

FORDHAM MARKET

TONY SMALLWOOD, CODENAMED HEMLOCK, sat nervously on a bench in St James's Park and watched the ducks on the lake. He was not looking forward to the rap over the knuckles he was certain to receive for his failure to locate the Mother Goose dossier.

A smartly dressed older man, Michael Rafferty, codenamed Larkspur, approached the bench and sat at the other end. Without acknowledging Smallwood, he said, 'Moscow is not happy. They are adamant that Nightshade's true identity should not become known. Sadly, they seem less worried about our own situation.'

Smallwood nodded glumly, but said nothing. It sometimes seemed to him that Nightshade was a mythological character. He certainly had no idea himself of Nightshade's true identity, which was probably for the best. Rafferty, on the other hand, rather prided himself on knowing Nightshade personally. Smallwood was not convinced, although he accepted that there was no simple way of testing the truth of Rafferty's claim.

'What's the problem, Smallwood?'

'Mother Goose's papers are guarded by a family retainer who lives on the premises.'

'Surely, you are trained to deal with these eventualities?'

‘Yes, and he has now been evicted, but it has not been easy. This is a remote corner of rural Hertfordshire which is struggling to free itself from feudal power relations.’

‘Smallwood, spare me the sociological analysis and reassure me that the next time we meet I will be able to tell Moscow that the Mother Goose dossier has been located.’

‘Yes, Rafferty. You can rely on me.’

‘The only thing that makes me half believe you is that your own name is very likely in that dossier. If it were to fall into the wrong hands, that would be the end of your brilliant career in British Intelligence, which, when you come to think of it, is a bit of an oxymoron.’

Smallwood tittered uncomfortably. ‘I am about to spend a couple of days in Fordham Market with unfettered access to Wyvern Hall. If there is a dossier there, I will find it.’

Rafferty stood up. Before walking away, he said, ‘Remote corner of Hertfordshire indeed! If you are ever unfortunate enough to get to know Siberia, you will understand what a remote corner really is.’

Tony Smallwood munched thoughtfully on his sandwich. Not the first time he was starting to regret having taken the Soviet shilling.

THE LITTLE VILLAGE OF Fordham Market lay snoozing in the late July sunshine. Fordham had been mentioned in the Domesday Book, and some said that the Warren family had been lords of the manor since that time. Now, in 1963, there remained but one scion of that noble pedigree, Richard Warren, who at the age of thirty-five had so far shown little enthusiasm for continuing the line. But worrying about who would inherit the estate on his own demise was the last thing on Richard’s mind on that particular sunny afternoon, as he sat in his Lagonda in the car park at Puttenham Junction, smoking furiously while he waited for the three-thirty train from London to get in, bearing his old Cambridge friend, Tony Smallwood.

Stubbing out his cigarette in the car’s ashtray, he folded the letter he had just been reading and stuffed it pensively into his inside

breast pocket. It was from Agatha Ponsonby. They had been close during the war years. Her parents were old friends of his mother's and Agatha had been evacuated to The Priory at the start of the war. She had been two or three years older than Richard and although things had not started well, she soon became the big sister that he had never had. Richard's parents had been only too pleased to have acquired a combination of playmate and governess for their unruly offspring. But if they thought that the scrapes that Richard was always getting himself into might be reduced by the supervision of this older and supposedly more sensible teenage girl, they were sadly disappointed. Where, before Agatha's arrival, Richard's difficulties had been as a consequence of his tendency to daydream, thereafter it was because of the devil-may-care attitude that Agatha now introduced into their adventures in and around Fordham Market. But somehow it was always Richard who was caught red-handed.

As they moved into adulthood and each went off to university and then, in Richard's case, did military service, they continued to stay in touch. Neither was particularly surprised by the direction their respective sexualities took. It had become fairly obvious when they were teenagers that though close, indeed surprisingly intimate, there had been no spark of sexual attraction between them. In more recent years as Richard's career as a country solicitor foundered, they had lost touch with each other. So, it was a surprise to get a letter from Agatha announcing that she had decided to pay him a visit and would be arriving in a fortnight's time. She apparently had a matter of importance to discuss with him, a matter that had the potential to change their lives profoundly. Richard was genuinely pleased at the prospect of seeing Agatha again, but was slightly irritated by her enigmatic tone and the timing of her visit.

