

Chapter 25

THE VILLAGE – 1836

The coachman brought the carriage to the house promptly at nine o'clock. Edward declined the outing, choosing instead to stay behind to administer William's hot packs and exercises, and to consult with Mr. Sharp if he came to the house that day.

James, who was ever ready to have an adventure, was eager to join Anne and Barbara on their day's business.

The carriage drove across the embankment on its way to the village. Barbara mentioned that the road was not as wide in 1836 as it was in 2012. And, there was no smooth tarmac surface. James explained that the Romans had constructed the road on top of the burial barrow that was ancient before the Romans invaded the island. Appreciating the strategic importance of the rise of ground, and the extra height provided by the barrow, the Romans had built a watchtower and one fortified barracks at the summit. After the Romans left England, the natives tore down the buildings and hauled the stones away to be used in constructing houses and barns. The limestone paving stones of the roman road were still in place, however, and Barbara admired the engineering and workmanship of those Roman soldier-laborers.

James pointed out several burial mounds and megalithic rings that could be seen in distant fields. The rings were as ancient as the barrow. No one knew for what purpose the stone circles had been erected.

Leaving the high ground, the carriage drove down into the valley past farmhouses, fields and barns. Farmers paused in their work and lifted their hats in greeting as they saw the Huntley livery trot past. Dirty-faced children smiled and waved when they recognized Anne, and she smiled and waved at them in return.

The village looked so tiny! Gone were the paved streets, gone were most of the

buildings. There were no automobiles, buses, motorcycles or bicycles. Roofs of the buildings were either thatched or shingled with slate. Smoke curled from every chimney, which produced a blue haze in the valley. She shook her head in wonder and thought, "I really AM in 1836!"

The coachman turned down a narrow cobbled lane and halted the rig in front of an inn called, "The Sacred Oak." Barbara admired the fine diamond-paned windows and the stucco and half-timbered finish of the Tudor-styled building. The footmen helped the ladies from the carriage, and James seemed happy to stretch his legs after their two-hour ride.

The party strolled down the raised wooden walkway and Barbara looked at the shops with great interest. She told Anne that she felt just like a character from a Jane Austen novel.

A sign in the bow window of the pub advertised the stable for "the keeping of horses and carriages." The diamond panes between the mullions were in great need of washing. Next to the pub was a building which housed two shops; an apothecary and a store that sold "spirits and ale."

At the end of the long block stood a charming thatch-roofed cottage surrounded by a picket fence which enclosed a neat garden and yard. Behind the cottage stood a small wooden shed and a chicken coop. Fat hens clucked and strutted and pecked along the ground. There were rabbits in hutches and several goats nibbled at dried vines and stalks, the remains of a vegetable garden.

James held open the gate for the women and the party walked to the cottage door. A merry little bell announced their presence and the mistress of the house greeted them warmly. She was pleased to see Mrs. Huntley and was happy to be introduced to James and Barbara.

Goody Pipp escorted the party through the front of the cottage to the living quarters at the rear of the house, then she bustled away to her kitchen and returned shortly bearing a tea tray.

"This tea is delicious, Mrs. Pipp. Do I detect the flavor of rose hips, and perhaps a touch of mint?" Barbara said.

"You do, indeed, ma'am. This is my own special brew of mint from my garden and hips from the dog roses that grow along the barrow road. I can never duplicate the exact

flavor from year to year and I suspect the plants are affected by the weather each season.”

Barbara liked this plump little woman, so neat in her spotless apron and white ruffled cap. Her house was clean and tidy. She certainly did not look like a witch, not the kind described in fairytales.

After a few minutes, Barbara began to speak haltingly about the reason for their visit. She explained that she was a visitor from America and told her about the accident and her injury. “And now I find that it will be impossible for me to find my husband unless you can help me,” she said.

“Oh, surely that cannot be the case, ma’am. The people in the village would be happy to help you search for him. In fact, I believe Jenkins was here in the village a few days ago looking for him,” Goody said.

“I do not know how to explain the problem to you, Mrs. Pipp, except to just tell you plainly. This year is numbered 1836. My husband and I live in the year 2012. And I assure you, I am not a raving lunatic!”

“Well...well, I never!” Mrs. Pipp blinked her eyes and stared hard at Barbara. “What makes you think the time is wrong?”

“I know it is. Look at my shoes, have you ever seen anything like them?” She removed a shoe and demonstrated the velcro tabs. “Here are some coins that were minted in the 1900s. My glasses, er...spectacles are made from a material called ‘plastic’. I brought these objects to show you examples of things from the world of 2012. I do not know how or why I was sent to 1836, but I need your help to get me forward in time to 2012. Can you help me? Do you know of a way?” Barbara said with tears in her eyes.

“Can you tell me when you were last in the future? And where were you when you discovered you were in 1836?”

“I was with my husband and others on Friday, then there was an accident on the roadway. I was struck on the head, fell down the embankment and landed in a small cave. When I came out of the cave on Saturday morning, Mr. Rochester and Mr. Huntley and Jenkins found me and took me to Belvoir. That is when I discovered that you...and I...are living in 1836.”

