Mortimer’s arm mechanically shifted, with the torch.

He wiped away the thick gray webs, shrouding him.

His first glimpse startled him, as he had been expecting an identical emptiness endlessly going off into darkness.

It had look of a dungeon. Its space was large, and an amount of objects became visible.

There were ancient objects scattered everywhere, glowing in the dim light, covered in layers of dirt and webs.

He crouched beside a nearby object—an ancient seat.

It had mostly rotted away, with thick lumps of rust and decay over it. And piles of decomposed materials were beneath it.

“It’s a seat!” Merton explained, persuading Bryson to go further in, to another item.

He came to a similar seat, which he shook, causing pieces of it to fall and float about in the air, in the vague light, as if its parts were falling to bits.

Mortimer arrived at their side. They began moving about—checking various objects—treasure hunting—within the range of the light.

Their murmurs were soon telling Bryson that they were unable to identify the objects. Disintegrating boxes of things were heaped about them like mounds animals dig.

Within them, which he downheartedly viewed, he caught glimpses of something – differently shaped, and in a superior condition, to the rest.

They marched over to it, ignoring other strange objects, by their sides, vaguely capturing their attention—but they were mainly things that some past owner had discarded, or had forgotten about.

He had heard tales of people finding valuable and extremely rare antiques, in places where things had remained out of the reach of people, where they could not destroy them or throw them away—where they had remained for decades.

As he approached the object, he saw that it was large, and then that it was another bookshelf.

Mortimer carefully fitted the torch onto an old garden ornament, beside it, so that the light brightly went over it.

“It’s packed with books!”

“Is it another section of the library?” Mortimer uttered, looking confused.

“Someone must have put it there to store them,” Bryson uttered, glaring at the books with interest.

Bryson and James lunged towards them, with their eyes glancing everywhere, engrossed in what they saw.

That section luckily had no dampness, and deterioration had only partially ruined their contents.

They had to have found something, or it would lead to that. However, most of them were in bad condition, with no real value, and apparently never mentioned anything. Although they had similar contents as the original castle library, placed out of the way, by some such as Sir Richard, at an earlier era.

Bryson knew that there were books missing from the outer library. Their contents were empty—as if someone had chosen to put them there for their lack of information—perhaps so as not to give away too much, and give away the location of the money.

“How long do you think it’ll take to check them?” Merton asked, searching through the titles, which were readable, for things in particular.

“I don’t know,” Mortimer moaned. “We may be lucky.”

“The others are working outside!” James replied. “Some of them can help us look for it.”

Bryson decided to do what he had done the last time, and to start by checking all the titles.

He soon started wondering how boring the people in those times had been.

He was sure that there was something there.

At a distance, his eyes searched the whole lot, seeing what would become noticeable, but his sight fell on empty, blank shapes. It was as though their spines had rotted away, or had some form of ink dropped on them. But it was their real original covers.

Even though many of them had bits missing, they seemed to have their contents intact.

He held one, unable to see little, in the dim light, and he then greedily roamed through the rest, confirming that they were just books to amuse people of there era.

When they finished, and the torch was going dud, they rushed up to the library with what they had.

Merton and Mortimer then dedicatedly rummaged through the tattered remains of the pages of books, slightly horrified at the state of them—as they were valuable!

They more than likely also would hold a great deal of useful facts, which might help a lot.

Their fingers touched their pages as if they were tissue paper that might crumble away, and be lost forever.

They insisted on leaving pages of them, and books, for further investigation, where they could properly restore and investigate them.

One surprised Bryson with how well he could read it, without trying to decipher it.

“What do you have?” James asked, becoming bored.

Merton leaned over, to examine it, and turned interested in it. Bryson then handed it over to him. He was curious what he would make of it.

Bryson tried to imagine what kind of person had written it.

And he wondered why the entrance had been hidden away under the floor.

Though Sir Richard had been eccentric, and had been capable of doing strange things, he doubted if he had known it was there.

“Let’s check them some other time,” Bryson informed them, seeing that Mortimer was becoming tired, and temporarily losing interest in their latest discovery.

“Good idea!” Merton replied, standing up.

Merton handed back the book.

Bryson started searching behind the shelves, at the inner library. Then for where the cable there led to, as it was not visible.

“Where do want to go?” Bryson asked, playing for time, while he tried to find it.

“We want to go back to the vault,” Mortimer announced firmly.

“We first want to collect a piece of equipment that we left out there,” Merton replied. “It’ll also be a good idea to check the others!”

“They’ll be looking in other places now,” James muttered.

“Where does that wire lead?” Merton moaned.

“They had to have covered it up!” Merton answered.

Merton and Mortimer followed the wall, occasionally glancing at the floor and roof for any signs of anything.

“I cannot see it,” Merton spoke, at the doorway.

They looked about the outer walls, seeing nothing.

Mortimer tapped the wall, about the doorway. It was, as it looked, solid.

Bryson observed him tapping at the wooden doorway, which thickly surrounded the entrance, where the door was at the middle of. And he saw Mortimer recognize something, and that he resembled a dog homing in on something.

He watched him tap the doorframe, showing him that it had a distinctly different sound.

Bryson banged it, trying to acquire some kind of insight into what was there; but it only sounded hollow, and that the wood there was thinner.

Mortimer then spotted something, and he moved the whole section of the doorframe, to its side, leaving a slight gap. And Bryson shoved it further, and the sheet of wood slid smoothly to the side, revealing a mechanism, with the cable wrapped around its spindle.

The device was magnificent! And it was far from being Victorian... It looked more like machinery from the Second World War (perhaps even a little later).

Mortimer activated a red button, and they watched its small engine shudder, making screeches—showing him that it was either broken or jammed.

He then pressed it again, stopping it. And Bryson saw that the cable had been tangled by them opening the shelf out in an unconventional way, and that it had caught on a bit of metal on the device, which he untangled, and then activated it again.

The shelf opened out, and switched itself off.

“What era do you think it’s from?” Merton asked Mortimer.

“The Victorians never had anything as advanced as that,” Mortimer concluded.

Bryson then activated the red button, making it close.

Chapter 43

Another Death.

They did what they could to check what the others were doing before they walked to the wood.

James left them, and joined Sarah, as she cheerfully left a taxi, with bags of souvenirs, from the village—while vaguely considering what the taxi driver was up to, trying to warn her of something.

The others notably seemed to have lost interest in looking for anything in that part of the wood.

The wood had returned to being virtually empty—with only a few distant sounds.

Merton and Mortimer walked slowly, obviously not bothered about how long it would take to arrive at their destination. But when they approached the vault, Mortimer swiftly took them towards the tombs, to get the piece of equipment.

Bryson wandered down the steps, expecting to see the figure of the reporter—with a resemblance of a ghost—with his image firmly implanted in his mind.

He was sure that he had even dreamed of the place.

Mortimer seemed obsessed with the tombs, probably because it looked like a haunted place, and a normal location that they worked at.

The piece of equipment turned out to be a small tape recorder, which Mortimer had not remembered, and which was in an unobservable place, between two tombs, where it could gather sounds.

When they reached the top of the stairs, Bryson soon started to become interested in it, as he thought over what it could have captured, and it had obviously recorded many sounds.

As they rested, in the upper chamber, Mortimer finally activated it.

Its batteries were weak, from much use.

Sounds of Mortimer appeared first, and then he heard the voices of James's friends rushing around—with some of them astonishingly opening the tombs, while laughing, as they had finished hidden bottles of wine.

As they had left, the machine had deactivated, and another sound had appeared. Footsteps had echoed through the chamber, going specifically to a place at the back – with no vocal sounds.

Bryson listened to the reporter lifting or moving something heavy—trying to grip whatever it had been. He then had stopped abruptly, and Bryson heard himself walking down the stairs.

The amount of time that it had taken Mortimer to emerge had been surprisingly short.

Then, incredibly, more noises appeared, afterward, showing that the reporter had gone straight back to the exact same place, after they had gone into the wood.

"What do you think that guy was doing?" Bryson muttered, mainly to himself.

Merton shrugged, showing his lack of interest.

Bryson grew determined to obtain facts, and he went out of the building, to search for his footprints.

Bryson and Mortimer then started following them, from where he had left the vault, after he had returned there. And they went from the vault in the opposite direction, from where he had arrived from.

"So you want to look over there?" Merton uttered, catching up with him, desperate to obtain some information on what he was doing.

"They go back to castle anyway," Mortimer continued, while pointing to a place further out, where the prints sharply turned, going towards the castle.

They were at a distance away that they would never have seen from the pathway.

While they followed them, it became apparent that he had gone through places that had hidden him.

It astonished him that they looked the same as the other prints that had gone from the castle.

He started to wonder why he had not asked the police, the night before, to interrogate the man again, to ask him why he had returned there, and if he had entered the castle. They had his shoe prints to confirm it! How many people wore the same shoes, with that type of tread?

He attempted to remember every detail of the marks, and thought of drawing them.

At an open area ahead, he spotted an unusual shape, which he watched Mortimer glaring at, astonished. And he felt a strange feeling that there was something there that he did not want to see.

Suddenly, there were marks across the ground, across their path, from where the reporter had obviously fallen over. Yet there was no sign of anything on the ground that could have caused him to fall in such a way.

Then, as they went further, Mortimer rushed ahead, and crouched on a mound of snow. And Bryson observed the reporter at it, and his blood covering his fingers.

Chapter 44

The Hit Man.

Bryson had trouble accepting that the situation had been confusing before, because now he could not even imagine solving what had happened.

The thought of departing from the cold confines of the castle gave him shivers of extreme pleasure.

He could return home, and stay in reality—not on the brink of catastrophe!—and he could solve normal problems, with the effortlessness that he had done.

He studied the crumpled body of the reporter, trying to ignore how hideous it was, trying to look upon it as an artist would observe a crazy exhibit at an art exhibition. But it was no use!

The complexion of the body, drained of blood, and frozen over the snow, made the place too dangerous, even though it had been there from the previous day.

He attempted to work out the exact time that it could have occurred, and where he had been. He could not understand why he had not heard a gun.

Mortimer still seemed slightly shocked—since the discovery of the body, besides the bushes, where the reporter had crawled to in his last seconds of life.

“Who would want to shoot him?” Mortimer muttered, not being able to stay silent any longer, breaking the deep silence.

“What worries me more than anything,” Bryson replied, with confusion, “is that I don’t have any clues!”

“They’ll find something!”

“This is ridiculous! We should have gone back to the castle.”

“There was no need for us to go back...”

“But, on the other hand, we could have gone back to the warm library—instead of staying with this corpse!”

“You’ve a point, but we may find out something, which we should know—about who did it. His prints will be found—once they find out where he was hiding.”

“It has to be in those bushes over there...”

“You’re correct,” he muttered, glaring about the wood with interest, perhaps wondering how much he would ruin it if he took a look.

They had to stay where they were, and not touch anything!

“How did his killer know that he would be here?” Bryson muttered, startled by the thought that there had been someone watching the reporter, and perhaps them, with a gun.

“Perhaps he was lurking about, and saw him on his own—and then followed him to this spot.”

“Why would he want to kill the reporter? At first, he was a lunatic who was strangling people! Now he is using a gun, with a silencer.”

“Why would he have had a silencer? He might have noticed that sounds were not carrying that well – owing to the atmospheric conditions...”

“However, yesterday sounds were reasonably loud from throughout the wood, and deep within it. I heard an airplane away over there! And I’ve heard farmers

using guns and shotguns... And I'm fairly sure that we should have heard it. He must have used a silencer..."

"Shotguns and normal shooting guns produce much more of an explosion, than a normal handgun. But you could be correct..."

Mortimer eyed up the wound on the corpse, almost trying to measure it in millimeters, to compare it to a small handgun bullet.

