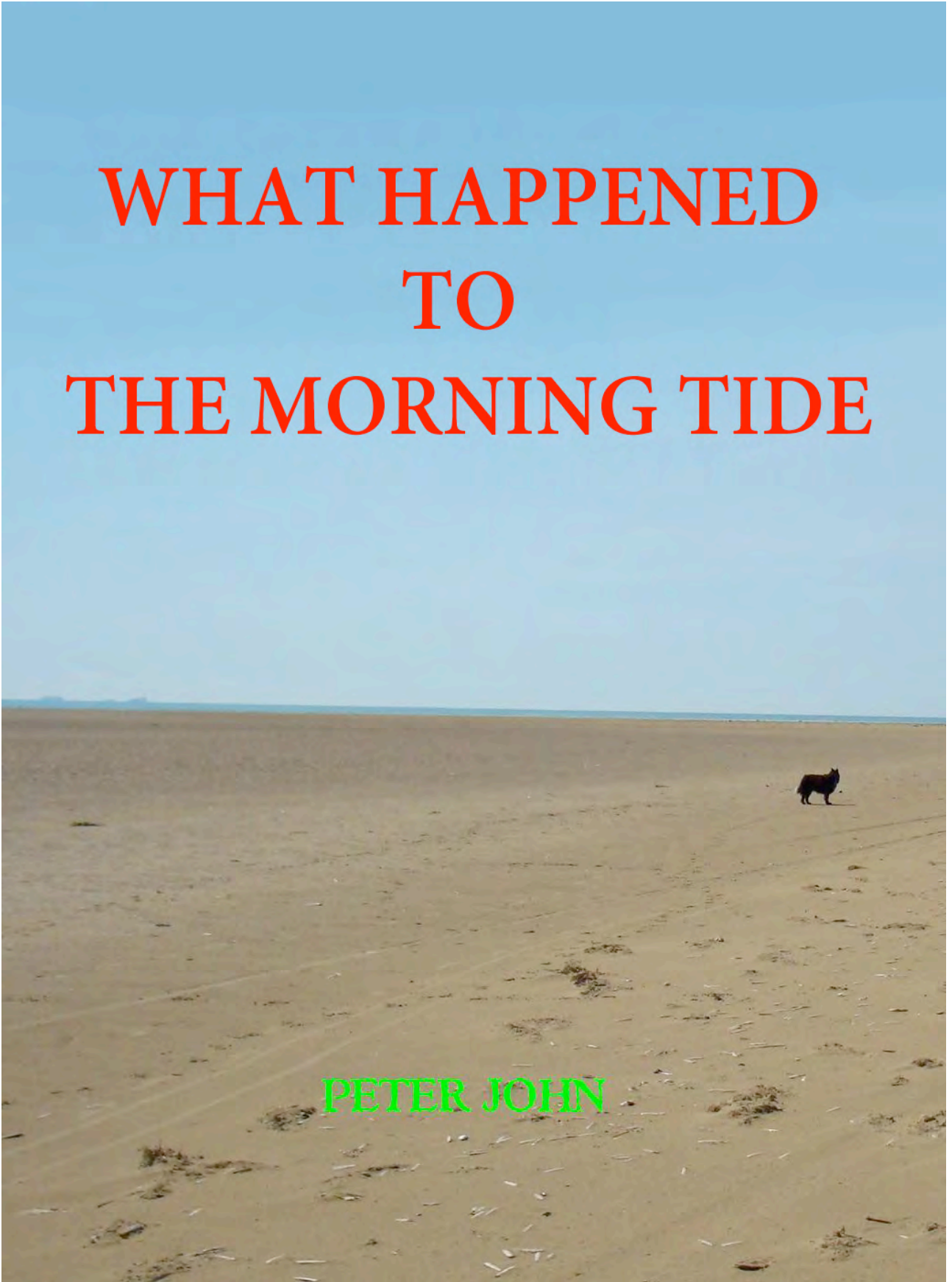


WHAT HAPPENED TO THE MORNING TIDE

PETER JOHN



WHAT HAPPENED TO THE MORNING TIDE

Peter John

© Copyright Peter John 2013

This is a legally distributed free edition from www.obooko.com

The author's intellectual property rights are protected by international Copyright law.

You are licensed to use this digital copy strictly for your personal enjoyment only.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed commercially without the prior written permission of the author. This free edition must never be offered for sale in any form.

Chapter 1

Luck, rather than fame or fortune, brought me to a small cottage in Wales, near the sea. Idyllic as it was, the truth is, life was lonely, until rescue came in the guise of Fly, a Sheep Dog, herself rescued from a farmer, one of those begrudgers who cursed the living world. By his reckoning, the world was in debt to him.

Fly, because she was fast; but she had other qualities, like a nervous temperament, lovely looks, and a taste for freedom that, to her surprise, pleased me. One day she cleverly legged it from the field behind the cottage where we walked. I found her wandering by a neighbor's house, and returned. When I went to put on her collar, she bit me, and expected to be punished. When no reprisal came, understanding resulted, and from it a friendship that grew gently with each day.

Car- rides were an early delight, short runs at first, gradually opening out through the spidery lanes of west Carmarthenshire, where, on winter days we would stop at inviting side –turns and venture the unknown together. Down muddy brambled tunnels we would try to find just where they led, to see what was at the end. Sometimes nothing, just a gradual disappearance of some way into a field, marsh or moorland. An old sheep- way, perhaps, a Roman or medieval road. Someone s long ago walk to work, and journey home, a route to school, to church, to a shop or a neighbour. Paths where ancient feet trod: pilgrims, bleeding feet bound for St David's shrine on the sea s edge, remorseful; children with hoops, cattle drovers knitting stockings, lovers, lusty for white skin, stumbling by moonlight to tap an expectant widow.

Those were my imaginings. Fly, with her nose, read messages; and posted her own. On tufts of grass, at tree boles and near gate-posts. Some she read signaled the status and movements of residents and passers-by, local field –mice, rabbits, fox and badger. Other dogs perhaps and, who knows, strange other- world goings –on, discernible only through canine sensibility. Fair exchange for our imponderable human doings. On such mutual trust and unquestioning, the best dog-walks depend.

On one of our expeditions into the unknown, the idyll was disrupted, and trust almost fractured. We met, that day in the car, one of the forces of evil, a peril to the country lane traverser of modern times that has become pervasive. It is an ill- atuned being, one out of its element and a danger to all, including itself. I refer to

the hazard of man in white van. If you are a practicing lane-explorer, mww governs your approach not only to each blind corner and intersection, but to life itself, its preservation and continuance. When low intellect combined with short attention span, accustomed to progressing cocooned, lulled and unimpeded at 80mph for long hours, finds itself in a spider's web of winding lanes, doom rides shotgun.

So it was on that January day, when Fly and I, proceeding at our usual considerate pace, viewing the majestic scene between Llanboidy and Trelech, suddenly met the menace almost head-on, sending a cold shiver through me realizing my dreaded fears with the truth now a reality. White van man racing towards me, and oblivious that I also use the roads, I virtually had to dive in to the hedge growth, and slid to a halt with the car now lying a strange angle in the ditch. Robot man's van flashed past as if I was just an inconvenience to him, gone, leaving showers of dead leaves from the hedge cutting he seemed to be practicing for his next job.

Fly, now scrambling on to the back seat from where she had been unexpectedly flung, and I was now trying to calm her.

I glanced through the rear windscreen, and noticed something white further down the lane. I felt rather nervous when I realized that it was the van man rounding the bend and heading full steam back towards us.

'Maybe he's come back to apologies,' was my first thoughts, but there was no such luck, when he drove passed swerving and blasting his horn in protest that he had to slow down, momentarily negotiating the gap between me and the opposite bank.