Because Richard had more than enough on his mind at this juncture. The previous year, his parents, with whom he had had an uneasy relationship, had died in a car crash, leaving him The Priory, by some margin the biggest house in the village. The problem was that The Priory and its estate were severely encumbered with debt. His father had been an enthusiastic but incompetent speculator and had squandered the considerable fortune that he

had inherited on the death of his own father. Richard might live in a grand house, but he was strapped for cash.

It didn't help that he had also lost his position with the firm of solicitors by whom he had been employed as an assistant solicitor over the matter of inconsistencies in the client funds account. The matter had been hushed up, and the partners had made up the deficit but had forced Richard to resign. It was put about that he had some obscure illness, but locals didn't buy into that explanation. He was much too frequent a figure at Newmarket, local point-to-points, and at the so-called turf accountants that had sprung up with the relaxation of the gaming laws a few years earlier.

More recently, to add to the bereavements in the Warren family, Cuthbert, Richard's uncle and also a resident of Fordham, had died of a heart attack. Cuthbert was the owner of Wyvern Hall, the next biggest house in the village, and Richard was his sole heir. In the normal run of things, the property would have passed directly to him, the sale of which might have been expected to generate sufficient funds not only to fix the hole in his finances, but also to enable him to do up The Priory.

Unfortunately, Cuthbert had added a codicil to his will, witnessed by Richard's parents shortly before their deaths, allowing Cuthbert's loyal servant and general factotum, Neville Smith, known to all and sundry as Nippy, to enjoy a life interest in the property. That meant that Richard would be unable to dispose of Wyvern Hall until Nippy died. Nippy himself was not young, but these country folk had a nasty way of lingering. It would be fair to say that Richard Warren's thoughts towards Nippy were far from charitable. His first impulse on reading the will was to destroy it, but he assumed there must be a copy at Wyvern Hall, his uncle's residence and also with Loveday and Stoker, the firm of solicitors in Standon that had acted for the Warren family over many years. Fortunately, he was the executor of the will and so there was scope for him to drag his heels before he began probate.

And then a few weeks earlier, out of the blue, he had had a letter of condolence from Tony Smallwood, who had seen Cuthbert's obituary in *The Times*. The letter was followed a day or two later by a long chatty phone call. Before he knew what he was doing,

Richard had found himself inviting Smallwood to come and stay for a few days. He was a little perplexed by the rekindling of this relationship. It was true that they had been friends at Cambridge, but they hadn't seen much of each other in the intervening 15 years. The most recent occasion before the visit following Cuthbert's death had been seven or eight years previously at a college reunion. Still, one never really stopped being friends with the chaps one met at varsity. Furthermore, while Richard didn't know exactly what Smallwood's job entailed, he knew that it was quite an important post in Whitehall.

But the fact was that this second visit of Smallwood's was dashed untimely. Richard had more than enough on his mind with what to do about the inconvenience of Nippy's life interest. In addition to which, his creditors were pressing and it was getting increasingly difficult to deter them from extreme action. He kept on telling them that it was just a matter of cashflow, but they were adamant in their refusal to extend the mortgage on the estate and were now threatening foreclosure. It would be ironic if, just as he had become a property owner of consequence, he was forced to sell that same property.

It was true that their reunion a month earlier had been surprisingly successful. And Smallwood had come up with a good solution to the problem of Nippy. Smallwood had suggested that Richard simply act as if there was no amended will and instruct his solicitor to give Nippy notice to vacate Wyvern Hall, offering him instead accommodation in an estate cottage. Nippy had been outraged, it would seem, but wiser heads in the village had pointed out the benefits of the move. Nippy remained obdurate. It appeared that it was not the loss of his apartment in Wyvern Hall that he minded so much as loss of access to his perpetual motion machine in the barn to the rear of the Hall. Following approaches from a number of village worthies in this connection, Richard had grudgingly allowed Nippy access to the barn. Nippy had finally moved his things to the cottage the previous week.

Richard recognised that the solution had been Smallwood's, but now that he had adopted it there was really no need for Smallwood to be further involved. In fact, he was feeling irritated with himself for having confided in Smallwood. He realised that he had given

Smallwood a certain amount of power over him, not that he imagined Smallwood would attempt to blackmail him. He seemed much too upstanding for that. On the other hand, Richard had been a little surprised that Smallwood had not shown the smallest scruple in conniving in the suppression of an entirely valid will. It did suggest that his ethics were somewhat flexible. Richard had expressed his thanks and tried to make it clear that no further support was needed, but Smallwood had insisted and Richard had eventually given in.

