

SHORT STORY

The barrow king — a Ms Winslow investigation

CHAPTER 1

Dorothy Winslow aus Cambridge besucht wieder einmal ihre Lieblingsnichte Lucy in dem kleinen rheinland-pfälzischen Dorf Heroldstein. Als man sie zu einer Séance einlädt, nimmt ihr Besuch eine unerwartete Wende.

Von JAMES SCHOFIELD

MEDIUM AUDIO



A single candle lit the faces of the small group as they stared at the pointer moving across the letters of the Ouija board in the middle of the dining-room table. The rest of the room was in darkness.

"Frau Winslow, come and join us," said Angelika Moser, hostess of the small dinner party being held in her house. "You can ask the spirit a question in English."

Dorothy reluctantly left the sofa and sat down next to her friend Armin von Weiden at the table. She had preferred sitting on the outside, watching the rest of those in the room ask questions of the spirit medium, Madame Isadora, who was leading the séance. Frau Moser wanted to know when her daughter, Charlotte, would give her the grandchildren she longed for; Lena Bauer, the local hairdresser, had a question about the honesty of one of her assistants; whereas Hilde Fuchs had lost her cat.

Dorothy was visiting her niece Lucy again in the village of Heroldstein in the Rhineland-Palatinate. That morning, Frau Moser had dropped by the house to return a book and invited Dorothy to join the séance she had arranged. Dorothy had met several people who claimed to be in touch with the supernatural and found them interesting. Mostly, they were mistaken, but once

or twice, she'd seen things that were difficult to explain, so she was curious to meet Madame Isadora.

Before dinner, Armin told Dorothy what he knew about her.

"Isadora was always a bit wild. When she was 18, she ran away to Paris, where she worked as a cabaret artist for many years. It was a big scandal in the village at the time, and her father never really forgave her. He owned a lot of land here and, even though she looked after him when he was ill, he left her only the house on the main road just outside Heroldstein. The land and the money went to her cousin."

claim [kleɪm]

↳ behaupten

curious ['kjʊəriəs]

↳ neugierig

drop by [drɒp baɪ]

↳ vorbeischaun

hostess ['həʊstɪs]

↳ Gastgeberin

long for sth. ['lɒŋ fɔː]

↳ sich nach etw. sehnen

Ouija board ['wiːdʒə bɔːd]

↳ Hexenbrett

pointer ['pɔɪntə]

↳ Zeiger

reluctantly [rɪ'lʌktəntli]

↳ ungern, widerstrebend

Rhineland-Palatinate

[ˌraɪnlənd pə'leɪtɪnət]

↳ Rheinland-Pfalz

spirit medium ['spɪrɪt ˌmiːdiəm]

↳ Geistermedium

Dorothy had seen the house when out walking. It was a beautiful old building with a garden, but in bad condition.

"So, she's quite poor," Armin continued. "But she makes a living by running séances at parties or telling the fortunes of people who visit her. Madame Isadora is something of a celebrity around here."

Isadora looked perfect for her role, Dorothy thought. She was about 60 and wore a long, elegant dress, a necklace with an astrological sign and several shiny rings. Her big dark eyes, ringed by black eyeliner, turned to Dorothy.

"So, Frau Winslow," she said in a deep, smoky voice, "put your finger on the pointer next to mine and then ask the spirit your question."

For a moment, Dorothy couldn't think of anything, and then something occurred to her. Near Isadora's house stood a small hill, or barrow, which Armin said might be the grave of a local chieftain from Roman times. Nobody knew. A spirit should be able to answer that.

"Who is buried in the barrow... the Grabhügel... next to Madame Isadora's house?" she asked.

The group around the table made little noises of surprise, and Isadora's eyes became even bigger. For a moment, there was nothing, then slowly, the pointer began to move among the letters on the board.

"U ... N ... H ... E ... I ... L" it spelled.

There was a moment of silence and then, in a sudden movement, the pointer flew across the room and the candle went out. There was a scream, then chaos, until Frau Moser turned on the lights, revealing Madame Isadora lying on the floor, looking very pale and still. Dorothy got to her first.

"Oh mein Gott!" screamed Frau Moser. "Ist sie gestorben? Auf meinem Teppich?"

*

Lucy giggled when her aunt told her the story the next morning. Fortunately, Isadora had only fainted.

"I see Frau Moser has her priorities right," said Lucy. "How's the carpet doing now?"