With the weather deteriorating, I made some desperate attempts to get the car back on the road, but without much success. Then I heard the sound of a tractor not far off, and hopefully coming our way

'What a relief,' I thought, 'As I don't know where we are and could be stuck in this lonely lane all night, freezing cold, not to mention poor Fly wondering about her dinner, and a drink of water. But help is at hand the farmer will surely help us!'

So standing by the car, eagerly waiting for the tractor to draw near. Fly was inquisitively sniffing at the hot paraffin smell wafting through the cold winters air. She seemed to recognize it, maybe from past times, and she started to growl.

Realizing this was some kind of warning that Fly was now transmitting, doing what a trusted friend would do in times of danger, I saw that in front of this funnel of smoke emitting from the tractor,

was a rampaging herd of cows, brutally bashing into one another, probably petrified at this noisy tractor edging them on, as if it was trying to run them down.

Sensing the immediate danger, I did the worst thing I could have done, by screaming at Fly in a loud tone, to get back in the car. She immediately must have remembered being bullied on her previous farm days, so she made her way up the lane in panic. It was too late for me to do anything, but scramble back into the car, out of the way of the mad rush of cows, trampling down all before them.

To my complete amazement, not even one of them touched the car, unbelievable to say the least but true. So, quickly recovering from the ordeal, I climbed out of the listing car just in time to signal the farmer to stop. I soon panicked again, for although I stood directly in front of this approaching tractor he did not attempt to stop.

‘What a blundering idiot!’ I thought, but I was in no position to cause confrontation, as I need his help desperately.

The machine suddenly stopped, and what I was witnessing seemed uncanny, for gazing directly at me, was an old man on an ancient open top tractor. He was enough to give anyone the shudders, looking like death itself.

He sat completely motionless, staring at me, or through me. I tried communicating to him with hand signals, rather than trying to shout louder than the racket of the revving tractor engine, trying to make him understand what my plight was, but without much success.

It was apparent to me that he seemed to be in another world, sitting there with a weird smirk on his face, virtually amused, deadly invitation, he seem to be inviting further conflict.

One couldn’t help but notice that he was only dressed in what looked like a thin ragged shirt, torn and full of mud.

Something else drew my attention. Was I seeing things? Just above us a flock of black crows glided past with what seemed to be an orange flame trailing behind them. And with that extraordinary sight, I clearly saw that the leading bird was carrying on its back another crow, that only had one wing, spread open as if one was missing.

I realised that the old man’s attention was also drawn sky-wards, and that his face was turning blue, so without any warning he raced forward, clearly prepared to mow me down as he sped away in a cloud of white fumes.

All these happenings left me confused and shaking with the cold or shock, until my mind suddenly switched back to Fly when I heard her yelp further up the lane.

God the charging cows and stare cow on his antique, did fly manage to get out of the way?

With adrenaline now running high, I scrambled back in the car and tried to drive it out of the ditch, and to find Fly with all haste. So without pondering how and if, I just unconsciously drove forward, rather than reverse as I had previously done, and to my relief, this worked. There was more good luck, when Fly came into view, flying towards me, probably having heard the car engine she recognized. She probably thought I was abandoning her.

Not looking any worse for wear, she quickly made for the safety of her personal back seat, amongst the torn covers she had customized to her liking.

Now it was time for some logical thinking, I had to somehow try to immediately find a suitable turning place, and head back, away from this creepy territory. Traveling ahead cautiously looking for a turning, some time later I observed a track on my right leading to some farm buildings.

'Ideal maybe to get the car facing in the right direction,' I thought, until I noticed the tracks made by farm vehicles, so deep, with an enormous hump in the middle, plus the deep hoof imprints imbedded in the mud. I couldn't afford to get bogged down again.

I had been driving with the window wound down for a clearer observation of the situation, and then I saw it. There it was, the white van, parked by the farmhouse, and the tractor near by.

'So this is where that queer lot hangs out,' I thought.

Upset as I was, there wasn't much point looking for any more trouble, it was already proven what type of people one was dealing with, so I concentrated on finding a way to go home away, from the evil lot.

With Fly now curled up on the back seat, trusting in me to head south, for she always knew the way the geography of the landscape lay, she settled on the homeward journey, as if to tell me she was satisfied with the new adventure and probably mapped it for future reference.

Extremely intelligent are Border Collies. In the past I had tried to trick her, by entering a particular destination from a different

direction, but she knew, and I did too, with her piecing bark, driving me to cry out loud, 'shut your ...'

'Sorry Fly'

Well we sat there awhile pondering what to do. I had a cigarette, wondered to myself, was it my imagination witnessing what seemed to have been some bright fiery flame tailing behind the weaving crows? Could it have had something to do with the wintry sun-shine reflections, that very strange unnatural sight?

I suddenly came out of my deep thoughts and realised there was the sound of traffic not far off.

'It must be where this lane joins a normal commuting highway or something,' I thought.

So we pressed on, keeping a careful eye on the petrol gauge that was indicating 'get some now,' so creating a further worry, hoping that I would soon find a filling station on the main road.

To my dismay on reaching the junction I didn't know whether to turn right or left, as there were no signs to indicate where the road was leading.

So, yes, you guessed it, we went back the way we came; it seemed the better of the two evils, praying the fuel would hold out.

The mist of the evening and the airy cold bite was descending upon us fast, making us feel lonely and vulnerable to the elements, a feeling like missing the last train home, or being lost in the wilderness, hoping some kind heart would put everything right again.

Not trusting completely in the old banger, especially at night-time, even with years of mechanical knowledge. It's always the same story when you break down, you think the worst, without any logical thought. If the suns shining, all seems different, but it was certainly not the case as we travelled back down the awesome narrow track, overgrown with the previous summers vegetation, looming with decay, dead branches hanging wearily, ready to take a swipe, with tragic consequences for the fast driver.

Should I care? I now imagined the scene with white van man ending up off the track, hopefully in a swamp or something.

'Don't be so cruel,' I said to myself, but I meant it all the same.

Apart from some selfish analysis of the horrible day that it turned out to be, I'm was wondering what else could go possibly wrong, just to cap it all, on this lonely and desperate attempt to reach

home safely. With dipped headlights on, and doggie asleep on the back seat, unaware of the gloom and visibility deteriorating by the minute, and with the ice cold fog now closing in fast.

I couldn't see anything at all, so I just crept along, very slowly, waiting for the clatter of the hedged growth banging against the car to warn me; too close, right a bit or left, guiding us along till eventually we reached familiar territory, with the roads leading in the right direction home.

After the necessities were done, (good job Fly doesn't drink, more for me), I slept like a log that night, determined that I would have a word with a retired farmer friend of mine the next day, to see if he could throw any light on the subject concerning our mystifying friends.

And that's exactly what I did.

I visiting my friend, that fortunately I had come to know by chance, and who was now in his eighties. He had a wealth of experience concerning nature and the land. He spoke fluent Welsh when he wished to, more to baffle you with science than anything sinister, if he thought one were trying to get one over on him.

So I am sat on a three-legged chair, trying to balance it from falling over, seriously wishing to convey my story to him, while he sat laughing at me like it was some joke.

"Thank you I will remember your sound advice, and will take Fly down to the beach in future." I said when he was done talking "what was that you said, beware of the crocodiles in the sea?"

'Think it's time for me to disappear' I said to myself.

I made some sort of attempt to leave my friend, who seemed to be enjoying every minute of my tale, as if I was just trying to humour him. I stood and promised for the umpteen times that I would fix his three legged chair as soon as I had time. I made a move to leave, without giving the impression I had better things to do, and wished him well.

He sat there, looking lonely, but comfortable on the high Welsh chair, as if he was some kind of judge passing sentence.

