

KAY

The party of young people were laughing and joking as they spilled out of the old minibus in a quiet, side road of the old, country town. They had come to see a very fine and beautiful old church built in the sixteenth century.

When they entered they found it cool and peaceful. They wandered around in twos and threes reading the inscriptions on the floor and walls. There were hand carved pews and altar rail, hand embroidered hassocks, and the most exquisite hangings. A well maintained, be-flowered, and very much loved place of worship for all that lived in the town. As the young people wandered around talking softly, a verger came in through a side door, nodding his head towards them in greeting. As he came nearer he seemed to notice one young woman standing with two friends a little apart from the others.

"Would you care to be shown around?" he asked.

Kay, Leslie, and James agreed to a guided tour of the church, while the others decided to go back into town to make arrangements for a meal before setting off to see other churches. They walked up one aisle and down another. They read all the brass plates on the walls, with the verger explaining who each person was and his connection with the town. These plates were put up in honour of people who had helped the church and the town in various ways. There was a list of rectors who had served the church dating from 1500 to 1967. One very prominent name on the list was that of "Vincent".

"James Vincent, Rector of this Parish 1500-1537"

"Pemberton Vincent, Rector of the Parish 1540-1580"

"Hubert Vincent, Rector of this Parish 1580-1610"

There were five more Vincents between 1640 and 1957. To Kay the name of Hubert Vincent had a vaguely familiar ring to it, a rather disturbing ring that she could not account for at all.

"Hubert Vincent?" she said in a slow voice. "Isn't there a marble effigy of him on the other side of the church?"

"Yes," said the verger, "it is over here", and showed her to the corner of the church where there were three such effigies in grey marble lying down side by side. He explained to Kay who they represented.

"This is a likeness of Hubert Vincent who was Rector here from 1630-1650. He was the youngest of all the Rectors we have had in the town. He was thirty when he first became Rector and sixty-five when he retired. He married a local girl, one Catharine Harbottle. It was an arranged marriage. As she was a lively, fun loving girl, her father, a staunch churchman decided that this tall, handsome, if rather narrow minded, young man would keep her in check."

Kay looked at the cold, grey stone face with its curling hair and short, curling beard. Although the face seemed stern, the mouth with its full lips held a mocking smile. The left hand was resting over the right hand half concealing it. Something made her touch lightly the fingers of the strong looking left hand on which was a ring, a strange ring like a cat's head, but when she tried to take her hand away, a slight magnetic force was keeping it there. The hand felt warm and pliable to the touch. Feeling startled, she turned to the verger and came face to face with a strange, yet familiar, young man who was standing so close to her that her long, fair hair brushed his face as she moved her head.

She quickly apologised.

"I thought you were the verger." she said, "He was here a moment ago."

"I think he had other duties to perform." said the young man. "Some times I take over

from him. If you like I will finish the guided tour for him."

"Thank you. I should like to see more of the church. I would also like to know more of this Hubert Vincent."

So saying, she made as if to turn around once more to look at the grey effigy of Hubert Vincent. The young man caught her arm and pulled her away, but not before she had time to catch a quick glimpse of it. The clear cut chiselled lines of the carving had collapsed slightly as if air were slowly escaping from a pricked balloon. She shook her head. She thought it must be the heat, and turned to face the young man who was still holding her arm in his rather cool hand. She saw a tall young man with fair curling hair, and a short fair beard.

"Come, I'll show you round and explain things. What would like to see first?"

"Do you know the town very well?"

He told Kay that he had lived in the town all his life. Indeed, his ancestors had lived in the town for generations and had practically built it. He led Kay round the church, explaining in detail the reasons why the various plaques were on the walls. Some were in memory of past dignitaries and some in memory of departed persons. He took her into the vestry, where she looked around her in wonderment.

"It all looks so familiar to me and yet I have never been here before..."

"It will come back to you eventually." said the young man. "Come, I will show you a very old marriage register and some of the names may help you to remember more clearly."

Kay went with him. She had completely forgotten her two companions, Leslie and James. They saw her go, looked at one another, and shrugged their shoulders. As they walked out of the church, they called back to her.

"We will come back in an hour, see you about three o'clock."

Kay saw them go, then turned to the young man beside her who guided her to the vestry. As she stood in the vestry with her back to the door, she saw shadowy figures all around her. She walked to the table with the young man at her side. The shadowy figures were noiselessly speaking. She could not hear what they were saying, but sensed the words they were using. They were asking her questions, but she was unsure of the answers. Something she said made them throw up their hands in horror. They spoke to the young man. They were bowing and smiling at the answers he gave them. They called him "Your Honour". He wrote something down in a big book that was on the table.

That done, they turned and slowly walked out of the church. The young man took Kay's right hand and placed his left hand over it. He pressed it rather tightly so that she felt his ring cut into her hand.

"I thought you were going to pass out when we were in the church just now." he said.

Kay snatched her hand away and saw that it was bleeding a little and that a small drop of blood had fallen onto the cuff of his shirt, spreading out to the size of a penny.

"Oh, dear! I am sorry." she said.

"Don't worry about it. It will be something to remember you by. Shall we have coffee somewhere?"

"Why don't you join us?" said Kay, "We are meeting at the Ten Leaguer Inn in South street."

"Oh, please have it with me!" begged the young man. "We may not meet again for such a long time to come. I know a lovely place to go top. It has a corner seat by a window where we can watch the world go by. I always go there."