"It's recovering. We gave the poor lady a glass of water, and then Armin drove her home. But in all the excitement, nobody explained to me what this word Unheil means."

"Well, it means 'disaster' or 'evil', which fits in with a local legend about the barrow. But Aunt Dot... do you think that maybe Madame Isadora pushed the pointer to spell that word?"

"Why?"

A lot of people in the village were putting pressure on

her, Lucy explained. A property developer from Munich wanted to buy Isadora's house and the land around it to build a housing estate. The local council was in favour of this because more families would be good for the village school. The regional government was thinking of closing it as the classes were so small. But Isadora had refused because they planned to flatten the barrow, which she said would bring bad luck to Heroldstein.

"Who owns the land around her house?"

"The council owns the land where the barrow is, and her cousin, Tobias Zöllner, owns the fields behind it. He's happy to sell, and he's persuaded the council to do so as well. But the developer wants Isadora's property because it's next to the main road."

"Hmm. I can see why everybody's upset. But why should she spell out that word?"

"To get local people on her side. Everybody in the village will hear about what happened last night."

Dorothy looked thoughtful.

"Let's take the children and the dog for a walk, Lucy, and have a look..."

The story continues on the next page.



barrow ['bærəʊ]

↳ Grabhügel

chieftain ['tʃi:ftən]

↳ Stammesführer

faint [feɪnt]

↳ ohnmächtig werden

flatten ['flætən]

↳ eibnen, abtragen

fortunes tell ['fɔ:tʃənz]

↳ Wahrsagen

giggle ['gɪɡl]

↳ kichern

housing estate

['haʊzɪŋ ɪˈsteɪt] UK

↳ Wohnsiedlung

necklace ['nekləs]

↳ Halskette

pale [peɪl]

↳ blass, bleich

property developer

[ˌprɒpəti di'veləpə]

↳ Bauträger(in)

recover [rɪ'kʌvə]

↳ sich erholen

run [rʌn]

↳ hier: anbieten

upset [ʌp'set]

↳ aufgebracht, verärgert

SHORT STORY

The barrow king — a Ms Winslow investigation

CHAPTER 2

Ein unglückliches Geistermedium, ein mysteriöser Grabhügel und ein aggressiver Bauunternehmer. Dorothy Winslow nimmt die Ermittlungen auf.

Von JAMES SCHOFIELD

MEDIUM AUDIO

There was definitely a special atmosphere about the place. As Dorothy sat on the grass at the top of the barrow, she found herself looking over her shoulder to see if there was anything there. Not that Freddie, Roland and Trotsky the dog seemed worried as they chased each other up and down and occasionally brought back interesting things they found.

"Could we visit Madame Isadora, Lucy, dear?" said Dorothy after a while. "I'd like to see how she is."

"Why don't you go?" said Lucy. "The children will need their tea soon." So Dorothy walked down to the house alone.

When closer to it, she could clearly see the sad condition of the building. The roof needed repairing, and the garden had run wild. It was depressing in the pale light of the winter afternoon. For a moment, Dorothy thought about going back. Isadora was probably well, and it would be nice to have tea with the children. Then she pulled herself together and was about to knock when the door was opened by a man in his fifties. He looked surprised to see Dorothy, but just muttered something and pushed past.

"Guten Tag, Frau Winslow," said Isadora, coming to the door. "I'm afraid my cousin has no manners."

They sat together in the drawing room. It was cold, there were marks on the ceiling where rainwater had come through, the teacups were chipped and Dorothy saw a mouse run across the carpet to a hole in the corner.

"Tobias is very determined that I should sell," said Isadora. "He says I can live with him and his poor wife if I accept this company's offer. I said I would rather be run over by the bulldozers when they try to build those houses here. It would be much less painful."

barrow ['bærəʊ]

→ Grabhügel

chase [tʃeɪs]

→ jagen

chipped [tʃɪpt]

→ angeschlagen, beschädigt

determined [dɪ'tɜːmɪnd]

→ entschlossen, bestimmt

drawing room ['drɔːɪŋ ruːm]

→ Salon, Wohnzimmer

manners ['mænəz]

→ Manieren

mutter ['mʌtə]

→ murmeln, brummen

pale [peɪl]

→ fahl

tea [tiː] UK

→ hier: (frühes) Abendessen

would rather [wʊd 'rɑːðə]

→ würde lieber

Dorothy laughed. "Heroldstein must seem very quiet after living in Paris," she said. "Don't you miss it? I was there as a diplomat a long time ago, but I still try to visit at least once a year."

