

The Queen of Scots Mystery



Cecilia Peartree

A Pitkirtly Mystery

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Chapter 1 Excluded

The landlord of the Queen of Scots looked particularly grim this morning. Christopher's brain instinctively began to run through all the reasons why this grimness should be directed at him and not just at life in general. He hadn't seemed too bothered about the Range Rover incident, and unless Amaryllis had secretly arranged some sort of April Fool's surprise... But then, Amaryllis wasn't around. She had left a week before on what she insisted was an impulsive last-minute holiday to Monte Carlo, and what he believed was a mission on behalf of her former employers.

He had even threatened to go with her, whereupon she had taken great delight in telling him she knew his passport had run out in 2001 and he couldn't get a new one in time except by paper dispensation – or something even less likely, such as queuing all day at an office in Glasgow.

The landlord said something to him as he passed the pub, but he couldn't hear what it was because of all the noise of the beer delivery that was in progress. He only got along the pavement with difficulty and by circumventing a large trapdoor that had opened up. He had never imagined the Queen of Scots as having an actual cellar where the beer was kept, but evidently it did, for there were two men engaged in unloading steel kegs from the lorry and rolling them along and downwards as the landlord stood on the doorstep watching. Of course, he had never thought about where the beer was stored as he sat at the usual table inside the pub with his group of friends and discussed an eclectic range of topics.

'Morning!' called Christopher.

A growl answered him.

Not from the landlord – evidently his mood wasn't as grim as all that – but from under a bench near the bus stop.

Approaching with caution, Christopher saw a bundle of blankets, or perhaps it was a sleeping bag, on top of the bench, while underneath a dog crouched, shivering. It growled and wagged its tail at the same time as he got closer. He didn't attempt to pat it, but said to it quietly, in a tone he hoped was soothing,

'Hello! What are you doing here?'

'Nowhere else to go.'

He jumped back, startled. The bundle of blankets stirred and the person underneath struggled into a sitting position.

'Sorry – did I give you a fright?' said Charlie Smith. 'Been here all night. Couldn't get home.'

He didn't sound too concerned about it as he blinked in the light of the cool April morning. At least it wasn't raining, Christopher thought.

'Did you bring those blankets with you?' he enquired, not sure how deeply to probe the situation.

'Not when I first came out,' said Charlie. 'I stole them.'

Oh dear. Christopher was even less sure what to say next.

'Where from?' he asked after a pause.

Charlie shrugged. 'Police station.'

Christopher didn't even consider the possibility that he might be dreaming. Instead he wondered what had gone wrong with reality. He sat down in the space at the other end of the bench. The chances of the dog savaging him were so small as to be negligible. Indeed, it came out from underneath and put its head on his knee.

'Why – what?' he said. If the world had gone mad it wasn't up to him to be the only one still

making sense.

~~Charlie Smith stared down at the dog mournfully. The dog stared up at Christopher mournfully.~~

‘I’ve been drinking,’ said Charlie at last.

Well, there’s a surprise, Christopher thought but didn’t say aloud. He could smell the result from where he was sitting.

‘All night?’

‘No, of course not!’ said Charlie. ‘I’m not as daft as all that.’

‘Hmm,’ said Christopher.

‘Only until I got thrown out.’

‘Out of the Queen of Scots?’ said Christopher. He was slightly surprised by this admission. He had only ever known one other person to be thrown out of the Queen of Scots, and that was Jock McLean. And then only because he had threatened to smash the newly-installed jukebox because it was playing non-stop country music. After throwing Jock out, the landlord had the jukebox taken away too by popular demand. You had to have some standards, after all.

Charlie Smith nodded. ‘I knew I wasn’t in a fit state to drive home,’ he said. ‘So I went round to the police station and broke in through the back window – you know the one that doesn’t lock properly – and stole the blankets from the holding cells.’

Christopher was still puzzled. ‘But why? I mean, why did you break into the police station? Why didn’t you go in and sleep in the cells again? I mean, you did that when we had that bad weather, didn’t you?’

Charlie Smith’s mournful gaze travelled from the dog’s head, still resting on Christopher’s knee upwards to meet Christopher’s eyes. ‘I couldn’t,’ he said.

‘But why?’

Immediately after asking the question, Christopher wished he could take the words back. He had a feeling he didn’t want to hear Charlie’s reply.

‘I’ve been suspended,’ muttered Charlie.

‘What? Why?’

‘Oh God. I don’t feel well.’

Charlie got up from the bench much too quickly and made a dash for the sea wall, twenty yards away. He was sick very noisily on the grass verge next to the wall. Christopher began to feel guilty for asking so many questions. Charlie obviously wasn’t ready to answer them yet.

He was trying not to look or even breathe in that direction when Zak Johnstone, who was currently doing a work placement at the Cultural Centre, walked past, giving him a brief wave. He couldn’t remember whether Zak was due to come in the next day to help with the fossil collection or not. He had half-risen from the bench to ask the boy his plans when there was a crash from the direction of the pub. Men’s voices, shouting. A lorry revving its engine. Surely there wasn’t going to be a fight at this time of the morning. He risked a glance in that direction, but there was nothing to see. Just a man jumping into the cab of the beer delivery lorry, and the landlord waving to the men as they departed. He found himself reading the name on the back of the lorry, just because he could never resist reading anything, from sale signs in shop windows to the voltage information on light bulbs at Aberdour Breweries. Well, you learn something new every day. He hadn’t known until now there was a brewery in Aberdour.

By the time he lost interest in the beer lorry, Zak was already halfway along the harbour wall, evidently intending to enjoy the sea air and the icy Siberian wind in his face.

As Christopher watched Charlie Smith weave an unsteady path back towards the bench, he

wished Amaryllis were here. She would know exactly what to ask Charlie in order to discover the whole story of what had happened to him without even appearing to be at all nosy. Whereas he didn't even know where to start.

Fortunately – or perhaps not - Charlie was now quite prepared to go into more detail than Christopher wanted.

'Tampering with evidence,' he said in disgust as he sat down. Being sick hadn't done anything to improve the smell that arose from his person. 'After all those years – after all I've done for them! It's all just bureaucracy, pure and simple. Evidence! Hmph!'

'What evidence?' Christopher ventured, moving slightly further along the bench. He wanted to help Charlie to the best of his ability, but he didn't think that being overcome by noxious fumes would do any good. Apart from anything else, he thought he could get himself drunk just on Charlie's breath.