Then, he jerked, when Inspector Bailey's heavy breathing emerged in the distance.

His persistent moans followed, and gave Bryson the impression that Merton had not entirely explained what had happened, and that he could be thinking that he had dragged him out for nothing.

Although he could not imagine what he had said, as the occurrences on this occasion were far from normal. Yet, perhaps, he just did not fully believe him or something.

He watched him appear, with mild curiosity, considering what he intended to persuade Merton to explain to him.

Or did he suspect them of carrying out the ghastly crimes?

His eyes hardly moved from them, and he suddenly stopped, placed his hands at his hips, and tried to see the body.

When Bryson looked again, he was rushing towards them, not caring how tired he became.

"Are you sure that he was shot?" he moaned loudly.

"We ought to be able to recognize a bullet wound," Merton moaned, not really thinking about what he was saying any longer.

"How do you know the person never stabbed him with something? Or perhaps after he could not strangle him!"

Merton shrugged, and vaguely thought it over.

"There are not any other footprints near him though. And he collapsed over there, across the snow."

Inspector Bailey moved his head, and carefully studied the ground that he was going over.

"So while you were searching... This fellow was being shot..."

Bryson slightly moved his position, to see beneath the shoes of the reporter, and one of his nearby prints—and that they were as he had expected them to be.

As Inspector Bailey approached him, Bryson decided to grasp the opportunity to show them that he was right.

"You said that he didn't kill the servant!"

"What...?" Inspector Bailey uttered, tiredly walking closer to the corpse.

"Is that the same tread mark that we followed from the castle, over to that road?"

"It does seem to be the same," he murmured, studying it, with surprise, and slight amusement that they could have allowed such a detail to go amiss.

"If you want a better look at a proper print, look over there."

Inspector Bailey walked over to the prints, where the reporter had fallen to the ground, and he examined the footprints.

"Let's find out where the killer's prints are," he called over, looking at Merton.

Inspector Bailey approached them, glanced at the corpse, from where he was, homed into a position, and he marched straight over to the position that Bryson had carefully worked out.

The place, behind bushes, was hard to see, and the killer had chosen it well. The reporter surely would not have looked there, and it had concealed the person's footprints.

Bryson studied the shoe marks, as he arrived there, with them, and was surprised to see that they were the same. As if the gunman had deliberately chosen the same shoes. Yet they looked in better condition!

He believed that the person had carried out a revenge attack, for what the reporter had done.

There had been many people about—with reasons. But where had the person obtained a gun? And how had he managed to do it without anyone seeing or hearing him?

Bryson carefully thought it over. But they had been in groups, except for one of two of James's associates. But they had not been on their own for a long time. And when it had taken place, they had been away over there.

Nobody would have had the slightest inkling that he had been the reporter, or that he had done anything—especially after the police had released him. How could any of them have even known about the reporter? It was too far-fetched!

Bryson left with Merton and Mortimer, when more policemen started coming towards them through the wood. He knew that the prints of the gunman would lead to a road, and that he was too professional to do anything stupid like revealing where he was staying. Yet there was a chance that he could have left something behind!

He now thought of him like a hit man. But what if he was mistaken, and that he had killed the reporter just because he had been on his own.

What if the reporter, if that is what he had been, had been watching from the wood, and the killer had been in the castle, killing the servant. Both had reacted to them leaving the castle! The reporter had not properly seen the person hiding the body outside the kitchen, and had been checking what the killer had been doing, when he had entered the castle.

Nevertheless, why had he returned, and why had he been watching the castle?

Chapter 45

Ancient Treasure.

Adrenalin exploded through Bryson, as he interpreted the text of the ancient diary again.

There was no doubt about it, every time he had read the ancient text, he had acknowledged the same thing.

They had left the diary, forgetting it, leaving it for another time, when they had enough time to look for the treasure mentioned in it. They had not the time to look for both. And it could have been discovered anyway! But, when he had examined it

again, at where he had left it in his room, he had believed that it could still be buried there, somewhere.

He had then realized that he had actually seen the missing page from it—an old crumpled piece of paper, which nobody had bothered about—at the place he had found the diary. And he had found it there—unnoticed by the others.

He had sat reading it repeatedly, in amazement, and had decided not to tell anyone until he had time to put the information that he had learned together—and perhaps discover something.

It was defiantly an authentic diary of one of his ancestors, who had stayed in the castle during the Victorian era, and who had been the daughter of the owner! And it gave a good deal of facts about the owner.

When Merton and Mortimer entered the library, he insisted in only suggesting it to Merton.

Mortimer had other things to think of, and seemed to have little concern about looking through the books. He surely was still thinking of the crime that had occurred, and perhaps who had done it.

Bryson returned to what he had been doing.

“We don’t want to spend too long here,” Mortimer confessed. “There are other things to do!”

“Do you think that they’ll catch that guy with the gun?” Merton asked, after reading something.

Mortimer and Bryson shrugged at each other.

“They should put serial numbers on bullets,” Merton muttered. “So that they can directly trace the bullet.”

“They can trace them to the manufacturer,” Bryson replied. “And maybe to the shop selling them. But would someone give their name to buy them, and use them to shoot someone? I reckon that they would not give them their proper identification, or buy illegal bullets.”

He wondered if there had been two killers in the wood, and one with a gun. He also wondered why the reporter had been in the vault. Had he been actually looking for the money? And had he been onto something? But had his killer been looking for it or him?

They knew what the killer’s shoes were like. They could check the others in the castle, by checking their shoes. But he saw that he was making a mistake, and that it would not be any of them or James’s friends. It seemed absurd, as they would easily have followed the person’s prints to the person, to where they had been in the wood, or have noticed that they had the same shoes.

Bryson read a passage from the diary, mentioning sounds from the woods, with the woman and father’s obsessive beliefs about it. It puzzled him! How could people have so many different views about such things (when there were no real facts)?

They had kept an ancient mentality at that era, but they had carried appropriate ways of handling things.

Their main way had been to pass on warnings to the next generation – influencing them into avoiding things, and doing things in specific ways.

It had lasted for centuries. In fact, he believed that Sir Richard’s uncle had been the weak link, who had stopped it, and he had held different views. He recalled

some things about him, which he had found out when he had once questioned Robert. He had been the owner who had the castle modernized, into the way that it was now.

Merton pushed away his book, and looked at the diary with little enthusiasm.

Bryson casually pushed it in his bag. "After I've something to eat, I'm going take a look about the upper castle. I may come up with something with all the extra knowledge that I have accumulated!"

They nodded their heads in agreement, with a lack of interest in helping with the idea.

Bryson left, and went out into the corridor.

At the end of it, he spotted some of the police leaving to go to the murder scene.

How could they not have found anything? They had rigorously searched everything. But when he thought of how careful and accurate the killer had been, he could not imagine him making a mistake. And they would be lucky to find genetic evidence outside—in the snow, and harsh breezes. It was far from being the place that they normally did their work.

What was strange and annoyed him was that he had been starting to learn things about the reporter when someone had killed him. But it showed that his killer was also capable of making mistakes. Why had he not kept himself unknown about, and kept him alive? He could easily have carried out the crime somewhere else!

Chapter 46

Rearranging Abnormalities.

As Bryson went around the end of corridor, he saw Robert in the dining room—sitting on his own—frantically chewing at a piece of beef, slightly startled, thinking over events, and what was occurring.

It surprised Bryson how fit he and some of the others now looked. They even had persuaded Sarah and Helen into walking about intensely, and out into the wood, looking for it.

"Sit down!" Robert announced, with a slight smile, with some inner amusement, as he caught sight of him entering. Perhaps disappointed in his lack of help!

A servant appeared with another plate full of food.

"Can you please fetch another!" he moaned, pushing it over to Bryson.

The servants were cordial; they speedily obeyed their few wishes, sometimes before they spoke.

They looked as if they had been chosen owing to them having worked in busy places. He was sure that Sir Richard had kept a system, and that he had regularly replaced them.

Bryson ended up eating as fast as Robert was eating, instinctively coping him, even though he was not as hungry.

"Where are you now looking?" he asked, casually, smiling.

“We had been over there before...” he replied, between swallowing pieces of potato.

“What happened over there?”

“We found the body of the reporter that they had caught watching here.”

Robert considered it for a few seconds, and just ignored it.

“Good luck!” Bryson said finishing his food, standing, deciding he was full now—moving for the door.

Robert continued eating, nodding his head towards him, still considering something and smiling.

Bryson listened to the creaks from the floorboards, as he went up the stairs, and he remembered the first time that they had gone up them.

He had fulfilled his wish of returning to the castle!

He walked along the second floor to his room, but as he passed the room that had the disturbances, he saw that the others had been working there.

He went in, approached the window, and observed some of the police, gathered about the front, beside many police vehicles. And he saw another group of policemen taking the body there, from the wood.

He watched their faces, trying to see any signs that they had found anything, but there was nothing.

Bryson looked at the wall behind the bed, after discarding anything being under the floorboards. It was too obvious. The hunt that they had conducted had been nothing more than what school kids could have done. It was ridiculous: they had achieved nothing!

The wall grabbed his attention. Yet every wall, in every room, could have the money. They were thick enough. Some of them even had chimneys running through them.

If he only had some of equipment that archaeologists used, it would give him a vague view of their interiors, as well as of the floors.

Bryson repeatedly thumped his hand hard against the wall, intensely listening for anything, while he slowly moved over the bed. Then he suddenly halted, and jumped back, as a chunk of stone crumbled and shifted out, from behind the wallpaper.

Chapter 47

Odd Ventilation System.

The destruction to the historical castle gave him no real feelings of guilt, but he carefully shifted the awkward mass of stone out, in stages, from the wall.

He was obsessed, and his clambering resumed until he finally had to stop – feeling a sudden loss of energy, with his legs starting to collapse under him, with a mild discomfort to his hands and arms, cut and bruised, at where he had been tugging.

His eyes fell on the mess under him, with little interest. The thick layer of stone and dust fragments scattered across the bed could be cleaned.

With one sudden heave, he incredibly yanked the boulder out, and allowed it to fall to his side. A loud bang instantly came from the bed, and it collapsed downwards with the weight.

In the black gap, where Bryson had removed the stone block, there was nothing, and he waited for his eyes to adjust. But it stayed dim! And he poked his head in, but only saw that there was no stone behind where it had been.

He then stuck his body further inward, with his arms out in front. And further in, he felt that it was a sort of chamber between the walls, but as his sight adjusted to it, he saw that it was not, and that it must be a chimney.

He realized it was a stupid idea anyway. Why would anything be there: in a room in the middle of nowhere?

Yet it seemed too large to be a chimney, and there was no trace of soot or anything that would surely be there, even if they had it cleaned. Although there was a dim chance that nobody had really used it, and that any marks, if any, were in the darkness below. But, again, it was not in the right position to be one! And there were no chimneys below.

He knew where there was a torch, to check it, so he pulled himself away.

In a room along the corridor, he found the torch, and he speedily returned. And he climbed back in, and instantly saw its true size, and that it went further down than the room below, deep beneath the castle.

He thought of other castles, as he tried to work out why the builders would have logically added it to the castle. And he concluded that it had to be for ventilation! The people at that time did not have tightly confined buildings: they could easily have believed that they could suffocate in such places.

But what about the chimneys, why would they not have done? And why was it so large? And where was the opening that allowed the air to flow in?

His breathing echoed down into its abyss, and its coldness made him imagine clouds of steam pouring out of his mouth, into its darkness at the edge of him, out of the range of the torch beam.

His mind could not imagine anything.

He shone the torch upwards, and saw the end of the shaft, near the roof.

At the end of the corridor, behind him, he heard voices coming towards him, and he pulled himself out.

In the corridor, he saw Merton and Mortimer strolling towards him, probably wondering where he was. He had not arrived back, when they had expected him to.