He then surprised me, seemed he had been waiting to play his trump card, so puzzling me with more confusion, when he suggested that I should tell him again the turmoil I had encountered with white van man. So I did, trying not to exaggerate on the encounter too

much, just keeping it simple and honest in case he choked with laughter again.

My friend sat looking at me, trying to keep a serious face. He didn't fool me, for I could sense he was very amused by something in the story.

"Ok," I said, "now what's so funny, please enlighten me?"

"Listen here you daft bugger," he said, "the only farm along that lane, was Tingle Lane you mentioned, anyway it burnt down about ten years ago, to some peoples pleasure."

"Ho, why was that?" I asked him.

"Make yourself comfortable and I will tell you a little story," he said.

"I'll try to if another leg doesn't fall off this chair," I replied, now joking with him.

"As you are aware, that's a very dangerous lane to travel along, especially years ago when the farmers son used to deliver fresh milk in a white van. The lad treated the road as if it was his private drive from the farm dwellings, and pity the person meeting him on his rounds. He caused no end of accidents with his reckless driving, with the rumor going around at the time that the farm was deliberately set alight as a warning to the old mans son to watch it. But with the strong wind, the fire spread from the hay barn to the house, and fortunately, or unfortunately, the young lad was in another world, fast asleep with his heavy drinking habits, and that was curtains for him."

"Why are you smirking again, what is so amusing about that?" I asked, "I'm not entirely, seeing the funny side of the tragedy."

"You townies are unaware with the system that prevails in the countryside, through bitter struggle over centuries of hardship, but that's another story," he answered. "Now where was I, oh yes as I was saying, what was I saying?"

'I'm not quite sure myself,' I thought, but I politely said, "What was that you were saying? Go on."

"Yes I remember now. Come to think of it," he said, "the old man died shortly after, none to soon, with the up-heaval, by moving to clean accommodation. Set in his ways, he couldn't take no more."

All went silent for a minute, and then he burst out laughing again.

“All right, what’s on your mind, please tell me more before I fall off this chair in anticipation?” I said.

I was becoming a little worried about him, now really reminiscing in the past, going red in the face, almost carried away with past memories. This combined with my unexpected company for a afternoon’s chat, rather than just popping in to see him at the stables where he still cared for one remaining Welsh cob. The cob was all that he seem to live for, he lost another one about a year ago through old age. Both horses he said were well over thirty years old had them from the beginning.

“I remember now,” he said.

“What?” I hurriedly asked, before he forgot, “will you stop laughing to yourself and get on with it!”

When the interlude was over, he told me with tears rolling down his face, and didn’t seem to be sad ones either, that the old lady on the farm fell into the silage, drowned in a tank of shit.

“The whole bloody family were a load of it!”

And I believed him when he informed me many years previously he was employed by them. On one occasion he was instructed to dig a long ditch in the winter months. He stood knee deep in watery muck that froze solid around his legs later that day, with the result he suffered frost bite. He had real bad experiences for many years working on that farm.

Lightning struck a cow he was attending to, that killed it, but threw him across the cow shed. It saved his life, as the cow earthed the charge.

“You did mention earlier,” I said to him, “that the white van had a small green sign painted on the side, that said ‘Fresh Farm Milk.’ That’s what I saw on the van parked by the farmhouse.”

“Rubbish,” he said “I have already told you the place been derelict for years, go and have another look!”

So some time later I carried out his suggestion, but found difficulty finding the place again. I ventured to what now seemed the back of beyond, with no recollection of similarity of my earlier experience. Not wishing to bother my friend any more for directions, I thought ‘best leave well alone, only evil seemed to prevail, surrounding that incident, so why dig further in to the occult?’

Strangely I’ve been having enough bad dreams since that encounter. Makes one think, what’s happened in the past?

Chapter 2

So now here we are now in the middle of summer with the glorious hot sunshine, and little Fly learning to swim in the sea, and loving every minute of it, on remote beaches far away from the main holiday resorts. A new world has suddenly opened up, no longer the dreaded winter experiences of muddy lanes, driving around needlessly, just to keep Fly happy in her little world, playing now with her new found friends – the crocs!

This reminds me of my farmer friend's words of wisdom regarding watching out for the crocs. Not forgetting to call again to see him, I was around at the stables shortly after telling him of my epic tour of Tingle lane. I was now dismayed to find him crying, standing staring at the old horse lying awkwardly on the old cold slabs, soaking wet, on the stable floor.

"Whatever's happened," I compassionately wished to know.

"She's dying," he said pitifully.

"Tell me, what is the matter with her, perhaps I may be able to help in some way," I said.

"Too late for that now," he remarked, "the vet's due any minute to put her down."

Reluctantly he started to tell me what's been troubling him lately, keeping every thing bottled up to himself, and now his worse fears were coming true. Still sobbing he explained that his horse had suffered for many years with terrible arthritis.

I knew this to be true as I had witnessed, in dismay, the horse suddenly collapse on to its knees, hitting the stone floor and hearing a tremendous crack of the bones on impact. What terrible pain the poor thing must have suffered. Even with the scattering of hay thereabouts, she now lay in a week's mess, unable to get up on her feet again.

At times like this, one can picture the horse in former times of glory, snow white, perfectly groomed every day with loving care. It seems a tragedy was now set before us. How can one help? It was impossible to describe the sadness locked up in this tiny corner of the big tragic world. Most people wouldn't care a damn, to be honest, but I did.

Gloom was evident with sadness, probably the same as seeing the Titanic losing its majestic rule of the high seas, sinking into an

alien world that wasn't intended, with no happy memories of voyages to mysterious destinations. Whilst it was not quite the same, it must have seemed so to my dear, heartbroken friend, who was ailing fast himself.

Kneeling down alongside the horse, ignoring the mess, I tried to comfort her by talking quietly, and trying to encourage her to get back on her feet. At the same time I said a little prayer for her in my mind. I knew that it was hopeless, and my thoughts drifted, thinking how I would feel if it was I lying in pain on a wet floor, unable to move, or to tell anyone what was wrong.

Trusted friends they have been to man with countless slaughtered needlessly in two world wars, obeying their masters. What a shame on the human race.

So I prayed.

"Please God, help if you can, this poor animal, if only for its sake."

I had to leave the two of them before I disclosed how weak I really was in such circumstances. I left, and promised to call again in a few days time, hoping by then my farmer friend would have accepted the inevitable, and just remembered the wonderful captured memories of past times with his loving companion.

The days drifted by and I felt sad that I would no longer be able to pop in and see the two of them at the stable anymore. A feeling of emptiness creeps over one in times like those, and its true what they say, you don't miss them until there gone.

'Better make a move and see how he is,' I thought, 'it might help by talking to him, every one needs someone to talk to when tragedy prevails.'

And so I did. I picked up enough courage and ventured down to the stables in case he was cleaning up, knowing full well he would still be hanging around the haunts, if only to talk to himself and feel close to his beloved.

I found no horse, no farmer; the stable was deserted, as I imagined it might be. I noticed that he had been busy cleaning the place, so I called at his old cottage and was very concerned when no one answered.

'Is he all right?' was my first thought, 'perhaps the shock's been to much for him. I really don't know what to do now!'

Help was at hand when a neighbor of his shouted to me from his car, and said if I wanted Elwin, he was up the field trying to catch the horse.

“What?” I queried, and he repeated what I thought he said.

“The horse has been put down, surely, are you sure? When did you last see the horse?” I asked.

“Just left him a few minutes ago, don’t you believe me? Go and take a look for yourself,” he answered.

Disillusioned as I was, somehow I thanked him. I was rather puzzled, but I hurriedly made for the location that he had mentioned, only to see for myself this majestic white horse, normally referred to as a gray, belting up and down the field, halting on occasions to lay down, for what I would term as a roly-poly. She lay on her back, and rolled repeatedly. It seemed that the world was going crazy. With poor Elwin in his eighties, as I have already mentioned, trying to gain control of his horse, before she did herself some injury.

