

Brittle Diamonds

Pages: 324
Format: pdf, epub
Language: English

[[DOWNLOAD FULL EBOOK PDF](#)]

Brittle Diamonds

Hilary C.T. Walker

Copyright 2008 Hilary C.T. Walker

Cover Design: Hilary C.T. Walker

All Rights Reserved

WARNING: This book is not transferable. It is for your own personal use. If it is sold, shared, or given away, it is an infringement of the copyright of this work and violators will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

No portion of this book may be transmitted or reproduced in any form, or by any means, without permission in writing from the publisher, with the exception of brief excerpts used for the purposes of review.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are solely the product of the author's imagination and/or are used fictitiously, though reference may be made to actual historical events or existing locations. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Published in the United States of America.

Brittle Diamonds

Hilary C.T. Walker

This book is dedicated to Muriel (Moo) Young

<https://hilarywalkerbooks.wordpress.com>

Table of Contents

[Chapter 1: Raw Deals and Raw Heels](#)

[Chapter 2: Village Voices](#)

[Chapter 3: Father Peter Enters the Fray](#)

[Chapter 4: A Frank look at Things](#)

[Chapter 5: Of Bells and Bishops](#)

[Chapter 6: A Native Runs into Matt](#)

[Chapter 7: Matt Runs into a Native](#)

[Chapter 8: The Jaded Gems](#)

[Chapter 9: The Prime Minister and Uncle Frank Intrude](#)

[Chapter 10: Intrusion by Blair and Protrusion of Babies](#)

[Chapter 11: A Confidence Shakes Father Peter's Confidence](#)

[Chapter 12: Scratches and Explanations](#)

[Chapter 13: More Explanations](#)

[Chapter 14: Singed Lunch and Sinning Priests](#)

[Chapter 15: Father Peter Carries His Cross](#)

[Chapter 16: More than a Movie](#)

[Chapter 17: Father Peter Climbs the Scaffold](#)

[Chapter 18: Diverse Opinions](#)

[Chapter 19: Fibs and Fairy Tales](#)

[Chapter 20: Reality Check](#)

[Chapter 21: Admiring the Mess](#)

[Chapter 22: Sweet Apple Pie and Bitter Herbs](#)

[Chapter 23: A Great British Institution](#)

[Chapter 24: Colossal Courage from a Little Lady](#)

[Chapter 25: Miss Davidson Has a Past](#)

[Chapter 26: Whys and Wherefores](#)

[Chapter 27: The Crusade](#)

[Chapter 28: The Proxy Priest](#)

[Chapter 29: Discovering the Little Bird](#)

[Chapter 30: Goldworth P.D.](#)

[Chapter 31: Manure Happens](#)

[Chapter 32: Manure Strikes Again](#)

[Chapter 33: The Status Quo](#)

[Chapter 34: A Priest by Any Other Name](#)

[Chapter 35: The Letter and the Sister](#)

[Chapter 36: Fighting Words](#)

[Chapter 37: The Dark Valley](#)

[Chapter 38: God Speed](#)

[Chapter 39: The Envelopes](#)

[Chapter 40: Home at Last](#)

[Chapter 41: The Brotherton Grapevine](#)

[Chapter 42: Father Peter Serves Dessert](#)

[Chapter 43: The Final Curtain](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Discover Other Titles by Hilary Walker](#)

[Connect with Me](#)

[Free Book Offer](#)

Chapter 1: Raw Deals and Raw Heels

Friday

Matt Goldworth stormed out of Monument plc's offices that afternoon. Within an hour he had kicked a dog, been bitten by its owner, missed his train, and met a dying priest.

As usual, the mangy black poodle huddled near the office doorway like a pile of squashed crows beside his decomposing tramp. Matt had often wanted to punish the dog for looking so pathetic, and this evening he had the perfect excuse. But as his expensive shoe touched the animal's ribs, the vagrant grabbed his ankle, tearing dirty teeth into his Achilles tendon. Matt howled more loudly than the poodle.

The bum released his jaws but not Matt's leg, and yelled, "That'll larn yer, yer toffee-nosed git!"

Cursing, Matt tugged himself free and hobbled off to the London Underground, pursued by mocking guffaws. He limped onto Paddington's Main Line Station twenty minutes later, and watched his Express train push slowly towards the West Country without him.

At 6.55 p.m. a casual observer might have noticed the abrupt entrance of a tall, slightly lame man into a bistro near the station. The newcomer was in his mid-thirties, sporting an expensive suit and angry eyes, and his mood contrasted sharply with the bistro's cozy atmosphere. Along the walls subdued lights glowed over sepia photographs of steam locomotives, and cigarette smoke swirled like lethargic ghosts towards the ceiling.

Trying to hide his limp, an irate Matt strode through the room past chatty clientele laughing and relaxing in their booths on seats plundered from old trains. Working-class warthogs at the watering hole, he thought wryly. He hadn't wanted to come in, but needed to rest his sore tendon while waiting for the next train home.

The last booth was free. Self-pity seized his throat as he sank into a seat facing the rear wall to blot out the TGIF crowd toasting the end of their working week. This was the last time he'd be taking - or missing - the 6.45 p.m. from Paddington.

A stiff drink was called for.

Several irritating minutes elapsed before a figure appeared at his table and Matt barked, "I'll ha - "

But instead of the waiter, a lofty old man smiled down at him. He wore smart jeans, and a black polo collar showed under his tweed jacket. It was clear he wished to share this booth, so Matt ignored him and slowly studied the menu. A tall man himself, he knew how that game went; he'd used his height many times to intimidate others.