"What's happened?" Merton asked, shifting awkwardly, looking at the dust covering him.

"It's not a chimney," he quickly remarked, moving back to the room.

"We can't leave you on your own..." Merton joked, astonished, entering the room, wondering what he had been doing.

Bryson handed Mortimer the torch, and he climbed onto the bed.

Merton went over to the window to observe the police.

Mortimer reached in, ignoring the dirt.

"It could be for ventilation," he confirmed.

Bryson nodded once, showing that he agreed.

Merton looked at it. "It could be something like one of those small lifts that they use in hotels to hoist things up."

Mortimer pulled himself out, while Merton shuffled his way to it. "Or it could have been used in the construction of the castle. That would explain why they hid it."

After a few minutes, Merton seemed to see something in it.

"What is it?"

Merton pushed himself further in, moving the torch about inside it. "Did you see those holes down there?"

"I never saw them!"

"There are small holes going into other places. They're all the way through it! It has to be for something like ventilation."

He carefully considered something else, and he ignored it.

As he removed himself from it, Bryson moved back into it.

He instantly saw the holes at the places that Merton had looked. They were like the outlets of drainpipes, going into a sewer pipe. Perhaps it, in fact, had been an old sewer shaft, which led outside.

They obviously had built the castle toilets much later. Its strange design could have been an early invention, perhaps made by the builders. The relics of some Roman structures had them! Yet it did look more like a ventilation shaft! He could recall seeing something like it in the wall of another castle, which workmen were repairing.

"It would be interesting to find out where it leads," he spoke, clambering out of it. "Did you have anything to eat?"

"I could do with something," Merton replied, delighted, and Mortimer agreed.

"Let's clean up some of this mess first," Mortimer explained, brushing some of the dirt on the bed inwards with his hand. "It really is only on the bed."

"If we can shift that block of stone into the corner...!" Bryson continued.

Mortimer went onto the bed, feeling it, making sure that it did not collapse any further under his weight, and he cleaned some dirt out of the hole, onto the bed.

Bryson and Merton joined in, and then Mortimer wrapped the outer bed sheet around the block. Then they lifted it off the bed, and shifted into the corner of the room – out of sight.

Bryson closed the door tightly shut, and they left. He did not want to draw too much attention to it.

He tried to recall what group had been working there.

As they walked into the dining room, Bryson saw that most of the others were there.

And he sat opposite Inspector Bailey, and a policewoman shifted from her distant seat to sit next to Inspector Bailey.

"What were you doing out there?" Bryson asked Sarah, trying not to speak too loud, and only put a slight noise into the background sounds.

"We were looking for another building," she explained, trying not to look devious about something.

She took a sip of coffee, and gently placed it on its saucer, sensing some annoyance from them about it.

"How did you end up away out there though?"

She shrugged her shoulders, showing that she had no part in what had occurred, and that she did not wish to explain any further than she had done.

Inspector Bailey seemed to realize that they had not realized the trouble that they had caused.

He captured his attention for a moment, and continued to digest a piece of potato. And he lifted a smoldering cigarette from an ashtray, next to him, breathed it deep into his lungs, and blew it away from him, in their general direction.

"I heard that you had your detection equipment at the tombs out there!" he muttered.

"We did," Merton replied first.

"Why did you go back to the tombs?"

Mortimer reached into his jacket pocket, and he removed the small tape recorder. Then he played with it, activating it.

"We left behind this noise-activated recorder in the vault. We went out to collect it! There are some sounds on it of the reporter going in there. He seems to have gone back to the tombs after we left..."

"You met him at the vault! What do you think he had been doing there?"

"We don't know," Mortimer replied, switching on the machine. "He could have been looking for the money. He did not stay long. There are sounds on it of him going in, and us arriving. After it, you'll hear him returning there, before he went to where he died."

Mortimer handed the machine over to him.

Inspector Bailey put it near his ear, and listened.

"That's intriguing," he muttered, handing it back, looking slightly puzzled.

Bryson took it from Mortimer, wondering if he would hear anything else on it. He had not heard it that well the first time, because of its low battery power. And it clearly did sound different.

He listened to the sounds of James's friends leaving, with a slight amusement. Then the reporter arriving, when he had gone to the tomb. And he turned the volume up to try to hear him. He instantly heard a noise of him shifting something heavy, over stone. And, when he had returned after they had left, he heard the sound again, similar to the noise, as if he had returned something that he had altered.

"What have you found?" Inspector Bailey asked, noticing his reactions.

"Do you want to go over there to check?" Merton asked, guessing what was going to come next.

"If you wish..." Inspector Bailey answered.

"He could've hidden something there..."

Chapter 48

Underground Explorations.

Inspector Bailey rushed down the vault stairs, grasping his torch, as though he expected something dangerous to leap out at him.

His reactions created a tense atmosphere amongst them, making Bryson wonder if all the policemen were reacting like him.

It was phenomenal, they were holding a full murder inquiry over in the trees, with them still searching for genetic evidence, as it grew dark.

Inspector Bailey was not stupid, and he did not push things too far, if he could help it.

Bryson led Inspector Bailey over to where the reporter had been standing. The place looked much different in the bright light of all their torches, and he was now able to see William Randall's tomb properly.

Inspector Bailey moved at the ground, shifting his light downwards, creating a bright circle of light where he could closely examine the dirt.

Webs, pieces of vegetation, and layers of dirt covered everything.

In the dim outer illumination, Bryson watched Merton and Mortimer's tense faces patiently waiting for the outcome, or for something to occur.

Inspector Bailey placed the torch at his side, rubbed his hands hard together, and moved his fingers as though he were going to carry out delicate surgery. He eventually shifted to another position, to allow them to see that there were faint shoe marks on the ground near him.

He then started brushing the dirt away, delicately removing it, and looking for traces of anything.

Bryson recognized a small hole in a slab—surely designed for some type of lifting contraption.

Inspector Bailey shoved a small stick in it, and used it to give it a hard pull up, lifting the entire slab a couple of inches.

Bryson recalled testing the floor near there.

It was where the reporter had been standing.

Merton shifted about breaking the deep silence, and Inspector Bailey carefully lifted the slab.

Bryson noticed a shaft, and that it would have prevented water flooding the vault floor. Small amounts of water had seeped through cracks, flowing down into it.

"Are we going to check it?" Inspector Bailey asked, trying to make them come to a conclusion.

Inspector Bailey looked uncertain at what it was.

It reminded Bryson of the shaft that he had seen in the room. But when he thought of it, he did not have a clue what it was. What was a tunnel doing in a vault? Why had they gone to such lengths to construct it? What hidden motive had been behind it?

They had to have built it for logical reasons, as all the constructions, which he could recall, of that era had been built for. They had built them for their needs!

"Perhaps it's another part of the burial chamber," Merton spoke, trying to recollect something such as it; maybe even from his memories of Egyptian tombs.

"Therefore, we're going down into it!" Inspector Bailey forced himself to announce.

He pointed the light straight in front of him, illuminating part of the ground, and a few feet further down into it. And he lunged at it, as if he had decided that he would have to go into it eventually. He shifted down, examining steps, going into the darkness, which seemed to go down endlessly.

"Are you coming!" he yelled back at them, making Bryson move in next, startled at his actions.

Its main feature was its neat size, making it resemble an ancient mine, but more expertly constructed than that, as though built to last a long time, like an ancient sewer.

Further in, they had cemented bricks around it, like a Victorian sewer, which led him to believe that its age might not be as old as the castle. But it was too much in the same style.

The tunnel, when it stopped descending, noticeably went endlessly on into the distance, in a direction where there was nothing but woods, and they marched off into, preparing themselves.

What dangers could it hold? Did it have something of an incomprehensible nature existing in its darkness?

All the significations of it were startling! He had not even believed that the money could be under the wood, and there was a tunnel going under it.

The vault vanished behind them, and it even felt absurd that they were going so far into it. It was like something that was out of place, and should not have been there. Especially not at a burial site. Nothing seemed to put a conclusion to what it had been needed for, and why they had gone to such lengths to construct it.

Questions endlessly went through his mind, as he followed Inspector Bailey's dark figure trudging on like a soldier into it, behind a beam of light.

He was sure that he had his gun, but his hand did not go near it; almost as though he believed a gun would not do any good. He seemed obsessed with handling his fantasy situation more than anything!

"Do you want one?" Merton moaned, handing him his cigarettes, as he blew out smoke about him; and he took one from him to break the endless routine.

He made sure Inspector Bailey took one, and he lighted it for him.

Bryson strolled on, blissfully smoking, wondering where they were going. They clearly were still under the wood, roots from trees had smashed their way through the brickwork, and they even had to avoid hitting some, going straight through.

It was surprising that it had not flooded with all the cracks and holes. But he saw signs that it had occurred, and saw a thick layer of dried mud over the stones under his feet.

There was no real chance of water leaking through anyway, as it would only snow.

"This could lead to that other structure, which we were looking for in the wood," Mortimer announced loudly, from behind them.

"But why design and build a tunnel going from one building to another?" Bryson moaned back, to see what his reply would be.

The question hung in the air for a long time, with him trying to think of the conclusion. Even when he illogically thought about it, he could not find an answer.

Inspector Bailey lost his temper a few times, even with a cigarette, flaring away at his mouth, with the smoke spinning through the thin air behind him.

The mystery of where it led to was certainly the main inspiration that kept them going, seeking an answer, driving them on, no matter what.

If they turned back, they would never know, so they ought to keep going.

He realized that none of them would have believed that it went out to that length. Inspector Bailey might even have avoided going. His pace was slowing, his walk had changed, and he was struggling to keep going at a fast pace.

He was sure that he wished that he had ordered his men to go in it for him.

Bryson noticed that he took it for granted that the tunnel had not collapsed anywhere, and that they would not have to journey back.

There was something about that reporter and his casual attitude that gave him the impression that it had. If it was correct, then it surely proved that he had been in it before, and that would count out the money being at the end of it.

Bryson spotted something, in the distance, and his reaction instantly caught Inspector Bailey's attention. And he went slowly, with his head facing there.

His head then went back to where it had been, watching the tunnel about him, making sure that nothing was in his way. But Bryson continued to examine what it was, and saw something blocking the tunnel ahead.

Merton and Mortimer soon noticed the problem, and Bryson attempted to hear their silent discussion. And he saw that they did not come to any real conclusion.

As they approached it, Inspector Bailey suddenly exploded with anger, and then held himself calm, on the brink of losing his patience, while he marched on.

"Why did they build a wall there?" Merton finally moaned, trying to obtain an answer, to such absurdity.

The four of them stood, resting, glancing at individual sections of the wall.

"They could have built another structure there," Merton remarked. "Where do you think this is?"

Bryson saw that none of them knew, and that they had not been able to trace the direction with all the bends that had been in it.

Inspector Bailey started feeling along the edge of the wall, where there was a crack, going around it.

"We could shove it over," Merton spoke, looking at it, showing Bryson a smile.

"That'll not be necessary," Inspector Bailey answered. "Even though that may do ... I believe that the reporter has been here. And perhaps someone else!"

Bryson waited to see what he was talking about before doing anything. And he watched Inspector Bailey touch something, hidden between the side bricks, and push the wall. He then shifted it, showing them that it was a hidden door, made of bricks and cement, with thick metal hinges.

Behind it, a set of steps went upwards, somewhere, and Inspector Bailey crept up them.

Maybe it even led into the killer's home, or hiding place. By the stones in the walls, he was sure that it was a large ancient structure.

Bryson realized that it would now be very dark outside, and that they would need to go back through the dark wood.

The stairs were perpendicular, while the height that they moved up to grew unrealistic, until his imagination could not stretch that far.

Suddenly, Inspector Bailey became aware of something, and had them climbing back down.

Once he arrived at the bottom, he tried to see the other tunnel, at the side of it.

