

A COTSWOLD ORDEALS: COTSWOLD MYSTERIES 2

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Ordeals: Cotswold Mysteries 2 LIT, you might even find guide groups that are different. We're the best place to get for your publication. And now, your own time to get this specific guide since on the list of compromises has become ready. At home, after phoning her folks, Celestina made a ham sandwich. She ate a quarter of it. Then two bites of a chocolate croissant. One spoonful of butter pecan ice cream. Everything was without taste, more bland than Phimie's hospital food, and it cloyed in her throat. "If you're a dowser, better dowse," said Licky, coming up alongside him and looking sidelong into his face. "And if you're not, you'd better dowse all the same. That way you'll stay above ground longer." "To support my eyelids. And because without anything in the sockets, I look gross. People barf. Old ladies pass out. Little girls like you Pee their pants and run screaming." Recognizing the danger of saying the wrong thing, the potential for self-incrimination, Junior clenched his jaws and waited. "By law, adoption records are sealed and so closely guarded that you'd have an easier time acquiring a complete roster of the CIA's deep cover agents worldwide than finding this one baby." "And, listen, if you leave too soon behind me, I've got a guy watching, and he'll put a hollow-point thirty-eight in your ass." Beyond the window, behind veils of rain and fog, the metropolis appeared to be more enigmatic than Stonehenge, as unknowable as any city in our dreams. That every mortal semblance took, Maria Gonzalez arrived with her daughters, and while it was natural for Angel to be drawn to the company of older girls, she had no interest in anyone but Barty. She worried that her anxiety would prove contagious, that when her fear infected her boy, he would be less able to fight whatever hateful thing had taken seed in his right eye. Of the things you couldn't have seen coming, I'm the worst ... I'm the worst ... I'm the worst..... And the irony of ironies: With her talent deepening to a degree that she had never dared hope it would, with collectors responding to her vision to an extent she had never imagined possible, with her goals already exceeded, and with great vistas of possibility opening before her, she would throw it all away with some regret but with no bitterness if required to choose between art and Angel, for the child had proved to be the greater blessing. Phimie was gone, but Phimie's spirit fed and watered her sister's life, bringing forth a great abundance. Standard decks of playing cards are machine packed, always in the same order, according to suits. You can absolutely count on the fact that each deck you open will be assembled in precisely the same order as every other deck you have ever opened or ever will open. When the subject shifted to card tricks and fortune-telling, Maria admitted to practicing divination with standard playing cards. Shivering, Junior slammed the trunk lid and warily surveyed the lonely landscape. Black pines spread bristled arms through the chary night, and the moon cast down a jaundiced light that seemed to obscure more than it illuminated. Junior didn't slow as he passed the house, but circled the block and drove by the place again. Of the three Bartholomews that he'd turned up recently, he chose Prosser because, burdened by the name Enoch, Junior felt sympathy for any girl whose parents had cursed her with Zelda. Celestina looked out a kitchen window and saw Agnes in the Lampion driveway, where the three-vehicle caravan was assembled. She was loading her station wagon. When she was finished with the dishtowel, she returned to the dining room, and though dinner was underway, she called for another toast. Raising her glass, she said, "To Maria, who is more than my friend. My sister. I can't let you talk about what I've given you without telling your girls that you've given back more. You taught me that the world is as simple as sewing, that what seem to be the most terrible problems can be stitched up, repaired." She raised her glass slightly higher. "First chicken to be come with first egg inside already. God bless." On the two-chair bed beside her mother, Angel issued small cries of distress in her sleep. Whatever presences flocked around her in the dream, they weren't baby chickens. "That won't do it." With some sharp instrument, probably a knife, Cain had stabbed and gouged the red letters, working on the wall with such fury that two of the Bartholomews were barely readable anymore. The Sheetrock was marked by hundreds of scores and punctures. "I can't." When at last he spoke, real