

The Communication of the Dead

A Novel

by

John William Houghton

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Preface

Lots of things changed over the years after my last memoir. I switched to Diet Coke, for one, and Annandale Military Academy did in fact become a co-educational school, beginning in the fall of 1996. My term on its Board of Trustees took a bizarre turn a couple of years later when the Fort Wayne Military Institute, of whose Board I was *ex officio* Chair, voted to merge with Annandale, one of the provisos being the creation of a new office of President of the Annandale Trustees (alongside the existing Chairman), to be vested in me and my successors as Bishops of Michigan City. Bob Esther and Brad Peniston both left Annandale for endowed chairs at other schools, Phil Cicero got married and took a state government job in Tennessee (leaving me with a vacant home in Annandale), and Luke Faber moved up from being a company counselor to Dean of Student Life, a new position above the Commandant created in the wake of coeducation.

Rhys and Caroline had four solid years here at Walsingham University, graduating on Decoration Day of 1999, she with a major in classics, *summa cum laude*, he with a *magna* in history, and both with acceptances to graduate school at the University of Chicago. As Chairman of the University's Board of Trustees, I had the pleasure of handing each of them the diploma, earning a hug and kiss from my goddaughter and a firm and manly handshake from my distant cousin.

Mrs. Equitone, after long and faithful service in the diocesan office, retired, and we found an almost equally omniscient replacement in Jon Adamson, over the half-serious objection of my archdeacon, Carl Carlson, that it would be too confusing to have two people named Jonathan in the same office (though in fact Jon always used the nickname, and most people around the Cathedral other than

Carl himself and the Dean ordinarily called me "Bishop"—"It's progressive depersonalization," an older bishop once told me: "First you're John Smith, then Father Smith, and finally simply Bishop. After that you're just dear old what's-his-name....").

To move on to the more arcane side of things: my brother Dan had, as I have reported earlier, managed, at a particularly opportune moment, and with the help of our friend Abbot Alfred, to reconstruct some of the ritual magic in our family's lost Book of Secrets. Once we were at more leisure, I was able to help the two of them with some of the older manuscript hands and less obvious Latin, and Rhys and Caroline, as their educations progressed, lent their talents to the task, as well. While Dan had quickly mastered (as I apparently could not) some of the most spectacular skills and spells in the collection, much of what was there reflected simpler times and the different needs of our ancestors—spells for good crops, chants to stop bleeding, rituals to help a baby with "short growth" (the last of these so much a part of popular folk magic that my mother's Swiss/German Anabaptist forebears practiced it as well). Nonetheless, with Dan's instruction, we all four became, in our own somewhat different ways, masters (well, masters and a mistress) of *goetia*, the White Magic which Renaissance analysts of these things distinguished from *magia*, Black Magic.

It is partly a tribute to family tradition and good child rearing, I suppose, and partly perhaps some sort of implication of our particular arcane discipline itself, that none of us seemed to be much tempted to take these skills and cause the world trouble with them, nor even to (say) change a problematic traffic signal to green a few seconds early. That seems odd to me, as I write it, given the long tradition in literature and popular culture of people grasping at magical power to reshape the world to their own designs—

and, for that matter, given our own experiences of undead relatives, possessed monks and neo-pagan hierophants fixated on human sacrifice. But the fact is that my father, and his father before him, and so on back, had had all the knowledge in the lost book and lived happily as farmers—not even wealthy farmers, for that matter—well back into the Middle Ages. I think I once calculated that they rented the same house in Hampshire for nearly four hundred years: you might have expected magic to come up with the cash to make an offer to *purchase* the place at some point in the passing centuries. It isn't just that they only used their magic for good—though, so far as I can tell, that is the case—but by the standards of a Dr. Faustus or an Aleister Crowley (the self-proclaimed modern Antichrist), they really hardly used it at all. And so, for the most part, we did likewise. But I do have to say, "for the most part," because, obviously, some things happened, or I wouldn't be putting together another memoir. This particular episode involves Rhys and Caroline's honeymoon, for much of which I was a socially awkward supernumerary guest.

1. Saturday, July 1, 2000: The Wedding

To begin with, I want to say that the honeymoon was not my idea, nor even, in some sense, *our* idea. We have, as it turns out, a cousin, Peter Mears, in the English town of Bishop's Waltham, who has been compiling a world-wide directory of our family (for purposes as genteel as his retirement). Building on Peter's initial web of contacts, Charles and Janet Peasecod, a young couple from the neighboring village of Botley (each of them descended from at least one Mears line, but neither, so far as I know, a practitioner of the *Ars Magica*) planned a US honeymoon and extended family visit. Or, rather, they accepted such a trip as a gift from Janet's dotting grandfather, Roy, on *their* condition that he come along as well. The three of them were my guests at the palace in the fall of '98.

So, then, when Rhys and Caroline, newly graduated from Walsingham, and bound for graduate school at the western end of the South Shore Railroad, announced advance plans to wrap up their first year at Chicago with long-expected nuptials, it was the Peasecods' example that suggested to them a reciprocal trip to the UK, and laid the groundwork, if I can put it that way, for the idea of bringing along an elderly relative. The cornerstone (to press the metaphor) of the plan came about three weeks later (on, coincidentally, the Feast of St. Alban, first martyr of Britain), in a tastefully understated envelope—heavy ivory paper, a UK postmark, and, on the flap, an address engraved in red ink: Lambeth Palace, London SE1 7LB. Even though I'd known perfectly well that something of the sort was in the works, I still hesitated a moment before opening it, turning it over in my hands several times while Carl and Jon waited as eagerly as I.