After some fruitless attempts on my behalf, I eventually drew his attention. Exhausted, he made his way towards me waving his hands, indicating, ‘just can’t cope, give up.’

Totally amused, as I didn’t know what the hell was going on, after gaining his breath, he started to explain.

“Steady down now, and start at the beginning,” I solemnly asked.

With some hesitation and persuasion, I managed eventually to hear the unbelievable tale he tried to tell me, between the apparent tears, and trying to convince me he was just sweating. Poor soul, lovely these old people, so proud till the end.

Without referring to anything spiritual, nor a mention of his faith in other worlds, beliefs that came naturally to him after living through some appalling times, he now disclosed to me what had happened.

Starlight his horse was still lying on the cold stone floor when I left them, so he went and sat down on a bail of hay in the small store room adjoining the stable, where he used to have his afternoons nap during the winter months. He sat there crying, waiting for the vet to comfort Starlight.

In an instant there came a noise like thunder, and he realized it was Starlight kicking at the stable door, insisting to be taken out for

her afternoon walkies as she usually did. Panic, he said, wasn't the word for it; he almost had a heart attack.

'Must be dreaming,' he thought to himself, but he wasn't. He watched her kicking at the door, and head butting at the damn thing, impatiently telling him --

Seeing him breaking up again I interrupted him, "I know what you mean," I said.

A little time later, when things had settled a bit, I made an effort and called as promised. In the meantime I had been seriously considering the ifs and buts of how a horse, tragically doomed to die on that miserable misty day, found a new meaning, to throw away death, picturing in her mind the warm summer days grazing once again by the river with her master.

I can tell you that she did just that for five years without being in the slightest of pain, until she died peacefully one afternoon in her sleep.

Shortly after her death he also joined her, worn out chasing the two year old, as he kept telling me.

There was a moment a few days after she first recovered, when it looked like she was going down again, but I believe this was just a test of faith, because the next day she bounced back again with vengeance.

Makes one think sometimes if we should leave well alone.

With fond memories of past years shadowing out the not so nice ones, another event was about to transpire.

Chapter 3

On one very hot summer's day we were making our way home from the beach. Fly and I left earlier than usual, as a precaution for her sake, due to the sweltering heat, knowing like eating, she never gives in and I can't say no to her.

They say you have to be cruel to a dog to be kind, that's why were on our way home now, with her barking in protest. So giving in slightly, I decided to do a detour round the coastline, knowing she

would love it, new, mapping territory, always curiously taking note of every bend, curvature of the road, crashing into the rear hatchback window when she thought she noticed a dog or something on four legs passing by.

Negotiating one very steep incline, feeling shattered now with the lack of sea breezes, being inland again, I noticed the engine temperature gauge was feeling the same way, too hot. So shortly I pulled off the busy road, where I found a little side road, which seemed to be leading to what looked like an old church. It was a beautiful and peaceful small church, just basking in the afternoon sunshine, so quiet away from the traffic noise. The sound of skylarks hovering above greeted me when I stepped out of the car in the little car park near to the church.

I checked the radiator water, and give Fly a drink of cool spring water from a spring I found near to my cottage.

Going about the necessities, I was startled, as unexpectedly a voice behind me queried, "is everything alright sir, do you need any help?"

Spinning around quickly I noticed at the other side of this pull in, sitting on an old wooden bench, was a priest. I hadn't noticed anyone there when I pulled in. Where the hell had he come from? Anyway the old priest was beckoning to me, to come and have a chat, it seemed, so curiously I made my way across to him.

'This might be interesting,' I imagined, 'maybe he could shed some light on my ghost story, providing he will listen. He might, on the other hand, disappear as quick as he emerged, if I spoil his peaceful afternoon with a strange conversation.'

Some people you can take to, and some you cannot, but I quickly felt at ease looking at his friendly face, now smiling at me as if he had known me for years. Soon I was having an interesting conversation with him, mainly with my quest to understand what life meant to him, being a devoted person to God. Did he accept the usual activities associated with the turmoil of every day living in this tragic world? He took me by surprise mentioning that all his spare time was devoted to comforting the sick, of course now putting me to shame. I am good on times?

However, during our conversation, he kept emphasizing that I should not confuse history with the bible. Complexity started to fill the air. Now baffled, I sheepishly asked him to explain what he meant. Simple, he explained it's a question of historical fact. Being

cheeky once again, a trait since I was a youngster, I said “come again.”

“Listen here my son,” he replied, “what I’m trying to tell you, is don’t mix up historical facts with your faith in Christ, the two don’t mix. And regarding your earlier question, when you asked me where God came from, like he fell out of some planet or something, let me make one thing clear to you right now.”

He paused.

“God is God; no ifs or buts, no dwelling regards how, with patience one day you will know the truth, but don’t leave it to late, whatever fate bestows for you. Furthermore, with all mans brains in this modern world, the achievements and successes granted by God to achieve the final goal of his original intentions for man and woman to be granted life on earth with a free mind, not programmed like a robot, to either abide by him or follow Satan who is almost as powerful as God. You have to be born of this world to be able to enter heaven obviously, each to there own as one might put it, so ease your mind, what will be will be, but don’t be a fool for that invites sorrow, better to die peacefully than to be self rightness for your own personal aims.”

Little Fly was now fast asleep underneath a yew tree, where she found some shade from the sweltering sunshine, so why hurry to leave this interesting conversation with my new found friend. At the same time I wished to have a cigarette. So I asked him if he minded if I had a smoke, with an excuse, just see to Fly for a second.

“With my blessing,” was his answer, and to make me feel completely at ease he asked if I could spare him one.

“Of course,” I replied, handing one to him. Then in some round about way, sitting completely relaxed, he asked me, “is it possible for you to lend me a couple of cigarettes to save me tramping down the steep hill to the village this evening?”

“Have the packet, you are welcomed,” I insisted.

Suddenly our eyes were cast into the blinding sun’s rays glaring down upon us, with the unexpected company of two cracking looking blonde girls walking towards us. Two young girls, probably from the village, rather eye catching to say the least, with more of their bums showing than the blue shorts they were wearing to hide such.

No complaints on my behalf, but I was completely surprised when they stood before the priest with stretched out hands indicating

to him and accepting cigarettes from the packet in his hands. Amused as I was, I didn't know if they were friends of his or not, such beauty standing before us with faces like angels, like some beautiful painting you just wish to admire when you needed to. But they will soon be gone, and not even a glance in my direction. Must be the sun or something. Forget it.

"Friends of yours?" I asked him, after their departure.

Looking a bit confused, and trying to find some explanation to justify their familiarity, he eventually confessed, "no comment."

Everything went strangely quiet for a while, with neither of us quite knowing what to say. Must have been the sight of two sun-tanned behinds walking away from us, where did such beauty just appear from?

Imagination runs away with you, perhaps they're on holiday, could get arrested if they ventured amongst the public dressed so scantily.

Well, slowly regaining our senses, he smiled and looked at me as if he was trying to tell me something, and myself, as usual not having the patience, interrupted, asking him, if he would care to hear about my strange tale that had no explanation and had a ghostly theme to it.

His reply was, "no sorry, I have more than enough to reconcile with at the moment, but if its troubling you my son, remember there are two forces at work in this world, and I already visualize you may have been in the same territory as Satan's children's haunts."

"Something along those lines," I mentioned to him.

"Well sometimes evil manifests itself on anniversaries of tragic deaths, with the souls not having time to make their pardon with God, then its too late for them, there in Satan's clutches, and its his wish they carry on with evil deeds wherever it be in this world or the next," he said.

