"WILL BURROW UNDER YOUR SKIN AND HAUNT YOU" — BEN WHEATLEY

THISTLEBONE

THE COMPLETE COLLECTION



T.C. EGLINGTON

SIMON DAVIS


'IT STARTED OUT AS A COMMUNE, APPARENTLY.
'THEY WERE TRYING TO BE SELF SUFFICIENT. LIVE IN BALANCE WITH NATURE. RETURN TO AN OLDER WAY OF LIFE. YOU KNOW THE SORT OF THING.
BENEATH THE WAXING MOON, RIPEN KIN AND SWELL THE FRUIT...
'IT SOUNDED NICE.
HANG HEAVY THE BRANCHES, AND DRINK DEEP THE ROOT...
'MAYBE THE WEIRD BELIEFS IN PAGAN STUFF CREPT IN WITH HILLMAN. OR MAYBE THEY WERE THERE ALL ALONG AND HE JUST FIGURED OUT A WAY TO EXPLOIT THEM.
'EITHER WAY, SOMETHING TOOK HOLD. A GROUP PSYCHOSIS. DELUSIONAL BELIEFS. WHATEVER YOU WANT TO CALL IT.
LET FOX AND STAG LEAD THE CHASE, TO BLESS THESE FIELDS AND BLESS THESE FOLK.'
FOR WHAT WE'VE TAKEN WE NOW GIVE BACK, TO OLD THISTLEBONE OF THE OAK.'


'I REMEMBER ONCE READING ABOUT THE MANSON CLAN AND HOW THE PEOPLE IN IT THOUGHT THEY WERE DOING THE RIGHT THING AT THE TIME.
'TO THEM, KILLING WAS PART OF A REVOLUTION. THEY THOUGHT THEY WERE TRULY FREE AND EVERYONE ELSE WAS BRAINWASHED BY SOCIETY.
'HILLMAN'S CULT WAS LIKE THAT. THEY THOUGHT THEY WERE PURE. I WAS THE ONE THAT WAS CORRUPTED.'
PLEASE... PLEASE, I WON'T TELL.
'I PROMISE! JUST LET ME GO AND I WON'T SAY ANYTHING ABOUT ANY OF IT.'
YOU WILL NOT POISON US WITH YOUR WORDS. THE OLD WAYS WILL PROTECT US.
FOLIH SLIGHTLISO CHTRU.
LEWI CLINMITHPEU SENVE.
PLEASE. I JUST WANT TO GO HOME.'


EIGHT DAYS THEY KEPT ME THERE.
AVERIL. IF YOU'RE NOT COMFORTABLE WITH THIS, WE DON'T HAVE TO DO IT NOW...
NO. IT'S OKAY. IT'S JUST SOME OF THIS STUFF... I ONLY EVER TALKED TO THERAPISTS AND COUNSELLORS ABOUT IT.
I'M FINE, REALLY.
'MORNING AND NIGHT THEY CARRIED OUT THEIR RITUALS. CHANTING, MOSTLY.
'SPEAKING IN TONGUES, I GUESS YOU WOULD CALL IT. JUST THIS BROKEN-UP BABBLE OF WORDS.
GAMBOLUMIN CHOURTUSOF... HUNISTHORRAM... SULLFULOMAA...
'IF YOU LISTENED FOR LONG ENOUGH, YOU STARTED TO HEAR STUFF IN IT. WEIRD MESSAGES BUBBLING UP OUT OF IT.'
STUSHBUEELOMIE... YOUNOT THIS STUPID GIRL WHAT HAVEYOUDONE... AVVVRL... TELLING STORIES... TELLTRUTH... AVVERLLL... BIENNIT... BIENNNITAVEL...


IT'S HARD TO DESCRIBE, BUT IT WAS LIKE FEELING YOUR MIND COME UNDONE.
'MAYBE IT WAS WHY I COULD SENSE SOMETHING WAS WRONG ON THAT FINAL NIGHT...
LISTEN. AH'M NO GONNY HURT YE, BUT YE HUV TAE TRUST ME.
'MAIRI HAD BEEN NICE TO ME. BROUGHT ME FOOD A FEW TIMES.
HERE. CUT YERSEL FREE.
IT NEEDS TO LOOK LIKE YE ESCAPED ON YER OWN OR I'LL BE THE ONE GETTIN' IN TROUBLE. USE THE PATH THROUGH THE WOODS.
HURRY!
'I DID WHAT SHE SAID...


...EVEN THOUGH IT WAS A TRAP.
BY HER OWN HAND, IT IS DONE. OUR QUARRY RUNS FREE.
HUH...?


OH.
N-NO—!
"THE WORST THING WASN'T THE BEATINGS, OR BEING LOCKED UP, OR BEING STARVED, OR EVEN WHAT THEY PLANNED TO DO TO ME...
UHNN.!