“Can you describe the cave? Did you see or hear anything unusual while you were inside?” Goody said. Barbara described the scene for Goody Pipp as well as for Anne and James, since she had never told them about it before. She described the altar stone,

the Ogam markings, the crystals growing from the roof. "We searched for the cave the other day, but we were unable to find it. Young William Huntley was in that cave when he was a small boy and he has a crystal that matches mine. I know the place exists."

Mrs. Pipp steeped her hands and held them to her mouth. She sat in silence for several minutes. "I know where the cave is, I have been there many times. It is special, it is ancient, and it has powerful magic attached to it." She blinked her eyes and looked pointedly at her visitors. "You must pledge to me on your sacred honor to reveal nothing of what I will tell you to any other persons...except your husbands and your wife, sir. Then tell them only after they have pledged to keep this secret from all others."

Barbara said, "I will pledge my secrecy, Mrs. Pipp." To herself, she added, "at least to no one in 1836!"

Anne and James nodded in assent. Barbara smiled, noting James's eager face. He looked like a puppy, wriggling in anticipation of a bone to gnaw, or a romp with his master.

"All right, then. In ancient times, before human beings came to these islands, only the fairies, gnomes and brownies occupied the land. They came here from lands far to the east, places like India and Persia and Araby. Later, men discovered this land and when they came, they brought with them their legends and their pagan gods. The fairies gave way to live with the Norse and German and Celtic gods. Each kept space unto themselves. Much later, the Druids held sway over the humans for many centuries. The Christians came and brought their God, and all the others retreated from the human world. They now occupy the underworld."

Goody looked at the others and saw that they were listening with great interest, so she continued. "Although fairies are not much concerned with mortals, their magic is still powerful and it can still be exercised. I suspect there must be a very good reason for them to use their magic on humans."

"You speak with a good deal of authority, Mrs. Pipp. Can you tell us how you came to be a witch?" James said.

Mrs. Pipp's plump little body shook with merriment. "That is a good question, sir, and I am not quite sure myself. But I will tell you what I know. I was widowed quite a number of years ago. When my husband, Mr. Hawthorne, died of the ague, I came to this village hoping to live with my aunt who owned this cottage.

You remember her, Mrs. Huntley, she was Mrs. Webb."

Anne nodded and said that she remembered her well. Mrs. Webb had died soon after the May Day, the day when William got lost and the day Lucy was born.

"When I arrived, my aunt was not surprised to see me. It seems that she knew that I would be coming here, even though I had not sent word to her of my plan. I had never met her before, but I had heard many stories about her from my mother, who was Mrs. Webb's sister. My aunt had 'the sight' as my mother described it. She was a strange girl from babyhood, and she, herself, had been drawn to this village many years ago. Although she called herself Mrs. Webb, my aunt had never married, and she had been invited into this house by the owner and was taught many things by the woman, who was a witch. The owner's own mother was also a witch. It seems that the occupants of this house have been witches going back hundreds of years," Mrs. Pipp said.

"Does this mean that living in this house turns one into a witch?" James asked.

"I do not know, sir, but I believe that only certain people are chosen to become witches. The cottage has been re-built many times through the centuries, but always upon the same ground. There is a well under this house, an enchanted well. My well is connected to the well at the end of the Lane, the one with the pump house built over it. The water from both wells flows through the cave and into the stream beside the barrow. I believe the special properties of the water are passed into the structure above it and to the persons who inhabit the house," Goody said.

"Did Mrs. Webb teach you about witchcraft, how to use it, how it works?"

Anne asked.

"My aunt taught me about herbs and plants and how to cast spells. She showed me the fairy cave and how to behave towards them. If that makes me a witch, then I must claim that title. There are books and folios and old parchment scrolls that have been in the house for many generations. The writing is old and faded and indecipherable by anyone but the 'chosen ones' if you would call them that."

"And who will be your successor, Mrs. Pipp? If you have no children, to whom will your knowledge pass? And why do you use the name Pipp if your name was Hawthorne before?" Anne said.

"My aunt gave me that name, as it is the name of one of the fairies. My aunt used the name Webb in honor of an elf called Cobweb. The fairies are pleased

when we honor them by taking their names," Goody replied.

"There really are fairies, Mrs. Pipp? And can you see them and speak with them?" James said, his blue eyes sparkling with excitement.

"I have never really seen them, at least not when I am awake. I have vivid dreams about them, and perhaps that is how they communicate with me. Music and bells and singing can be heard near the well under the house. When I am in their cave, I can feel their presence, but they have never made themselves visible to me. I may have seen them in human form and not been aware of it. Several years ago, I thought that a young man might be 'faerie', but I had no way of knowing."

Goody sat for moment, then said, "You remember him, Mrs. Huntley. You held their baby when the couple danced around the May pole a few years ago."

