

AN ISLE OF MAN GHOSTLY COZY



ZEPHYRS *and* ZOMBIES



DIANA XARISSA

ZEPHYRS AND ZOMBIES

AN ISLE OF MAN GHOSTLY COZY

BOOK XXVI

DIANA XARISSA

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CONTENTS

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Murder at Atkins Farm](#)

[A sneak peek at Murder at Atkins Farm](#)

[Also by Diana Xarissa](#)

[About the Author](#)

“So, how did you meet your fiancé?” Beth Monroe asked.

Fenella Woods just stared at her for a moment.

“You don’t know who she is?” Shelly Blake asked.

The woman frowned. “I am sorry. I’ve been on the island for only a few weeks. Mr. Coventry said that you were a very important guest, but I didn’t realize that you were someone famous.”

Fenella laughed. “I’m not famous,” she said quickly.

“But everyone on the island knows who she is,” Shelly added.

Beth raised an eyebrow but nodded slowly. “Maybe we should start over. Hi, welcome to the Seaview. We’re glad you’re considering it for your wedding.”

“Thank you,” Fenella said with a chuckle. “The Seaview is my first choice.”

Beth nodded. “Of course, you’ll want to know what we can do within your budget. Have you and your fiancé set a budget for the wedding?”

Fenella shook her head. “I’m not all that concerned about the cost.”

Beth’s eyebrows shot up. “Weddings can get very expensive,” she said. “Obviously, we do everything we can to

keep costs reasonable, but it will be much easier for me to help you plan if I have a rough idea of what you're thinking of spending."

Shelly shook her head. "Beth, Fenella owns property all over the island. She has enough money in the bank to buy the Seaview several times over. She isn't worried about the price difference between the chicken and the beef for dinner."

"Okay, then," Beth said, giving Fenella a curious look. "As I said, I was not made aware." She sat up straighter behind her desk and picked up a pen. "Why don't you tell me what you're envisioning?" she asked Fenella.

"Something simple, but special," Fenella replied. "It's my first wedding, and I don't plan to ever do this again, so it needs to be wonderful, but I'm also realistic enough to know that it won't be perfect."

"I can't quite manage perfect," Beth said, making a note. "Have you lived on the island for your whole life, then?"

Fenella looked at her niece, Margaret, who was sitting next to her. Margaret laughed.

"Maybe you should just tell her your life story," Margaret suggested in a whisper.

"That might help," Shelly said from her seat next to Margaret.

Fenella looked at Beth, who was looking from one woman to the next.

"I was born on the island, but my family moved to the US when I was only two," she replied. "I didn't move back until a few years ago after I inherited my aunt's estate. Mona Kelly left everything to me, including an apartment on Douglas Promenade. I decided that my inheritance was the perfect opportunity to completely change my life."

Beth grinned. "I'm busy completely changing mine right now. I'd love a nice big inheritance to help me along."

"I'd met Mona only a few times as a child, and I didn't really remember her. I had no idea what I'd actually inherited

until I got here,” Fenella continued. “It was something of a shock to discover that Mona had left me a considerable fortune.”

“Where did Mona get all of the money from, if you don’t mind my asking?”

“I don’t, because everyone on the island knows the story,” Fenella replied. *Or part of it, anyway*, she thought before she continued. “When Mona was eighteen, she met a very wealthy man named Maxwell Martin. The pair had a volatile relationship until Max passed away decades later. During their years together, he showered Mona with gifts, everything from gorgeous jewelry to properties and cars.”

“Wow. Where can I meet a man like that?” Beth asked. “Although I did move to the island for a man, he isn’t rich or anything.”

“Money can’t buy happiness,” Fenella told her.

“Your fiancé must be really rich, too. I mean, otherwise, you’d be worried that he was only marrying you for your money. Is he richer than you?”

Fenella shook her head. “Daniel is a police inspector. He’s very good at his job, but he’ll never get rich doing it.”

“I hope you got a prenup,” Beth muttered as she made another note.

“We are going to sign prenuptial agreements,” Fenella told her. “Only because Daniel is insisting on it. He wants to be sure that if we ever separate, he isn’t entitled to anything of mine.”

“Really? I mean, I suppose, if he’s with the police, then he really ought to be honest. But even really good people can behave very badly when it comes to money.”

“Don’t I know it,” Fenella said.

“How did you meet Daniel, then?” Beth asked.

“We met over a dead body.”

Beth’s eyebrows shot up. “Tell me everything.”

Fenella sighed. “I was simply walking back to my apartment building when I stumbled across a body. I called the police and Daniel was the inspector who was put in charge of the murder investigation.”

“It was murder? When you said dead body, I assumed that someone had had a heart attack or something. Do people get murdered on the island often?”

“Not at all,” Fenella assured her, not wanting to talk about the large number of murder investigations in which she’d been involved in the years she’d been on the island.

“So you met your fiancé over a dead body. What about your friends here? Are they going to be part of your wedding party?”

Fenella looked at Margaret and Shelly and then nodded. “This is Margaret Woods. She’s my niece. Her sister, Megan, will also be part of the wedding party. Shelly Quirk, er, Blake, is my next-door neighbor and closest friend on the island. She and her husband, Tim, will both be in the wedding party.”

Beth looked at Shelly. “That’s a lovely dress,” she said, nodding at Shelly’s bright red dress. It was covered in bright blue polka dots. “I love bright colors.”

Shelly grinned. “I do too, but that’s mostly because of Fenella’s Aunt Mona.”

“You can’t just leave things there. What do you mean?” Beth demanded.

“A few years ago, I lost my husband. His death was unexpected, and I felt completely destroyed by the loss,” Shelly explained. “I took early retirement from my job as a primary school teacher, and I sold the house that my husband and I had shared. Then I bought a flat on the promenade, one that happened to be next door to Mona Kelly.”

“Fenella’s aunt?” Beth checked.

“Yes, Fenella’s aunt. She listened sympathetically while I sobbed on her shoulder and then, over time, she pushed me to move on with my life. She persuaded me to celebrate living with bright colors in both my wardrobe and my flat. She

passed away about six months after we met, and I felt as if I'd lost a dear friend. Fortunately, Fenella moved in a short while later."

Beth nodded. "I should be taking notes. Margaret, you're Fenella's niece, correct?"

Margaret nodded.

"How long have you been living on the island?"

"Not much more than a month," Margaret replied. "I was born and raised in the US, but just before Christmas my sister and I came over to visit Aunt Fenella. I'd just quit my job and ended a relationship, so when she suggested that I consider moving here, I gave the idea serious thought."

"Don't you need a British passport to move here?" Beth asked.

"I'm a British citizen through my father," Margaret explained. "He was able to pass citizenship on to me and Megan. He was also able to pass Isle of Man Worker status to us, so if I can ever find a job, I can take it."

"What do you want to do?"

"I'm a chemical engineer."

Beth frowned. "There probably aren't many jobs for chemical engineers on the island."

"There aren't many, but there are a few. Fortunately, Aunt Fenella is letting me stay with her while I try to find one."

Beth nodded and then made another note. "Let's talk about the wedding, then. Have you given any thought to what you want?"

Fenella nodded. "Shelly just recently got married here, and I helped her with the planning, so I've a good idea of what I want."

"Excellent. Let's start with dates. What month and year are you considering?"

"April, this year," Fenella replied.

Beth stared at her. "It's already April this year. Are you suggesting that you want to get married later this month?"

"That's exactly what I want."

Beth frowned. "I don't think we have nearly enough time to plan anything for later this month. I don't even know if there's any room in the schedule for a wedding later this month."

"We're going to have a registry office ceremony," Fenella explained. "All we want to have here is a reception after the ceremony. It may be a fairly large reception, though, as Daniel wants to invite the entire constabulary, and I have a number of friends and associates who ought to be included."

"I'm going to have to check our master calendar to see if we have any availability."

"That's fine. As I said earlier, the Seaview is my first choice, but I'm sure I can find somewhere that can accommodate me if you can't."

Beth nodded. "Let me go and check the calendar," she said, getting to her feet. "I won't be long."

As the door swung shut behind Beth, Fenella sat back in her seat and sighed.

"This is crazy. We should just get married in a registry office and forget about a reception," she said.

"But there are quite a few people on the island who want to celebrate with you," Shelly pointed out.

"And Daniel wants to invite everyone from the constabulary," Margaret added.

Fenella sighed. "I know, and I love the idea of celebrating with all of our friends, but it's such short notice. I'm just afraid the whole thing will end up feeling as if it was put together in only two weeks."

"It is being put together in only two, or maybe three, weeks," Shelly said.

Fenella laughed. “I know, but I want it to feel as if I spent months or even years planning for every perfect detail.”

Shelly put her hand on Fenella’s arm. “At the end of the day, you and Daniel will be married. Take it from someone who just had a wonderful wedding – your relationship is the most important thing.”

“After last month, being Daniel’s wife is what matters most,” Fenella agreed. “But I would like a nice reception. I don’t plan to ever do this again.”

“Why not?” Margaret asked. She blushed when Fenella looked at her. “I don’t mean you should get married again, but you can certainly celebrate your marriage as often as you like. Have a huge annual anniversary party or something. We celebrate weddings all the time, but actually staying married is a much bigger accomplishment.”

Fenella nodded. “That’s a good point. We’ll see where Daniel and I are in a year’s time. We should be back on the island, since his leave from work is only for a year, but maybe after a year of traveling the world, neither one of us will want to come back.”

“Do you have the first part of the trip booked?” Shelly asked.

Fenella shook her head. “We don’t have anything booked yet. Daniel has been too busy with work to sit down and plan anything. We haven’t really even talked about the wedding. He basically told me to plan whatever I want, and he’ll make sure he’s there.”

Margaret laughed. “That may be for the best.”

“I don’t know. Part of me wants him involved, but part of me is excited to be able to have the wedding exactly the way I want it. Of course, that may all fall apart immediately if the Seaview can’t fit us into their schedule. I’m not prepared to postpone the wedding or our extended honeymoon just to have the reception here.”

“Ms. Woods, good afternoon.” The smooth voice came from the doorway.

Fenella turned around in her chair and smiled at Jasper Coventry, the manager and owner of the Seaview. He and his partner, Stuart, had purchased the property years earlier and had worked hard to turn it into the island's premier hotel and event venue.

"I'm sure I've told you a million times to call me Fenella," she said as she stood up to give the man a quick hug.

He chuckled. "No doubt. But how are you? I saw the note that you'd rung to inquire about booking a wedding here. I do hope it is your wedding this time?"

Fenella laughed. Not only had she helped Shelly plan her wedding, she'd also paid for the special day as a wedding gift to the happy couple. During the planning and subsequent event, she'd spent a lot of time working with Jasper.

"It is most definitely my wedding this time," she replied. "After Daniel's accident last month, we're both determined to get married as quickly as possible."

Jasper nodded. "We were all shocked when we heard what had happened to him. I hope he's fully recovered from his unexpected dip in the icy cold water."

"He came down with a miserable cold immediately after his unplanned swim, but otherwise, he's fine," Fenella assured him. "But he's been through a lot lately. The Chief Constable has agreed to allow him to take a sabbatical for a year. We've decided to get married and then do some traveling with that time."

"How lovely for both of you," Jasper said. "And you want to have the wedding here? I'm honored."

"It's the most wonderful, beautiful place for a wedding reception," Fenella replied. "We're going to have the ceremony at a registry office, probably here in Ramsey, but we'd like to have the reception here."

"Later this month?"

Fenella nodded. "If that's at all possible."

Jasper waved a hand. "For you, anything is possible," he said. "I've brought my appointment book. Let's see where we can fit you in. How many guests are you expecting?"

"Less than a hundred, but probably not many less," Fenella replied, feeling as if she was guessing.

"Did you want the ballroom?"

"If we can have the ballroom, I'd love it."

Jasper laughed. "The ballroom is nearly always empty. Very few couples actually want to use such a huge space. Of course, we'll arrange it so that it doesn't feel large and empty when you're in there."

"If you can set it up almost exactly the way you had it for Shelly's wedding, I'll be happy."

"We can do that, of course." Jasper opened the book in his hand and flipped through the pages. "How about Saturday, the twenty-first?"

"That's only two weeks away," Fenella said, feeling dazed.

"Is that too soon?"

She shook her head. "We want to get married soon, the sooner the better. Hearing an actual date just sort of threw me for a minute. But the twenty-first sounds good. Are you sure you can squeeze me in?"

"We have another wedding reception that afternoon, but they're using one of the smaller conference rooms for their event. We've no one booked for the ballroom for the entire month, actually."

"In that case, we'll take it."

Jasper made a note. "Now, I assume you'll want the thrones," he said, winking at Fenella.

She and Shelly both laughed.

"I definitely don't want the thrones," Fenella replied.

"Thrones?" Margaret repeated.

“Several years ago a very wealthy island resident got married for the umpteenth time and his much younger fiancée requested thrones for the reception,” Jasper explained. “I wanted to rent them for the day, but Stuart insisted that we purchase them so that we’d have them for future use. In the years since, we’ve discovered that no one else on the island has any interest in using them, however.”

“Thrones? Are they terribly tacky?” Margaret asked.

Jasper shook his head. “Of course not. They’re lovely.”

“They’re terribly tacky,” Shelly said.

Jasper laughed. “They’re lovely, and they would be the perfect centerpiece for any wedding.”

“Just not mine,” Fenella said firmly.

Jasper sighed. “It’s far too late to return them, of course, but I’m often tempted to try.”

“Really, if you can re-create everything you did for Shelly, but with some different flowers, I’ll be happy,” Fenella said.

Jasper nodded and then made a note in his appointment book. “Shall we discuss the menu now, or would you rather come back for a proper tasting before you make any decisions?”

“Oh, can we?” Margaret asked. “One of my friends took me along to her tastings. It was the best thing ever.”

Fenella laughed. “I think a tasting would be wonderful, but I’m not sure I’ll be able to get Daniel here.”

“While I’m sure you’d love to have his opinion, I’ve no doubt that you and your niece and Shelly will make excellent choices if he’s unavailable,” Jasper said.

“I’ll eat his share, just to be sure,” Margaret offered.

Everyone laughed.

“Let’s arrange that for Monday,” Jasper suggested. “Or would you rather try to fit it in on the weekend?”

Fenella pulled out her mobile and tapped on it. “Let me text Daniel and see when he’s available.”

“Midday on Monday would work for me,” Jasper said, looking at his book. “There should be more than enough samples for you to try to make it a suitable substitute for lunch.”

Fenella sent a text and then sat back to wait for a reply. “I can’t thank you enough for fitting us in,” she told Jasper.

“You know I’m happy to do it. If it was the height of the summer season, I’d have struggled a bit more, but we’re fairly quiet in the spring. Things start to get busy in May, actually, so you’re fortunate that you chose April.”

“I’ve always wanted a June wedding,” Fenella said. “I know it’s very traditional and probably old-fashioned, but I always loved the idea of getting married at the beginning of the summer. After everything that has happened, though, it now seems far too far away.”

“It’s only two months away,” Shelly said.

“But Daniel and I want to be together forever starting now,” Fenella countered. “We actually talked about running away to Gretna Green or some such thing, but then we decided that we’d rather have a proper event, as long as we can put it together quickly enough.”

“You know I’ll do everything I can to help,” Jasper said.

Fenella’s phone buzzed. She read the screen and then smiled at Jasper.

“Daniel is available on Monday at midday.” Fenella glanced at Margaret. “That’s noon in American English,” she explained.

“I’ll try to remember that,” Margaret replied.

“I should say that he’s available assuming nothing comes up at work,” Fenella added. “With Daniel’s job, you just never know.”

Jasper sighed. “I’m rather hoping that there won’t be any additional dead bodies found on the island ever again. There

was an odd period in the late nineties when my dear friend, Bessie Cubbon, seemed to trip over a murder victim every time she left home. After a few years, it all stopped, though. Now you've had a long run of finding bodies. I hope your run is just about finished."

"I'm afraid that Daniel and I might take our bad luck with us," Fenella admitted in a low voice. "Every time we've gone away together, we've found a body."

"You and Daniel are going to have an amazing year together," Shelly said. "You're going to see the world and have adventures, and you aren't going to find any dead bodies."

"I hope you're right," Fenella replied.

"I know I'm right," Shelly said. "What else do we need to do here?" she asked, looking at Jasper.

He shook his head. "I think I have everything I need for today. I'll pull out my notes from Shelly's event and draw up some preliminary plans based on those. We'll go through them on Monday, while you're trying various samples from the menus. We are going to have to finalize everything on Monday, though, if the event is taking place on the twenty-first."

Fenella nodded. "I'll be ready to make all of the necessary decisions, with or without Daniel. I'll bring my checkbook, too."

Jasper laughed. "That would be much appreciated."

"I'll need several rooms for the entire week," Fenella said. "I'm hoping that all four of my brothers will be coming with their families. My ex-boyfriend, Jack, and his wife, Linda, are hoping to come as well. I just need to call everyone and give them the date."

"We'll reserve the entire penthouse level for you and your friends and family," Jasper told her. "When I said it was quiet at this time of year, I meant it. That should give you plenty of rooms, but we'll have others available if you need them."

They talked for a few additional minutes about everything that Fenella had loved about Shelly's wedding before Jasper

got up to leave.

“I’m going to handle your event personally,” he said as he walked to the door. “But if I’m ever not available, please feel free to talk to Beth. She’ll be helping with everything along the way.”

“Thank you,” Fenella replied.

As Jasper walked out, Beth rushed back into the room.

“I do hope that Jasper was able to find a way to work with you,” she said.

“He was,” Fenella told her. “We’re having the reception here on the twenty-first.”

“Of April?” Beth asked, looking surprised.

“Yes, of April.”

“But that’s only two weeks away. Are you quite certain Jasper put you on the calendar for this year?”

Fenella laughed. “I’m quite certain.”

“Great,” Beth said unenthusiastically. “We’ll get started on that right away, then.”

“We’re meeting Jasper on Monday for a tasting,” Fenella told her.

“Good, great, wonderful,” Beth replied. “I’ll probably see you then.”

After a short and awkward silence, Fenella picked up her handbag. “Thank you for your time today,” she said as she stood up.

“You’re welcome. We’ll see you Monday,” Beth replied as she sat down behind the desk and turned her attention to her computer.

Feeling dismissed, Fenella headed for the door. Shelly and Margaret followed her out of the room.

“I don’t think Beth liked me,” she whispered as they walked down the corridor toward the front of the hotel.

“She’s probably just upset because it’s such short notice,” Margaret said.

“If Jasper doesn’t mind, I can’t see why she does,” Fenella replied.

“Let’s not worry about her or anything else for today,” Shelly suggested. “We’ve started making your wedding arrangements. We should celebrate.”

Fenella laughed. “It’s only going to be a few weeks before we’re celebrating the wedding. I need to keep reminding myself of that, or I might forget.”

“You won’t forget,” Margaret said. “And you and Daniel are going to be deliriously happy together.”

“I’ll settle for just happy, without the delirious,” Fenella said. “Actually, I’d settle for content, as long as there weren’t any dead bodies involved.”

They walked out of the hotel and started toward Fenella’s car.

“It’s a lovely day,” Shelly said as the light breeze blew past them.

“It’s a bit windy,” Margaret said.

“That isn’t wind. It’s just a light zephyr,” Shelly replied. “Although I’m not entirely certain that it’s a west wind, and it should be if it’s properly a zephyr.”

“It’s a good word, though,” Margaret said. “It sounds much nicer than wind.”

“If this zephyr gets much stronger, it might blow us back to Douglas,” Fenella complained as the wind picked up a bit.

“Not if it’s coming from the west,” Shelly said with a laugh. “If it’s coming from the west, it will simply blow us into the sea.”

Fenella drove them all back to Douglas to the luxury building where she and Shelly had their apartments. Margaret was staying with Fenella at the moment, something that Fenella needed to discuss with her before the now-scheduled

wedding. She parked her car in the garage under the building. The trio walked together to the elevator that whisked them to the top floor.

“Thanks for coming with me today,” Fenella told Shelly as they reached Fenella’s door.

“I was happy to do it,” Shelly replied. “You came along to most of my wedding planning sessions, and I was grateful for your support. It’s always helpful to get a second opinion on things.”

“Too bad we didn’t get to give any opinions today,” Margaret said. “I’m looking forward to having lots of thoughts on the food.”

Fenella laughed. “You are coming to the tasting, aren’t you?” she asked Shelly.

Shelly shrugged. “I don’t want to be in the way.”

“You won’t be in the way,” Fenella assured her. “But that’s not until Monday. What are you doing this weekend?”

“I don’t really have any plans. Tim is away for work, actually, so I’ll be staying here with Aunt Elaine rather than at his house.”

“Then we should make some plans,” Margaret suggested.

Fenella nodded. “I thought tomorrow we might go house hunting,” she told Margaret.

Margaret frowned. “House hunting? You want to buy a house?”

“Not at all,” Fenella laughed. “But when you first talked about moving to the island, you said that you didn’t want to live in a modern building on Douglas promenade. You said that you thought you’d prefer a small cottage somewhere quiet.”

“Did I? I probably did, but now that I’ve lived here for a while, I’ve come to appreciate how convenient it is to live right on the promenade. I can walk to all the shops and dozens of restaurants, which is handy, since I don’t have my Manx driver’s license yet.”

“But you’ll have it soon,” Fenella said. “I had Doncan go through my properties to see what might be available if you wanted to move into a small cottage instead of staying here while I’m away with Daniel. I actually have three cottages that are going to be vacant starting in May, so I thought maybe we could take a look at them.”

Margaret looked up and down the corridor and then shrugged. “I suppose it wouldn’t hurt to take a look, but I suspect that after I’ve seen them, I’m going to want to stay here.”

“I’m sure it helps that Ted’s flat is nearby,” Shelly suggested.

Margaret flushed. “That’s certainly a factor to consider,” she admitted as she dug out her keycard and then opened the door to the apartment she was currently sharing with Fenella.

Ted Hart was a police inspector who worked with Daniel. He and Margaret had met during a recent murder investigation and they were currently dating. Fenella wasn’t certain if the relationship was getting serious or not, because Margaret didn’t like to talk about her personal life.

“I’d love to see your cottages,” Shelly said. “Can I come along?”

“Yes, of course,” Fenella replied. “Elaine is welcome, too, if she’s interested.”

Shelly laughed. “Aunt Elaine loves nothing more than snooping around someone else’s house. I’m certain she’ll want to come along, too.”

Shelly’s aunt, Elaine Coleman, was in her mid-seventies. She had grown up on the island but had lived across for most of her life. When she’d returned to the island for Shelly’s wedding, she’d decided that she wanted to move back and had returned to the UK only long enough to pack her things and put her house on the market. She was currently staying in Shelly’s apartment while she was waiting for the house to sell.

“One of the cottages has a tenant, but he’s agreed to be out of the house after nine tomorrow,” Fenella told her. “The other

two are empty, so we can start with the occupied one and then see the other two afterwards.”

“Where are they located?” Shelly asked.

“The first one is near Lonan. The second is just north of Ramsey and the third is not far from the Point of Ayre.”

Shelly shook her head. “You don’t want to live there,” she told Margaret. “You’d be miles and miles away from everyone and everything.”

“I should still take a look,” Margaret replied. “Now that Aunt Fenella has mentioned them, I’m curious about the cottages.”

They agreed to meet in the corridor at eight-thirty the next morning before Fenella and Margaret went into their apartment, leaving Shelly to let herself into the one next door.

“I think I’d miss all of this lovely furniture if I moved,” Margaret said, looking around the large living room that was full of gorgeous antiques. “And I’d miss the views.”

“But you’d have a good deal more privacy,” Fenella pointed out. “The one in the far north has sea views, too. You could always take some of the furniture from here with you. Or you could go through Mona’s storage room and take some of that furniture.”

“Mona has a storage room?”

“It’s on the ground floor. Every unit has a storage room, but Mona’s is bigger on the inside.”

Margaret stared at her for a moment and then laughed. “Of course it is. Everything about Mona is magic, isn’t it?”

“I believe so.”

A huge pink cloud suddenly appeared in the middle of the room. As the mist dispersed throughout the space, Mona walked out from the center of the cloud.

“Good afternoon,” she said, waving a hand to clear the haze.

Fenella stared at her aunt. Although Mona had passed away more than two years earlier, she hadn't gone far. When asked, Mona refused to answer questions about the afterlife, but as far as Fenella could determine, the woman had simply refused to move on and was, instead, continuing to occupy the apartment that had been her home for many years. Fenella was mostly used to Mona's dramatic entrances and exits, but there were times when she still found the idea of sharing her home with a ghost rather odd.

"Good afternoon," Fenella replied.

"I hope your planning session was a success. Have you set a date for the wedding?" Mona asked.

"The twenty-first," Fenella told her.

"As soon as that? How lovely. Of course I shall miss you, but at least I will have Margaret for company," Mona replied.

"Except Margaret and I are going to look at a few cottages tomorrow," Fenella told her. "She might prefer a small cottage somewhere quiet to living in an apartment in Douglas."

Mona raised an eyebrow. "I can't imagine anyone preferring a cottage over this flat, but by all means, go and see what is available. I assume you're only going to be looking at cottages that I, or rather you, already own."

"For tomorrow, yes, but if Margaret doesn't care for any of them, then we might have to look at other options," Fenella replied.

"Or she could just stay here," Mona said, pouting.

"I probably will," Margaret told her. "It's a wonderful location and the views are spectacular."

"And Katie is happy here," Mona added as the tiny cat strolled into the room.

She seemed oblivious to the fact that all three women were staring at her as she walked toward the wall of windows. Choosing a spot in the sun, she curled up tightly and then lifted her head and looked around. "Mereww," she said before putting her head down and shutting her eyes.

“I think Katie would be happy anywhere,” Fenella said with a laugh.

“Good luck tomorrow,” Mona told them. “I’m afraid you’re going to need it.” With those words, there was a loud crash of thunder as a lightning bolt flashed through the room. Mona vanished, as drops of rain seemed to fall from the ceiling.

“**W**hat did she mean by that?” Margaret demanded as Fenella grabbed a few paper towels to clean up the worst of the rain.

“How should I know? I hope she just meant that you’re unlikely to find anything as wonderful as this apartment, but you never know with Mona.”

“It almost sounded like a threat,” Margaret said, shivering. “Maybe we should take Daniel and Ted with us tomorrow.”

“I would be happy to include Ted, but Daniel is working tomorrow. He’s going to work tomorrow morning so that he can take Monday afternoon off for the tasting.”

Margaret sighed. “Ted is working, too. He’s always working. The Chief Constable has given him a stack of cold cases to go through, and he’s become rather addicted to them, I’m afraid.”

“How many cold cases can there be from an island this small?”

“A surprising number, actually. Very few of them are murder cases, though. Most of them are unsolved burglaries and that sort of thing. He’s working to try to find similarities between the cases so that he can group them into piles where he suspects the same culprit might be behind them.”

“I suppose that could be very interesting.”

“Right now it seems to be more interesting to Ted than I am,” Margaret sighed.

Fenella pulled her niece into a hug. “You should be happy that Ted is so dedicated to his work. What he’s doing is important.”

“I know. And I want him to love what he does and, obviously, I’d love it if he could solve every crime that has ever happened on the island, but I’d also really like to see him once in a while.”

“I thought you were having dinner together tonight?”

Margaret looked at the clock. “We are, in half an hour, actually. I should go and get ready.”

Thirty minutes later, someone knocked on the door. Fenella opened it and then smiled as Daniel pulled her into an embrace. They were still kissing when someone loudly cleared his throat from behind Daniel. He lifted his head and Fenella looked over and smiled at Ted.

“Are we in the way?” she asked.

Ted laughed. “Just the tiniest bit.”

“Come in,” Fenella said, stepping back to let both men into the apartment.

“What are your plans for tonight?” Fenella asked Ted as she shut the door.

He shrugged. “We were just going to get dinner somewhere. I have stacks of files to go through at home, so I don’t want to be out for too long. You two are welcome to join us.”

“Thanks,” Daniel said.

Before he could continue, Fenella held up a hand. “Yes, thanks, but not tonight. Daniel and I need to have a long talk about wedding and travel plans, and I don’t want him to have any excuse to talk about anything else. You and Margaret go and have fun together.”

Ted laughed. "I'm sure we'd enjoy hearing all about your wedding and travel plans."

"I'm not," Margaret said. "Let's get away quickly, before they start talking."

"If I were you, I'd keep Margaret out for hours," Fenella told Ted. "That way you can both avoid hearing about the wedding."

Fenella let them out and then turned back to Daniel. "What do you want to do for dinner?" she asked.

"Do we really have that much to discuss?"

She laughed. "Yes and no. Mostly, I wanted to encourage Ted to spend some time alone with Margaret. Apparently, he's spending a lot of time with his files full of cold cases, and Margaret is feeling a bit neglected."

Daniel frowned. "I know how Ted feels. I felt the same way when I started going through cold cases not long after I arrived on the island. You read each file and you think that you may have found a different angle, a question that was missed, something that might solve the case. Most of the time, you're wrong, of course, but just once in a while, you're right, and the feeling of finally getting a break on a cold case is exhilarating."

"Yes, well, unless Ted is happy being exhilarated all alone, he's going to have to find a way to fit Margaret into his busy schedule."

"I'll have a word with him. He probably doesn't realize how much time he's spending on the cold cases."

"I'm going to worry about Margaret while we're away."

"We will have telephones and computers at our disposal."

"Yes, I know, but I'm going to miss her." Fenella looked around the apartment. "I'm going to miss this apartment. I'm going to miss the island. I'm going to miss everything." *Even Mona*, she thought.

"You won't miss me," he said, pulling her close. "Me, you're going to have to put up with every day and every night."

You won't be able to get away from me."

Fenella kissed him. "I think I can live with that," she murmured as the kiss ended.

"I certainly hope so. I'm going to miss a lot, too, though. I'm going to miss my new flat that's only starting to feel as if it's home. I'm also going to miss my job. It's hard work, but it's very satisfying, solving crimes and putting criminals behind bars."

"It's only for a year. We'll be back here before we know it."

Daniel sighed. "And when you put it that way, I start to feel as if that isn't nearly long enough. The Chief Constable was right. I really need a break."

"Let's go and get dinner somewhere."

A few minutes later they were at a table in the back of one of their favorite restaurants.

"So, what shall we talk about?" Daniel asked after they'd ordered.

"You know I talked to Jasper today. I hope you made a note of the date in your calendar."

Daniel laughed. "The date? You mean our wedding date? Yes, my darling, I put it in my calendar. And then I circled it a hundred times and put a few exclamation points around it. I'm actually quite happy that we're getting married, you know."

Fenella flushed. "I'm happy, too, but I'm also feeling a bit overwhelmed. We've only two weeks to plan our wedding and figure out where we want to go first once we're married."

"We could always stay here for a few days. We don't have to rush off as soon as we've said our vows."

"Whenever we're going, we need to start making plans. But let's talk about the wedding first. We've set a date now."

Daniel nodded. "I rang the registry office in Ramsey and got all of the information we need to have the ceremony there on the twenty-first. It's all pretty straightforward."

“Great,” Fenella said weakly.

Daniel patted her arm. “You do want to get married, don’t you?”

“Yes, yes, yes, a thousand times, yes. I’m just ever so slightly terrified by the idea.”

He laughed and then nodded. “It’s easier for me, because I’ve done it before. I can tell you that I’m a lot more confident this time than I was last time. Last time I kept telling myself that my doubts were just cold feet. This time I don’t have any doubts.”

Fenella leaned over and kissed him gently. “I don’t really have doubts. It’s just a big change in a short period of time.”

“You’ve made big changes to your life before.”

“Yes, and this is far less scary than selling everything in Buffalo and moving to the island. This time I know that I have enough money to survive on, and I know that I’m not doing everything alone.”

“You won’t be doing anything alone ever again,” Daniel said.

“See, that’s why I love you. That was the perfect thing to say.”

“Garlic bread,” the waiter said, putting the plate on the table.

“And that’s another perfect thing to say,” Fenella said happily as she picked up a piece of bread.

Daniel laughed. “I’ll have to remember that. When in doubt, make garlic bread.”

“I think all marriages would be a lot happier if people remembered that rule. The same is true for chocolate cake, but I think garlic bread is easier to make.”

“We were going to talk about the wedding,” Daniel said a few minutes later, after they’d discussed the relative merits of cake.

“We have the tasting on Monday. We’ll have to pick the menu then and there. Do you have any idea how many guests we’ll be having?”

Daniel shrugged. “We don’t really have time to send out proper invitations, do we? I thought I’d just put something up on the notice board at work to let everyone know.”

Fenella stared at him. “I’m sorry, but what? You can’t just put up a notice about our wedding. I’m not terribly old-fashioned about most things, but this is our wedding, and I’m not doing this again. We’ll have to find time to send proper invitations. If you want to just hand them out around the station rather than mailing them, I can live with that, but every single person is going to get an invitation. We aren’t just posting something on a notice board.”

Daniel chuckled. “Okay, darling. If that’s what you want, we can do that. I truly don’t care in the slightest, as long as you are my wife at the end of all of this.”

“I’ll talk to Shelly about invitations. I’m not sure who she used, but we’ll have to get them made in a hurry. I told Jasper that we wanted the ballroom decorated much like he did for Shelly’s wedding.”

“That’s fine. It looked great.”

“And we’re going to talk about the menus on Monday. What about flowers?”

“What about them? I like them, but I don’t have particular favorites.”

Fenella laughed. “What did you have at your first wedding? I’d rather not have anything the same.”

Daniel frowned. “I’ve no idea. My first wife planned everything and simply told me where to be and when. I can try to find a photograph or two, if you really want to know.”

Fenella thought for a minute and then shrugged. “Maybe I’ll call your sister and ask her. She probably remembers.”

Daniel laughed. “She probably does. She was in the wedding party. She probably has pictures, too.”

“I haven’t spoken to her in a while, actually. I assume you’ve told her that we’re getting married soon?”

“I called her this afternoon and gave her the date. She and her husband will be flying over for the weekend, but they are going to leave the kids with her husband’s mother. They both thought that would be easier than bringing them.”