The intruder cleared his throat.

Matt continued reading.

An educated voice followed a second cough. "I wonder if you'd mind my joining you? There are no other seats available, and I've a long wait before my train."

The man waited for an answer, and Matt let him. "I'd really appreciate your allowing me to sit here," he persevered.

God, he was insistent! Reluctantly and without looking up, Matt nodded.

"Thank you," the fellow said without a trace of irony, as he slid into the seat opposite. Matt noticed sourly how a waitress appeared as soon as the old guy picked up the drinks list. He asked for a glass of red wine and Matt ordered a double gin and tonic.

The waitress departed and the other observed, "Strong drink."

Matt glared at him.

"That drink you ordered - pretty strong stuff."

"I need it," Matt snarled, looking round for his gin and drumming his fingers impatiently on the table.

The waitress returned. "Here we are! A glass of red wine for you, sir, and a strong g and t for you." No 'sir' for him, Matt noted as she held the bill in the air. "Who wants this, then?"

Matt snatched it: there'd be no more comments about his 'strong drink' if he paid for both of them.

But the grey-haired guy was too quick for him. "Thanks, I'll get mine. How much is the wine, my dear?" He tendered cash to the girl, leaving Matt with just his share to pay and his companion's tip to outdo. She left, pleased with her reward.

Matt attacked his drink with its plastic stirrer and took several deep draughts.

The old man was lost in thought. With the stem slipped between his fingers, he cradled the bulbous wineglass in both palms, as if awaiting a microwave-style 'ping' when his wine reached room temperature. Gradually becoming aware of Matt's sullen curiosity, he looked straight at him.

Matt was taken by surprise. Conscious of his nearly empty glass, he said acidly, "Not everyone drinks as slowly as you do, you know."

"Of course not. Each to his own, wouldn't you say?"

Matt grunted, took another long swig and caught the waitress's eye.

"Another one, sir?"

Now he was 'sir.' Matt nodded, then stared gloomily at the flotsam of lemon and ice-cubes in his glass.

"What train are you waiting for?" his companion asked.

"The 8 o'clock to Gloucester, if you must know."

"Nice part of the country. Do you live in Gloucester itself?"

Exasperated, Matt rolled his eyes. "No, I get off at Strawford. And before you ask, I live in Brotherton, a village exactly two miles by car from Strawford station and probably shorter as the crow flies, but not being a crow, I can't be sure. Does that answer everything to your satisfaction?"

"Oh, admirably thanks." The other grinned and Matt glowered at him.

Unconcerned, the man took a careful sip of his wine and was silent. But when Matt's second gin and tonic arrived, he spoke again. "Care to talk about it?"

"About what?" Matt snapped. "You a psychiatrist or something? No, I wouldn't!" He took a gulp of his new drink.

"What exactly is it you don't wish to discuss?"

Matt looked up sharply, poised to punch the old coot who was leaning back, highly amused. He registered Matt's ire, however, and raised an apologetic palm.

It was only now that Matt noticed the man's skin. It was tinged with grey, a hue he found chillingly familiar without knowing why - until, with a jolt, he remembered a close friend from many years back...

Drink and bitterness had erased what little tact he possessed. "You're dying, aren't you?" he blurted, with the sensitivity of a black widow spider who's just bitten her mate.

The man's white eyebrows shot up. He set his glass deliberately on the table between them like a barrier, and his words were laboured. "We're all dying - the whole process of life leads towards death."

"I'm not talking about all of us, dammit, I'm talking about you. I can see it in your face - you've got that cancer look - I've seen it before."

The man picked up his wineglass. "No," he said wearily, "I don't think so. I'm just tired - it's been a long day." He took a sip of wine then added with a hollow laugh, "And I'm clearly not looking my best."

Mischief made Matt ask, "Care to talk about it?"

The old man grimaced. "I suppose I deserve that." He hesitated. "If you must know, I received some bad news this afternoon. Well, good news for the other person but bad news for me."

Matt waved impatient circles in the air. "And - ?"

"And it was told me in confidence, end of story. What about your bad day?"

"Who says I had a bad day?"

"Those two gins." He pointed at Matt's half-empty second glass.

It was Matt's turn to grimace. The alcohol had eroded his reserve, like acid eating into skin. So what if I tell old ash face, anyway? Hell, I'll never see him again. What do I have to lose?

"All right, something did happen." Matt took a deep breath. "I was fired today." The harsh reality slumped him back in his seat.

His companion whistled in surprise. "Gosh, I'm sorry." He leaned forward confidentially. "If you don't mind my asking, what happened?"

Matt knew he should be confiding in Rosa, not some stranger, but couldn't face the humiliation of admitting this defeat to his wife. He'd already confessed the worst to this guy, anyway, so why not carry on?

The vibrations in his sore tendon were dwindling: he decided to skip the undignified poodle episode.

He explained how Monument's pot-bellied pig of a Managing Director was centralizing the company's accounting. Instead of each unit overseeing its own finances, (as had worked perfectly well before) those functions were now moving to a shared services center in Dublin, Ireland. Of the eight Financial Directors of Monument's divisions, only one would stay to head up the Irish center. Of course, Matt wasn't chosen: he and six others were being axed.

"So you're not alone in losing your job?"

Sod the others! "Have you ever lost your job?"

"No. I expect to have my job for life."

"How nice for you! I thought I was secure with Monument, too. Length of service means nothing, let me tell you. How would you feel if you got fired?"

The old man looked puzzled. He placed his elbows on the table and rested his chin on steepled fingers.

Matt sneered over the rim of his glass. Ha! That's worried you!