They would have to take their meals at The Fox, of course, but that was not such a penance either. Indeed it was a long time since there'd been a cook at The Priory. Richard no longer even had a cleaner. Shortly after his parents died, he had dispensed with the services of Doreen Hammond, the wife of Fred, the local butcher. The house might now be covered in a film of dust, but it meant that he no longer had to find the pittance he paid her nor put up with Terri, Mrs Hammond's brat of a daughter, who seemed to think that she had the run of the place. That had been his father's fault. He had doted on the girl, especially when she was younger. Well, Richard was immune to her charms, whatever those were. It was true that she had recently turned into a young woman in that alarming way young females did. But that was not the kind of thing that Richard was interested in. His only reason for even giving her the time of day had been so that he could feast his eyes on Mike Smith, her brawny swain. Sadly she had transferred her affections to Flo Hodges' great-nephew, the previous summer, and while her new young man was not without his charms, he lacked the guardsman's physique that Richard found so compelling in Mike.

Sitting in his magnificent but rusting car, Richard brooded on how drab life was with insufficient funds. At that moment, he noticed Flo Hodges' light blue Morris Traveller putter into the car park. Flo, who lived at The Croft which abutted the Wyvern Hall estate, was another of Fordham's cast of eccentrics. It was rumoured that she and Cuthbert had been sweethearts during the war. It seemed unlikely to Richard, but they had certainly remained good friends until the day of his uncle's death. The worst thing about her was that with her brisk manner and her no-non-

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sense approach she had the ability to make Richard feel like a grubby schoolboy.

He dropped down in his seat and stubbed his cigarette out in the hope that she might not notice him, but it was pointless, really. His car was far too distinctive. The dotty old dear must be meeting someone off the train too. He checked his watch to see how much longer it was before the train arrived. Three minutes. That was a relief. He had no relish for pointless chitchat. With luck, because of her gammy leg, she would decide against passing the time of day. But Flo was not so easily deterred. She was already hobbling towards the Lagonda.

Oh, well. Best make an effort. Richard wound down the window. ‘Flo. How lovely! Meeting someone off the train?’

‘Yes. My great-nephew. You may remember him. He spent last summer with me and did rather well in the annual cricket match against Standon. Quite turned the heads of some of the village maidens, including the fiery Terri Hammond.’

‘That can’t have gone down well with Mike Smith.’

‘Probably not, but I think Mike is not short of admirers.’

Richard wondered what exactly Flo was hinting at. It seemed she was not just referring to the village youth. ‘Well, it’s very brave of you. But by the end of the summer, you’ll be quite fed up with the dreadful music these teenagers listen to now.’

‘Oh, I’m quite looking forward to being introduced to this pop music.’

‘Well, I wish you well.’

Flo thanked him. ‘And you’re meeting someone too?’

No, you silly old bat, I came here for a quiet smoke!

‘Yes, an old college friend. He fancied a weekend in our glorious countryside. He’s an amateur architectural historian and wants to know all about The Priory and the Hall.’

‘Well, you’ve plenty to show him.’

Just then, the big green diesel locomotive with its bright yellow snout hove into view. Flo bade Richard farewell and slowly made her way to the platform, while he continued to slump in the driving seat of the Lagonda, drumming his fingernails on the steering wheel. By the time Flo got to the platform, the train had creaked to a halt and three or four doors had swung open. Flo was standing

near the first-class carriage from which a brilliantined young man emerged. He raised his trilby to Flo and glanced across to the car park. A jaunty toot from the Lagonda brought forth a languid wave from him. Flo frowned. There was something familiar about the newcomer, although she couldn't quite place him. But at that moment, she caught sight of a tall, loose-limbed teenager with a rucksack on his back and a guitar case in one hand emerging from a carriage further down the platform. She waved at him and a few moments later Peter, her great-nephew, was giving her a big hug.

'My goodness me, Peter, how you've grown. You're probably fed up hearing such things from us oldies, but you really must have grown several inches in the last year.'

Peter laughed. 'Yes, Mum is starting to get worried. She says she won't be able to afford to clothe me soon.'

Flo laughed too. 'It must be the Hodges genes.'

And indeed Flo was herself an imposing figure, tall and still good looking. Peter's mother had said that Flo had been in the Wrens during the war and was a little eccentric, putting a curious kind of stress on the word *eccentric*.