"Would you rather steam it open, Jonathan, to preserve

the envelope?" Carl finally asked.

"Oh, no, no, just savoring the moment." I picked up my letter opener—like all good Annandale Military alumni, I use a miniature copy of an AMA officer's saber—and ran it along the top of the flap. The letter inside, with a coat of arms reproduced in full color at the top, and the Archbishop of Canterbury's bold "+ Thomas Cantuar." at the bottom, invited me (a year in advance) to attend, in Canterbury and London, the last Lambeth Conference of the twentieth century. The decennial meeting of all eight hundred of the world's Anglican bishops was set (this was the news element) for the last three weeks of August of this year, opening with a festival Eucharist for the Feast of the Transfiguration on Sunday, August 6, 2000. By taking some sabbatical time before the conference itself, I would be able to accompany the kids on a fairly extensive tour and still meet with my international colleagues; moreover, we could save on accommodations for at least part of the trip by taking advantage of Michigan City's foothold in Oxford, at our namesake Walsingham College. And there were, of course, some relatives who might put us up.

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Caroline and Rhys certainly had their choice of venues for the wedding itself—the Cathedral, the University Chapel, even the palace chapel, if they had wanted a relatively private ceremony. For that matter, as an alumnus and the daughter of an alumnus and the niece of the new President of the Board of Trustees, they could have used the Annandale Memorial Chapel. But Caroline is a creature of southern Indiana, as loyal to rolling hills, forests, and the Monroe County "7" prefix on her license plate as I am to flatlands, corn fields and Wabana County's "83" on mine. And the place she had in mind was closer to home for her—Trinity Church, not actually in Bean Blossom, but in central Bloomington, not far

from IU. Dan rented a whole block of rooms in the University's Indiana Memorial Union for family and friends, including the Hoosier-baronial (it has arches, but you could also see playing basketball in it) Alumni Hall for the reception. (I could hardly imagine the cost of doing so on a holiday weekend.) It turned into a curious sort of Annandale / Walsingham / Mears / Evans reunion: though not so curious as *some* of our family reunions, I have to admit. Marcia and Jerry Kirkfleet treated us to a lovely rehearsal dinner at a very sophisticated downtown Bloomington restaurant on Friday, and on Saturday the ceremony itself—conducted with the express permission of my brother bishop in Indianapolis—came off flawlessly, though even with the church's air-conditioning cranked up about as far as it would go, we were all too conscious of being in Indiana in the summer. Dan spent the day looking as proud as if he had just invented the very idea of weddings, and Caroline was stunning in white satin that positively glowed in Trinity's Gothic dimness (my suggestion of cloth-of-gold, to match my vestments, had been dismissed without comment early on in the planning). Rhys set a model of decorum in a morning coat whose utter and absolute blackness defied the weather and left me wondering whether he had found some way of concealing ice packs under his impeccable vest: or had perhaps resorted to some occult way of controlling the temperature. If it was the latter, I wouldn't necessarily have minded his extending the benefits to the clergy.

Back at the IMU for the reception, I was placed next to Tom Adams, the best man, who had been a student of mine at Annandale, and the host of the Wiccan ceremonies in Main Barracks that began my conscious involvement in Rhys's adventures. Tom's father, Bob, had been the Regimental Commander in my own senior year, and he and his wife, Mary, had named their only child "Geoffrey Thomas," in

memory of Geoff Davidson, another member of the Class of '70, who had died in a house fire from which they themselves narrowly escaped. (Bob and Mary had themselves been killed in the crash of a private plane early in Tom's senior year in college.) Occult interests aside, Tom had been unique in my teaching experience as the only student who came close to having a photographic memory. He was smart, too, which I suppose helps, but he really did seem to remember things after one glance, even passages in languages he didn't understand. He came to me once in great excitement after having been assigned *The Chosen* for summer reading and discovering that one of its main characters read the same way he did.

"We missed you at the bachelor party, Bishop," he said as he sat down.

"Well, yes, hmmm, it did seem as though it might not be the best venue for someone in a backwards collar."

"Right, sir. It turned out pretty tame though, really. About the raciest thing was couple of the guys asking Rhys what it was like dating a girl for six years who had telepathic access to what you were thinking."

"I think I can see where you were headed with that—minds in the gutter, the lot of you. And what did the man of the hour have to say?"

"Apparently they can turn it off, which isn't half as interesting as we had hoped. Seriously, though, talking about these ideas of telepathy and such does give me some personal questions of my own."

"I thought Rhys said you'd given up on Wicca."

"He's right, I did, a long time ago. I've gone back to being a plain vanilla Methodist. And I know this isn't the time or the place for a long discussion of my religious wanderings. But there were some things my folks told me...or maybe I should say, there were things that they *didn't* tell me, but that

I sort of figured out from hints and overheard bits. Anyway, I would like your advice."

"Of course, Tom. You know we're off to England on Monday, though."

"Yes, I was thinking about that. But I'm going over there, too. You know I inherited a house in Bourton on the Water, so we'll be fairly close to each other when you guys are in Oxford—you can come out to the Venice of the Cotswolds, as we call it." (I should perhaps have mentioned that Bob and Mary both came from a lot of money.)