"Then the people must know you quite well." laughed Kay.

"They don't notice me." he replied. "This is the oldest shop in the town. It was built on the ruins of old barn that was here in 1266. You see, I am quite knowledgable on local history. I can tell you anything you may want to know about the town from the 1500's to the present day."

"Why are you so interested in this particular town?"

"My ancestors owned most of the land around here for centuries. It's only during the last hundred years that they have been selling."

"What is your name?" asked Kay. "You don't know mine, and I don't know yours."

"But, I do know your name.... It is Kay. I heard your friends address you as Kay when you first came into the church."

"And yours...?"

The young man hesitated for a moment, and his face clouded over.

"My name is Vincent, Hubert Vincent."

"Oh, are you one of THE Vincents. One of the many whose names we see all over the town?"

"I am." he said, and offered no further explanation.

Kay smiled at his somewhat saddened face.

"Take me to your old shop and let us sit in the corner to watch the world go by. It sounds fun."

They left the church, closing the door quietly behind them. Taking Kay by her arm he led her through a series of narrow passage enclosed by rough and worn old brick walls that had moss and lichen growing on them. In a few minutes they came out into a side street brilliant with sunshine. On the first corner was a shop so small that it would seem almost impossible to find which appeared to be able to hold no more than two tables. However, once inside, Kay was amazed to find it held a half dozen tables going the length of the room. At the farther end of the room was a large picture window leading onto a patio gay with flowers. Hubert led her to a small window that faced the front of the shop. As they sat down a waitress came slowly towards them.

"Do you know, I don't feel very hungry. I suppose it must be the excitement of meeting you." said Hubert. Kay laughed.

"It is the same with me. Shall we just have coffee?"

As the waitress came to the table to take their order, Hubert leaned over the table and said in a low voice,

"Will you order the coffee, Kay?"

She looked at him in surprise, but ordered the coffee. She saw that his eyes were far away and dreamy as they stared out of the window at the people passing by. She thought she saw his eyes fill with tears for a moment. Seeing her look at him, he hastily blinked and gave a long sigh.

"Oh, Kay!, it has been such a long time waiting for you to come. There is so much I want to say. All sorts of "do you remember's?" Do you remember the day when my horse lost a shoe and I fell off his back? And the day you gave me this ring to wear while you were away? It has never left my hand in all this time, but you never came back."

Kay looked at him with her cup of coffee half way to her lips.

"You are mixing me up with someone else, someone who looks like me.

I have certainly never been horse riding with you, or given you a ring."

It was his turn to look surprised.

"Kay! Take my hand, look at me, then tell me that you honestly remember nothing at all of the past!"

He held her left hand in his left hand, and smiled at her with raised eyebrows. She drained her cup and put it down. Her hand began to feel a warm glow which became a tingling sensation her hand.

"I seem to remember something, but I don't know what it is!" she whispered. Still holding Kay's hand, Hubert drew the ring from his finger and put it onto her finger. It was a curious ring of silver with shape of a cat's head in diamonds on it.

"Now you will remember the days that have gone before. You must never forget again, and as long as you have this ring on your finger you will be reminded of me. Now, give me

yours to wear."

"Mine is only a birthstone ring, an amethyst. It doesn't mean anything."

"It will mean something to me if you let me have it."

Kay looked at the birthstone ring on her right hand. She liked it and was rather reluctant to part with it, but she held out her hand, and taking her hand in his, he gently drew it from her finger and placed it on the little finger of his right hand. Kay felt a feeling of revulsion.

"Please excuse me for a moment," she said, and getting up from the table she walked swiftly through the room to the "powder room". On her return she saw that Hubert was not there. She looked out of the window with its small panes at the people passing and re-passing. She was so interested in watching the world go by that she almost forgot the time. Half an hour passed and Hubert had not returned. The waitress came up to the table to ask her if there was anything else she needed.

It was then that she noticed that his cup of coffee had not been touched.

"You really didn't want two cups of coffee, did you?" she said cheerfully to Kay.

"One was for my friend," answered Kay. "He was here a short while ago. Did you see him go out?"

The waitress looked at Kay sharply. She told her that there had been no one else at the table with her and she would have to pay for the two cups of coffee as she had ordered them. Kay paid for the coffee and went out in a daze. She tried to find her way back to the church, but got completely lost in a maze of small streets and alley ways. Then as she came round a corner, she was grabbed by her arm, and there were her friends, Leslie and James.

"We have been looking for ages! Where have you been? We have to meet up with the others soon. Come on!"

"I must go back to the church," said Kay, a little wildly, they thought.

"There isn't the time, really," said James, but we can do it if we hurry".

When they got to the church Kay asked to go in alone. She went to the aisle to the left hand corner where the cold, grey stone effigies were lying. She looked at the tallest of the three.

"Hubert Vincent" she whispered, and touched the cold, grey face. Her eyes travelled down to the cold, grey hands. On the cuff of the right sleeve of the shirt was a dark stain that had not been there before, and on the little finger of the right hand was a ring, an amethyst birthstone ring.

"Oh, Hubert! I am so sorry, I could not do it then, and I can't do it now!"

Slowly she drew from her finger the ring with the diamond cat's head and placed it in the folds of his jacket nearest his heart, and walked out of the church into the sunshine.

Leslie and James were waiting for her. James took her hand.

"Where is your birthstone ring?" he asked.

"I gave it to someone to remember me by." she said. "Someone I knew a long time ago."