'They called it evidence! When it was a living, breathing thing that needed somewhere to go,' said Charlie, patting the dog's head. Christopher took this in and understood.

'The dog counted as evidence?'

'According to them,' Charlie nodded. 'According to the rulebook I shouldn't even have touched him, never mind taking him home with me and giving him the first square meal he'd had in weeks. Maybe months. He'd just have been sent to the dog home otherwise. Or kept in the station. Out at the back, where we've got a couple of dog runs.'

'Dog runs?'

'It's bureaucracy,' Charlie repeated. He blinked. Christopher wasn't sure if he was blinking back tears or whether the sun had got in his eyes. It wasn't as if any of them were used to the brightness after all. They had only just emerged from the darkness of a very grey northern winter. Maybe Amaryllis had got fed up with the failure of spring to appear, and had really gone chasing the sun. Maybe she wasn't in any danger at all. But Christopher had a sort of feeling about her trip, which was quite likely to be wrong. There was no such thing as masculine intuition: he was well aware of that.

'So you've been suspended, because of the dog,' he said, as much to clarify the situation in his own mind as because he doubted Charlie's account of events so far.

Charlie nodded.

'And you've been thrown out of the Queen of Scots.'

'Least of my worries,' said Charlie.

Christopher was inclined to agree with this analysis. The landlord had no doubt thrown Charlie out purely for his own protection, to make sure he didn't drink himself into a coma. There was no reason to think he would be permanently banned. The suspension from the police, on the other hand, seemed a bit more serious.

'So how long does it last?' he said.

'Suspension?' Charlie shrugged. 'As long as it takes. For the investigation. Could mean the end, though.'

'The end?'

'The end of my time in the force,' said Charlie gloomily.

Christopher didn't ask Charlie what he would do if that happened. There was no need to look that far ahead.

They sat in a glum silence on the bench for a while. It wasn't exactly a companionable silence; it was more that each was immersed in his own unhappy thoughts. Or at least, Christopher assumed Charlie's thoughts were bound to be unhappy. He certainly had very little to be happy about at the moment.

As Christopher was thinking that the only way things could get any worse was if Jock McLean came round the corner and saw them there, Charlie lurched to his feet again. He turned to bundle the blankets together and pick them up in his arms.

‘Better be off then,’ he said. ‘I’ve left my car up in the High Street. I wasn’t fit to drive before.’

‘Are you sure you’re fit to drive now?’ said Christopher uneasily.

‘I’ll be fine,’ said Charlie. He untied the dog’s lead from the bench and added, ‘Surely the wouldn’t breathalyse me as well as everything else.’

‘You’d better come with me,’ said Christopher, stifling a groan. ‘I’ll get you something to eat before you go. That should help with the breathalyser.’

‘The dog could do with some water,’ said Charlie. ‘He hasn’t had anything since last night.’

‘He looks all right,’ said Christopher. ‘Here, let me take these.’ He reached for the bundle of blankets and took them gingerly out of Charlie’s hands. ‘It’s up this way. Turn left at the top of the High Street.’

By some miracle they got through the busiest part of town without bumping into anyone Christopher knew. It wasn’t like Dave, Jemima or Jock McLean to miss out on anything as interesting as this. He allowed a vague worry about them to infiltrate his mind before he remembered they had already been planning to go into Dunfermline to the pictures that day. There was a pensioners’ special showing of ‘Ultimate Zombie Horror IV’ with free tea and biscuits. He knew Jemima planned to take her knitting with her in case she got bored.

Once Charlie had been encouraged to have a wash and to borrow a shirt from Christopher, and the dog had been allowed out in the back garden, where he was chased by the magpies and then terrorised by one of the cats from next-door, they all gathered in the kitchen for bacon and eggs and hot-cross buns left over from Easter weekend.

After a while Charlie’s replies to Christopher’s mundane comments became more intermittent and quieter, and eventually Christopher turned from the washing-up to find the other man asleep, head on arms on the kitchen table. His dog lay under the table, stretched out luxuriously.

Christopher went into the front room so that he didn’t have to hear them both snoring. He was sorting out the past week’s mail on top of the television when he happened to glance out of the window. Two men in beige raincoats were walking up his front path.

His first thought was that they were in pursuit of Charlie, perhaps in order to confiscate the dog and store it as evidence in one of the runs Charlie had mentioned. His second thought was, over the dead body, and his third was that he had better get to the front door before they rang the bell and woke up both man and dog.

He wrenched the door open as one of the men reached for the bell-push.

‘Can I help you?’ he said as quietly as he could.

‘Mr Wilson?’ said one of them.

They knew his name. But then, every police officer from here to Burntisland probably knew his name by now. That didn’t mean anything. He nodded.

‘Mr Christopher Wilson?’ said the other one.

He nodded again.

‘May we come in, sir?’ said the first one. There was a respectful tone in his voice that sent Christopher’s teeth on edge. He sounded like a funeral director. ‘We’re on official business.’

‘Um – yes, I suppose so... Are you from the police?’ he enquired, although not at all sure that was the case. ‘Do you have some identification?’ he added belatedly.

They gave their names in muttered undertones and produced identification cards that might

well have been forgeries, for all he knew. He couldn't quite make out where they were from. Either they had flashed the cards in front of him too quickly or he needed glasses, which he had begun to suspect lately in any case.

He had a sudden thought.

'Has something happened to Caroline? The children?'

They stared blankly at him and followed him into the front room. He hoped Charlie and the dog wouldn't wake up and barge in. He might be able to get rid of the men if they didn't see the fugitives.

They all sat down.

'Would you like a cup of tea? Or some water?' said Christopher, and immediately wished he hadn't asked. Getting them a cup of tea or a glass of water would mean going into the kitchen. He willed them not to feel thirsty.

One of them cleared his throat. Did that mean he wanted a drink? Better not to ask.

'Are you aware, sir,' said one of the men cautiously, 'that you're listed as the next of kin of Miss Amaryllis Peebles?'

Christopher gasped as if someone had kicked him in the stomach.

'I assume you didn't know, sir,' said the other man.

'What do you mean?' said Christopher, regaining some of his composure. 'Where am I listed as her next of kin? And why?'

They glanced sideways at each other. It was hard to read their expressions, but then, if they came from the government department he had begun to think they did, their training would ensure they didn't give anything away.

'We have your name on our records, sir,' said the man with the darker hair and fiercer expression of the two.