“Why was that camouflaged to resemble part of the tunnel?” he declared, astonished.

Bryson then recognized the wall next to it, at the front of the stairs, and he shoved it, and walked into the brighter storeroom, at the back of the castle kitchen.

Chapter 49

Deadliest Menace.

Bryson’s dreams had been surreal, and of an incomprehensible nature. Shimmering lights and freakish sounds had whirled about him like an immense vortex.

And he calmly sat upright on the end of the bed!

He noted the air, and that it was cool and calm in the room. But he spotted that there was a blanket of snow falling outside. He remembered being in a huddled posture, with blankets tightly wrapped about him.

An array of silent knocks made the door vibrate. And he stopped breathing slowly.

Bryson sighed, and shifted across the floor, listening for sounds from the outer corridor.

He swiftly unlocked it, and pulled it slightly open.

Merton and Mortimer stood outside, suggesting something was along the corridor. Bryson nodded, and closed the door.

He quickly dressed, but when he opened the door, they were gone. So he shut the door, and went to the room, wondering what they were doing. It had to be significant, as they had been positive about it being a good idea to wake him, in the middle of the night.

Before he arrived at the room, he gasped, hearing the sounds blaring out. It then mildly amused him, as it were as if Merton and Mortimer had two creatures fighting each other in the room. He tried to compare it to his dream, but he could not notice any connection.

The disturbance seemed as if it had different states.

He imagined it as a warp through space and time, causing many different things to occur about the castle, and in his dream he had seen inside the warp itself (and the room lay somewhere beyond it, connected through it to many locations throughout space and time).

But what he could never understand was what the things were doing. Did the things, or whatever they were, become part of the disturbance, while near it, when it automatically opened, at night?

Bryson dragged himself to the doorway, wondering what would happen if the source of the disturbance were closer!

Three scientists rushed passed, and rushed in, carrying cables, leading from all the rooms next to it.

Merton and Mortimer were standing at the hole in the wall, where, to his astonishment, the sounds were mainly emerging, blaring out from the depths of the shaft.

If the sounds had been astonishing before, they now were mind-bending. They came screaming through the shaft with fury. The things now sounded as though they were under the castle, trapped in some form of field.

The scientists rushed about, setting up their new equipment, connecting the equipment from room to room.

"What do think is down there?" Merton carefully asked, giving him the impression that they might be going to do something. And Mortimer then gave him the impression that he had waited all his life to do it!

Bryson started to realize the implications of the find, and that they would have to check what was there.

Bryson quickly asked: "Investigate all these walls?"

"Yes!" Mortimer replied. "We'd all the best equipment that we could get hold of brought in – to examine inside the walls."

"What did they find out?"

"There are small shafts running through them..."

"Where did they lead? Did these shafts go under the building?"

"They stopped just below ground level!"

"All the shafts are connected together," Merton continued. "They must run through most of the building. We're positive that they were for an ancient form of ventilation..."

Bryson did not like Mortimer's behavior: he had something planned. And he soon saw that he had even underestimated them: as Merton removed a large roll of nylon rope, from an old large nylon bag.

"I'm going down...!" Mortimer then spoke.

"What's wrong with lowering some equipment?"

Bryson then noticed that the scientists were getting ready to do that later.

"I want to experience and evaluate what's there first," he said, putting on a harness.

Surely they had not brought that with them. What had they been going to do with an old rope and harness?

"Why not send down a camera, with a few lights attached? We could easily obtain a good picture, and sounds. And you'll have evidence of what's there!"

"After some consideration—over the last hour!—I've decided to go down and experience what's there. It's something I would very much like to do. And I shall take a camera with me."

Once Merton had tested that the harness was correctly fitted, he fixed the end of the rope to metal pegs that they had attached to the wall at the window.

Mortimer slowly climbed through the gap, and squeezed into the shaft.

It was no use: Mortimer's bewildered face disappeared into the blackness.

"Where did you find that...?" Bryson moaned, expecting to hear Mortimer's screams in the noises.

"It was in a cupboard, in the kitchen. I saw it there when we went through there."

Bryson tried to recognize any change to the tones, which would indicate Mortimer was influencing anything.

"What was climbing gear doing there?" he moaned aloud, wondering whose it was. It was old!

Bryson then noticed that the rope had stopped moving, and he knew that Mortimer had reached the bottom.

"Perhaps one of the servants left it there."

"What would one of the servants be doing with mountain climbing gear?"

Bryson felt his tiredness, and wished that he had stayed in bed.

"They could have used it to climb up something else."

The rope started swaying and vibrating furiously, giving the impression that Mortimer was frantically climbing up it—to escape.

He clearly had not realized how hard it would be to climb out of it.

Bryson and Merton pulled the rope up, while Mortimer used it to move out of it.

Suddenly, Mortimer's frantic face appeared at the edge, desperate to climb out, almost slipping.

"Get me out of here!" he hollered, making Bryson and Merton go as fast as they could to help him.

Even as he landed on the floor, he was still rushing to remove the harness, shocking them even further—and that they might now be in danger.

But, as he removed it, he rushed away through the door, running towards the other rooms, leaving them waiting for something terrible to appear. But he had not suggested what.

At the edge of the doorway, they watched him running along the corridor.

"Where is he going?" Merton muttered, just staring, bewildered. "This castle is one hell of a crazy place!"

Bryson watched the drifting currents of snowflakes blow by the window.

He really felt like some rest, in bed. It had been a long day, and the next day might be even longer.

What was Mortimer doing? Even though he had done what he himself felt like doing – rushing away, without saying anything (but to go to bed instead).

Why were they not tired like him? What had they been doing at the room anyway?

In the darkness, at the end of the corridor, he saw two figures rushing towards them – resembling a sort of dream view, in his sleepy mental state.

He then saw Mortimer, and that he had dragged Inspector Bailey out of his bed.

Bryson turned to observe the hole in the wall, wondering what he had found. It had to be something real, as he would not have awakened Inspector Bailey. Had Mortimer found another body down there? He gasped, and looked along the corridor.

"Not again!" he moaned.

He could not stand it. And they might have to stay up for a long time, to obtain the conclusion.

Bryson felt so sleepy that when they rushed past, he was hardly aware that they were there.

Then, as they raced away, in the opposite direction, he realized he had better follow.

He was sure that they had not wanted to tell them what it was. But it might have just looked that way.

Bryson shrugged, and then followed Merton, who started chasing after them.

In the sounds, from the room, he heard a rhythmical tapping, increasing in volume, making him slow to listen. Then he realized that it was footsteps rushing towards him.

From the end of the corridor, behind him, two policemen came running along, still fixing gun holsters on their waists.

Bryson then saw that Inspector Bailey now had his gun in his hand, as he arrived at the stairs. He also had a torch, but it was switched off, keeping them in dark.

The situation was worse than he had anticipated. If someone did not die, it would be surprising.

Bryson and Merton rushed towards them, and crept down the stairs, which creaked loudly when they made rapid movements.

At the bottom of the stairs, he watched their figures creep from room to room, looking for something. But there definitely was not anything there.

He finally was able to approach Mortimer.

"Let's look in the kitchen!" Inspector Bailey warned, and crept through to it.

The policemen went next to him. And one of them switched on the light, and Inspector Bailey rushed into the storeroom, holding out his gun, ready to shoot at anyone who appeared.

Bryson felt awake again, but tired, and avoided staggering.

"I heard someone down here," Mortimer muttered to Merton, moving away from him.

How had he heard anyone down here? It had been so noisy at the shaft that he would have thought that by the time he had climbed to the surface that he would have needed a hearing aid just to speak.

"There's a footprint!" one of the policemen announced, standing at the hidden entrance.

Bryson mechanically recognized it, and that it was the killer's!

Chapter 50

Into Oblivion.

Clouds of gray dust mingled through beams of light, edging into Bryson's face and lungs.

He groaned to himself, and dangled about on the rope, glimpsing parts of the shaft above, mentally exhausted, wondering if he could wangle his way out of it. But it was not a matter of persuading them, it was really himself.

It might be his final confrontation with the room, which had shrouded his life.

If he had only known all those years ago, as a youth, what he would end up doing, he would have forced himself to forget about the haunted castle. Its sounds were now screaming out at him, out of the darkness, in an abyss below, as if a gateway into hell were there, with him suspended over it on a thin rope, waiting to descend into its hideous reaches.

How had they managed to talk him into this? One minute they had been chasing a murderer, who mysteriously had appeared in the middle of the night, from the tunnel (somewhere close to where Mortimer had descended), and next they had been checking what he had been up to. Then they had listened to Mortimer's theories about the shaft. He had claimed as he had descended into it, that he had heard the sounds coming loudly from the small vents, and that the louder sounds had gone behind him as he had fallen downwards into it. At the bottom it had been empty, and had resembled the bottom of a well. But as he had been going to climb back up, he had heard the person going through the tunnel, which had been near him.

They were sure that they had scared him away, by going down the stairs, with its loud creaks. The person was either lucky or good. Any other night they would have had the police search the area. The roads had been blocked with thick snow, and the heavy blizzard would have quickly covered any trace of him anyway.

Then, afterward, as they had been resting in the room, discussing it, Mortimer had found another shaft, in the wall at the other side of the room, at precisely the same spot as the other.

It was part of a complex ventilation system.

A few small shafts below went outside. It was all that it needed.

He wondered where the killer had gone. How could he have traveled there with the snow blocking the roads? Could it be that he did not use a car, and was at some distant location, at the fringes of the estate? Could there be another tunnel going there? It would be a good way to sneak about without them catching him.

He surely had not known that they had found the tunnel into the castle.

What had he been trying to do? He had to have a good reason for risking doing what he had done. If he had been going to poison them, he would have tampered with the food. But they had followed his prints into the dining room.

The person had to have been doing something. And why had he been so desperate to do it?

Bryson went down the shaft in stages, edging himself in it.

Why had he not gone to bed when the police had?

Mortimer had believed that the main sounds had been emerging through the small vents from this direction, implying a possible source had been in this wall. And, of course, he had soon located it, and removed a block of stone, to reveal the shaft, hidden there all the time.

He jerked, startled, hearing a sort of scream, as though from a faraway place, on a distant world. He visualized it out in space, in the blackness.

There were traces of rotted vegetation in the air, floating in the light coming from overhead.

Some of the blocks of stone about him resembled the stones in the Egyptian pyramids. They were strange things to use to build, but they were hard to penetrate, and had been needed for a good castle.

He imagined a spectral figure in the thick darkness, which was now swallowing him.

Merton's face appeared, through the hole above.

Bryson angrily waved his arm about to clear away thick webs, and cleaned green slime from his face.

"Here's Inspector Bailey's searchlight!" Mortimer voiced, from behind Merton, with the searchlight that he had finally fetched, as the other had gone dud, due to Mortimer leaving it alight.

Mortimer lowered the light to him on the end of a length of string.

Bryson imagined weird shapes of giant insects darting about him.

Once he had the torch, he illuminated a thin tunnel going down, as if probing something that he should not probe—lighting somewhere that perhaps centuries of people who had stayed in those rooms would have cringed in utter horror near.

It remarkably only resembled a well though, and his eyes strained to see what was at the bottom. But the light and his eyes were not good enough. And he looked until he could maintain it no more and he shut his eyes, and mentally rested.

As he dropped down, the entrance slowly disappeared out of sight.

He then realized that the main sounds emerging were not mainly coming from under him—they were coming from somewhere above—and when he listened more intensely, he heard them mainly coming from somewhere above the entrance. In the loud sound, and confusion, he had not heard it.

He was sure that it was coming from the top floor.

Incredibly, nobody had been near there at night.

Yet they were so muddled and strange, with so many echoes, from the thick stone, he could not properly make out what or exactly where they were coming from.

