**Blue Sky Black Deleted Scenes**

**Welcome to the bits of the novel that were chopped, pruned, cut or otherwise removed from the final version. NB Some of these scenes are early drafts.**

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## **Chapter One first two scenes previous draft**

***This sequence is how the book was initially going to begin. You can see how the focus changed and how there are quite a lot of differences from what’s in the published novel.***

**Against a sullen grey sky seven birds wheeled and turned with acrobatic ease. Anyone observing them might imagine they were playing but this was no game. Four dark black crows with orange beaks and fierce eyes were chasing down three lighter starlings. The chase swept fluidly through the canopy of early autumn trees occasionally catching branches and sending brown edged leaves spinning down towards the ground. Then the birds swept upwards like rockets making for the clouds. Two of the starlings managed to separate from the third leaving it vulnerable to its pursuers. It dived downwards into tree cover but the crows followed.**

**The starling glided until landing on a branch of a large tree where it could shelter. Boastfully noisy the crows soon found it and as the starling made an attempt to get away they raised their wings and pulses of light shot out from them. The beams hit the surrounding foliage sending plumes of leaves and twigs into the air. Finally one hit the escaping starling wounding its rear and causing several feathers to fall from its plumage. They glowed like the embers of a fire as they landed on the woodland floor. The bird, fatally wounded, made one more attempt to escape but its wings were too weak to carry it further and it plunged into a pile of crisp leaves below. The crows, seemingly satisfied, circled the body for a short while before flying upwards. For a few moments the bird lay there until it slowly dissolved altogether.**

On a muggy August evening in New York, at the foot of an imposing curved glass and steel building two security guards chatted in a booth next to a barrier. An anonymous vehicle turned off the main road and drew up to the booth. One of the guards stood up and emerged, nodding at the driver who was in shadow inside the cab.

“Yeah?” he called up, “Can I see some ID and registration documents?”

After a moment’s silence the door opened and a figure dressed from head to toe in a dark cowl obscuring their face descended the three steps to the tarmac below.

“Whoa, steady on there pal, I am armed you know…”

The guard looked confused, backed off and fumbled to reach a gun but before he was able to do so the visitor raised the cloak and a flash of light flew from it, slamming into the guard sending him falling backwards against the booth.

The other guard was idly flipping through security camera views unaware of his colleague’s fate. The stranger walked around to the booth and by the time the guard noticed he too was on the receiving end of a flash of light that sent him sprawling across the desk. The intruder flipped two switches with a gloved hand and a large metal grille nearby started to rise.

## **The Doomed Vicar**

*First pages are always difficult because you want to grab people’s attention yet also not give too much away and this opening scene did the latter, revealing too much too soon however atmospheric it is. It would be ok for a television series but not a novel.*

Night had fallen on a small village whose white walled cottages seemed to glow in the moonlight. A single light shone from the vestry of the imposing church where inside the vicar was hastily packing clothing into a case. Every so often he looked up nervously as if expecting something to happen. When his packing was complete he grabbed a coat and scarf hurriedly and headed for the door.

As he made his way to the gate of the churchyard, the vicar’s feet made tell -tale noises on the gravel path. He reached for the gate and jumped when an elderly looking immaculately dressed man with thinning white hair and sharp eyes.

“Reverend Cutler- are you going somewhere?” he asked in a wispy but determined voice.

Seemingly resigned to stopping to talk, the vicar placed his suitcase on the ground.

“As a matter fact I am not that it’s any of your business!”

“I’d hate to think of your parishioners deprived of their priest for too long”

Cutler shook his head, “They don’t need a *priest*, not here, not in this place. Not when they have you!”

“You’re too kind...”

“That wasn’t a compliment. But take it however you want. I surrender! The village is yours- you already own it body and soul. Now kindly get out of my way”

“I’m sorry vicar, I can’t possibly allow you to leave”

“You can’t stop me!”

Picking up his bag, Cutler pushed past Wyndham easily but as he walked across the village green a cloud of mist stated to creep around the far corner. There was nothing normal about this fog and the way it headed straight for the vicar. By the time he saw what was happening, it was too late. The mist embraced him and icicles started to appear across his terrified face. However much he called out the mist closed in around him and he quickly froze before eventually shattering into thousands of pieces that where absorbed into the ground as soon as they fell. All that was left was the suitcase sitting incongruously in the middle of the green.