They walked towards the Morris. Flo noticed that Richard had emerged from stowing his guest's luggage in the Lagonda's boot and was drawing his attention to Flo and her own guest with a nod of the head and smirk. Flo instantly understood that it was not she who was the object of their attention, a perception that was confirmed by the unpleasant chuckle this elicited from the trilbied one and the way he dug Richard in the ribs. Fortunately, Peter seemed oblivious to the reaction his arrival had provoked and put his rucksack and guitar in the back of the Morris.

Until the previous summer, Flo had not really known Peter all that well. She had seen him a few times, mostly when he was still only a tot. But she was fond of Doris, her niece, and keen to help a relation who was also a single parent. Peter's father had been killed in the Korean War. Doris had not remarried and had brought Peter up on her own. This had certainly made life harder for her and in the early years had limited her to part-time jobs. But when Peter started secondary school she had been able to take on a full-time position and was now doing well in her career. The previous year Doris had been promoted to a position that required some

overseas travel. She had been keen to accept the promotion but was reluctant to leave Peter in the flat on his own for a large part of the summer holidays and so, much to Peter's chagrin, it was agreed that he should spend the summer with his great-aunt.

Peter had resisted the arrangement, mainly because he would miss his friends over the summer, but in the event he and Flo had got on famously. He had even won over the local youth with his heroics in the annual cricket match against Standon. Somehow, although Flo had never understood the mechanics of this particular occurrence, he had also smitten the self-proclaimed princess of Fordham, Terri Hammond, who had forsaken her former boyfriend, Mike Smith. Flo supposed that London boys had a certain cachet for country girls. It had certainly involved an overall improvement in Terri's manners and appearance, even though she still displayed a tomboyish tendency.

Flo was already in the driver's seat. Peter climbed in on the passenger side, and they set off. Flo was a careful driver, keeping close to the verges, which at this point in the year were foaming with midsummer cow parsley and nettles, the unfamiliar aniseed and citric scents of which filled the car. It was all quite different from the dusty London streets and choking diesel fumes that Peter was more used to. They hadn't gone very far when Peter became aware that another car was tooting at them from behind.

As a long sleek car overtook them, Flo tut-tutted. 'Oh, that's Richard Warren. Always driving much too fast. One of these days he'll end up in a ditch. Or worse. I saw him at the station. He was also meeting someone off the London train. One of his fancy friends.'

Having passed Flo on the outskirts of the village, Richard roared up the high street, turned left at The Fox public house, then right at the ancient parish church of St Mary's, skirted the cricket ground, and eventually turned in through the impressive gates that led to The Priory. He swept down the drive and pulled up under the *porte-cochère*. A short while later, having deposited Smallwood's bag in the lobby of the house, the two men proceeded to take a quick turn around the grounds, delightful even in their current unkempt condition. Back at the house, Richard showed Smallwood to his

room, apologising for the lack of staff, which Smallwood dismissed with an airy wave of the hand.

‘Much better not to have one’s habits too closely monitored.’

Richard agreed. ‘Please make yourself at home. I’m going to have a nap. We can rendezvous on the terrace at six o’clock for an *apéritif*, then take a stroll around the Wyvern meadows to work up an appetite for supper in The Fox. I’ve booked a table for seven-thirty.’

Smallwood smiled. ‘My dear chap, you are the perfect host. And if I recall, the food at The Fox is excellent.’

‘It is,’ said Richard, exuding an unwarranted pride, as if personally responsible for the bill of fare. ‘The produce is locally sourced and the meat is from Hammond’s, the butcher’s in the high street. Fred really does know one end of a hog from the other.’

A little while later Smallwood was lying on the bed in one of the guest rooms of The Priory, reflecting on the situation. There was no doubt that Richard Warren, his old college chum, was a fathead, but Smallwood rather envied him. Even if the Warren family had contrived to squander their inheritance, Richard Warren still had a magnificent house in which to live and the informal status of lord of the manor, which brought him no special privileges other than the right to open the annual garden fête, but gave him a standing in the local community that his own qualities could not have earned. Now, with the demise of Cuthbert Warren, he had the means to restore those empty coffers by selling his uncle’s estate, and in a curious turn of events, it was Smallwood’s task to help him achieve that as a way of fulfilling the wishes of his Soviet paymasters. Of course he could not divulge to Richard the real reason for this apparent altruism. It would seem to Richard that they had the same goal, whereas in fact it was the locating of two completely different documents that they were intent upon; Smallwood to locate the Mother Goose dossier, Richard to locate his uncle’s amended will. And if the net effect of preventing Mother Goose’s ancient retainer from enjoying a life interest in Wyvern Hall were to turn Richard Warren into a wealthy man, Smallwood could hope to be recompensed in some appropriate way.