He released the rope, and landed on the ground.

It resembled a well, under the castle.

A thick layer of dry dirt occasionally gave off a cloud of dust, as he moved his feet.

Mortimer had been correct, about hearing sounds easily from below the castle. The sounds from about the lower castle, from the blizzard, were there, as though magnified.

A silent whistle came from the wind blowing against something.

It would be almost impossible to search the whole castle. There must be many of these shafts through the walls. How could they check them?

Strange objects about his sides, vaguely captured his attention, but they were only building rubbish, which had been discarded from somewhere above.

Yet an object, partly buried in dust, that he had seen, and had ignored, started to interest him, and he crouched at the side of it, to see it better.

And he carefully fitted the light onto an old chunk of wood, behind it, so that the light brightly went over it. Then he cleaned away the dirt, and revealed an old chest.

He grabbed the lid, and unsuccessfully attempted to yank it up from it.

He then rested, while studying it, and prepared himself. And he just took off the harness, and firmly wrapped the object in it.

He energetically climbed up the rope, and he was soon climbing out of it.

He then rested on the bed, breathing heavily.

"It's mainly coming from above somewhere," Bryson stated, recalling what he had realized in the shaft.

"What do you mean?" Merton asked, screwing up his face, as though he could not fully believe what he had said, obviously seizing the opportunity to question him—probably detecting that he had found something else.

"Up at the top floor!" Mortimer declared.

"Nobody has been up there at night," Bryson replied, leaping off the bed.

"What's on the rope?" Merton asked, tugging at it.

"I found something. Pull it up!"

Merton hoisted the chest up, and he placed it on the floor.

"It's locked!" he uttered, backing away from it.

"I'll go and get a hammer and chisel!" Merton declared, and excitedly left.

Bryson felt how solid it really was.

What would a locked chest have in it? He suddenly imagined valuable items there!

If Sir Richard had left it there, there surely would be some signs of it.

Merton quickly arrived with the hammer and chisel.

Mortimer looked surprised, that they were now going to open an old chest.

The chest sat strangely upon the bed. It looked very expensive, and even a shame to ruin. And Bryson was sure that it was even exceedingly rare, and that it could be an expensive antique. However, he could not imagine them spending hours trying to pick its lock, when it might be worth virtually nothing, while its contents might be worth millions.

Merton banged the chisel gently against it, trying to separate the lid, waiting to see if they had any other ideas on how to achieve their goal. Bryson just nodded, in agreement, for him to continue. And he began firmly chipping away at the gap, next to the lock.

It mildly surprised him to see that it did not do much to it. But he continued with more zest.

Merton was almost licking his lips as he tried to open it. Perhaps hoping that it would spring open, and be full of jewels.

The clangs grew loud, and it started to dent it.

"Is that a type of chest used with jewellery, or is it just an old sea chest...?" Mortimer inquired, studying the sides of it, seeing if they had any information.

"It could be," Merton moaned, partially exhausted, not stopping to study it.

The chisel then entered a gap, and he used it as a lever, forcing it upwards, making it into a bigger gap. And a bolt became visible—locking it—over the keyhole.

It gave out rhythmical clangs, as he bashed the chisel and the chest against the bed, becoming even more desperate to acquire what he wanted.

Finally, the bolt started bending and breaking, and he hit it with a last whack, breaking it. And Mortimer and Bryson stood, to observe it better.

Merton shuddered nervously, and realized something, just before he pushed it open. Then, it opened, and they stood glaring at its contents—which were the remains of a pile of newspapers.

Chapter 51

The Old Chest.

Even though he had been prepared for its contents having little value, it created some anguish, contemplating that it had nothing but newspapers.

In those few seconds that Mortimer had glared down at its contents, looking as if it had been one of the saddest things that he had encountered, Bryson had made the decision that he would do everything that he could possibly do to acquire something of value there.

The next day, they met in the evening, at the library.

"Well, it's another 'dead end'!" Merton groaned. "Why did your uncle, or whoever left it, leave it locked, with that junk in it?"

"Perhaps it was the best place to put it!" Mortimer replied.

"It must have had some importance...!" Merton pleaded, putting out his hand, and touching part of a newspaper.

"Let's take a close look at the 'junk'!"

Mortimer lifted the chest, and placed it near the end of the table. Then he tipped its contents over the floor, until it was empty.

It seemed just to have newspapers in it. But Bryson gradually recognized the covers of some books. They were in bad condition, but in good condition for the length of time that they had been there.

Bryson grasped a newspaper, noticing that Merton and Mortimer were waiting for him to do so. Then he gently cleaned away its dust and loose bits, and placed it down on the table. He turned pages, and lightly brushed them.

The contents were only the things that he had already seen there, but he wanted to confirm it.

"Do you think that they were your uncle's?" Mortimer spoke, sitting silently, observing things.

"I don't know. I cannot tell how old they are, but I'll check to see what year they have ..."

Some of them were really old looking. And he found the tattered remains of the top of one, and glared at its faint print. "They're from the nineteenth century!"

"So they're not your uncle's."

Bryson picked up another, and flattened it out on the table, in front of him. And he started reading the headline, and he saw that it was a local newspaper, covering that region.

Then he caught sight of something familiar. In a column, at its edge, it mentioned Grovnor, and it gave a vivid description of a death in the district.

And the rest of the newspaper proved to be empty of anything else of interest.

He considered if they were worth anything as collector's items—rare items!—even though most were in poor condition.

Another newspaper's unusual looks grabbed his attention. Not because it was a different paper, but it was because it was from a different time. Its date showed that they had printed it fifteen years before the other.

It was apparent that someone had gone to considerable lengths to collect them. He had not realized that they had collected newspapers then. However, were they there because of their value?

He held up the newspaper, and handed it to Mortimer.

"Look! This is around fifteen years older than the other..."

Merton and Mortimer observed the two papers, comparing them.

When he started searching through another, he realized that he had been wrong—they were not collector's items!—the front page gave a breathtaking account of the police finding the bodies of some women in a wood in Grovnor, claiming that they had died of freight. It was identical to a legend that he had heard about the place. Yet what astonished him the most (with his reactions grabbing Merton and Mortimer's attention) was that the wood that they had found them in was part of the castle's grounds.

"What have you found?" Merton grunted, as he tried to grab his attention.

"I'm not sure," he replied, glaring down at the other newspapers. "These are not collector's items!"

"What?"

"Someone has kept them because they've accounts of deaths in them!"

"Why?"

"They've accounts of deaths, in these woods."

Bryson held out the newspaper, and Merton and Mortimer read it, looking astonished, with glimmers of surprise at what they saw.

He gave more of them to them, and they sat reading the columns.

As Bryson read more, he was astounded to see that there were accounts with mentions of supernatural disturbances, and transcendent monsters. They had descriptions of immortal things that had plagued generations of people!

Bryson then collected the books that were there, before they reached for them, and placed them in a pile.

He stared at the first, wondering what he was looking at, almost preparing himself for what it held. Its cover had too much deterioration to see what it was.

He forced himself to turn the first pages.

"This has to have something to do with the deaths!" Merton uttered, calming himself, reading a newspaper that Bryson had not seen.

"Incredible!" Merton groaned loudly. "Perhaps we should show this to Inspector Bailey..."

He stared at it, looking slightly pale.

Bryson started reading a more detailed account of one of the deaths that he had read in one of the newspapers. It had more accounts, but it only had one that had occurred there.

The other books were about the same as it, with other occurrences that were in the newspapers. They had been chosen from different decades. Some were full of stories of ghost sightings and other paranormal phenomena.

“Wait until you read this stuff!” he declared to them, knowing that the books would make them spellbound. “This is full of supernatural sightings, and with the stories that are in the newspapers. And they’re more full descriptions.”

Merton grabbed the books, trying to read their titles at the same time, almost dropping them.

“Look at this...!” Mortimer gasped, reading an article. “This has an account of the death of a distinguished MP, Lord Lincoln, who had been a friend of Queen Victoria...

“His remains were found, beside his dead horses, and coachman, at the side of a lane over there—after they had taken a short cut through this region, one night. The rest of the carriage was later found smashed to pieces and scattered throughout a wide area of open woodland!”

“There’s something in those woods!” Merton resumed.

“This place was so deadly...” Bryson replied, realizing, by their behavior, that they now believed that something with a lethal nature could exist there.

“We should warn the others...” Merton warned.

“We can show the evidence to Inspector Bailey!”

“Who wants to do that?” Bryson replied.

Merton stood, and went to the door. He looked about the corridor, to see if any of the others had arrived back.

“You’d better tell him only the basic facts!”

Mortimer picked up and held a book as though it were gold, not daring to damage it in any way, reading the information as fast as possible, as if someone might take it away from him. Yet if the police took the books, what would they possibly do with them? They would think that they were mad if they used them for anything. He had heard of the police supposedly using psychics to help them solve crimes, but they would never accept monsters, many centuries old, as the suspects.

Chapter 52

Rats in the Attic.

Inspector Bailey shivered nervously, with his fingers touching his lower lip—until he grew satisfied.

“I’m not so sure that I believe these,” he argued, and marched out of the door.

He hastily left the library to join the others again.

He had checked out the library and was free to go back to the dining room.

Yet he had returned Bryson to reality again, and to face the truth. And that superstitious people could easily have manipulated the stories. The media had always created stories, playing around with normal occurrences. It was their job to do such things. And it sold newspapers!

Mortimer shrugged towards him.

It was too easy to miss things.

There could even be something in one of the other walls, at the bottom of a vent.

He would now help the others more.

There were more of them, and they had now spread out, checking all the right places that they came upon.

"I would like to question some of the locals about those legends," Merton conferred silently to Mortimer, who was still excitedly reading one of the stories in a book. "If we can find the cause of this ..."

"Perhaps that's a better idea..." Mortimer replied, looking at Bryson. "I believe some of that legend that you told us—Robert told you—about his ancestor having the castle constructed on this site where something massacred them."

"Whatever it is, it had to have already existed here!" Merton spoke, startled, recalling the story.

"We may not find out what it is though!" Mortimer replied.

"Did you read this?" Merton asked Bryson, pointing to a newspaper. "It's about some trappers discovering the remains of two German tourists, in a wood over there."

"What date does it have?"

"That's strange!"

"What?"

"It happened in the thirties!" he spoke, glaring at it. "That means that it was left by someone who had lived here just before your uncle..."

They returned to the books, hardly noticing anything else, completely absorbed in what they were doing, looking as if they did not know whether to laugh or be astounded at the other accounts that the books claimed had happened at other locations about the country.

They were the kinds of books that Bryson had expected to have pictures of people covered with white sheets superimposed over dark places in, with captions saying that they had been famous photographs of ghosts.

Again he considered if science in the twenty-first century and beyond would ever authenticate anything.

The darkness outside made him wonder why such things took place at night. It made people question the truth of them, as people's imaginations contrived such things in dark places – where people could not properly see or prove that the things were there.

There had to be a logical reason why the disturbances at the castle took place at night. Perhaps it was more like a strange flaw in the fabric of the space-time continuum.

Was there some other dimension aligned with here?

Had it snared the beasts in the wood, trapping them forever, as entities? And had they gone raving mad, over centuries, dwelling on the world in the absence of light?

Chapter 53

The Unknown Motive.

The lights illuminated the dining room, in the dimness caused by black clouds menacingly covering the sky.

Bryson sipped his coffee, as though he were suffering from the after-effects of a late night drinking session.

The room was almost empty, besides Inspector Bailey—sitting calmly opposite him.

Bryson had deliberately met him (noticing his routine of going there at specific times).

“What do you think that guy was doing in here?” he finally began, noticing that he was going to grow restless, and would surely leave.

“I don’t have the vaguest idea,” he mumbled, looking as though he missed having a newspaper to read.