“I like the boys, but weddings are pretty boring for children. I can understand why your sister would want to leave them at home. I’m excited to see your sister and her husband again, though.”

“So you and my sister can figure out the flowers?”

“I suppose so. I expect it’s going to cost me a small fortune to get things done in such a hurry.”

Daniel frowned. “We could wait.”

“No, we can’t. I want to get married as quickly as we possibly can, and I don’t mind if it’s going to cost a bit more to get exactly what I want in a hurry. You know I can afford it.”

“And you know that your money makes me uncomfortable.”

“But it shouldn’t. You shouldn’t even think about it. Let’s talk about something else.”

“Let’s talk about our prenuptial agreement.”

Fenella sighed. “Doncan sent me a draft copy today. It feels unfair.”

“In what way?”

“If we get divorced, you don’t get anything at all. I feel as if you deserve something for putting up with me, even if we don’t stay together forever.”

Daniel chuckled. “I get the pleasure of your company for our time together, and I’m letting you pay for our honeymoon. You’re treating me to a year-long holiday all around the world. That’s more money being spent on me than I want you to spend.”

“But I get to go on the trip, too, and you know I wouldn’t be taking it if you weren’t coming along.” Fenella sighed and then took Daniel’s hand and squeezed it tightly. “I love you, and I trust you. Even if I thought you might be marrying me for my money, I’d still be more generous in any prenup than you’re letting me be in ours. If things don’t work out between us, I want you to have enough money to start over comfortably.”

“What are you suggesting?”

“I had Doncan write two other drafts. One is what I really want, but I suspect you’ll think it’s too generous. The other provides you with a much smaller settlement, should we ever divorce, but at least it gives you something to work with if you have to rebuild your life.”

“I’ll look at them, but you know I’m happy with the current draft.”

“But I love you too much to sign that one.”

He laughed. “This isn’t how these things are supposed to work. You’re supposed to want me to agree to get nothing if we separate.”

“But I love you, and you mean a lot more to me than the money. Maybe it’s because I never expected to have a fortune, or maybe it’s because I inherited it, rather than working for it, but I’m more than happy to share every penny I have with you. I suppose it also helps that I don’t have any children to whom I want to leave my fortune. I’m happy that I’ll be able to leave my brothers and my nephew and nieces something, but if I’ve spent nearly everything Mona left me before I go, then they won’t get very much. None of them need the money, although I’m sure they’d all appreciate a windfall.”

“I’ll look at the other drafts,” Daniel promised. “Have Doncan send me all three and then we’ll talk again. What else do we need to discuss?”

They talked about the wedding and honeymoon plans while they ate dinner and dessert. Then they took a short stroll along the promenade before Daniel walked Fenella back to her

apartment. Margaret was still out, so they watched television together for an hour until Fenella found it impossible to keep her eyes open any longer.

“I’m sorry. I’m exhausted. I hope I’ll have more energy when we’re traveling; otherwise, we’ll never get to experience the nightlife anywhere.”

Daniel kissed her before he replied. “I’m not all that interested in nightlife. I want to see historical sites and museums more than bars and clubs.”

“Me too. It’s going to be fabulous.”

“I hope so. I just have to get through the next fortnight. I’m really hoping for a dramatic drop in the crime rate for the next two weeks.”

“I’ll be happy if no one gets murdered,” Fenella replied.

Daniel kissed her again and then let himself out. Fenella crawled into bed a short while later and didn’t wake up until Katie started tapping on her nose the next morning.



“Is it seven already?” Fenella asked as she opened her eyes. The clock confirmed the time that Katie seemed to know instinctively.

Sighing, Fenella pushed back the duvet and made her way into the kitchen. She got Katie her breakfast and then started a pot of coffee. While it was brewing, she took a shower and got dressed. She was sipping her first cup when Margaret came out of the second bedroom.

“Good morning,” she said. “I hope I didn’t wake you when I came in last night.”

“You didn’t. What time did you get home?”

Margaret flushed. “It was quite late. Ted and I had a lot to discuss.”

“Oh?”

She shrugged. “I told him that I was feeling a bit neglected. Then he started talking about the cold case that is currently taking up all of his time. It was fascinating and we ended up talking about it for hours.”

“So now you can understand why he’s so obsessed with it?”

“Yes, but that doesn’t mean I have to like it.”

“How much was he able to tell you? I would have thought that the files would be classified.”

“He told me only as much as was reported in the local paper at the time. The case is from twenty-odd years ago, and according to Ted, it was a slow news week. Apparently, Dan Ross did a lot of his own investigative work and wrote about the case every day for over two weeks.”

“And it still wasn’t solved?”

“No, and that’s what’s so frustrating for Ted. Someone stole a necklace from out of the safe in a mansion. There were a limited number of suspects, but in spite of everything the police did, they were never able to work out who was behind the theft.”

“Tell me more,” Fenella said.

Margaret laughed. “I can show you the necklace if you want.” She tapped on her phone and then scrolled through her pictures. “This is the picture that was published in the local paper,” she said, handing Fenella her phone.

Fenella stared at the necklace. The huge red stone at its center was surrounded by small blue stones that continued all the way around the entire necklace. “Is that a ruby?”

“It is. The blue stones are sapphires. The number at the bottom is the insurance estimate of its value.”

“Wow. That’s a very expensive necklace. I assume the owners claimed the insurance money.”

“They did. Karl and Suzanne Edwards were the owners. They had to wait six months while the police investigated, but then they were paid the amount of the insurance valuation.”

“So what does Ted think happened to the necklace?”

“He has no idea. It disappeared during a party, but it was a small party with a limited number of guests. The couple live just outside of Castletown in a large mansion. They used to have parties frequently, but according to Ted, they don’t have as many these days.”

Fenella frowned. “Do you have any pictures of them?”

“I do, but again, these are from the newspaper, so they aren’t great,” Margaret said. She flipped through the pictures on her phone and then held it out to Fenella.

“I’ve met them,” Fenella said. “And I’ve been to their house.”

“Really? Tell me everything.”

Fenella frowned. “I wish there was something I could tell you. They had some sort of charity event at their house not long after I first arrived on the island. I went with Donald Donaldson.”

“The millionaire businessman that you dated briefly in your first few months on the island.”

“That’s the one. He almost always took me to charity events. At the time I thought it was a bit odd, but that was before I found out just how many of those sorts of events I get invited to every day. For Donald, who relies on the support of the island’s residents to keep his businesses successful, such events are necessary. Mona used to go to just about everything, but I’m a good deal more selective in what I attend.”

“You should go to more.” Mona’s voice floated through the air.

Fenella waved a hand. “I donate a great deal, but I’d rather not waste entire evenings making small talk with random strangers as well.”

“Never mind all of that. Tell me about the Karl and Suzanne Edwards,” Margaret said.

“I met them only in passing. They were polite and they seemed passionate about whatever charity they were supporting.”

“It would have been something in support of research into childhood cancers,” Mona said as she appeared in a shower of glitter. “They lost their oldest son to cancer when he was in his early teens.”

Fenella nodded. “Now that you mention it, it was exactly that. Donald explained about their son before we went to the party so that I’d know what to expect.”

“I don’t suppose you got a tour of the house or anything,” Margaret said.

“Actually, I did get something like a tour. They were having an art auction, and they had the pieces displayed all over the house. Donald and I were escorted through three different bedrooms, including the master bedroom.”

“Did you see the safe?”

“No, but I was told it was there,” Fenella replied. “They had four pictures on the walls in the master bedroom. We were told that three were part of the auction, but that the fourth belonged to the couple and that they’d had it made to a specific size so that it would cover up their wall safe.”

“How foolish of them,” Mona said. “The entire point of hiding the safe behind a painting is so that no one will know that it’s there.”

Fenella shrugged. “Maybe they weren’t worried about Donald or me trying to steal anything from them.”

“They should have been. Someone stole the necklace, after all, and on that occasion there were only a handful of their closest friends in the house,” Margaret said.

“I remember when it happened,” Mona said. “It did get a lot of coverage in the local paper. I’d been to the house, and I knew about the safe, but everyone knew about the safe. Suzanne bragged about it all the time. She’d had it installed so she could keep more of her jewelry at home, rather than having to keep it locked up elsewhere. She seemed to think it

was a brilliant idea. Of course, Max had already had a safe installed in my room by that time, but I didn't tell anyone about it."

"That seems smarter than bragging about your security," Margaret said.

Mona nodded. "After the theft, Suzanne's insurance company refused to insure anything that was being kept in that safe again. I believe they had another safe installed elsewhere in the house, but this time they kept quiet about it."

"While I'd love to talk about the missing necklace all morning, we're supposed to be going to look at cottages today," Fenella said. "Doncan is going to meet us at the first one soon. We need to go."

Margaret swallowed the last of her coffee. "I'll be ready in two minutes," she promised as she rushed back toward her bedroom.

Fenella fixed her hair and touched up her lipstick. Then she slid on shoes and grabbed her handbag. Margaret was waiting at the door for her when she arrived.

"Good morning," Shelly said as Fenella and Margaret walked into the corridor.

"Good morning," Fenella replied.

"I hope you don't mind if I come along," Elaine said. "I'm still looking for somewhere to live, and a little cottage in a quiet location sounds perfect."

"None of these properties are for sale, though," Fenella told her. "I own them all and rent them out."

"Yeah, but we're practically family," Elaine countered as she began to walk slowly toward the elevators. "I reckon I could talk you into selling me one of the cottages if I fall in love with it."

"Maybe," Fenella replied uncertainly.

Elaine looked at her and laughed. "It's okay. The fact of the matter is that I didn't have anything else to do today, so when Shelly said she was going with you and Margaret to look

at cottages for Margaret, I invited myself along. I don't really want to buy a cottage. I'm quite happy in Shelly's flat. I can't afford to buy that, though, so I'm doing everything I can to keep in her good graces so she'll let me stay."

Shelly chuckled. "I'm more than happy for you to stay in my flat. I may decide to sell it when Tim and I find something to buy, but for right now, if you weren't staying there, it would mostly be sitting empty. I only stay there when Tim is away, and I plan to travel with him most of the time. I didn't go this time because I have a few appointments over the next week, but I expect that I'll be going with him in the future."

They chatted about Tim and his travel plans as they rode the elevator to the garage. Fenella unlocked her sensible car and then waited while everyone climbed inside. As she reached for the driver's door, she gave Mona's little red sports car a pat. "We'll go out somewhere soon," she whispered to the tiny two-seater. A trick of the light made it look as if the car's headlights flashed on and off a few times as Fenella got into her other car.

"Where are we going?" Elaine asked as Fenella started the car.

"The first cottage is near Lonan," Fenella told her. "It has two bedrooms and two bathrooms."

"That would be useful when Megan visits," Margaret said.

"I thought she was thinking of moving here, too," Shelly said.

Margaret shrugged. "She changes her mind nearly every day. There's a new man in her life, but they never last long. I suspect when the relationship ends, she'll come back to the island for a long stay."

"She'll be here for the wedding, at least," Fenella said.

"Oh, yes, of course. There was no way she is going to miss that," Margaret said. "But she's flying in for only a few days for that, and Aunt Fenella has rooms booked for everyone at the Seaview."

“Not everyone, just my brothers and their families, and anyone else coming from the US,” Fenella said. “It seemed easier to have them all in one place.”

“It should be wonderful, assuming no one finds a dead body,” Shelly said.

“Let’s not even go there,” Margaret said. “Let’s talk about something pleasant.”

They were talking about old movies as Fenella pulled up in front of the small cottage just outside of Lonan.

“It’s adorable,” Margaret said as she got out of the car. “It looks like something out of a fairytale. There ought to be fairies or pixies living in there.”

“It’s bigger inside than it looks from the outside,” Doncan Quayle told them as he approached. “It’s been a very comfortable home for the man who has been renting it for the past ten years. He’s moving out only because he’s getting married and his future wife has three children from a previous relationship. They’re buying a larger house in Laxey.”

Doncan unlocked the door and then stood back to let the four women enter the cottage first.

“It’s charming,” Margaret said after she’d walked around the entire property. “The views out over the fields are lovely, but they aren’t as nice as the views from Aunt Fenella’s apartment. I like it, but I don’t love it.”

Doncan nodded. “Does that mean I should start looking for a tenant for it?” he asked Fenella.

She shrugged. “Do you want me to leave it empty for a few weeks while you think about it?” she asked Margaret.

Margaret thought for a moment and then shook her head. “If it was a bit closer to Douglas, maybe, but I don’t really want to be this far away from the shops.”

“Go ahead and try to find a tenant,” Fenella told Doncan. “Do you think that will be difficult?”

“Not at all,” he assured her. “The only reason I haven’t found one yet is because you told me to leave everything that

came available empty until Margaret could have a look around. I'm fairly certain I can rent out all three cottages within a day or two, once you tell me that Margaret doesn't want them."

Fenella nodded. "The next one is even farther from Douglas, but it's close to Ramsey," she told Margaret as they walked back to the car. "There are a lot of great shops in Ramsey."

Margaret nodded. "But Ted lives in Douglas," she said softly.

"So maybe not Ramsey," Fenella said. "Do we even need to take a look at it?"

"I want to see it," Elaine said. "I really like this place, but it's too far from a grocery shop. If the next one is close to Ramsey, maybe it will be perfect for me."

"Let's go, then," Fenella said.

It took her only a few minutes to drive to Ramsey. They drove through the center of town and then continued north for a short distance. The cottage sat on a small incline on a grassy plot of land. The houses on either side of it were considerably larger.

"We could probably get planning permission to knock down the cottage and replace it with a larger building," Doncan said as the women approached him. He was standing at the gate that led to the property.

"I assume that's what the neighbors have done," Fenella replied, looking at the row of large, modern houses that stretched out in both directions.

"It is," he agreed. "This entire street used to be cottages just like this one."

They walked through the cottage and then back outside before anyone spoke again.

"It's charming in its own way," Margaret said. "But it feels a bit odd, being so tiny with its larger neighbors looming over it."

Doncan nodded. "As I said, we could tear it down and rebuild."

"I'll have to think about that," Fenella said. "It seems a shame to tear down such a lovely little cottage, and it isn't all that old, is it?"

"It was built in the fifties," Doncan told her. "Every house on the street was pretty much the same. It's the last one of its kind, but it isn't particularly interesting, from a historical standpoint."

"I don't like it," Elaine said. "But if you do tear it down and build something lovely and modern in its place, I'd like to take a look at that."

Fenella laughed. "That would take ages, though. You probably want to find something sooner than that."

Elaine shrugged. "Shelly hasn't started threatening to throw me out yet."

"You know you're welcome to stay in my flat for as long as you'd like," Shelly told her.

"The last cottage is considerably more isolated," Doncan warned them. "It's very far north and some distance from the nearest neighbors. I really don't think it would be suitable for either Margaret or Elaine."

Fenella nodded. "I remember seeing it when we went for our tour of my properties. I thought you said then that the tenants were an older couple who had been there forever and had no interest in leaving."

Doncan nodded. "And then they both had some serious health issues. They ended up moving across to be closer to their son. They were sorry to leave the island, but they didn't feel as if they had any other option."

"Now I'm curious," Elaine said. "I don't want to live in the middle of nowhere, but I do want to see this cottage."

Fenella laughed. "Let's go, then. I wouldn't mind seeing the inside. When we did our tour, we only drove past it."

She followed Doncan as they drove north. The closer they got to the Point of Ayre, the fewer houses they saw.

“Are you sure anyone lives up here?” Margaret asked as they went.

“A few people do, but you have to like privacy,” Shelly told her.

They drove around a corner and then Fenella sighed. “Some people take advantage of privacy,” she said.

“What a horrible mess!” Shelly exclaimed.

Fenella stopped the car and they all stared at the field in front of them. It looked as if someone had had a large party there, but then had made no attempt to clean up after themselves. There were empty bottles, cans, and glasses everywhere. Fenella could see several half-built tents dotted across the grass. There were blankets and items of clothing scattered around the place and bales of hay stacked in messy piles that must have been used as tables and chairs.

“The worst part is, that’s my cottage,” Fenella said, gesturing toward the cottage just behind the field.

Fenella parked next to Duncan in front of the cottage. He was on his mobile as she and her friends got out of her car.

“I’ve rung for a crew to come and clean up the mess,” he told her as he put his phone into his pocket. “They may not be able to get here until Monday, though.”

A strong wind blew past them. Fenella looked over at the field and sighed.

“Everything is just going to blow around all weekend if we leave it,” she said. “I don’t want cups and cans and bottles spread all over the island because of this.”

“We can clean it up,” Margaret said. “It won’t even take that long if we all pitch in.”

Duncan nodded. “That’s probably for the best. I’ll ring my wife and have her bring up some rubbish bags and gloves. We’ll have to work carefully, but we should be able to clear up the worst of it, anyway.”

Fenella sighed. “I think we probably need to get this cottage rented out quickly. Presumably, our partying friends took advantage of the fact that no one was here to see them making that mess.”

“While we clear things away, we should look for anything that might help us identify the culprits,” Duncan suggested. “They ought to be fined for leaving such a huge mess behind.”

“Do you think we should call the police?” Fenella asked.

“Probably, if you’re going to want to file a complaint against anyone,” Doncan told her.

Fenella frowned. “I think I’d rather just clear everything up and forget it ever happened,” she said after a minute. “I feel as if the local paper might not be kind if I took any legal action.”

“Local multi-millionaire has teens arrested for leaving a few empty cups outside one of the properties in her huge portfolio?” Margaret suggested.

Fenella nodded. “It’s a mess, but it doesn’t look as if they did any real damage. We can clean it up, but we may need to hire someone to act as security up here at night, at least on weekends. Ideally, though, we’ll find a new tenant soon, maybe one who can act as security as well.”

Doncan nodded. “I may know just the person for the job, actually. The former tenants have a friend who was interested in renting the place, but it is a bit outside his budget. He’s retired and trying to write a book, and he thought the solitude would be good for him. If you’re certain that Margaret and Elaine aren’t interested in the property, I’ll ring him and offer it to him at a price he can afford. You’ll lose a bit of money on the rental, but you won’t have to pay for security.”

“That sounds like the perfect solution,” Fenella said. “And I’m already quite certain that neither Margaret nor Elaine wants to live here, but we may as well take a look at the cottage while we wait for your wife.”

Doncan unlocked the door and then stepped back to let Fenella go inside first. The other women followed closely behind.

“The wind is terrible out there,” Shelly said as she finger-combed her hair back into place.

“Who said something about zephyrs?” Fenella asked. “What’s a zephyr’s angry older brother called?”

“But this is really lovely,” Elaine said as she looked around the small living room. “I love the fireplace.”

“The entire cottage was modernized about five years ago. Mona was friendly with the previous tenants and they worked together on the modernization,” Doncan told them. “Mona wanted the best of everything, but the tenants wanted it to still feel the same as it always had, so they all made lots of compromises.”

Fenella walked through the living room to the large opening at the back of the room. It led her into a small dining room with a pretty chandelier hanging in the center of the room. The back wall of the room had French doors that led to a walled garden outside.

“The property runs to over ten acres,” Doncan said as he joined her. “The tenants are responsible for only the small garden at the back. The rest is allowed to grow wild.”

Fenella looked at the meticulously maintained garden. “The previous tenants clearly spent a lot of time out there.”

“I believe they both loved to garden,” Doncan told her. “Their friend who enquired about the property is also a keen gardener. He promised me that he’d take excellent care of everything his friends had done if we rented him the property.”

“He’s welcome to it, at whatever he can afford,” Fenella said. “I can’t actually imagine anyone else wanting to live up here.”

“You’d be surprised,” Doncan said. “I’ve had several inquiries, actually, but many of them were from developers who wanted to buy the land and then build on it.”

“Goodness, build what?” Shelly asked. “They can’t seriously be thinking of putting a housing estate up here.”

Doncan laughed. “Probably not a housing estate. One of them mentioned building a number of small manufacturing plants, and another suggested that it was the perfect location for rows and rows of storage units.”

Fenella nodded. “I can see that, actually, but I don’t want to sell the property, especially not if you already have the perfect tenant ready to rent it.”

She turned and walked into the large and bright modern kitchen.

“Mona insisted on all the windows,” Doncan told her as he and the others joined her. “The old kitchen had one single window, in the door that led outside. Mona wanted the kitchen to be the brightest spot in the cottage.”

“It’s definitely very bright,” Fenella said. “And we’re facing away from the mess outside, so it’s also lovely.”

“You can see the lighthouse from here,” Shelly said, pointing to the building in the distance.

“This room almost makes me tempted to consider the place,” Elaine said. “The views are incredible, and this kitchen has every possible modern convenience. There’s a pot filler.”

Fenella smiled at the small tap on the wall behind the stove. “That would be handy, but truthfully, how often does anyone fill a pot?”

“Not often enough to make it worth having a pot filler installed,” Shelly said. “But if Tim and I find a house that has one, I’ll be delighted.”

They were still talking about the relative merits of pot fillers as they walked through the door that led to the bedrooms. They were both fairly small, and they shared a bathroom that was between the bedrooms.

“So the only way to get to the bedroom at the front of the house is through the other bedroom and the bathroom,” Shelly said as they walked back through the kitchen.

“The previous tenants wanted it that way. Mona objected, but in the end she let them have what they wanted. They never used that room, so they were happy to leave the door shut and ignore it,” Doncan explained.

“We really should cut a door from there into the living room,” Fenella said.

“We can, although the new tenant won’t be happy about that. He wants to use that room as his writing room, and he said the best thing about it was that it was tucked away and

almost inaccessible. He's hoping that if he shuts himself in there, he'll be able to focus on his work."

Fenella sighed. "I suppose it doesn't matter, not unless it's a fire hazard or something."

"It's not. The room has a large window that could be used as an emergency exit," Doncan told her. "And the cottage isn't that large. Even in that room, you're never far from an exit."

Fenella turned around and walked back to the bedroom in question. Then she counted the number of steps it took her to reach the back door in the kitchen. "You're right. It isn't far," she said. "If the new tenant is happy, we can leave it alone."

"I'll ring him this afternoon and see if he's still interested," Doncan said. "And I'll find a security firm to come and stay here at night until someone is ready to move in."

"That sounds good," Fenella said, sighing as they reached the front of the property. "And now we really need to start cleaning up the mess, don't we?"

She opened the door and looked out at the field in front of the cottage. "I think the empty cans have been reproducing while we've been inside," she said.

"You would think that people would at least take their clothes home with them," Shelly said as they all walked out of the cottage together.

"And their tents," Margaret added. "Megan dated a guy who was really into camping for a while. I was shocked when she told me how much some of that camping gear costs."

"My wife is on her way," Doncan said. "Unfortunately, she can't stay and help, but she's bringing us lunch."

"That's very kind of her," Fenella said. "But you don't have to stay and help, either."

"I know, but I will, for a while anyway. I've been spending too much time in my office lately. A day outside, collecting rubbish in a gale, actually sounds weirdly enticing."

Fenella stared at him for a moment. "You really need to get out of your office a bit more."

He laughed. "You aren't wrong."

A few minutes later, as they all stood and watched things blowing around in the field in front of the house, a car slowly approached. It took them only a few minutes to unload the boxes that Doncan's wife had neatly stacked in her trunk. Doncan, Margaret, and Fenella carried them all into the cottage as Doncan's wife drove away.

"We don't have any chairs, but we can use the kitchen counter as a table," Doncan said as he opened the box that smelled delicious.

He unpacked several large pizza boxes, a large bowl of salad, and a stack of paper plates. A smaller box held plastic knives and forks, and Fenella found plastic cups and large bottles of soda in another box. Margaret found the large stack of paper napkins in yet another box.

"I think we have everything we need," she said happily.

Half an hour later, they were all full of pizza, salad, and soda.

"I do hope the water hasn't been turned off in here," Elaine said. "I drank a lot of soda."

"Everything in the house is in good working order," Doncan assured her.

Elaine nodded. "I'll just go and see for myself," she said before walking off toward the bathroom.

"That was really good," Fenella said as she put her cup down. "Please tell your wife how very grateful we all were."

"I will. One of these boxes should be full of rubbish bags. We can clean up in here before we go outside."

Doncan started opening boxes again. He unpacked a large box full of cleaning gloves and several bottles of cleaning sprays. Margaret pulled out boxes of garbage bags while Fenella opened the box nearest her. She lifted out the smaller box inside and then lifted the lid.

"We have brownies," she said happily.

Doncan laughed. "I thought there might be a treat tucked away somewhere. Should we have them now, or do some work first?"

"While I'd love to have one now, I think we should get started outside," Fenella replied. "The wind seems to be picking up, and it looks as if it might rain."

"This isn't going to be fun, but it will be even more miserable in the rain," Margaret said.

"I think it's probably best if everyone wears gloves," Doncan said. "We don't know who was here or what they were doing. There could be substances scattered around the place that we'd all rather not touch."

Fenella sighed and then pulled on a pair of gloves.

"We should have separate bags for things that can be recycled and things that are trash," Margaret said. "All of the bottles and cans can be recycled."

"What do you want me to do?" Elaine asked as she rejoined them.

"I think it might be best if you stay in here and help coordinate our efforts," Doncan said. "We'll bring our filled bags inside and you can let us know where the wind is strongest so that we can tackle that section next."

"And you can guard the brownies," Margaret added.

Elaine grinned at her. "I can do that. I may have to taste-test them for you, though."

Everyone laughed and then Margaret, Shelly, Fenella, and Doncan each grabbed a pair of garbage bags and headed outside.

"Let's start in the corners and work inwards," Doncan suggested. "It's going to take effort to take down the tents and move the hay bales, so let's start by gathering up the cans, bottles, cups, and other rubbish that's flying around in the wind. Leave the clothes, too. I want to go through them carefully to see if we can find out anything about the men and women who were wearing them."

“I don’t want to press charges, or whatever the equivalent is over here,” Fenella said.

“It would still be useful to know who was here,” Doncan told her. “They were trespassing, and they left behind a mess. Actually, before we do anything, I want to take a few pictures of the entire site. They may be useful one day.”

The three women stood and watched while Doncan slowly walked all the way around the field. He used his phone to take pictures every few feet. When he finally got back to them, he was frowning.

“They clearly used some part of the field as a bathroom,” he said. “There are some very unpleasant smells coming from some areas.”

Fenella frowned. “Maybe we should wear two pairs of gloves.”

“Let’s start with the easy items,” he said. “It shouldn’t take long to clear away the worst of the rubbish. We may want to get a professional biohazard team in here to do the worst of the cleaning, but we can decide on that later.”

“Recycling in one bag, trash in the other,” Fenella muttered to herself as she started in her corner. The wind was blowing from north to south, so she couldn’t smell any of the odors that Doncan had mentioned. Hoping that would still be the case as she moved farther into the field, she tried to work quickly, gathering up cans and bottles and random bits of paper that seemed to flutter everywhere around her.

“The bits I’m finding are all from yesterday’s local paper,” Margaret said loudly. “The party must have happened last night.”

“I found this,” Doncan said, holding up a sheet of paper.

The others all joined him to see what he’d found.

“‘Isle of Man Zombie Festival,’” Fenella read off the sheet. “Is that what this was?”

“It says Point of Ayre and it was supposed to happen last night,” Margaret said. “What’s a zombie festival?”

“I heard something about this. Let me ring someone,” Doncan said. He handed the paper to Fenella and then pulled out his phone. He took a few steps away and then turned his back to them.

“From dusk until dawn,” Fenella read. “They probably didn’t leave much before we got here, then.”

“According to the flyer, people were supposed to bring their own drinks,” Margaret said. “They should have been told to take their empty bottles home with them, too.”

Fenella nodded. “If they’d cleared up after themselves, I wouldn’t really have minded them having the party here.”

“There’s a number to ring for more information,” Margaret said. “If you did want to press charges, you shouldn’t have too much trouble finding out who was behind the, um, festival.”

“But I don’t want to press charges. I’d just as soon get everything cleared away and then forget it ever happened,” Fenella replied.

“They did use those hay bales as a bathroom,” Margaret said. “Although I think they used one of the tents, too. There are all sorts of nasty smells all over the field.”

“Maybe they used the hay bales for the men and a tent for the women,” Shelly suggested. “I can’t imagine a bunch of women wanting to wee into hay bales in the middle of a field.”

Fenella shrugged. “I can’t imagine wanting to come all the way out here for a party. I prefer to do my drinking in more civilized surroundings.”

“But not everyone appreciates the Tale and Tail,” Margaret laughed.

“I can’t imagine why not,” Fenella said. “It’s the perfect pub.”

Having formerly been the library of a large mansion, the Tale and Tail had everything that Fenella could imagine wanting from a pub. The bartender was friendly, and he always remembered her usual order. The walls were lined with bookshelves that were full of books. And a dozen or so

rescued cats and kittens called the pub home. They were always available for quick cuddles or longer snuggles with guests who sipped drinks and browsed through the collection of books. That the pub was only a short distance from Fenella's apartment made it even more perfect.

"I've rung Daniel and reported everything," Doncan said when he returned. "They're trying to crack down on these kinds of events. Large outdoor parties, especially in isolated areas, with copious amounts of drink and drugs, aren't good for anyone."

"Does he want us to stop clearing up?" Fenella asked.

Doncan shook his head. "He said we can carry on, but he wants us to be careful when collecting the clothes and the tents. He's going to have someone go through them to try to find the owners so that they can all be spoken to about trespassing and hosting illegal events."

"I don't suppose you found out what a zombie party is," Margaret said.

Doncan laughed. "I did, actually. I'd overheard Breesha saying something about zombies the other day, so I rang her to see if she knew anything. You know that she does local theater?"

Fenella nodded. "Of course."

"Ah, that's right," Doncan said. "You saw her in *Three Gentlemen from Bologna*, didn't you?"

"We did," Fenella agreed.

Doncan sighed. "That was a mess, but never mind. Breesha was talking to one of her theater friends, someone who is in the current production on which she is working. He told her all about the party up here."

"He invited her?" Margaret asked.

"More or less. It wasn't just a party, it was a LARP," Doncan replied.

"A lark?" Shelly asked.

“No, a LARP. That’s live-action-role-play,” Doncan explained. “Apparently, there’s a very popular television show right now that is all about zombies. Last night’s event was some sort of zombie role-playing event. Everyone was supposed to come dressed as a zombie and then hang out together, doing whatever zombies do.”

“What do zombies do?” Margaret asked.

“From the looks of it, they drink a lot,” Fenella replied.

“Actually, if they truly were undead, they probably wouldn’t be able to eat or drink anything. Their digestive systems should have stopped working when they died,” Shelly said thoughtfully.

“So there were a bunch of people out here last night dressed as zombies, drinking heavily,” Fenella said. “If I’d organized the event, I wouldn’t have put my phone number on the flyer.”

Doncan laughed. “I’ve already given the number to Daniel. He’s going to find out more about the owner. He’s also going to talk to Breesha and find out who told her about the party.”

“And on that note, I suppose we should get back to work,” Margaret said with a sigh.

“I’m going to take this to Elaine,” Doncan said, holding up the flyer. “I’ll also take a few scraps of the local paper that prove that whatever happened out here happened last night.”

He headed toward the house as Fenella and the others walked back to their corners. Fenella sighed as she reached down and picked up an empty cup. A short while later, her bags were full, and she’d cleared a fairly large section of the field.

“I’m going to take these bags inside and then I’m going to see what’s in that tent,” she told the others, nodding toward one of the tents that was partially collapsed near the center of the field.

“I think it might be wise to take a video of whatever you find in there,” Doncan said. “By the time we finish, you may

have changed your mind about making a complaint to the police.”

Fenella nodded and then carried her full bags into the house. Elaine was standing in the window, watching them work.

“You’re doing a great job,” she said. “This would probably be a good time for a break.”

Fenella laughed. “Are you ready for a brownie?”

“Sweetie, I’ve been ready since I heard that we had them. But you’ve done a lot out there. Surely you’re all ready to take a break.”

“Let me get through the first of the tents and then maybe we’ll take a break,” Fenella said. “I’m not sure what I’m going to find in there, but I’d like to get it out of the way as quickly as possible.”

As she walked back across the field, Fenella took several photographs of the tent she was going to investigate next. When she reached it, she looked around.

“Margaret, can you video me as I start trying to take this down?” she asked.

Margaret nodded and then put her garbage bags down and walked over to Fenella. “I needed a break, anyway.”

“Elaine suggested that we should stop for brownies soon.”

“Elaine is right.”

Fenella opened the new garbage bag she’d picked up and then bent down and lifted one of the collapsed sides of the tent. Margaret held up her phone, recording everything as Fenella unzipped and unhooked things to open up the tent.

“It looks like piles of dirty clothes,” she said as she stared into the tent.

“Put them all into a bag. We’ll let Daniel take a look,” Doncan said.

Fenella nodded and then slowly and carefully began to collect the clothes from inside the tent. The air smelled of

alcohol, smoke, cologne, and vomit. Fenella found a pile of that under the clothes.

“Thank goodness for gloves,” she said as she stuffed the last of the clothes into a bag. “I suppose we need to shove the tent into a bag, too.”

“Maybe we should do something about the, um, mess, before we shove the tent into a bag,” Margaret suggested.

“Maybe we should just leave the tent there and let professionals deal with it,” Fenella countered.

“Leave it for now,” Doncan suggested. “I think we’re going to have to bring in professionals at some point. There are a lot of unpleasant things that are going to need clearing away.”

Fenella frowned. “I have that horrible smell stuck in my nose now. I wanted brownies before, but now I feel quite unwell.”

“Take a few deep breaths of sea air,” Margaret told her. “It helps.”

“If you want to go through the other two tents, I’ll keep working out here,” Shelly suggested. “We’ve nearly cleared away the worst of the things that were blowing in the wind, anyway.”

Fenella looked around and then nodded. “It’s looking a lot better. Thank you all.”

“Let’s see what’s in the second tent, then,” Margaret said grimly.

Fenella unzipped the front of the tent that had collapsed at the back. As she lowered the door, she sighed. “It isn’t nearly as bad. There are clothes and makeup in here, but I don’t think anyone threw up.”