"I've *been* to the Venice of the Cotswolds, Tom, and I have to tell you I have seen creeks that would qualify for rivers before the Windrush. It's not Venice if you can wade through the water and not get the tops of your shoes wet."

"Oh, come on, sir, it's deep enough for trout and ducks. And it does look pretty nice running through a person's back yard. Besides, there's a restaurant in Moreton in Marsh I'll want to take you to."

"Aha, the old buying-the-bishop-lunch gambit! I can't argue with that, can I? I'll look forward to seeing you there. Shall we set a date, or do you want to get in touch when we're all in-country?"

"You guys'll be there a couple of days before I am—why don't you just give me a call sometime after the sixth? Here's my mobile number—Rhys and Caroline both have it, too, so you don't have to worry about losing the card."

"Sometimes I think all my students know me far too well."

"Nonsense, Bishop," he said with a smile, "nothing could be further from the truth. Now if you'll excuse me, I need another drink. May I bring you a Diet Coke?"

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After dinner, the cutting of the cake, some fiddling about with garters and bouquets, and the obligatory dances,

Dan took to the stage and sang a medley of old Broadway tunes: a great delight, other than the fact that it indirectly encouraged those with less-professionally-trained voices to trot up to the microphone and make their own attempts at public performance. After enduring the first couple of stabs at Lord Lloyd-Webber's greatest hits, I wandered out into the hallway, where, though the buffet line had been taken down, the champagne fountain was still spouting merrily off to my right, and the bartender was still ensconced behind his row of bottles further down to the left. As I stood there for a moment, trying to make up my mind, Dan walked up.

"Fingernails on a blackboard?" I asked.

"Mmm...yeah, I hate to say so, but...let's say I need a drink. Unless you were counting on champagne."

"No, I hadn't decided. Drinks will be fine."

"Good. I'm buying."

He had a scotch and soda, and I ended up with a Manhattan when it turned out that the bartender had gin but neither lime juice, for a gimlet, nor tonic water. Dan would have been willing to send the poor guy off to get some, but I settled for bourbon (not rye, but this was no time to be persnickety) and vermouth.

"I wanted to talk with you, anyway, Jon."

"What's up?"

"I'm worried about the kids. Not about the marriage, but the honeymoon."

I raised an eyebrow.

"No, not that either: how did you ever get to be a bishop? I'm concerned about them traveling so far away. That makes me sound like grandma, I know. But everything we know comes from people who thought fifty miles was as good as the other side of world. I don't expect that the rings will work between England and here to let us know someone is in trouble; based on your own trips to the UK, we know the kids

won't be able to communicate between there and here; and I seriously doubt that I will be able to just pop in to the rescue if something goes wrong."

"You're probably right; certainly, you know more about the whole business than any of the rest of us. But..."

"But they're all grown up, and sooner or later the little birds have to leave the nest, and besides you'll be along to help, and after all we haven't had any trouble in years. I know all the right answers, Jon, it's just that they don't make me feel any better."

"Right, I hear you, Dan: you feel just as concerned, no matter what you tell yourself. It's like you feel helpless and on top of it you're helpless not to feel helpless..."

"Exactly. It's a vicious circle. So what do I do?"

"Like a lot of things—start off by acknowledging that you're helpless. The feeling is awful, and it'll gnaw at your insides like the Spartan boy's wolf, but it's not wrong about the facts. You'll worry about Caroline until you're both standing in the presence of the Divine Mercy—and Rhys, too, for his own sake and because she loves him."

"'It is the blight man was born for / It is Margaret you mourn for,'" he quoted.

"Well, Hopkins made poetry out of it, but it's still just plain homely truth, as plain as the bread Father Gerard broke every day in the Mass. Grief is a mystery God enters into, not one he ends. And the same is true of anticipating grief. We have a sure and certain hope of the resurrection, but even so the Virgin held her son's dead body in her arms."

"So I should just suck it up?"

"Some people might, I'm sure, and a lot more might try; I was going to say almost the opposite, though. I think we're better off if we can know it's going to happen, and acknowledge it when it does, and then let go of it...I'd say, 'take it to the Lord in prayer,' if that was our end of the

tradition."

"If you did, I'd think you'd had a stroke. But I see what you mean, though...it's like what you always say about avoiding distractions when a person is trying to pray—you can't get to a place where there won't be distractions, the thing is just not to give them the kind of attention that lets them distract you."

"Yes, that's it exactly. Worry, but don't obsess. Think about what Dame Julian said."

"Right. 'And all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well.' Remember me at her shrine, when you go to Norwich."

"I shall. And, Dan, I will take care of them, both of them, every way I can."

"I know you will, Jon....Are you ready to go back in? Maybe I can wrestle the mic back from those refugees from a karaoke party."

"It would win you the thanks of a grateful nation, I'm sure."

II. Monday, July 3: The Trip

The kids went off to an undisclosed location for what was left of the weekend, and I back to Kokomo for, on Sunday morning, my last parish visitation before the sabbatical. We rendezvoused at O'Hare on Monday afternoon, though I took an early train into the city so I could stop for lunch at the Walnut Room in Marshall Field's. It's famous around the Midwest for its elegance and history—in fact, it was the very first department store restaurant—but I like it because I find it, well, such a *sensible* place: you can leave a European trip's worth of luggage in the coat check room, on the one hand, and the dessert list features Frango Chocolate Mint Ice Cream Pie, on the other. I took full advantage, and decided to take a cab to the airport lest I fall asleep on the Blue Line. O'Hare is the end of the track, so I suppose there was no danger of snoozing past my stop, but even so I feel it's undignified for members of the episcopate to be seen snoring on public transport. And Chicago actually has an ordinance against sleeping on the CTA, for that matter.