Anne gasped. "Oh, my! Yes, I remember him very well. The couple were very handsome and graceful, and their baby was an exquisite creature. Do you mean to say that..."

"It could very well be, Mrs. Huntley. I know the young man spoke with my aunt at our stall. After you spoke with us, I was impelled to prepare the picnic basket. My aunt told me to include the flower wreaths and her special wine," Goody said.

Barbara and James looked at one another inquiringly. Neither spoke, nor questioned Anne about the picnic. The subject seemed to be special to Anne and Goody Pipp.

Goody pulled her chair next to Barbara's and took her hands in her own. She closed her eyes and sat very still for several moments. At length, she said, "You were brought here for a special reason, Mrs. Rowett. I do not know what the reason was, but it must have something to do with Mrs. Huntley's son. You have both been inside the cave and you both have crystals from it. There is a connection between you, one that has bridged the centuries. The fairies wove a spell to bring you here, and they will release you when the purpose of the spell has been fulfilled."

"But I do not believe in fairies. I do not believe in witches, either. No offense is intended," Barbara said.

"Of course you do not believe in them. Neither did I until I became a witch myself!" Goody said with a laugh.

"Can you ask the fairies how Mrs. Rowett will be transported back to her own world? Shall we have you cast a spell, or something?" James said.

"I shall certainly try to help you. I shall visit the cave and the stone circles and consult the texts. We do not know the reason for this shift in time, nor the reason why Mrs. Rowett was brought here," Goody said.

Anne, who had been sitting very quietly, said, "I know the reason why Mrs. Rowett was brought to us. It is because of William. Perhaps you have heard of it, Mrs. Pipp. My son is plagued with the summer paralysis. Mrs. Rowett had the same disease when she was a child. She has persuaded us to try a treatment that is known only in her proper time. That must be the reason, but why would the fairies be interested in William's welfare?"

"You must be right, Mrs. Huntley. As to the reason, I believe it has something to do with the May Day celebration. Master William's birthday is in February... is that correct?"

Anne gasped, then she blushed. "Yes, yes, it is."

"What has William's birthday have to do..." James was interrupted by Goody.

"What will you do if we cannot find a way to get you into the future, Mrs. Rowett?" Goody said as Anne widened her eyes at her, grateful for the interruption.

"I do not know, and that frightens me very much. How could I go on without my husband and our children? I have no way of making a living in this country...in this century! We must find a way to get me back, there is no other alternative for me," Barbara said with tears threatening to spill from her eyes.

"There, there, madam. I am sorry I distressed you. I shall look into the matter and I shall contact you in a few days. Let your heart rest easy. Continue to help Master William and all will be well, of that I am certain," Goody said.

As Mrs. Pipp escorted her guests to the door, Anne and Barbara admired the nosegays, bundles of fragrant herbs and packets of tea that were displayed in the front part of the house. There were also wood carvings, figurines made of pewter, dolls and wooden toys offered for sale. Mrs. Pipp told them that some of the villagers crafted the items and she was happy to sell their handiwork for them.

Barbara said she would like to purchase a number of things, but she had no money at all. James gallantly offered to pay for whatever Barbara selected, in thanks for helping his nephew. She chose several sachets of scented rose petals and combinations of dried herbs and several tins of tea. She found a pewter knight on his charger for William,

a tiny wooden sword and horse for Charles and a pretty doll for Lucy. She thanked James warmly for his generosity.

They ate lunch at the inn, and then returned to Belvoir. Edward was eager to hear about their visit and was fascinated to learn about Mrs. Pipp's history. He was very pleased to hear that Goody had verified the existence of the cave. For seven years, William had been steadfast in his assertion that he had been inside a cave on that stormy May day.

"I am happy to see that the village witch did you no harm. When I saw the carriage return, I half expected to see three frogs or toads hop into the house looking for a meal of insects," Edward said with a twinkle in his eye.

"Edward, you must come with us to visit the lady some day. I liked her very much. She is a remarkable person and I am convinced there is something to her story about enchantments and fairies. Did you feel that way, Anne?" James said.

Anne smiled and said she was almost convinced there were such creatures. "How else can we explain about Mrs. Rowett's being here? Now, tell me what Mr. Sharp had to say today."

Edward beamed when he announced that William's fever was gone and he could now receive visitors. "Mr. Sharp reported that he could detect some improvement in William's legs, although his neck muscles are still very weak. In addition, his patients in town have been taken off laudanum because the heat treatments are working wonders for their comfort. And, due to your suggestion, Anne, Mr. Sharp is endeavoring to find a suitable building in the village where a clinic can be set up to treat all the residents in the neighborhood for any kind of malady. I told him we will supply the funds to purchase or lease a building and to purchase the necessary beds and equipment. He will try to entice young surgeons to set up practice here."

James enthusiastically offered to match Edward's contribution. He even thought of a name for the place. "It should be called, 'HRRS Clinic' in honor of Huntley, Rochester, Rowett and Sharp," he said.