## **The original Muellers**

***This was my first draft of the arrival of the Muellers.***

**Kyle reached his front door and leaned against it to catch his breath. Almost as soon as he did it opened and he almost fell inside the house.**

**A tallish man with thinning hair wearing a pullover and stripy slacks looked down on him though it was not a hostile look. In fact he was smiling.**

**“Kyle,” he declared with a strong American accent, “We were wondering where you’d gotten to.”**

**“Er who are you? And what are you doing in my house?” asked a confused looking Kyle.**

**“Eddie Mueller,” replied the man extending his hand which Kyle shook tentatively.**

**“I don’t know you- you must have the wrong house but then how did you get in?”**

**“Oh your folks gave us a key. We’re old friends of your father me and my wife Pearl. We’ve wanted to come over for so long and now we thought we’d do just that. Your father said we could stay in his house for the duration, such a kind man.”**

**“You came on holiday?”**

**“That’s right”**

**“To Rooksbourne? In November? On holiday?”**

**“Of course. Are you feeling alright? You look a little feverish.”**

**“I’m fine…”**

**“Of course we’re only using this as a base. There are lots of quaint places to explore round here and we simply adore the English countryside. Everywhere just looks like a postcard.”**

**A woman trotted into view carrying a large spoon.**

**“I’m making lamb casserole if you’re hungry Kyle…”**

**“Lamb casserole?” said Kyle looking slightly more relieved, “That’s my favourite. I’ve not had it in so long. Mum makes it when she’s here.”**

**“She said how much you liked it. We thought it’d make you feel a little more homely. Are you hungry?”**

**Kyle nodded, “Very.”**

**“He does look a little peaky don’t you think Pearl?**

**The woman approached him with a friendly smile and ruffled his hair.**

**“He’s probably had a long day at school and needs a rest and a good meal. Come on then Kyle let’s see if we can demolish this casserole?”**

**Kyle smiled back, “You know after today that’s just the best thing.”**

**“Well there you go and afterwards we can maybe go open up some gifts…”**

**“Gifts?”**

**“You don’t think your folks would let us come over without bringing some gifts do you now?”**

**“Awesome!”**

**With an adult on either side, Kyle was escorted into the back room, his bag forgotten by the door.**

## **Rachel / Laura**

***Before the shop existed, Rachel lived in a cottage and this was the scene where she first encounters Tom and Amber and also demonstrates her ability to change into a bird. Oh and she was called Laura!***

**Tom caught his breath as he looked around the cottage into which they had escaped. It looked like an ordinary country cottage might look. Low ceilings with several wooden beams, a comfortable looking sofa in front of TV set. There was a mantelpiece over an old fashioned fireplace but a modern heater where the grate might once have been. A kitchen lay to one side. There was nothing unusual about the place except that the curtains were drawn and several lamps lit the room. Amber had sat on the edge of the sofa.**

**The woman who appeared to be the sole occupant returned from the kitchen carrying two mugs of coffee. Amber cupped hers gratefully but during the ensuing conversation Tom soon left his on the mantelpiece unsure whether it would be safe to drink.**

**“You saved us!” he said as the woman invited him, too, to sit down though he remained standing.**

**“Least I could do,” she replied.**

**She was a middle aged woman wearing simple clothes with longish brown hair tied back. She was one of those people who seemed to look perpetually worried and Tom thought that living here she might well be.**

**“My name’s Laura,” she said, “Laura Smith.”**

**“Tom Allenby, this is Amber Carlton. I know small places don’t like strangers but I’ve never heard of them being attacked by birds!”**

**“They’re just protecting their own- or so they see it.”**

**“And you don’t?” asked Amber taking a sip of her coffee.**

**“I know the truth of it. They’re trying to protect a secret that need never be found out. And there’s no reason to harm strangers whatever they come here for.”**

**Tom realised something, “That was you- the bird that fired back at the others.”**

**Laura nodded, “You know our secret. That makes it dangerous for you now. Do you want some cake?”**

**Tom shook his head, “No thanks. We came here because of these things that have been happening. You know where metal things have been flying around.”**

**“Oh yes,” she said as if it was an everyday occurrence, “Well we’ve had that too so don’t be blaming us for it.”**

**“I wasn’t. But whatever is causing it is round here. Do you know anything about that stone circle over on the hill?”**

**She raised an eyebrow, “I know about that place alright. That’s where his nibs lives.”**

**“Who?”**

**“Gabriel Wyndham. He owns this village and nearly everyone in it.”**

**“Do you think he’s responsible for these magnetic things?”**

**“That’s not for me to say is it? But I wouldn’t be surprised if he was. See Wyndham is always working on something.”**

**“Where does he live?”**

**“He lives in Tangleweed Cottage at the end of the lane.”**

**“You sound like you don’t approve of him? Is that why you helped us?” suggested Amber.**

**“He has everyone in the village wrapped around his finger alright. Doing his bidding. He says it’s to hide our secret but I think he’s up to something else.”**

**“How do you actually do it?” asked Tom, “I mean we saw someone turn from person into a bird…”**

 “Perhaps it’s best if I show you?”