grief, quiet but profound, softened his voice: "March first, three years ago, my wife and two sons-Danny and Harry, both seven, twins-were coming home from visiting her parents in New York. Shortly after takeoff ... their plane went down." "The pepper tree had been whispering in the breeze, the roses nodding their bright heads. Now a stillness came into the cemetery, as if rising from beneath the grass, from out of that city of the lost. IMplode To burst inward under pressure. Like the hull of a submarine at too great a depth. She had put aside a half-finished pencil portrait of Phimie to develop several of Nella Lombardi. Junior put the money on the desk. "Then get into the records of Family Services." To look entirely like her name, she needed only white wings. He would give her wings: a short flight out the window, into the oak. He wondered if the hawk had descended in a constricting gyre, justice coming down, but he could not lift his head to see. In his entire life, Junior had never suffered this much pain without first having killed someone. Reluctant to depart until certain that his student was out of danger physically, emotionally, and mentally, Bob Chicane stayed until three thirty. When he left, he broke some bad news to Junior: "I can't keep you on my student list, man. I'm sorry, but you're way too intense for me. Way too intense. Everything you do. All the women you run through, this whole art thing, whatever all those phone books are about-now even meditation. Way too intense for me, too obsessive. Sorry. Have a good life, man." Although the only light on the back porch came from the pale beams that filtered out through the curtains on the kitchen windows, all these faces seemed luminous, almost preternaturally aglow, like the kiln-fired countenances of saints in a dark church, lit solely by the flames of votive candles. The rain-a music of sorts, and the jasmine and incense, and the moment sacred. She leaned against the apartment door for a long moment, holding on to the doorknob and to the thumb-turn of the second deadbolt, as though she were convinced that if she let go, she would float off the floor like a cloud-stuffed child. He didn't want to lean inside and peer over the front seat. He had no weapon. He would be unbalanced, vulnerable. He knew for a fact that Seraphim had died in childbirth. He had seen the gathering of Negroes at her funeral in the cemetery, the day of Naomi's burial. He had heard Max Bellini's message on the maniac cop's Ansaphone. A pathologically suspicious cop, aware of Junior's acute; emesis following Naomi's death, might imagine a connection between this epic bout of diarrhea and Victoria's murder, and Vanadium's disappearance. Here was an avenue of speculation that he did not want to encourage. Although Junior felt honor-bound to give Victoria first shot at him, he certainly didn't owe her monogamy. Eventually, when he had shaken off suspicion as finally as he had shaken off Naomi, he would be in the mood for a dessert buffet, romantically speaking, and one éclair would not satisfy. The word need, instead of want, moved Paul to follow the doctor across the coffee shop. Rising from the chair and approaching the bed, the detective kept turning the quarter without hesitation. "She was a very sweet girl. Very romantic. Her diary's full of rhapsodies about married life, about you. She thought you were the finest man she'd ever known and the perfect husband." NED--"CALL ME NEDDY"--Gnathic was as slim as a flute, with a flute-quantity of holes in his head from which thought could escape before the pressure of it built into an unpleasant music within I his skull. His voice was always soft and harmonious, but frequently he spoke allegro, sometimes even prestissimo, and in spite of his mellow tone, Neddy at maximum tempo was as irritating to the ear as bagpipes bleating out Bolero, if such a thing were possible..A

trickster, this detective. Full of taunts and feints and sly stratagems. Psychological-warfare artist. "Search me. But I didn't tell him different. The less he knows, the better. I can't figure his motivation, but if you were tracking this guy by his spoor, you'd want to look for the imprint of cloven hooves." In his mind's eye, Junior saw the coin in transit of the blunt fingers, moving more swiftly than previously because its passage was lubricated by blood. Although only half the stools at the counter were occupied, and none of those close to Junior, customers were seated in most of the booths. Some had their backs to him, and three were about Vanadium's size. During Junior's brief stroll, the sidewalk ended, giving way to the graveled shoulder of the