If he hadn't been so worried about Amaryllis, Christopher might have been inclined to worry about this last statement, but as it was he became impatient for them to break the news, no matter what it was.

'Never mind all that!' he snapped. 'What's happened? What do you want?'

'There's an ongoing situation,' said the man with the darker hair.

'What's that supposed to mean?'

'Sign here,' said the other man, producing a word-processed document from his pocket and handing it to Christopher, who flung it down on the coffee table.

'Not unless you tell me.'

'We can't tell you unless you sign.'

'Fine!'

They all glared at each other.

'Would it help if we explained it's the Official Secrets Act?' asked the man with the lighter hair nervously.

'No.'

'Now, listen, Mr Wilson,' said the other one – the one Christopher was starting to think of as the bad cop. 'We've been tasked with informing you of certain – developments – regarding your friend Miss Peebles, and we can't leave here without informing you of them. But you've got to sign this first. We can stay here all day and all night if necessary.'

'Fine,' said Christopher again, although of course he knew it wasn't fine. He snatched up the piece of paper and skim-read it. 'OK, I'll sign. Have you got a pen?'

No sooner had he signed the document and handed it back than the 'bad cop' man said rapidly

'It's a hostage situation. Somewhere in North Africa. I'm not able to be more specific than that. We sent Miss Peebles in to recover an asset, and her security has been compromised.'

'I think Amaryllis likes to be known as Ms Peebles, not Miss,' said Christopher, 'and I'd like one of you to translate what he said into English, please.'

The 'good cop' said, 'Amaryllis went into a dangerous place to try and bring out a person of interest to the UK government, and she was taken hostage herself.'

Christopher found his hands were shaking. He clenched his fists to try and stop it.

'So what are you going to do about it?' he said in a low voice.

'We don't negotiate with terrorists, obviously,' said the man with the darker hair.

'So?'

There was an uncomfortable pause.

'Are there troops on the way?' said Christopher. He could hardly get the words out.

The men looked at each other sideways again. The one with the lighter hair said, 'Yes, but we can't be sure...'

'Can't be sure of what?'

'Can't be sure they'll be in time. Or that they'll accomplish the rescue without collateral damage.'

'You'd better leave now,' said Christopher. 'Will I hear something later on?'

'We'll certainly keep you informed, sir. Would you like us to send someone to be with you?'

'No. Thank you.'

He saw them out, although he wasn't sure if his legs might give way under him at any moment. What he really wanted to do was to scream and shout, and fling himself about like a two-year-old having a tantrum. But he wasn't a two-year-old, and there was a disgraced police officer and a dog asleep in the kitchen, and the only thing he could think of that might help was to go down to the beach alone, and scream and shout at the waves.

He put on his outdoor jacket again, left it five minutes to make sure the two men were out of the way, and left the house, closing the door slowly and carefully behind him.

Chapter 2 Nameless No More

Neil Macrae held his breath until his overnight guest had made it across the road to the bus stop and had got on board the first bus out of Pitkirtly. It was only seven o'clock on a Saturday morning and he knew if anyone saw her leaving the pub they would jump to completely the wrong conclusion. He had let her sleep in his spare room in the flat upstairs because she had been so upset and he had been so confused by the whole situation that they had both forgotten the time of the last bus.

Never mind that Penelope Johnstone seemed almost old enough to be his mother – even if she wasn't actually that old in years, she certainly acted like his mother – but she always dressed in the sludge colours that he thought of as camouflage, intended to divert everyone's attention from her gender and the fact that she had rather an attractive face and the kind of mature figure that some men liked. Neil didn't think it would enhance his own image to be seen with her.

Of course she deserved better than that idiot Liam. It was ridiculous for her to be agonizing over his whereabouts and stressing out over the fact that he seemed to be having an affair, when really these were the least of her worries.

He was standing at the door of the pub, staring into space and vaguely wondering if it would rain when he noticed Jock McLean at the other side of the road.

He didn't have time to dodge back inside before Jock came across and accosted him.

'Here, wasn't that Penelope Johnstone? What was she doing catching the first bus?'

Neil only just managed not to roll his eyes and groan. It would have to be Jock McLean, of all the people. If any man ever deserved the honorary title of fishwife, it was him. This meant that almost everyone in Pitkirtly would know before breakfast that Penelope had spent the night at Neil's flat. So much for his efforts to be discreet, for both their sakes.

'It's none of your business, Jock,' said a deeper voice from the other direction. Neil looked round. Dave and Jemima Douglas were strolling down the narrow street that led from the town centre. It was a pincer movement. He was trapped. All he needed now was for Amaryllis Peebles to pop her head out of the nearest drain and to start interrogating him.

'I expect she missed the bus last night and had to stay over,' murmured Jemima gently as she approached.

'Yes, that was it,' said Neil, nodding. 'Got to get on,' he added hastily before this turned into a full-scale social gathering. What were they all doing out at this time in the morning anyway? Had the clocks gone forward again? No, that was last weekend.

'I couldn't sleep after seeing that zombie film,' said Jemima to Jock. 'What about you?'

'It didn't bother me,' said Jock with a barely concealed shudder.

'Have you seen it?' said Jemima to Neil. 'Something to do with zombie horror. There was a special showing for pensioners. Half price. We got a cup of tea and some biscuits – only rich tea though, not custard creams.'

'I don't have time for the pictures,' said Neil. 'Well, see you later. I've got to go and...'

He couldn't think of an ending for the sentence so he turned and went back into the pub entrance. He felt like going back up the stairs to his flat and possibly even back to bed, but he had things to do. Instead he pushed open the door that led into the bar. He had better open the cellar door and check on the carbon dioxide warning system, which he already knew had developed an intermittent electrical fault. He crossed the room, went behind the bar and opened the heavy door that led to the cellar steps.

The first thing that struck him was the unusual smell. He had a very sensitive nose, which as

pub landlord he often wished he hadn't, though this was only one of many aspects of the job that he found increasingly hard to put up with. He tilted his head up like an animal sniffing the air for predators or prey, but tried not to inhale too deeply. There was a sort of acid tinge to the air, and that was what warned him in time. He took a step backwards, and another. He swore aloud, and the acid gas went into his throat and made him cough.

He grabbed the mobile phone that was lying on the bar, flung himself back through the door and ran out through the pub entrance so fast that he was halfway across the road outside before he came to a halt. Fortunately there was no traffic around.

Jock, Dave and Jemima, however, were still on the pavement outside.