We checked in well ahead of time, saw our luggage onto the conveyor belt, and made it through security with minimal trouble. Even in a purple shirt and backwards collar, I did have to make excuses for my made-out-of-nails pectoral cross, twice (apparently there's some possibility that I might try to poke someone with it), but I can't complain—I read in the paper about a retired general and former governor of his state who almost had his Congressional Medal of Honor confiscated because a whole series of, shall I say mildly, ignorant would-be bureaucrats thought it was some sort of elaborate oriental throwing star. By dint of cashing in my frequent flier miles, and thanks, in the kids' case, to a generous gift from the Kirkfleets, we had unaccustomed business-class seats, and spent the rest of the time before our

8:15 flight being catered to in the lounge.

As usual for me with transatlantic flights, despite my weariness, I was unable to fall asleep on the plane until some absurd hour in the morning, British Summer Time: I had thought, in the airport bookstore, about buying an Inspector Morse omnibus volume, to get back into the mood for Oxford, but at the last minute grabbed instead a new fantasy novel, also set in Oxford. I didn't have to read too far before I knew I should have stuck with the Inspector. I tried to soldier on, put the book down, picked it up again, listened to some of the in-flight classical channel, thought about my sermon for the coming Sunday (I had been invited to preach in Oxford's cathedral), and must have watched part of the feature film...it all blurs together, but in any case I was out like a light when the nice lady came by with a morning cup of tea.

We flew BA into Heathrow, where the yellow and black signs and something indefinably Lego-like about the architecture itself always serve as my first confirming signs that I really have made it back to the land of the ancestors. Her Majesty's immigration agent seemed unimpressed by my reason for traveling, but duly rubber stamped my passport with "leave to enter for sixth months, employment and recourse to public funds prohibited" (I assumed the promised tea at Windsor Castle with the Defender of the Faith didn't count as recourse to public funds)—and to be fair, wished me a happy Independence Day. By noon, we were on The Airline coach to Oxford, watching the always-slightly-alien fields and suburbs of the M25 roll by. We didn't have the bus all to ourselves, but there certainly weren't very many passengers, and we were able to chat quietly across the aisle without attracting undue attention.

"Would you look at all the sheep?" Caroline asked, looking up from my discarded Oxford novel, which she had idly started to read while we were standing in the passport

queue. (We have a lot of pigs in Indiana, and quite a few cows, but not so many of your woolly herbivores.)

Rhys, the experienced traveler with a trip to Wales already under his belt, hummed a couple of relevant bars from the *Messiah* and affected disdain: "Wait till you see their version of mowing a cloverleaf: they just turn sheep loose in the grassy parts and let them roam around munching."

"That, and wait till you see their version of a good dinner menu, with a succulent roast leg of lamb from Ebbw Vale and a nice cassoulet."

"Uncle Jon!"

"Well, it's true, dear. There's a great lamb dish at a bistro in Blue Boar Street I'll show you this evening, if we're any of us awake to eat a full dinner."

"A bistro in Blue Boar Street'?" Rhys said. "I don't believe it. You just made that up for the sake of alliteration."

"Cheeky boy. I did not make it up, I just can't remember the name. It's French, though. Michelle, or something like that. Some Beatles lyric. Ask me again when we're looking at the menu. Speaking of cheeky, by the way, can we now settle once and for all the 'what to call my-wife's-godfather' question? You're welcome to stick with 'Bishop' and 'sir,' if that's what you're comfortable with, but now that we're related..." (He started to say something, as though I could have forgotten we had common ancestors in the fifteenth century.) "...*more closely* related, I should say, you needn't be all that formal."

"Would 'Uncle Jon' be okay? That seems to work for Caroline, and I'm calling your brother 'Dad,' seeing as I call Jerry, well, Jerry." (*And the less said about your real father the better*, I thought to myself.)

"'Uncle Jon' it is."

"Good deal, sir." (Apparently the new rule was not to go into immediate effect.) "So what do we actually need to

know about this place we're staying? I know we could have come for a semester abroad, but we didn't, and that there's a summer program from AMA, but that's new since I was there. So I don't know much."

"Well, Walsingham's sort of a reincarnated college. There was a medieval college on the same site called St. Mary's, owned by the Augustinian Friars, but it was closed down at the Reformation, like the other religious houses. Then there was a brief stretch where the city of Oxford owned the property and used it for some sort of orphanage, but eventually it came into the hands of Brasenose College, which took away the roof of the chapel to use for one of its own buildings, leased out what was left of the place for three hundred years, give or take, and even stopped calling it St. Mary's College. Then right before the Depression, a group from the Evangelical wing of the Church of England founded a hall, the first step toward a college, for poor low-church students. The new hall was to be attached to the Church of St. Peter-le-Bailey, a traditionally Evangelical parish which was right across New Inn Hall Street from the entrance to what was left of St. Mary's."

Sorry, Caroline, I hit the lecture button again, Rhys thought, accidentally-on-purpose allowing me to overhear.