She urged them to back off to the side of the room and once they had done so stood stock still. Slowly she closed her eyes. She stood there, silently, for such a long time that Tom and Amber began to exchange puzzled looks. Then, just as it seemed as if nothing would happen, Laura let out a sound that seemed to shake the contents of the confined room. The air in front of her shimmered and as the disturbance intensified took on a shape of a dark cloud and slowly transformed into flapping wings, a feathered body, head and beak. In seconds a full sized black crow was hovering in the air in front of them.

The bird seemed as solid as the furniture but then it began to lose its shape, the process reversing until Laura was once again standing there though breathing hard and looking tired. She almost collapsed, falling onto the table. Amber and Tom rushed forward to help her.

“I’m fine! It takes the wind out of you for a few seconds that’s all. So you see what I mean now?”

“Can everyone in Hodcombe do that?”

“Aye.”

“Are you aliens?”

She smiled, “No, we’re human or perhaps humans as they will one day be. You see something happened about fifteen years back, something to do with the blessed stone circle…”

“What do you know about it?”

“The story is that Wyndham was some sort of boffin measuring the stones and all of a sudden there was this strange energy. It spread across the village but he seemed to be able to control it. It gave us this ability to become birds but at the same time imprisoned us. We cannot leave Hodcombe.”

“Why not?”

“Can you imagine what would happen if we did? It would only take one sighting for people to lock us up and start experimenting on us. Or, worse, try and use us as weapons.”

“You said Wyndham has protected you from that? That sounds ok to me.”

“It does to most but he’s up to something else. He uses fear of outsiders to keep control while he works on some other plan.”

“How come you don’t follow him then?”

“I believe in free will. How can we be able to become birds and be denied flight? These magnetic incidents are the start of something big. Some of his followers have told me- they talk about a great migration.”

“And you don’t know what that means?”

“It means nothing good…”

## **Who is Harry Jukes?**

***Harry Jukes is the book’s lost character, written out during the process. He was originally with Emma in the van and they had an early scene looking around Ravensthorpe before the scene below where they bump into Jake. The problem was that once everyone was in the house and Jake and Emma had been caught by the Dark Greens there was nothing for Harry to do. He’d escaped when the other two were captured and there was a sub plot involving the people who hired him and Emma to take the paintings. Harry would go with them back to the house. However this meant we had about 10 speaking characters all stuck in the house so the sub plot went leaving Harry with little to do. I gave Emily a family reason for her actions and all of a sudden realised Harry was not needed in the plot at all. Sorry Harry!***

**-A white van only just stopped in time, brakes screeching as it halted inches away from Jake who glared sideways as Emma wound down the window.**

**“Great driving,” snapped Jake.**

**“Matches your walking then doesn’t it,” Emma shot back, “You could have been flattened if I’d been going any faster.”**

**“So what?” shrugged Jake causing Emma to roll her eyes.**

**“Oh you’re one of those moody teenagers I suppose.”**

**Jake moved around to the vehicle’s window.**

**“And who are you exactly? I haven’t seen you round here before and this isn’t a cut through….”**

**“Well actually you haven’t seen me. OK?” she said as she made to drive off.**

**Jake put his hands on the door, “I get it, you’re up to something.”**

**“And you’re nosey. Get out of the way, we’re in a hurry”**

**Jake did not budge, “Not till you tell me what you’re doing here.”**

**Emma cut the engine.**

**“I don’t have to tell you anything, country boy.”**

**“Worried I’ll call the police.”**

**“I don’t know- would you?”**

**“Probably not. They know me too well.”**

**“Troublemaker as well?”**

**“Maybe. I don’t have to tell you anything either.”**

**“Well maybe you can help us then. How’d you like to make some money?”**

**Jake smirked, “What, a fiver for telling you the way to somewhere.”**

**“Oh I’m not talking about a fiver- I’m talking about hundreds of thousands of fivers!”**

**“How?”**

**In the passenger seat, Harry was looking increasingly nervous; “Can we go now? Every minute we’re here our photo fit will be getting more accurate you know.”**