"Most people don't believe in spirits, ghosts, whatever you decide to term such, but if you are fortunate enough to encounter the presence of good spirits, you should be very happy, as then you will have discovered for certain that there is life after death. In normal circumstances this is not Gods wish, as true faith is the believing in the unknown. Sometimes sprits appear for your help, and may try to help you in other circumstances."

He then went on to request another favor, mentioning that he would be away from the church for some time to come, had a call to continue with heavenly business elsewhere, so would I be kind enough when passing to keep an eye on the church and check inside that no vandals been on their rounds. He offered me the spare key and thanked me, even before I had time to consider this unusual request.

With no more to be said, we parted, wishing each other the very best.

After another eventful day I tried to remember how to find the church again, and took a short cut home along the back roads. 'Not to worry,' I thought, 'Fly will guide me.' As I have already mentioned she maps everything.

I went to bed that night more or less contented, but certain things the priest disclosed yesterday were still on my mind. Reality and torment seemed to be taking over. Full stop, otherwise, I realised, who am I to self diagnose the meaning of life, meaningless as it may seem at times, to some people it's heaven on earth.

So be it, it's their problem not mine, but sadness prevails deep in my heart, as for many with similar predictions we really can't cope.

Is that why we blank out all forecast of help from the mysterious biblical past?

Last mention on the subject, deep in thought, why should we in this modern world expect glory when so many poor souls have suffered imaginable pain in the making of this world we now live in?

Only God knows.

I really wish to tell you more about my conversations with the priest, but finally came to the conclusion that that's another story that would deviate me from my desire to continue with the portrayal of events taking place now.

So, many days later I asked myself what the hell was I doing accepting the keys of the church? What if someone broke in, and stole things? I may get the blame for it with the authorities putting two and two together and making five. I decided that I should drop the keys back through the letter box and pretend that I'd never seen the place. That was the easy way out of it.

But sadly, in my heart, I wasn't sure what to do. One thing I did know for sure, was that I had a feeling that there was trouble ahead,

a sixth sense inherited from my father, and his father before him, that always proved to be true.

Fly and I made the effort one day, after running out of excuses, avoiding the journey to this distant church. After setting off late one evening, avoiding the heat wave that had been unbearable throughout the day, we headed in the direction of some nasty looking black clouds, with flashes of lighting apparent in the distance.

Fly was petrified of storms, and was not too keen myself, after seeing the devastating damage to property and life in the past, and the havoc that storms can inflict.

When we eventually found the little church again, driving along flooded country roads that lead to it, plus the thunder and lighting with torrential rain which seemed to have been following me, the scene became frightening, with lighting streaks that were burning the long grass around the perimeter of this church, smelling of warm air, with a scorched scent swirling around like an inferno. It was strangely magical with the rain showering down like a warm shower. With only the lighting exposing silhouettes and shadows, I stood under the archway entrance, with the yew trees overhanging it, then made a dash along the narrow pathway to the large oak doors, which may have been cedar for all I knew, I didn't care. I was concerned at the moment with the fact that there was no letter box for the disposal of the keys left in my trust.

Christ, with that came one thunderous clap of thunder, and instant lightning, lighting up everything in sight, such was the brilliance with this instant flash. It was so terrifying that it seemed that God was signaling me out personally for other places.

'God I need a smoke' I thought, but I had left them in the car. 'Well,' I thought, 'I may as well try the key in the door and take a peep inside and see if there's some way I can shut the door after with out the use of the key.'

Being brave, I opened the creaking door, and bloody petrified, peered into the darkness inside this church, which was momentary lit up again with the flashes of lightning. Casting my eyes towards the altar I wondered what were the silvery objects placed either side of the altar. I nervously walked down the aisle a little way, as if something was urging me to come closer. I shouldn't have, as the altar now lit up like a search light, with a deafening roar that shook whole structure again, but what I witnessed left me standing there motionless. The silver objects were two life-sized figurines of two ladies, which had similar faces to the two girls who I had seen with the priest a few

weeks ago. What terrified me, and sent me stumbling back towards the door, was when I studied their faces, and noticed their eyes appeared to be blacked out. I was also convinced that I heard behind me a voice say, “cigarettes, whisky!”

Shit I was gone!

Back in the car, shaking with cold shivers, we made our way as quickly as possible and as far as possible, when I realised that I hadn't locked the church door. I stopped the car on some distant hill, with the church now separated from me by a valley between us, and looked back. I could see the lightning was still vivid, and hovering over where the church was located.

I explained to little Fly that we had to go back and lock the door. I turned the car around reluctantly, and made my way back, ducking down behind the steering wheel when a blinding flash shot past the windscreen, as if it was a warning to stay away.

When we finally reached the church, I made for the door as quickly as I could. It had been blown open with the turbulence of the raging storm. A quick glance inside with my torch left me completely astonished when I saw that the statues were no longer there. I was puzzled and confused with my observation, which was confirmed with the next brilliant flash. They were gone!

I went back to the car after locking the door, and was of the opinion I had better telephone the police. I decided not to, because they would never believe me. As far as I was concerned I never went out to night, did I?

It was time to go home, Fly had had enough. I would try to sort something out the next day when my mind tried to fathom out of how two statues just disappeared in such a short time, it must only have been about twenty minutes at the most.

On the way home I felt a little bit better, and worked out, that it must have been the reflections from the windows casting images towards the altar. I definitely recognised the faces, imagination again with the lighting.

‘I'd better sleep on it,’ I thought, ‘after getting rid of any bottles I left from yesterday first.’

I told myself that before I ventured to that place, there would be trouble ahead, right again.

I couldn't sleep that night, and kept hearing voices asking for cigarettes, whiskey.

‘Better go and see a doctor or something, no, on second thoughts don’t, he might put you away somewhere, and I’ve got little Fly to look after.’

I made double sure that I didn’t head in that direction for some time to come. But then my conscious started to get the better of me. I was still holding on to the keys, and I wondered what the priest would think of me. I now started to question myself.

So one fine day, I took Fly for her usual run in her chauffeur driven wreck of a car. It was reliable, so what more did I need? In any case, Fly liked it, and, as I have said, had customised the inside to her liking. People must have thought that I was some kind of tramp if and when I went shopping in the village, by just glancing in the car. I know what they’re thinking. Christ poor dog!

Unknown to them, the dog was loved with all the warmth that any living soul could give to one of Gods creatures.

And I unashamedly will confess to losing in the past, another beautiful loyal sheep dog, that was innocently fast asleep during a hot summers day on a cool pavement, when some drunken menace mounted the pavement in his vehicle and it was curtains for my dog. He howled all night in tremendous pain, till the vet was available to quickly put him down the following morning.

Back in the present, I was not wishing to mention past tragedies, for the world is full of them, but I sometimes wondered where is this God who lets such cruel happenings take place? It may be that we are the fools, worth thinking about.

So we made our way once again to the mysterious church, and on arrival such was the beauty of the picturesque setting, the tranquility of skylarks singing, the warm sunshine, and the peaceful magic, that I felt as if I was in another world. And to think I had been dreading the miserable venture, and had been predicting more problems, in my mind.

A complete feeling of ease came over me, as if every tension that had been building up over many years simply disappeared.

Somehow I had the sensation that I owned the place, as if it had been left to me, and I suddenly felt completely at home, as if I was in charge. I began dreaming again, imagining having something like an Amy tank outside to keep every one off my private territory. It was stupid, of course, I realised, the church was meant for people to find a place of worship in peace near to God.

Forgive me! Ok, I decided to have another sneak inside, no more in fear, just inquisitive to be nosey and find every creak and cranny in this interesting building, the wings lying off the main structure. What mysteries did they hold? It all seemed to be very old and quaint.