Margaret looked at the neatly stacked makeup cases. “That’s some very expensive stuff. I can’t imagine why anyone would have left it behind.”

“Maybe the owner was so drunk that he or she forgot about it,” Fenella said.

“Maybe,” Margaret replied.

She recorded Fenella as Fenella carefully stacked the cases into a clean garbage bag. Then Fenella carried the bag into the cottage.

“Maybe you could sell all of that to pay for the cleaning crew,” Elaine suggested as Fenella set the bag down.

“It might be interesting to stay here for a while and see if anyone comes to try to collect it,” Fenella replied. “I’d be tempted, but I’m tired and cold and windblown, and I really just want to go home and soak in a hot bath.”

“Oh, that sounds lovely,” Elaine said. “I want to soak in a hot bath with a glass of wine and a brownie.”

“Perfect,” Fenella replied.

She walked back outside with another empty garbage bag. “One tent to go,” she said. “And this is the one that smells the worst.”

“We’ll take a quick look, and if it was being used as a bathroom, we’ll leave it for the professionals,” Margaret said.

Fenella nodded. “I’m tempted to not even look.”

“But we should, just in case,” Margaret replied.

“Just in case what?” Fenella asked. As soon as the words were out of her mouth, she knew what Margaret was suggesting, though. Her heart skipped a beat and then began to race. “There’s no way,” she said softly as she walked back across the field.

“It’s going to be fine,” Margaret said when she caught up to her. “I shouldn’t let my imagination run away with me.”

Fenella nodded. “They used it as a bathroom. That’s all.”

“I’m sure that’s it.”

“You need to record this,” Fenella said flatly.

“I’m ready,” Margaret replied. “At least, I hope I’m ready.”

Fenella took a deep breath. The last of the three partially standing tents was the largest and it was more or less upright. The front had been zipped shut and it took Fenella a moment to find the slider that would open the door.

“Here goes nothing,” she said softly. She pulled the slider all the way around and then slowly lowered the door to the ground. The interior of the tent was dark. Both women grimaced as horrible smells assaulted their nostrils.

“What have you found?” Doncan asked as he walked up behind them.

“I’m afraid to look,” Fenella replied. She pulled out her phone and switched on the flashlight function. After glancing at Margaret, she aimed the light into the dark tent.

“She’s dead,” Margaret said in a strangled voice.

“I’ll call Daniel,” Doncan said, his voice shaking.

Fenella just stood and stared at the dead woman’s necklace. The huge red stone seemed to sparkle as Fenella moved her flashlight back and forth. The smaller blue stones were almost black in the odd lighting.

“**W**e should have looked into all of the tents before we touched anything,” Doncan said.

“We had no reason to believe that we’d find a dead body in one of them,” Fenella replied.

Doncan looked at her and nodded slowly. She knew exactly what he was thinking. *With my track record, we should have expected to find a dead body.* She sighed.

“At least we were wearing gloves,” Margaret said.

Doncan nodded. “That’s something, anyway.”

“How long will it take for anyone to get here?” Fenella asked, looking up at the cloudy skies.

“A constable should be here almost immediately, but we need an inspector and a crime scene team,” Doncan replied. “When I talked to Daniel, he seemed to think that the Chief Constable might send an inspector from Douglas to manage the investigation.”

“Except it won’t be Daniel or Ted,” Margaret said. “Because we’re involved.”

“That might not actually be the case,” Doncan replied. “Although Fenella owns the land on which the body was found, and we found the body, as far as I know, none of us has any connection to the event that was held here last night or to the dead woman.”

“We were all fast asleep in Douglas last night,” Fenella said.

“I think I’m going to go inside,” Shelly said. She had avoided looking into the tent, but she was still pale and clearly upset.

“We should all go inside,” Doncan suggested. “There’s nothing we can do out here.”

“I don’t want to leave her,” Margaret said. “It’s bad enough she was murdered and left alone in this desolate place. I don’t want to leave her alone again. You can all go inside, though. We don’t all have to stand out here in the wind.”

Doncan nodded. “I’m going to walk Shelly to the cottage and check on Elaine. Then I’ll be back,” he told Margaret. “Fenella, what are you going to do?”

“I’ll stay here with Margaret. She’s right. The poor woman shouldn’t be left alone.”

The two women watched as Doncan and Shelly slowly made their way back toward the cottage.

“I can’t believe the victim is wearing the missing necklace,” Margaret said as soon as the others were out of earshot.

“It does seem an odd coincidence,” Fenella replied.

“I wonder who she was. Was there someone here with a connection to the Edwards family? This is going to be quite the mess for the police to sort through.”

“The necklace does seem to complicate things, but it seems unlikely to have been the motive for the murder. She’s still wearing it, after all.”

Margaret nodded. “Who wears a necklace worth a fortune to a party in an empty field?”

“That’s odd in itself, even if the necklace wasn’t rather famously stolen years ago.”

“I only glanced at her, but she looks really young. She may not have even been born when the necklace went missing.”

“Regardless, I hope the police can find out how she came to be wearing it.”

“In an empty field with a bunch of people pretending to be zombies.”

Fenella sighed. “I don’t know anything about role play, do you?”

“One of my college roommates, the one I was randomly assigned as a freshman, was heavily into role play. She did everything from historical reenactments to comic book conventions to big LARP events where everyone was in costume and in character for an entire weekend. I went with her to a few single-day events and conventions, but I never quite understood the appeal.”

“I worked with an adjunct professor once who did a lot of historical reenactment. He loved dressing up as a Civil War soldier and going to Gettysburg for reenactment events. The amount of time and effort he put into everything that he wore, making sure that everything was completely historically accurate, was impressive. I enjoyed going and watching his group do demonstrations and a lot of what they did really helped to bring history to life, but it wasn’t anything I was interested in trying.”

“Even if I were interested in that sort of thing, I can’t imagine wanting to dress up as a zombie. Maybe that’s just because I’m not a fan of Nation Zom.”

“Nation Zom?”

“I’m assuming that’s the American television program around which the party was based. I watched the first few episodes, but I couldn’t get into it.”

“What’s it about?”

“Zombies,” Margaret said flatly.

“Right.”

Margaret shrugged. “It’s set in a post-apocalyptic world where some sort of massive shock wave killed everyone on the planet. That’s important, because apparently, the shock wave

stopped everyone's hearts, but didn't do any other damage to the bodies. That means the zombies can come back to life looking pretty good."

"Pretty good?"

"Very good, actually. You can tell that they are zombies only because they're really pale. Otherwise, they look perfectly normal."

"So how do they come back from the dead?"

"Ah, that was complicated and I'm not sure I really understood it. As the shock wave hit the planet, some scientist was doing an experiment with electricity. When he got zapped and his heart stopped, he dropped the cables he was holding. When he fell to the ground, the cables shocked him back to life, or something like that."

"So is he alive or is he a zombie?" Fenella asked, feeling totally lost.

"Yeah, so he's actually alive. His heart restarted almost immediately, but he's the only one. Everyone else was dead for longer before he zapped them all individually, so they're all in some sort of zombie state. He wasn't sure the technique he developed would actually work, so he started testing it on random strangers before he brought back his wife and some of his friends. Now there are two rival factions, the scientist and his friends against the random strangers. They're all fighting for the limited resources available to them because there aren't enough people to farm or run any food processing plants or something like that."

"What about animals?"

"Oh, they all died in the shock wave, too. The lead character tried bringing back some cows for food, but couldn't do it. He did bring back his wife's dog, though."

Fenella shook her head. "It doesn't sound at all enjoyable."

"I actually enjoyed the first episode. The main character is played by one of my favorite actors, and I found myself getting drawn in when he woke up and found that he was the only person left on the entire planet. Watching him work to

find a way to revive people was interesting, but it got really sad after that. Everyone he brought back had a list of friends and family that they wanted brought back, too, but he had his own list and he knew that their resources were limited. It all got too complicated and too scary for me.”

As Fenella opened her mouth to reply, she spotted a car in the distance. “That must be the constable,” she said. As the car got closer, she could see that it was a marked police vehicle. The driver parked next to Fenella’s car in front of the cottage.

The young woman in uniform who climbed out of the car was a stranger to Fenella.

“Margaret, hello,” she said as she approached them.

“Hi, Patty,” Margaret replied. “I wasn’t expecting to see you here.”

The policewoman shrugged. “I’ve been lent to the north of the island for a few weeks. Just about everyone up here has the same horrible flu.”

“Oh, dear. What a shame,” Margaret said. “Aunt Fenella, do you know Patty?”

Fenella shook her head.

“I’m Constable Patricia Cooper,” the officer said. “Everyone calls me Patty.”

“It’s nice to meet you. I’m Fenella Woods.”

Patty nodded. “I’m usually stationed in Douglas, so I’ve seen you around, usually with Inspector Robinson.”

“Patty and her friend had a party last weekend,” Margaret said. “She invited Ted and he took me along.”

“I invited everyone from the station,” Patty said. “But no one over the age of forty turned up.”

Fenella and Margaret both laughed.

“I was told to come up and secure the scene,” Patty added. “I don’t know that there’s any way to do that, though. It’s a field.”

“You’re more than welcome to put up police tape wherever you think it might be useful,” Fenella told her. “I’m not sure what else you can do.”

Patty shrugged. “I’ll just stand guard until an inspector gets here. He or she can decide what’s needed. The dispatcher said you’d found a dead body.”

Margaret nodded. “She’s in that tent,” she said, gesturing.

“Under ordinary circumstances, I’d verify your findings before an inspector and a crime scene team would be dispatched, but that wasn’t deemed necessary in this instance,” Patty said.

Fenella frowned. “I don’t mean to keep finding dead bodies.”

“No, of course not,” Patty said. “I understand that you and Inspector Robinson are planning to get married soon and then go on an extended honeymoon. I hope this doesn’t interfere with your plans.”

“We’re getting married on the twenty-first,” Fenella said. “Two weeks from today. I can’t see why this would interfere with our plans. I didn’t know the woman, and I was unaware that anyone was using my land for a party last night.”

Patty nodded. “I was just wondering if you’ll have trouble getting Inspector Robinson to leave the island during a murder investigation.”

“The police have two weeks to find the killer. That’s plenty of time,” Fenella said, pushing her worries and doubts out of her head.

“What happened up here last night?” Patty asked as she looked around. “You said it was a party?”

Fenella nodded. “We found a flyer among the piles of garbage that we collected from the field. Apparently, it was some sort of zombie party.”

“It was a LARP,” Margaret added.

“A zombie LARP? I remember hearing something about that yesterday. I thought the guy talking about it said that it

was taking place at a campsite near Bride, though,” Patty replied.

“The flyer we found said to find the party near the Point of Ayre,” Margaret told her.

“A campsite would have been a better choice,” Patty said. “But maybe they couldn’t find any that are open for the season yet.”

As another car approached, the women fell silent. It parked next to the marked police car. As doors opened, Fenella was happy to see Daniel among the new arrivals. Margaret smiled as Ted emerged from the back of the car.

Mark Hammersmith, another Douglas-based inspector, was with Daniel, Ted, and another man. The four of them walked to the edge of the field and then stopped and gestured for the women to join them.

When they reached them, Daniel pulled Fenella into a tight embrace. Ted gave Margaret a quick hug. Mark cleared his throat.

“We’re going to want to have the crime scene team go over the entire field,” he said.

Fenella nodded. “We spent hours clearing away garbage this morning. It’s all in bags in the cottage.”

Mark frowned. “That’s unfortunate.”

“We were wearing gloves,” Margaret said. “People were sick inside one of the tents and they used some of the hay bales as bathrooms.”

Mark made a face.

“I’ve never been so happy that I’m not on the crime scene team as I am right now,” Ted said.

Daniel and Mark both laughed. The other man just shrugged.

“Introduce me to everyone,” he said.

“Sorry, I should have done that immediately,” Daniel said. “Fenella Woods, Margaret Woods, this is Arthur Stout. He’s a

homicide inspector on loan from Liverpool for the next six months or so.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Inspector Stout,” Fenella said.

“Call me Arthur. You’re Daniel’s fiancée?” he asked.

She nodded.

“And Margaret is my girlfriend,” Ted said, putting his arm around Margaret.

“I was warned that it’s a very small island,” Arthur replied.

“It is, yes,” Mark replied. “But I’m not dating anyone on the scene.”

“Sadly,” Patty said in a whisper that Fenella was pretty sure she was the only one that heard.

“Where do you want to start?” Daniel asked Arthur.

“We should take a look at exactly what was found,” he replied. “The crime scene team is already on its way. I want to take a good look at the body before they get here and take over the scene.”

“Where is the body?” Mark asked.

“In the white tent, the one that’s mostly still standing,” Fenella told him.

“She’s wearing the missing necklace from your cold case,” Margaret said to Ted.

He raised an eyebrow. “Are you certain of that?”

“If it’s not the missing necklace, it’s one exactly like it,” Margaret replied. “It looks exactly like the picture that you showed me from the local paper.”

Ted frowned. “That’s a complication I wasn’t expecting.”

“We’d better get started,” Arthur said.

“I’ll escort the witnesses into the cottage,” Patty said.

“Very good,” Arthur replied.

Fenella and Margaret turned and headed for the cottage with Patty. The four men had a brief conversation before they

began to walk toward the white tent. The cottage door flew open as they approached it.

“My goodness, what a mess,” Elaine said. “I can’t believe we’ve found another body. This sort of thing never happened to me when I lived in Bolsover. Was it very awful?”

Margaret and Fenella exchanged glances.

“It was pretty bad,” Fenella said after a moment.

“Could you tell what happened to her? Maybe she had a heart attack or something similar. Do you think she was murdered?” Elaine asked.

“I think the inspectors would rather you didn’t have this conversation,” Patty said loudly.

Fenella nodded. “We can’t talk about it,” she told Elaine.

“Well, darn. What good is being there when the body is found if you can’t hear all of the secrets?” Elaine asked. “Does anyone want brownies?”

Fenella swallowed hard and tried to ignore the wave of nausea that Elaine’s words had triggered. “No, thanks,” she said.

“Not at all,” Margaret replied.

“What do we do now?” Elaine asked.

“We need to wait here while the police start their investigation,” Fenella replied. “Eventually, they’ll want to speak to each of us in turn about everything that happened today. Then we’ll be allowed to go home.”

Elaine frowned. “I don’t suppose they’ll tell us anything, will they?”

“I doubt it,” Fenella said.

“But who was she? Why was she here? And who killed her, assuming she was murdered?”

Patty held up a hand to stop Elaine from asking any additional questions. “It’s best if you all stop talking and simply wait patiently for the inspectors. I’m certain they’ll be

working as quickly as they can to get the investigation started.”

“It would be helpful if there were chairs in here,” Elaine said. “I’ve been standing all day.”

“Would you like to sit in the car?” Fenella asked.

Elaine shrugged. “I’d like to sit. I thought about sitting on the floor, but getting up again would be difficult.”

“Let me see what I can do,” Patty said. She pulled out her phone and walked a short distance away. When she walked back a few minutes later, she smiled at everyone who’d stood silently while waiting. “Someone is on the way with some folding chairs and tables,” she said. “The inspectors will want them when they’re conducting their interviews, but I told them to bring extras for the witnesses who need to sit down.”

“Thank you,” Elaine said. “I hope they aren’t coming from Douglas.”

“No, they’re coming from Bride. They should be here soon,” Patty assured her.

With nothing else to do, Fenella found herself pacing slowly back and forth across the small living room.

“I can’t imagine what it would be like living here,” Margaret said. “It feels as if we’re a million miles from everything.”

Fenella nodded. “While I’ve never been fond of big cities, this is too far off the beaten path for me.”

Patty cleared her throat. “I know you aren’t talking about the investigation, but you really aren’t meant to be talking at all.”

“Sorry,” Fenella said. She walked back and forth a few more times and then dropped to the floor next to Margaret, who was sitting near the window. When she looked outside, she could see the four inspectors standing near the white tent. They were talking to a large group of men and women who were all wearing the white outfits that marked them out as

members of the crime scene team. As Fenella watched, a large van pulled up and parked near her car.

Two constables emerged. They opened the doors at the back and began removing folding chairs from the van. Doncan held the door for them as they carried stacks of chairs into the cottage.

“It’s not much better, but it’s better than standing,” Elaine said as she dropped heavily onto one of the chairs.

Doncan moved them into a neat row along the back wall of the living room. Fenella slowly got to her feet and then walked over and sat down on a chair. Margaret stayed where she was on the floor. Shelly took the chair next to Fenella, sighing deeply as she sat.

The constables brought in two tables and even more chairs. Then they stood by the door, clearly waiting for someone to tell them where to put them. Daniel walked into the cottage a minute later.

“Fenella, can you show me around the cottage, please,” he said. “I hope you won’t mind if we use it as a temporary headquarters during the initial investigation.”

“Not at all. You are more than welcome to use it,” she replied. “This is the living room, obviously.” She got to her feet and led Daniel into the dining room and then the kitchen. “The bedrooms and bathroom are through here,” she said, leading him into the first bedroom.

He followed and then shut the bedroom door before pulling her into a hug. “Are you okay?” he asked.

She shivered and squeezed him tightly. “I’m fine,” she said. “Mostly fine, anyway. I just feel so awful about that poor girl. She looked so young.”

“I’d guess around twenty-five, but that’s just a guess.”

Fenella sighed. “There was a lot of blood, but I didn’t see any weapon. Having said that, I didn’t look for one. Once I realized what we’d found, I stopped looking.”

“You know I can’t tell you anything.”

“I know.”

“I can tell you that I love you.”

Fenella smiled at him and then pulled him close again. “I love you, too. I was really hoping that I was done finding dead bodies and that we could get married and go away and never have to worry about another murder victim.”

“Maybe this will be the last one,” Daniel said.

“We’re still getting married on the twenty-first, right?”

“We are. I’m not letting anything interfere with that. The Chief Constable has already agreed that my last day of work will be the twentieth, regardless of what happens between now and then. That’s one of the reasons why Arthur is here, actually.”

“He seems nice enough.”

“He has a solid background in homicide. Our victim out there is in good hands.”

“Margaret was just telling me about Ted’s cold case. We were both shocked to see the victim wearing that necklace.”

“We can’t be certain it’s the same necklace, not yet. If it is, it raises a lot of questions, but it also gives us another starting point for the investigation.”

Fenella shook her head. “I wish we’d never come to look at this cottage.”

“If you hadn’t, who knows when the body would have been discovered.”

“Maybe the killer would have come back and gotten rid of it.”

“Also a possibility. As unpleasant as all of this is for you, our victim is fortunate that you found her when you did.”

Fenella sighed. “I suppose that’s something.”

Daniel released her and then looked around the empty room. “We can use this room for interviews. Is there another bedroom?”

“It’s through here, on the other side of the bathroom,” Fenella told him. She led him through the bathroom and into the other bedroom. “The living room is on the other side of that wall,” she said, pointing.

He frowned. “What an odd layout.”

Fenella shrugged. “They should have put a door on that wall so that you could get into this bedroom without going through the other bedroom and bathroom, but apparently the former tenants were happy with the layout. The man who wants to rent it next wants it left the same way.”

“How strange,” Daniel said. “But at least we have two bedrooms for interviews. We’ll be able to question you all a bit more quickly.”

“That’s good news. I’m ready to go home and cry.”

Daniel hugged her again and then they walked together back to the living room. He told the two uniformed constables where to set up the tables and chairs while Fenella walked back over and sat down next to Shelly.

“I’m sorry that this is taking so long,” Daniel said a short while later. “We’re going to start taking your statements soon.”

Fenella watched as he went back outside, rejoining the other inspectors, who were still clustered around the tent. A few minutes later, someone from the crime scene team walked into the cottage.

“I understand you spent some time picking up rubbish from the field,” he said.

Fenella nodded. “It was full of cups, bottles, cans, and bits of paper. We sorted everything according to whether it would recycle or not and put it all into garbage bags. They’re in the kitchen.”

She got up and walked into the kitchen with him to show him which bags had been filled from the mess outside.

“This bag is from our lunch,” she said, pointing to the half-empty bag on the floor near the sink. “The other bags were filled from outside.”

“That’s a lot of rubbish.”

“It is.”

When Fenella walked back into the living room, Daniel and Arthur were standing near the door. Daniel gave her an encouraging smile as she walked over and sat back down.

“We’re going to start taking statements now,” Arthur said after Daniel introduced him to everyone.

“Maybe you could start with Elaine,” Shelly suggested. “She’s had a long day.”

“I’m fine,” Elaine said. “I may be old, but I’m still alive. I’ll wait my turn so that the police can do whatever they think will solve the case the fastest.”

“I don’t think it much matters what order we talk to you,” Arthur said. “Daniel, why don’t you talk to Elaine while I speak to Fenella?”

Fenella did her best to keep her expression neutral as Daniel nodded. “I can do that,” he said.

“I’ll take Fenella in the bedroom at the back, as I suspect we’ll need longer for our conversation than you’ll need with Elaine. Once you’ve finished with her, you can take Doncan Quayle’s statement. Maybe he could drive Elaine home after that,” Arthur said.

“I’d be happy to do so, assuming no one wants me with them while they talk to the police,” Doncan said.

“We’ll all be fine,” Fenella replied.

“Shall we, then?” Arthur asked.

Fenella and Elaine both stood up. Fenella followed Arthur through the house to the second bedroom. The table had been placed in the center of the room. There were two chairs on either side of it.

“Have a seat. I’ll just get a constable to take notes,” he said.

Fenella sat down and looked out the window on the side of the house. She could see nothing but empty fields that seemed

to go on forever. Arthur was back a moment later with one of the constables who'd brought the chairs.

"I'd like to record our conversation," Arthur said as he pulled out his phone. "And both the constable and I will be taking notes."

"That's fine."

The two men sat down and took out small notebooks and pens. Arthur put his phone on the table and tapped to start recording.

"Let's start with your name and why you were here today," he said.

"I'm Fenella Woods. I was here today because my niece, Margaret, has now moved to the island and needs a place to stay. I own this cottage and it's currently empty, so I thought it would be worth taking a look at it to see if it would suit Margaret."

"And did you think that it would suit her before you found the body?"

Fenella shook her head. "It's too far from everything and too isolated. I wouldn't want to stay here alone, and I definitely don't want Margaret to stay here on her own."

Arthur nodded. "And, of course, when you arrived you discovered that someone had used the field outside for a party. How did that make you feel?"

"I was annoyed, of course."

Arthur made a note. "I believe you own a number of properties all over the island."

"Yes, that's correct."

"Tell me what you did today, then. Start with breakfast."

Fenella did her best to remember everything that had happened. Breakfast felt as if it had been a very long time ago, though.

"...and then Constable Cooper arrived," she eventually concluded.

Arthur nodded. "It's clear that you've done this before."

"Unfortunately, I've found a few dead bodies over the past few years."

"More than a few," Arthur countered.

Fenella shrugged. "I'd rather not think about it."

"You told me about finding the victim. Did you recognize her?"

"Not at all. I don't think I knew her, but I also didn't take a good look at her face. As soon as I realized that she was dead, I turned away."

"I'd like to show you a picture, then. It would be helpful if you could identify her." Arthur picked up his phone and scrolled through it, eventually stopping and then holding it up to Fenella. "Did you know her?"

Fenella looked at the picture and then blinked back tears. "She looks so young," she said in a low voice. "I don't recognize her at all."

Arthur nodded and then put the phone back on the table. "It's a small island. I was hoping someone here would be able to identify her."

"I'm sorry, but I don't think I've ever seen her before. I did see her necklace, or rather a photograph of it, just yesterday, though."

He nodded. "Ted and I had a long conversation about that necklace. We can't be certain that it's the same one that he's been investigating, but if it is, that raises a number of other questions."

Fenella sighed. "It's all just awful."

"Is there anything else you can think of to tell me that might be relevant to the investigation?" Arthur asked.

She thought for a moment and then slowly shook her head. "I'm afraid I don't know anything. I don't know who she was. I don't know why she was here. I don't know who was having a party on my property last night."

“When you arrived, did you suspect that anyone had been inside the cottage since the tenants left?”

Fenella frowned. “No, not at all. All of the rooms are empty and there wasn’t any sign that anything had been disturbed.”

“I’ve taken a good look at the locks on the cottage doors,” Arthur said. “They’re good locks, but not great ones. I’m surprised that no one at the party last night tried to get inside the cottage. You may not have furniture in here, but you do have running water and a working loo.”

“I didn’t even think of that, but you’re right,” Fenella exclaimed. “Why didn’t they break into the cottage?”

“That’s just another piece of the puzzle. Are you quite certain that they didn’t?”

Fenella sat back and closed her eyes, trying to remember exactly what they’d found when they’d walked into the cottage.

“If people did get inside, they were incredibly careful in here,” she said eventually. “Nothing was here that didn’t belong here, and I don’t recall seeing anything that suggested that anyone had been in here in weeks.”

“What about smells? Did the cottage smell as if it had been shut up for weeks?”

Fenella nodded slowly. “It did, actually. The air smelled stale, as if none of the doors or windows had been opened in a long while. The other empty cottage that we visited today had a similar smell.”

Arthur made another note. “I think that’s all my questions for today. Obviously, you’ll talk about the case with Daniel and with your niece. I’m certain I don’t have to tell you to let someone know immediately if you remember anything that might be relevant.”

“I’ll tell Daniel, if that’s okay?”

“That’s fine. I’m going to be taking the lead on the case, with some assistance from Mark Hammersmith. Both Daniel

and Ted have offered to provide assistance as well, and I fully intend to take them up on their kind offers.”

Fenella nodded. “Am I free to go?”

Arthur looked at her and frowned. “Daniel and Ted mentioned that you sometimes seem to stumble over witnesses during a murder investigation.”

“It’s a small island,” Fenella said.

“Yes, of course. I’m just going to ask you to do your best to stay out of my way during this investigation. You didn’t know the victim. That should make it easy for you to avoid getting involved.”

“I never want to get involved.”

“Of course not.”

Arthur didn’t look as if he believed her, but Fenella didn’t bother to argue any further.

“Let me see how Daniel is getting on,” he said as he got to his feet. “Wait here, please.”

He walked to the door and then opened it and exited the room. He was back only a few moments later.

“We timed that well. Daniel has just finished an interview as well. Let’s go.”

Arthur walked her back into the living room. Daniel smiled at her as they entered.

“I’m finished with Elaine and Shelly,” he said. “Do you want to take them home while I talk to Doncan and Arthur talks to Margaret?”

“I thought you were going to interview Doncan next,” Arthur said.

Daniel nodded. “His office rang with an urgent matter, so I interviewed Shelly instead.”

“I hope the urgent matter wasn’t related to this case,” Arthur said, looking at Doncan.

Doncan shook his head. “One of my clients, a gentleman in his nineties, passed away. I had to start making arrangements for the funeral that he planned for himself.”

“He planned his own funeral?” Arthur asked.

Doncan nodded. “He had very specific ideas of what he wanted, and he didn’t want his wife to get anything wrong.”

“Interesting,” Arthur said. He looked back at Daniel and then nodded. “Yes, let’s do that. You talk to Doncan and I’ll interview Margaret. Fenella and Shelly and Elaine are free to go.”

“I’ll bring Margaret home once we’re both finished,” Doncan said. “I’ll be going into the office anyway, so it isn’t even out of my way.”

Daniel pulled Fenella into a tight hug and then walked her to the door.

“I’ll ring you later,” he whispered as he opened the door for her.

“Love you,” she said before she walked outside.

Shelly and Elaine followed Fenella out of the cottage to her car. No one spoke as they all climbed inside.

“This seat is a good deal more comfortable than those horrible chairs they brought,” Elaine said as she fastened her seatbelt.

“At least they brought chairs,” Shelly said. “I felt as if I’d been standing for days.”

Fenella took a few deep breaths before she put the key into the ignition. She could feel tears in her eyes, and she slowly reversed out of her parking space.

“Was it truly awful?” Shelly asked.

Fenella shrugged. “It was quite horrible. Did Daniel show you any pictures of the victim?”

“He did. He thought I might have taught her, but I didn’t recognize her.”

“Humph,” Elaine said. “No one showed me any pictures.”

“You’ve only just moved to the island,” Fenella said. “It’s highly unlikely that you knew the victim.”

“They could have asked anyway,” Elaine replied.

“It was quite a gruesome picture,” Shelly said. “You could tell that the poor child was dead. I’m going to have nightmares about her for weeks.”

Fenella nodded. "But what's going on here?" she asked. The road in front of her was blocked by two cars that had been parked facing each other across the road, seemingly deliberately stopping traffic from getting through.

"Isn't that Dan Ross's car?" Shelly asked.

"I don't have the energy for Dan Ross right now," Fenella said.

"Who owns the other car?" Shelly asked.

Fenella stopped her car a few feet away from the parked vehicles. There didn't seem to be anyone inside them.

"I'm going to ring Daniel," Shelly said.

"That may be for the best," Fenella replied. The words were barely out of her mouth when Dan Ross suddenly popped up from behind the cars.

"Hello," he said brightly as Fenella lowered her window. "How interesting to find you here."

"Just move your car," Fenella said tiredly.

"Not just yet," another voice said.

Fenella frowned as Heather Bryant stood up next to Dan. While she disliked Dan Ross, who was an investigative reporter for the *Isle of Man Times*, she both disliked and worried about the much younger Heather, who did the same job much more effectively than Dan.

"It's illegal to block the road," Fenella said.

"We both had car trouble," Heather replied.

"Really?" Fenella asked. "In that case, I'll call my friend and he can come and tow both your cars away."

"That won't be necessary," Dan said quickly. "Both cars overheated. That's all. Once they've had time to cool down, we can move them."

"And while we wait, you can tell us what's happening up at the Point of Ayre," Heather said. "Since it's you, I'm going

to guess that you found a body. Man or woman? I assume he or she was murdered. Aren't they always?"

"No comment," Fenella said flatly.

"We have sources within the police," Dan said. "We'll have the entire story within the hour."

Fenella just stared at him.

"I assume you didn't just drive up to the Point of Ayre to look for bodies," Heather said. "What were you doing up there?"

"No comment," Fenella said.

"Oh, come on," Heather replied. "I'm sure you'd rather we printed the truth rather than some wild speculation."

"On the contrary, speculate away," Fenella told her.

"Do you own any property up there?" Heather asked. "Wait, don't bother answering. You must own property up there. You own half the island. So you were visiting one of your properties. And you have two little old ladies with you. Interesting."

"Hey, that's insulting," Elaine said. "I'm seventy-six, which isn't old and I'm not all that little, either."

Heather laughed. "I didn't get your name."

"No, and I'm not giving it to you. Not after you insulted me and my niece in that way."

"Ah, so you're Shelly's aunt." Heather pulled out a notebook and quickly wrote something in it. "So why would Shelly's aunt want to see Fenella's property at the Point of Ayre?"

"Who cares?" Dan asked. "What matters is what they found in that property. There are four police inspectors and an entire crime scene team up there now, so that has to mean that you found a dead body."

Fenella sighed. "No comment."

Heather was on her phone, scrolling through screens. When she looked up, she had a nasty grin on her face.

“According to my records, you own a small cottage on several acres near the Point of Ayre,” she said. “A cottage that is currently listed as available to rent. I may be interested in renting the cottage. How long do you think it will be before the police are finished with it?”

“Are you serious?” Dan asked. “You’d actually want to live in a cottage where a dead body has been found?”

Heather shrugged. “People die every day. How do you know that no one has ever died in your house?”

Dan shuddered. “No one has ever died in my house.”

“And no one has died in my cottage near the Point of Ayre,” Fenella said. “Now I suggest that you move your cars before I call the police.”

“No one died in your cottage?” Heather asked, looking disappointed. “Then where did you find the body?”

“She loves historical sites,” Dan said. “Maybe they were looking at the lighthouse.”

“Is the lighthouse interesting?” Heather asked Elaine.

Elaine shrugged. “Define interesting.”

Heather laughed. “Very clever. So you were at the lighthouse and you stumbled across a dead body. Or maybe you found one in your cottage and you’re lying to us.”

The sound of sirens filled the air. A moment later, a marked police car pulled to a stop next to Fenella’s car. The uniformed constable who got out of it winked at Fenella before he turned his attention to Dan and Heather.

“Why are your cars blocking the road?” he asked.

“We heard that there was something happening up at the Point of Ayre,” Dan said. “So we came up to cover the story.”

“By parking in the middle of the road?” the constable asked.

Dan shrugged. “Neither of our cars are used to making such long journeys. They both overheated.”

The constable raised an eyebrow. “Did they really? How long ago was that?”

“Not long,” Dan said, staring at the ground.

“I suggest that you both try starting your cars,” the constable said. “They may well both be cool enough to drive now. If they are, I suggest you turn them around and drive yourselves back to Douglas. The Chief Constable is going to be giving a news conference about the incident here in the next hour or so.”

“He is?” Heather asked. She ran back to her car and jumped inside. It took her several attempts to get turned around without hitting Dan’s car, but as soon as she could get away, she sped off.

“When is the news conference?” Dan asked.

“I don’t have an exact time,” the constable replied.

Dan nodded. “Knowing the Chief Constable, it won’t be for hours yet. Maybe I’ll stay here and see if anything interesting happens in the next hour or so.”

“If you’ve ever covered a police investigation before, you’ll know that nothing interesting happens in the first few hours,” the constable countered. “If I were you, I’d head back to Douglas and have some dinner before the news conference.”

Dan frowned and then patted his tummy. “Now that’s a very sensible suggestion,” he said.

Fenella and the others watched as Dan got back into his car and slowly drove away.

“Thank you,” she said to the constable.

“You’re welcome. I probably should have arrested them for something, but I didn’t want to deal with the paperwork.”

She laughed. “As long as they’ve gone, I don’t care.”

“I’ll just follow you back to the main road in case they decide to try again anywhere between here and there,” he told her.

There was no sign of either reporter on the drive back to the main road. Fenella waved to the constable as he turned around to drive north and then continued on her way.

“Well, that was unpleasant,” Shelly said.