It's not as though you have someplace to go, I replied, *and Caroline's no more reading that book than I was.* I continued more conventionally: "Anyway, with the foundation of the new, Evangelical, St. Peter's Hall, the Anglo-Catholic wing felt as though they needed a new hall of *their own*, and as Brasenose's tenant's lease was coming up, they found a benefactor or two and bought the remains of the medieval St. Mary's. There were already a number of things named for the Blessed Virgin at Oxford, including one of the other colleges (though no-one ever calls it that), so the organizers of the new hall had to find a new dedication: but

they wanted one that would still honor Mary, thereby preserving history and also irritating their Evangelical neighbors. English devotion to Mary as Our Lady of Walsingham was reviving at just the same time, and the organizers were the very sorts of people who were reviving it, so, Bob's your uncle, there was their name for the new institution, The Hall of Our Lady of Walsingham. I think they *may* have known there was already a university by that name in far-off Indiana, but I wouldn't swear to it. Certainly, we didn't know about them at that point.

"In any case, once the Crash came, both of the new halls were in trouble. St. Peter's found a good Samaritan in Lord Nuffield, the founder of Morris Garage; this Walsingham's main rescuer was one of our Walsingham's own benefactors, an American, Jason Everett, a fellow from Tulsa who had inherited both some functioning oil wells and some very well-invested profits, and whose sister had taken a substantial dowry with her into marriage with an English baronet. The sister tossed in some money, and I think provided the college silver, but most of the support came from Jason in Oklahoma. And from that point on, of course, this Walsingham and our Walsingham back in Michigan City were very much aware of each other.

"So the upshot was that both St. Peter's and the Oxford Walsingham survived the Depression, flourished after the War, and were raised to the status of colleges in 1961. Things were actually pretty tense between them early on, but eventually the wars of religion back and forth across New Inn Hall Street died down, and it's more of a friendly rivalry these days. As you said, our Walsingham has a semester study abroad agreement with this one, and since the merger with Fort Wayne Military, Annandale has had a summer program over here, as well."

"So you're chairman of the trustees of two different

American organizations that pump cash into the English college's bank accounts," Rhys observed. "I hope that means we get private bathrooms."

"Well, chairman of one and president of the other, to be precise. But yes, you two are staying in one of the guest rooms, which does, indeed, have *en suite* accommodations, or so I'm told; and I'm staying in Wesley House, the Warden's Lodgings. Last time I was here, I got not only a private bath but a bottle of sherry alongside the tea things."

"Now you're just gloating," Caroline said, having abandoned all pretense of reading the Oxford fantasy. "I appreciate the history, but could you give us more of a sense of what it's actually going to be *like*? What do we do when we get off the bus? Is it hard to get a cab?"

"Oh, right, right. Well, let's see. The coach will make various stops as it comes into the city, but we stay on right to the end, when it comes into the station, at a place called Gloucester Green. The Green is not actually green, anymore, though. It's a large paved-over square where they have outdoor markets and such, with the bus station and other permanent structures around the edges. There's a cab rank across the plaza from the bus station, but in fact once we get that far, it'll only be two shortish blocks to Walsingham: we'll go, maybe fifty feet, past the cabs, a kebab place, and a movie theatre to get down to George Street, jog left, and then uphill a bit on New Inn Hall Street past the Methodist Church on the right and a curry joint on the left, and there you are, poised between the architectural representations of the two extremes of the Church of England."

"What do they look like?" she asked. "Is it all medieval-ish?"

"Well, not so much, no. The Church of St. Peter is Victorian-*faux*-medieval, but on the high church side of the street the only things left of old St. Mary's are the gateway

and the basement. We'll see more medieval stuff in the older parts of the university, though. We can take a quick walking tour this afternoon to help us stay awake."

Enthusiasm did not flare in their eyes, and Caroline turned back to her reading.

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As it turned out, there were two elements missing from my briefing, both of which ought to have been predictable. The first was that by the time we arrived at Gloucester Green, it was pouring down rain, and the pleasant little walk up to Walsingham turned into a cold miserable slog up narrow sidewalks—"pavements," I should say—crowded with grim Brits doing their best to look as though they were completely inured to such elemental misbehavior and with tourists of every land and nation who were coping with the specific disappointment of seeing the England they expected and discovering that rain, unlike snow, is hardly ever scenic when you're in it. The other was revealed when the Head Porter, having welcomed us, issued us our keys and the electronic SmartFobs that would open the gate, and somehow deduced our immediate need to have nice warm baths, showed us through the Lodge and into the Front Quad, where we nearly tripped over a gaggle of American teenagers, most of them in wet AMA-themed athletic gear. Summer school was already in full session, and Annandale had preceded us to Arnold's city of dreaming spires.

III. Tuesday, July 4: An Afternoon Walk

It stopped raining, of course, just about as soon as we were back under cover. The Warden and her husband were away from home, which saved me the embarrassment of a soggy greeting. Once I was dried off, washed up, and changed into clean clericals, I went back down to the Front Quad. The temporary Annandale Headquarters was across from the Lodge, allowing the cadet officers on duty to keep further watchful eyes on traffic in and out. The whole phenomenon of young Americans in uniform tromping around an English city carried with it, I thought, a distant echo of the war years, and I had in fact asked the Superintendent whether we might not have less baggage if we conducted the Oxford camp as a civilian program: but apparently it works for the people who are in it, and it's certainly not my job to get involved in decisions about what our students wear. Given the different military branches represented in our US summer camps (Cavalry, Navy, and Aviation, plus the elementary-aged Indian Scouts kitted out in a robin's-egg-blue shade that an early Superintendent's wife apparently had a fondness for), it had been something of a challenge simply to settle on putting all the Oxford students in Army-style uniforms—albeit khaki uniforms, instead of more modern JROTC greens.