MEANWHILE FLO AND PETER were turning into the drive of a thatched cottage set in its own garden and surrounded by lawns and flower beds.

Flo switched off the engine and said, 'Welcome to The Croft again, Peter.'

'It's great to be back, Flo. The cottage looks even more lovely than I remember it,' Peter said, with evident sincerity.

The house had at some point been a lodge for Wyvern Hall, perhaps accommodation for the estate manager and his family, but this must have been in the days when the Wyvern Hall estate was a going concern. A separate freehold had been created earlier in the century for a previous owner and Flo had bought it when she had retired from the civil service a few years previously.

It was by no means spacious, but was more than adequate for a small family or a single person who had the occasional guest. To the left of the hall that led from the front door was a kitchen where Flo took most of her meals. At the rear of the kitchen was a small utility room, which contained the boiler and a washing machine. There were hooks for coats and a rack for boots, a clothes horse, a small sink unit and a broom cupboard. To the right of the front door were a further two rooms, a formal dining room overlooking the front garden and to the rear a cosy sitting room with inglenook fireplace and French windows onto the back garden.

Upstairs were three bedrooms. The small bathroom boasted the usual facilities but also a walk-in shower cubicle, decidedly exotic from Peter's point of view, but essential for Flo because her gammy leg made it difficult for her to get into and out of a bathtub. The bedroom that Peter had occupied the previous year was at the back of the house with views of a row of mighty trees at the bottom of the garden and glimpses of a large meadow between the trees. Peter dropped his rucksack and guitar in this room and went back downstairs to join Flo.

The big kitchen table was spread with a selection of sandwiches, a handsome-looking pork pie and a large chocolate cake. Flo invited Peter to sit down, poured two strong cups of tea and then took a seat herself, passing Peter a large plate of sandwiches.

After a moment or two, she said, 'Well, as you know, there have been a number of changes since you were last here.'

Peter regretted that he had not conveyed his condolences sooner. He knew how fond of Cuthbert Flo had been.

'I was so sorry to hear of Cuthbert's death.'

Flo's earlier cheerfulness evaporated. 'It's still so recent that I haven't really come to terms with the fact yet. He'd always been so fit and well. He just didn't seem to be the kind of person who would have a heart attack. It wasn't as if he'd been having chest pains or difficulty in breathing. And, of course, Nippy is very distraught, not only because he feels that he ought to have kept a closer eye on Cuthbert, but also because he's now had to move out of the Hall.'

Peter was shocked. 'Where has he gone to?'

'Oh, he's still on the estate, but Richard Warren asked him to move to one of the estate cottages. Actually, in many ways it's a better place for him to be and I hope that Richard is not being disingenuous when he says that Nippy can stay there for the rest of his life. There was some talk of Cuthbert making specific provision in his will that Nippy would have what is called a life interest in the estate, but no such will has come to light. The only will that the local solicitors have leaves everything to Richard.'

'So does that mean that we can't go to the Hall again?'

'I'm afraid that's exactly what it means. Richard is about to start sorting out Cuthbert's affairs and I don't think he will be as tolerant of the youth of Fordham using the estate as an adventure playground as Cuthbert was. What worries me, though, is what his longer term plans for Wyvern Hall might be. He can't live in two large houses in one village. And in any case, I fear that his financial situation is not particularly robust, which might prompt him to dispose of the estate. That might be for the best if a sensitive buyer could be found, especially one with enough money to restore the buildings. But we will have to wait and see.'

'But what about Nippy's machine?'

'Well, apparently he has made some kind of breakthrough recently. Don't ask me what is involved. Not having access to the barn upset him more than having to move out of the Hall. But Richard relented when he saw how upset Nippy was and said that

he could continue to have access to the barn. How long that arrangement might last is not clear at the moment. But at least it means that Nippy has calmed down a bit, even though he continues to say that the Master put something in his will that gave him the right to stay forever. So go easy with Nippy when you see him.'

'I'm hoping to see him as soon as possible.'

'Even before Miss Hammond?'

Peter blushed. 'Well, maybe not.'

Flo laughed. 'I'm surprised that she hasn't come around already. Fred says that she hasn't talked about anything other than your visit for several days.'

'Would you mind if I went over to the Hammonds' after tea?'

