

Extract from Chapter 1, *The Calling of the Grave*

One. Two. Eight.

The numbers of decay. That's the ratio by which all organisms, large and small, decompose. In air, in water, in soil. Provided it's the same climate, a submerged body will take twice as long to break down as one left on the surface. Underground it will take eight times as long. *One, two, eight.* It's a simple formula, and an inescapable truth.

The deeper something is buried, the longer it survives.

Bury a body, and you deprive it of the carrion-feeding insects that thrive on dead flesh. The microorganisms that would normally digest the soft tissues can't function without air, and the cooling insulation of dark earth further restricts the onset of decay. Biochemical reactions that would normally break down the cells themselves are slowed by the lower temperature. A process that would, under other circumstances, take days or weeks can last for months. Years, even.

Sometimes longer.

Starved of light, air and warmth, it's possible for a dead body to be preserved almost indefinitely. Cocooned in its cold burrow, it exists in near stasis, indifferent to the passing of seasons above.

But cause and effect applies here, as anywhere else. Just as, in nature, nothing is ever truly destroyed, then neither is anything ever completely concealed. No matter how deeply buried, the dead can still make their presence known. *One. Two. Eight.*

Nothing stays hidden forever.