**“So you are up to no good?” said Jake, leaning through the open window.**

**“Do you know Ravensthorpe Hall?”**

**Jake looked taken aback at the mention of the name.**

**“Yeah… you could say that.”**

**“We’re going to liberate some of the paintings in there before the place is knocked down.”**

**“Paintings? Boring.”**

**“Valuable. Very valuable and we’re talking thousands and thousands, maybe more. Enough to be cut three ways. We could do with some extra muscle.”**

**“It’s sealed off isn’t it?”**

**“You don’t look like the sort of kid who worries about that kind of thing.”**

**“True but there’s something weird about that place. Very weird.”**

**“You mean huge wild animals? Yeah we saw a few last night and Harry here almost…”**

**“No I did not,” interrupted Harry, “But those creatures were like nothing I’ve ever seen before. Giant sized dogs and things. How’d they get there?”**

**“The owner was….unusual.”**

**“Did you know the owner? Lord Pennington it said in the records.” asked Emma**

**Jake nodded, “Sort of. But he was best not to know. Tell you one thing though- I bet the paintings are not the most valuable thing in there.”**

**“No?”**

**“There’s a safe on the first floor; I saw in it once, it’s got like loads of jewels and that. From centuries ago. Pennington was a big collector. They’re probably worth more…”**

**“And easier to carry,” mused Emma.**

**“Oh no, no, no, “said Harry, “I am so not going up to the first floor. The ground floor was freaky enough!”**

**Emma looked at him sharply, “We can always go back to a fifty fifty split- me and the kid here.”**

**“Jake.”**

**She smiled, “Emma. And this scaredy cat is Harry.”**

**“Don’t tell him our names!” said Harry, “He could be undercover!”**

**“I think he’s in, “replied Emma, staring at Jake, “Look at his eyes, He’s definitely in.”**

**Jake smiled slightly, “I need a bit of excitement. So yeah I’m in.”**

**Emma opened the door through which Jake climbed into the back. Harry sat back looking less than pleased.**

**“I’m not going to help the kid if he gets in trouble you know,” he huffed.**

**“Don’t worry,” said Jake, “I won’t rescue you either”**

**Grinning, Emma started up the engine and the van sped off along the road.**

**Harry was lying spread eagled on the bed in a modest room in the Winchester Hotel when there was a loud knocking on the door outside. He roused and groaned as he pulled himself to his feet, yawning as he went to answer it.**

**“Ok, you can stop knocking- I heard you a minute ago.”**

**He opened the door to face a bulky thick set man in his fifties dressed in a pinstripe suit. His longish hair was slicked back and his fingers were decorated with expensive looking rings. He did not look pleased.**

**“I’ve been calling Emma’s phone – and she’s not replying,” he said pushing past Harry into the room, “Is she still asleep or something?”**

**“She’s….erm…not here.”**

**“And where is she?”**

**“It’s a bit complicated mate…”**

**The man smiled thinly, “See, I don’t do complicated. I do simple. She promised me paintings and I’m a busy man so if you can give them to me I’ll be on my way.”**

**“You’re Johnny Merrick?”**

**The man looked slightly disappointed that the question had been asked.**

**“What, you’ve never heard of me?”**

**“Sorry.”**

**“Well yes I am Johnny Merrick- are you Emma’s other half then?”**

**“No, it’s not like that. My name’s Harry Jukes- I’m here to help her.”**

**“So where’s the paintings then?”**

**“Well, see, we had a few issues with the place…”**

**“Issues!” interrupted Merrick, “I didn’t ask for a survey, just a couple of paintings. What issues?”**

**“Animals- I mean big animals, giant ones. All over the place – it’s not safe in there I swear!”**

**“Animals? What are you on about? A few wild cats probably. I knew using students was a bad idea- too soft by half. If you want a job doing you have to get someone with a bit of backbone. I’ll check this scary old house out myself.”**

**“Ok, great.”**

**Merrick smiled again, “You’re coming with me Mr Jukes, don’t you worry about that.”**

**“But I haven’t even had breakfast!”**

## **Bill’s bird watching**

*In earlier drafts the birds were more prominent and this cut scene saw the readers’ first sighting of them as Bill witnesses a battle.*

