



Minster Home

By Diana Cutler

(Adult Category)

Jack knew he was dead but he was still glad to be home. The young man, just a shadow to the Verger and his dog as they walked past, stood on the Green, looking at the Minster, especially at the bricks, Saxon and later, in the solid ancient walls of the building that he had loved throughout his life. It was a shame that that life had to be so short. He supposed his earthly remains, such as there were after the attack, were scattered on the battlefield where he had fallen - somewhere near a river. The Somme. It must have been lovely there in such a beautiful part of France before the fighting. It was good to think that he was lying "in a foreign field", so much like the Stour in many ways.

He smiled to himself, thinking of the many trips he had taken with his brother in their tiny boat on stretches of the Dorset river. "No more than a coracle," his cousin used to say. He could understand easily why his spirit had flown back to Wimborne, rather than lingering on the banks of the Somme. This was where he belonged. Tom had loved Wimborne as much as him so he supposed he would be here now if he had also fallen. Good. That meant Tom had survived and there would be someone to look out for their mother. Not that she would have been really alone, of course. Community was strong in Colehill, where they lived, but he had always believed that family is more than friends.

He looked up at the Quarterjack. Nearly midnight. He was shocked as he looked at the figure of the Napoleonic soldier and it winked at him. He fell back, alarmed, and then found himself in a group of men who were chuckling at his reaction.

"Don't mind him. He's been waiting for you lot to arrive. There haven't been many since the Boer Wars and shocking a new ghost is his only fun. After all, he can't get drunk up there, can he! Nor can any of us, more's the pity. I still wish I could wrap my hands around a tankard of ale sometimes, but we are here, and that's worth a lot."

Jack looked round the group. The speaker was a man in the dress of a seventeenth century royalist and next to him was a parliamentarian, from his garb. Strange to see them standing side by side in such a comradely fashion. Their clothes suggested such differences and yet they seemed completely at ease with each other.

Then there was a group who looked to be Saxon. One of their number saw him looking in their direction. "Yes, we all fell at the Battle of Marston, fighting against the Vikings. We followed King Æthelred into battle and when he, too, fell at Marston and Alfred brought his body back to the Minster on a barge to be buried here, we followed our leader one last time. Our reward is eternal rest with him in this place where you join us - tranquil and a balm to any troubled soul." Sitting at a distance were two more noble figures. One nodded at the Saxon soldier as he spoke. That must be Æthelred, a king of Wessex for just six years, who fought to keep his land free. The other, clearly dressed as from a later period, came over to Jack.

"So, we have a new recruit to our ranks. Welcome, young man. You have fought bravely and now you have rest and eternal peace. Thank you for giving everything and doing so much for my family."

As he heard these words, Jack knew who it was that spoke to him. This was John Beaufort, Duke of Somerset, great-grandson of Edward III and grandfather of Henry VII - therefore a father figure of every king and queen of England or Great Britain thereafter. Wimborne was his resting place. Like so many, he perhaps should not have been asked to be a soldier. He sought peace rather than the futile bloodshed of empty territorial gains, fuelled by pride and aggression. He tried to do his duty, spent thirteen years in captivity as part of the price for such duty and endured intense hostility and opposition from the Duke of York. Dying in 1444 he avoided the Wars of the Roses, a war fuelled once more by pride, aggression and ambition and without even the saving grace of defending native soil.

Now at peace, he smiled benignly at the newcomer. "So many wars, so much empty conquest; so sad that we never go straight to the table to discuss the peace. After all, that is where it must always end. Imagine if we could always just meet and discuss without having to fight first for the upper hand. However, don't misunderstand me, young man. Your life was not thrown away in vain. You stood and fought for an ideal. Your courage in fighting for your country shows your honour and integrity. Your country went to war because it had promised to support Belgium and an honourable promise must be kept if

life is to have meaning. We must always stand against an oppressor and your bravery and courage and that of your comrades will occupy perhaps the biggest place in history. Perhaps people will one day have learned that nations can live side by side in peace, following their own laws, faiths and customs, as we do here, in an atmosphere of mutual caring and support. We may just be shadows but we are shadows who have given our substance for the greater good.”

The Quarterjack chimed the hour and at the signal, Jack and the other shadows faded into the Minster’s walls as day approached, each soul an echo of the place of peace the Minster has always been, and a grain of the mortar binding it for so long - people, family if you will, not just bricks.