'Hey, watch where you're going!' Jock yelled as Neil's outstretched arm hit him in the chest.

'What's the matter, Neil?' said Jemima. He turned and blinked at her.

'I didn't know you knew my name,' he said, feeling stupid. Then, 'Excuse me, I've got to make a call.'

Neil walked along the pavement a little way, hoping their hearing wasn't quite as acute as the human brains appeared to be, and rang the alarm maintenance company, wishing he had contacted them earlier when he had first noticed the problem. But he had been preoccupied with other matters then.

He had been slightly concerned that the company wouldn't come out at the weekend but the person he spoke to was aghast to hear the cellar might already be full of carbon dioxide, and said someone would be there in half an hour, and on no account was he to go back into the building in the mean-time. He resigned himself to standing at the door telling people to go away.

'What's wrong, lad?' said Dave as Neil walked back towards the pub entrance.

'Nothing really,' said Neil, sliding his phone into his pocket and wishing he had worn a parka to come out and see Penelope off. It was colder than it looked this morning, and surely colder than it should be for the time of year. Or maybe he was in shock. He wished Jock McLean, Dave and Jemima would go away. At least Amaryllis Peebles wasn't with them – knowing her predilection for poking her nose into things that didn't concern her, he thought she would probably have endangered herself in an instant by going to check out the premises.

They were all staring at him, which was rather unnerving.

'Didn't you have things to do?' said Jemima after a while.

'Yes, well, now what I have to do is stand out here waiting for the maintenance people to come along.'

'One of us could do that,' Jemima offered politely. 'Then you could go in there and get on.'

For heaven's sake... He realised they weren't going to leave until he gave them some sort of reasonable explanation for his behaviour.

'I can't go in there at the moment,' he said after a moment. 'I think there may be a gas leak.'

'Is it a good idea to stand in the doorway, then?' said Jock McLean. 'What if the whole place goes up?'

Neil forced out a short laugh, which came out sounding a bit like the bark of a smallish dog. 'I don't think it's that kind of gas leak.'

'Hmm, well,' said Jock, obviously unconvinced.

'We'd better be going anyway,' said Jemima. 'We only came out to work out an appetite for breakfast. It's smokies today.'

Neil's stomach began to churn.

'Come on, Jock,' said Dave, perhaps responding to some unspoken signal from his wife. 'There's enough for you if you want some.'

They ambled off, back towards the town centre. He hoped fervently that nobody else came along in the next half-hour. It wouldn't be good for business if people thought there was the danger of an explosion.

Finding a body in the cellar wasn't exactly going to help either, Neil reflected an hour later.

He and the carbon dioxide monitor maintenance man stood on the top step looking down at the scene. A man's body was sprawled among the beer barrels. It was currently impossible, or at least extremely inadvisable according to the maintenance man, to go into the cellar without breathing apparatus, which the local fire brigade were due to bring with them any minute now. Even standing where they were was a bit risky, although they had put wet cloths over their noses and mouths to enable them to open the door in the first place so that the maintenance man could better assess the situation. There was no knowing whether the man was still alive or, as seemed much more likely, stone dead.

'Come on,' said the maintenance man in muffled tones. 'We'd better wait outside. This stuff is deadly even in quite small amounts. It'll disperse a bit if we leave all the doors open. But the police need to see this now anyway.'

He ushered Neil outside and, perhaps sensing that the landlord was in a state of shock, rang the police himself.

'Come on and sit down over here, pal,' he said once he had completed the call. He led Neil to the bench by the bus stop. 'Bit of a shock, eh?'

'I didn't know – do you think he's dead?'

'There's a good chance.'

'I meant to call you in before,' said Neil, stuttering a little in his agitation. 'I didn't know this would happen.'

'No worries,' said the maintenance man in a futile attempt to play it all down.

There were sirens in the distance. The fire engines arrived first, and after only a few cursory questions which the maintenance man answered on Neil's behalf, two firemen donned breathing apparatus and went into the building. They re-emerged fairly quickly, and one of them came over to the bench.

'Who's that in the cellar?'

'I don't know,' said Neil, feeling ridiculous.

'Not an employee of yours, then?'

'No. I didn't know there was anybody down there at all. I'm the only one who goes in there usually.'

More sirens. The police were on their way.

'Is there any chance he's still alive?' said the maintenance man.

'No,' said the fireman baldly. Neil closed his eyes and wished himself thousands of miles away. If only he had emigrated to New Zealand when he had the chance. If only he were on holiday in the Caribbean... Spain.... Thailand.

When he opened his eyes, a police officer was standing over him, blotting out the light.

'Mr Macrae?'

'Yes,' he said.

'What's all this about a body?'

'We saw – in the cellar – wedged between two barrels. Do you mean he isn't there now?'

'He's there all right,' said the policeman, a scornful edge creeping into his voice. 'We're waiting for the Fire people to give us the all clear to go in and have a look. We're going to need breathing'

apparatus. Do you have anything you can tell us before we do that?’

~~‘There’s a carbon dioxide leak,’ said the maintenance man nervously.~~

The policeman glared at him. ‘I need to hear this from Mr Macrae first, if you don’t mind, sir. His gaze returned to Neil. ‘When did you first notice this leak?’

‘Just this morning. I opened the cellar door and I smelled something. A kind of acid smell. It made me think of carbon dioxide so I called the maintenance people. I’d been meaning to get them to have a look at the detection system. It seemed a bit erratic lately.’

‘Erratic?’

‘I thought there might be an electrical fault,’ mumbled Neil, staring at the ground.

Fortunately the firemen came to fetch the policemen at that point. More sirens sounded and an ambulance drew up on the street near the bench.

‘Not much point in that now,’ said the maintenance man cheerfully.

Now that all the emergency services were here, they seemed to need an inordinately long time to discuss the situation amongst themselves and presumably to decide what action they needed to take and in what order. At one point they seemed to be arguing heatedly amongst themselves. Neil was rather glad he didn’t have to join in with their deliberations, although the maintenance man seemed a bit miffed that they didn’t solicit his expert advice. After a while Neil closed his eyes again, and at some other point, hours and hours later, he was asked by the police to have a look at the man’s body and see if he recognised it.

He did.

‘Oh, my God,’ he said when the paramedics pulled back the sheet. ‘Oh, God.’

His legs started to give way under him, and he clutched at the ambulance doors to stop himself from falling.

‘Do you know this man?’ said the policeman who had originally stood over him.