The answer came after a long pause. "I suppose if I lost my job it would be my own fault." He added hastily, "You see, my work is different from yours. I can imagine making an error of judgment through false pride. Yes," he said, almost to himself, "that could happen." He raised his voice again and spoke quickly. "How would I feel? Devastated. My whole life's work would be in vain."

"Well, what would you do?"

"I'd seek comfort and wisdom in my Bible."

"Are you serious?" Matt's voice went up a decibel. "What possible good could that do? The Bible is for weak people who can't stand on their own two feet."

"All of us are weak at various times in our lives and need the Word of God to sustain us."

Matt stared. He'd just bared his soul to this person, thinking the man was sane. It was like biting into a delicious steak which turns out to be a lump of brown earwax. "Do you really believe that rubbish?"

"It's far from rubbish, I assure you—it's seen me through many rough periods in my life."

"Tell me one thing from the Bible that's helped you."

"If you answer this: Do you believe in God?"

"As a child I did, but I grew out of all that nonsense," Matt answered defiantly.

“What a shame. For those of us for whom God is real there’s a lot of comfort to be gleaned from His Word.”

“Alright, then, what does God say about unemployment?” As far as Matt knew, God had never mentioned unemployment.

“The Lord is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.’ ”

“How’s that supposed to help?”

“Maybe God created this situation to guide you back to Him?”

In one move Matt bolted his drink. “I need to buy a book,” he said tersely and rose, leaving the religious maniac to finish his wine alone.

* * * *

Seated in an empty carriage on the last train to Strawford, and thus avoiding his irascible drinking partner who’d taken the earlier express, Father Peter Chartwell wondered about the man. They hadn’t exchanged names and maybe it was better so: for sure their paths would cross again and he hoped it would be later rather than earlier. The confiding turn of their conversation made it desirable.

That abrasive comment about dying had given him a nasty jar, for today had already hit him hard.

Chapter 2: Village Voices

Saturday

“Matt Goldworth is a city snob,” Tracy snorted, “ and we’re just country yokels to him.” The buxom redhead who ran Brotherton’s tack shop flicked a coil of hair from her face and took a sip of her white wine.

She was attending a neighborhood ‘social,’ and standing with her in their hosts’ plush living room was Catherine, a newcomer to the village. The slim blond had rented a cottage on Matt Goldworth’s property four weeks previously. Since Matt never stirred from his house except for the weekly drive to Strawford station, a group of curious residents had formed around his new tenant, who was the only person to have actually met the strange landowner.

First it had been their duty to respectfully ask Catherine what brought her to Brotherton. Upon which they discovered that she was a London accountant who’d been offered a horse for free and - here Catherine had lied a little - came to work in the country because she wanted a change from city life. Tracy’s outburst was prompted by Catherine’s gratitude to Matt Goldworth for renting the present lodgings for her and Ruby, her mare.

“What do you think of your new landlord, then?” asked an elderly white-haired lady with a laughter-wrinkled face.

“Dodo - !” exclaimed her portly husband, his eyes watering behind tortoiseshell glasses.

“Oh, Bob, don’t be such a prude. You know we’re all dying to hear about him and his wife. Isn’t that so, Lady Sarah?” She addressed an erect lady of regal bearing. “He’s such a recluse, and finally

here's Catherine living on his property and able to tell us all about him."

"Yes," said Tracy, "I bet he's a perfectly beastly landlord."

Catherine was surprised. "He's been very civil to me."

"Do you see him a lot?" Lady Sarah asked.

"No, and his wife seems pretty shy. But my horse got loose once and Mr. Goldworth helped me catch her." Here Catherine hesitated. "Well, actually, he chased her off his lawn."

Dodo said, "That I can believe. I can't imagine him ever helping you."

"He can't be that bad," Bob complained.

"I side with Dodo," said Lady Sarah. "He's not a sociable man."

Catherine felt uncomfortable. On the one hand she wished she could impress her new neighbors by reporting something of interest about her landlord, but on the other it was unethical to talk about the Goldworths behind their backs. Without them, she'd have no accommodation for herself or her new horse.

"You mustn't mind us, love," Dodo said gently. "We live for gossip round here. You'll get used to it. But the Goldworths have never come to any of Florence's socials, and she always sends them an invitation. Mark my words, that Matt will fall flat on his face one day."

Bob intervened. "Leave the poor chap alone! If a man works hard during the week, he has a right to keep to himself at weekends."

"Well, he's the only one on the Ridge who's so unneighborly. Florence works hard to keep all of us in touch."

Their hostess Florence Pendleton considered it her duty to cultivate solidarity among the residents of Brotherton. The village stretched along a wide elevation known as 'The Ridge.' Contractors regularly tried to build on the slopes towards the centuries' old estates, but Florence's socials nurtured unity among the landowners. Thanks to her efforts, the gentry repelled every attempt by the serfs to spread their nasty urban sprawl.

These soirées included only one outsider: Tracy, who rented a modest council house in Strawford. This put her on a different social standing from the villagers. But her saddlery shop in Brotherton was well patronized by them and they considered her an honorary village resident.

"Isn't it ridiculous," she now said, "that after four years in 'The Grove' Matt Goldworth has never said a word of greeting to any of us?"

"You're right," Lady Sarah agreed. "I wouldn't lift a finger for that man."

Dodo added, "Drives like a bloody Londoner, too! If he doesn't slow down in the lanes, he'll cause an accident."

Bob sighed. "Dodo, that's really uncharitable. What is Catherine going to think of you? Come on, you're more Christian than that."