'Of course not, dear. I think you will find that she has changed quite a lot. Not quite the tearaway tomboy she was last summer. But then you have changed a lot too. A year is a long time at your stage in life.'

Peter wasn't quite sure what Flo meant and was a little worried. Was Terri now wearing glasses or had braces on her teeth? Flo could see the signs of consternation passing over Peter's face. 'Oh, I'm sorry, Peter. I didn't mean to worry you. I think you'll approve.'

Peter helped Flo with the washing up and then said, 'Is it okay if I go and see Terri now?'

'Of course, dear. Supper will be at eight. You're welcome to bring Terri.'

RICHARD WARREN AND TONY Smallwood were sitting at a small table on the terrace of The Priory. They were enjoying the first drink of the evening, large whiskies on the rocks for both of them.

Smallwood sat back in his chair and said with quiet satisfaction, 'Well, now that we have Mr Nippy out of Wyvern Hall, we can make a thorough search for Cuthbert's amended will, if such should exist.'

'Thank you, Smallwood, but I'm perfectly capable of doing that myself.'

‘I think you’ll find that in such cases two pairs of eyes are better than one. Anyway, I have been doing some research and it would appear that the Warren finances are in a sorry state.’

Richard was irritated. ‘Smallwood, I hardly need you to tell me that.’

Smallwood smiled patronisingly. ‘From what I saw of it, as we drove by, Wyvern Hall is indeed a charming house and small estate, ideal as a stud farm or sporting estate. And I look forward to seeing it in greater detail tomorrow. And even if it needs some work doing on it, it should enable you to extricate yourself from your current financial predicament.’

Richard sniffed. ‘Considering we haven’t seen much of each other in recent years, you seem to be rather well informed about my affairs, Smallwood.’

‘Well, as I say, I do have access to sources of information not available to everyone.’

Richard was uncomfortable that such information was available, even to a Foreign Office mandarin. ‘But probate has not yet been granted and I remain nervous that a copy of the revised will might still surface.’

‘Which is exactly why we have to assure ourselves that there is no copy in Wyvern Hall.’

‘There might be other people who have a copy of it.’

‘Who? You seem to be Cuthbert’s only family and Nippy his only servant.’

‘The old dear we saw at the railway station. She was his neighbour and they saw a lot of each other. Some say she was his former sweetheart.’

‘But if she had a copy, wouldn’t she have come forward with it? Especially since you are the executor.’

‘That’s true, but perhaps Nippy’s assertions will jog someone else’s memory.’

‘But does Nippy’s word carry weight in the locality? I mean, a man who is building a perpetual motion machine is hardly a reliable source of information.’

‘Well, it is true that he is seen as an eccentric and a loner, but there is a degree of affection for him too.’

‘Which you have recognised in housing him in a delightful estate cottage. To an impartial observer you cannot be faulted, my dear chap.’

‘No, I suppose not,’ said Richard, not entirely convinced.

‘Look at it this way. When Cuthbert made his will, he hardly supposed that both witnesses to the codicil would predecease him. No doubt in due course he might have made a new will, but the Grim Reaper caught up with him too. So at the time he amended the will, a copy at The Priory and one at Wyvern Hall would have seemed a reliable enough means of transmitting his pentimento in relation to a life interest for Mr Nippy. If he didn’t bother to send one to the family solicitor, it is unlikely he gave a copy to his neighbour, even if she was an old flame. Fortunately for you, once we have found the Wyvern copy, we will be in a position to modify his wishes to reflect what would have been his attitude once he’d been aware of the threat to you and to The Priory.’

‘Do you think so?’

‘Yes. I am pretty sure that were you to go to law over the matter, the court would accept the argument that Cuthbert had not intended Nippy to enjoy sole occupancy of the entire estate and find in your favour. But why line the lawyers’ pockets? And, after all, you have made over to Nippy accommodation that is much more suitable to his needs. If you also grant him a life interest in the Wyvern cottage, you will have honoured ninety-nine percent of Cuthbert’s wishes.’

Richard realised that Smallwood was trying to make him feel better about the suppression of the amended will, but he was unable to dismiss a certain apprehensiveness. He looked at his watch and said, ‘If we’re going to get our walk in before supper, we’d better get a move on. I’ll give you a quick *tour d’horizon* of the Wyvern estate before we broach Cuthbert’s papers tomorrow.’

Smallwood leapt to his feet. ‘Raring to go, old boy.’