I opened the door once, and once again saw the sheer splendor within. I cannot describe the immaculate cleanliness, the wafting of fragrances, sweet like summer breezes of freshly cut grass, or something nice to please anyone entering, a place unto itself.

There were no statues. I told you it was my imagination, and nearing the lovely altar I noticed the entrance to what must be the side wings on my right.

Naturally, being cheeky, I now thought to have a look. But as soon as I was begun feeling my way through a corridor, opening various doors, a nervous sensation crept over me once again.

I entered the kitchen, and couldn't understand the amount of whiskey bottles lying around, some full some empty, strange, all very strange.

I was just thinking that it was really none of my business though, when I froze again at the sound of footsteps closing in. I kept dead still, didn't make the slightest sound, hoping it would go away. I was rather frightened now of what was creeping towards me. Knowing my luck, it was probably a ghost or something.

Standing glaring at me from the doorway, was an old woman who didn't seem a bit surprised at my presence, and solemnly asked "are you the new Chaplin?"

"What me, no, definitely not me, I'm just carrying out the request the priest asked me to do, to keep an eye on the premises while he is away," I replied.

"May I enquire who you are?" I asked.

"Glad you asked," the lady now said, "I do the cleaning here; with no help might I add."

"Well I must say you certainly are doing a magnificent job, never seen a church so well cared for," I said.

"It is normally referred to as a chapel, Welch chapel you see," she rushed to instruct me.

"Really, well it does not really matter to me, whatever, each to their own in this troubled world, who am I to judge? Anyway would

you happen to know when Father, will be returning, I have the keys and would like to return them to him.” I replied.

With this remark the cleaning lady looked at me vacantly.

“Return?” she whispered, “God forbid!”

Now a silence gripped the air. Eagerly, I was curious to understand what she was trying to tell me.

“You have the keys in your care,” seemed to be her main concern now.

“Yes, I have. Can I leave them with you for safekeeping?” I asked.

“No,” she bluntly replied.

She, much to my astonishment, asked why I had removed the Angel statues.

Not disclosing to her of my experience on that awesome night, I kindly asked her to explain, as I had never set eyes on Angel figurines. Did they really exist?

“What statues are you referring to, I haven’t moved anything, in fact this is the first visit to the chapel since father, what’s his name, left the keys with me?”

“Which one?” she asked.

Puzzled, I described him to her.

“You know the nice friendly one, that nice old priest.

“They’re all old that come here to conduct services, no regular ones, seems to me no one likes it here. they just disappear into thin air like the last one did a few weeks ago. We have not found another priest yet to carry on, if only for the Sunday morning service. Perhaps you could spare a little time and pretend you are the temporary clergy,” she said.

“Me, you must be having me on, God would never forgive me for insulting him, if I stood in front of say, the church-going public, inflicting my personal views, and nasty ones at that the way I see things?” I replied.

“You will soon change your mind,” she confidently assured me, “and you are exactly what this chapel needs, a breath of fresh air, and the truth forthcoming.”

Really, I would make a complete fool of myself, and there again it is a thought to consider, as somehow I find complete relaxation by just being within this –church.

With what I would term as added confidence, I've always been a dreamer, I thought 'she's taken to me, so why not indulge her and find out more about the mystery concerning, lets say, the angel's disappearance.'

"About the Angels you mentioned earlier, could you, if possible give me more information as to when they went missing, and where they were situated in the chapel?" I asked.

"They stood each side of the altar, could not have gone far, they're blind you know," she said.

"Really I said?" What she was trying to say hadn't quiet sunk in, but it soon did when she repeated it. Shit, definitely time I was moving on.

"Listen my dear," I said, "am I hearing you correctly, you have stated twice that the stone statues are blind? Excuse me, but what are you talking about?"

Sorrowfully casting her eyes deeply in my direction. I started to leave the premises. She called out to me, "please don't be frightened, I mean you no harm, come back and I shall let you know a secret, providing you promise not to mention what I am about to say to any other living soul."

"Trust me darling," I said, the words flew out of my mouth. I listened for what I imagined would give me the cold shivers. And by Christ I was right.

"The Angels eyes were purposely painted black to stop them wondering around the cemetery frightening mourners in times of grief," she said. "Drunk they were most of the time, and the one named Sara smoked like a trooper, the chapel didn't smell of incense, more like Woodbines, damp ones at that."

Curious, I interrupted her.

"What's with all these whiskey bottles, are they your property?"

"Nothing to do with me," she said.

'Could have fooled me,' I thought.

I then asked the old lady to describe what colour hair the angels had.

"Let me think," she murmured, "the statues are stone white in their stationary form, but they are not white when they are misbehaving, sneaking out of the chapel when someone's forgets to lock the front doors, only come back when they need cigarettes and

pop if you know what I mean? They mysteriously appear as blondes on occasions!"

"Do you mind if I had a glass of whiskey?" I asked, "you may need a drop more as well?" I offered her the bottle.

"I don't drink, and even if I did I wouldn't touch it," she said, "cursed, you know, the last priest, tipsy he was most of the time, I blame him, he encouraged the Angels drinking habits. He used to leave things for them, treating them in his drunken state as if they were his own daughters, live ones. He had a bloody shock one day when Sara, the stone statue on your left as you enters the chapel, spoke to him asking for more cigarettes? She was followed by Jane, pleading for whiskey."

"Who the bloody hell is Jane?" I asked.

"Sorry, of course, I haven't mentioned her; she's the other angel."

'God here we go again, what's the easiest way out of here?' I wondered to myself.

"I can read your thoughts," the lady then informed me, "you wish to leave and never return. It's too late for that now; I have given to you the blessings that you must now honour. Otherwise, our chapel will decay with no resting-place for the heavenly angels."

"Well what do you wish me to do, I'm no good at building renovation," I said.

"Nothing of that kind is on my mind," she thankfully assured me. "A service is all that is required of you for one or two Sunday mornings, nothing special just talk about anything that comes to your mind, being of a religious nature."

"Ok, I always make a fool of myself, so be it," I said.

I really wanted to resolve this Angel saga, and this gave me a good opportunity to hang around, as one might put it. In addition, I would love to see those two gorgeous blondes again, getting as bad as the last priest.

"I'm off now, I'll see you in two weeks time," I said, and departed from the cleaning lady, with the date firmly set for Sunday morning.

'Some hope,' I thought, 'what am I letting my self in for?'

So a week went bye, and I tried not to even think about the coming Sunday. But then time started to creep up on me. I worried now whether to keep my promise or not, but in my mind I was

unconsciously practicing some sort of speech I may remotely have to conduct if I did turn up.

I thought that the best thing to do would be to have a practice run, to venture down to the church one afternoon and talk to myself. I was always doing that in any case.

So that was exactly what I did, in the calm peaceful splendor of the hall, on another sweltering summer's day. Cool fine breezes drifted through the front doors that I had left wide open, filling the heavenly place with a feeling of tranquility and magic.

Fly was nervous, she didn't take to the place one bit. I tried to get her to come into the shade of the hall, but no way was she having it. I could see her tail tucked in tight between her back legs, warning of danger she couldn't handle. Silly dog. Or was she?

I noticed a lovely piano mothballed in the corner, and in concert pitch. Meddling around with it I pretended I was the resident piano tuner. It was strange that there were no candles anywhere.

'Must buy some,' I thought, 'and provide some of my spring water, holy water you know!'

I pretended to talk, to say what I would say to a hopefully almost empty church on the coming Sunday.

I started by saying "Good morning and welcome to the church of the blessed angels."

"Who are you staring at, have I got the same tie on as you or something? Can't say that, they will all walk out. Perhaps I should. Any way now lets try to be a bit more serious."

I was stuck at the moment, but on the second attempt I got it.

"My name is Dick, and my dog's name is Fly and I am here to fill in for father Guinness, who unfortunately as you can see, is not with us."