"Well, if I am, it's because of Father Peter. He shames us all into behaving...well, most of the time." Her eyes twinkled at Catherine. "Have you met our parish priest yet?"

"No," said Catherine. She was tempted to add, 'why would I want to?'

Dodo patted her arm. "You'll see him tonight, I expect. He usually pops in at Florence's do's. I warn you, he's a total dish!"

Lady Sarah and Tracy laughed, but Bob took firm hold of his wife's arm. "Dodo, that's enough! You're speaking about a man of the cloth." He addressed the others. "I'm taking my wife away before she gets any more outrageous."

"Well, before you drag me off, let me ask Tracy something." Her hand fluttered to the redhead's chin and she peered into the girl's face. "Your skin is positively glowing, my dear, are you using some new cream?"

The plump woman looked coy, replying only with a smile.

"Won't give away your secret, eh? Well, whatever you're doing, it suits you."

Her husband tugged at her arm.

"Bob, I'm not being outrageous now, am I?"

Before he could answer, Florence Pendleton's strident tones carried across the room from the doorway. "Good evening, Father, I'm so glad you could make it tonight."

Dodo was unable to resist. "Tracy, make sure Catherine gets to meet him - he's a very attractive man."

"That's it, let's go!" Bob pulled her away and her rose perfume receded into the crowd.

Chapter 3: Father Peter enters the Fray

Saturday

Catherine's eyes swiveled towards the door. The man who stood there was in his early sixties and not at all her idea of handsome. His only distinguishing features were height - he measured well over six foot - an aquiline nose and a full head of white hair. His face held an appealing benevolence, but his skin was so gray! He must be severely overworked. And where were the familiar dog collar and black soutane? In their stead he wore a white shirt, unbuttoned at the neck, pressed blue jeans and a tweed jacket with leather elbows. He looked like a mature student.

Mrs. Pendleton said something to him in a lowered voice.

He laughed and stooped to speak in her ear.

Hand to her mouth, she tittered like a schoolgirl. "Father Peter!" she cried for everyone to hear.

Seeing a look pass between Tracy and Lady Sarah, Catherine raised inquiring eyebrows.

"Oh, it's nothing," Tracy said. "Just that Flo Pendleton makes such a bit deal out of having Father

Peter attend her do's. It's pretty sickening."

"She's a tad full of her own importance," said Lady Sarah.

"As in the case of the bells," added Tracy.

"Precisely," Lady Sarah crisply agreed.

"What case of the bells?" asked Catherine.

Tracy squinted up at the aristocratic lady who said, "You tell her, Tracy dear, while I mingle - I have a hard time reliving that absurd event. Goodbye, Catherine, I hope you'll be happy here." She left and Tracy began.

"It's a really stupid story, but it split the villagers. Earlier this year, when - "

"Catherine!" Out of nowhere Mrs. Pendleton's voice boomed as if she were shouting over a force 10 gale, and she grabbed her guest's arm as if to steady her from the blast of wind. "I must introduce you to our village priest. I don't think you've met him, have you?"

Overwhelmed by this attack, Catherine shook her head.

"Tracy, dear, I need to borrow your friend for a while."

Tracy laughed. "I'll go and refill our glasses, Catherine. Good luck!"

"Come," the formidable woman commanded and Catherine was propelled into the priest's tête à tête with pretty Ms. Freeman, the recently divorced postmistress.

"Alice, dear," Mrs. Pendleton said, "I hate to interrupt, but I feel it my duty to introduce new parishioners to Father. You can spare a few moments away from him, can't you?"

Alice looked annoyed but politely replied, "Of course. I'll talk to you later, Father."

The priest touched her lightly on the back. "We'll be sure to catch up with each other, my dear."

Eyes narrowed at this exchange, Florence Pendleton pushed her guest further forward and announced: "Father, this is our new neighbor, Catherine Davidson. Meet the parish priest of Brotherton. Now I'll leave you two to have a jolly chat." She sailed off.

Father Peter's clear grey eyes looked down into Catherine's. "So, are you enjoying Brotherton?"

She wasn't fooled by that bland expression. He's going to ask if I'm Catholic, and whether I go to church regularly, etc., etc., etc....She squared her shoulders, preparing to face the lion's den, and addressed his Roman nose. "So far, so good."

"Meaning 'as long as a certain clergyman doesn't pry into your religious life?'"

Catherine blushed.

She was furiously thinking up a reply when Tracy's cheerful voice chipped in. "How's it going?"

Here's your new drink." She handed Catherine a brimming glass. "Hello, Father! Made another conquest?"

Catherine stole a glance at the priest, who was grinning boyishly.

"I'm not sure I know what you mean by 'conquest'," he said.

Tracy laughed. "Oh right! Shame on you, Father, for such an untruth! This man..." She pointed an index finger at him, "has single-handedly converted Brotherton to Catholicism!"

"Come now, that isn't strictly true," he objected. His ashen face had turned pink and the healthier tint suited him. "The good Lord has given me much success, I have to say, but I can't claim to have brought the whole of Brotherton into the Catholic fold."

"Oh piffle!" Tracy exclaimed. "Name one person who hasn't fallen for that celibate charm of yours!"

"Tracy!" gasped Catherine.

Father Peter raised his hand, like a veteran policeman manning traffic at a busy intersection. "Don't be distressed, Catherine," he said theatrically, "I'm sad to say we have here a heretic who hasn't been converted - " he winked at Tracy " - yet."

Tracy made a face and retorted, "Catherine may not be Catholic, either."

"Oh, she's Catholic all right."

The young women exchanged glances and Tracy asked, "What makes you so sure?"