road. He saw no one on foot, and no vehicles passed him. She tried to raise her right hand, but it flopped uselessly and would not respond. The tenderness with which Grace acceded to Phimie's desire, at the expense of her own peace of mind, filled Celestina with emotion. She'd always admired and loved her mother to an extent that no words-or work of art-could adequately describe, but never more than now. Commodified fantasy takes no risks: it invents nothing, but imitates and trivializes. It proceeds by depriving the old stories of their intellectual and ethical complexity, turning their action to violence, their actors to dolls, and their truth-telling to sentimental platitude. Heroes brandish their swords, lasers, wands, as mechanically as combine harvesters, reaping profits. Profoundly disturbing moral choices are sanitized, made cute, made safe. The passionately conceived ideas of the great story-tellers are copied, stereotyped, reduced to toys, molded in bright-colored plastic, advertised, sold, broken, junked, replaceable, interchangeable. With the same surprising ease that she had gotten a plane out of San Francisco on a one-hour notice, Celestina booked two return seats on an early-evening flight from Oregon, as though she had a supernatural travel agent. Celestina jammed the shaft of the crank into the casing socket. Wouldn't fit. Her hands were shaking. Steel fins on the shaft of the crank had to be lined up just-so with slots in the socket. She fumbled, fumbled. Opening his eyes, still not daring to meet Victoria's gaze, Junior knew she had registered and properly interpreted his response to her seductive spooning. She had frozen, the utensil in midair, and her breath had caught in her throat. She was thrilled. "So where he threw the quarter," Barty said, as Angel listened intently and nodded her head, "wasn't really into Gunsmoke, 'cause that's not a place, it's just a show. See, maybe he threw it into a place where I'm not blind, or into a place where he doesn't have that messed-up face, or a place where for some reason you never came here today. There's more places than anybody could ever count, even me, and I can count pretty good. That's what you feel, right-all the ways things are?" If he had cut himself intentionally for the express purpose of writing the name in blood, then the reservoir of anger was deeper still and pent up behind a formidable dam of obsession. She didn't hear gunfire this time, either, but the hard crack of splintering wood attested to the passage of at least two more bullets. To the foot of the bed slouched the third and final Hackachak: twenty-four-year-old Kaitlin, Naomi's big sister. Kaitlin was the unfortunate sister, having inherited her looks from her father and her personality equally from both parents. A peculiar coppery cast enlivened her brown eyes, and in a certain slant of light, her angry glare could flash as red as blood. Slowly rotating his raised hands before his eyes, as if he saw them young and supple-fingered, the magician described the amazing manipulations that a master card mechanic could perform. Though he spoke without flash or filigree, he made these feats of skill sound more sorcerous than hares from hats, doves from scarves, and blondes bisected by buzz saws. Junior tipped his head back and gazed up toward the section of broken-out railing along the high observation deck. For her, the suspense that grew throughout dinner didn't have much to do with whether or not Wally would pop the question, because if he didn't broach the subject this time, she intended to take the initiative. Instead, Celestina was more tense about whether or not Wally expected that a heartfelt expression of commitment should be sufficient to induce her to sleep with him. Because the upper part of the hospital bed was somewhat raised, he didn't have to lift his head from the pillow to study the corner where the phantom waited. He peered beyond the IV rack, past the foot of the bed. She thought of herself as a creative person, a capable and efficient and committed person, but she did not think of herself as a strong person. Yet she would need great strength for what lay ahead. The boy's silvery giggles rang as merrily as sleigh bells, his Christmas spirit undampened. "Not between, Mommy. Nobody could do that. I just ran where the rain wasn't." The syphilitic-monkey comparison struck Tom Vanadium as bizarre, but it turned out to be a sober judgment based on experience. In his fifties, Sparky had worked as the chief of maintenance at a medical-research laboratory, where among other projects-monkeys had been intentionally infected with syphilis and then observed over their life span. In