The Cadet Officer of the Day and his orderly, identified by armbands rather than the various elaborate uniform accessories, including a saber for the OD, that would have marked them off back on the AMA campus, jumped to their feet as soon as I walked through the door. The OD, who was the shorter but pretty clearly the elder of the two blue-eyed blonds (there have been days when I have idly wondered about the extent of the summer admissions staff's commitment to diversity), snapped out: "Good afternoon, Bishop Mears! Welcome to Oxford, sir." We had been

anticipated: I noticed that a copy of my biography from the diocesan webpage, featuring a full-color headshot, had been printed out and stuck under the glass on the desktop. I gave quick thanks for Annandale's ubiquitous use of nametags and for the experience that had taught me to read them as soon as I saw them.

"At ease, gentlemen. Mr. Jordan, good afternoon. It's good to meet you."

"Thank you, sir. Sir, this is my orderly, Cadet Watson."

"Mr. Watson, it's a pleasure." As we shook hands, I looked more closely, and thought I saw something slightly familiar in his face: though that's an illusion to which I am often subject.

"You taught my father, sir," he said: "Bruce Watson, Troop B, Class of '78. They called him 'Beagle,' I think."

"Beagle Watson, yes, I remember: yet another inexplicable Annandale nickname. Have you managed to escape the same fate?"

"The closest I've come so far is 'Sherlock,' sir, but I don't know if it's permanent."

"Right, Sherlock Watson, I get it. Let's hope it's only temporary. Mr. Jordan, are any of the adults about?"

"Yes, Bishop. Ms. Erdenberger is out, but Ms. Brownstein asked us to let her know when you got here. Her office is just above us on this staircase. She said she'd be happy to have you come up, sir, if you have a moment."

"Apparently, I do. My young cousins should be along any minute, if you'd keep an eye out and let them know where I am."

"Absolutely, sir. I remember Mr. Evans: he was a First Classman in my company when I was a Sixth Class plebe. Watson, keep an eye on things: I'm going to show the Bishop to the office and I'll be right back."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Jordan."

So far as I could tell, there was nothing about going out the door and taking two left turns to get to the staircase that the average college graduate couldn't have managed, but Jordan was obviously falling over himself to be polite to someone he thought of as part of his grandparents' generation. I did, though, assert that I could find my way up the steps without further assistance.

The program office had obviously been converted from a seminar room of some sort for its summer purpose—there were a distinctly ill-matched assortment of tables and chairs, some cardboard pigeon-hole mailboxes, a couple of copiers, four or five computers, and, off in one corner, a dorm-room size refrigerator and a table with some fruit, an assortment of biscuits, some dirty dishes and the ubiquitous electric kettle. Photos of the summer's cadets were stuck up on poster boards around the room, and most of the horizontal surfaces supported militarily tidy piles of papers. At the far end, beyond the incipient chaos, was a monumental partners' desk, bedecked with a vase of fresh flowers and an extremely trim laptop. Behind the desk sat Annandale's greatest acquisition from the FWMI merger, Andrea Brownstein. She'd started private school life as an English teacher, and still kept her hand in with senior electives on Romanticism and the Holocaust (senior electives were another new development since my day at AMA): but the Superintendent at Fort Wayne had recognized her administrative talents early on, making her a dean and then a division head. When the merger went through, she became head of the transition team, and then Academic Dean. That's ordinarily a year-round job at Annandale, but Andrea had been the first director of the FWMI Oxford program, and her one condition on taking the new appointment at AMA was that she be allowed to continue to spend her summers on New Inn Hall Street. Around the Oxford program, when people referred

fondly to The Queen, it was understood that you weren't talking about the nice lady with the corgis and the tiaras.

"Jonathan, how lovely to see you! Have a seat, if you can find one."

"Thanks, but I can only stay for a minute, and I don't want to fall asleep. Are you running the show by yourself today?"

"That would be a hoot! No, I've got Jane and the standard allotment of deans and program assistants, it's just that the ones who aren't actually off for the afternoon all went on a field trip to the stationers in Park End Street, and I imagine that storm gave them an excuse to stay there. But they have to bring back so much materiel that they'll need a cab to carry it, anyway. So how was your trip? Where are the happy couple?"

"Well, I didn't get much sleep, and my in-flight reading wasn't a very good choice, and we got caught in the storm walking over from Gloucester Green; but other than that, really, it all came off pretty well. The youngsters are theoretically getting cleaned up and changed and are supposed to meet me at the guard station downstairs. How's the summer going so far?"

"Just lovely, thank you. We got everyone in, eventually, on Saturday, though we were tearing our hair out over one or two kids who missed connections. Orientation stuff on Sunday went well, and we now have almost two full days of classes under our belts. So knock on wood, but nothing to worry about—yet, anyway."

"I'm glad to hear it. We did pass a few kids in Athletic A on our sodden way in, and they looked happy enough."