The priest rested a hand on Catherine's shoulder. "The secret's in the guilt, Tracy. Your friend here looked very guilty when we were first introduced. A non-Catholic would have exhibited casual interest in a Catholic clergyman, or perhaps disdain. Catherine here," he lightly squeezed his fingers, "looked worried, like someone with a bad conscience. She was waiting - " he smiled " - and is still waiting for me to cross-examine her on her practice of the faith." He peered down into Catherine's eyes. "Am I right?"

She nodded numbly. Tracy gave a loud, "Wow!"

Catherine was beginning to appreciate the man's influence. She'd entered this conversation with defiance, but the priest's perspicacity was humbling.

Father Peter released his hold on her. "How old are you?" he asked.

"Twenty-eight."

"I know how hard it is these days to be a good Christian."

The simple statement struck a chord and Catherine looked away: this man understood.

Florence Pendleton's voice loomed nearer, and soon that stalwart lady was drawing a proprietary arm through her religious visitor's, patting it familiarly. "How's the conversion of our new neighbor coming along, Father?"

"No need, Florence. She's one of us."

"Oh? That's strange, I haven't seen you in church, Catherine. Mind you, Father does say a lot of Masses on the weekend - I must have missed you."

"I expect that's the reason," Father Peter quickly interjected. "Now, let's leave these girls to discuss secular matters, shall we?" He looked at Catherine. "See you again - " he stopped. He'd been going to say 'in church', Catherine was sure of it. He looked distinctly sly as Florence Pendleton bore him away to convert any lurking heretics.

Once they were out of earshot, Tracy said, "He's quite something, isn't he?"

Catherine nodded.

"Wasn't he clever to know you're Catholic?"

"Embarrassingly. And speaking of embarrassment, are you always so flirtatious with priests?"

"Only him. I can't help it, he somehow has that effect on me."

"He is very personable, isn't he?"

"Yes." Tracy hesitated a moment. "But sometimes I worry there might be another side to him."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, I don't know, it's just my uncle's been saying weird things."

"Like what?" Catherine asked.

"Rubbish, really. Uncle Frank doesn't like Father Peter—I think he's jealous of him."

"Why?"

"Seems Uncle Frank wanted to be a priest, but for some reason was never ordained. He won't explain. Just keeps saying 'Father Peter's comeuppance is coming up' and 'he ruined the priesthood for me and others,' stupid stuff like that."

"It's hard to imagine Father Peter ruining anything for anyone."

"I know. If you ask me, Uncle Frank's soft in the head. He's always blamed other people for what's gone wrong in his life and I don't usually pay much attention to what he says." She shrugged her shoulders and tilted her head to one side. "Anyway, I shouldn't have brought it up when you've only just met Father. I think he's terrific and he's done a lot of good round here."

"Then your uncle's ramblings can't do any damage, can they?"

Tracy smiled. "You're right. No one'd be daft enough to take him seriously."

"Good, stop worrying then. Now tell me that story about the bells."

Chapter 4: A Frank Look at Things

Palm Sunday

Frank Nonnock sat in the small lounge of his council house on Strawford's Featheridge Estate.

Two photographs stood on the cluttered mantelpiece. In one a young and handsome Francis was dressed as an altar boy in full garb for High Mass. He was posing with a priest, whose paternal arm draped round the shoulders of the proudly smiling teenager. The second photo depicted him as an older boy, around fifteen or sixteen, standing, with a shy smile, against the background of a building with a tall cross on it, perhaps a church or religious school. His mother - the resemblance was clear - stood behind him, beaming.

Here he sat, many years later, full beer can in one hand and television remote in the other. A couple of empties lay beside him on the floor, squashed in the middle, a sign that he still had muscles. The T.V. was old and the picture wasn't very clear, but Frank was used to that. Anyway, he was about to come into a lot of money. He'd be able to get out of this dump and afford the latest technology - and a few other things besides. He grinned, revealing teeth which had not seen a dentist for many years.

Frank's attention was not on the Monty Python rerun, though there were some good moments which made him laugh. And he felt like laughing a lot more these days than he had for a long time.

Oh, yes. There was good reason to laugh now. He'd finally nailed that bastard of a priest, that pompous holier-than-thou ass up in Brotherton.

Of course, while Letitia was alive he wouldn't have dared try anything.

He sort of missed his wife, but then he sort of didn't. She was a great cook and kept the house clean. But could she ever go on about him needing to get a decent job! His income was perfectly adequate, thank you. What with her regular earnings as a nurse at Strawford Maternity Hospital and his as an odd-job man, they did very well, all things considered. Of course, it meant he never had time to fix anything round the house, and she did get onto him about that, a lot. In fact, one of the good things about her being gone was that he could do things in his own time and not have some old nag getting on his case saying 'exactly when did you think you'd get round to mending the broken window upstairs?' and 'how safe do you think this house is with a broken front door lock?'

And it wasn't his fault he couldn't get work all the time. It wasn't like her situation, where she had a regular employer, like. You could rely on people having babies, that was the nature of things. But not everyone was going to break something and need an odd-job man. It wasn't his fault that that was his profession now. That was just the way things were, thanks to that S.O.B. in Brotherton.

Frank had known that was the way to get easy money. Once in a while he would test his idea out on Letitia, but she would tell him he didn't know what he was talking about and that it was dangerous for him to go around suggesting what he was thinking. She used to tell him off good and proper, more times than one. But he knew all she cared about was that stig-thingy - the posh name for being ashamed of her marriage to damaged goods - that's why she wouldn't let him tell the truth. She didn't want people to know she'd been having sex all these years with a bloke who'd been sodomized by a priest.