“I thought it was amusing,” Elaine replied. “I love knowing things that reporters want to know. I just kept thinking how excited they would have been if we’d told them everything.”

“They shouldn’t have blocked the road, though,” Fenella said. “What if someone had needed to get in or out in a hurry?”

“It was probably Heather’s idea,” Shelly said.

Fenella nodded. “She’s ambitious and ruthless. I can see her suggesting it and Dan going along. I can’t see him coming up with that idea on his own.”

“If the Chief Constable is giving a press conference, does that mean that the body has been identified?” Shelly asked.

“I’ve no idea,” Fenella said. “Maybe the Chief Constable isn’t giving a press conference. Maybe the constable was lying. Actually, let’s say maybe he was mistaken. Maybe the press conference is going to be held as soon as the body has been identified and the constable just thought that it would be later today.”

“Some poor family is about to find out that someone they love is dead,” Shelly said.

“I think we should talk about something else,” Elaine said. “I didn’t care for any of those cottages. What else do you have available?” she asked Fenella.

“I don’t know that I have anything else available. It’s quite unusual for any of my properties to sit empty for any length of time. Doncan and his team are usually quick to find new

tenants for me,” she replied. “What are you looking for? I can have Doncan keep an eye out.”

“I wish I knew,” Elaine said. “I’ve had an offer on my house in Bolsover for a reasonable amount. I could buy something here, but I’m not certain where I want to live. I suppose what I really want is a flat in your building, ideally on the top floor.”

“You want my flat,” Shelly said.

Elaine laughed. “I would be more than happy to buy your flat, but you aren’t interested in selling it.”

“I might be, eventually. Tim and I still haven’t worked out where we want to live, though.”

“I thought you were looking at houses,” Fenella said.

“We looked at a few, but Tim didn’t care for any of them. He’s an architect, and he has a very clear idea of what he wants. I don’t think the house he wants actually exists, though.”

“And you don’t like his current house?” Fenella asked.

Shelly shrugged. “I don’t hate it, but I don’t love it. Tim bought it when his previous marriage was falling apart. He likes it even less than I do, because he bought it when he was sad and desperate. House hunting is hard work, though, and expensive, so he just stayed there.”

“Maybe you should think about building your dream home,” Fenella said.

“I suggested that,” Shelly told her. “I have the money that I inherited from Mona tucked away in the bank. We could build a fabulous house with that money. Tim doesn’t feel comfortable spending my money, though.”

“Maybe after you’ve seen every available house on the island he’ll come around,” Fenella suggested.

“I hope so. I’ve been encouraging him to think about what he would want in a house if we were to build our own. He has some wonderful ideas.”

The trio talked about what they'd want in their dream homes for the rest of the drive back to Douglas.

"I'm going to take a nap," Elaine announced as they rode the elevator to the top floor.

"That sounds very tempting," Shelly said.

"I'm terrible at napping, but I'm tempted to try," Fenella said.

Shelly gave her a hug outside Fenella's door. "You're welcome to come over if you'd rather not be alone."

Fenella shook her head. "I'll be okay. Hopefully Margaret will be home before too long."

She let herself into her apartment and then sank into the first chair she came to. Resting her head on the back, she let a few tears slide down her cheeks. When she heard an accordion start to play, she opened her eyes. Mona appeared a moment later.

"Sorry about that," she said, waving a hand to clear away the puff of smoke that had accompanied her. "I requested an angel with a harp, but they sent me an angel with an accordion. I didn't have the heart to simply send her away. But what's wrong? You're crying and Margaret isn't here."

Fenella sighed. "You can probably guess."

Mona frowned. "I refuse to believe that you found another dead body. Even you can't have luck that bad, not for this length of time. You're still wearing your engagement ring, so you haven't ended things with Daniel. What else could possibly be wrong?"

"We found a body," Fenella replied flatly.

"Who was it this time?"

"I've no idea."

Mona sat down and pulled a small notebook out of the air. Then she snapped her fingers and a pen appeared. "Tell me everything."

“There isn’t much to tell. We went to see the three cottages that I have which are currently available. When we got to the one near the Point of Ayre, the field in front of the cottage was full of garbage. It looked as if someone had had a party in the field and then left all of the bottles, cans, and cups everywhere when they’d left.”

“That property has always been a challenge. It was not much more than a tiny shack when Max bought it. He wanted the land more than the cottage. He was actually considering building something up there, maybe a manufacturing plant or something similar, but it quickly became obvious that no one on the island wanted to have to drive that far to get to work every day. Besides, the weather can be quite dreadful there.”

Fenella nodded. “It was very windy today, which is why we did our best to clear away the mess.”

“And there was a body under a pile of cups?”

“No, there were a few tents scattered around the place. All three of them were partially collapsed. We cleared away one of them, left one for the experts, and then found a body in the third.”

Mona shivered. “How dreadful. Tell me about the person you found.”

“It was a woman. She looked young, not much more than twenty. It was dark in the tent, and I didn’t want to see anything after I realized what we’d found, but I did notice a lot of blood.”

“So she was stabbed,” Mona speculated.

“She was also wearing a necklace with a large red stone surrounded by blue stones,” Fenella said. “One that exactly matched the picture of the stolen one that we were talking about yesterday.”

Mona looked surprised and then shrugged. “It was probably one of the copies.”

“Copies? What copies?”

“Let’s wait and talk about that when Margaret gets back,” Mona said. “I don’t want to have to repeat myself.”

Before Fenella could argue, Mona slowly faded from view. Sighing, Fenella went into the kitchen and poured food into Katie’s bowl.

“I know you missed lunch. I’m terribly sorry. We were supposed to be back in plenty of time,” she told the animal, who rushed in and quickly began to eat.

Fenella filled her water bowl and then dropped a couple of treats into Katie’s bowl. She was pacing back and forth across the living room when Margaret finally arrived.

The two women hugged as soon as Margaret shut the door behind herself.

“Are you okay?” Fenella asked.

Margaret shrugged. “I’m upset and sad and more than a little concerned about the murder rate on the island, but otherwise, I’m okay.”

“I told Mona about what happened, and she said there were copies of that necklace.”

“Copies? Tell me more.”

“I wish I could. Mona didn’t want to have to repeat herself, so she disappeared. She said she’d come back when you got home so that she could tell us both the story at the same time.”

“I’m here,” Margaret said. She looked around the room. “What will we get this time? Fireworks? Bubbles? Glitter? Clouds? Lightning? Come on, Mona, make your big entrance.”

“She had an angel play the accordion earlier.”

Margaret laughed. “This is not a conversation I ever imagined having before I moved to the island.”

“Maybe I should have warned you about Mona when you visited.”

“I understand why you didn’t. I keep thinking I might tell Ted about her, but it never seems to be the right time.”

Fenella nodded. "I've been thinking about telling Daniel for over two years, but it's never been the right time. When we first met, I didn't want him to think I was crazy, but now I'm afraid he'll be angry that I waited so long to tell him."

"I don't feel as if I know Ted well enough yet, and I don't have any way to prove her existence to him, either. He seems like the kind of person who would want proof."

"Right now, I just want to hear about the copies of the necklace," Fenella said, looking around the room.

After a minute, Margaret sighed. "We could talk about the murder."

"Except we don't know anything about the murder, do we? I mean, we saw the body, but I didn't recognize the victim. Did you?"

Margaret shook her head.

"What happened after I left, then?"

"I talked to Arthur for what felt like hours and hours. He had me tell him everything we did today twice and then had me tell him about finding the body at least a half dozen times. He didn't seem to believe me when I said that I didn't recognize the victim, and he didn't seem happy that I recognized the necklace."

"I don't know why we both had to give our statements to Arthur. Daniel and Ted were both there. I'd have rather talked to Mark Hammersmith over Arthur, actually, and I think Mark hates me."

Margaret laughed. "Mark is a nice guy. He and Ted are quite friendly. But Arthur is in charge of the investigation, so he gets to pick which witnesses he interviews. After Arthur was done with me, he sent me home with Doncan. Ted was in the field with Mark, walking up and down, looking at the ground. They both waved as I got into the car, but that was it."

Fenella sighed. "And now they're all going to be tied up in another murder investigation. I suppose the killer didn't care that I'm trying to plan a wedding, and now I don't know when I'm going to see Daniel again."

“I’m sure he’ll do everything he can to fit you into his schedule.”

“No doubt, but I have an awful feeling that I’m going to be doing a lot of the wedding planning on my own.”

“Do you hear bells?” Margaret asked.

Fenella listened and then nodded. “They’re very pretty.”

“They are. And so are the bubbles.”

Fenella turned her head and saw the steady stream of bubbles that seemed to be coming out of nowhere. The bubbles were every color of the rainbow, and as they emerged, they began to drift slowly around the room before eventually sinking toward the floor.

“I think that’s enough bubbles now,” Fenella said after a minute as the room started to feel quite full of the small balls. She reached out to pop one, but it floated away from her.

“There are rather a lot of them,” Margaret said, waving them away from her face.

“Merooww,” Katie said, jumping down from the chair where she’d been resting. She batted a few bubbles with her paw and then disappeared into the kitchen.

“That really is enough,” Fenella called. The bubbles were now at least a foot deep at floor level and they were still pouring out of thin air.

“They won’t pop,” Margaret said. She stood up and began walking back and forth, trying to squash some of the bubbles, but they continually evaded her footsteps.

Fenella stood up and tried to catch a handful of them, but that proved impossible. “Mona, that’s quite enough,” she said sternly.

“What happens when they fill the room?” Margaret asked.

“Maybe we should open the door and send some out into the corridor.”

“What happens when they fill the corridor?” Margaret asked as she headed for the door.

“Maybe we need to move out,” Fenella muttered as the pile of bubbles reached her knees.

The bells stopped suddenly. Fenella and Margaret both froze. A loud cymbal crash exploded all of the bubbles as Mona appeared in front of them. She was covered in bubbles and she looked unusually disconcerted.

“That didn’t exactly work as expected,” she said as she tried to brush the bubbles off her dress.

“What happened?” Fenella asked.

Mona shrugged. “I think the angel with the bells was feeling a bit devilish today. Never mind. Margaret is home. We can talk about the necklace now.”

She walked to the couch and sat down carefully. Bubbles floated around her and spilled onto the floor as she crossed her legs and then patted her hair. “Just ignore them. They’ll get bored and wander off eventually,” she told them.

Fenella and Margaret exchanged glances before they sat down on either side of Mona.

“What did you mean when you said that there were copies of the necklace?” Fenella asked.

Mona nodded. “Yes, of course, but first, have you learned anything else about the dead woman?”

Margaret shook her head. “Dan Ross was hanging around when Duncan and I left, but obviously we didn’t talk to him.”

“We got stopped by both Dan and Heather,” Fenella replied. “We had to call for a constable to get them to leave.”

“Dan knows all about the necklace and the copies, of course,” Mona said. “It will be all over the papers tomorrow, once he learns that the victim was wearing one of the copies.”

“If it was a copy,” Margaret said.

Mona shrugged. “That seems the most likely explanation, but I suppose anything is possible.”

“So why are there copies of the necklace?” Fenella asked.

“Suzanne had them made from photographs after the necklace was stolen,” Mona explained. “She really loved that necklace. She wore it quite regularly, and she even occasionally lent it to her closest friends. After it was stolen, she decided that she needed another one just like it. While she was having a replacement made, she had two additional copies made for her friends.”

“Are they all exact copies?” Fenella asked.

“They’re all exact copies of the original necklace, but with simulated stones,” Mona explained. “The copies were made in white gold, rather than the platinum that was used in the original. The copies had some value, of course, because of the amount of gold involved and because they used very good quality imitation stones, but they’re only worth a fraction of what the original was worth.”

“I don’t understand why she had three made,” Margaret said.

“She told everyone at the time that she wanted to give her dearest friends something truly special,” Mona replied. “The whole thing raised a lot of eyebrows, of course.”

“Why?” Fenella asked.

“Some people speculated that Suzanne had had the copies made because she and her husband had faked the theft. Once everyone knew there were copies, she could wear the original necklace and no one would be the wiser.”

“Interesting,” Margaret said.

“The other issue was about to whom she gave the copies,” Mona added. “There were five couples as guests at the party the evening the necklace was taken. Suzanne gave copies to two of the wives and not the other three, even though one of the other women was widely believed to be her closest friend.”

“Did she ever say why she’d given the necklaces to the women she chose?” Margaret asked.

“No, but there was a lot of talk that she’d given them only to women she was certain hadn’t been involved in the theft.”

“So she suspected the other three women, including her closest friend,” Margaret said.

“It was all just talk, of course. Suzanne has never spoken publicly about the theft or about the necklace copies.”

“So who received copies?” Margaret asked. “And what connects those women to our victim?”

“Suzanne gave one copy to Louise Matthews. Louise and her husband, whose name escapes me, hadn’t been living on the island for long at that point, but she and Suzanne had become friends very quickly. They had a lot in common, including a shared love of horses and summers in Portugal. If I’m remembering correctly, Louise had two sons and a daughter. The daughter would be in her mid-twenties now.”

“So she might be the victim,” Fenella said.

“Do you remember her name?” Margaret asked.

“She was named Matilda, which I always thought was dreadfully old-fashioned. I believe they called her Mattie, which was better.”

Fenella nodded. “And the other necklace?”

“Went to Janice Long. She and Suzanne had been friends for years. Janice had three daughters. The oldest must be in her early thirties by now, and the second is probably close to thirty, but the youngest was something of a surprise baby. If I’m remembering correctly, she’ll be in her mid-twenties as well.”

“Do you remember her name?” Margaret asked.

“They gave all three girls names that started with J,” Mona replied. “Her husband was Lawrence and if they’d had boys they were going to give them names that started with L. The girls were Joan, Jennifer, and Judy.”

“Judy is the youngest?” Fenella checked.

“I believe so. It’s been several years since I thought about any of these people. I may be mixing up the girls.”

“What about Suzanne?” Margaret wondered. “You said her oldest son died in his teens. That suggests that she had other sons?”

“She did have other sons. She had two more. The son who passed away was Isaac. Their second son is Walter and their third is Kirk.”

“Kirk? How old is he?” Fenella asked.

“He must be in his mid-twenties, too,” Mona said after a moment. “Walter must be close to thirty. I suppose the victim might have been romantically involved with one of them, and that one might have lent her his mother’s necklace.”

“Neither of the brothers are married?” Fenella asked.

Mona sighed. “I’m sorry, but I simply don’t know. Neither of them was married before my death, but I haven’t spent the last two years keeping track of everyone on the island. Karl and Suzanne were not exactly in my social circle, anyway. They lived in the south of the island and they preferred to spend their time with other married couples with children. They used to enjoy having long conversations about the state of the island’s schools and about which sports their children should play.” Mona yawned.

Margaret went into the kitchen for a notebook and a pen. Then she wrote down all of the names that Mona had mentioned.

“So the victim might have been Mattie Matthews or Judy Long. Or it could have been someone who has been dating Walter or Kirk Edwards,” she said as she studied the list.

“This is all just speculation at this point,” Fenella said. “Maybe one of the three women sold her copy. Or maybe more copies were made later and sold to the public. Or maybe it was just some cheap costume jewelry that just happened to look like the stolen necklace and none of the people that Mona has mentioned had anything to do with her murder.”

“If I were Daniel or Ted, I’d start by interviewing Suzanne and Karl,” Mona said. “And after I’d spoken to them, I’d talk to their sons.”

“They may not even still live on the island,” Margaret pointed out.

“Karl and Suzanne do,” Mona told her. “I’d have heard if they’d left. As for Walter and Kirk, I suspect they’re both still here, too. This is where the money is, after all.”

“Yes, well, as fascinating as this is, there isn’t anything we can do now until the body is identified,” Fenella said. “And we’ll probably have to wait until that news is revealed in the local paper or online. Daniel and Ted aren’t going to tell us anything.”

Margaret frowned. “Did we get lunch?”

“We had pizza.”

“Oh, yeah. That was a long time ago, though.”

Fenella nodded. “Let’s go and get something to eat. I want brownies for dessert.”

“I wonder what happened to the brownies that Doncan’s wife brought us. I wish we’d taken a break to eat them before we found the body.”

“Yeah, we should probably buy brownies for Elaine.”

“You go and get dinner,” Mona said. “I’m going to go and talk to a few people to see what I can find out about Karl and Suzanne and their sons. I’ll be back later.”

“With fewer bubbles,” Fenella called after her as Mona vanished in a puff of smoke.

Both women changed clothes and then got ready to go out.

“What sounds good?” Fenella asked as they walked out of the building.

“Chinese,” Margaret replied.

“Good idea.”

They’d gone only a few steps when someone called Fenella’s name.

“Fenella Woods? Please stop,” the unfamiliar voice with an American accent said.

Fenella turned and stared at the tall man with dark hair who was rushing toward her. He appeared to be in his mid-thirties. His jeans were full of rips and tears that Fenella was certain were deliberate. The bright orange T-shirt he was wearing said “Nation Zom” across it in big letters.

“**Y**ou are Fenella Woods, aren’t you?” the man asked when he reached them.

Fenella nodded.

“Okay, great. I’ve been watching for you for like an hour. They wouldn’t let me into the building, and I needed to talk to you before you have me arrested.”

“Arrested?” Fenella repeated.

“Oh, I didn’t do anything wrong, but I know I need to explain that to you before you hear otherwise. It was totally not my fault, but other people will probably tell you all sorts of stories. I knew I needed to talk to you directly.”

“Who are you?” Margaret demanded.

The man stared at her for a moment and then laughed. “I’m doing this very badly. I’ve been so worried, you see. But let’s start over. Let me buy you a drink. There must be a nice pub around here somewhere.”

“We were just going to get dinner,” Fenella told him.

“Oh, excellent. Dinner is even better. I’ll buy you a drink over dinner and we can talk.”

“Who are you?” Margaret repeated.

“What sounds good? I’m told the Chinese restaurant is very good, but I’m never quite sure about Chinese food. What about Italian? I love Italian food.”

The man started walking, waving toward various restaurants as he went. Fenella and Margaret stood in place, watching him. After a moment, he stopped and looked back at them.

“Aren’t you coming?” he asked. “I thought we were going to get dinner somewhere.”

“We aren’t,” Fenella told him. “At least not until you tell us who you are and what you want.”

He walked back to them and shrugged. “I wasn’t sure that this was the best place to talk.” He looked left and right and then left again. “I was told that everyone on the island knows you.”

Fenella looked around and then sighed. “Heather,” she whispered to Margaret.

Margaret looked over and spotted the reporter standing behind a nearby lamppost. “She can probably hear every word we’re saying.”

Fenella looked at the stranger and frowned. “Come on, then,” she said, turning on her heel and walking back to her building.

The man fell into step behind her. Margaret followed him. As Fenella walked into the building, she glanced back and watched as Heather rushed after them.

“She’s not with us,” Margaret said to the security guard at the door as Heather tried to follow them inside.

“I just want to know why you’re meeting with Ray Houston, that’s all,” Heather said. “What does this meeting have to do with today’s murder?”

“Nothing,” the American man said flatly.

“This way,” Fenella said, walking briskly away from the door. She didn’t stop until she and Margaret and the stranger were on the other side of the large lobby. When she turned around, she could see Heather watching them from outside the building.

“Can she read lips?” Margaret asked.

“Maybe,” the man said, mouthing an obscenity. Heather turned bright red. “Definitely,” he sighed.

“So we sit with our backs to the door,” Fenella said, gesturing toward a long couch that faced the blank wall at the back of the room. She’d always wondered about its placement, but now it was exactly what they needed. She sat near the center of the couch. The man sat next to her. After a moment’s hesitation, Margaret sat on his other side.

“So who are you and what do you want?” Fenella asked.

“As our friend from the local paper told you, I’m Ray Houston,” he said. “And I want to apologize. No matter what anyone else tells you, I was completely unaware of who owned the property on which we held our little gathering last night.”

Fenella frowned. “You were at the party last night?”

“For a short while, but I was also responsible for organizing the event,” Ray explained. “It’s what I do. I arrange Nation Zom events all over the world. I’ve done everything from tiny events in people’s backyards to huge conventions with thousands of people and special guest appearances from some of the actors in the show. I’ve done events from Maine to California and back again. At the beginning of the year, I was invited to come over to the UK to arrange some events over here.”

“Invited?”

He flushed. “Some Nation Zom fans practically begged me to come. I will admit to not doing enough research before I flew over, but it never occurred to me that I would need some sort of special permission to work over here.”

“So you’re working here without the right visa?” Margaret asked.

He shrugged. “My lawyers are working on it. For now, I’m not actually doing any work. I’m just advising others.”

“What does that mean?” Fenella asked.

“It means that the official organizer of last night’s event was a man named Damon Tyler. He’s English, and he’s the one who arranged the party on your property,” Ray said.

Fenella frowned. “So why are you here?”

Ray shook his head. “The thing is, people have already started pointing fingers and trying to pass blame. Damon made all of the arrangements, but I was the one who was contacted in the first place. It’s all very complicated, but I want to assure you that I had no idea that we were trespassing on your property.”

“Let’s go back a step or two,” Fenella said. “Why did you come to the island?”

“I got a phone call from some Nation Zom fans here on the island. They wanted to have a proper Nation Zom party. I’m the only person on the planet who knows how to arrange one of those.”

“Really?” Margaret asked.

Ray flushed. “Look, I’ve worked unbelievably hard to become an expert on Nation Zom. I’ve studied every minute of every episode. You want to try the weird blue drink that Carly Kason drank in episode three? I can mix that up for you in a heartbeat. You want to eat the cookies that Zurn made out of peanut butter and cereal crumbs in episode six? I have the recipe. I have boxes of costume pieces that will let you dress up as your favorite character. I have wigs and enough makeup to make you and fifty of your closest friends look undead in minutes. I’ve met nearly everyone involved in making the show, and I have half of the minor cast on speed dial. In the US, I could almost always guarantee to get someone who’d had a walk-on part to make an appearance at an event. Obviously, I can’t do that over here, but I can do everything else.”

“So who called you?” Fenella asked.

Ray shrugged. “Like I said, some fans of the show.”

Fenella got to her feet. “The way I see it, you’ve been working in the UK without the proper visa. I’d be willing to

bet that you didn't bother to arrange a work permit for the island, either, which is entirely separate from your UK work visa. You came over and planned an event on private property without verifying who owned that property. Someone got murdered at that event, and now you're trying to cover your tracks. Talk to the police, Mr. Houston. I'm not interested in anything you have to say."

"His name was Kirk Edwards," Ray said. "He called me, and he said he wanted me to organize an event here for his twenty-sixth birthday. Do you really need a work permit to work on the island?"

Fenella nodded and then sat back down. "After messing things up with your visa for the UK, I can't believe you didn't check."

"But we're still in the UK," Ray argued.

"The Isle of Man is an independent country," Fenella told him. "Surely your friend – Damon, was it? He should have told you that."

"I don't think Damon has any idea," Ray replied. "We were supposed to be here for only a couple of nights. We were going to fly back to London today. The only reason we didn't leave is because we still haven't been paid for the event."

"And now the police won't let you leave," Margaret suggested.

"They won't?" Ray replied. "Why not?"

"Someone was murdered last night," Fenella said, feeling as if she needed to speak very slowly so that the man would understand.

Ray shook his head. "I heard something about an accident at the party or something, but that's nothing to do with me. I wasn't even there, not after midnight, anyway. Damon and I got everything set up, and then we stayed until things were well underway and everyone was having a good time before we headed back to Douglas. It was obvious that that group was going to be partying well into the night, and I wanted to get some sleep."

“It wasn’t an accident,” Fenella said. “A young woman was murdered.”

“Even so, it’s still nothing to do with me. Like I said, I wasn’t even there. I can’t tell the police anything,” Ray protested.

“You haven’t spoken to the police?” Margaret asked.

“No, of course not,” he replied.

“Let’s start over,” Fenella suggested as Margaret pulled out her mobile phone. “Where did you get my name?”

Ray shrugged. “I told you that we haven’t gotten paid yet for last night,” he said. “We were supposed to meet up with Kirk this morning to get our payment. He never showed up, and when Damon called him, Kirk said something about an accident and about having the party in the wrong place. When Damon insisted on getting paid, Kirk told him that he’d better hope that Fenella Woods didn’t find out about the party, or he and I would be in more trouble than we could handle.”

Fenella sighed. “Then what did you do?”

“Damon made a few phone calls and found out that the place where we’d had the party was actually your property and not Kirk’s. While we were trying to figure out what to do next, the police called Damon. They wanted to know about the party.”

“It was his number on the flyer,” Margaret guessed.

Ray nodded. “While Damon was talking to them, I decided that I needed to come and find you so that I could explain. This was all Kirk’s fault. He told me that he owned the field where we set up for the party. I didn’t have any reason to doubt him.”

“Ted’s on his way,” Margaret said.

Fenella nodded. “Start at the beginning,” she said, hoping to keep the man talking until Ted arrived. “Kirk Edwards called you and asked you to come over and arrange a party. When did he first contact you?”

Ray shrugged. “A month ago, more or less. As I said, I haven’t been doing much of anything, just sitting around in Damon’s apartment, waiting for my work visa to come through. One afternoon, his phone rang. I answered it because otherwise it would just keep ringing and ringing, which is incredibly annoying.”

“And it was Kirk?” Fenella asked.

“Yeah. He wanted to know if I could arrange a party for him on the Isle of Man. I laughed at first because I’d never heard of the Isle of Man. I thought he was making it up.”

“Where had he gotten your name?” Margaret asked.

“You’d have to ask him that. He just said that he’d heard that I was arranging Nation Zom parties and that he wanted to have one on the Isle of Man. As I said, I laughed.”

“And then you told him that you weren’t doing any such thing because you didn’t have the correct visa,” Fenella suggested.

“Sure,” Ray replied, flushing. “I mean, first Kirk convinced me that the Isle of Man was a real place, and then I explained about my visa. He was really disappointed, so that was when I suggested that Damon could help. Since he’s letting me stay with him while I’m waiting for my visa, I’ve been teaching him how to plan Nation Zom parties. It’s going to be like a franchise thing, eventually. Damon will do the UK parties and I’ll do the US ones, or something like that.”

Fenella nodded. “So you gave him Damon’s name?”

“Yeah, and then I took down some information, just to help Damon, you understand. Kirk gave me the date that he wanted the party and assured me that he had the perfect location. I gave his name and number to Damon when Damon got home.”

“What constitutes a perfect location for a Nation Zom party?” Margaret wanted to know.

“I suggest a large open field. The more isolated the location, the more in keeping it is with the show, of course. It’s set in a post-apocalyptic world where no one feels safe going inside buildings. The best parties happen in places where you

can't see any signs of civilization. Those sorts of places are hard to find, though. If nothing else, you need roads to get to them."

"But Kirk said he had the perfect spot," Fenella said.

Ray nodded. "I know, I know. We should have verified the ownership of the property. We didn't have any reason to doubt the man, though."

"Did you have any reason to trust him?" Margaret asked.

Ray sighed. "I'm afraid I'm just too trusting. I tend to believe whatever people tell me, which hasn't been great for the business. In this case, I should have insisted on verifying ownership of the property, and I should have demanded payment in advance."

Margaret frowned. "How much do you charge to plan an event?"

"You have to understand that you aren't just paying for me to plan an event. You're paying me to plan a very unique and unusual event. You're paying for my expertise on the subject matter as well. If I plan your Nation Zom event, you can be certain that there won't be one single object at your party that isn't canon within Nation Zom."

"So beer bottles and cans are canon?" Margaret asked.

Ray sighed. "I provide drinks that are appropriate. Sometimes the people hosting the event opt to supply additional drinks and food outside of what is included in the event. I have no control over such things."

"So how much do you charge?" Fenella asked. She nearly gasped when Ray replied. "And what do your customers get for that?" she had to ask.

"That's the basic planning fee," he explained. "It also includes a certain amount of decorating and our basic food and beverage package."

"What constitutes decorating?" Margaret asked.

"That depends on the venue. We sometimes have to have parties indoors for any number of reasons. For indoor parties,

we cover all of the windows with dark paper and then try to make the ceiling look like a field of stars. All of that costs extra, though. The basic decorations consist primarily of hay bales and a few tents. Have you ever seen Nation Zom?”

Fenella shook her head.

“I saw a few episodes,” Margaret said.

Ray frowned. “You didn’t enjoy it?”

“It wasn’t my thing.”

“Well, I don’t know how much you remember, but the main character is in a large warehouse when he gets killed and then revived. He’s the only character who is willing to go inside any of the buildings in the area. Everyone else sets up camp in the fields on the outskirts of the city.”

“Why?” Fenella asked.

“Everyone else is dead, or undead,” Margaret said. “I remember something about them having to stay outside in order to stay, well, undead.”

Ray nodded. “That’s exactly right. The main character revives them, but they can only stay reanimated if they stay outdoors. They need sunshine or moonlight in order to continue to function.”

“What happens when it rains?” Fenella asked.

“So far it hasn’t happened,” Ray replied. “There have been a few cloudy days, which resulted in everyone feeling quite unwell, but we’ve yet to see what rain does to the undead.”

Fenella swallowed a sigh. “This is definitely not my kind of television show,” she said. “So you decorate with tents and hay?”

“For the most part. I’ve done a few parties where we’ve completely re-created the main character’s warehouse laboratory, but that’s complicated and expensive. Hay and tents are relatively cheap.”

“And that’s what you provided for Kirk?” Margaret asked.

“Yeah, a few piles of hay bales that could be used as tables and chairs and several tents. The tents are deliberately only partially erected because that’s how they are on the show. The undead can’t go completely inside a tent, either.”

Now Fenella sighed. “Seriously?”

Ray shrugged. “I don’t write Nation Zom. I just study it obsessively and then throw parties around the theme.”

“So you partially built a few tents in the middle of an otherwise empty field, added a few hay bales, and called it a party?” Margaret asked.

“You’re oversimplifying things,” Ray told her.

“What about food and drinks?” Fenella asked. “What did you provide to Kirk?”

Ray sighed. “That proved more difficult than I’d expected, actually. I’ve been working with the same menu for the past year, and I’ve never had a customer complain. Unfortunately, some of the things that I provide for parties in the US are far more difficult to source in the UK, especially at a reasonable price. Coming to the Isle of Man was an added complication. I’m afraid I was unable to offer much in the way of refreshments, really.”

“So what did Kirk get for his money?” Margaret asked.

“Several large bottles of Zom Punch, which is my own special concoction. Bottles of three different specialty cocktails taken directly from the television show. Boxes of Zom Pizza and assorted bags of chips.”

“Zom Pizza?” Fenella asked.

“Again, that’s my own creation,” Ray said. “I ordered it from a local pizza place, but with very specific toppings. Done right, it ends up looking exactly like something that was eaten in episode four, *The Zom Rising*.”

“So they got pizza and chips and drinks,” Margaret said. “And some tents and hay bales.”

Ray nodded. “And my expertise, don’t forget that. I set everything up and then stayed to supervise the first few hours

of the party. I was there to answer questions and to help keep everything true to the television show.”

“Except you aren’t meant to be working,” Fenella said.

“I wasn’t working. I was simply assisting Damon. To be honest, I love Nation Zom enough that I’d do what I do for free if I could. As it is, I only charge what I have to charge in order to pay my bills.”

Fenella looked at the door. *What was keeping Ted?* she wondered. “When did you arrive on the island?” she asked.

“Thursday. We wanted to be here in plenty of time to make all of the necessary final arrangements. You’d be amazed how many times I turn up for an event and find that the person hosting it hasn’t actually found us a place to have it or that the place he or she has chosen is completely inappropriate.”

“Or maybe the place is owned by someone who doesn’t even know that the event is going to take place,” Margaret suggested.

Ray flushed. “As I said earlier, I’m really sorry about that. I never should have trusted Kirk, but he seemed honest enough, and he paid the deposit quickly.”

“What did you do on Thursday?” Fenella asked.

“We checked into our hotel, which is not terribly nice, actually.”

“Who chose it?” Margaret asked.

“Kirk,” Ray said. “He’s also paying for it, or he’d better be. That was also part of the deal. He had to pay for two nights in a hotel for Damon and me. We agreed to share a room, which I thought was nice of us.”

“Two nights? So Thursday and Friday, which was the night of the party,” Fenella said.

“Yeah, exactly, but we haven’t checked out yet. We were supposed to check out before noon, but we were still waiting for Kirk to pay us, so we didn’t make it. Now I suppose we’re going to have to pay for another day. It’s a good thing our flight doesn’t leave until nine.”

“I don’t think you’re going to make that flight,” Margaret said.

Ray frowned. “I really don’t want to stay on this island for any longer than necessary. We can fight with Kirk for our money from London if we have to, but I really want to get on that plane.”

“You’d better see what the police have to say about that,” Margaret replied.

“Damon is taking care of them. I just wanted to make sure that we were okay with you,” Ray said to Fenella. “Using your property was all part of a big misunderstanding, that’s all, and I’m really sorry about it.”

“How was it a misunderstanding, exactly?” Fenella asked.

“Ah, well, I mean, Kirk gave us directions, and Damon and I went and set everything up. When Kirk arrived, he never said anything about us setting up in the wrong place, so I didn’t give it another thought. Clearly, we misunderstood the directions. I have to assume that Kirk didn’t think it really mattered. It was an empty field in the middle of nowhere. I’m surprised anyone noticed that we’d been there.”

“We might not have noticed if it weren’t for the empty cups, bottles, and potato chip packets everywhere,” Margaret said.

“It’s the responsibility of the host to clean up the site after the party,” Ray said quickly. “I mean, it’s his or her property, usually, or a space that he or she has rented for the event. Of course, the host is going to clean up everything.”

“But in this case, since it was my property, Kirk left a huge mess,” Fenella said.

“You don’t keep the tents?” Margaret asked.

Ray shook his head “Hosts get to keep all of the decorations that we provide.”

“Keep them or leave them behind,” Fenella said.

“Again, that wasn’t my fault. Kirk should have told us that we were in the wrong place. It wouldn’t have taken all that

much effort to relocate to the correct field, not when Kirk first arrived, before the first of the guests.”