"I'm sure they did—someone must have let them out of class a good deal early. That's the problem with having professional academics or painters or whatever for faculty: they know their subjects, but they frequently don't

understand what old school people are talking about when we try to go over the details of running an educational institution.

"Say, speaking of running an institution, I hope you're still free to be our speaker on Thursday evening; I'm afraid you've already been the subject of a little publicity."

"I've been looking forward to it. Where do you want me and when?"

"I believe the series is uniformly set for 7:30, around the corner in the Union Debating Chamber. We experimented last summer with using different venues for different sized groups, but it just confused everyone. So you get the big historic room."

"Oh, wonderful! I'll try to live up to the setting. In the meantime, would you like to join us for dinner this evening?"

"Twist my arm. Were you thinking about Ma Belle?"

"Right, yes, Ma Belle: actually I was."

"Lovely. You won't want to eat too late—why don't we meet in the Lodge at 7?"

Rhys and Caroline came in about then, each carrying an umbrella, and, after we had a set of introductions all around, my new nephew drew our attention to the fact that we had skipped lunch: "I understand why we're not supposed to go to sleep until a reasonable hour, but is fasting also part of the anti-jet-lag program?"

"It might do some members of the family some good," Caroline added pointedly, though Rhys is, if anything, on the slim side. "I did notice as we were coming in, though, that there's a sandwich shop right next door."

"Yes," Andrea said, "and they're pretty good. The College also has a nice little snack shop, with lower prices, though the selection isn't as extensive. They don't stay open all afternoon, though."

"I was thinking we should check out the Covered

Market," I said. "We need to walk around a bit anyway, and if sandwiches still seem like a good idea, there are three or four more places over there."

"And the cookie store," Andrea observed.

"Ummm, yes, the cookie store. I'll see if I can remember how to get to it."

"It's in the south-eastern quadrant, closest to the High, but not the farthest entrance east: but if you get onto that side of the market, you can pretty much follow your nose."

"You know," Rhys observed plaintively, "this isn't helping matters any." Caroline nodded vigorous agreement. So we said our goodbyes, and made our way back to the Porter's Lodge. The Front Quad's buildings were, as I had said to Caroline, not actually medieval, but even the seventeenth and eighteenth century bits looked old enough by American standards, and the landscaping, now that we were at leisure to notice it, was a truly remarkable tribute to a master gardener with a large budget. There were splendid roses growing eight or ten feet up the walls; a range of something deeply, dramatically, red and spiky with dark green leaves like swords; petunia planters (I guess they were petunias, though for all I know they could have been geraniums) hanging out of windows; and a lawn in the center that could have passed for dense green velvet—on which we instinctively knew better than to walk. In the Lodge itself, Mr. McVicker, the Head Porter, stopped us to ask that we formally sign the receipt book for the keys he had hastily given us earlier; as each one did so, the rest of us had a moment to read over the bulletin boards. Several were full of the published notices of who had finished how well on the University's spring exams, but a couple had clearly been taken over by Andrea's minions. Judging from the array of "delivery for you in the office" notices on one of them, four days away from home was widely considered to warrant intercontinental dispatch of a care

package.

Caroline was surveying the next board over: "Look at this, Uncle Jon. They're having our favorite author in to speak tomorrow evening."

"Trollope is dead, dear."

"Ha, ha, ha. Sleeplessness does wonders for your sense of humor. I mean Cedric Cope, the man who wrote that fantasy novel."

I stepped over to see the poster she was reading, which included a photo of the author (modesty forbids me to mention who was pictured on the poster next to it). "Well, he *looks* like a decent fellow, doesn't he? It says here he's an Old Walsinghamian, and I understand he does actually live in Oxford, so it's reasonable enough to have him as one of the speaker series."

"The travel expenses may be reasonable, but this *is* the man who thinks he's the atheists' answer to Charles Williams."

"That's what I gathered from the part of his novel that I read last night, and I suppose I wouldn't ask him to speak in the Cathedral; but this isn't a church camp, after all."

"I know, but still, there ought to be more edifying people for them to hear from than he."

"Exquisite grammar, dear. I'm speaking on Thursday, if that's any help."

"I had noticed. Self-deprecation aside, though, Uncle Jon, at least you'll provide some balance."

"Balance in what?" Rhys asked.

"Theism, basically, my love. I can explain, but let's deal with food first."

In my admittedly sleep-deprived state, I conceived that my immediate problem was to remember a route to the Covered Market and its more or less authentic British eateries that would involve a bank ATM and the minimum number of

(on the one hand) American fast food outlets, in which I disapproved of eating, and (on the other) pubs, which typically leave me confused about how to order. St. Michael's Street, to the north of us, would take us by the Three Goats' Heads and close to the KFC on Cornmarket, while I was pretty sure that going by Queen Street, at the next major intersection south, would eventually involve passing the Cornmarket McDonald's. I settled on the third alternative, Shoe Lane, the quasi-dead end next to Caroline's sandwich shop, which would lead us to the back entrance of the Clarendon Center mall, past Barclay's Bank and the Australian-themed "Bar Oz," and so to the back entrance of the Covered Market. This worked pretty well, though it did involve a briefly distracting encounter with someone who had actually brought a spinet piano along for his busking next to the row of ATMs.