Neil nodded. He didn’t think he could speak but the policeman was waiting for him to say something, so after a moment he said, ‘His name’s Liam Johnstone.’

He saw the policeman making some sort of signal to another uniformed officer, who approached briskly. Before he knew where he was, they had cautioned him and manhandled him into one of the waiting police cars. He was under arrest.

Chapter 3 Locked out

Christopher had been trying to avoid his friends ever since the two men had visited him and told him about Amaryllis. In normal circumstances they would all have met at the Queen of Scots on Friday night, but he hadn't gone there at the usual time, preferring to stay at home and stare at the walls. He did have the television on, set to the 24 hour news channel, but he couldn't have claimed to be watching it. His gaze often strayed to the window and occasionally he would make a foray into the kitchen, where he would open a food cupboard and stare miserably at the contents, or to the front door where he willed the doorbell to ring heralding Amaryllis's arrival. After he had worked out that the doorbell could equally be a harbinger of doom, he stopped doing that. Amaryllis rarely used the front door anyway.

So when the bell did ring in the early evening on Saturday, he didn't rush to the door immediately. Either it was bad news, or Jock McLean, which amounted to much the same really.

He wasn't sure to be relieved or irritated when the door opened and Jock McLean's head popped round it.

'Anybody in?'

'Yes,' he said.

'You'll never guess what's happened!' said Jock, advancing into the house with only this small amount of encouragement.

'No, I don't suppose I will.'

'It's the Queen of Scots.'

'What?'

'It's shut,' said Jock. 'Police tape all across the front door and everything.'

'Police tape?'

Christopher had started to develop a headache already. Jock sat down on the chair that had once been Christopher's father's. He pulled his pipe out of his pocket, looked at Christopher's expression and put it back again.

'And danger of death signs,' he added hopefully.

'All right,' said Christopher wearily. 'You might as well tell me.'

'They've found Liam Johnstone. Dead. In the cellar. Karen Whiteside told me.'

'She shouldn't have told you anything of the kind, should she?'

'She was standing outside guarding the place when I was round there... They've arrested Neil Macrae.'

'Who's Neil Macrae?' said Christopher.

'The landlord,' said Jock.

'But I thought nobody knew his name,' said Christopher.

'Hmph. That's what he wanted you to think,' said Jock scornfully. 'Anyway, what happened was that there was some sort of gas leak first thing this morning, and Liam got stuck in the cellar and breathed in the fumes.'

'But gas isn't poisonous these days, is it? It just explodes.'

'I don't know about that. I'm only telling you what Karen told me. Jemima and Dave and me were around when Neil first found the gas leak, but we had to go and get our breakfast. Jemima had got smokies in. When's Amaryllis due back? We need her here to sort this out. We can't have Neil Macrae locked up and the Queen of Scots out of bounds. Where will we go? What will we do?'

‘That’s a bit selfish, isn’t it?’ said Christopher. ‘What about Liam Johnstone?’

‘Good riddance,’ said Jock callously.

‘But what about Zak and what’s-her-name?’

‘Penelope,’ said Jock, giving him an odd look. ‘You know that. We’ve known her for years. And don’t you remember she and Liam separated? And Liam got arrested last year for firing his gun without due care and attention, or whatever it was. She didn’t have any more to do with him after that. Jan at the wool shop said she was getting a divorce. Come to think of it, she was just leaving the pub when we were there this morning. She caught the first bus. Neil told us some sort of story about her missing the last one the night before.’

‘I don’t keep all those things in my head the way you do,’ said Christopher crossly, rubbing his hand across his brow.

Jock stared at him again. ‘Do you want a cup of tea?’ he asked unexpectedly.

‘Tea isn’t the answer to everything, you know,’ said Christopher.

‘Have you got anything stronger in the house?’

‘No. Caroline was over last week for a few days. I don’t like to put temptation in her way.’

‘Toast?’ said Jock.

It was tempting, but somehow toast made him think of Amaryllis. Everything made him think of Amaryllis. He would have to try and push his massive anxiety about her to one side and get on with his life.

‘All right, let’s have a cup of tea,’ he said, mainly in order to get rid of Jock for a few moments. But it wasn’t anything like long enough.

‘Here you are,’ said Jock. ‘I’ve given you that mug with the skull. Is that all right? Only I couldn’t find any other clean ones except this.’

Jock himself was drinking his tea out of a novelty mug with rabbit’s ears that Christopher’s niece or nephew had received with an Easter egg years ago. Even the fact that he looked utterly ridiculous didn’t cheer up Christopher. He sipped gloomily from the skull.

‘When did you say Amaryllis was due back?’ said Jock. ‘We need her to get Neil Macrae out of jail. There isn’t another pub for miles around that sells Old Pictish Brew.’

‘It’ll be a while,’ said Christopher, putting the skull mug down with a bump on the coffee table. He had hoped it would shatter, sending tea flying in all directions. Then Jock might have stopped burbling on and rushed off instead to get a cloth to clean up the mess. But it sat on the table mocking him.

‘Shouldn’t you use a coaster with that?’ said Jock.

‘Coaster! Ha!’ said Christopher. ‘Life’s too short to worry about coasters.’

‘That isn’t what you said the time I put the kebab down and got grease all over the place. Anyway, even if Amaryllis isn’t due back yet, why don’t we go round to the police station and get Charlie Smith to tell us what’s going on?’

‘Um,’ said Christopher. ‘Charlie Smith won’t be there.’

‘How do you know that?’

Christopher shrugged. ‘I just do.’

Jock gave him another of his looks. ‘I didn’t realise you were party to the police shift rota,’ he said. ‘When will he be there?’

‘He won’t be,’ said Christopher.

‘Why not? Is he away on holiday too? Has he run off with Amaryllis? Is that why you’ve got that face like a wet weekend?’

Not for the first time, Christopher felt as if he was dealing with a nosey four-year-old. But at least the idea of Amaryllis running off with Charlie Smith amused him for a few seconds, until he remembered where she really was.

‘He’s been suspended from the police. He won’t be at work for a while. Maybe never.’

‘How do you know?’

‘I bumped into him yesterday. He’s staying with me for a bit. So that he’s on hand. For the enquiry.’

It was easier to convey this information, he found, if he came out with it in bite-sized chunks. Maybe in due course he would be able to tell Jock about Amaryllis, if he broke it down like this. But not for a while.

‘So where is he now?’ said Jock.

‘Walking the dog. He’ll be back soon. I’m sure he’ll corroborate my story.’