Only when she died did he see his chance. Of course, being dead she couldn't bring in the money, could she? She'd had no life insurance, neither of them did, they couldn't afford the premiums - so there was no gain by her death, either. He had to think of some other way to increase his earnings.

Especially since his back was hurting him and he didn't feel up to the rigorous work demanded of an odd-job man these days. And him only forty-five, too.

He'd tried over and over to explain to Letitia that he wasn't meant for the secular world. God had meant for him to be a priest. He had an inner calling, something ordinary mortals couldn't understand.

Letitia had always given that loud guffaw which got her those looks in the pub when he told her this. She'd said he wasn't cut out for the priesthood, and that had hurt, really hurt, not being understood by his own wife.

But she knew he'd been in a seminary. And boys didn't go in a seminary if they weren't interested in becoming priests, did they? Why else did she think he went there, then? Silly old cow, what did she know, anyway? No, now that she'd gone - though that heart attack of hers was a bit sudden like and it had taken him a while to get over it - he was free to do what he knew he should have done all along.

It was people like Father Peter who ruined their victims' lives. Of course, the ugly things the priest did to the teenage boys in the seminary were all done under the guise of 'God's will'. He picked on vulnerable boys who'd bought the Catholic faith wholesale and believed that priests were right in everything they did. Then afterwards those boys spent years trying to accept what had happened to them and wanting to forget because they couldn't make sense of it.

When he went into that seminary as an innocent boy of seventeen, he thought the place would be his salvation. He knew he had a few problems to sort out, and knew, too, that God would resolve them for him if he absolved himself by going into the priesthood. But Father Peter ruined all that. He tainted the faith for him, and Frank had to leave.

Frank had carried the trauma ever since of his disappointment at not being saved in that seminary. Father Peter had stopped Frank from shooting into his life's goal, pardon the football expression and Frank had been searching all these years for something to save him. But nothing else would. He turned to odd jobs as a means to support himself. It earned a pittance but at least he had a livelihood. Luckily for him he'd met Letitia, who had a really decent job. In a way she was his worldly salvation.

No, whichever way you looked at it, Frank was supposed to have become a priest. And watching Father Peter get more and more popular had been very galling to him. After leaving St. Francis of Assisi seminary in Wales, chosen because it bore his name, Francis, he became 'Frank' and took on a series of jobs. Long-distance lorry driver, roofer, fork-lift truck driver - none of them satisfied him. He married, but his first wife had no patience with his restlessness and constant job-changing. She didn't understand that it was all due to having missed his vocation. The marriage lasted three years. A bachelor again for many years, at the age of forty-one he moved to Strawford, where his niece lived. Tracy was family, and she'd put him up for a while.

He met Letitia here, in Strawford. A good-looking widow, she'd come with her brother to the dance at the workman's club, and her brother worked with Tracy in the local supermarket, before she got ideas above her station and started that snooty tack shop in Brotherton. He was sweet on Letitia the moment he saw her. She had a masculine feel about her that he found appealing: she was a strong woman, there was no doubt about that. He knew he wasn't her idea of a good catch, but he told good jokes which made her laugh, and when, a few months later, he proposed, she said 'well, I suppose you'll do.' She had this council house in Featheridge and it meant he could move out of Tracy's without having to put a penny into a new place. It worked out beautifully.

Then another brilliant thing happened. Well, it didn't seem brilliant at the time. Father Peter came to the parish of Brotherton, doing his 'goodwill to all men act', and conning the area's rich and famous into giving up their money so he could build a ladida medieval copy of the Strawford Abbey church. Then, what do you know, his congregation gets huge and he's being touted as the next Bishop to replace Mullard! He's got celebrity status in Gloucestershire. He's asked to speak on local and national radio, and make television appearances. His sermons get taped and sold. The money's pouring in.

And all the time Frank waited. Frank, who'd had to leave the seminary, who had a lousy job instead of following his glorious calling, who lived in a leaky-roofed council house in the bad end of town, while Father Peter was living the high life on the snooty Ridge.

Frank could have been that man whose sermons everyone wanted to hear. He could have built a massive new church and filled it with people who hung on his every word.

But, no. Instead he was expected to live not five miles away in total obscurity and tolerate the man who was to blame for his poverty and misery, enjoying the fruits of his misbehavior.

It made him boil. And then, when the poor buggers who'd been abused by Catholic priests were finally being heard, Frank told his wife that it was time to speak up. And look at the sums of money those victims were being awarded. He couldn't go wrong!

Frank had always had a problem with his sperm count. Although his lovely wife told him he was talking nonsense, Frank knew it had something to do with the atrocities permeated on him as a teenager by that evil man. She said the real reason was that God knew Frank would make a perfectly awful father, and the word he meant was 'perpetrated'. But that was just like a woman, wasn't it, to think she knew better?

When Letitia died, Frank decided to go to a psycho-wotsit. At last, he found someone who understood him. It cost him a fair penny, and he had to do a good few jobs to scrape the cash together, but it was worth it. The man wrote a whole report on how he'd managed to uncover the despicable acts done to his client as a teenager.

The golden moment came when he visited Bishop Mullard armed with that report. What absolute bliss it was to squeal on precious Father Peter! And be able to demand that he do something immediately. Bishop Mullard's fat face was a treat: he went all purple.

But when Frank tried to warn the villagers in the pub last Sunday about their darling priest, do you think they listened to him? Oh, no. Frank was like the prophet in his own country, not believed and accepted by his own people.

Well, they'd soon see.