Bill Ambrose was walking back towards his cottage, a dead rabbit hanging over the edge of a large bag he was carrying. It was late afternoon and the fading sunlight filtered through the mostly bare trees as he trudged over the uneven ground, leaves rustling and flying as he progressed through them. Over his head several birds were wheeling and turning. Bill stopped to observe their behaviour, a look of puzzlement on his face. The birds swooped low into the woods themselves and it became clear that there were three much larger starlings chasing a smaller sparrow. The pursuers were gaining on the other bird whose speed was no match for its enemies. Then just as they had almost reached their victim and might have been expected to use their claws to make the kill, the starling closest banked slightly and what seemed to be a flash of light shot from its wing. The light hit the sparrow which plummeted to the ground, all life gone from it.

It landed near Bill with a thud, its body still smoking slightly. Looking concerned Bill moved away behind a tree trunk as the three starling hovered above. A second bird raised one of its wings and a beam of light shot from underneath it hitting the body only a few yards from where Bill was taking shelter. When the smoke from this latest strike blew away there was no trace remaining of the dead bird.

Bill emerged from behind the tree looking around at the scorch marks embedded in tree barks and on the mossy ground. Then he spotted a wisp of smoke drifting from underneath a shrub. Cautiously he approached it pushing the foliage aside with his boot to reveal a single feather. It was black but along its length there were patches that were glowing a bright orange colour.

Bill pulled a smaller bag from the satchel over his shoulder and carefully pushed the feather inside with gloved hands. After he’d closed the bag he hurried away.

## **Jade’s return first draft**

*First draft of the aftermath of Jade’s apparent return. I ended up cutting the amount of time we’re with her in the narrative because the point is really more about Amber’s reaction to her.*

Jade sat perched on the end of the sofa balancing a cup of coffee on her knees. Amber sat next to her, constantly looking and then looking away.

“So,” she said, “You don’t know where you’ve been?”

“I said didn’t I?” replied Jade looking agitated.

“For nearly eighteen months?”

“It’s hazy, kind of distant.”

“But you must remember something- even about yesterday? About how you got here now? I mean can you remember even an hour ago?”

Jade shook her head, “I can’t really remember much, sorry…it’s been difficult.”

“Of course, sorry, it’s just that I’ve been thinking all the things we’d talk about when you came back and now you have I can’t think of any of them!”

Jade took a sip of coffee and pulled a face.

“What’s up?”

“It’s very sugary.”

“You like lots of sugar in coffee don’t you?”

“Perhaps I don’t now?”

“So that’s different for a start.”

“Stop being a detective Amb. Just stop, yeah?”

“Yeah, sorry. But Jade you can’t just vanish for all that time and come back and not say anything about it. People will ask when they see you...”

Jade shook her head and stared directly at Amber for the first time, “No, you can’t tell anyone, not anyone…”

“Well...”

“You have to promise. Don’t tell anyone at least for a day or so till I can sort things out in my head.”

Amber nodded and squeezed her hand, “Of course. Its handy you came here first. I’m sure the professor won’t mind you staying here. By the way why did you come here?”

“I’m not sure. Perhaps I sensed you were here?”

“Do you want something to eat?”

“Not at the moment. Just being here is enough.”

## **Everyone’s welcome!**

***Remember the axed Harry? Well the end of the novel seemed to be accumulating characters so that as well as the Dark Greens and Merrick’s group, the army turn up (Harry having tipped them off). Clearly most of these characters had to go including a cameo from Colonel Davenport who featured in `The Spectres of Winter`. Vik by the way is the character who became Sunil. I often change character names as the process runs along. Emma for example is the fourth name the character had.***

**Outside Ravensthorpe, the gaggle of people debating what to do next was abruptly switched off by the sudden arrival of a number of grey coloured vehicles. They drew up near the gate without ceremony before a number of soldiers emerged from the rear, carrying weapons. As they did Merrick pulled out his phone while covertly dropping a pistol into nearby bushes.**

**The others were slower and as the soldiers approached them they quickly raised their hands in surrender. A smaller vehicle arrived, the door opened and a senior looking figure emerged. Emerging from the other door was Harry Jukes.**

**Nina stepped forward.**

**“I am glad you are here to sort out these thugs that are interfering with our work.”**

**The officer raised an eyebrow, “My name is Colonel Davenport and I hardly think you people have any more right to be in here than they do.”**