‘I believe you. What’s he in trouble for?’

‘Wait a minute and you can ask him yourself.’ Christopher heard the front door opening again and then the steady, solid tread of a long-serving policeman, accompanied by the scratching of small feet on the laminate he had recently laid in the hall.

Charlie Smith and the dog halted on the threshold of the front room, both watching Jock with almost identical expressions of suspicion mingled with displeasure. It made Christopher think of the saying about people looking like their pets. He wondered if the dog had studied Charlie’s face until he was confident about mimicking his moods, or if Charlie had been spending long periods staring into the dog’s eyes. The second option was a bit too creepy to consider.

‘Did you have a good walk?’ said Christopher.

‘All right,’ said Charlie. ‘I thought of going into the Queen of Scots for a drink, only there was a police presence so I decided I’d better not go near it.’

Jock, who had stood up, possibly to make a swift getaway, sat down again and repeated everything he had already told Christopher. It was impossible to stop him, but when he eventually calmed down, Charlie Smith said uneasily, ‘I’m not sure you should be discussing this.’

‘But that’s what normal people do,’ said Jock. ‘They talk about things in the privacy of their own homes...’

‘Or other people’s,’ said Christopher pointedly.

‘...and reach conclusions that don’t have to be backed up by evidence,’ Jock concluded. ‘You should try it, Charlie. It’s more fun than police work.’

‘That’s a matter of opinion,’ said Charlie, and sat down. The dog sat on his feet. They sighed in unison. ‘This is going to be really difficult,’ said Charlie after a pause. ‘Something like this happening on my own patch, and I can’t have anything to do with it. I have to sit on the sidelines and watch.’

‘Hmm, tell me about it,’ said Christopher.

They stared gloomily at each other.

‘Well, you’re a barrel of laughs, I must say,’ said Jock McLean, glancing from one to the other. ‘It might as well go down to the cemetery and sit on a gravestone. Or round to Dave and Jemima’s. At least they always have some food in the house.’

‘What about your own house?’ said Christopher. ‘Isn’t there any food there?’

He was sorry as soon as he had said it, but he seemed to have reached the stage where he couldn’t even be bothered to censor his own words on the way between his brain and his tongue. He didn’t really want Jock McLean to go home yet. In some ways, although he hated to admit it, Jock was a barrier that stood between him and a rapid and drastic mental meltdown.

Luckily for him, Jock didn't take the hint. 'I could go for fish and chips, if you like.'

~~'All right,' said Christopher. 'There's some money in a drawer in the hall. Use that.'~~

Charlie Smith frowned. 'You do realise it isn't safe to keep money in the house, don't you? We could – they could – send round a crime prevention officer to give you some tips.'

He got to the end of the sentence with an effort, and went very red in the face. 'Sorry – I forgot.'

The others ignored both his advice and his apology.

Chapter 4 Banged up

Neil had tried very hard to answer all the questions without mentioning Penelope. He wasn't sure if the two police officers who were asking them had spoken to Jock McLean, or Dave or Jemima. He wondered, in fact, if they were from out of town: he had never seen them in the pub. Maybe they didn't know the right people to question if they were strangers. Even men from Limekilns or Rosy probably didn't have a handle on Pitkirtly the way the local men did. With this in mind, although Charlie Smith was a good customer and usually caused no trouble in the Queen of Scot – apart from that last time - he hoped Charlie wouldn't be reinstated in time to take part in the case.

It was easy not to mention her at first. They seemed to be most interested in how Liam had got into the cellar in the first place.

'So – you knew Liam Johnstone before this, did you?'

'Well, I knew him by sight – he'd been into the pub. Most people come in if they're around the town at all.'

'How do you think he got into the cellar? Was it kept unlocked? Or did you deliberately open it to let him in?'

'It wasn't kept unlocked,' said Neil slowly. 'I suppose it's possible I left it unlocked by mistake. I've had a lot on my mind.'

'Such as?'

'Well, you know, business stuff.'

'And personal stuff? Like your divorce, for instance?'

'That was a while ago.'

'A year ago? Not that long. Was Liam Johnstone involved in that?'

'No, of course not! I'd had very little to do with him, as I just said.'

Neil was getting tired already. He knew the police officers could keep it up more or less forever with what with shifts changing and all the practice they'd had, but he wasn't used to the relentless quickfire questions. He was bound to make a mistake sooner or later.

'Can I have a drink of water?'

'In a minute. We'll finish this round of questions first, if you don't mind, sir.'

They were younger than him. They could concentrate better and last longer without getting exhausted and muddled. He had thought he'd seen a flash of sympathy or something similar in the eyes of the even younger of the two, but it was the other one who was asking most of the questions. Neil thought he might be an inspector, but he was wearing cycling shorts and a T-shirt, which didn't seem appropriate, and Neil had forgotten how the man had introduced himself.

'So there was no way Mr Johnstone could have got into the cellar unless you'd forgotten to lock the door? Was it locked when you first got to it this morning?'

'Yes.' Neil remembered putting the key in the lock and turning it. And of course if it had been unlocked Liam might have been able to escape before he suffocated. If that was what had happened. Nobody had told Neil anything much yet at all.

'Was there any other way in?'

'No – yes! Of course! That must have been it. But why?' Neil spoke the thoughts aloud as they came to him. His eyes refocused on the two men across the table. They were giving him a funny look. 'Sorry – the beer delivery. That was Friday morning. That must have been when he got in – I had the trapdoors open. For the delivery men. But we didn't see anybody go in there. And why would he come in there?'

that anyway?’

~~He was aware he was rambling too much and that a lawyer would have told him to shut up. But I~~ hadn’t wanted a lawyer at the start in case they thought he had something to hide. He had, of course. Didn’t everyone? Should he ask for a lawyer now? Or would they think that even more suspicious?

‘So you’re saying Liam Johnstone could have got into the cellar while the delivery was going on?’ said the older, tougher-looking policeman. ‘But he wasn’t on your radar.’

‘That’s the only thing I can think of,’ said Neil, ignoring the part about the radar. ‘The door’s almost always locked. Even when it isn’t, nobody can go in without one of us seeing them.’

‘And was there a time during the beer delivery when that could have happened without anybody seeing him?’

‘I can’t remember.’

‘It was only yesterday!’

‘I wasn’t really paying attention.’

‘No brownie points for not paying attention,’ said the same policeman slowly. ‘Doesn’t tick any of my boxes. How many men came with the delivery?’