"Of course," sighed Isadora. "But it's so expensive. I wanted to go back after my father died, but it isn't possible to live there without a lot more money than I have. But anyway," she sat up straight in her chair, "now I have to protect the village from the curse of the Barrow King!"

"Ah, the Barrow King," said Dorothy. "Tell me about him."

According to legend, Isadora said, the barrow was the grave of a great king who had ruled the area thousands of years ago. He had promised that if his grave was ever destroyed, he would punish the local people.

"As a spirit medium, I have a duty to help the spirits warn ordinary humans when they're making a mistake. And since the local council doesn't respect the barrow, I have to try to stop the project — or at least delay it."

"Even if it annoys your cousin?" asked Dorothy.

"Especially if it annoys my cousin. Did you know that he's also a member of the council? He gets his way around here far too easily. It's good to frustrate Councillor Zöllner sometimes."

*

Dorothy left shortly afterwards, but instead of going home, she went to visit Armin, who was cataloguing some Stone Age arrowheads that had been donated to the small museum he ran. She asked him about the barrow.

"There was an archaeological dig there many years ago," Armin said. "They never found anything, so the council has no obligation to protect it. And they're desperate to get more families living here for the local school and shops."

"Well, it would be nice if Freddie and Roland could go to school in the village. How much do you suppose Isadora's house is worth?"

"Not much, as it's in such bad condition. Of course, the property developers will make a fortune if they can build there."

"I wonder..." said Dorothy, and fell silent. Armin looked at her expectantly.

"What?"

"You have such good connections, Armin. Do you think you could find out a little bit more about this property developer? And I will try to learn something about what Isadora did in Paris before she returned to Heroldstein. It might be useful to know..."

When she got home, she found Lucy and the children in great excitement.

"Treasure!" squeaked Roland, pulling Dorothy's arm. "I found treasure on the hill!"

"It wasn't you, it was Trotsky," said Freddie, pulling the other arm. "He dug it up."

"But I took it to Mummy," answered Roland, his eyes filling with tears.

"Boys, stop it now!" said Lucy. "Let Aunt Dot have a look!"

In the middle of the kitchen table was a clump of very solid earth, and sticking out of the sides were several blackened discs. Lucy had removed one and cleaned it with water and a toothbrush. Dorothy looked at it through the magnifying glass that Lucy gave her.

"S ... P ... Q ... R," she read. "Senatus Populus Qui Romanus!"

"Yes," said Lucy. "These are Roman coins!"

The story continues on the next page.



arrowhead ['æɹəʊhed]
► Pfeilspitze

clump [klʌmp]
► Klumpen

curse [kɜ:s]
► Fluch

donate [dəʊ'neɪt]
► spenden

expectantly [ɪk'spektəntli]
► erwartungsvoll

magnifying glass
['mægnɪfajɪŋ gla:s]
► Lupe, Vergrößerungsglas

sigh [saɪ]
► seufzen

spirit medium ['spɪrɪt ,mɪdɪəm]
► Geistermedium

squeak [skwi:k]
► quieken, kreischen

Stone Age ['stəʊn eɪdʒ]
► steinzeitlich

suppose [sə'pəʊz]
► annehmen, vermuten

treasure ['treʒə]
► Schatz

SHORT STORY

The barrow king — a Ms Winslow investigation

CHAPTER 3

*Wie sich herausstellt, ist der Grabhügel ein sehr interessanter
und gar nicht unbedingt unheilbringender Ort.*

Von JAMES SCHOFIELD

MEDIUM AUDIO

Was will die Alte?" said Tobias Zöllner to Armin. Ms Winslow, who was sitting next to Armin with her handbag on her knees, smiled politely and pretended she understood no German.

They were in the kitchen of Tobias's farm. It was a large, comfortable room, and the warmth from the wood stove in the corner contrasted strongly with the cold and damp in Isadora's house. They were not offered any tea, however.

Armin explained they wished to discuss the building project and that maybe they had a solution that would persuade Isadora to sell.

"Wie denn?"

It was a question of meeting her needs, said Armin. Firstly, she had to feel confident that the barrow would be treated with respect. Secondly, she needed enough money to leave Heroldstein and return to Paris. The money she'd been offered was not enough. Tobias shrugged. That wasn't his problem.