“What did he say when he got there?” Fenella asked.

“He just walked around and looked at what we’d done. He tried the Zom Punch and a couple of the cocktails, too. He said he was happy with everything and that he was looking forward to the evening.”

“What time was that?” Margaret asked.

“Somewhere around six, I think. I wasn’t paying that much attention to the time, really. Damon and I spent most of the day trying to get everything that we needed for the event. It was a lot harder than we thought it was going to be, if I’m honest. The pizza was almost impossible to get. I’d just assumed that you’d have pizza places on the island.”

“So what time did you go up to the Point of Ayre?” Fenella wondered.

“We finally found a restaurant to make the pizzas in the afternoon. We had to wait while they baked them, so we didn’t get to head north until after four. It was probably close to five by the time we thought we’d found the right field.”

“Do you still have the directions that Kirk gave you?” Margaret asked.

“Damon has them in his phone. Once we found out that we’d set up in the wrong place, I read through them again. I can’t believe that we went wrong, though. I think Kirk deliberately sent us to the wrong place so that he could refuse to pay us the balance he owes us.”

“I’m surprised you don’t demand payment in advance,” Fenella said.

“We usually do, or rather, I do back in the US. It’s different here, though. People here seem to want to pay in installments. Kirk was supposed to pay the balance before the party started, though. That was one of the reasons why he was supposed to meet us at six on the site. He was going to make sure that everything met his expectations and then pay us the balance.”

“Why didn’t he?” Margaret asked.

“He claimed that he’d forgotten his wallet.”

“He was going to pay you in cash?” Fenella asked.

Ray flushed. “That’s just easier for everyone.”

Especially if you’re working illegally, Fenella thought. “So you told him that he could wait and pay you in the morning?” she asked.

“Yeah, he pointed out that we were staying in a hotel that he was paying for, so clearly we could trust him. Now that I think about it, I should have argued, but it seemed to make sense at the time.”

Margaret nodded. “What time did the party start?”

“Damon and I sat around talking and having a few drinks until around nine. That was when the first guests arrived.”

“Where was Kirk while you and Damon were sitting around?” Margaret asked.

“He was with us for some of the time, but he was also up near the house, on his phone, for a lot of it. He said he’d had to leave work early to meet with us, so he had a few things to finish up before the weekend.”

“Do you remember the names of any of the guests?” Margaret asked.

Ray shrugged. “Sure. There weren’t all that many of them. Two women arrived first. Della Sparks and Sheila Christian. Kirk introduced them to Damon and me. He said they were huge fans of the show, but Sheila threw a fit when she found out that there weren’t any bathrooms available.”

“I don’t blame her,” Fenella said.

“But not having them kept the story real,” Ray argued. “Remember that the undead can’t go indoors in Nation Zom. When Kirk first got to the site, I asked him if he was going to open up the house to let people use the bathrooms, but he said that he wanted to keep things Nation Zom accurate.”

“And he didn’t have keys to the house, because it wasn’t his,” Margaret suggested.

Ray flushed. “Yeah, that too, probably.”

“So Sheila was upset about the bathrooms. What about Della?” Fenella asked.

“She didn’t seem to care. She started drinking Zom Punch and eating chips as soon as she arrived and she seemed happy enough.”

“Who arrived next?” Fenella asked.

“Everyone else,” Ray laughed. “They’d hired an oversized taxi to bring them all there and scheduled it to come back for them at three.”

“Della and Sheila came in one of their cars?” Margaret asked.

“They came in Sheila’s car, which was something else she wasn’t happy about.”

“What about Kirk?” Fenella asked.

“He had a friend drop him off at six. He told us that he’d find a ride back to civilization somehow.”

Fenella nodded. “Do you remember the names of the people who came in the taxi?”

“Some of them, but maybe not all of them. The women were Judy and Mattie. Mattie’s last name is Matthews. The guys were Luke, Doug, and Oscar. I don’t remember any other last names.”

“And that was everyone at the party?” Margaret asked.

“Yeah. I was surprised, because Kirk had said that there would be forty people. Damon and I sat there, waiting for the rest of the guests for several minutes, before Kirk told us to get things started.”

Fenella frowned. “Eight is a lot fewer than forty.”

“That’s what I said,” Ray told her. “We’d brought enough food and drink for forty, and we’d planned all of the activities

for forty as well.”

“What did Kirk say about the smaller number?” Fenella asked.

“He just shrugged and said that some people had canceled at the last minute. Damon and I had to rethink a few things, but we made it work.”

Margaret nodded. “What happened next?”

“We encouraged everyone to eat the pizza because it was already pretty cold. Then we made sure that everyone had drinks before we started the games.”

“What sort of games?” Fenella had to ask.

“We have a number of different games based on Nation Zom. I’d rather not go into too many specifics, because they’re quite special and an important part of what makes my Nation Zom parties unique.”

Fenella didn’t bother to argue. “Did you have a chance to talk to any of the guests?”

“I talked to Sheila several times. She wasn’t happy about the food. She couldn’t drink because she was driving. It was cold. It looked like it might rain. She didn’t really want to be there. Oh, and could I do anything to get Doug to pay her some attention, because he wouldn’t stop talking to Judy.”

Margaret sighed. “Did you talk to anyone else?”

“Not really. I think just about everyone asked me about getting into the cottage, but I just told them to talk to Kirk about that. Otherwise, they were quite happy talking amongst themselves and ignoring Damon and me unless we were organizing another game.”

“Did everyone play the games?” Fenella asked.

“Of course. Sheila complained about a few of them, but the others all seemed quite happy to play. They’re all huge Nation Zom fans, of course.”

“What happened after the games?” Margaret asked.

“It was close to midnight by the time we finished the last game on our schedule. We’d originally told Kirk that we were going to leave at eleven, so he’d gotten an extra hour of our time. He didn’t seem all that grateful for it, though. In fact, he seemed quite annoyed when we said that we were leaving.”

“Everyone else was still there?” Fenella asked.

“Yeah, the taxi wasn’t coming back until three. Sheila kept saying that she wanted to leave, but no one was paying her any attention.”

Margaret frowned. “What time did you leave, then?”

“Just after midnight. As I said, Kirk wasn’t happy, but then he said that he was quite capable of organizing a few games himself. He was trying to talk the others into some sort of hide-and-seek game as Damon and I left.”

“Hide-and-seek? Where would people hide in a mostly empty field?” Margaret asked.

Ray shrugged. “That wasn’t my problem. By that point, I just wanted to get away.”

“And I’m looking forward to hearing why that was,” another voice said.

Fenella felt herself blushing as she looked at Arthur, who’d quietly joined them.

Ray jumped to his feet. “I think that’s all I have to say,” he said. “I really need to go. I have a plane to catch.”

“On the contrary, you and I have a lot to discuss,” Arthur told him. “But this isn’t the place for our conversation.” He looked over at the two uniformed constables who were standing near the building’s entrance. When he nodded, they quickly walked over to join them. “Take Mr. Houston down to the station,” he told them. “I’ll be there shortly.”

“That isn’t necessary,” Ray protested. “I’ve already apologized for setting up the party in the wrong place. Damon and I will go up and clean up the mess that was left behind, and we’ll pay for any damages done to the field. There’s no need to involve the police in any of this.”

“A young woman was murdered in that field last night,” Arthur said tightly. “That definitely requires police involvement.”

Ray stared at him for a moment. “I heard there was some sort of an accident, but when people said murder, I didn’t believe it. Are you telling me that someone really was murdered up there?”

“Yes, and that’s all I’m going to say on the subject for right now. The constables will take you to the station. We’ll talk there shortly.”

“But whatever happened isn’t anything to do with me. Everyone was absolutely fine when I left,” Ray said. He was still protesting as the constables led him out of the room.

Fenella and Margaret got to their feet as they watched the man being escorted out. As the door shut behind him and the constables, Arthur turned around.

“How did you happen upon Mr. Houston?” he demanded.

“He found us,” Fenella said. “He wanted to apologize for using my property for his party.”

“Did he really? And how did he come to discover that it was your property that was used?”

“Apparently, Kirk Edwards shared that information with him when he called Kirk to try to get the rest of his fee for planning last night’s event,” Fenella replied.

Arthur frowned. “I’m going to need you to repeat everything that Ray Houston said to you.”

“We’d better sit down,” Margaret muttered.

Arthur nodded. “Please, sit,” he said. “I can’t wait to hear what you found to talk about with the man.”

Fenella felt her cheeks redden. “We talked about the party. Obviously, we had a lot of questions for him.”

“Mostly, we were trying to keep him here,” Margaret added. “He kept insisting that he needed to go to catch his plane.”

Arthur pulled out a notebook and pen. “Start at the beginning. Where did you meet the man?”

Fenella felt as if repeating the conversation took a good deal longer than the original conversation had taken. “...and then you arrived,” she said eventually, wishing she had a glass of water to hand.

Arthur glanced at his watch and sighed. “I need to get to the station and speak to Mr. Houston myself. I wish I had time to go back over a few of the things you said, but I really don’t.

Do you agree with everything your aunt told me?" he asked Margaret.

Margaret nodded. "She remembered more than I did."

Arthur got to his feet. "Daniel warned me that you make a habit of bumping into witnesses in murder investigations. He didn't tell me that when you do so, you also question them. I shouldn't have to tell you that that is a dangerous habit. I will remind you that this is my investigation, not Daniel's. I don't appreciate anyone interfering with my investigation."

"We weren't trying to interfere," Fenella said. "We just wanted to keep the man here until you arrived."

"Then you should have talked about the weather," Arthur snapped before he turned and walked away.

"He's not happy with us," Margaret said.

"Let's hope Daniel and Ted are more understanding," Fenella said. She pulled out her mobile and sent Daniel a quick text message.

Had a long conversation with Ray Houston. Arthur is not happy with us.

While she was doing that, Margaret sent a message of her own.

"What are we going to do now?" she asked as she slipped her phone into her pocket.

"We were supposed to be going somewhere for dinner," Fenella replied. "I'm so hungry I'm not even hungry anymore."

"Who does the fastest food on the Douglas promenade?" Margaret asked.

"We could try the chippy."

"Fish and chips? That sounds wonderful. To be honest, though, just about anything sounds wonderful. I'm starving."

"Let's get something and take it back to the apartment," Fenella suggested. "I don't want to risk seeing anyone else involved in the case today."

The pair walked the short distance to the closest fish and chip shop and ordered dinner to go. A short while later, they were back in Fenella's apartment with food spread across the kitchen counter. Fenella had been pleased to see that the bubbles in the living room had all finally disappeared.

Fenella filled a plate and then got herself a can of soda. "Want one?" she asked Margaret.

"I really want a glass of wine, but I don't know what wine goes with fish and chips."

"Any you want."

Margaret thought for a moment. "I'd better not. Ted and Daniel might still want to talk to us about our conversation with Ray."

"Why do I hear a marching band?" Fenella asked a short while later.

Margaret walked to the window. "There's nothing happening outside."

"Mona?" Fenella asked.

A huge white feather appeared in the center of the kitchen. It seemed to shimmer for a moment before it disappeared, leaving Mona standing where it had been.

"That was different," Margaret said.

Mona shrugged. "The angelic marching band has been offering to play for me for months. I kept turning them down because, well, they're a marching band. It just seemed a bit too much, but they were quite insistent. I hope you enjoyed their performance."

"They were wonderful," Margaret replied.

Mona smiled. "Very good. Now tell me what that man who was speaking to you on the promenade wanted. Who was he and why did you sit and talk to him for ages?"

Fenella sighed. "Can you wait and hear the story when we tell Daniel and Ted?"

"They aren't coming tonight," Mona replied.

Fenella frowned. "They aren't?"

"I haven't actually heard back from Ted," Margaret said.

"Daniel hasn't replied, either," Fenella told her. She pulled out her phone and stared at the screen. "They must be really busy."

"So tell me about the man," Mona said.

Fenella was halfway through yet another retelling of their conversation with Ray when her mobile beeped.

"Daniel can't get away," she said with a sigh as she read the screen. "He says he'll see me tomorrow."

Margaret's phone buzzed a moment later. "And that was Ted, saying much the same thing," she said. "I suspect Arthur is keeping them busy."

"I'll see what I can do," Mona said. "If I can find the right person for you to talk to tomorrow, Daniel and Ted will have to come over."

"They'll just send Arthur," Fenella replied. "And then we'll get another lecture about staying out of police investigations."

Mona frowned. "What fun would that be?"

Fenella finished telling Mona about their conversation with Ray. When she was done, Mona pulled out her notebook.

"Della, Judy, Mattie, Sheila, Luke, Kirk, Oscar, and Doug. Those are the people who were at the party," she said thoughtfully. "And Ray said that Mattie is Mattie Matthews. I'm going to assume that Judy is Judy Long. Either of them could have borrowed that necklace from her mother."

"What about Della Sparks or Sheila Christian?" Fenella asked. "Do you know anything about either of them?"

Mona shook her head. "Sparks is an unusual surname. I don't know that I've ever met anyone on the island with that surname. Christian, on the other hand, is one of the island's most common surnames. Sheila is a bit more unusual as a

Christian name, but without more information, I don't believe I can tell you anything about either of the women."

"What about the men?" Margaret asked.

"Ray didn't give you any of their surnames, aside from Kirk's. I need more than just Christian names," Mona told her.

Fenella yawned. "It's getting late. I need to watch some mindless television and then get some sleep. I'm more than happy to leave the entire investigation to the police."

"I'm not," Mona said with a wicked grin. "But I'll leave it for tonight. You enjoy your television. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Don't interfere with the investigation," Fenella said.

"Who, me?" Mona asked. She laughed and then vanished in a puff of black smoke.

"What are your plans for tomorrow?" Fenella asked Margaret after they'd watched an episode of a favorite American sitcom together.

"I don't really have any plans. Ted and I were talking about doing something, but I suspect he's going to be busy with the murder investigation."

"I need to work on the wedding plans, but I don't think I'll be able to do anything tomorrow. It always feels as if half of the island is shut on Sundays."

"Tomorrow we can make a list of all of the things that have to be done for the wedding," Margaret said. "And then I can help you tackle the list on Monday."

"That sounds good. Thanks."

"I don't have anything else to do, except search for a job. That doesn't take long. There aren't many jobs available on the island."

"The perfect job will come along eventually."

Margaret sighed. "I can't help but feel as if it already did, but then it was given to the boss's nephew or whoever he was. I'm starting to wonder if I'm going to find anything here."

“Don’t give up yet. If you don’t find the right position soon, we can always have Mona do something.”

“What could she do?”

“I’ve no idea, but we could find out.”

Margaret laughed. “She does seem to send suspects our way quite regularly.”

“Maybe we should keep her busy with your job hunt so she stops doing that,” Fenella speculated. “I don’t want Arthur angry with us.”

“He shouldn’t be angry with us. We didn’t go looking for Ray.”

“No, but we could have talked about the weather.”

Margaret laughed again. “If we’d told him that we’d talked about the weather, he wouldn’t have believed us.”

“Probably not,” Fenella agreed around a yawn. “Sleep, sleep, sleep,” she chanted as she got to her feet. “I’ll see you in the morning.”



Fenella was still munching on her toast the next morning when someone knocked on the door.

“Who could that be?” Margaret asked, frowning over the coffee.

Fenella looked through the peephole. “It’s Elaine,” she said as she reached for the doorknob.

“Have you seen the local paper?” Elaine demanded as she rushed into the room.

“No, not yet. We haven’t been out of the apartment yet,” Fenella replied as she shut the door.

“It’s got lots of information about our murder,” Elaine explained. “Heather has been a busy bee.” She held up the paper.

Fenella frowned at the headline. “Murder on Mona’s Property,” she read. “That’s a terrible headline.”

“It certainly is,” Mona snapped as she appeared next to Margaret. “You should complain.”

“It is technically true,” Margaret said.

“But it’s not relevant. The woman’s death didn’t have anything to do with me,” Mona replied.

“I hope the article is better than the headline,” Fenella said.

Elaine nodded. “It’s all about the people who were at the party. Heather got the full guest list from somewhere and then she did some research on them, too. Let’s sit down and go through them one at a time.”

“Let’s sit in the kitchen,” Fenella suggested.

“That coffee smells good,” Elaine said as they walked into the kitchen. “I rushed out to get the local paper and didn’t even have any breakfast this morning.”

“Do you want some toast and some fruit?” Fenella offered.

“Toast would be good. Coffee would be better,” Elaine replied.

“Have both,” Margaret suggested as she got up and grabbed the loaf of bread from the counter.

Fenella poured Elaine a cup of coffee and then refilled her cup and Margaret’s. A few minutes later, they were all sitting around the table together. Mona frowned and then waved her hand. A small coffee cup appeared on the table in front of her. Fenella resisted the urge to look and see if there was anything in the cup.

“Where do you want to start?” Elaine asked.

“Does the paper say who was killed?” Margaret asked.

Elaine shook her head. “Apparently, that information hasn’t been released yet. Heather speculates that the victim had to have been one of the people she talks about in her article, but she does admit that it could have been anyone. The victim doesn’t have to have been someone on the guest list.”

Fenella nodded. “How many people are on the guest list?” she asked.

“Apparently, there were eight people at the party, along with two organizers who left early,” Elaine replied.

“That ties in with what we were told,” Margaret said.

“What do you mean? Who told you something and what did they say?” Elaine demanded.

“Ray Houston, one of the organizers, came to see me yesterday,” Fenella explained. “He wanted to apologize for setting up the party in the wrong place. He told us a little bit about the party while we were talking.”

“Tell me everything,” Elaine replied.

“Why don’t we go through the stuff in the paper first?” Margaret suggested. “Most of what we learned is probably in there, anyway.”

Elaine hesitated and then nodded. “According to the paper, the event was organized by Ray Houston and Damon Tyler. Ray is American, and he was responsible for Nation Zom events all over the US, apparently. Heather says that there are Nation Zom parties nearly every weekend in some of the country’s major cities.”

“Are or were?” Margaret asked. “I mean, if Ray is here, who is running the parties now?”

“There’s an entire sidebar about that,” Elaine told her. “It’s all about Nation Zom parties. Apparently, Ray was one of the first to organize them and he was pretty successful at it, but now the company that produces the television show is cracking down on people using their intellectual property for events. Heather says that Ray left the US because he couldn’t legally have events there any longer.”

“Surely he wouldn’t be able to have them in the UK, either, then,” Margaret said.

“Maybe he just thought he was less likely to get caught over here,” Elaine replied.

“I don’t think Ray is all that bothered about what’s legal,” Fenella said.

Margaret nodded. “You could be right about that. What does the article say about Damon?”

“Damon Tyler is a professional promoter. He’s worked with a handful of D-list celebrities, none of whom have become any more successful. He also promotes a few clubs in London. From what Heather could determine, that mostly means that he passes out flyers in the street outside the pub, but I’m certain Damon would insist that it’s a lot more complicated than that.”

“How did he and Ray meet?” Fenella asked.

“They’re distant cousins,” Elaine told her. “Apparently, they’ve known each other since childhood.”

“Damon is English?” Margaret asked.

“He is. He was born and raised in London. The article says that Damon invited Ray to come and plan events in the UK because he could see clear demand for Nation Zom events. Heather speculates that Ray was in trouble with the US authorities and ran away to London to escape.”

“I suppose both things could be true,” Margaret said.

“Ray told us that he and Damon left the party around midnight,” Fenella said.

Elaine nodded. “According to this,” she said, shaking the newspaper, “they arrived back at their hotel not long before one. The night manager let them in.”

“Now they just have to hope that the dead woman was killed sometime after midnight,” Margaret said.

“So let’s talk about the women who were at the party,” Elaine said. “Heather talks about them alphabetically. That makes Sheila Christian first.”

“Tell us about Sheila,” Fenella replied.

“Sheila is, or maybe was, if she was the victim, twenty-nine. She’s single, and I’m going to talk about all of them as if

they're still alive because we don't know who died," Elaine said.

"Does it say anything else about her?" Margaret asked.

"Apparently, her family has money, but that's true for all of them," Elaine said. "According to Heather, Sheila has a part-time job at one of the local shops, just for fun. I can't imagine it's fun, but from everything Heather says about her family in the article, Sheila doesn't need to work."

"Just because her parents have money, doesn't mean that she has any," Margaret pointed out.

"It isn't just her parents, though," Elaine replied. "All of the party guests, starting with Kirk Edwards who was hosting the event, come from old money. From what Heather says, everyone who was there has at least one trust fund, and they're all in line to inherit fortunes as their grandparents and parents pass away. None of the others have jobs, aside from Della Sparks, who is the one exception to everything I just said."

"Oh? Tell us about Della, then," Margaret said.

"I was going through them in alphabetical order," Elaine objected.

Fenella swallowed a sigh with a sip of coffee. *It would be rude to go and get your own copy of the paper*, she told herself sternly.

"Go anyway," Mona said.

Margaret looked confused.

"Who comes next, then?" Fenella asked Elaine.

"Judy Long, twenty-eight, also single. Her parents own nearly all of the retail spaces in the south of the island."

"Interesting," Margaret said.

"Then there's Mattie Matthews," Elaine continued. "She's only twenty-four and she just finished university less than a year ago. She studied art history, and according to Heather she likes to spend her spare time painting and drawing."

“I suppose you have a lot of spare time if you don’t need to work,” Margaret said.

“And last is Della Sparks,” Elaine said. “She’s twenty-six and she is just visiting the island. She’s an actress from London.”

“What is she doing here?” Fenella asked.

“Heather didn’t seem entirely certain, but she speculated that Della is romantically involved with one of the men who was at the party.”

“I suppose that makes sense,” Margaret said. “According to Ray, she arrived at the party with Sheila. I don’t suppose Heather says anything about how those two know each other?”

Elaine frowned. “I don’t think so,” she said, before opening the paper.

As Elaine reread the article, Fenella got herself another cup of coffee. After she’d topped up the other two cups, she sat back down. Elaine looked up a moment later.

“There’s nothing in the article about the relationships among the various women,” she said. “Heather is very careful with what she says about the relationships between the men and women, too, but at least there is some information.”

“Tell us about the men, then,” Margaret suggested.

“Oscar Bradley is first,” Elaine said. “He’s thirty-one, and he’s the one that Heather thinks might be romantically involved with Della Sparks.”

“Why does she think that?” Fenella asked.

“Apparently, Oscar spends a lot of his time going to West End shows in London. That’s where he met Della, who had a small part in a show there last year.”

“She’s a West End actress?” Fenella asked.

“She was in a show last year,” Elaine repeated. “She’s also done a few commercials and had tiny parts in several different television shows. Heather hinted that Oscar is doing his best to

buy her bigger parts in television or movies, but he doesn't seem to be doing very well with it."

Margaret grinned. "Maybe he's only telling Della that he's trying."

"Maybe. The next man on the list is Kirk Edwards. He was the one who arranged for the party. It was supposed to be a twenty-sixth birthday party, but who arranges for their own birthday party? If he truly did, then he needs better friends."

Fenella and Margaret both laughed.

"You aren't wrong," Margaret said. "What else does the article say about him?"

"Nothing really. He's the youngest child of Karl and Suzanne Edwards, who lost their oldest son to childhood cancer. Apparently, Karl does not do much of anything, Suzanne does a lot of work for charity, and Kirk does a lot of fast driving and heavy drinking."

"Heather actually says that?" Margaret asked.

"Not in so many words, but she says that Kirk has collected an impressive pile of speeding fines and has been banned from several pubs around the island," Elaine explained. "She hints that he's not legally allowed to drive any longer, but doesn't come right out and say that."

Fenella sighed. "Ray did say that Kirk had had someone drop him off at the party."

"There you are, then," Elaine said. "The next man on the list is Luke Huff. He's twenty-eight and that's just about all the article has to say about him."

"But he's from the island, right?" Margaret asked.

"Oh, yes, he's from the island. Heather mentions that he grew up in Castletown and went to university in Manchester, but that's all she says."

"Maybe his family has good lawyers," Margaret suggested.

"Advocates is the Manx word," Fenella told her.

Margaret nodded. "I knew that."

“What about the last man?” Fenella asked.

“Doug Perkins is twenty-seven. Heather hinted that he and Judy Long are a couple, but it was just a hint.”

“Did she have anything else to say about him?” Margaret wondered.

“He went to Cambridge but never finished. His father had done the same. His father met his future wife, Doug’s mother, at Cambridge, though, and they got married once she’d finished. Heather doesn’t come right out and say it, but it sounds very much as if his mother now manages the family business while his father pretends to do things.”

“That’s absolutely true,” Mona said. “Miles is useless, but incredibly attractive. Gail runs the business and has done since they got married.”

Fenella and Margaret exchanged glances.

“And that’s everyone. Now we simply have to work out which one of them was murdered and who did it,” Elaine said as she folded the newspaper and put it down on the table.

“The police are investigating,” Margaret said.

Elaine waved a hand. “But we can do our own investigation. We’ve done it before.”

“I think I’d rather leave it to the police,” Fenella said. “I’m trying to plan a wedding, after all.”

“Yes, but surely Daniel isn’t going to be able to leave the island, not until after the case is solved,” Elaine argued.

“He’s already assured me that we can get married and leave for our honeymoon no matter what happens with the case,” Fenella replied.

“But he’ll be a good deal happier to go if the case has been solved,” Elaine said.

Fenella frowned. Elaine was right.

“So, which of the women was the victim?” Elaine asked. “You both saw her. How old was she?”

Fenella looked at her niece. “You may be a better judge than I am on that. You’re much closer in age to the people who were at the party.”

Margaret shrugged. “She looked very young, but I only got a quick glimpse of her face in a dark tent by flashlight.”

Fenella nodded. “I thought she looked very young, too.”

Margaret crossed the room and picked up her laptop. “I’d be willing to bet that the newspaper’s website has pictures of everyone they named in the article. If not, we can probably find them all on social media.”

A minute later, Margaret pulled up the website. The front page was filled with photos of the men and women who’d been at the party near the Point of Ayre. The headline read: “One was the Victim, One is a Killer.”

Fenella shivered. “What a horrible headline.”

“It’s a risky one, too, accusing someone there of murder,” Margaret said.

Fenella gestured toward the large black square at the bottom of the screen. “That one says ‘unknown person.’ They probably think that covers them.”

“Maybe the victim was an unknown person,” Elaine suggested.

Fenella slowly shook her head. “The victim was Mattie Matthews,” she said sadly.

Margaret nodded. “I thought I recognized her, but I wanted to see what you thought before I said anything.”

“She was the youngest of the four women,” Elaine said. “It says here that the police will be releasing more information later today. I expect they’ll release the name of the victim soon.”

“Her poor family,” Fenella said.

Mona nodded. “Louise will be devastated. I always got the impression that she preferred her horses to her children, but she did love her children.”

Fenella opened her mouth to reply and then snapped it shut. Elaine was still staring at the computer screen and didn't notice.

"According to this, Mattie was involved with Kirk," Margaret said.

"That puts him at the top of my list of suspects," Elaine announced.

"You don't know anything about him," Fenella argued.

"I know that he drinks too much and drives too fast," Elaine replied. "And I know that he arranged for a party to be held at a location that wasn't his to use. I also know that the woman who died was his girlfriend. All of those things are significant factors."

"Maybe they had a fight," Margaret said.

"Maybe," Fenella replied. "I'm not clear on how he managed to kill her without anyone noticing, though."

"The same holds true for all of them," Margaret said. "Someone killed her in the middle of a party and then left the body there where anyone could have stumbled across it."

"Unless someone killed her after the party," Elaine said. "Maybe everyone left and then Mattie and her killer went back for some reason."

"Ray told us that everyone aside from Sheila and Della arrived together in a taxi," Margaret said thoughtfully. "They should have all left together as well."

"Kirk got a ride from someone," Fenella said. "Someone who apparently wasn't invited to the party, which is odd, now that I think about it."

"That is odd," Elaine agreed. "I can't imagine asking a friend to drive me all the way to the Point of Ayre for a party if I hadn't invited that friend to attend."

"Maybe he was dropped off by a business associate or something," Margaret suggested.

Fenella sighed. "I'm sure we'll hear the entire story eventually. Something tells me that Kirk isn't going to keep quiet while he's being investigated for murder."

"I suspect everyone who was at the party is going to talk to Heather at some point," Margaret said. "They'll want to tell their version of events."

"Which is good for us," Elaine said. "We want to hear every version of events. Then we simply have to work out who is telling the truth and who murdered poor Mattie Matthews. Do either of you have any idea what the killer's motive might have been?"

Margaret and Fenella exchanged glances.

"Mattie was wearing a copy of a necklace that was stolen over twenty years ago," Margaret said. "I can't see why that would have been a motive, but it's interesting."

"Indeed," Elaine said. "Heather doesn't mention it. I suppose she doesn't know. I'm awfully tempted to share that little bit of information with Dan Ross, actually."

Fenella laughed. "He'd love to hear it, but we weren't supposed to tell anyone about the necklace, especially not anyone with the paper."

Elaine sighed. "But how lovely would it be to see Dan get a headline for a change? I know he's annoying and unpleasant, but at least you know exactly what you're getting with Dan. Heather is ever so pleasant to your face, even though you know she's planning on writing shocking headlines based on every word you say to her."

Fenella nodded. "It's probably best if we simply avoid both Heather and Dan for the foreseeable future."

"So I can't tell Dan about the necklace?" Elaine asked.

"Definitely not," Margaret said. "The police will release that information when they're ready to do so. In the meantime, we need to keep quiet about that and about the identity of the victim."

Elaine nodded. “Okay, then, what are we going to do today? We need to find the men and women who were at that party.”

Fenella shook her head. “I’m not getting involved. I have to go and visit florists and maybe look for a dress, too.”

“I can’t believe the woman who did the flowers for my wedding can’t help you,” Shelly said.

“She said she needed more notice than I was able to give,” Fenella replied. “I offered to throw money at her, but she just apologized and said that she simply didn’t have any way to get enough extra flowers to the island in time. I’m afraid I’m going to hear that same thing at every flower shop on the island, really.”

“Maybe you can order just a few flowers from every single shop,” Elaine suggested. “Then you’d just need someone to put them all together into bouquets on the morning of the wedding.”

“It may come to that,” Fenella said. “I have some very specific requests, too.”

“Oh? What sort of requests?” Elaine asked.

Fenella pulled out her phone and opened it. Then she scrolled through her photos. “This is a picture of the bride’s bouquet from Daniel’s first wedding,” she said eventually, holding the device toward Elaine. “I’d rather not have any of those flowers in my bouquet.”

Elaine looked at the picture and smiled. “That bouquet is a mess. Those are all exotic flowers. It must have cost a fortune, and I bet the flowers were already drooping by the end of the

ceremony. You shouldn't have any trouble getting a beautiful bouquet of very different flowers."

"I was really pleased that she didn't have any roses in the bouquet. I think I want roses," Fenella said. Then she sighed. "I may not be able to get them, though. We're crazy for trying to plan a wedding in only two weeks."

"It's going to be fine," Margaret said firmly. "Let's go and talk to florists. I'm sure we'll find someone who can do what you need. If not, then, like Elaine said, we'll get a few flowers from every shop on the island that sells them and make the bouquets ourselves."

Fenella nodded. "Florists first. Then dresses."

"There isn't anything in Mona's wardrobe?" Margaret asked.

Fenella glanced at Elaine. "Mona left behind a wardrobe full of beautiful clothes," she explained. *Clothes that magically seem to fit the wearer, regardless of her size*, she added silently. "I'm going to go through everything in the wardrobe later, but I wanted to see if I could find anything in the local shops first."

"Try Fiona's," Mona said. "They have lovely clothes."

"I've never been in there," Fenella replied.

"You've never been in where?" Elaine asked.

Fenella flushed. "I'm sorry. I was having a conversation in my own head and accidentally said some of it out loud."

Mona laughed as Elaine waved a hand.

"I do that all the time," she said. "You go and do your shopping then. I'll come back over this afternoon to see if you've learned anything. I expect the victim will be officially identified before midday, so there will be updates on the paper's website. We'll see what they have to say and then try to work out where we could go to find the people who were at the party. According to the paper, they all live in the south of the island. Maybe we could have dinner in Castletown."

“We’ll see,” Fenella said. “There are some lovely restaurants in Castletown, actually, and I may need to visit all of their florists, but I think it’s highly unlikely that we’ll bump into the suspects if we do visit.”

“But it’s more likely there than here,” Elaine argued. “Although anything is possible, isn’t it? Perhaps I’ll spend the morning wandering around Douglas, looking for suspects.”

“I think you’d be better off staying home and reading a book,” Fenella said.

Elaine nodded. “Actually, that’s a good point. I have two new books to read. One is all about serial killers and the other is about successful police investigations. I’ve just started reading the chapter on questioning suspects. I should read it and try to learn the proper technique before dinner. Then, if we do happen to see any of the suspects, I’ll be ready.”

Fenella wasn’t sure how to respond to that. Mona shook her head.

“That’s a good idea,” Margaret said. “I hope you learn a lot.”

Elaine nodded and then stood up. “I’ll be back around four. That should give you plenty of time to find flowers and a dress. I’d suggest meeting for lunch, but I have plans.”

“Exciting plans?” Margaret asked.

Elaine shrugged. “I met a gentleman in the lift yesterday. I was going down and the car stopped to collect him on the third floor. Apparently, he’s only recently moved to the island and into the building. We talked very briefly as we descended, and then he asked me to have lunch with him today. He’s hoping I can tell him more about the island. He used to live in Wales.”

“It was very nice of you to agree to help him,” Fenella said.

“It wasn’t nice at all,” Elaine countered. “He’s paying for lunch. Besides, he’s rather attractive. I was always busy with work and friends when I was younger, but now that I’m older, it might be quite interesting to have a boyfriend. We’ve barely

spoken, of course, so I might not like him in the slightest once I get to know him, but he has potential.”

“Good luck,” Margaret said.

“Thank you,” Elaine replied. “If we don’t find any suspects in Castletown, at least we’ll be able to talk about Ernie.”

“His name is Ernie?” Fenella asked.