“I believe that there’s something in this room!”

“What?”

“Why would he have gone to such lengths to enter the castle, and go straight in here?”

“So you have assumptions that it’s the money then?”

“I think that we should at least check it though!”

“If you wish,” he replied, suddenly seeing the opportunity to do something. “And do you think that my officers should help?”

Bryson firmly nodded, acknowledging his reply.

Inspector Bailey wandered out of the room, and he returned with his policemen.

“We’re looking for something that our visitor might have been trying to take, in this room.”

“It’s more than likely hidden or out of view,” Bryson continued, slightly amusing Inspector Bailey.

Even though there was the chance that he had carried out his mission, which could explain why he had left so fast, and might not have even heard them coming down.

The police went to where they had found an impression of the person’s shoe, at the fireplace.

It could not have been very high up as there had been no signs of him tampering with the seats or anything.

The room was empty looking: with large white walls, hardly any new furniture, and decorated mainly with antiques. Most of the small items were on the table, at the center of the room.

Why had he not just left it until they had gone from the castle though?

To his surprise, he watched Inspector Bailey swiftly leave where he had been, to go over to one of his men. The policemen then grouped about them. And Bryson moved there, and he saw an electronic device in his hand, which he had removed from between the brick spaces at the edge of the fireplace. The policeman had shone a pocket torch into it, trying look behind the bricks.

They viewed it without saying anything.

“It’s a microphone,” Inspector Bailey whispered, at his ear. “That guy has planted a bug in here!”

Bryson instantly shut up, feeling fairly astonished that the killer could be out there listening to them.

In fact, it was incredible! He had believed that he might have been watching them, and he had been listening to them.

The policeman, acknowledging something, carefully placed it back into its place of concealment, and they marched out of the door, and then out of the castle.

At the front of the building, he saw that Inspector Bailey now looked different, and he realized that they could finally have something. If they played their cards right, they could perhaps persuade the person to go somewhere, and trap him.

“What if there are more of those things about?”

Inspector Bailey realized the implications of it.

“Where do you think they would be?”

“The places that we occupied the most,” Bryson replied frankly, wishing that they would just solve the crime.

Two policemen left towards a police car, and Bryson left to go to the library, to warn them.

Everywhere that they occupied was a potential zone that could have the devices. But how good was the device? He had never seen it before, or tested what it could do. Yet if that guy had a van packed full of equipment out there, he could even pick up a good signal from the weakest device. Or receiving equipment nearby, where it could receive a powerful signal? Had that been what he had been doing in the wood?

He could recall devices that had been attached to animals—used to track them—and that they used satellite technology. The device could easily send out signals like a mobile phone.

For some reason, he accepted that they could not track the person listening in. Yet he was sure that the technology existed.

Bryson tried to think of the places near him that could have them, as he approached the library.

Merton and Mortimer were waiting for him.

“You took your time,” Merton explained, with a sudden smile.

“We’ve found something. But I cannot discuss it at the moment!”

Merton wondered why, and dropped his book.

“We’ve looked through it enough...” Mortimer assured him.

“We’re going to put the equipment up on the top floor!” Mortimer uttered, standing.

“That’s a good idea,” Bryson replied. “I’ll tell you what we have found, once we’re up there.”

Mortimer thought about it, and dismissed it.

Bryson wondered if there was anything up there, as they left to move the equipment.

Chapter 54

The Bugs.

Bryson had vivid recollections of his original thoughts of the upper floor, as they entered the room. And he had sneaking suspicions that they were going to be returning there at night.

None of them had been anywhere near there at night.

As the scientists started setting up the equipment, he considered the others' reactions to them going there.

"What were those policemen doing then?" Merton eventually asked.

"What?" Bryson asked.

"They're searching the rooms!"

"It must remain a secret...!"

"Why?" Mortimer asked, trying to see him.

"They searched the dining room, where that intruder had been last night, and they found a bug hidden next to the fireplace."

"He bugged the dining room?"

"And they believe that that there could be more of them about the castle."

"So what are they going to do then?" Merton asked.

"I'm not sure yet. But they may be able to catch him! They left it in the dining room, and they're searching the castle for more."

"We'd better watch what we talk about down there!"

Bryson noticed that they were already starting to turn silent.

Mortimer looked about him for something, and remembered something. "That camera is still out there!"

Bryson instantly froze! He had forgotten it.

"That's right," Merton answered, seeing his expression, "that intruder came through that tunnel last night."

"He should show up on it!"

"But he went through there twice. Once to enter, and the second to leave."

"And it would have filmed the reporter, and anyone that might have passed there."

Merton and Mortimer rushed about setting up their equipment, at the exact positions that they had carefully thought out, and had done before.

"Let's go and fetch it then," Mortimer said, once he had finished something.

"It could snow!"

Chapter 55

The Forgotten Camera.

The police had affected the others with their behavior, and searching all over the castle. Yet Bryson was positive that they did not suspect what they were doing.

Some of them even indicated to him that they had been checked by them, for some reason.

As they were about to leave through the front door, Inspector Bailey approached them.

He realized that they had some equipment brought in to detect the bugging devices better.

Bryson avoided asking any questions about their search, as he could not decide whether he should tell them that he had told Merton and Mortimer.

"Where are you going?" he inquired, searching his face, almost as if he suspected him of something, but was not quite sure what.

"We forgot that we also had a camera out there," Bryson uttered. "It's an infrared camera, and it might have captured that guy last night?"

"You had a camera filming something out there?"

Bryson saw an expression of astonishment, hidden beyond his weak smile expression. And he was sure that he now had some sort of plan to capture the person.

"It was filming the vault!"

He had left it there as long as he could, now it was time to check what it had captured.

"I'll be extremely interested in that film," he finally muttered, looking at the deep snow with contempt.

"We'll bring it straight back," Merton explained, following them to the wood.

"Wait!" he called out. "Take one of my officers with you. It's too valuable!"

Inspector Bailey glanced at one of his officers, and he joined them.

He obviously was a good runner, and he had chosen him for it. And he was capable of helping them handle any trouble that they might encounter.

There was a chance that the person could do something – if he had heard them leave the castle, and spotted them collecting the camera.

But the detective had a gun, and he persistently showed that he had it, as he followed them into the wood. And they sensed that he was ready for action.

Yet there were no signs of anything about them.

Where was the person? Was he capable of reaching there? The police were covering the roads: he had overheard it, from the detective's radio, under his outer jacket.

If he did something, and escaped, it would prove that he had a place in the outer radius of the estate.

Yet he could even be staying in a tent, like mountain and Arctic explores did. They only had a few days left, and he only needed to stay there that long.

Bryson realized that they would not have found the body if it had been a day later, as it and the prints would have been buried deep under the snow, and they would still be searching for the reporter.

His skeleton might even have been found years later, partially buried in the ground.

The wood could have many of them, from what those newspapers suggested about those things stalking there, over the centuries.

Once at the structure, Bryson and Mortimer went into it, while Merton remained outside with the detective.

They went down to the tombs. Then they carefully noted that the entrance to the tunnel had dirt over it. The person had covered it over after leaving it!

Bryson then climbed up the tree, and got the camera.

And, as they approached the castle, heavy snow started to fall, covering all their prints.

At the castle, it was almost dark, and the snow was whirling about them. And Inspector Bailey rushed out to meet them.

"Is there anything on it?" he uttered, affected by the wind and spinning snow.

"Let's check it at our room!" Mortimer replied.

"We've not checked there yet, so try to remain as silent as possible."

"Have you found more of them?" Bryson asked, realizing that Inspector Bailey took it for granted that he had told Merton and Mortimer about the bugs.

"We've found a great deal of them—all about the castle!—in places such as the dining room. Someone has gone to a considerable amount of trouble to listen to all of you. That's not all – that one in the dining room is not working properly, and we believe that the person was either trying to see what was wrong with it or trying to fix it."

"So what are you doing now?"

"I'm going to keep my men ready, in case he reappears."

"You may have to do more than that!"

"What like?"

"What about sabotaging a few important bugs, to force him into reappearing?"

"We did that, earlier today!"

He nodded in agreement.

"We may acquire a faint image of him them," Inspector Bailey muttered, examining the extraordinary look of the camera, Mortimer held.

The four of them rushed through the doorway, back into the now warm castle.

Bryson thought of what he could have overheard, and what had been the most important things that they had said, which they would not want him to hear (but it was almost hopeless, as they had even mentioned the tunnel at some places). And he could only make a guess at what he might know, and hope that they had not wrecked what might be their only opportunity to catch him.

Once in the room, Mortimer removed a laptop from a case, and Merton set it up on the bed. Then he wired the camera to it, and captured what it had collected.

The picture appeared, on the small screen, showing freak gusts of wind vigorously blowing branches about, with large amounts of snow falling from the tree.

Most of the scenes that it had filmed were empty, and usually powerful wind or snow movements, except for good views, after James's friends had left, of the reporter.

Then a faint view of the back of someone appeared, at night, shifting through the snow, going into the vault, which Mortimer activated the infrared image of, to make clearer.

All of them knew that it was the killer, and, as it went fast forward, they waited in breathtaking silence for him to reappear.

Then his figure, in a blur of dim light, crept back out, like a deformed silhouette of a hunchback.

Chapter 56

The Source.

Sounds from the shaft blared out into the night, as they headed away to the top floor.

They only delayed their progress to glance through the windows in the rooms, at the wildly falling snow.

It now was incredible that they had not recognized it at the start—that the sounds were mainly coming through a system of shafts.

“So,” Bryson muttered nervously, “this is it: we may finally find out what all this is about.”

They increased their progress at the stairs, while occasionally listening for the intruder.

Ghostly cries came from behind them, mingling with the howling winds. Frequent currents of air coming from places where it had penetrated into the castle.

“We may find something,” Mortimer sighed, looking tired.

The top floor was exceedingly dark, but, instead of turning on the lights, Merton and Mortimer illuminated their path with torches.

The sounds were inconceivable, and they could not distinguish where they were coming from, or if they were as loud as below.

There were a few demon-like wails coming from somewhere in its blackness, as they approached the place.

It was astounding how far they had gone.

As they came to where the equipment was, it became obvious that there was something wrong. There definitely was not enough noise.

“It must be coming from below then,” Merton instantly explained, recognizing that they must have made a mistake.

The other scientists went around checking the equipment, to confirm it.

At the door, Bryson rested on a seat, and took a good look at his new surroundings. He could not even recall the room. The others had obviously keenly searched it.

“We don’t understand this...” Merton spoke to him, after he had finished checking the results that the scientists had pointed out, on some of the equipment. “It has to be from below!”

“Perhaps we’re doing this all wrong!” Bryson replied.

Merton and Mortimer stopped what they were doing.

They sat on the bed, and considered the problem.

“We could climb up the vent in the room below?” Mortimer replied.

“A ladder will not fit in the vent,” Merton spoke first.

“Do we have any more metal pegs with the climbing equipment to do it?” Bryson asked, as he stood, and glared at the expensive wallpaper.

“No!”

“Then we’ll just have to put a hole in that wall.”

It was their only option!

"There are some tools still at the entrance to that hidden passage," Merton announced, standing.

Merton went straight along the corridor to it, and returned with a large hammer, chisel, and crowbar.

"That's strange," Merton muttered, as he put them on the bed. "That sheet of wood should have been covering the entrance!"

Bryson wondered how long it would take to enter the shaft. The stones might be more secure because it was on another floor.

Merton and Mortimer immediately started work on a stone that they had decided to remove.

It was further down the wall than the stones that they had removed in the other rooms. And it would allow them to obtain a better observation of beneath them, where they suspected it manifested.

Bryson did not know what Merton and Mortimer expected to find any more.

Was it really some sort of warp or something? He had never encountered anything like it, to compare it with.

But he continued searching for the source of the phenomenon, by listening.

