

Cassandra Cottlestone's tomb had the appearance of a massive Elizabethan dresser which had been made off with by culprits who, being caught in the act, had abandoned the thing in the churchyard where, over the centuries, it had turned to stone.

Longish grass sprouted all round the limestone base, a clear sign that this part of the churchyard was seldom visited.

The sun went behind a cloud, and I realized with a shiver that just under my feet was the secret tunnel through which the wraith of the dead Cassandra was said to walk.

Pray for mye bodie to sleepe

*And my soule to wayke.*

As I went round towards the north side of the monument, my heart gave a little leap.

An adjacent grave had sunk, and the turf no longer wholly covered the base of the Cottlestone tomb.

It was just as Daffy had said!

At the northwest corner, a large stone slab had been leaned at an angle against the monument, parts of it draped with a weathered tarpaulin which had filled with pools of rainwater. The sheeting was held down at the corners with broken chunks of stone and, by the amount of sediment that had already settled, I deduced that it had been left lying like this for some time.

Either Mr Haskins had been diverted from repairing the cave-in, or he was simply lazy.

From where I now stood at its north end, the bulky tomb blocked the view of the church, and vice versa. As I have said, nobody ever came to this part of the churchyard anyway. It might as well have been on another planet.

I got down onto my hands and knees and peered under the tarpaulin.

What lay beneath was a gaping hole. Around it, in the disturbed soil, were a number of footprints, some blurred by the recent rain, while others, protected by the tarpaulin, remained remarkably clear. They had not all been made by the same person.

I removed the stones and pulled back the covering, taking care to let the puddled water run off to one side in the grass.

Now the hole was fully revealed.

Once more on hands and knees, I was able to see into the opening.

Had I been expecting bones? I wasn't quite sure, but what lay beneath the tomb was a stone chamber, most of which was filled with darkness.

*Oh for a torch!* I thought.

Why didn't nature provide us with a headlamp in the middle of our foreheads, something like the Glow-worm, but with our lights on the opposite end? And more powerful, of course—it would have been a matter of simple

phosphorescent chemistry.

I was craning my neck for a better look when the soil gave way beneath my pressing hands.

I grabbed wildly at the long grass to save myself, but the blades either broke off or slipped wetly through my fingers.

For an instant I tottered, arms windmilling, fightily madly to gain my feet. But it was no use. My shoes slithered and slipped one last time on the muddy turf and I plummeted into the grave.