Chapter 5: Of Bells and Bishops

Palm Sunday

Joyful as dolphins cavorting in sun sparkled seas, the three bells Agnes, Lucy and Bernadette called the faithful to Palm Sunday Mass at St. John's Church.

Affectionately nicknamed "The ALB" by Brotherton villagers, the trio of bells had been donated and christened that spring by the Ridge's foremost Catholics - the Oldings, the Pendletons, and Lord and Lady Willesley. But prolonged bickering broke out between Florence and Lady Sarah,

each wanting to fund the largest one. Florence's stronger will and louder voice had carried the day and she called the bell 'Agnes' to spite her rival, who had declared an intense dislike for that name.

In a fit of pique, Lady Sarah announced she would now pay only for the smallest bell, and give it the longest name.

But Bob and Dodo, having originally budgeted for that little one (now known as Bernadette) were forced to sell family silver to scrape together enough cash for the middle-sized bell. The couple named it Lucy, after their Great Dane. The huge pet had narrowly survived a heart attack (to which that breed is prone) brought on by the most heated phase of The Great Bell Debate, which raged long and loudly and often at the Oldings' house.

Upon later learning of the Oldings' emergency sale, a chagrined Lady Sarah had located the family heirlooms and restored them to their grateful owners.

And today, having rung out the gathering song to the congregation throughout Lent, the tuneful trinity of bells heralded the Sunday before Easter.

Father Peter smiled to himself in the vestry as he listened to the merry notes. He recalled the bitter vying over the bells, about which he was supposed to know nothing, and thanked God the divisiveness was over. It had taken a long time for the warring parties in Willesley v. Pendleton to resume normal relations, although he knew bad feelings still rankled between both parishioners.

The parishioners...

He felt a twinge of pity for his aging predecessor. Father Tom had presided over a mere handful of octogenarians but how that had changed! Bishop Mullard, alarmed by the dwindling number of Catholics in his diocese, had taken Drastic Steps.

A furious Father Tom was removed as Brotherton's parish priest 'on grounds of failing health' and sent into resentful retirement.

Mrs. Honeywell, the priests' aged housekeeper, had shaken her head. She informed Dodo Olding that "Father Tom were real sore about being taken away from 'is people so's a younger, 'andsomer cleric could take over."

The two ladies were supposedly discussing church flower arrangements over a cup of tea at Dodo's house, but Mrs. Honeywell was never able to stray far from her favorite topic of Father Tom. "'E kept Judas in the 'ouse for two days wivout letting 'im out or giving 'im a litter box. Yer know, the fat tabby Father Tom's 'ad all these years. Well, yer can imagine how smelly the 'ouse were after that!"

Sipping her Earl Grey, Dodo had mused on how clever Father Tom was. He had delegated to his cat the task of creating the stink which he himself would have liked to raise publicly over his disgraceful ousting. Dodo had immediately relayed the housekeeper's information to the new priest.

And so, ten years previously, Father Peter's reign had begun. After fumigating the house, he and Cerberus, his large black dog of indeterminate breed, had settled in.

The new priest likened himself to St. John the Baptist going into the wilderness to gather the

dispersed flock. While experiencing appropriate guilt over Father Tom, he told himself this had been a necessary change of administration.

Donning Lenten purple, he now stood in the vestry doorway admiring the stream of worshipers into his church. All those years of courtship had paid off. Bishop Mullard was pleased with his protégé: these results reflected well on priest and superior alike. Who knew what Father Peter's next appointment might be?

But a sense of foreboding had been plaguing him. When and where it started, he couldn't say, nor why it should erode his confidence now, when his popularity was riding so high. The bad news he'd received on Friday only exacerbated it. And that statement by the angry chap in the bistro about him dying didn't help either.

God is on my side, he firmly told himself, He will take care of me.

He caught the reassuring smile of his tall deacon, James Giaour, who stood close by. The man's face, weather-beaten from his secular job as a carpenter, clearly said, Let the show begin!

The priest patted James's shoulder. They were joined by a shorter parishioner holding a large, purple clad cross, who headed the procession of three as it moved slowly up the aisle from the back of the church.

The choir and palm-waving congregation lustily sang the entrance hymn.

* * * *

During Father Tom's day those few who had shown up on Sunday would scuttle home as soon as their duty was done, like deer escaping gunshots.

Now a tradition flourished under Father Peter of gathering after Mass for coffee and biscuits in the parish hall.

Today the priest heard a buzz of chat long before he entered the little building adjacent to the Church. On arrival he noticed two distinct groups of the faithful. He sighed. When would the Brotherton and Strawford residents socialize with each other in proper Christian fashion?

Lady Sarah Willesley touched his sleeve. In one hand two brimming cups and saucers wobbled precariously on top of each other, like a couple of upturned turtles. "I brought you some coffee, Father," she said. "I'm afraid there were no more biscuits."

Father Peter carefully removed the upper cup. "Most kind of you, Lady Sarah. Don't worry about the biscuits, they're not good for my waistline."

"I enjoyed today's sermon, Father. Wonderful!"

Her words were barely out when Florence Pendleton's strident voice proclaimed, "Father, your sermon today was absolutely brilliant!"

"Thank you. Lady Sarah was graciously saying the same."

"Was she?" Florence looked venomously at Lady Sarah as if she had just caught the aristocrat cheating in the village egg-and-spoon race. With swift revenge she whisked the custard cream off her own saucer and placed it deftly on their pastor's. "I saved you a biscuit," she lied triumphantly.

"It'll go well with the coffee Lady Sarah brought me. You're both very kind. Ah! there's Farmer Jeffrey - I must ask him about his weather predictions for the Easter weekend. If you'll excuse me, ladies." He bowed his head and glibly extricated himself as if from two inflating puff adders.