Elaine made a face. “I don’t really care for the name. I wonder if he’d mind if I used his middle name instead. Of course, as yet I don’t know his middle name. It could be a good deal worse, I suppose.”

“I doubt it,” Margaret said.

“So, flowers and dresses,” Fenella said after Elaine had gone.

“Surely the perfect dress is already hanging in Mona’s wardrobe,” Margaret said.

Fenella shrugged. “I haven’t had the nerve to look yet. I thought I’d try there after I’d exhausted all of the other possibilities.”

“Must dash,” Mona said. “I’ve a very busy day ahead. I’ll see you both later.”

She disappeared silently, without any fanfare.

“That was odd,” Margaret said. “I thought she’d be eager to show you the dress in her wardrobe.”

Fenella nodded. “It was odd. Now I’m really afraid to look in the wardrobe.”

She walked into her bedroom with Margaret on her heels. They stopped in front of the wardrobe.

“Every time I’ve found something in here, it’s been the perfect outfit for whatever occasion was happening,” Fenella said. “A perfect dress for my wedding may be too much to hope for, though.”

“Perfect is impossible,” Margaret said. “What you want is something that is beautiful and appropriate.”

Fenella nodded. “Beautiful and appropriate,” she repeated before she pulled open the wardrobe door.

“It’s rather nice,” Margaret said as Fenella stared at the sweater that was hanging in the center of the mostly empty railing.

“It’s a lovely sweater, but it’s not what I wanted for my wedding day.”

“Maybe it’s beautiful and appropriate for going dress shopping,” Margaret suggested.

Fenella removed it from the wardrobe and held it up. “It is really nice. I think I will wear it today, actually.”

“Maybe the wardrobe needs some time to create a wonderful wedding gown.”

“Or maybe I need to find one in the shops.”

“Where’s Fiona’s? Mona mentioned it, but I don’t think I’ve ever heard of it.”

“It’s a very fancy boutique shop in that little shopping center full of fancy boutique shops,” Fenella told her. “I think it’s open only a few days a week, and you may need an appointment to shop there.”

“Goodness, how posh. Now I want to peek in their windows, if nothing else.”

“The last time I walked past, they had a single plain white T-shirt in the window. The price was tens of thousands of pounds.”

“For a plain white T-shirt?”

Fenella nodded. “Apparently, it was a very special shirt, designed by an expert. I didn’t even bother to try it on. I figured I’d probably spill something down it if I ever actually tried to wear it, so I didn’t want to try it and discover that it fit perfectly and made me feel wonderful.”

“Even if it fit perfectly, it would still have been just a T-shirt. Was it spun out of white gold or something?”

“Nope, it was one hundred percent cotton.”

“From magical cotton fields in another dimension?”

Fenella laughed. “Maybe. But maybe you’ll get to see it for yourself. They may not have changed the window display in the last few months.”

“Oh, I hope not. If you find any dresses to try on, I may even try on the ridiculously overpriced T-shirt. I’ll send a picture of me in it to Megan and ask her to get it for me for my birthday.”

“You know she’d want to get it for you, though.”

“And you know that I’d never actually do that.”

“Flowers first,” Fenella said a short while later as they walked out of her building. “Although my dress is probably more important, I can’t help but feel as if Mona’s wardrobe is going to come to my rescue there.”

“Maybe if you ask nicely the wardrobe can conjure up flowers.”

“I’ll be happy with one nearly perfect, incredibly beautiful dress. We’ll figure out something for the flowers.”

The man at the first shop they visited was incredibly sympathetic but unable to help.

“I’m very sorry, but I couldn’t possibly find enough flowers for what you want on such short notice. I don’t think anyone on the island can manage it, actually,” he said.

“We may be back the day before the wedding to buy whatever you have,” Margaret told him.

He nodded. “I’d be more than happy to sell you whatever I have in stock that day. I’m sure some of the other flower shops on the island will do the same. If you’re happy to visit them all, you’ll be able to do something, anyway.”

“Let’s start a list,” Fenella said as they walked out of the shop. “How many florists do you think we’ll need to buy out

the day before the wedding?”

“Shelly had a ton of flowers all over the Seaview ballroom. Are you hoping to do the same?” Margaret asked.

“Ideally, yes, but I suppose I’m going to have to take what I can get.”

“We’ll start a list and just add every florist we find,” Margaret said. “Megan and I can go everywhere to collect flowers for you if we have to.”

“Let’s see how it goes. We may still get lucky,” Fenella replied, even though she wasn’t feeling particularly hopeful.

The second florist they visited gave them the same answer.

“There’s only one other florist in town,” Fenella said as they walked out of the shop. “And their shop is in the center with Fiona’s.”

“Does that mean it’s terribly expensive?” Margaret asked.

“Very terribly expensive. But at this point, if they can do what I want, I’ll pay just about anything.”

The pair walked the short distance to the small shopping center. A man in uniform pulled open the door for them.

“Good morning,” he said in a hushed tone. “Welcome to The Rembrandt.”

“The Rembrandt?” Margaret repeated as she followed Fenella through a spacious lobby.

“That’s the name of the building. The coffee shop is called Belshazzar’s after one of his paintings.”

Margaret nodded. “Belshazzar’s Feast. I studied it for a class in college. It’s from an Old Testament story. I’m not sure I’d name a café after it myself.”

Fenella shrugged. “Maybe the owners don’t know anything about the story. I doubt they know anything about Rembrandt.”

The florist shop was up one flight of stairs. Fenella took a deep breath and then walked into the shop, trying to convince

herself that she was ready to be disappointed again.

The young woman behind the counter looked upset.

“Good morning,” Fenella said.

“Yeah,” the woman replied. She inhaled slowly and then gave Fenella and Margaret a forced smile. “Yes, of course. Good morning.”

“Is something wrong?” Margaret asked.

“Not at all,” the woman replied. “Everything is fine. Just fine. How can I help you?”

“I need flowers for a wedding,” Fenella said.

The woman smiled sadly. “I don’t suppose you want to get married in a hurry?”

“What do you mean?” Fenella asked.

“Nothing, sorry, you were saying?”

“I’m getting married,” Fenella replied.

“Congratulations. We’re happy to help, but let me make it very clear to you that if we agree to work with you on your special day, we require a deposit equal to twenty percent of the total bill. That deposit is nonrefundable, no matter how much you threaten me or who you know in the island’s government.” The woman flushed and then looked down at the counter. “I do know who you are, of course, but the policy still applies.”

“That’s fine,” Fenella assured her. “Are you having trouble with another customer?”

The woman hesitated and then nodded. “Weddings get canceled for all sorts of reasons, and I’m terribly sympathetic, really, but I can’t stay in business if people always cancel at the last minute and then demand their deposits back. I have seventeen thousand pounds worth of flowers arriving on the nineteenth for a wedding that is now not going to happen. Even if I keep the deposit, I’ll be out of pocket for quite a lot of money. But I’m sorry, you didn’t come in to hear about my troubles. Have you set a date for your wedding?”

“The twenty-first,” Fenella said.

“Of what month and year?”

“This month, this year.”

The woman’s jaw dropped. “But that would be too perfect. Seriously? You’re getting married that quickly?”

“We hope so. We have a venue, but I’m still working on everything else.”

“How do you feel about roses?”

“I love them.”

The woman smiled brightly. “Let me show you what I was going to do for the party that canceled. We can modify everything, of course, but I can show you the flowers that they selected and we can go from there.”

An hour later, Fenella had everything she’d ever imagined wanting in the way of flowers for her wedding. The young woman who owned the flower shop was so thrilled that she’d be able to use the flowers she’d ordered that she’d given Fenella a large discount.

“I’ll still make a profit, but it’s truly more important to me that the flowers aren’t wasted,” she’d told Fenella as she put Fenella’s credit card through her register.

“That worked out rather well,” Margaret said as they walked out of the shop.

“We were very lucky,” Fenella replied, stopping in her tracks as an idea crossed her mind. “Or Mona just persuaded some unsuspecting couple to cancel their wedding.”

“She wouldn’t do that,” Margaret said unconvincingly.

“She would, but I’m not going to think about it. Let’s go and see what’s in the window at Fiona’s instead.”

They walked up another flight of stairs and then down the short corridor. Fiona’s was the last shop on the left. A faceless mannequin was on display in the window. It was naked, aside from a sheer silk scarf that had been wound around its body.

“I’d hate to think what that scarf costs,” Fenella whispered.

“I’d hate to think that anyone will see that and think it’s actually meant to be worn that way,” Margaret replied.

Fenella laughed. “I’m almost afraid to go inside. What if everyone in there is dressed in nothing but scarves?”

“Then we pretend to have an emergency and run away.”

Fenella nodded. “At least we have a plan.” She reached for the door, noting the small sign that said “Appointments preferred but not always necessary.”

“We didn’t have a plan for this,” Margaret murmured as they stepped into the shop and seven heads swiveled their way.

Fenella felt speechless as she stared at the men and women who’d been at the Nation Zom party.

“We’re closed,” said one of the women, who was sitting on a long couch.

“No, we aren’t,” one of the men exclaimed as he jumped off of another couch. “Or rather, no, you aren’t. Or rather, yes, we are, but we want you to stay,” he told Fenella.

“Kirk,” another of the men said.

The man who was standing shook his head. “Don’t you all know who this is?” he demanded.

Fenella hid a smile as the others looked at him blankly.

“Ms. Woods, please let me apologize for our unfortunate mistake on Friday evening,” the man said, turning his back on the others. “I should have been more careful with the instructions that I gave to the two, um, how do I put this politely? I believed that my instructions were very clear, but the two idiots that I’d hired to set up the event for me managed to get very lost. When I arrived at the site, I should have insisted that they relocate everything to the correct location, of course, but they’d put a lot of time and effort into their preparations and I’m afraid I’m simply too nice sometimes.”

One of the women snorted with laughter. Kirk ignored her.

“Where was the party meant to be being held?” Margaret asked.

Kirk stared at her for a moment. “In a similar field nearby,” he said eventually.

“Where, exactly?” Margaret asked.

Kirk waved a hand. “I’d have to get a map and show you exactly which field they were supposed to be using. To be honest, I wasn’t all that concerned about where they set up because my parents own several acres of land up there. I assumed that if they didn’t manage to find the correct field they’d end up in another of my parents’ fields and that it wouldn’t really matter.”

Margaret looked at Fenella, who shrugged.

“Maybe we should start with introductions,” she said. “You already know who I am. This is my niece, Margaret Woods.”

Margaret nodded. “It’s nice to meet you,” she said.

The man laughed. “Polite, if not entirely truthful. I’m Kirk Edwards, of course. Host of the party that went so spectacularly wrong. Birthday boy who had to arrange for his own birthday party because his friends couldn’t be bothered. Chief suspect in the murder of the woman I loved. Man who is about to sue the *Isle of Man Times*, the stupid idiot who organized that party for me, and anyone else I can find.”

“But none of us,” one of the women behind him said.

Kirk shook his head. “None of you, of course.” He glanced behind him and then looked back at Fenella. “These are, of course, my friends. They were all with me on Friday night, celebrating my birthday, drinking too much, pretending to be zombies.”

“They aren’t zombies,” a voice said. “The characters in Nation Zom are undead, but they aren’t zombies. If you were a real fan, you’d know that.”

Kirk sighed. “I paid for the stupid party, didn’t I? I arranged to fly a Nation Zom expert over to organize the party for us, didn’t I? I even wore the stupid zombie costume – sorry, undead person costume – that he gave me, even though

it didn't fit properly. What else do I have to do to prove I'm a fan?"

"Watch the show?" the woman suggested.

Kirk laughed. "Who has time for that?"

"I'm Judy Long," the woman told Fenella and Margaret. "I'm a huge Nation Zom fan. I was the one who originally suggested a Nation Zom party, months ago now. We were supposed to have one at Christmas and then we talked about a New Year's Eve LARP, but all of our plans just kept falling through."

"We had no idea what we were doing," said the woman who'd spoken when they'd first walked in. "If we'd actually had the party, it would have been us all standing around drinking green drinks and pretending that they were Zom Punch. Ray and Damon were idiots, but they also know how to throw a good Nation Zom party."

"That's Sheila," Kirk said. "She's the one who works here."

Sheila yawned. "This week, anyway. I'm getting tired of working, though. I may quit."

"I never understood why you were working here in the first place," Judy said.

"It's a long and boring story. Basically, my mum got mad because I bought a tank top here that cost thirty-seven thousand pounds. She threatened to cut my clothing budget, so I told her that I'd get a job and earn enough to pay her back for the top."

"And have you managed to do that yet?" Judy asked.

Sheila laughed. "Nowhere near. This job doesn't pay that much, even with our commission. By the time I pay for my petrol to get here and buy myself lunch in the café downstairs, working here ends up costing me money. Mum's tired of me working, though, too. She's agreed to increase my clothing budget when I quit."

“Maybe I should get a job here,” Judy said. “I could do with an increase to my clothing budget.”

“I could do with a clothing budget,” Margaret said softly.

Fenella winked at her.

“Forgive us,” Kirk said to Fenella. “We spend far too much time together and we still find endless topics to babble on and on about. We should be talking about Mattie. That’s why we’re here.”

“I don’t want to talk about Mattie,” Sheila said loudly. “She’s dead. Someone killed her. I can’t believe that we were out in that damned field, drinking and laughing and partying while someone was sneaking around with a knife, waiting to kill Mattie.”

“I thought the island was a much safer place than London,” the third woman said. She looked at Fenella and smiled. “I’m Della Sparks. I’m only visiting your lovely island. I’ve been here for nearly a month and, aside from the murder, I love everything about it.”

“It has that effect on some people,” Fenella said.

Della looked at the handsome man sitting next to her. “It isn’t just the island that has an effect on me,” she said with a throaty chuckle.

The man smiled at her and then looked at Fenella. “I’m Oscar Bradley. Della and I are very good friends.”

“Very good,” Della repeated.

“Yes, yes, whatever,” Kirk snapped. “I’m sorry, but seeing people in love is difficult right now. The woman I loved was murdered and I can’t help but feel responsible.”

“Are you confessing, darling?” Sheila asked. “Because if you are, remember who Fenella is marrying.”

Kirk laughed. “Don’t be stupid, dearest. Of course I’m not confessing to anything at all, except to being foolish enough to plan a party that drew the attention of a madman. I suppose the killer could have been a woman, but I find that harder to believe. I shall, of course, spend the rest of my life regretting

my decision to have that party and regretting everything that happened up there. No punishment is punishment enough, of course. Poor, darling, dearest Mattie lost her life. I shall mourn her passing with every breath I take until I take my last.”

“And Della is the actor,” Sheila said. “You should see if she can get you a part in her next play. That was so dramatic as to be ridiculous.”

Kirk flushed. “I was just telling everyone how I feel.”

“Too bad you didn’t tell Mattie all of that on Friday night,” Sheila said. “But you didn’t really have time, did you? You were too busy trying to get Della into a tent with you.”

Della shook her head. “We were role-playing,” she said. “That’s all it was.”

“It didn’t look like playing to me,” Sheila replied. “And Mattie wasn’t happy about it, either.”

“Mattie understood the game,” Kirk said sharply. “Everyone understood the game, except you, apparently.”

“Oh, I understood the game,” Sheila said. “That doesn’t mean that I agreed with it.”

“But when does Sheila ever agree with anything?” Judy asked with a laugh.

The others all laughed while Sheila frowned.

“I’m afraid you’re getting a terrible impression of all of us,” Kirk said to Fenella. “We’re all angry and upset, and we’ve all been friends forever. We’re snapping at each other and throwing around accusations and saying things we don’t mean. Please just ignore us, really.”

“We should probably go,” Fenella suggested.

“Of course, of course,” Kirk said. “But before you go, please accept my sincere apologies for our mistake on Friday. I will, of course, pay to have the field cleared, and if we caused any sort of damage, I’ll make certain that it’s put right.”

“I’m not worried about the field,” Fenella told him.

“Can I get that in writing?” Kirk asked.

Fenella smiled. "Let's not worry about that for today."

Kirk hesitated and then nodded. "No, of course not. Today we should be mourning for Mattie. She was an amazing woman."

"Tell me about her," Fenella said.

"Ah, where do I even start? She was young and beautiful and smart and funny and we, well, I don't know where we were going. I'd love to say that we were deliriously happy together and that we were headed towards a long and happy life together, but I simply don't know if that's true or not."

"She was smart and funny," Sheila agreed. "And she could do a lot better than Kirk. She knew it, too, but she was having fun with him. After the way he treated her on Friday night, though, I suspect she would have been done with him."

"Thanks, Sheila. That just breaks my heart even more," Kirk said.

"What happened up there? Why was Mattie in a tent by herself?" Margaret asked.

The room went silent. For a moment, no one seemed to move. Eventually, Kirk looked around and then sighed deeply.

"My friends are trying to protect me," he said. "Not that I had anything to do with what happened to Mattie, but I can't stop feeling incredibly guilty regardless. We were playing a game. It was just a game, but some people got upset anyway."

"I don't understand," Margaret said.

"It was a role-play game," Della told her. "We were all given parts to play."

"Parts based on characters from the show," Judy added. "We got given our parts a month or so ago so that we had time to get costumes arranged."

"What sort of costumes?" Fenella asked.

"Have you ever seen Nation Zom?" Judy asked.

Fenella shook her head.

“Most of the characters wear really odd clothes,” Judy told her. “They’ve been brought back from the dead, but the process zaps them with electricity, which destroys a lot of what they were wearing when they were zapped.”

“It destroys the most on the women,” one of the men said. When Fenella looked at him, he shrugged. “I’m sorry, but it’s true. Most of the men end up with a torn T-shirt and ripped jeans. The women end up in not much more than their underwear covered in scorch marks.”

“That’s Luke,” Judy said. “And sadly, he’s right. The only reason I kept watching the show is because after they get zapped and run around in their undies for an episode or two, the characters start scavenging around for clothing. After the first season, they all ended up in incredibly unusual outfits.”

“I saw an episode where one of the men was dressed as a pirate,” Margaret said.

“My favorite was when they came across a history museum that had been struck by a tornado,” Della said. “There were all these old dresses lying in the streets. The women on the show got to wear some amazing things for a few episodes.”

“So what were you all wearing on Friday?” Fenella asked.

“I have pictures,” Judy said. She pulled out her phone and scrolled through it for a moment. “Here, look.”

Fenella took the device and held it so that she and Margaret could look at the screen. The eight people in the photo looked as if they were having a wonderful time. They were all holding drinks and laughing at the camera. The women were wearing evening gowns with sneakers. The men were mostly in T-shirts under suit jackets with matching trousers. They had sneakers on their feet, too. Fenella found herself staring at Mattie, who was near the center of the group and looked incredibly vibrant and alive.

“You all look wonderful,” she said as she handed the phone back to Judy.

“I felt dumb,” one of the men said. “I’m Doug Perkins, by the way. This LARP thing wasn’t my idea, and I felt stupid dressing up and pretending to be someone I’m not.”

“But we looked fabulous,” Della said.

“In one of the last episodes of the current season, a tree falls on the local formal wear shop,” Judy explained. “All the men start wearing tuxedos and the women find cocktail dresses and evening gowns.”

“I’m not sure that’s what I’d want to wear for a party in the middle of a field,” Margaret said.

“But that was the whole point of the party,” Kirk said. “We weren’t going to a party in the middle of a field. We were lost in Nation Zom. We weren’t there because we wanted to be there. We were there because we’d been dragged back to some sort of half-dead life by a madman who wanted to resurrect his own family but wanted to test the science on someone else first. We weren’t ourselves. We were characters in a story and we had to behave appropriately.”

“Which means that Kirk was able to flirt outrageously with all of the women,” Sheila explained.

Kirk shrugged. “My character was supposed to flirt with everyone. I didn’t do it because I wanted to take anyone other than Mattie to bed. I did it because that was what was appropriate for my character.”

“You can try to justify it however you like,” Sheila said. “But the fact is, you made Mattie miserable during the last few hours of her life.”

“I didn’t know she was going to die,” Kirk nearly shouted. “I didn’t know that someone had crashed the party and was just waiting for a chance to kill her. I didn’t know that when we left her behind, we were leaving her to die.”

“You left her behind?” Margaret asked.

Another awkward silence filled the room.

“It was all part of the story,” Judy said eventually. “You really need to watch Nation Zom to understand.”

Kirk nodded. “We were playing Testers. Those are the men and women that The Survivor tested his revival techniques on. There are ten on the show, and we all chose to role-play as one of those characters.”

“The Survivor?” Fenella repeated.

“So the story is that there was some weird electronic pulse from somewhere in space. It hit the planet and stopped everyone’s heart. Apparently, there is some science behind it, but only if you don’t look too closely,” Judy explained. “The Survivor died, just like everyone else, but when he fell to the ground, he landed in a puddle of water while he was holding a live electrical cable. The shock brought him back to life.”

Fenella nodded. “You told me that much,” she said to Margaret.

“So once The Survivor realized what had happened, he started trying to bring back his friends and family. But before he did anything to them, he experimented on a bunch of random strangers. There were more than a dozen when the show started, but some of them only came back for a short time,” Judy explained.

“And a house fell on Harvey,” Della added.

Judy frowned. “I’m never going to get over that. I loved Harvey.”

Della nodded. “Everyone loved Harvey, which is why the actor who played him suddenly became so popular. He’s going to be in three films this year, and I’ve heard rumors that he’s been cast as the lead in a new sitcom.”

“So you all picked characters in the show to role-play,” Fenella said.

Kirk nodded. “Which is why we kept the party so small. I have hundreds of friends, but if I’d invited everyone, we couldn’t have run the story the way we did.”

“It would have been a party where everyone dressed up like characters from the show, rather than a proper LARP,” Judy said.

“And Judy talked me into a proper LARP,” Kirk added.

Judy flushed. “Don’t say that. I’ll start to feel responsible for Mattie’s death.”

“But it’s true,” Kirk replied. “I was just going to have a party, but you suggested Nation Zom and then told me all aboutLARPs and how they work. I was intrigued enough to find out more.”

“And here we are,” Sheila said harshly.

“Yeah, here we are,” Judy replied. “All we wanted to do was have some fun. We couldn’t possibly have known that we were being watched or that someone was going to sneak up on Mattie and kill her after we’d all left.”

“Of course not,” Oscar said. “We never would have left her there alone if we’d had any idea.”

“So how did she come to be left alone?” Margaret asked.

Judy shook her head. “I’m trying to tell you, but it was complicated. We all picked who we wanted to be and then Ray, the guy who organized everything, put together a story for us to follow. Basically, we were supposed to be trying to organize a raid on The Survivor’s compound so that we could get supplies.”

“What sorts of supplies do the undead need?” Fenella asked.

“They still need to eat and drink,” Judy told her. “Not as much as they did when they were alive, but something. Since the building fell on Harvey, they’re all even more afraid to go indoors, though, so they have to try to find supplies in outdoor places or in buildings that have been partially destroyed. They need sunlight or moonlight in order to continue to function, too. It’s complicated.”

It sounds stupid, Fenella thought. “So your story was that you were going to raid The Survivor’s compound?”

“Exactly,” Judy said. “We spent an hour or so drinking and pretending to talk about how we were going to get inside and get what we needed. Then we just kept drinking. We stayed in character, though. They drink a lot on the show, so it worked.”

“And then it was time to raid the compound,” Kirk said. “Ray had things set up for that, too. He had a small shed put together on a field near Douglas. We just had to go and break into it.”

“Who owns that field?” Fenella asked.

Kirk laughed. “That one belongs to my parents. I helped arrange for the delivery of the shed, so I was able to be certain that it was set up in the right place.”

“So after a few hours you all headed into Douglas to break into that shed?” Margaret asked.

“That was the plan, anyway,” Judy told her. “We drank and ate pizza and ran around the field, pretending to be Testers until quite late. I wasn’t paying any attention to the time, really.”

“We’d arranged for our taxi to come back for us at three,” Luke said. “We probably should have said two, though, because I think we were all a bit bored by three.”

“I wasn’t bored,” Judy said.

Luke shrugged. “It was cold and dark and we’d run out of food and drinks. We were all ready to go.”

“Except for Mattie,” Sheila said. “She and Kirk had had a fight, and she was sulking in one of the tents.”

“Except we hadn’t really had a fight,” Kirk said quickly. “Our characters had had a fight. My character spends every episode trying to get all of the female characters into bed. Mattie’s character is secretly in love with my character and she gets upset all the time when my character ignores her.”

“That isn’t exactly how it is on the show,” Judy said. “Greg does try to get all of the women to have sex with him, but Gloria has only just started to realize that she has feelings for him. The real problem was that Kirk played his part with too much enthusiasm and Mattie got upset.”

“She wasn’t really upset with me,” Kirk insisted. “She understood that we were just playing a game.”

“She was upset,” Judy replied. “So much so that she decided to stay behind when we all left to go and break into the compound.”

“And then we left,” Kirk said. “Which was the biggest single mistake I’ve ever made in my life.”

“Where was she when you left?” Margaret asked.

“She’d gone into one of the tents at least an hour before we left,” Judy said. “I think we all took a turn trying to talk to her, but she wouldn’t speak to any of us.”

Fenella and Margaret exchanged glances.

“I tried to talk to her when she first went into the tent,” Kirk said. “It was half-collapsed, but she’d managed to stretch out and make herself comfortable. I tried talking to her as Greg, but when she started to get upset, I broke character and we talked. She said that she was just tired and that she was going to take a nap while we kept playing. I told her that I’d wake her when the taxi arrived, but she said she would rather stay behind and let us break into the compound without her.” He sighed. “Basically, she was tired of the game and she just wanted to get some sleep. I said I’d get her a taxi whenever she wanted one, and she told me that she was perfectly capable of getting her own taxi.”

Judy nodded. “She said something similar to me when I tried to talk to her. She refused to stay in character and said

that she was bored with the game and didn't really like Nation Zom anyway. Then she said that she'd get herself a taxi home because she didn't want to interfere with our fun."

"Did anyone else speak to her after that?" Margaret asked.

"I shouted at her through the tent when the taxi arrived, but she didn't reply," Oscar said.

"I did the same," Sheila said. "When the taxi arrived, I decided that I was going to go home. I was tired of the game, and I was freezing. I'd driven my own car to the party, so I decided to take myself home. I shouted through the tent and offered Mattie a ride home, but she didn't reply."

"I think we all shouted through the tent at her," Luke said. "None of us wanted to leave her there, but we all just assumed that she'd fallen asleep and that she'd ring for a taxi when she woke up."

"And instead, someone watched us leave and then sneaked into her tent and killed her," Judy said.

I can't believe they can't see the more obvious solution, Fenella thought.

"Maybe she did ring for a taxi," Kirk said. "Maybe the taxi driver killed her."

"That's one possibility," Fenella said.

"You said it was dark in the field," Margaret said. "Were there any lights?"

Kirk shook his head. "Ray wanted to make it as realistic as possible. The surge that killed everyone also destroyed the electrical power grid. There isn't any electricity in Nation Zom, aside from what The Survivor manages to generate in different ways."

"I assume you all had flashlights," Fenella said.

Judy grinned at her. "Some of us had torches. Why do Americans call them flashlights when they don't flash?"

Fenella shrugged. "I've no idea."

“I didn’t have a torch,” Sheila said. “No one told me that I was going to need one. I wasn’t warned about the lack of loos, either.”

Kirk laughed. “Don’t start on that again. You were told it was a Nation Zom LARP. You should have realized that you weren’t going to be able to go indoors anywhere.”

“I would have brought a torch if I’d known that we were going to be in a field in the middle of nowhere,” Sheila replied. “As it was, I had to follow the people with torches around so that I wouldn’t trip over anything.”

“Did Mattie have a torch?” Margaret asked.

“No, but she had her phone,” Judy told her. “We weren’t supposed to bring our phones and if we did, we weren’t supposed to use them.”

“They don’t work any longer in Nation Zom,” Oscar explained. “And even if you could use one for something, you couldn’t charge it when the battery died.”

“So none of you had phones?” Fenella asked.

“Oh, we all had them,” Kirk laughed. “We just left them in our pockets and pretended not to have them. Oscar had his out a half dozen times, checking on the taxi, and Sheila kept getting hers out and using it like a torch to help her get around.”

“I didn’t want to fall over anything,” Sheila said.

“We all kept falling over all kinds of things,” Oscar said. “I think I tripped over the same tent pole at least a dozen times. I was doing my best to stay in character and not use a torch or my phone, though, aside from when I was texting the taxi company.”

Margaret looked at Fenella before she spoke again. “How dark was it?” she asked. “What I’m wondering is whether someone could have sneaked into the field while you were all still there.”

There was a short silence before anyone spoke.

“Yes,” Kirk said flatly. “It’s entirely possible that the killer was already there before we left.”

After another pause, Sheila spoke.

“What if he or she actually killed Mattie before we left?” she asked. “I mean, that could have happened, couldn’t it?”

“We all assumed that she’d fallen asleep when she didn’t answer us,” Luke said. “Could she actually have already been dead?”

Kirk shook his head. “I can’t – no, that’s not possible. It’s not possible that someone killed her while we were all there, laughing and drinking and having fun. I won’t believe it.”

“But that has to be why the police insisted on talking to all of us,” Sheila said. “They wanted to know if any of us saw anything unusual.”

“Like someone sneaking into the party and hiding in the tent with Mattie?” Kirk asked. “My dear, that’s ridiculous. If any of us had seen that happen, we would have said something at the time.”

“But it could have happened,” Doug said. “We all stayed pretty far away from the tent that Mattie was using once she’d stormed off.”

“She didn’t storm off,” Kirk snapped.

Doug shrugged. “Whatever. We all stayed away from her tent.”

“There were things we needed to do at the other end of the field,” Judy said.

“And it was incredibly dark,” Sheila added. “Even if I’d wanted to keep an eye on Mattie, I couldn’t have managed it. An entire army could have marched onto the field, and if they were quiet, I never would have noticed.”

“She’s exaggerating slightly,” Judy said. “But not much. Kirk had a torch and so did Doug. They tended to stay near the bar, so the rest of us spent most of the party there, too.”

“The bar?” Fenella repeated questioningly.

“It was just a stack of hay bales, but all of the drinks were set up on top of them,” Judy explained. “That was where we worked out the plan to break into the compound, too. Kirk had some drawings of the building and the area for us to study.”

“We were trying to be as accurate to the show as we could,” Kirk added. “On the show, there’s security around The Survivor’s compound. He has things like trip wires and traps. Obviously, we didn’t bother to put those sorts of things in the field around the shed, but we pretended that they were going to be there.”

“And you were all standing around the bar for at least an hour after Mattie went into the tent and before you left?” Margaret asked.

“It might have been closer to two hours,” Judy said after a moment. “Mattie headed into the tent not long after Ray and Damon left. Kirk went in and spoke to her and then I had a go, but she was adamant that she wanted to be left alone and left there. When I left the tent, the others were at the bar, talking about the plan.”

“And none of you spoke to Mattie again?” Margaret asked.

“I feel so guilty,” Kirk said. “We should have checked on her every half hour or so. She’d been drinking. She could have passed out and died. Actually, maybe that’s what happened. Maybe she simply passed out and then died from alcohol poisoning or hypothermia or something. Maybe she wasn’t murdered at all.”

“The police are pretty sure it was murder,” Margaret said.

Kirk frowned. “So we should have checked on her. Someone should have stayed with her, really. We never suspected that by leaving her alone, we were making her the target of a killer, though.”

“You know the police suspect all of us,” Luke said.

There was a moment of silence.

“Don’t be silly,” Kirk said eventually. “We all loved Mattie.”

“Of course we did,” Luke agreed. “But the police don’t know that. And you have to admit that it’s possible that one of us killed her.”

“We were busy,” Judy said. “We were planning our raid on the compound.”

Luke laughed. “We were standing around a bunch of hay bales, drinking too much and pretending to be undead. We all had plenty of opportunity to kill Mattie, though.”

“No, we didn’t. We were all together and Mattie was far away in the dark,” Judy said. “If she was killed while we were still there, someone else had to have slipped into the tent without us noticing.”

“You disappeared for ages not long before the taxi was due,” Luke said. “Where were you?”

Judy flushed. “Are you actually accusing me of killing Mattie?”

“I’m just curious where you were. We were all talking about it at the time, but now everyone wants to pretend it didn’t happen,” Luke replied.

“I told you at the time that I needed the loo,” Judy said tightly.

“And it took you half an hour to wee?” Luke asked.

Judy sighed. “It took me several minutes to find a place where I felt safe trying to wee,” she said. “And then I had to hike up my gown and fight with my tights and balance on uneven ground. You can’t possibly understand.”

Luke laughed. “I’ve never been so grateful to be a man.”

“Let’s not start making unnecessary accusations,” Della said. “We all loved Mattie and we’re all devastated by her death. We just have to hope that the police find the killer quickly. I know I’ll sleep much better once I know he or she is behind bars.”

“Unless Oscar killed her,” Sheila said.

Della sighed. “That was unnecessary.”

“But someone killed her,” Sheila argued. “And the police are seriously looking at all of us as suspects. I hadn’t really thought about it, but Luke’s right. They think one of us killed her.”

“They wanted me to give them an approximate timeline for the evening,” Doug said. “And they wanted to know exactly where everyone was when Mattie went into the tent.”

“They kept asking me that, too,” Sheila said. “I should have realized what they were suggesting.”

“I just told them that we are all moving around,” Kirk said with a wave of his hand. “And you all should tell them the same thing. It was a party. It was dark. We were all drinking and having fun. No one was keeping track of where anyone else was at any time, before or after Mattie went into the tent.”

“Except we all noticed when Judy was gone for ages,” Luke laughed.

“You were gone for a while, too,” Della said.

Luke shrugged. “I needed a loo, too, and I was bored, so I went for a walk. There was just enough moonlight to help me find my way around the cottage. I walked around it twice before I made my way back to the party.”

“I don’t suppose you want to tell the police that while you were walking you saw a man hiding in the shadows,” Sheila said.

“Well done,” Kirk said with a laugh. “Now if any of us remember seeing anyone, the police will never believe us because you said that in front of Fenella and Margaret.”

“I was kidding,” Sheila said flatly.