The source could well be invisible. But was it possible for anything to fall into it?

He would not know what to do if he found himself in it, or stuck at the other side, where it could trap things for eternity, or to the end of the universe. Even though he did not understand it, the source could be capable of trapping them as entities, as forms of energy.

It could be flaw in reality causing time to pass at an immensely slow rate, suspending whatever fell in it. But why would he hear those things at the same time speed?

What was it doing there, trapped in a shaft in a castle? Had someone hidden it there for some reason? Perhaps it had trapped the relatives and friends of William Randall in it, and he had hidden it there, expecting them to return...

But it should be somewhere near the bottom, so that if it collapsed they would not fall to the ground.

However, it might have moved there; proving that it was capable of escaping from its confines.

Bryson realized how tired he had become, and that his imagination had gone haywire. He sat just listening now, to Mortimer taking his turn at removing the stone, and then he heard it shifting out of the wall. And Merton started to help.

He rested a little longer though.

Merton and Mortimer would be famous if they found anything. They would be the only scientists to come up with hard evidence of anything, as far as he knew.

Bryson recalled his dream, the night before, and the vortex spinning about him.

He considered if he had received a vision of inside it. And if it had been, it would be more complex than he had so far imagined (and it might have connections to all of space and time—with things appearing in it from all of creation).

But, seriously, it might have been hidden for many reasons.

"It moved!" Merton called out, startling him.

In one glance, he saw him gripping the metal bar, wedged between the stones, and the stone coming out.

Could the source have an intelligence of its own? They might have thought that it had been a type of god.

Something was trapping the stone, preventing it from falling out of the wall.

Bryson watched them force it sideways, and pull it, trying to loosen it, and he attempted to help them.

His weight helped.

But as they shoved it, the wall crumbled away, under the intense pressure, and as it fell, two heavy chunks of stone fell away behind the wall—plunging down the shaft.

The noise of them crashing below was tremendous, and everyone in the castle would have heard it.

Merton and Mortimer could only stare at each other, occasionally seeing the dust cloud in the shaft slowly shifting about, as though something might appear out of it, with the fury that they had subjected there.

“We’d better tell the police down there what happened,” Merton announced, moving away from the large hole.

Merton and Mortimer left, following their professional procedure.

He could see their point, and that it probably would have scared the daylights out of those cops waiting there.

He was too keen to find out where the sounds were coming from to leave immediately.

The dust soon cleared, and he put his head into the shaft.

He had never realized how hard it was to find the location of some sounds, with an invisible source.

Yet, as he thought about collecting the rope from the room below, he recognized a shape above him, hidden away in a damaged area of the shaft wall—and that the sounds were mainly emerging there—and that it was a small vent.

Chapter 57

The Killer.

At the secret passage, going down to the kitchen, Bryson heard scrambling movements and panic-stricken voices. The police clearly believed that they were chasing the killer, over to the vault.

He considered shouting that it was a false alarm, but it was too late.

A blue light flashed over the roof, and he went over to the window. It was worse than he had imagined. The police were rushing about outside, and two of them were in one of the cars, contacting the rest of the police force.

He hoped that Merton and Mortimer were moving there fast enough to prevent things escalating any further.

Then he realized that he might be able to arrive there before them, as they had *walked* down the stairs. So he rushed down the tunnel.

At the bottom, Inspector Bailey was talking to Merton and Mortimer, as Bryson pushed his way into the storeroom.

"They're chasing him!" Mortimer declared, staring at him, across the dark kitchen storeroom.

"They heard him rush into the tunnel from somewhere," Merton continued.

"Those boulders crashing down the shaft must have scared him."

"We think that he went up through that hidden tunnel to the entrance at the top," Merton announced. "Because they sabotaged two of the microphones on the second floor!"

"That guy was sneaking around up there!" Bryson gasped.

"If he escapes, we may never have a chance to capture him again."

"I'm going after him!" Bryson announced, checking his watch, and noticing that little time had actually passed since the boulders had crashed down the shaft.

He then swiftly led them into the tunnel, going towards the vault.

He surely did not have that much of a head start. If they moved fast enough, they might catch him in the wood.

The police in the tunnel might give up. He was sure that they could catch him, especially after he recollected that image of him moving slowly out of the vault! Though none of his face features had been properly visible, he had seen how unfit looking he had been (even though he was thin and light). He also knew that the police would be looking for his car on the roads. Yet he believed that he did not have a car, and that he used a hideout.

It was snowing heavily, and it could cover his trail in the wood. They had to be as fast as they could. This would be their only chance to catch him!

As he heard the police, not far ahead of them, he realized that they had not been through the tunnel before, and they were going slow, trying to see what was ahead.

Bryson regulated his breathing, blowing out steam, into the beam from the torch, and rushed on.

He started to recall where all the obstacles were, as he kept his eyes on everything in front.

He felt surprisingly awake now, with no need to sleep.

If things went successfully, he intended to increase their pace further.

The police were going slowly, and they allowed them to pass, almost not believing that they could capture him, probably put off by the length of the tunnel. And, as they continued, Bryson saw that they were following them, from just behind Mortimer, at the back.

But Bryson realized that he was now at the front, and that the killer could even be nearby. It was a hideous thought! It could be anyone, and be more different from what he had accepted, from what he had seen on the camera from the vault.

He definitely did not want to confront him in the tunnel, as he would shoot him, and it was better to wait until they were outside. Even in the vault!

His eyes stayed on the most distant part of the tunnel, searching for him, waiting for him to take a shot at them, or to attempt to ambush them.

When he recognized the steps, he sprinted there.

And, as he approached them, he considered all the options open to them. Yet he could easily be waiting for them to climb out of the tunnel.

Bryson rushed up the stairs, and waited for the others to appear, from behind him.

“Well, what will we do now?” Mortimer asked, panting.

“We’d better have the police here, with their guns. We don’t know what this guy could do!”

Once the police moved to his side, he pushed the slab up, expecting a heavy weight to stop him.

Bryson climbed out, almost in complete darkness, without his torch being on, considering everything that he was up against, attempting to observe every place.

He listened, but all that he noticed was the wind blowing the door about up the stairs.

Before he darted over to a hiding place, Mortimer shone his torch about.

“There are his footsteps!” Merton announced, pointing.

The police moved in front, with their guns held out.

By their reactions, he was sure that they did not have a clue what they were dealing with, and that they had not seen the place before. They were in a dark vault, at night, within the grounds of desolate castle, and they were chasing a vicious serial killer.

The police rapidly shifted up the stairs to the door, as they tracked the prints. And they easily traced them out into the dark wood, blanketed in deep snow.

Then they stopped at the door, and Bryson froze, expecting a gun battle to break out.

When it did not, Bryson moved to their side to see what the problem was, expecting to see the person in the thick currents of snow. But instead he saw that the prints vanished, into the blizzard, and heaps of snow, falling from the pine trees.

Yet, at the side of his eyes, he spotted traces of shoe marks, in a sheltered area going along the side of the building. They were facing his direction, and came back to the door – indicating the killer, for some reason, had moved along it, back into the vault, and had perhaps taken his shoes off, to stop him making any further prints. And there was nothing indicating that he had left.

He slowly turned, and faced the blackness at the other end of the upper vault. And the others turned.

Inspector Bailey stood frozen, holding his gun out at a faintly visible black figure with a gun.

Bryson’s heart exploded, beating faster than he had ever felt it beat.

As the seconds, which felt like minutes, passed, he watched the figure almost fall over, barely able to stand. Then finally the figure dropped to the ground, with a thud. And he spotted a trail of blood, over the floor.

They strolled there, not shining their torches at the killer—as though not daring to!—approaching in wonder, as though they were going to meet the devil himself.

But, when a torch beam shone there, they were only dumbstruck—at what had happened to the real killer.

And Bryson stared down in horror at Sir Richard, crippled on the ground!

Was he a form of ghost? He had died!

A weak splutter came off him.

“Do you know him?” Inspector Bailey muttered, gritting his teeth, avoiding looking.

“I’m sure...” he muttered back.

And they then waited for him to say something.

"Leave me, for a few minutes!" he finally pleaded, and they moved away, to the other side of the vault, where they stood silently, panting, and resting.

He stared down at his diminishing body, cringing on the ground, holding onto life.

Bryson fell to his knees, at his side, staring in horror at Sir Richard! Was he really a ghost?

"Thomas!" his weak and aged voice spoke.

He pulled out a crumbled bit of paper, and allowed it to fall at his side, unable to move any further.

Bryson instantly picked it up and examined it.

"It's a copy of the missing page from the diary!"

"It's more! It's definite proof of the treasure—which I've been searching for: for most of my life."

"So your money doesn't exist?"

"That's it! All of you were to find it. Ever since I inherited this estate, I've looked for it.

"When I found that I was dying...!

"I've lived at many places—across the globe. Spending money... They believed I..."

He stared down at his diminishing body, cringing on the ground, holding onto life.

Bryson nodded. "Was that reporter your hit man?"

"I didn't ask that bloody idiot to do that... Hit man! Those blasted bugs... They were going to ruin it, and so was he...!"

Bryson saw blood pouring from his mouth, and that he was about to die. The pain was fading...

His gaze went straight to his.

In the dimness, and excitement, he spotted something strange about him!

He realized that he was really an alien creature!

It was wearing a form of disguise, made like human skin, covering its whole body. It had the sharp claws of a creature, and red wings hidden away in the back of its clothing.

"You *accidentally* shot yourself!" he mumbled.

Its face went blank, and it fell over dead; and Bryson strolled away.

"Who was that?" a policeman asked.

"It was one of the servants who used to work here! I met him when I first visited the castle. He was going to take our money!"

Chapter 58

The Hidden Chamber.

At a top floor window, Bryson observed the last of the police cars going away through the trees.

A glance behind him, along the corridor, once again showed him that the workmen had properly removed the lower ceiling, to reveal the original ceiling, made of solid oak beams.

The wires from the lights had rot and webs over them, and had been easily broken, and were in bits on the floor.

The workmen had been from the village, and had been surprisingly keen to work in the old haunted castle.

"So where is it?" Helen asked, arriving at the top of the stairs, approaching them first, in front of the others. "We read the diary!"

Bryson marched along the corridor, and James and Robert followed, occasionally looking into the rooms, which the others had rigorously searched.

"Are you saying that you think that there's treasure here too?" Sarah asked.

Everyone stopped near him, to listen.

"There's a page missing from it," Helen broke in.

"Yes, and I found it," Bryson forced himself to reply, taking the page out of his pocket. "It was on the bottom of the bookshelf, where it had been."

Robert took it from him, and spread it out in front of him. And all their eyes seemed to go on it.

"It refers to a clue that her father passed down to her," Robert muttered. "But it gives the clue that Sir Richard left!"

"I believe that's because it's the same...!" Bryson quickly added. "I believe that Sir Richard never had a great deal of money left."

For a moment, none of them seemed to accept it—not believing such a horrible fact. But their desperation to find something made them continue seeking answers.

"Are you saying that he left us chasing after a 'fantasy'?" James resumed.

"No! I'm saying that he knew that it existed, and he spent his life trying to find it. And his last wish was just to have it found—to prove he had been right! But he never went through with his whole plan... And he perhaps forgot about that video!"

"So you think that we should start looking for it instead!"

"No!"

"What?"

"I know where it is!"

Bryson opened a long bag, and removed an antique pole, which he had seen James playing with, and which resembled an ancient walking stick.

Bryson recalled that it had been at the fireplace, and that one of the servants might have placed it there, believing that it had been there to prod the fire.

Bryson held it, to James's fascination, and considered what to say.