* * * *

With Father Peter gone, both rivals experienced an awkward silence.

They were still staring at their coffee when Dodo joined them with a cheery "Hello, you two!" before lowering her voice. "I say, has either of you noticed that Matt Goldsworth's been around an awful lot?"

"What do you mean?" Lady Sarah was intrigued.

"You know, he wasn't in London all week as usual. He just stayed at home."

The Oldings' property was across the lane from the Goldworth residence, known as 'The Grove.'

"Now you mention it, his three cars have been parked in his drive all week," said Lady Sarah.

Florence chimed in with "I noticed that, too."

"What do you think it means?" Dodo asked. "Is he on holiday?" She looked first at one woman then the other.

Lady Sarah took a thoughtful sip of coffee. "You know, he might be on forced leave."

Florence looked up sharply. Once again, her neighbor was coming up with ideas before she did. "What do you mean, forced?"

Dodo gasped. "You're saying he's been laid off?"

"Who's bearing the brunt of your evil tongues today, then?" Her husband came up and grinned at the three women. They looked a trifle guilty.

Florence whispered dramatically into Bob's ear, "We've noticed Matt Goldsworth has been at home a lot and we're trying to work out why."

"And exactly how long is 'a lot' supposed to be?" He directed this challenge at his wife.

"At least a week," she replied.

"How can you possibly call a week 'a lot'?" Bob retorted. "The man's probably taking a well-earned holiday."

Dodo said weakly, "Well, I did think maybe he was."

Florence frowned at her. "Oh come on! April's a ridiculous time to take a holiday! Although I suppose his son is back from boarding school," she reflected. "But surely he'd want to be off during Easter, which would mean taking two weeks off. That's a lot of time for someone who's

supposedly 'needed so badly' in the City!"

"Beats me how you ladies know so much about him," Bob said. "Do you take turns spying on his house?"

Dodo felt compelled to defend her friends. "You know, his cars are very plain to see in that open garage of his."

"How can you see them all the way down his drive? You must have incredible eyesight!"

"You can see them, Bob," Dodo insisted. "Those cars are prominently displayed."

Her husband sighed. "Well, his wife has a car, doesn't she? Maybe his aren't working and he's using hers?"

The three women looked at him scathingly and Florence spoke first. "Her car hasn't moved either. Something's up with both of them, I'm telling you."

Bob grimaced. "All right, all right. The man's lost his job and 'The Grove' will be on the market any day now. Happy? Now, ladies, let's move onto a more appropriate subject. What did you think of Father Peter's sermon this morning, eh?" *

Father Peter is the beloved parish priest of Brotherton village.

But when allegations of misconduct mysteriously surface against him, his parishioners are thrown into turmoil. What should they believe?

Father Peter's own faith starts to crumble when a close priest friend commits suicide. Then bizarre circumstances throw him together with Matt Goldworth, a non-believer.

Matt finds himself helping a clergyman of the very Church he despises, and discovering a solution to the mystery no one could have foreseen.

Hs Mods - We show that these wax suspensions are soft brittle solids exhibiting a specific.. Yield stress before (filled diamonds) and after (open diamonds) collapse. (PDF) The current understanding on the diamond machining - Read chapter 3 Characterization Techniques Relevant to Superhard Materials: Recent discoveries enabling the growth of crystalline diamond by chemical vapo. What does 025 mean on a gold ring - Kashata Book An Appointment - Booking - Diamond Hair Company - springerprofessional.de Something Out of Nothing - ... encompassing a wide range of die errors caused by brittle failure.. GDS352 Natural Pendant Arrowhead Diamond Pave Charm Charm.. Official Red Book Online - Coin Price Guide Mecco Training -

Seo - Quality Gem Diamonds and Jewelry Arthur Diamond on Openness to Creative Destruction - Econlib - 30 words related to playing card: crib, ace, card, club, two, deuce, diamond, draw, face.. Vietnam ace of spades card on brittle cardboard stock - posted in for the Ace of Swords, be sure to check out my Love Tarot Meanings e-book. Cracklin' Ginger by Hilary Walker - Book - Read Online - Scribd - How to Select Stock Diamond & cBN Wheels 13. Starting... book and a dressing stick. It can be rebuilt.. Fragile (Heat and Impact). Upper mantle - A sharp hit with a hammercleaves' the diamond into smaller pieces: as diamonds are both incredibly hard and very brittle, they tend to split quite cleanly. Brittle Diamonds eBook by Hilary Walker - 9781386758501 - Nick Malgieri calls this Cubbbaita di Giugulena or Sicilian Sesame Brittle in his book, Great Italian Deserts. He says this recipe is true to its Arab origins. Wylde Search - Nicholas Wylde - A sharp hit with a hammercleaves' the diamond into smaller pieces: as diamonds are both incredibly hard and very brittle, they tend to split quite cleanly.

Relevant Books

[[DOWNLOAD](#)] - Download ebook The Greatest is love: Love is the Kingdom culture of heaven free pdf online

[[DOWNLOAD](#)] - Believers Foundations Training Manual epub online

[[DOWNLOAD](#)] - Book Studying Sinkholes (Explorer Library: Science Explorer) free pdf

[[DOWNLOAD](#)] - Pdf, Epub Comment former un nom chiot chien sauvage Manley : Si tous les hommes sont des chiens, qui est le meilleur entraÃneur de pour enseigner ces chiots ces rusÃs, des astuces de chien intelligent? free

[[DOWNLOAD](#)] - View Book Fire Nectar Vampires: The Choice pdf