With our fresh wads of £10 notes, we made our way the remaining block or so to our destination. The combination of smells alone—everything from raw meat and fish to cut flowers and the distant hint of chocolate chip cookies—was enough to arrest one's attention, even before we actually walked into the relatively dim interior. "Well," I said, "what do you think?"

Apparently, they didn't think much: at least, their reactions rather more localized than I had anticipated. "I've never seen so much cheese in one place," Rhys murmured, looking longingly at the stall to our left, while Caroline gazed intently at an immense range of fruits and vegetables across the aisle. Amateur theatrics, I suppose: but I can tell when I'm beaten. Eschewing further tour guide gestures, I led the kids toward the center of the market and up a narrow set of stairs to one of my favorites, a tiny second floor salad and sandwich shop, decorated on every wall and ceiling with old movie posters and album covers. By that time in the

afternoon, it was nearly deserted, and the smoke which often fills the place earlier in the day had mostly cleared out. After all the drama about being on the edge of starvation, we all ordered modestly, having an eye on eventual dinner, and the waitress brought us wooden platters with thick hunks of fresh bread, salads, and quiche, plus two English 'lemonades' and a Diet Coke, the latter by no means as cold as it ought to have been, even with its three precious miniature ice cubes.

I had just started to fill Rhys in on our bulletin board conversation when Caroline interrupted: *Shh, Uncle Jon. Don't look around. Cedric Cope is sitting at that table next to the window, reading a tabloid.*

Can't fool me, I thought back, and she obligingly sent me a mental picture of what she was seeing. *Oh, well, then.*

I suppose everybody has to eat someplace, Rhys added. *And he is the one who lives here.*

Right, I replied, *fair enough. So unless Caroline's brought along the book for him to autograph, I suppose we just allow him to go on about his business.*

Thank you, Bishop, a strange 'voice' said, *I do appreciate it.*

At that, all of us *did* look in his direction. The author smiled pleasantly at us as he folded up his paper and moved toward the stairs: "You see, sometimes whispering is actually preferable. Have a lovely holiday, and I hope I'll see the three of you at my talk tomorrow." With that, he was on his way.

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"Hmm, that's likely to overshadow sightseeing for the rest of the afternoon," Caroline observed.

"Do you *think*?" Rhys said. "I had no idea someone could do that."

"Neither did I, obviously, dear. But maybe we just haven't met the right people until now."

"Met? I wonder if he was waiting for us."

"That's not very likely," I observed. "I mean, coincidence is enough to explain our running into him."

"True," Caroline said, "though if he's stopped in at the program office to discuss his talk, he could have seen your poster in the Porter's Lodge, the same way we saw his."

"Right, sir, or he could even just have seen your name on a list of other speakers or something."

"No question, Rhys, but even knowing that we were going to be in the city wouldn't tell him to dawdle over his lunch at this particular sandwich shop. For that matter, judging by the remains of his lunch, he's actually been here for a while, so unless he knew where I was headed before I did...."

"Right, agreed," he said. "So this is chance favoring the prepared mind."

"I think so, too," Caroline said. "Which just leaves us with his irritating eavesdropping."

"But is it eavesdropping?" I asked.

"How do you mean?" Rhys asked.

"Well, do we really know how 'loudly,' so to speak, we're communicating? Is there any expectation of privacy, or is it as though you're standing on a street corner and shouting? It seems to *me* as though I'm just thinking, but then again I've always suspected that it's actually you two who are actually making something happen."

"Okay," Rhys said, "assume that's true. It feels to me as though there are three settings, if I can put it that way. One is just plain 'off,' the same way I might turn off my phone; the second is just for Caroline—or, no, I guess for any one person—and the third is for the whole family at once. Is that right, Car?"

"Yes, I think so," Caroline agreed. "But now it looks as though the 'whole family' setting may actually be the 'whole world' setting."

"Well, 'whole neighborhood,' anyway," I added. "There's no evidence that our new friend has been listening in on our conversations from the other side of the globe, and we already know that you can't hear me in Indiana when I'm over here."

"That's true, too. So what we need to figure out is whether we're doing something preventable that plugs Mr. Cope in, or whether he's actually wiretapping."

"We could just ask him," Rhys offered, but Caroline grimaced: "I'd rather save that as a last resort."

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As promised, we stopped for freshly baked cookies on the way out of the Market, then braved the crowds on the High, turned up Catte Street, and saw the Radcliffe Camera, giving Rhys a chance to deliver a lecture of his own on its connection to Tolkien's Temple of Morgoth. Cutting past the Sheldonian Theatre and the Museum of Science (with more Tolkien biography comments from our staff historian), we ambled on down the Broad to see the cross in the street that marks the place where Cranmer, Latimer and Ridley were burned: I was ordained to the diaconate on their feast day. Rhys was willing to leave the Inklings' favorite pub, the Eagle and Child, for another outing, so we made the jog left down Cornmarket to St. Michael's Street, noted the location of the Goats for future reference, and used our SmartFobs to admit ourselves to the side entrance of Walsingham. About 7, we reassembled for our dinner with Andrea, and I did in fact have a lovely piece of lamb and one cautious (I was still wary of things that can intensify jet lag) golden glass of Sancerre. Andrea is a genius at drawing people out, and set up a conversation with the kids that gave each of them room to talk brilliantly about their senior theses as well as their plans for Chicago: but to tell the truth, after our meeting with Mr. Cope, everything else seemed anticlimactic.