the terminal stages, some of the primates engaged in such out? behavior that they had prepared Sparky for his eventual encounter with Enoch Cain. "That discord sets up lots of other vibrations, some of which will return to you in ways you might expect-and some in ways you could never see coming. Of the things you couldn't have seen coming, I'm the worst." "I'm no hero," Paul insisted. "I just got your mom out of there in the process of saving myself." Into her fevered mind came an image of a milk-glass infant, as translucent as Joey at the back door of the ambulance. Fearing that this vision meant her child would be stillborn, she said, My baby, but no sound escaped her. Junior needed something in his life, a missing element without which he could never be complete, something more than a heart mate, more than German or French, or karate, and for as long as he could remember, he'd been searching for this mysterious substance, this enigmatic object, this skill, this thingumajigger, this dowhacky, this flumadiddle, this force or person, this insight, but the problem was that he didn't know what he was searching for, and so often when he seemed to have found it, he hadn't found it after all, therefore he worried that if ever he did find it, then he might throw it away, because he would not realize that it was, in fact, the very jigger or gigamaree that he'd been in search of since childhood. done with it at last, he opens his mouth, lets the roses be shoved in, the bitter green taste of the juice crushed from. Copyright (c) 2001 by Ursula K. Le Guin All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. face looked familiar, and he sensed that he had seen it before in a disquieting context, although the man's identity eluded him. At Thanksgiving dinner, again at the three tables set end to end, in the year of the triple zero, Mary Lampion, now fourteen years old, made an interesting announcement over the pumpkin pie. In her travels where none but she could go, after seven fascinating years of exploring a fraction of all the infinite worlds, she said she sensed beyond doubt that, as Barty's mother had told him on her deathbed, there is one special place beyond all the ways things are, one shining place. This consequence of rape, the baby, was less baby to Celestina than cancer, a malignancy excised rather than a life delivered. She had been no more impelled to study the child than she would have been, charmed to examine the glistening gnarts and oozing convolutions of a freshly plucked tumor. Consequently, she could remember nothing of its squinched face. Shifting the Suburban out of park, Wally said, "I didn't know Baptists indulged in wagering." Footsteps in the hall drew their attention to the open door, where the surgeon appeared in his loose cotton greens. Murder itself was easy, but the aftermath was

more draining than he had anticipated. Although the ultimate liability settlement with the state was certain to leave him financially secure for life, the stress was so great that he wondered, in his darker moments, if the reward would prove to be worth the risk..Turning in Celestina's lap, Angel said, "Smell," and held the index finger of her right hand under her mother's nose..After examining Barty, Dr. Schurr sent them to the hospital for further tests. There they spent the rest of the day, except for an hour break during which they ate lunch in a burger joint..Barty stood in the rain, surrounded by the rain, pummeled by the rain, with the rain. Saturated grass squished under his sneakers. The droplets, in their millions, didn't bend-slip-twist magically around his form, didn't hiss into steam a millimeter from his skin. Yet he remained as dry as baby Moses floating on the river in a mother-made ark of bulrushes..Speaking of bosoms, everywhere in the loft were braless girls in sweaters and miniskirts, braless girls in T-shirts and miniskirts, braless girls in silk-lined rawhide vests and jeans, braless girls in tie-dyed sash tops, with bared midriffs, and calypso pants. Lots of guys moved through the crowd, too, but Junior barely noticed them..Awed, dropping to one knee before Barty, Tom fingered the sleeve of the boy's shirt..His profession was cocktail piano, though he didn't have to earn a living at it. He had inherited a fine four-story house in a good neighborhood of San Francisco and also a sufficient income from a trust fund to meet his needs if he avoided extravagance. Nevertheless, he worked five evenings a week in an elegant lounge in one of the grand old hotels on Nob Hill, playing highly refined drinking songs for tourists, businessmen from out of town, affluent gay men who stubbornly continued