

Murder At St Marmaduke's
Chapter Four
Monday 4th November 1985: 13.00 – 13.15

'All this excitement,' Andrew said. 'Don't think we've seen so many people since the Dread Primary School Gathering of 1971. You know - when all those seven-to-ten-year-olds came galloping in and decimated the place in five minutes flat.'

He laughed. 'Do you remember, one little monster coloured your beard pink? Took the then vicar weeks to get it off. Mind you - that could have been more to do with the amount he was charging people to come and take pictures of you.'

'I thought it looked rather good, myself. Lit up the church at night, as well. Could see in all the corners, even. Did wonders helping the mice avoid the traps.'

'Do you remember, they started worshipping you as "Squeakacoatl, the Bizarrely-shaped Mouse God"? Kept sacrificing bits of cheese to you? Rather sweet, I thought.'

There was no reply from James. *Oh, be like that*, Andrew thought.

He supposed his fellow effigy was still sulking over his romantic situation. The griffin from the font had now set up home on the pew-end opposite James's gargoyle girlfriend, and the two other-worldly creatures, Andrew understood, were only one step removed from starting what he guessed would be an extremely ugly stone-wood hybrid family.

It wasn't that he missed the sound of James's voice; but it did get a tad quiet when the other saint was having the occasional sulking fit. Always had, even when they'd been people rather than engravings.

'Loads of folk wandering around in white costumes,' he carried on, hoping to elicit *some* response. 'Powdering things, then brushing them down. Vicar'll have a fit; they're leaving more dust than that roof restoration gang did. Remember the mess they made? All those bits of tile mucking up the altar?'

'The vicar accidentally handed them out as communion wafers. Terrible row.'

There was still no response from beside him. Andrew sighed. This was a *real* mope.

'Tell you something else,' he decided to give it one more try. 'They're being a bit liberal with this "Police - do not cross" tape. They've wrapped it right round my chest and half-way up my chin. Any higher, I wouldn't be able to say a word. How about you? You got any?'

After a moment's silence, he heard, 'Mmm. Mmm mmm mmm mm mm mmm mmm mmm mmm.'

'Oh. Oh, right.'

A thought struck him, and he couldn't help letting out a chortle. 'Oh well; at least you can't say anything else to upset Gargoyly.'

'Mmmmm mm mm mm mm mmm mmm mmm.'

'No need to be rude.'

He smiled to himself; it was nice to be able to tease James for a change, rather than being on the receiving end.

Then something caught his eye; and, as far as it was possible for a frieze to freeze, he froze.

'Oh heck,' he said.

'Mmm?'

'Well - you know I told you they've been carrying all those stiffs up from the vault?'

'Mmm.'

'Well, that's what they all were; stiff as the proverbial sermon. The old woman on the floor, though; they're standing around her taking photographs at the moment...'

'Mmm?'

'And when they had their backs to her for a second...'

'Mmm?'

'I don't think they've noticed; but she turned over so they could capture her good side.'