“But I may have seen something,” Luke said. “I mean, I did see something, a shadow and a flash of light near Mattie’s tent. It was when I was on my second lap around the cottage. I stopped to try to get a better look, but the more I stared, the less I could see, if that makes sense.”

“So maybe you saw the killer climbing into the tent,” Sheila suggested.

“Maybe, or maybe Mattie was using her phone. Or maybe someone else was using their phone and just happened to walk past Mattie’s tent at the same time. There are a million possibilities,” Luke said.

Kirk opened his mouth and then shut it again. After a moment, he sighed. “I think we’ve talked about Mattie as much as I can stand for today,” he said. “I need to go home and drink myself into oblivion.”

“I wouldn’t, if I were you,” Luke said. “The police will probably have more questions for you, and you need to be sober when you talk to them.”

“Why?” Kirk challenged. “I haven’t done anything wrong. I have nothing to hide from them. I’m the one who has lost the woman he loved. The police don’t frighten me.”

“Then stay sober in case the killer comes for you next,” Judy suggested.

Kirk frowned. “Why would the killer want to kill me?”

“Why did he or she want to kill Mattie?” Judy countered.

“That’s a question that might never be answered. She had to have been killed by a random stranger – a stranger who killed without logic or reason,” Kirk said.

“No one had any reason to kill Mattie,” Della said. “She was a good person.”

Sheila laughed. “She still had you fooled, then,” she said.

“What does that mean?” Kirk asked.

Sheila looked over at Fenella and Margaret and then shrugged. “Mattie could be a very nice person, but she could also be rather horrible when it suited her. And I know you aren’t meant to say bad things about dead people, but I’m just being honest here. You can all disagree, but you all know I’m telling the truth.”

“She was just a bit spoiled,” Judy said. “But aren’t we all?”

A few people nodded.

“She was used to getting her way, and she could get very angry when she didn’t,” Kirk said. “She took herself off to the tent to get away from me because she wasn’t enjoying the party. I’m fairly certain that she thought that I’d cancel the rest of the evening once I saw how upset she was.”

“That sounds like Mattie,” Judy agreed. “She’d grown bored with the LARP and wanted to go into Douglas to one of the clubs. She told me that much when I went to talk to her. When I told her that the rest of us were still having fun, she said a few unflattering things about us.”

“What did she say?” Della asked.

Judy shrugged. “Something along the lines of us being immature and foolish. She was angry with Kirk and tired of standing around in a freezing cold field. I suggested that she could ring for a taxi straight away, but she was determined to stay until the end of the evening. I’m fairly certain that she wanted to make Kirk feel increasingly terrible as the hours ticked past.”

“And I did,” Kirk said with a sigh. “I felt guilty that she was there but not having fun. I was frustrated that she didn’t want to ride with us into Douglas. I was annoyed that she was so angry that I’d been flirting with other women. By the time we left, I assumed that I was going to have to buy her something very expensive to apologize to her.”

“It would have cost you a lot,” Doug said. “We went out only a few times, and the one time I was five minutes late to collect her she made me buy her diamond and ruby earrings.”

Kirk shrugged. “I’d have bought her just about anything to get her forgiveness.”

“She probably wanted the original necklace,” Judy said.

Again, the entire room went silent.

“I was just kidding,” Judy said awkwardly. “It was a joke.” She looked at Fenella. “It was a joke,” she said again.

“What original necklace?” Fenella asked.

Kirk sighed. “Mattie wore a very particular necklace to the party. The center stone is a huge ruby, and the ruby is surrounded by sapphires. The stones aren’t real, but the necklace is a very good copy of one that my mother used to own.”

“The original was stolen decades ago,” Judy added. “My mother has a copy, too, but she won’t let me wear it.”

“The copies don’t contain real stones, but they do have some value,” Kirk said. “My mother keeps hers in her safe.”

“And where does she keep the original?” Doug asked.

Kirk glared at him. “It was stolen,” he said tightly. “And I’m really tired of all of you suggesting otherwise.”

“Mattie was the one who wore the necklace to the party,” Sheila said. “And she was the one who kept teasing us and telling us that it was possibly the original necklace.”

“She was teasing,” Kirk said. “There’s no way she could have been wearing the original necklace. That disappeared before she was even born.”

“Maybe whoever killed her stole the necklace. Maybe that was the reason why she was killed,” Judy said. “I told the police about it, but they didn’t seem very interested. If she wasn’t wearing it when she was found, though, it could matter.”

“Who could have known she was wearing it, though?” Doug asked. “We collected her at her flat and went straight from there to the party.”

“What about the man driving the taxi?” Kirk asked.

“Let’s not start pointing fingers,” Della said. “I’m certain the police are investigating every possibility.”

“Including the possibility that one of us killed her,” Sheila said glumly.

“I saw the necklace,” Luke said. “But I didn’t realize it was a copy of one that had been stolen. Why did Mattie have a copy of something that was stolen from your mum?” he asked Kirk.

“After the theft, Mum had three copies made,” Kirk explained. “She kept one for herself and gave the other two to her two most trusted friends. Everyone on the island was talking about the theft. She wanted to make a very public statement of trust in those friends.”

“The friends were Mattie’s mother and my mother,” Judy added. “As I said, my mother has a copy, but she won’t let me wear it.”

“Does she ever wear it?” Luke asked.

Judy shrugged. “Once in a while, when it goes with what she’s wearing. She told me once that she doesn’t wear it very often because people always comment on it or just stare at it. She said she always feels as if they think that she stole the original and is wearing that and simply pretending that it’s a copy.”

“That would make sense if there was only a single copy,” Doug said. “Maybe that’s why Kirk’s mum got so many made. If there was only one, people would think that it was the original and that it had never actually been stolen.”

Kirk sighed. “My mother got accused of stealing her own necklace every time she wore the copy,” he said. “She loved that necklace and used to wear it all the time, but now she feels as if she can’t wear it at all. I don’t think she’s had it out of the safe in years.”

“What a shame,” Della said. “The original must have been amazing. Mattie’s copy was stunning and the stones looked real.”

“They’re very good copies,” Kirk said.

“Wouldn’t it be interesting if the police discovered that Mattie was wearing the original necklace?” Judy asked. “That would put the murder in another light.”

“If she was wearing the original, then her parents would have been behind the theft,” Kirk pointed out. “Are you suggesting that Mattie’s mother and father stole my mother’s necklace?”

Judy shrugged. “Maybe Mattie found it somewhere. Maybe it was never actually stolen. Maybe it just got lost or misplaced and Mattie found it. She was spending a lot of time at your house in the last few weeks.”

“We were spending a lot of time together,” Kirk said. “We were falling in love.” He looked around the room and then sighed and got to his feet. “I can’t do this anymore. I need to be alone right now.”

No one spoke as he walked to the door. He paused as he pulled it open. “I’ll ring someone later,” he said before he walked out.

As the door slowly shut behind him, Sheila looked at Fenella. “We’re closed,” she said flatly.

Fenella frowned. “I need a dress for my wedding.”

“Come back tomorrow,” Sheila told her. “I don’t work tomorrow.”

“It doesn’t seem as if you’re working today,” Margaret said.

Sheila shrugged. “I’m in mourning.”

A few people chuckled.

“Don’t mind her,” Judy said. “She’ll use any excuse to not work.”

“Maybe you should shut the shop if you aren’t open,” Fenella suggested.

“Yeah, good point,” Sheila said. She got up and walked to the door and then stood and stared at Fenella.

“Are you going to tell your fiancé everything we said?” Judy asked.

Fenella hesitated and then nodded. “He’s not the person in charge of the investigation, though.”

“But he’ll tell that person, and they’ll all laugh when they hear that we only just realized that we’re suspects,” Doug said.

“I just hope they find the killer soon,” Della said. “We all know that none of us killed her. It’s very scary to think that someone was watching us while we were enjoying ourselves.”

“I thought that was why we had the party in the middle of nowhere,” Doug said. “I thought Kirk didn’t want anyone to see us all running around pretending to be zombies.”

“We weren’t zombies,” Judy said. “We were undead. There is a difference.”

“Is there, though?” Doug asked. “I mean, it’s all made-up crap for television, so it doesn’t truly matter, but maybe you can explain the difference to me over dinner tonight.”

Sheila laughed. “And now we can all enjoy watching Judy try to get out of having dinner with Doug without upsetting him.” She looked at Fenella. “Doug has been trying to get Judy into bed for months, but she always keeps him at arm’s length. I think she’s after Kirk, but she’ll deny that as soon as I stop talking.”

“Of course I will, because it isn’t true,” Judy said. “And now I think I’m going to go home and go to bed. All of this stress has given me a migraine.”

As Judy walked out of the shop, Sheila laughed. “And thus she gets out of actually turning down Doug’s invitation,” she said before she glared at Fenella and Margaret. “Does everyone have to leave in order to get you out?”

“Not at all,” Fenella said quickly as she headed for the door.

“It was nice meeting all of you,” Margaret said as she followed.

“We can’t say the same, though, can we?” Sheila asked. “You came in and asked a bunch of nosy questions, chased poor Kirk away, and gave Judy a migraine. We’d have been much better off if you’d stayed away from us today.”

“And I’d have been much better off if Kirk had thrown his party on his own property instead of mine,” Fenella replied before she walked through the door and rushed down the corridor.

Margaret caught up to Fenella as she walked down the stairs.

“That was interesting,” she said.

Fenella shrugged. “I can’t believe they didn’t all realize that they were suspects.”

“I got the feeling that they hadn’t really talked about the murder until we got there. And I got the feeling that none of them had given it any thought until we started discussing it.”

“I agree. They all seemed incredibly self-absorbed, and none of them truly seem to care that someone is dead. Kirk talked a lot about how sad he was, but he didn’t actually appear to care in the slightest.”

Margaret sighed. “I feel quite sorry for Mattie, really. They are supposed to have been her dearest friends.”

“I still don’t understand why she was sulking in a tent during a party.”

“Kirk said she was bored and wanted him to quit play-acting.”

“I can understand that, but in her place, I think I would have just called myself a taxi and gone home.”

“Me too. It was cold and dark at the party. What would make you want to stay there rather than go home?”

“An unhappy home life?” Fenella asked. “Maybe she was happier being miserable with her friends than she would have been at home with her family.”

“Didn’t someone say something about picking her up at her flat, though? It didn’t sound as if she still lived with her parents.”

“Then maybe she hated being alone,” Fenella suggested. “We don’t really know anything about her.”

“I don’t know how we’d go about finding out anything more.”

“We don’t need to find out anything more. Let’s leave the investigating to the police. Why don’t we get some lunch?”

Margaret nodded. “I’m actually starving. Do you think we need to call Daniel and Ted before we eat?”

Fenella sighed. “Yes, but I’d rather eat first. What if we order food and then call them? The café here is supposed to be very good.”

The café was in the center of the building. The women ordered what they wanted from the counter and then found a small table in a quiet corner. While they waited for their lunches to be delivered, Fenella called Daniel while Margaret texted Ted. While Margaret typed what looked like a short novel, Fenella gave Daniel a brief summary of their conversation with the men and women from the party.

“I’m going to have to come and get a proper statement from you,” he said when she was done. “I’m also going to have to tell Arthur what happened. It’s entirely possible that he’s going to want to come with me. He may want to speak to you by himself, actually, so be ready for that eventuality, too.”

Fenella sighed. “We’re just about to get lunch. I hope it can wait until after we’ve eaten.”

“What time do you think you’ll be home?”

“Two,” Fenella said after a look at her watch. “In other news, I have flowers for our wedding.”

“I’m glad to hear that. Is there anything else I should be doing?”

“I don’t think so. Not right now. We do need to go ring shopping at some point, though.”

“I suppose that’s something we need to do together.”

“It is, yes.”

Daniel chuckled. “Where do you want to shop? Are there any jewelry shops in Ramsey? We’re going to be there tomorrow, and I’ve already arranged to have the afternoon off.”

“There are jewelry stores in Ramsey. We can start there, anyway.”

“I just want a simple gold band.”

“I’ll have the same, so they match. That should make things easy tomorrow.”

A waitress stopped at their table and put plates of food in front of Fenella and Margaret. “Is there anything else right now?” she asked.

“Is that your food?” Daniel asked as Fenella shook her head at the waitress.

“It is, yes,” Fenella replied before shoving a French fry into her mouth.

“I’ll let you go, then. Hopefully, I’ll see you at your flat around two.”

“Perfect,” Fenella replied. She put the phone down and turned her attention to her sandwich.

“That was good,” Margaret said some time later as the pair rushed back toward their apartment.

“It was good, but it shouldn’t have taken twenty minutes to get dessert. I hope we get home before Arthur arrives to question us.”

“Maybe it won’t be Arthur. Maybe it will be Daniel. I know it won’t be Ted, because he’s out at the Point of Ayre,

coordinating things there.”

“It’s not Daniel,” Fenella said in a low voice as they emerged from the elevator.

Arthur was standing in front of Fenella’s door, a scowl on his face.

“We are so sorry,” Fenella said as they approached the man. “The café was unbelievably slow with dessert and then they took ages to bring out the bill. I was about to just throw some money on the table and go, but I hated to do that because I wasn’t sure how much they wanted for the cake slices. They had a dessert trolley, you see, rather than a menu, so I never had a chance to check the price of anything. It wasn’t as if the place was busy. There were only two other customers in the entire café. They were just terribly inefficient.”

While she’d been talking, Fenella had opened her door and escorted the police inspector into the apartment. As she waved him toward the couch, Mona appeared next to her.

“Stop talking,” Mona said flatly. “You’re nervous and you’re babbling. The man is going to think that you have something to hide if you keep talking.”

Fenella inhaled very slowly and then swallowed hard. “Would you like a cup of tea or coffee or anything?” she asked the inspector.

“This isn’t a social visit,” he replied. “I want you to tell me exactly how you managed to spend an hour chatting with all seven of the witnesses in my investigation and then repeat absolutely everything that was said.”

“I’m going to need water, at least,” Fenella replied.

“Get what you need. We can talk here. I’d like to speak to you first and then, after we’re finished, I’ll speak to Margaret,” Arthur said.

Margaret nodded. She’d walked only a few paces past the door. “I can wait in my room,” she said.

“Put the television on,” Arthur said. “And turn it up loud.”

Margaret looked surprised, but she didn't argue. Fenella ran into the kitchen and grabbed herself a bottle of water. When she got back to the living room, she could hear the background murmur from the television in Margaret's room.

"Start at the beginning. Where were you and why were my witnesses all there?" Arthur asked.

"I was dress shopping for my wedding," Fenella began. "Someone had recommended Fiona's to me. I didn't realize that Sheila Christian worked there."

Arthur made a note. "Did you find a dress?"

"Um, no," Fenella replied, wondering at the unexpected question. "The shop wasn't actually open, or rather, it was open, but Sheila didn't seem to want to do any work."

"You'd better start at the beginning," Arthur said.

Fenella finished the water before she'd finished telling Arthur the story. He interrupted almost constantly, seeking clarification and demanding that she repeat herself over and over again. When she was finally done, she sat back and shut her eyes for a moment.

"Thank you. I'll speak to Margaret now," Arthur said.

Fenella got up and walked across the room. She knocked on Margaret's door. "Your turn," she said when Margaret opened it.

"I was starting to get worried," Margaret whispered. "That took ages."

"Good luck," Fenella replied in a low voice. "I'll wait in my room, then," she said more loudly.

She'd only gone a few steps when someone knocked on the door. Hoping for Daniel, Fenella pulled it open.

"Okay, I'm ready to go to Castletown and try to hunt down Kirk Edwards and his friends," Elaine announced as she walked into the room.

Fenella blushed bright red. Margaret gasped. Arthur slowly got to his feet.

“Was that the plan?” he asked Elaine.

Elaine looked at him for a moment and then shrugged. “It was my plan,” she said. “I want to talk to him and to anyone else who can explain what they were doing on Friday night. Mostly, I want them to explain why they left such a huge mess.”

Arthur nodded. “You need to talk to your co-conspirators. While you were busy this afternoon, they found a way to talk to everyone involved in the case.”

Elaine smiled brightly. “That’s great news. Tell me everything,” she said to Fenella.

“We can talk in my bedroom,” Fenella said. “Margaret needs to talk to the inspector.”

“Let’s go next door,” Elaine suggested. “We can have a cup of tea and some biscuits while we talk there.”

Fenella didn’t argue. She grabbed her handbag and rushed out the door, worried that Arthur might object. It wasn’t until she was sitting in Shelly’s cozy apartment with a cup of tea in her hand that she felt herself relax.

“Where did you go and who did you see?” Elaine demanded.

Fenella picked up a custard cream and ate it slowly. After a sip of tea, she told Elaine everything that the older woman had missed.

“How was your lunch date?” she asked after she was done.

“It was nice enough, but I’d have rather been with you. I was really hoping I’d get to meet them all for myself. They all sounded rather dreadful, though, so maybe it’s best that I didn’t get to meet them.”

Fenella thought for a moment. “They weren’t dreadful exactly. They all just seemed spoiled and a bit self-absorbed. None of them seemed all that sad about Mattie’s death. They got more emotional when it was suggested that they were suspects in the investigation.”

The pair chatted about the seven men and women while Fenella nibbled on several more custard creams. Elaine was on her third chocolate digestive when someone knocked on the door.

“Margaret,” Elaine said. “Does that mean that you’re finished with the police?”

“I’m not,” Margaret replied. “But Arthur wants Fenella to come back for a minute. She’s had a phone call, and he wants her to call the person back.”

“Who called?” Fenella asked. “And why is that any of Arthur’s business?”

“Karl Edwards called,” Margaret said. “And he wants to meet with you to discuss his son’s use of your field.”

Fenella frowned. “I don’t suppose I can refuse to meet with him. Arthur isn’t thinking of coming along, is he?”

“I don’t know. He just asked me to come and get you.”

Fenella followed Margaret back to her apartment. Arthur was on his mobile when they walked inside.

“I’ll ring you back,” he said as soon as they shut the door.

“He left a message,” Margaret said.

Fenella pressed play and then sat down next to the telephone.

“Ah, yes, Ms. Woods, this is Karl Edwards. My wife and I want to speak with you about the unfortunate incident on Friday evening. We’d like to invite you and a guest to our home tomorrow afternoon at four o’clock. We can have tea. I would be grateful if you could ring me back to confirm.”

Fenella frowned at the answering machine. “What if I don’t want to have tea at your house?” she asked.

“At least they said you can bring a guest,” Arthur said with a small chuckle.

“There is that. Are you suggesting that I should go?” she asked him.

He shrugged. "If I were you, I think I'd be quite curious as to why they want to speak to you."

"Surely they're worried that Aunt Fenella is going to sue them for trespassing on her property," Margaret said. "Kirk admitted that he knew they were in the wrong place, but they still had the party there. They left behind a horrible mess, including biohazards. They should be offering to pay to have the site properly cleaned, if nothing else."

Arthur nodded. "If you do meet with them, I suggest you take a guest."

Fenella frowned. "Are you inviting yourself along?"

"I was thinking of Daniel, but I can try to make myself available if you'd rather take me."

Fenella felt herself blushing. "Thank you, but I can take Daniel. He's meant to have the afternoon off tomorrow. We have a tasting at noon at the Seaview for the food for the wedding."

"Then tea at four in Castletown should fit right in," Arthur replied.

Fenella nodded and then picked up the phone. She dialed the number that Karl Edwards had given and then listened to the phone ring several times.

"The Edwards' Residence," a voice said eventually.

"Ah, yes, this is Fenella Woods. Mr. Edwards kindly invited me to tea tomorrow. I am just calling to let him know that I'll be there. I'll be bringing my fiancé with me."

"Very good. I will inform Mr. Edwards to expect you at four."

Fenella frowned as she heard a loud click. "And that's the end of that conversation," she muttered as she put the phone down.

"Thank you for coming back over and taking care of that," Arthur said. "I need only a few more minutes with Margaret, and then I'll get out of your way."

Fenella nodded. "I'll just go and wait in Shelly's apartment until you're finished."

She let herself out. Elaine quickly answered when she knocked on Shelly's door.

"What happened?" Elaine demanded as Fenella walked into the apartment.

"Karl Edwards called and invited me to tea tomorrow," she replied.

"Tea? Where?"

"At their home in Castletown. He gave the address. I'm going to have to look for it on a map, actually, as I can't remember where it is."

"They have proper tea at home? How very fancy."

"Maybe they're just going to give me a cuppa and a biscuit."

Elaine shook her head. "They'll have a tea trolley and everything. Just wait. It will all be incredibly posh."

"I suppose I should let Daniel know that he has plans." Fenella pulled out her phone and sent Daniel a text. He replied a moment later.

"Apparently, Arthur already let him know," Fenella told Elaine after she'd read the reply.

Her phone buzzed again before she could put it back in her pocket.

"And now Margaret is done and Arthur has gone," she added.

"Excellent," Elaine said, getting to her feet. "We can plan the rest of our day. I suggest we have dinner at the café in that shopping center you were at earlier today."

Fenella shook her head. "I really don't want to have to call Arthur and tell him that we saw his witnesses again. I'm happy to get dinner somewhere, but I'm not going back to that shopping center, not tonight."

“We could go to Castletown,” Elaine suggested.

“Or we could go to Laxey,” Fenella said as she headed for the door. “I’m craving Italian food, and they have a wonderful Italian restaurant.”

Elaine sighed. “I do love Italian food, but we aren’t likely to see any of the suspects in Laxey.”

“Which makes it perfect,” Fenella replied as she opened the door. “We’ll leave in twenty minutes, okay?”

“That’s fine. I’ll meet you in the corridor.”

Fenella let herself back into her apartment. Margaret was sitting on the couch, petting Katie, who was curled up in her lap. Mona was next to her. They were both staring out at the sea.

“Is everything okay?” Fenella asked as she shut the door behind herself.

“Everything is fine,” Margaret replied. “I’m just tired. Talking to Arthur felt like hard work.”

“He kept going back over the same things, time and again,” Mona complained. “He did the same with Fenella. I think he was quite frustrated because you both told him the exact same things.”

“He should have been happy about that,” Margaret said.

“He should, but I don’t think he was,” Mona replied. “It doesn’t really matter. Halfway through his conversation with Margaret, he got a text that seemed to cheer him up considerably.”

Margaret nodded. “I thought the same thing. Whatever it said, he suddenly stopped making me repeat myself several times over and he was quite nice when Aunt Fenella got that phone call, too. After that was taken care of, he finished with me very quickly.”

“Too bad we don’t know what the text said,” Fenella said.

Mona smiled. “Some of us might know.”

“Some of us?” Fenella repeated.

Mona laughed. "One of us, then. I know what it said."

"And you're going to share that information with us because you love us," Margaret said.

Mona shrugged. "Maybe. I need to think about the implications of you knowing about what was in the message."

"You think. We're going to get dinner," Fenella said. "We're supposed to meet Elaine in the corridor in a few minutes. I thought we could go to Laxey for dinner," she told Margaret.

"That's a great idea," Margaret replied. "I really don't want to bump into anyone else involved in the case tonight. Arthur would never believe us if we told him we just happened across another of his witnesses."

Fenella nodded. "I thought the same thing."

She went into her bedroom and ran a brush through her hair. Then she touched up her makeup and changed her shirt. "That will do," she muttered at her reflection before she returned to the living room.

Katie was now on Mona's lap. Fenella put Katie's dinner into her bowl and refilled her water. When she went back into the living room, Margaret was just emerging from her bedroom.

"Ready?" Fenella asked.

"And starving," Margaret told her.

They took Fenella's sensible car. The restaurant was busy, but they only had to wait about ten minutes for a table.

"Everything was delicious," Fenella told their waiter as he cleared the table.

"That's good to hear," he said.

"And we didn't see anyone associated with the case in any way," Margaret said happily as Fenella began the drive back to Douglas.

"You may be happy about that, but I'm disappointed," Elaine said.

“Imagine how much fun it would be telling Arthur all about your day,” Margaret said.

“I don’t think I’d mind. I don’t have anything else to do this evening,” Elaine replied.

“Come back to our place and watch old movies with us,” Margaret suggested.

“You two can watch old movies. I have a wedding to plan,” Fenella said. “I sent a bunch of emails to people, inviting them to the wedding. Now I have to see if anyone has replied.”

“Mom and Dad are coming,” Margaret told her. “I don’t know if Dad actually emailed you back or not, though. He texted me and told me that they’ll be here.”

“That’s wonderful,” Fenella said. “I wish we could have given everyone more notice. I know it’s a huge inconvenience for people, having to drop everything and come to the island, but Daniel and I really don’t want to wait.”

“Mom and Dad don’t mind,” Margaret assured her. “Actually, I think Dad was happy to have an excuse to get away for a few days. Mom said he’s trying to convince her to spend a week in London after the wedding. I got the feeling she’s going to agree.”

“How nice for them,” Fenella said. “One down, three to go.”

Margaret laughed. “Uncle James is definitely coming,” she said. “Apparently, he called all of his brothers and offered to help out if they didn’t have the money for last-minute flights. He told my father that they all needed to be here, no matter what.”

Fenella laughed. “James has changed a lot in the past year or so.”

“He’s written three books in the last three months,” Margaret told her. “Apparently, story ideas keep waking him up at night and he can’t help but want to sit and write them all. His agent is thrilled because publishers seem to want everything that Uncle James writes. The last time I talked to

him, Uncle James offered to buy me a car for my next birthday. Two years ago, he sent me a card with a five-dollar bill in it.”

“I’m so happy he’s doing so well. I’m really looking forward to seeing him again.”

“You and Daniel can go and visit him during your travels,” Margaret suggested.

“We might. We’ve been talking about visiting all fifty states, or maybe just driving across the country. We’ve been talking about a lot of things, actually, but we haven’t made any proper plans.”

She pulled the car into the garage under their building and parked next to Mona’s little red sports car.

“You’re going to have to drive them both while I’m away,” she reminded Margaret as the three women walked toward the elevators.

“Mel said that I’m almost ready to take my test,” Margaret told her. “He told me to expect to fail the first time, but that the practice will be good for me.”

“He’s right. Very few people pass on their first attempt,” Fenella replied. “Besides, no matter how many times Mel tells you about the test, you won’t actually know what to expect until you’ve done it once.”

“I’m going to try to schedule it for before the wedding. I’d like to be able to drive myself around once you and Daniel have gone.”

“You know you can legally drive on your US license for a while,” Fenella said.

“But I need to get my Manx one eventually. I may as well get it sooner than later.”

Fenella nodded as they got off the elevator on their floor. “Are you coming in to watch movies with Margaret?” she asked Elaine.

“For a little while,” Elaine replied.

While the two women searched until they found an old romantic comedy to enjoy together, Fenella fired up her computer and started reading through her emails. She sent long replies to everyone and then started looking at places to go and things to see on her extended honeymoon.

“I need sleep,” Elaine said a few hours later. She stood up and then yawned. “Who am I kidding? I slept through most of that last movie. It’s a good thing I’ve seen it a hundred times before.”

Fenella shut her laptop and pushed it away. “I need sleep, too,” she said. “My head is all jumbled up with cities and museums and theme parks and spa retreats. I should be thinking about flowers and cakes instead.”

“The flowers are sorted,” Margaret reminded her. “Can the Seaview do the cake?”

“I don’t think they do wedding cakes, but I’ll ask,” Fenella replied. She walked Elaine to the door.

“What are you doing about the investigation tomorrow?” Elaine asked.

“Nothing,” Fenella said firmly. “I’m having a lazy morning, and then Daniel and I are going to a tasting at the Seaview. After that, we’re having tea with Karl and Suzanne Edwards, but I doubt they’re going to want to talk about Mattie’s death.”

“No, they probably just want to protect their son,” Elaine agreed. “You can tell me everything they say over dinner tomorrow night, then. I’ll even cook something. That will be a nice change for everyone. I think I’ll make a shepherd’s pie. It’s been ages since I had a good shepherd’s pie.”

“That’s very kind of you,” Fenella said.

Elaine laughed. “It isn’t kind at all. I’m offering to cook to bribe you into having dinner with me so I can hear what Karl and Suzanne had to say. But please continue to think that I’m being kind.”

Fenella was still laughing as she shut the door behind Elaine.

“Are you coming to the tasting?” she asked Margaret after she’d locked the door.

“I was going to, but then what would I do while you’re having tea with Karl and Suzanne Edwards?”

“I can drop you off here on my way to Castletown. It isn’t much out of the way. You don’t want to miss the tasting.”

“I really don’t, but I also don’t want to make extra work for you.”

“It’s not a problem. We’ll have a lazy morning and leave for the Seaview around eleven-thirty. Good night.”

“Good night,” Margaret replied.

Fenella got ready for bed and then crawled in next to Katie. She shut her eyes and sighed deeply. “I can’t believe I’m getting married in less than two weeks,” she muttered as she snuggled under the duvet.



“**Y**ou can’t wear that to your wedding,” Mona said, sounding horrified.

Fenella put a hand to her neck. “But it’s such a beautiful necklace,” she said.

“But it’s red and blue. Those aren’t bridal colors. You need diamonds and pearls for a wedding,” Mona told her.

“What I need is a dress. Get your wardrobe working on that and let me worry about my jewelry.”

“The wardrobe is working on it, but it’s complicated. I’m not entirely certain what you should wear for your wedding.”

“I need something bridal and fancy, but not too formal. Not white, at my age, but maybe something close to white. Probably not full-length, but maybe. Something that looks appropriate for a woman my age but doesn’t make me look old. How hard can that be?”

Mona stared at her. “It’s nearly impossible, but I have confidence in the wardrobe. The perfect dress will be there when you need it. But you can’t wear that necklace.”

“I’m not even sure where the necklace came from. It isn’t mine.”

“It must be one of the copies, although you really ought to dream of genuine stones.”

Fenella frowned. “The copies are supposed to be so good that only an expert can tell the stones apart from genuine ones. I’m not an expert.”

“No, but you are dreaming. I would never dream about simulated stones.”

Fenella looked into the mirror and smiled at the gorgeous red stone at the center of the necklace. “Real or not, this is a beautiful stone.”

Mona nodded. “Maybe the necklace is the key to the whole thing.”

“The key to what whole thing?”

“Mattie’s murder,” Mona said with a sigh. “You aren’t even paying attention.”

“I’m a bit preoccupied. I’m getting married soon.”

“Yes, but surely you want the killer behind bars before you get married.”

Fenella shrugged. “Even if we put this killer behind bars, there will be another one right behind him or her. It seems as if it’s my fate to keep stumbling over murder victims left, right, and center.”

“You need to ask Karl and Suzanne about the necklace.”

“I can’t do that. The police haven’t told anyone that Mattie was wearing the necklace.”

“They’ve probably already asked Suzanne about it, though. They’ll have wanted to see her copy, just to be certain that she still has it.”

“Why wouldn’t she have it?”

Mona shrugged. “I don’t know, but it’s clearly bothering you.”

“It’s not bothering me. I didn’t even give the matter a single thought. You brought it up.”

“It’s your dream. I’m not even really here. You’re really just having this conversation with yourself.”

Fenella frowned. “Why would I do that?” she asked, blinking hard as Mona seemed to fade away. A moment later, another Fenella appeared in her place. “I don’t want to talk to myself,” she protested.

“Why ever not?” the other Fenella demanded. “We’re quite interesting, if I do say so myself.”

Fenella opened her mouth to argue, and then sighed. “I think it would be best if I just woke up.”

“Suit yourself,” the other Fenella said. “But don’t forget about poor Mattie. She died wearing that necklace.”

Fenella put her hand to her neck again, touching the large red stone. “Not this exact necklace, just one like it.”

“Maybe that necklace is one of a kind.”

Fenella shook her head. “Everyone knows that Suzanne had copies made. It was in the local paper.”

“And they never get anything wrong,” the other Fenella said mockingly.

“Maybe I should take this off,” Fenella said, reaching for the clasp at the back of her head. She couldn’t seem to find it, though, and when she woke up a moment later, her hands were still clutching at nothing in their search for the absent clasp.

“Merooww,” Katie said from her spot at the center of the bed.

“Sorry,” Fenella replied. “I just had the oddest dream.”

Katie sighed and then rolled over and squeezed her eyes shut. Fenella looked at the clock and then did the exact same

thing.

“I had the strangest dream last night,” Fenella told Margaret over breakfast the next morning. “I was talking to Mona. She said that the wardrobe would find me the perfect dress, but in the dream, I was wearing the ruby and sapphire necklace, and she kept insisting that I couldn’t wear it for the wedding.”

Margaret made a face. “First of all, red isn’t very bridal. Second of all, I think the necklace would just remind all of us about poor Mattie. I’m afraid I agree with Mona on this one.”

Fenella nodded. “I don’t disagree, but in my dream, I said something about the necklace being a copy, and the other me said that it was one of a kind.”

“The other you?”

“That part doesn’t matter. How sure are we that the necklace was actually copied?”

“Didn’t Mona tell us the story? Maybe you should ask her.”

Fenella nodded and then looked around the kitchen. “She isn’t here, though.”

“She’ll turn up. What do you want to do in the meantime?”

“I know I said we should have a lazy morning, but I’ve been thinking about my dress. Or rather, I’ve been thinking about my lack of a dress. I think I need to go dress shopping.”

“It probably makes sense to get something, just in case the wardrobe doesn’t manage to provide the perfect dress.”

“I wish I knew what I want.”

“Let’s go and see what your options are.”

Two hours later, they’d walked from one end of Strand Street to the other and visited a half dozen different shops.

“Nothing,” Fenella said miserably. “Not one thing that was at all appropriate.”

“At least you’re discovering what you don’t want.”

Fenella stared at her niece for a moment. “I suppose I am. I don’t want bright colors. I don’t want something short and tight. I don’t want something that looks like it was designed for a woman in her eighties. Conversely, I don’t want something that looks like it was designed for an eighteen-year-old, either. The only things that were close to appropriate both looked like mother-of-the-bride dresses.”

“And they weren’t the best colors.”

Fenella nodded. “Why do they even make dresses in that hideous shade of green?”

“I’ve no idea, but there are other shops on the island.”