'Say someone enquirers as to his whereabouts? Well tell them you don't know. Always be honest. In that case I'd have to say that he's probably pissed, sorry under the weather.'

I wasn't doing all that well, and I couldn't see the point in lecturing people with the dos and don'ts. We should realise that each and every one of us probably has a sad tale to tell, who am I to inflict my thoughts on God's worshippers? Especially since I never go to church myself?

'Well you are now so get on with it,' I told myself.

"God created the heavens and his angels and us they say in his likeness. You may appreciate that no one really knows the workings of God, some will tell you they do, try telling that to anyone in real devastating circumstances. Each of us seems to have a cross to bear for some it is light others heavy. At the end of the day the good will go to sleep peacefully and wake up in a new world, for others they will find no rest only anxiety forever more. This don't mean to say that one should live there lives solemnly if circumstances are not prevailing to do so, that only makes every one else bloody miserable. That's why the strong should help the weak. And dare I say it – the rich should help the poor. All born equal hey, better take another look, may be in Gods eyes we are as he is able to right all things, only thing is it might not be in this world. All the same if he did show favoritism to one, it would be unfair as we all may expect miracles, and that would be the end of the story, i.e., faith no more, no one to help, let God sought it out, see what I mean. Final word, it has to be this way so make if you can the best of it. That is my sermon over with, thank God."

Christ what's that? Clapping was coming from the back of the church. Hell, there they were, the blondies, and they were coming towards me. I knew that I shouldn't have started my apprenticeship in bible punching, they were probably going to cast some curse on me. Fly did warn me.

They were closer now, no bums showing today, both were dressed in beautiful wine-coloured dresses.

"Hello, are you the ghosts?" I asked, shivering.

"Pardon?" they asked, "why did you say such a thing?"

Standing before me were two of the most beautiful girls one could ever set eyes on. Ghosts? Rubbish! They were as natural as any other girls, and I felt completely relaxed.

"Sorry, it's just that some old lady indicated that the church was haunted, and you two fitted the description she had given me. Of course I didn't believe her, I was only joking you see!"

Like hell I was!

"Sorry, but I did not see you enter, perhaps I can put you in the picture why I am here."

After briefing them that I was not the priest, lay preacher or whatever, one of them said "I wish you were, I loved your little theme, very true to say the least."

"So my name is Lionel, not Dick, as I am mostly referred to, and what are your names?"

I shouldn't have asked, shit.

"Second question, where have you come from, and better still where are you heading for?"

"We are on holiday, and we love to visit old churches, memories of past days, mind you this is our last few days now."

"Meaning?" I butted in.

"Away then to far away places, carrying out duties with the nunnery."

"You mean you two are helpers in third world countries like nurses or something similar?"

Silence for a second, then they just nodded their heads. Still I'm none the bloody wiser.

"So you say, its just wicked rumors that are being spread around, just because people have seen two girls snooping around the graveyards, taking an interest in ancestral past, as your family in the distant past was buried in this location. You wouldn't happen to know anything about two statues that are gone missing from this church would you?" I asked.

"Haven't a clue. Please don't think for one minute us girls could lift heavy stone figures," they replied.

"How do you know they were heavy stone statues?" I asked, trying nicely to query them?

"We've been here before many times, and we know of the statues," they answered.

'I'll bet you do,' I thought, half believing them.

Just gazing into their lovely faces, I somehow felt honored that two such beautiful girls even had the time to talk to me. Furthermore, they promised to support me by coming along on Sunday.

"Time to say goodbye now to, you know, S&J."

I couldn't believe it when the cheeky little beauty put her hand in my pocket outside the church, and thieved my lighter and cigarettes, smiled and said goodbye.

'Home James, I mean Fly and fast, well little bit faster than our usual, just go!'

Naturally, on the way home I was pondering to myself whether this was really happening, and to be more specific, why was it happening? Conscious again, why did I say this, should I have said that, who cares, it's not important. Surely it is a set up for a laugh?

I'll give them a laugh when I get on that stand again, they will not mess me about, I trust no-one, I was taught that lesson years ago.

Reality struck me when Sunday morning came around. I was going, and then I wasn't, but I did.

I arrived late purposely, hoping they had all gone home, and ventured to the entrance doors that had been opened by someone. To my amazement, peering inside, I saw candles flickering, but the church was empty, thank God no people, but I was thrilled to see S&J sitting by the piano rehearsing some hymns quietly to themselves.

"Hi there," I shouted, "it's me again!"

The greeting was one of humiliation; they looked bloody serious for one reason or another, giving me the cold shoulder treatment.

I felt that something wrong, maybe it was because I was half an hour late.

"Speak to you later my love," they said, "now don't be incompetent, we will look after you."

"Thanks my little angels, but there's a lot on my mind, could you put my mind at ease by mentioning who let you two in today?"

"The cleaning lady did, so we could light the candles ready for this sacred service."

"Candles, God I forgot!" I said.

"We didn't," they announced smiling at me.

I stood there waiting and waiting for someone to appear, whilst the girls went into the wings, toilets maybe, then re-emerged shortly, dressed in the most glorious dresses of silky, pure white with golden hems matching the golden bands on their hair. It seemed uncanny, but they truly looking like angels! Even the sunglasses were missing, and for the first time I could capture the splendor of their blue eyes, sparkling like twinkling stars. They were obviously not of this world. I couldn't believe that I was seeing such heavenly creation, and strangely they made their way to either side of the altar, just like the silvery figures I witnessed the night of the storm. No wonder the ex priest loved them, who ever they were.

Then my worst fears came true. People were making their way in, as if they had been waiting for a signal. I closely observed every one of them entering. I didn't like the look of him, big fat chopsie arrogant pig, sixth sense again. 'Cut it out, you're horrible at times,' I told myself.

Once everyone was settled in their seats, I saw that they were all old people not a young one amongst them. My confidence began to build.

'They can't chase me if I have to do a runner,' I thought.

The cleaning lady was in the front row, so I focused my eyes on her when I spoke, and ignored the rest, hoping that it would all be ok then.

Ten o'clock here goes!

"Good morning and welcome to the church of the blessed Angels."

Dead silence followed, all were staring at me as if I was the traffic warden.

Trying to regain some confidence I began to speak, but didn't get that far. The fat man stood up, he seemed use to being the center of attraction, and blurted out in a deep roar.

"Since when was this chapel a home for blessed Angels? Pilgrims is what the chapel historically relates to!"

"Message taken, my apology sir," I politely announced.

"It is a sin to drive fast," I suddenly said. Why I don't know.

Silence again. Now anticipating fatso to make another complaint, I waited. When no comment was forthcoming I thought that I was on the right road.

"Fast drivers kill not only people but also all kinds of wildlife in the countryside."

'Better change the subject now,' I thought, 'they may imagine I am a policeman standing here lecturing them.'

The congregation was a strange lot. There was not a murmur, a cough just airy presence. I started to count them. There were about twenty-five, not including fat man, mostly old ladies sitting gazing into thin air.

I was stuck for words now, then the silence was suddenly broken, by, yes, the fat man. But this time far more aggressive.

"Hey!" he shouted to me, "I suggest you remove those two witches stood behind you immediately."

Momentarily taken aback by his outburst, I casually looked behind me, wondering what he was referring to.

It didn't take long to realise, for exposed to all, there stood Sara smoking a fag, and to top it all was Jane, swigging out of a bottle of whisky.

"Please don't be offended," I hastily announced, trying to find some excuse to justify their actions, like "herbal cigs for her chesty couch, medicine."

A question came bellowing through the air.

"What excuse are you going to find for the other slag?"

"Holy water, she's thirsty," I said without thinking.

Trouble was brewing and it was not whisky, but Jane making her way towards the target fatso. She stood directly in front of him and spoke quietly.