"The clue, given to us by Sir Richard, which the castle's builder, William Randall, had left, is not actually a clue. It had been a message that William Randall had wanted his associates to give to his son, who had been away abroad. He had made it in case he had died, as he had predicted that it could occur. His enemies, the castle had been supposed to defend him and his family against, had then killed him. And the message had contained where he had hidden his fortune, from his enemies. But his son had died before he had reached the castle, and nobody had understood where the fortune had been, because it had been a message that only his son would have understood.

“But before William had died, he had foreseen more trouble from his enemies, than his earlier predictions, and he had even predicted that his associates might not survive. Thus he had left a second message, where his son surely would have seen it, and where his enemies would not destroy it. He had the message put on his tomb! Thus he had left the message with tomb sculptors to put there.

“They’re not really riddles! They’re hidden messages, giving a location, saying something such as: that he had put it at where their last dwelling or sanctuary would have really been if they had been in the castle, and they had invaded it.”

“So where do you think it is?” James moaned.

“Well, I believe that once the castle had been just about completed, they had believed that they might not have been able to escape by the hidden tunnel—if the castle had come under attack at night, or they had penetrated their defenses—and that they had somewhere else added, where they could have gone.”

Bryson stuck his hand deep in his pocket, and he pulled out the gold key that had been in the gold pendant. Then he carefully fitted the end of the key into a key-shaped hole at the end of the antique pole.

He glanced upwards at the roof, and he inserted the end of the stick into a minute hole in the ceiling, which only resembled the other holes in the wooden beams.

He felt and heard a click of the lock of something.

Suddenly, the corridor roof seemed to come crashing down, to his momentary horror.

Yet, as they shifted away, the thick beams opened at their different positions on the ceiling. And the entrance to a chamber overhead, made to fit into the ceiling, without being visible, opened out.

Everyone watched in wonder, as it opened up like the gates of heaven, sluggishly going to the last stage of its descent, and onto the floor.

It had the workmanship of that era, and he knew that William had designed it, as well as the castle.

Bryson then confidently walked up into it, not fully knowing what was there.

In its blackness, next to him, he saw a winch, which they would have used to hoist the entrance back into place from the interior.

The chamber was not high, to keep it hidden, and he had to walk crouched down.

His torch gave him glimpses of insignificant objects scattered over places.

Robert and James moved to where he was, while the others silently followed.

“When did you first realize that this was here?” Robert asked, confused.

“We saw the roof outside,” James continued, “and we never saw anything. It did not look thick enough!”

Bryson put his hand in his pocket, and removed a piece of paper.

“This is a representation of the castle,” he said, holding out the plan of the castle, which had fallen out of the book in the library. “It has a faint line going under the roof, which none of the other floors have. And I realized that this had to be a scribbled copy of an original map of the castle.

“It was done by the hand that wrote the diary.

“It’s a treasure map! It was her treasure map...

“The thing is: she never did find a way to enter it!”

“How did you learn about the entrance?”

“I predicted that she had never found it because there had been a ceiling covering the wooden beams. The earlier inhabitants had not liked the bare wooden beams! And, of course, there had been another added just after her era, when they had put in the lights.”

It was difficult to see much. There were chimneys passing through to the roof all about it.

“What’s that?” James declared, pointing his torch.

Two shapes started to glow in the light there.

They approached them in stages, examining them at various perspectives.

Bryson realized that the objects were directly over the haunted rooms, just above the shaft.

One of the objects was clearly an immense chest, and James crouched in front of it, and held it.

“You’ve really found it!” Robert cheered, repeatedly clapping Bryson on the back.

The other object was a stone tomb (resting near the small vent—leading into the large vent in the wall).

“Who will that be?” Merton asked, astonished, arriving at his side, sitting in front of it, as though he were sitting at the front of an altar.

Bryson shoved the thick slab covering the tomb onto the floor—revealing a rolled up carpet in its interior.

He pulled away a piece of string from it—shifting tattered remains of cloth—unwrapping it. Then he stopped, and left it—when he saw part of a bone.

“Check that bloody *thing* some other time,” James explained, amazed at the sight of the large chest.

The chest was massive under the bright torches!

The others moved in at their sides, glaring at it.

Then James pushed the lid away, and a gold radiance exploded out, with sparkles of gigantic diamonds and rubies, gleaming from jewellery, packed into its interior.

Chapter 59

The Last Witch.

The thing must have come from beyond the boundaries of space and time, beyond normal reality. They had no way of knowing precisely where (or what it was!).

Bryson felt edgy just looking at its devilish features (similar to the skeleton of a demon).

He nervously rested at an angle to the decrepit corpse, lying over sheets, partly unwrapped, across the dining room table.

It was so despicable that nobody had objected to its presence there. But, as soon as the celebrating of the discovery of the fortune was over, someone would.

The content of the chest was worth immense millions (for their value as being normal jewels!). And the lawyer had it taken away to a bank.

The lawyer, with some historical experts, had already proven that they had belonged to a Scottish king, and that they were Scottish Crown jewels, and far more valuable than their normal value. There was even a king's crown buried in them!

They sure had had the last laugh on Sir Richard!

It was late, and they still had not decided what to do with the thing on the table. He wanted to return it to where it had been, and observe it there.

What the hell had William Randall and his other ancestors thought it had been? They must surely have been religious after seeing it! Where had he found it? Had it been anything to do with his enemies, who had killed him? Had they been enemies of Charles I, Charles II, or whoever had been on the throne? How had William acquired such a vast wealth? Why had the treasure not been money?

Merton finally finished setting up their psychic research equipment about it.

Bryson imagined the thing dragging him into the afterlife, with them trying to film it.

"I've made sure that nobody will come in," Mortimer spoke, coming through the doorway.

"Just one point, this could be a very dangerous experiment," Bryson revealed. "Those things in the woods could have killed us..."

"We're going to go!" Mortimer moaned. "We'll monitor it on a TV, from these cameras. And, if possible, approach in unhurried stages..."

"As long as we're leaving before anything happens," Bryson warned, taking his word for it.

It was as if they did not believe that they would be able to remove it from the castle. Nobody would object!

Yet there was a chance that moving it might alter it.

Moreover, if those things in the wood went with it, they could have monsters rampaging through London.

Bryson started to realize that it would somehow have to stay. It was a shame! They could have showed it to the world. But they could record everything for science, and if anything else ever turned up, the people of the future would have a better understanding of it.

They must find a way to destroy it!

Perhaps, if they couldn't, they could drop it into the deepest depths of the sea. But he could imagine people seeing strange lights out at sea, and monsters attacking ships. The disturbances had a definite attraction to people. Perhaps it would create another Bermuda triangle, with those things smashing massive holes in ships.

They could build a small rocket, and send its ashes into space. But if that did not work properly, and it ended up in orbit, they could have haunted spaceships, space monsters attacking spaceships, and sightings of strange white lights.

Mortimer started unwrapping bits of material from it, making sure that he did not damage it.

The skeleton was entirely different—like a strange version of a human—like another species of human.

"What's that?" Merton responded, jerking back, shifting onto his feet.

"It's some sort of book."

Bryson saw something similar to a book, made of some type of animal skin, in its claws. Merton pulled it away from it, as if it were welded to it.

Bryson saw James and Robert emerge, at the doorway, as if they had been listening to them, near the door.

"What are you going to do with this place then?" Bryson asked, wondering what Robert had in mind.

"I'm going to do it up and look after it, as Sir Richard wished. And I'm going to make it—as a historical place. It's famous! It's now been in most of the newspapers, and television..."

Bryson realized that there could be many more deaths, if they did not rid the woods of those things.

"This is full of symbols and strange words!" Merton remarked, holding the book out for them to see.

"That may be her spell book!" Robert forced himself to confess.

"What?" Bryson instantly asked, looking alert.

"I told you that I knew a few legends..."

"What legend...?"

"Well, that legend that I told about them having built the castle on the site where something had killed those people was only one legend about it. There was another about a witch or something that had been living out here in a cottage. And they had hanged the witch! But the witch had placed a curse on them and this place before they had!"

"There has to be some truth in it," Merton replied, vaguely disappointed. "There's some truth in most legends!"

Bryson held back a smile, and returned to looking at the book that Mortimer was now grasping in his hands.

"I understand this ancient writing," Mortimer uttered. "This stuff was used with *witchcraft*!"

He looked at Robert's startled expression.

"What does it say?" Bryson asked.

James and Robert sat next to him, fascinated in it—probably thinking of the money that it might make.

"This book was thought to be the spell book of the witch that you mentioned, and someone—I believe to be William Randall!—has written things through it, giving details about things.

"They found this book after they'd killed it—the witch or creature. This thing on the table!"

Mortimer held up the book, and turned it, to show them a drawing of a being that looked like a woman and a creature, with a long sheet of material wrapped about it.

"He believed that she had transported herself to this world, from beyond the grave, with some type of magic or magical object. She spoke in a strange language, but she told them of being one of the last witches, with the power to enter this existence."

As he stopped speaking, silent sounds manifested about the room—as though invisible creatures were surrounding them.

Strange, glowing and swirling, forces, forming a large bubble, went about them. And telepathic figures, like spirits with shrouds, flew about it, wailing and screaming.

Bryson felt himself falling over, staggered, and partly in a dream state, similar to the ones that he had been in when he had been asleep. Then, as it increased, he believed that he was holding onto reality, and that he would not be able to keep his sanity.

All about him, the others went into dream states.

James fell on the floor, as though taking a fit.

Bryson lunged at Mortimer's shoulders, pulled him to the door, and he forced him to rush away with him, until they were away from it.

Mortimer glared at his watch. "We must help them!"

"It's too powerful!"

"We'll have to find a way."

"You must tell me all you know about that thing."

"I don't believe that it is her. She brought something here that I believe that she had used to travel here. However, William Randall could not break its curse. He tried to use her spell book and spells to do it. But nobody could read it properly, or they believed that they were in riddles to stop anyone else using it.

Mortimer glared, and he read parts of the book fast, in more detail.

"A crystal created the magic! And William Randall intended to find the spell to neutralize it."

"That's the spell there!" Mortimer stated, holding out the book, showing it to him.

"Can you decipher it?"

"I don't know! But where's the crystal?"

"It has to be with the being."

Bryson realized where it was! He had seen it on the drawing of the creature in the book. It was in a pendant.

They rushed straight to the dining room, and to it.

He ripped the last of the material off the skeleton, plunged his hand in its chest, and onto the pendant.

"This is it!" Bryson screamed, holding out the pendant, watching strange energy surges make his arm muscles wildly shudder and vibrate.

The green crystal embedded in the pendant was pulsating, beaming out blinding beams of green light.

Mortimer grabbed the pendant, and held it out.

"I know why the spell never worked!" he shouted. "It was not a spell! It was an order to destroy it, if she had to. If she was captured by humans! It was a riddle, to hide it from anything that was not an alien transcendent!"

Mortimer smashed the pendant hard against the table, shattering the crystal into millions of particles, instantly making the disturbances vanish forever.

Epilogue

The Transcendents.

Once transcendent entities had existed throughout the universe and beyond, with magical forces.

Their wars and elaborate usages of their powers had in the end caused it to be annihilated, and the last had possessed so little that they could barely dwell in the universe, from beyond.

Objects, with accumulations of it, had allowed the last to dwell in desolate regions of the universe.

The powers of the last one had been told of in legends!

Fishermen had stumbled upon the magical being, floating in the sea, washed ashore, on the shore of a Scottish island.

It had been about to expire, but had somehow survived.

It had stayed, its last days, in the desolate Grovnor wood, as a witch, in a cottage, hiding to conceal itself, and magical crystal.

It had foreseen the future, and had found how to accumulate its powers from anything that had had it. And, when it had expired, it had left the most powerful magical object left – with powers going beyond anything else—with power surge sequences that opened gateways, going beyond the universe.

[**Ed. Note:** The numerous language errors in text (due to translation?) have not been corrected.]