‘Two, as usual.’

‘And did they both get out of the lorry?’

‘Yes, of course they did. How do you think they could get the beer into the cellar otherwise?’

The policeman glanced up frowning under his well-groomed eyebrows. Had Neil missed something? Was it now acceptable for men to pluck their eyebrows or otherwise train them into a new shape? Did everybody secretly think he was a caveman because he didn’t? He tried to picture some of the people who frequented the Queen of Scots, asking himself which of them was most likely to pluck their eyebrows.

‘... or not?’ said the policeman.

Neil realised he had missed at least half the question. ‘Um – what was that again?’

‘Come on, Mr Macrae, you can’t get out of answering with this village idiot act. Were the beer delivery men the usual ones or not? Was there anything that smelt wrong about the whole setup?’

Village idiot! Ha! He was a learned professor compared to most of the people he saw at the other side of the bar on a daily basis.

He decided he had better answer the question though. ‘Yes, one of them had done the delivery a few times before. I’m not sure about the other one. He could have been new to the round. He was a bit slower than they sometimes are.’

‘Names?’

‘No – I mean, I don’t know. They’re from Aberdour Breweries, if that’s any use.’

‘Could be,’ said the policeman, making a note. He nodded to the younger officer. ‘Do you want that drink of water now, Mr Macrae?’

It was as if the water were a prize for getting an answer correct.

Even the way the junior officer presented it to him was reminiscent of a school prize-giving. Although of course, they didn’t have these any more, did they? Everybody had to be equal nowadays. Maybe that was the trouble with young people, Neil mused. He remembered the village idiot jibe, and stopped musing. He had to stay alert – otherwise they would catch him out. If they found out about Penelope, they would definitely lock him up and throw away the key.

‘And was there anybody else around while this beer delivery was going on?’ The officer’s thought was an inspector didn’t sound as if he even believed in the beer delivery. He had almost plucked these fake quotes round it with his fingers, the way Neil had seen some pretentious yuppies do when

they were forced to mingle with the common people on occasion. Were they still called yuppies? Pa
attention, he told himself sternly.

‘I don’t think so...’ He pictured the scene. ‘Someone walked past. Oh, no, it was only Christoph
Wilson,’ he added dismissively. ‘I wouldn’t bother about him if I were you.’

‘We’ll decide who to bother about, if you don’t mind, Mr Macrae.’

He made another note. The younger police officer had an uneasy look on his face. ‘Mr Wilson
already known to us, sir. He’s helped us with our enquiries several times. Mr Smith knows him real
well.’

‘Known to you, Constable Burnet? That’s even better.’

‘I didn’t mean... He really has helped us with our enquiries. I mean literally helped us... He ar
his friend Ms Peebles. Sorry, sir.’

As the officer with the eyebrows glanced down at his notes again, the younger one made a face
Neil. It was almost as if he were apologising to him too.

‘Anybody else around?’

‘I don’t think so... Most people would have been at work. Unless they had the day off. Mr Wils
must have done. But.’ Because he was concentrating so hard on not mentioning Penelope – and aft
all, they hadn’t actually asked about Friday night yet – Neil almost forgot he had seen her son, Za
walking past as the delivery was in progress. But he couldn’t very well cast suspicion on the bo
either. Penelope would never forgive him. He stopped speaking abruptly.

‘But what? Was there anybody else or wasn’t there?’

‘I don’t think so,’ said Neil again.

Both policemen gave him suspicious glances.

‘One minute, sir,’ said the more senior one. ‘I’m suspending the interview.’

He spoke into the voice recorder with some standard police words. He nodded to the constab
again and they both left the room, swinging the door closed behind them. It swung open again in tim
for Neil to hear the senior one say, ‘This Mr Wilson. Is he likely to put up a fight?’

‘A fight, sir?’ said the constable in an incredulous tone.

‘Will we need guns? Riot shields?’

One of them closed the door more firmly and he could hear no more.

Chapter 5 Christopher puts up a fight

They came for him first thing on Sunday morning. They didn't break the door down, but they hammered on it until even the dog, who always seemed to sleep very soundly, woke up and started growling in the spare room. Christopher had no doubt that his annoying neighbour Mr Browning was also awake and quite possibly growling too and that the neighbour would make his feelings known later.

Thinking at first that there might be news of Amaryllis, he didn't even fling on his dressing-gown before rushing downstairs. He tripped on the last couple of steps and almost fell into the hall, grabbed the key from the table and took several attempts to get it into the lock.

He was surprised to see two uniformed police officers on the doorstep. He had fondly imagined these days were behind him. A third man, not in uniform, was getting off a bicycle on the garden path. He was casually dressed in cycling shorts and a T-shirt. It seemed to Christopher he was slightly under-dressed both for the weather and for interviewing people.

'Hello, Keith,' he said to Constable Burnet. 'Have you come for me? Or is it Charlie you're after?'

'We need to ask you some questions, sir,' said the third man, taking off his helmet and securing his bike to the drainpipe with a padlock before flashing his identification card very quickly and too far from Christopher's face to enable him to read it. Was he an inspector? Or some lesser being? He couldn't possibly out-rank Charlie.

'Inspector Armstrong,' he said, confirming Christopher's suspicions.

'I'll come quietly,' said Christopher, still reasonably relaxed. 'If you give me five minutes to get dressed.'

'That's all right, sir. We can ask the questions here, then you can go back to bed.'

For some reason Christopher found this unsettling. Perhaps it was because of his pyjamas, which had been a present from Amaryllis and which had 'Make my day' embroidered in large letters on the back. Realising this, he tried to usher the police officers into the house without turning his back on them, resulting in some uncomfortable contortions.

A loud growl came from the top of the stairs.

'Everything all right down there?' called Charlie Smith.

All four of them froze.

'It's fine,' lied Christopher.

'Is that dog dangerous?' said the cyclist, who seemed to be in charge. Christopher wished fervently that Charlie Smith was himself in charge. He wasn't at all sure of this other man, although of course he had known Keith Burnet for some time.

'Can I go and get my dressing-gown?' he asked.

'Better go with him, Constable Burnet,' said the senior officer. 'Find out who else is in the house while you're at it.'

'There's no need for that, Inspector,' said Christopher coldly. 'I'm not going to make a run for it. And the only other person in the house is Chief Inspector Smith.'