**Merrick, meanwhile, had started to walk quietly to his car.**

**“And where do you think you’re going?” shouted Davenport.**

**Merrick turned on his heels and said, “You can ask my solicitor if you want to question me. Hilbray and Stokes. We don’t live in a military state yet do we?”**

**“Now wait one minute, sir…”**

**“Sorry,” shouted Merrick as he climbed into his car, “You’ll just have to shoot me!”**

**With that he drove off.**

**“Perhaps I can explain something of what’s going on,” offered Vik stepping forward.**

**“You will say no such thing,” retorted Nina.**

**“Sorry. I don’t work for you anymore,” he replied.**

**“Which one of these is your accomplice?” asked Davenport as Harry came to stand next to him.**

**“She’s not here.”**

**“Small girl about five nine?” offered Vik...**

**“Yes. Emma.”**

**“She’s still in the house I think- with Amber and that Jake kid.”**

**“Amber and Jake?” said Davenport, “Now I know there’s trouble….”**

## **An Irish Theft**

*Cut because there’s already a scene of lodestones being stolen at the start of the book, this was set in Dublin. This is from an early draft when the antagonist was still a super evolved lizard.*

Dublin’s Natural History Museum was closed for the day. In a long wood panelled hall a series of strip lights flickered off plunging exhibits of all shapes and sizes into darkness. A lone attendant pressed more switches sending another corner of the building to sleep. As he made his way out, shoes echoing in the large empty room, there were only shadows lying across the floor. Moments later a figure moved silently amongst the displays, neither pausing to look nor showing caution about the number of security cameras looking down on the area. The figure wore a dark coloured cowl with a hood that totally obscured their face. Eventually the intruder stopped at an unremarkable case holding several pieces of rock.

The person slowly removed a glove from one hand before placing it directly on the glass. Cracks started to appear around the hand spreading outwards in a pattern across the front of the case. Then the glass shattered but it did not collapse. Instead the tiny particles shifted to one side inside the case allowing the thief to pick one of the pieces of rock from its shelf and place is in a small bag. When this was done the stranger waved a hand and the glass flew back into position, the cracks that had been there healing instantly. It was as if nothing at all had been disturbed though an observer might just have spotted a single fragment of glass that had somehow been left out of the reconstructed window lying on the floor.

## **Weird woman in a shop!**

***This is a fun scene from a draft when Rachel still lived in a cottage but there was an interlude in a shop with a much more eccentric owner. It was cut because it didn’t add anything but I still like it! The idea was that only some of the villagers were under Wyndham’s control but in the end it was more interesting for it to be just Rachel who was opposing him. NB The village was called Hodcombe in a lot of previous drafts.***

**The shop was a single story building whose window was packed with tins, bottles and boxes of items none of which looked as if they’d been moved in a decade. As they approached Tom spotted a few spiders webs draped across the tins. Amber walked up to the door and pushed it open ringing a bell as she passed through.**

**The interior of the shop smelt of liquorice though it might well be something else. The interior was compact with shelves reaching to the ceiling on either side, each rather frugally filled with more cans, tins and wrapped items. A lower counter at the back end contained the usual confectionaries and sweets Tom was used to seeing. A stand to one side contained a handful of magazines.**

**“This is like I thought Rooksbourne would be before I came” said Tom.**

**“Shop!” said Amber loudly as they lingered in front of the counter.**

**After a short while they heard shuffling footsteps from the back.**

**“Zombies or witches?” whispered Tom.**

**“Sounds like a zombie!”**

**The back door opened and a small, elderly woman made her slow way into the shop. She was white haired with a face that looked incredibly tired**

**“Zombie Witch” muttered Tom earning a reproachful look from Amber.**

**When the woman reached the counter she looked at the children but did not say a word.**

**“Er hello…” began Amber whereupon the woman produced a large spoon and slammed it down onto the chocolate bars in front of them making them both jump back.**

**“Blessed flies,” she croaked as if these could be her first words of the day, “Getting on the chocolate. You see a lot of them this time of year, coming inside to make their nests I suppose.”**

**She picked up what Tom now saw as the squashed remains of a bluebottle with a tissue and threw it into a bin behind the counter before turning back to them.**

**“You were saying?”**

**“Do you live here?” asked Amber causing the woman to raise her eyebrows.**

**“Oh no, they bus me in from Edinburgh!”**

**Amber did not respond but the woman burst into an unexpected volley of cackling laughter. She seemed to find her comment more amusing than it was.**