to believe in romance in an age that valued flash over substance, and unmarried heterosexual couples who were working up a buzz to ensure that their rigorously planned adulteries would seem glamorous..Jacob feared what men could do with clubs, knives, guns, bombs, with their bare hands, but he was most preoccupied by the unintended death that humanity brought upon itself with its devices, machines, and structures meant to improve the quality of life..Evidently, her face was knotted with the effort to remember what the child had looked like, for the physician said, "Yes? What's wrong?".From the bathroom, Junior gathered an electric razor and toiletries. He added these to the suitcases..IN GOOD DARK SUITS, clean-shaven, as polished as their shoes, carrying valises, the three arrived in Junior's hospital room even before the usual start of the working day, wise men without camels, not bearing gifts, but willing to pay a price for grief and loss. Two lawyers and a high-level political appointee, they represented the state, the county, and the insurance company in the matter of the improperly maintained railing on the observation platform at the fire tower..Thanksgiving dinner was a fine affair, and Christmas was even better. On New Year's Eve, Wally downed one drink too many and more than once offered to perform surgery on any member of the family, free of charge "right here, right now," as long as the procedure was within his area of expertise..He would have done it, too, and risked establishing a pattern that police might notice; but the still, small voice of Zedd guided him now, as so often before, and counseled calm, counseled focus..Although he had made no effort to summon them, tears spilled from Junior's closed eyes. They weren't drawn from him by thoughts of poor Naomi. These next few days-perhaps weeks-were going to be tedious, until he could have Nurse Victoria Bressler. Under the circumstances, he had good reason to feel sorry for himself..And so at the age of thirty-one, after more than twenty-eight years of blindness with a few short reprieves, Barty Lampion received the gift of sight from his ten-year-old daughter. 1996 through 2000: Day after day, the work was done in memory of Agnes Lampion, Joey Lampion, Harrison White, Seraphim White, Jacob Isaacson, Simon Magusson, Tom Vanadium, Grace White, and most recently Wally Lipscomb, in memory of all those who had given so much and, though perhaps still alive in other places, were gone from here..Lipscomb shifted his gaze from the street below to the source of the rain. "Phimie was not gone long, perhaps a minute-a minute and ten seconds at most-and when she was with us again, it was clear from her condition that the cardiac arrest was most likely secondary to a massive cerebral incident. She was disoriented, paralysis on the right side ... with the distortion of the facial muscles that you saw. Her speech was slurred at first, but then something strange happened. . .In the chilly darkness, his breath plumed visibly, frosted by moonlight. The rapidity and raggedness of his radiant exhalations would have marked him as a guilty man if witnesses had been present..The strand was inclined toward the lake. He closed the door and got out of the way as the Studebaker rolled forward, gathering speed..Then he looked up at the massive limbs overhead, and the mood changed: A sense of impending insight at once gave way to the fear that an unsuspected fissure in a huge limb might crack through at this precise moment, crushing him under a ton of wood, or that the Big One, striking now, would topple the entire oak..Happy weekend. His attitude amazed her, and his strength in the face of darkness gave her courage..Agnes returned home from a pie run with the usual team-grown to five vehicles, including paid employees-to find a gathering in the yard and Barty halfway up the oak..Dressed entirely in a shade of pink that darkened to rouge when wet, Angel squealed and deserted Barty. Spotted-streaked-splashed, with false tears on her cheeks, with a darkly glimmering crown of rain jewels in her hair, she raced up the steps as though she were a princess abandoned by her coachman, and allowed herself to be scooped into her grandmother's arms..During the past ten days, he'd proved that he was clever, bold, with exceptional inner resources. He needed to tap his deep well of strength and resolve now, more than ever. He'd been through far too much, accomplished too much, to be brought down by mere biology.. "But you don't understand." She recounted the extraordinary draw of aces during the fortune-telling session Friday evening.

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