He had succeeded in surprising the police inspector, whose mouth fell open inelegantly. Good. He knew Amaryllis would have said he should keep them on their toes, and in their places. He found himself smiling faintly as he walked back up the stairs, put on his dressing-gown and went down again, this time at a less precipitous pace.

‘You’d better come into the front room,’ he said. He didn’t want them in the kitchen: it was warm, friendly place where people slumped on the table and slept, where they made toast in the middle of the night and where Jemima had once shown him how to make a clootie dumpling. ‘Would you like some tea? Coffee? Biscuits?’

‘We’ve had our breakfast, thanks, sir,’ said Keith Burnet. The senior officer glared at him. C maybe that was just his natural expression.

‘We’re making enquiries into a suspicious death, sir.’

‘Oh, yes,’ said Christopher, sitting down in his usual chair. ‘Liam Johnstone?’

‘We’re not at liberty to release the name until next of kin have been informed. The death took place in or around the Queen of Scots public house at some time between Friday morning and Saturday. We understand that you were in the vicinity when the beer delivery took place on Friday. Is this correct?’

‘Yes, I suppose so,’ said Christopher, frowning. So much had happened since Friday, including his world having been turned upside down by the news about Amaryllis, that he had genuine difficulty in remembering anything. He doubted very much if he could help them. But he was nothing if not public-spirited, so he had to try, even although he had taken an instant dislike to the new inspector.

‘Well?’ said the latter, tapping his foot. He hadn’t taken a seat, but stood over Christopher. He couldn’t have deliberately been thrusting his cycling shorts into Christopher’s face but it did seem a bit like that. Or perhaps Christopher was being over-sensitive again. He disliked both the shorts and the person wearing them.

‘Yes! I noticed the name on the back of the delivery lorry. Aberdour Breweries. I remember thinking I didn’t know there was a brewery in Aberdour.’

‘Did you notice anything else, Mr Wilson? Think very carefully. It’s important.’

‘Um,’ said Christopher. The only other thing he could call to mind was the appalling smell that had come from Charlie Smith, and he didn’t think Charlie would thank him for passing on the information on to his colleagues, or former colleagues.

‘Did you see the delivery men?’

‘I must have done, I suppose. Were there two of them?’

‘That’s what we’d like to know, sir.’

Christopher closed his eyes and tried to picture the scene. He had walked past the Queen of Scots before seeing Charlie on the bench, and he had dodged out of the way of a man lifting something off the lorry... Had there been another man somewhere in the background? Perhaps.

It soon became obvious that he could add little or nothing to the information they already had. He wasn’t sure what they were expecting. Was the landlord still in custody? They wouldn’t tell him even if he asked.

A mobile phone rang. The fierce inspector went into the hall to take the call, and Christopher stared at the other two.

‘So is Mr Smith staying with you for a while?’ whispered Constable Burnet. ‘Has he got the dog up there?’

‘Yes,’ said Christopher. ‘They aren’t really going to confiscate it, are they?’

Keith Burnet shook his head. ‘I don’t think so. It’ll all blow over, I expect.’

‘Do you think so?’

‘I hope so. We’ve got Inspector Armstrong on loan from Rosyth at the moment.’ He gestured towards the hall. ‘You wouldn’t catch him cooking sprouts in the microwave for Christmas dinner.’

The other constable gave Keith a funny look, but he didn’t say anything. Evidently he was from

different force too.

~~The inspector popped his head back into the room. ‘Thunderbirds are go,’ he said to his two juniors. ‘We’ve got someone coming round to identify the deceased in fifteen minutes. Let’s get up and at them.’~~

They dashed off as suddenly as they had arrived. Once they were safely out of the way, Charlie and the dog came downstairs.

‘Was that about Liam Johnstone?’ said Charlie as they all went into the kitchen.

‘Mmm,’ said Christopher. ‘We’re not supposed to know who it was yet though. I wonder if they’ve got Penelope over from Aberdour to identify him. I just hope she hasn’t brought Zak along.’

‘Hmph,’ said Charlie, helping himself to Sugar Puffs, which Christopher had bought specially for him. ‘It won’t do him any harm to understand the facts of life and death. He’s old enough.’

Later, as Christopher did some Sunday housework and the dog undid it almost as rapidly, Charlie said in a conversational tone, ‘Do you think Penelope killed him?’

‘I thought we weren’t meant to discuss this,’ said Christopher, pulling the vacuum cleaner brush out of the dog’s mouth for the fourteenth time.

‘It’s usually the spouse or partner,’ said Charlie.

‘Here,’ said Christopher. ‘Take this and clean the bathroom.’ He handed Charlie a cloth and a spray bottle. He couldn’t stand any more talk for the moment. Maybe in a few hours he would be ready for it again.

The dog became baffled about which of them to follow, and moved between the two, showing signs of serious mental disorder. Christopher resolved never under any circumstances to acquire a dog.

After lunch they took the dog for a walk in the woods. There was nothing else to do, with the Queen of Scots presumably still out of action.

Late in the afternoon, as Charlie snoozed on the settee and Christopher wrestled with the Sunday papers, the doorbell rang and a crowd of people streamed into the house without waiting for him to answer the door. They were led, of course, by Jock McLean, and included but were not limited to Jemima, Dave, Tricia Laidlaw, Penelope and Zak Johnstone. Trailing along behind were Rosie from the cattery, Darren Laidlaw, Maisie Sue McPherson and Jan from the wool shop.

‘Right then,’ said Jock when he had them all in the front room, taking up far too much space and causing the dog to hide behind the curtains in terror. ‘We’ve brought our own biscuits.’ He waved a large industrial-sized packet of Bourbons. ‘I’ll go and put the kettle on.’

He returned from the kitchen a few moments later to say, ‘Come on, you boys, let’s find a few more chairs.’

Darren and Zak jumped to their feet. Christopher, powerless to do anything about it, heard the tramping upstairs, then down again dragging something along. Darren brought in the old conservatory chair from Caroline’s room as triumphantly as if he were delivering a dead stag that he had killed with his own hands. Zak had the stool from the bathroom, and Jock had a kitchen chair in each hand.

They were all here to stay.

‘Where’s Amaryllis?’ said Penelope. ‘She should be here too.’

‘She’s away on holiday,’ said Jock McLean.

‘In the South of France,’ said Jemima.

‘No, dear, isn’t it Monte Carlo?’ said Dave.

‘Same thing,’ said Jock.

‘No, it isn’t,’ said Dave.

By the way they studiously avoided looking at Christopher during this little scene, he knew the

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