**“Yes, I do live here darling. Where do you live?”**

**“Marley Vale”**

**“Never been there”**

**“And I live in Rooksbourne,” added Tom.**

**“Never been there” she repeated. Tom was starting to wander if she really was a Zombie!**

**“Erm we’re interested in birds,” he said “and we heard that round here there’s lots.”**

**The woman fixed him with a stare Tom found unnerving,**

**“You can see birds anywhere round here. You don’t need to come to Hodcombe to see ‘em.”**

**“Don’t you like strangers round here?” asked Amber with a barely suppressed smile.**

**“We don’t like children” she retorted, “and sometimes we cook them in a big pot!”**

**Again she followed this declaration with a gale of raucous laughter.**

**“Thanks anyway” said Amber turning to leave but as Tom followed the woman said;**

**“There’s something about you” she said and Tom knew he meant her**

**He turned back, “You’re not one of those people who can see the future are you?”**

**“I can see the present. Like your piece of rock”**

**The Earthstone was hidden under two layers of clothing- how could she see it?**

**“What about it?”**

**“Come looking for Mister Wyndham have you?”**

**“Er yeah, that’s right.”**

**“Thought as much. No-one comes bird watching here. Our birds are a bit different see.”**

**“How is that?”**

**“They watch us they do. With those eyes.”**

**“The birds?”**

**“Aye you can call them that if you want. But they’re more than that. Ask Mister Wyndham- if you can get near him.”**

**“How do you mean?”**

**“You’ll find him at the top of the hill in a big house. Never comes down, least not on foot.”**

**“Thanks, you’ve been a great help.”**

**“A lot of us- the normal people- want rid of him but those that try ended up six feet under so now nobody does.”**

**“Well I might be able to do something,” offered Tom hopefully.**

**“I reckon you might,” the woman said grabbing a bar of chocolate and offering it to Tom.**

**“Here you go”**

**“Cheers, how much?”**

**She shook her head, “Free to you. If you deal with Mister Wyndham you can have the whole shop!”**

**“Thanks…”**

**As they closed the shop door behind them, Tom and Amber exchanged looks.**

**“Did she say she was one of the normal people?” asked Tom, “I’d like to see the ones who aren’t!”**

**“I wouldn’t eat that chocolate” said Amber, “It’s probably been moulding there for years”**

**“She knew about the Earthstone though, at least she sensed I had something.”**

**“Have you heard of this guy Wyndham?”**

**“Vaguely. He owns a lot of land round here but I’ve never actually seen him.”**

**“That must be his house then” said Amber pointing across the green towards the top of a wooden structure that bore more of a resemblance to a giant nest than a house.**

## **Angry villagers!**

*Yes I did have a scene with angry villagers but decided it didn’t work but here it is anyway. You’ll notice Kyle is with Amber and Laura (aka Rachel) here.*

The villagers, led by Laura with Amber and Kyle at her side reached the house and it was as if decades of anger boiled over because they did not stop when they reached the door, pulling and tearing at the structure until twigs began to loosen. Finally a section gave way and Amber and Kyle slipped through the half opened doorway. The other villagers held back as if even their current mood did not give them the confidence to go inside.

Amber and Kyle rushed across to the lit area where the incongruous desk and laptop sat.

“There’s nobody here.”

Amber was staring at the floor, “Muddy shoes, about Tom’s size I’d say.”

Kyle looked around and then spotted the piece of crumpled paper

“Hey- look this is Tom’s cheat …er.. revision sheet.”

“He must have left it here deliberately”

“Why here though?”

“The book case. It could be like those spy films where it’s really a secret passage”

Kyle leaned against the case, “That doesn’t happen in real life...”

As soon as he’d said it the case swung open to reveal the tunnel.

At the entrance to the house, Laura and the others watched as the two children disappeared into the passageway.

A man stood next to Laura and muttered, “That girl is special- how did she do that?”

“I don’t think she knew that she did. You did feel it though- a connection?”

“Yes, a connection with everything, with the world.”

Laura nodded, “Yes, and I felt that my daughter was out there somewhere- that she is still alive.”

“Do we follow them?” asked one woman.

Amber’s head popped out of the gap, “We’ve found an underground passage. Best if you stay here in case Wyndham comes back.”

Laura replied, “If he comes back here, we can let him know he’s no longer welcome. We’re going to burn this place down!”

Amber grinned, “Good luck!”