"What did you call me?" she asked.

Red in the face and taken by surprise that someone actually challenged him, fatso repeated "slag," with the knowledge now that every one was taking a special interest, with things now livening up a bit. We didn't expect what was about to happen next, when he just slumped forward, falling on his hands and knees, howling out in agony. Shit what had she done to him? Stuck a knife in him or something? It can't be so.

Leaving my pedestal, I ventured forward, only to be uttered back by Jane, who was directing big mouth out of the church/chapel.

The glory of her returning was heartwarming, funny, but whilst she was seeing our friend off, emptiness seemed to over-run the place, sadness cannot describe the feeling.

All the same, I had lost control and decided that I may as well terminate the exercise.

As a last effort, I dared to enquire if any one could sing.

"I do," Sara announced.

Amazed and delighted that someone had come to the rescue, I said, "please do, and ask Jane, if she's still sober, to play the piano like she did earlier."

The Heavens now bestowed upon this little church notes, ringing out from the piano sweet and clear, accompanied by Sara, who without doubt had the voice of an Angel. Mystical splendor surrounded us, casting shivers of loving warmth, with echoing Welsh hymns followed by Jerusalem, land of Ava Marie, and many more. The congregation was held speechless, till Sara had a break for a cigarette, and instructed me to go and have a sit down while she took take over the complete mess of things I had got myself into.

She stood on the pulpit, and Jane made for the kitchen for a refill, to decorate the piano amongst the other empties standing there. How she could even walk with the amount of holy water she had consumed beat me.

Now eagerly awaiting what the other little Angel wished to say, standing there in her magnificent glory, now capturing the utmost attention of the souls present after the joy she crediting them with her magical singing. For a moment I could see a change of expression come over her.

The cleaning lady I was sitting by in the front row nudged me and said "may I have your keys now? Thank you for helping, but please leave now with our blessings. If you decide to stay and hear what Sara is about to disclose it may upset you. I have experienced this occasion before. We will always find another good soul that will carry on as you did."

"I would really like to stay and hear for myself, being I have come this far," I said, thanking her for her concern.

Sara now focused on me as if I was the only person present. Poised motionless until I paid attention, she commenced with a passionate tearful forecast with her view on forthcoming predictions. She warned that we would desperately require many ships to sail from every available port, that the day was coming when we will cry out, what happened to the morning tide. The heat from the sun will become unbearable. With the oceans becoming lakes, sinking to the center of the earth, expelling clouds of melting steam, the sea will become a desert; so make soon for the deepest oceans. God will raise you from the heat of the dense mist to another realm; remember to take your pets with you, but no snakes."

If she hadn't looked so gracious speaking with an air of overwhelming authority, I may have myself turned her off for portraying such gloom.

Explain that lot to a newborn child with every thing to live for. On the other hand, for Africa or somewhere similar, it may be a blessing. I must have been daydreaming for a while, disillusioned and deep in thought, and probably missed quite a lot of what she was saying.

I must have come out of my reveille to catch the message. All good people must leave from the ports and make for the open seas.

Already heard that I realised. Now its break time, with the incense of wafting Virginia vapors floating my way, so after a short break Sara continued.

"Look at the sky and you will see streaky clouds bloodshot in colour moving at tremendous speed from the west, but where is the wind you will ponder? Large trees will fall without reason. Days that follow will be like the chill of autumn, frightening without hope, the sun will not shine with any warmth only a bright glare receding like a distant star. When all seems hopeless, out of a strange wilderness, Angels will descend on the living, mounted on horseback in their billions, swarming like bees, halting any moving object. No transport will be able to move by road or rail with the swarm of Angels slaughtering all evil. If, by chance, when seeking refuge in the countryside hedge growth you see three very large men, you will recognise as if breaking the backs of these small ponies having mounted them, don't hide for they will seek you out, and if these men on horseback signal to you by putting fingers to their mouths, have no fear, for you will have been saved from the lashing swords meant for the elimination of evil men and women.

There' was more to come, it seemed. I studied her beautiful face, cruelly predicting forthcoming attractions. Her next words gave me nightmares. She disclosed the fact that those who seek refuge on the sands that once were home to the incoming warm seas of summer, will discover poisonous snakes blubbering out of the sands like maggots. Fly won't like that.

She continued by saying that when God was satisfied that his mission to eliminate all evil was completed, peace and majestic glory would be granted to those of the living left upon this earth, that God had spared.

I believed that she was finished. She stepped down from the pulpit with tears slowly filling her eyes. I felt so sorry to see such a lovely girl emotionally taking on the world for all its good and evil.

"The holiday is over now," she said to me, and smiled and gave me an unexpected kiss that I couldn't explain.

Tension and concern that I had, simply disappeared. I glanced around, witnessing that the hall was empty, and wondered where the cleaning lady had gone. God only knew.

Jane and Sara then went their ways, waving to me before rounding the bend of this country lane.

'Ill never see them again,' came the feeling in my heart, what a memory.

"Don't forget to blow out the candles," were Jane's last words to me.

I blew them out, but haven't a key to lock the doors.

I stopped the car on the way home on the distant hill, overlooking the church, just to take one last look for a captured memory that I stood in that church in year's gone by. For a moment it seemed to have vanished.

"Fly," I said, "it's gone." She barked to confirm my findings. I felt that I had to go back, but on second thoughts, I felt too tired.

'Some other time maybe. It was time to go home, it had been a long day for Fly and I.

It must have been the following that year we came across the little church again, purely by accident. We just seemed to be driving along a winding country road, when Fly suddenly started barking.

I recognized or realised that we had ventured to the little church from a different direction, and immediately cast my eyes upon the bell tower, blackened with jackaws darting in and out of the small apertures in the walls.

Something else also brought some sadness to my heart, confusion to say the least. The church now looked completely derelict, with the roof caved in, it was apparent something tragic must have occurred in my absence over this last year or so.

Out of curiosity I took a closer look, and wandered thereabouts, bewildered to see at first hand what was obvious to an idiot like me, what must have been endless years of decay. Yet I was in this church not so long back.

"Hello," someone said, to me now aimlessly just studying the structure, "may I be of some assistance?"

It now came to my attention that an old gent was apparently speaking to me. Attending to some grave headstones, cleaning them he was. Tell you the truth I didn't notice him there, he seemed to be the nome when visiting this location and its surroundings.

I mentioned to him that I could not understand how such deterioration had taken place in such a short time. I remembered the church to be such a beautiful building.

"Didn't think you were that old." he said to me, at the same time he was now eyeing me up and down as if to say 'another foreigner, where do they come from?'

I decided that I had better explain to him that perhaps he'd misunderstood me, so I gladly mentioned to him my fond memories of the previous year when I helped out for one Sunday service.

Hesitantly he queered if it was my car outside, and was I the driver? "Be careful," he muttered, "you could lose your license these days, you know?"

Baffled by his remark, I asked him to explain what he was referring to.

He did, casting further doubt in my mind if this gentleman was as one might term not quite with us.

Wouldn't mind calling in for a pint of beer now making my way home, could do with something. The church was struck by lightning over seventy years ago, and has stood derelict ever since.

I shall make further enquires regarding this matter.

I'll tell you more when they let me out. No wonder the skylarks had bugged off the day I said goodbye to S&Jane, and wait till I get hold of that father Guinness.

One consolation is that Fly likes it here, chasing the puddy cats around the grounds of this mansion house.

The End.

If you enjoyed reading my book please send me a quick message via the Feedback link on my obooko.com download page. I will be delighted to hear from you.

Please note: This is a free digital edition from www.obooko.com. If you paid for this e-book it will be an illegal, pirated copy so please advise the author and obooko. We also recommend you return to the retailer and demand an immediate refund.