"Oh, doch!" said Dorothy, putting some papers on the table.

They'd done some research, Armin said, and there was something strange about this deal. The price offered for

the land by the developer was only €250 per square metre, although the average price for the area was closer to €500. As Tobias was an experienced businessman, Armin continued, accepting this low price was surprising. Why was he leaving money on the table? Tobias said nothing.

Armin pointed to the papers he'd received from the company registry office in Munich. "Was the reason, perhaps, because Tobias was a company director of the Munich property developers Biedermann Immobilien GmbH?" he asked. Had he accepted a low price, encouraged the council to do the same while also putting pressure on Isadora, just to increase his own company's profits? Even though he was going to make so much money from building on the land? What would people in the village think about that? Would the council still give planning permission? There was a long silence as Tobias thought about this.

"Was wollen Sie denn?" said Tobias finally.

company registry office
[ˌkʌmpəni ˈredʒɪstri ˌɒfɪs]
• Handelsregister

shrug [ʃrʌɡ]
• mit der Achsel zucken

wood stove [wud ˈstəʊv]
• Holzofen

"You have to make a deal with us because otherwise you'll get nothing out of this project," said Dorothy, leaning forward. "And this is why..."

*

Dorothy stood up as Isadora came across towards her table in the Salon de Thé Angelique in the rue de Rivoli. She looked healthier and more cheerful than when Dorothy had first met her six months before. She told Dorothy about her life in Paris, how she'd found herself a small apartment, got in touch with her old friends and was even thinking of returning to the stage again.

"And I owe it all to you. I don't know why the developers suddenly offered so much money for my house or why Tobias became such a champion of the barrow, but I do know you were behind it. What's happening in Heroldstein now?"

Trotsky's discovery had been all over the local papers. There were pictures of Lucy and the children sitting on top of the barrow and holding some of the silver coins. The journalists were also full of praise for Councillor Zöllner, because he was the first to say that the barrow should be carefully excavated and restored so that people could visit the burial chambers. And then the council quickly agreed that the housing development could go ahead with a different plan, made possible because Isadora was now willing to sell.

"An archaeological team from the University in Speyer has started work on the barrow," said Dorothy. "They think it will be a long job, but Lucy says they're optimistic they'll find some interesting stuff this time."

They drank tea and talked for a while about the people they knew. Dorothy was just going to ask for the bill when Isadora touched her hand.

"I have to confess something to you, Frau Winslow. That séance at Frau Moser's house..."

"You staged it? Oh, I suspected something that evening. The fingers on your left hand had black marks on them from the candle. Later on, I found out that you did similar illusions in your cabaret performances. We all looked at the flying pointer instead of you."

Isadora blushed. "That's right. I thought that if I was difficult about selling the house and made people in the village afraid, then the developers would have to leave the barrow and increase their offer to me, because otherwise they couldn't build anything. Your question about the barrow was very lucky for me."

"It was clever of you to think of a suitable word so quickly for the Ouija board," Dorothy said. "Unheil was perfect. Very sinister!"

Isadora looked surprised. "I beg your pardon?" she said. "That wasn't me. I assumed you spelled it out. Didn't you?"

Dorothy shook her head. "I didn't even know the word."

For a moment, it seemed to Dorothy that the salon with all its customers disappeared and she felt herself transported somewhere cold and dark. Then the door opened as a young couple came in and the sun came out from behind a cloud.

"Do you know," said Dorothy, shivering slightly. "I've heard that they serve a delicious hot chocolate here. Would you like to stay a bit longer and have a little chat?" ☞



assume [ə'sju:m]
• annehmen, vermuten

beg: ~ sb.'s pardon [beg]
• jmdn. um Verzeihung bitten

blush [blʌʃ]
• erröten

burial chamber ['berial, tʃeɪmbə]
• Grabkammer

confess [kən'fes]
• beichten

excavate ['ekskeɪvət]
• ausgraben

housing development
['haʊzɪŋ di, veləpmənt]
• Siedlungsbau

praise [preɪz]
• Lob

restore [ri'stɔ:]
• wiederherstellen, restaurieren

shiver ['ʃɪvə]
• zittern

sinister ['sɪnɪstə]
• finster, unheilvoll

suspect [sə'spekt]
• ahnen, vermuten