Amber stepped into the passageway carefully. As they did the light flickered on revealing something headed straight for them. Four birds let loose a volley of light pulses that crashed into the rock walls. Kyle ducked down and fished his catapult from his pocket letting loose a stone that clipped one of the birds on its wing causing it to falter. Yet the other three were preparing to attack again.

Amber yanked Kyle up and they headed back just managing to shut the bookcase entrance as a further volley of light hit the wall behind them. As they waited there curls of smoke began to attract their attention.

“There’s a fire.”

“Oh Laura said something about burning this place down.”

“Oh great! So we’re toast this side and toast if we open the door.”

“Not if we’re clever.”

Amber signalled to Kyle to stand behind her. She pushed the panel which opened the door and the four birds swooped into the building. Then before they had a chance to see where their prey was, the children rushed through the door closing it from the other side. The birds were left floundering as smoke started to fill the whole space.

## **Giving it all away!**

***I wrote this unsure whereabouts it would go in the novel but decided it wasn’t needed. It depicts Wyndham taking the Earthstone just days before the events of `Elemental`.***

**The evening Summer Sun was sinking below the horizon as an unlikely procession made its way through Rooksbourne Woods. There were six figures in total, their features completely hidden in identical black hooded robes despite the humidity. They were not walking as such; instead the hem of their robes hovered about an inch above the ground as they floated towards their destination. Small animals scampered out of the way while above birds tilted their heads as if curious as to what was going on. A large bee flew up from the safety of bell shaped white flowers towards the hood of one of the travellers but before it could fly inside, it disintegrated in wisps of smoke.**

**On the whole however this unusual passage was ignored. Only one bird seemed to follow them. A shiny magpie, its distinctive petrol blue plumage and long tail shimmering in the low Sun, flitted from tree to tree at a safe distance. When the party of six stopped, the magpie landed on a low shrub.**

**They had arrived at an old well, its use clearly long since redundant. The circular wall was uneven and marked by weeds and plants sticking out at angles. Hordes of tiny flies fussed over the hole below. The six figures drifted around the well until they were equidistant and one of them produced a gloved hand from underneath their robe. They were holding a gold coloured box, the lid of which opened of its own accord. Lying on a pad inside was a small polished circular stone with white shapes across its black surface. A gold chain was attached to the stone.**

**For a short while the group stood there and this was when the magpie took its chance. It swooped silently down, claws outstretched, sweeping over the box and lifting the stone by its chain into the air.**

**For a moment it seemed as if the group had not even noticed the intrusion but then they seemed to stir into action. Each of them lifted their hooded heads and thick beams of red light shot from underneath as the magpie soared upwards, its prize firmly grasped. The energy fizzled around it but the bird was too agile to be caught and was soon flying high across the woods, out of sight and out of reach.**

## **Rachel and Rhiannon**

***For much of the writing process Rhiannon was Rachel’s daughter and I spent ages trying to work it properly into the plot but it didn’t quite work. It also felt too coincidental so towards the final version she became the child of the two unnamed people that were with Wyndham when the elemental vent opened. This scene- yet another alternative opener to the book- depicts Rhiannon as a baby being taken by Pennington’s birds. Of course it begged the question as to how he would know about her.***

***Twenty Two Years Ago***

**In a modest garden sitting behind a low thatched stone cottage two large white sheets billowed in the breeze and enveloped a young woman as she struggled to peg more items to the line. Each time she reached up the nearest sheet blew across her meaning she had to push it to one side and try to start again, each time becoming increasingly irritated. Every so often she would look back towards the house where a small wooden basket sat on a narrow patio. Lying inside mostly hidden under thick blankets and a woolly blue hat was a tiny sleeping baby. At this moment the child moved and opened sleepy eyes just a fraction then they closed again.**

**In the middle distance a black undulating shape was headed in the direction of the house and the village in which it was located. The `shape` was in reality a large number of tar black birds flying silently forward. The mother was again enveloped inside a sheet so did not notice the sharp change of course that took the birds in her direction.**

**Once they were overheard the cloud of birds swooped down gracefully but when the woman realised what was happening she was too far away to prevent it. The starlings whoosh was audible as they swept into the small area like a plague and moments later rose up again, this time carrying the basket and the sleeping baby within it. The woman was frantic with panic and fear but could seemingly do nothing.**

**“No!” she yelled at the fast retreating birds, “No!”**

**However as the words floated into the air her baby was already well out of reach as the birds disappeared into the cloudy grey beyond leaving the shocked mother staring at the sky above.**