“I know, but I’m out of time for today. And time seems to be a big problem. Even if I had wanted that green dress, they didn’t think they’d be able to get it for me in my size before the wedding.”

“Let’s worry about one thing at a time,” Margaret said. “We’ve worried about dresses all morning. Now it’s time to worry about food.”

Fenella laughed. “Except I’m not very worried about the food. I know everything the Seaview does is delicious. Daniel and I are supposed to go and look for wedding rings after the tasting. I hope we’ll have time for that before our appointment for tea.”

“One worry at a time,” Margaret said.

They walked back to their building. A short while later, they were on their way to the Seaview in Mona's little red car.

"I can't wait to drive this car," Margaret said as they sped along.

"It's far too much fun. I'm going to miss it while I'm traveling."

"I'll take good care of her."

"I know you will."

Daniel was waiting for them in the hotel's lobby. He greeted Fenella with a kiss.

"I feel as if I haven't seen you in ages," he said when he lifted his head.

"This case is taking up a lot of your time," she replied.

"It isn't the case as much as everything else. Arthur is handling the case. Ted and I are dealing with everything else happening in Douglas while Arthur is busy," Daniel explained.

"I'm glad you were able to get the afternoon off."

"I am, too, although our appointment with Karl and Suzanne is mostly work."

Fenella sighed. "I'm not looking forward to it."

"I hope you aren't talking about the tasting," Jasper said as he joined them.

"Not at all," Fenella replied. "I think we're all looking forward to this."

Jasper grinned. "That's good to hear. I'll confess that I'm looking forward to it as well. Our chef has put together an incredible assortment of options for your consideration. While we eat, we'll talk about exactly what you want for your special day."

"All four of my brothers are coming," Fenella said as they walked toward the restaurant. "And they're all bringing their wives – well, except for James, who isn't married. He's bringing a girlfriend, though."

“Oh, dear,” Daniel said.

Fenella laughed. “Actually, this one sounds okay. She’s an English literature professor who sent James a long email analyzing his first book. He replied by telling her that she was a pretentious snob and that his book was completely lacking in hidden meaning. They emailed back and forth for months, arguing, before they finally met. Apparently, she’s gorgeous and smart and funny and James has fallen head over heels in love with her.”

“Good for him,” Daniel said.

“And here we are,” Jasper said as he escorted them into a small, private dining room. “I hope you’re all hungry.”

An hour later, Fenella decided that she’d never be hungry again.

“That was incredible, every single bite of it,” she said as she pushed away her dessert plate. “But we really can’t have four desserts at our wedding.”

Daniel laughed. “You managed four desserts today.”

“Yes, but I do want a wedding cake,” Fenella replied. “Do you want a traditional British one?”

He shook his head. “We can have whatever you want. I promise I won’t feel less married if we don’t have fruitcake.”

Margaret grinned. “You could have a dessert table with every option we tried today and a few slices of cake.”

“We can do that,” Jasper said. “We don’t typically offer wedding cakes, but if you want a sponge cake with buttercream icing, we can do that. Our pastry chef spent a year training in Boston, Massachusetts. He’s confident that he can manage an American wedding cake. He has pictures for you to go through so you can select how you want it to look.”

He handed Fenella a small pile of photographs. She flipped through them and then passed two of them to Daniel. “One of these, I think,” she said.

He looked at them both and then shrugged. “I’m happy with either, but I think I like this one a tiny bit more,” he

replied, handing her a picture.

“I like that one better, too,” she said happily. “We’ll have this, or something like it.”

Jasper made careful notes on all of their choices for appetizers, main courses, and desserts. When they were done, he shut his notebook and smiled at Fenella.

“We haven’t really talked about price,” he said.

She shrugged. “Just send Doncan a bill when it’s all over. He’s going to be handling my accounts while Daniel and I are away.”

“Very good,” Jasper said.

“Do you need a deposit or anything?” Fenella asked.

Jasper shook his head. “I trust you.”

Fenella laughed. “You need to trust Doncan because I won’t even be here, but we all know that you can trust him.”

“And now, we need to look at rings,” Daniel said as they walked out of the hotel a short while later.

“I’ll meet you outside the jewelers,” Fenella told him.



“**T**hat was too easy,” Daniel said as they walked out of the jewelers.

“We weren’t fussy,” Fenella pointed out. “I wanted our bands to match, and you wanted plain gold, so that really narrowed down our options.”

“I think the man behind the counter was expecting you to pick out something fancier,” Margaret said. “He looked a bit disappointed when you said you wanted plain bands.”

“I hope you don’t mind the plain band,” Daniel said.

“I love the plain band. It says, clearly and distinctly, that I’m married, or rather, it will, once we’re actually married.”

Daniel patted his pocket. "I'll keep both rings safe until the twenty-first."

Fenella looked at her watch. "We did that in good time. I'm going to take Margaret home. Then we can head down to Castletown."

"I'll follow you, and then we can just take one car to Castletown."

"We can take Mona's if you want," Fenella offered.

Daniel grinned. "You know I love that car."

"You can even drive."

He thought for a moment and then shook his head. "Maybe after we're married."

Fenella laughed. "Whatever. I'll see you at my apartment soon."

He gave her a quick kiss and then they both walked back to their cars. Fenella and Margaret talked about the food for the wedding for the entire journey. As soon as Daniel arrived at her apartment, he and Fenella headed toward Castletown.

"I'm pretty sure I know where I'm going, but let me know if I go wrong," Fenella told Daniel as she pulled out of the parking garage.

"The house isn't that hard to find, but the entrance is tricky. The house sits on a small hill and is visible for miles around, but the entrance could easily be mistaken for an old and no-longer-used path or something. You'll see what I mean."

"Why do you think they want to see me?" Fenella asked.

"I suspect they're trying to protect their son. He could be in a lot of trouble if you wanted to make a complaint against him."

"If they offer, I'm going to let them pay to have the site cleaned up properly. People were using the field as a bathroom and someone threw up there. The smell was terrible. I'd rather

my next tenant not have to smell that if the wind starts blowing in the wrong direction.”

Daniel nodded. “That seems a reasonable enough request.”

“I had a really strange dream last night. It was all about the necklace that the victim was wearing. I read in the local paper that there were three copies made of the one that was stolen. Is that true?”

“No comment,” Daniel said.

“What does that mean?”

“It means that we’re actively investigating everything to do with the murder, including the victim’s necklace. We’ve been told the same thing, that the original was stolen and that three copies were made. I have no idea if that’s true or not.”

“So I shouldn’t ask Suzanne to see her copy.”

Daniel laughed. “You can ask. Don’t be surprised if she says no, though. Someone from the party shared pictures from the event with Heather. She spotted the necklace, of course. She’d already mentioned the story of the theft in her article about the murder simply because Kirk Edwards was involved. I suspect today’s front page is all about that necklace and its copies.”

“So Suzanne isn’t going to want to talk about it.”

“Probably not.”

“That’s the house?” Fenella asked as they drove down a side road.

“That’s the house,” Daniel agreed.

Fenella slowed to a stop so she could get a good look at the huge mansion on the hill. “It’s enormous and it looks like something out of a movie.” She snapped her fingers. “It looks like a house where a Bond villain would live.”

Daniel laughed. “Now that you’ve said that, I agree. Before, I just thought it was large and rather tacky. Now I’m going to be worried that the floors cover up giant alligator pits

or shark tanks. Keep driving. The entrance is about three hundred yards ahead.”

“Here?” Fenella asked a moment later. “That looks like a dirt path to nowhere.”

“Exactly. But once you get around the bend, you’ll see the house.”

Fenella turned off the main road and slowly followed the path around a corner. She stopped when she saw the gate and the gatehouse.

“I should have warned you about that,” Daniel said.

Fenella nodded as she pulled forward slowly.

“Is that what I think it is?” the man in the gatehouse asked, leaning out to get a better look at Mona’s car.

“It is,” Fenella agreed.

He stared at the car for what felt like ages. Eventually, he sighed and looked at her. “How can I help you?”

“I’m here to see Kirk and Suzanne Edwards. We were invited for tea,” she said.

“Are you selling Mr. Edwards the car? I’d love it if you’d sell Mr. Edwards that car. I’d volunteer in the garage and wash it every day,” he replied.

“The car isn’t for sale.”

He sighed. “I didn’t think so. If I had one, I’d never sell it. The problem is, they made only a handful of them, and no one ever wants to get rid of one.” He shrugged. “It isn’t as if I could afford to buy one anyway. What is your name?”

“I’m Fenella Woods.”

“I should have recognized you. I, well, let’s face it, I was blinded by the car,” he said apologetically. “I just have to ring the house and check that you’re on the list.”

A minute later, he stuck his head back out. “You’re cleared. Would you like me to wash your car while you’re here?”

Fenella laughed. “No, but thank you.”

The gate in front of them slowly slid open. As Fenella drove through it, Daniel chuckled.

“Maybe I’ll drive home,” he said.

Fenella laughed. “You know you can drive her whenever you want.”

She followed the winding road until it ended in a small parking lot outside the house. Small signs marked spaces for visitors. Fenella pulled into one and then looked at Daniel.

“They have assigned spaces for visitors at their home,” she said.

“The truly wealthy are a mystery to me.”

“I looked them up online. I’m worth more than they are, but I don’t feel the need to live in a mega-mansion with its own visitor parking.”

Daniel nodded. “Your money makes me uncomfortable, but at the moment, it’s making me feel a bit better about our upcoming meeting. Rich people can be rather intimidating. Knowing that you have more money than Karl and Suzanne Edwards is oddly satisfying.”

Fenella laughed and then leaned over and gave Daniel a kiss. “After we’ve traveled for a year, we can buy a horrible mega-mansion and install a pool full of sharks if you want,” she whispered.

He was still laughing as he got out of the car.

As they climbed the steps to the front door, it swung open. A man in what Fenella could only assume was a butler’s uniform held it open as they walked inside.

“Ms. Woods, Mr. Robinson, welcome to Eagle Crest,” he said.

“Thank you,” Fenella replied.

“Mr. and Mrs. Edwards will receive you in the drawing room,” he told them. “If you’ll follow me?”

He turned and led them through the small foyer and down a short corridor. Fenella tried to see as much as she could, but she didn't have time to notice much beyond the small fountain in the foyer that they had to detour around. There were several closed doors along the corridor, but the man stopped in front of the second one on the left. He opened it and then gestured for them to walk into the room.

"Make yourselves comfortable. Mr. and Mrs. Edwards will join you momentarily," he said before bowing and then shutting the door.

Fenella stood in the doorway and surveyed the room.

"Everything looks expensive," Daniel whispered. "The couches and chairs are leather and look new, but everything else looks antique."

Fenella nodded. "Who puts vases and sculptures on bookshelves? Where are the books?"

"They probably have a library."

"Maybe, but it wouldn't hurt to have a few books in here. The wallpaper is, um, odd."

"I'm sure it cost a fortune."

"Is it upside down?"

Daniel stared at the wall for a moment. "I don't know. I suppose it might be. It's abstract."

Fenella took a few steps forward. "The rug is incredibly thick, even more so than my rug, and I've always thought my rug was very thick."

Daniel followed her. "Where should we sit?" he asked.

She looked at the couches and chairs. "It doesn't look as if anyone ever sits on any of the furniture. Maybe they never use this room."

As she took another step forward, the door behind them opened. Fenella and Daniel both spun around.

"Good afternoon," the man who walked into the room said. "Thank you so much for joining us on such short notice." He

was wearing what Fenella thought was a smoking jacket, with leather patches on the elbows. His smile seemed friendly enough, but as he held out his hand, Fenella noticed that his eyes were cool and calculating.

“Good afternoon,” Fenella replied as she shook his hand.

“And Inspector Robinson, we’re grateful that you were able to take time out of your undoubtedly busy schedule to visit us,” he continued as he held out his hand to Daniel.

“Call me Daniel.”

“Oh, thank you. And I’m Karl, of course. I can’t imagine what’s keeping Suzanne. She’s always running late, of course, because she always wants to look perfect for our guests.”

Fenella smiled. “You have a lovely home,” she said, almost wincing at the bland comment.

Karl grinned. “That’s all Suzanne’s doing. When we moved to the island, I gave her a budget and told her to build her dream home. She went six times over the budget, but the house is exactly what she wanted.”

“I was only five times over the budget before you added in the things you wanted,” a voice said from the doorway.

The woman who walked in was stunningly beautiful. She looked far too young to be the mother of a child in his mid-twenties, but if she’d had work done, it had been done expertly and discreetly. Fenella knew enough about clothes to recognize the designer dress and shoes. If the jewelry the woman was wearing was genuine, then Suzanne could have sold her necklace and earrings and bought herself a small house somewhere on the island.

“Ms. Woods, it’s lovely to meet you,” she said, holding out a hand that had rings on every finger.

“Call me Fenella,” she replied. “But we’ve met before, actually. Donald Donaldson introduced us at a party once, more than a year ago now.”

Suzanne glanced at her husband and then back at Fenella. “Of course,” she said. “How could I have forgotten? I’m afraid

we've rather lost touch with Donald, though. He's in London, I believe, at his daughter's bedside. Such a horrible tragedy."

Fenella nodded. "Her accident was horribly sad, but I believe she's recovering slowly. The last time I spoke to Donald, he was happy to report that she's now doing better than her doctors ever expected."

"How wonderful for him. There is no pain to compare with losing a child. I'm certain he's thankful every day that his daughter is still here, even if she does have health struggles."

"Darling, this is Daniel Robinson," Karl said.

Suzanne held out her hand. "It's a pleasure to meet you. We appreciate you finding time in your busy schedule to join Fenella today."

Daniel nodded. "I am happy to do it."

"But have a seat," Karl said, waving a hand at the couches. "They're incredibly comfortable, I promise."

Fenella crossed to the nearest couch and sat down. *I guess I can't trust anything Karl says*, she thought as she slid back and tried to get comfortable on the hard furniture.

Daniel sat next to her and took her hand. Karl and Suzanne sat across from them. The large coffee table between them made Fenella feel as if they were far away.

"I've asked Walter to bring the tea in a few minutes," Karl said. "I thought we could talk about unpleasant things first and then enjoy tea while discussing something more enjoyable."

Fenella frowned. "Unpleasant things?" she repeated.

Karl sighed. "We know that you inherited Mona Kelly's estate. Of course, we've no idea of the value of that estate. Over the years, we heard a great many rumors about Mona and her relationship with Maxwell Martin. I understand that Maxwell was very generous to Mona while he was alive, but he passed away many years before Mona's own death."

"Indeed," Fenella said after an awkward pause.

Suzanne laughed. “What my husband is trying to say is that we have no idea if you have tons of money or are very nearly broke. Therefore, we don’t know whether we should offer you a lump sum to forget that our son had a party on your property or if we should expect you to be unconcerned because you actually own half of the island.”

“A friend of mine suggested that Mona owned several dozen properties by the time Maxwell died,” Karl said. “If that’s the case, then you probably aren’t the least bit worried about one small field in the far north of the island.”

Fenella’s mind was racing as she inhaled slowly. “I’m concerned about every piece of property that I own,” she said eventually. “Of course, I’m mostly concerned that a young woman lost her life at the party that your son held on that small field.”

Karl nodded as Suzanne put her hand to her face.

“It’s tragic, of course. Mattie was the daughter of dear friends of ours. Clearly, we’re all devastated to have lost her,” Karl said. He paused and then frowned. “In your place, I think I’d be looking at having security installed in that cottage of yours. The Point of Ayre is incredibly remote, and it clearly attracts people with evil intentions.”

“We’re going to find the person who killed Mattie Matthews,” Daniel said firmly.

“Yes, of course,” Karl replied. “But in a place that remote, security is a necessity. If you’d had some sort of security in place on Friday, we wouldn’t be having this conversation.”

Are they trying to blame me for Mattie’s murder? Fenella wondered. She cleared her throat. “Your son and his friends didn’t go anywhere near my cottage, or so they told me. Are you suggesting that I ought to have security in the field outside the cottage?”

“Motion detectors on the cottage would have picked up the people in the field,” Karl said. “And signs stating that the area was being monitored would have stopped people from using it for the party in the first place.”

“I can’t see why any of that matters,” Fenella said after counting to a hundred before she replied. “If the men that your son hired to plan the party had set up in the right field, I wouldn’t be here.”

Karl nodded. “Of course, of course. That is where the, um, fatal mistake was made. Those two men should be arrested for something.”

“But your son has admitted that when he arrived on the site, he knew that Ray and Damon had set up in the wrong place,” Fenella told him. “Kirk should have had them relocate the party to the correct field.”

“I will agree that mistakes were made by several people,” Karl said. “There seems little point assigning blame.”

But you just suggested that Roy and Damon should be arrested, Fenella thought. You just don’t want any blame attached to Kirk.

“This isn’t getting us anywhere,” Suzanne said. “What can we do to apologize for the mistakes that were made? If you don’t need the money yourself, perhaps we could make a large donation to a local charity in your name.”

“The site needs to be professionally cleared,” Fenella said. “Someone threw up in one of the tents, and they used one section of the field as a bathroom.”

Suzanne gasped. “Please tell me that you’re kidding.”

“There wasn’t anywhere else for them to go,” Fenella pointed out.

Suzanne looked at Karl. “I thought, that is, I assumed that they’d done something about such things.”

Karl shrugged. “I suspect the man who arranged the party was supposed to arrange for something. We know how incompetent he was.”

“I’m sorry,” Suzanne said, sounding sincere. “I had no idea. Kirk didn’t mention that to us when he told us about the party. Obviously, we’ll pay for a professional biohazard team to go in and clean up anything that needs to be cleared away.”

“I’d appreciate that,” Fenella said.

“You’ll have to wait until the police investigation is completed,” Daniel said. “They’re still gathering evidence up there. Clearly, it’s a difficult job.”

Suzanne sighed. “We’ll make all of the arrangements and get you the details,” she told Fenella. “All you’ll have to do is let the company know when the site is available to them.”

“Thank you,” Fenella replied.

Karl smiled. “That wasn’t so bad,” he said. “We’d also be happy to make a charitable donation in your name, as we’re terribly sorry for the inconvenience of what happened.”

Fenella shook her head. “That isn’t necessary, but thank you.”

“I do hope you won’t mind signing a little something,” Karl said. He got up and walked over to a small desk in the corner. After taking a sheet of paper out of one of the drawers, he walked back to rejoin them.

“We had our advocate draw up a document that we hoped you would agree to sign,” Karl explained as he put the paper on the table between them. “It’s nothing really, just an acknowledgement that mistakes were made and that you understand that it was all in error.”

Fenella picked up the sheet and read through it. “You want me to agree that I won’t make a complaint against Kirk for trespassing or destruction of property.” She looked at the sheet again. “Or anything else, it seems.”

“We tried to cover every contingency,” Karl said.

Fenella read through the paper again and then put it down on the table. “I’m sorry, but I’m not willing to sign that. I’m not interested in filing a formal complaint against Kirk, but I’m also not interested in legally absolving him of all responsibility for everything he’s ever done or ever might do in the future, which is how that piece of paper reads.”

“Maybe you could have your advocate draft something that you would sign,” Suzanne suggested. “We simply want to

do our best to protect our son.”

“I understand that, but he was trespassing, and he and his friends left a terrible mess behind them. Obviously, Mattie’s tragic death is much more important than either of the other two things, but Kirk should be held responsible for his part in both matters.”

“He’s been punished,” Karl said.

“We’ve taken his car away from him,” Suzanne added.

“He lost his license six months ago,” Daniel said. “Legally, he can’t drive.”

Suzanne flushed. “Of course, of course. We’ve done other things as well. It’s difficult, punishing an adult child, of course. It was much easier when he was two and we could simply put him in time-out.”

“You won’t sign?” Karl asked.

Fenella shook her head. “As I said, I don’t plan to make a complaint, either.”

Karl looked at his wife. Suzanne shrugged. After a moment, Karl picked up the telephone on the table next to him and pushed a button. “We’re ready,” he said into the receiver.

“I don’t believe you have children,” Suzanne said to Fenella.

“No, sadly I was unable to have them,” Fenella replied, preferring to give her only part of the story.

“How unfortunate for you. My children are my entire life,” Suzanne said. “My children and my charity work, but I do that work because of my children, if you see what I mean. I started my charity when I lost my oldest son. I buried my grief in raising money to fight against the horrible disease that had taken him from me.”

“I’m sorry for your loss,” Fenella said as the door opened.

A man in a black suit walked in, pushing a large tea trolley. He was followed by a young woman dressed as a maid. He stopped the trolley next to Karl.

“Tea or coffee?” Karl asked.

After drinks were poured and distributed, the maid gave everyone plates and then offered several trays of food in turn. Fenella found herself taking nearly one of everything. Karl sat with his cup of coffee, just watching. Suzanne took a single small finger of a sandwich. Daniel filled his plate with sandwiches and tiny cakes.

“This is lovely,” Fenella said as the two members of staff left the room.

“We have tea every day,” Suzanne told her. “The children often join us, but Walter has been traveling for the past two months and Kirk is otherwise occupied today.”

Karl snorted a laugh. “Kirk is in his room, feeling badly done to because we expect him to start taking an active role in the family business. He’s had far too many years of simply drifting along, doing whatever he wants to do. It’s time for Kirk to grow up a little bit.”

Suzanne frowned. “He’s my baby,” she told Fenella. “And having lost my first child, his younger siblings became far more important to me. They’re both wonderful young men.”

“Walter is doing well,” Karl said. “Kirk, though, has been too indulged. That stops now, though.”

“Yes, dear,” Suzanne said.

Fenella shoved a tiny cake cube into her mouth to keep from feeling as if she should respond.

“I have been too indulgent,” Suzanne said eventually. “Our sons lost their brother, though, which made them grow up more quickly than I would have liked. I’ve spent years trying to help them recapture some of the innocence of their childhood.”

A loud buzzing noise made everyone jump. Karl frowned and then pulled out his phone. He read the screen and then muttered something under his breath. “I’m terribly sorry, but I have something I’m going to have to attend to,” he said. “Thank you for coming. Good afternoon.”

He got up, picked up the paper he'd been trying to get Fenella to sign, and walked out of the room before Fenella could swallow and reply. Daniel was similarly occupied with his tea and didn't manage to say anything, either.

As the door shut behind the man, Suzanne sighed. "This would be easier if you were a mother," she told Fenella. "I feel as if you'd truly understand why it's so important to me to get you to sign that piece of paper."

"I'm sorry," Fenella said, feeling not sorry at all.

This time they were interrupted by a soft chiming sound.

"And that's my phone," Suzanne said as she pulled her phone out of her pocket. "And something I need to see to. Please stay and enjoy your tea. I'll be back as quickly as I can be."

Fenella thought about simply putting her plate and cup down and leaving, but Suzanne was off the couch and out the door before she managed it.

"That was interesting," she said to Daniel.

"They're planning something, but I don't know what," he replied.

"Presumably, something to get me to sign that paper."

"I would imagine so."

Fenella was just adding a few more cake bites to her plate when the door opened again. Kirk stuck his head into the room and then grinned.

"Oh, good. I thought that would get rid of them. I really must talk to you," he said as he walked toward them.

“Hi,” Fenella said awkwardly.

Kirk grinned and then dropped heavily onto the couch opposite them. He picked up the cup on the table in front of him and sniffed it. “Coffee, so Dad’s,” he said. “Mum drinks tea in the afternoon, but Dad prefers coffee around the clock.”

He leaned over and grabbed a tray full of cake pieces off the trolley. After setting it on the table, he poured himself some coffee and then sat back and popped two pieces of cake into his mouth at the same time. “Did they ask you to sign something?” he asked around the cake.

Fenella looked at Daniel, who shrugged.

“I don’t think we should repeat what we discussed with your parents,” Daniel said.

Kirk laughed and then washed the cake down with a gulp of coffee. “Yeah, whatever. I know them. They had their advocate here last night until late. They’ll have had him draw up some sort of legal document that says something about not blaming me for the party and the mess that was left behind. They’re terrified that you’re going to have me arrested and thrown into prison for the rest of my life.”

“I’m not planning on doing any such thing,” Fenella said.

“That’s great, but Mum and Dad will want it in writing.”

“I have no control over what your parents want,” Fenella replied.

Kirk stared at her for a moment and then laughed. “Excellent. Dad must have hated you.”

“Is that what you wanted to talk about with me?” Fenella asked as Kirk ate another piece of cake.

He shook his head. “I’ve been thinking a lot about what you said yesterday. Or maybe it wasn’t you who said it, but what someone said yesterday, about how one of us, the people at the party, might have killed Mattie.”

“That’s one possibility,” Fenella said.

“See, at first, I didn’t want to believe that, but the more I thought about it, the more sense it made. I mean, everyone keeps talking about how there must have been someone hiding up there, watching us and waiting to kill until the rest of us left, but that doesn’t really make a lot of sense.”

Fenella resisted the urge to agree, even though she’d always found the idea unlikely.

“We have to consider every possibility,” Daniel said.

Kirk nodded. “Yeah, but if the killer was just some random person, why was he or she hanging out at the Point of Ayre? I mean, it isn’t as if anyone ever goes there – not usually, anyway. Even if someone had heard about the party and decided to crash it or something, they never could have expected us to leave Mattie there alone. None of it really makes sense.”

“So what do you think happened?” Fenella asked as Kirk reached for more cake.

“As much as I hate to say it, one of my friends must have killed Mattie,” he replied matter-of-factly.

“That isn’t what you said when Inspector Stout interviewed you,” Daniel said.

“I hadn’t thought it all through back then,” Kirk said, waving a hand. “I was in shock, really. We’d had a party, and the woman I loved had been murdered. I’m surprised I made

any sense at all. Maybe I didn't." He laughed and then took a sip of his coffee.

"Do you suspect one friend in particular?" Fenella asked.

Daniel frowned at her, but Kirk was shoveling in cake bites and didn't seem to notice.

"They all had plenty of opportunity to do it," he said. "People were wandering all over the field all night long. No one was keeping track of anyone in particular, even if some people did notice when Judy was gone for a long time. It was Doug who noticed, though, and he has a thing for Judy."

"Can you think of any reason why any of your friends would have wanted Mattie dead?" Fenella asked, earning herself another stern look from Daniel.

"Where do we start?" Kirk laughed. "We all love each other, really, but there have been various disagreements among us all over the years. Judy and Mattie and I grew up together, and there was some awkwardness recently when Mattie and I became more than friends."

"Judy was jealous?" Fenella asked.

"Not jealous because she wanted me," Kirk replied, chuckling. "She was just unhappy that the dynamics of our friendships had changed. Growing up, she was the oldest and Mattie was the youngest. The two of them nearly always ganged up on me and made me play their games and do what they wanted to do, which actually meant what Judy wanted to do because Mattie used to follow her around and think she was wonderful."

"And that had changed," Fenella said.

Kirk nodded. "Judy wasn't happy because we did a lot together, the three of us, and now Mattie and I were getting to decide what we were going to do instead of Mattie and Judy making all of the decisions. Again, that had always meant that we did what Judy wanted because Mattie didn't like to argue with her."

"Interesting," Fenella said. It seemed a weak motive for murder, but she didn't know Judy well enough to know how

upset she'd been about the changed circumstances.

"Of course, Sheila was jealous for other reasons," Kirk said with a smirk.

"Oh?" Fenella replied.

He shrugged. "She's been after me for years and years. Lately, she's been throwing herself at Doug. I think she thinks that if she gets together with him, I'll get jealous, but I couldn't care less what she does."

Fenella nodded and then picked up a finger sandwich and took a bite. She wanted Kirk to keep talking, but she didn't want to ask him too many questions and annoy Daniel any further.

"Della's another story altogether," Kirk said. "She's crazy about Oscar, but she's also shockingly insecure. Someone made a joke about Oscar and Mattie getting back together and Della got really angry."

"Oscar and Mattie used to be a couple?" Fenella asked.

Kirk nodded. "Oh, yeah. They went out for about a year, but ended things around six months ago. Oscar's Mum was practically planning the wedding, but Louise thought Mattie could do better. Louise always wanted Mattie to marry me."

"Who made the joke about them getting back together and when?" Fenella asked.

"Doug said something at the party, when Mattie and I were arguing," Kirk replied. "He told Mattie that she could always go back to Oscar if I wasn't treating her properly. Della was furious."

"I don't know that I blame her," Fenella said.

Kirk shrugged. "He was just teasing. We all knew that Mattie was never going back to Oscar, no matter how upset she got with me. Oscar ended up taking a walk with Della, away from the party, around the back of the cottage. When they got back it was clear that they'd made up."

"That's good," Fenella said.

“Mattie had some history with Doug, too,” Kirk added. “They’d hooked up a few times, but then she’d started seeing Oscar. Doug didn’t take it well. I think he thought he had another chance after she and Oscar split, but we all know that didn’t happen.”

“I think the only friend you haven’t mentioned is Luke,” Fenella said, glancing at Daniel. *It wasn’t a question*, she thought as he sighed.

“I don’t know what to say about Luke. As far as I know, he’s never been interested in any of the girls in our group. Maybe he has a girlfriend that he doesn’t want us to meet.”

“I suppose that’s one possibility,” Fenella said.

Kirk laughed. “I know, I know. There are lots of other possibilities. It doesn’t much matter in this context, though. What does matter is that he and Mattie didn’t care for one another.”

“Why not?”

“They just had very different tastes in everything from television shows to movies to books to, well, everything. They were polar opposites and for some reason, when they talked to each other, neither of them was ever willing to try to see things from the other person’s perspective. It was odd, really. Mattie and I could have a calm discussion about some movie that one of us loved and the other hated, but she and Luke always seemed to end up screaming at one another over the tiniest of things.”

“That is odd,” Fenella said thoughtfully.

“I once suggested to Luke that he and Mattie fought so much because they were actually attracted to one another, but he just laughed. That was back when she was seeing Oscar, and we all knew she could do better.”

“And Luke is better?” Fenella asked.

“Oscar is a nice guy, but he’s never going to do anything amazing with his life. He’ll inherit a decent amount, but Luke is going to do a lot better when his parents die.”

Fenella took a sip of tea while she tried to process what Kirk had said. He glanced at his watch and then looked at the door.

“Mum is probably going to be back soon. I should go. I’m glad we got to talk,” he said as he got to his feet. “I really hope the killer was just some guy wandering around the Point of Ayre. It’s awkward hanging out with my friends now, wondering if one of them killed Mattie.”

“I’m sure they’re all wondering the same thing,” Fenella said.

Kirk laughed. “And some of them are probably wondering about me. Which is crazy, of course, because I loved her dearly, but I guess lots of people get killed by people who claim to love them.” He looked at Daniel. “I hope you find the killer soon,” he said.

“So do I,” Daniel replied as Kirk started walking toward the door.

He stopped and then opened it very slowly, peering left and right as he inched it backwards. “All clear,” he said before he walked out of the room and shut the door behind himself.

“That was interesting,” Fenella said.

Daniel nodded. “We can talk more about it in the car on the way home.”

“Speaking of which, would it be rude if we just left, or are we expected to wait here until Suzanne or Karl return?”

“I’ve no idea what the proper etiquette is in this situation. If I were here as a police inspector, well, things would be very different. We’re guests, though, and we’ve been left with food and drinks. I suppose we should wait.”

“We can talk about the wedding plans,” Fenella suggested.

Daniel laughed. “How are they going? What is still left to do?”

“I need a dress. You need whatever you’re going to wear. We need to get the invitations sent out, which really needs to be a priority as the wedding is less than two weeks away. I’ve

already invited nearly everyone on my list by email anyway, but I do want to send proper invitations.”

“I’ve invited nearly everyone on my list, too, either by email or in person, but sending proper initiations is a nice touch.”

“Maybe we could...”

Fenella stopped when the door opened again. Suzanne walked in and quickly crossed the room to join them.

“I’m so incredibly sorry. I can’t imagine what you must think of us. I can assure you that leaving guests on their own is not something that I would typically do, not under any circumstances,” she said as she sat back down opposite them.

“It’s fine,” Fenella assured her.

“Thank you for being so gracious,” Suzanne replied.

Fenella looked at Daniel and then back at Suzanne. “Mattie was wearing a very beautiful necklace,” she said. “I’ve heard all sorts of stories and rumors about it. Maybe you could tell me the actual story.”

Suzanne sighed. “I can’t believe how interested everyone is in that damned necklace. I’m sorry now that Karl ever bought it for me in the first place. We hadn’t been married for very long and we were in Italy, wandering the streets and feeling madly in love. When we stopped to look in the jewelry store window, I couldn’t take my eyes off the necklace.”

“I can only imagine,” Fenella said.

“It was expensive, of course, but the ruby was enormous and the setting was unbelievably intricate. I’m afraid I very nearly demanded that Karl buy it for me, but he was happy to agree, really. We had to ring and get insurance established for it before we even left the shop.”

“My goodness,” Fenella said.

Suzanne laughed. “That wasn’t the only time we’ve had to do that. I do love my jewelry, but it was the first time. Anyway, when we came home, we had a safe installed in our bedroom so that I could keep the necklace here with me and

wear it regularly. I'm sure you know that it was stolen out of that safe during a party."

Fenella nodded. "I remember reading that nothing else was taken."

"Which was odd, because there were several other pieces of jewelry in the safe, along with a collection of foreign currency. Even if the thief was only interested in the ruby and sapphire necklace, he or she should have taken everything to hide his or her true intention," Suzanne said.

"I wonder why he or she didn't think of that," Fenella said.

Suzanne shrugged. "It doesn't really matter, of course. What mattered was that my necklace had been stolen. We rang the police as soon as we realized what had happened, but that was over an hour after the party had ended. Our guests had all gone home, and they'd all had more than enough time to hide the necklace before the police arrived to take their statements."

"So you believe that one of your guests stole the necklace?" Fenella asked.

"It's really the only possibility. We had a small number of extra staff working that evening, but they were all closely supervised by the butler, the housekeeper, and the cook. None of them left the ground floor. Our bedroom is on the second floor."

"But you didn't notice any of your guests going up there?" Fenella wondered.

"Oh, our guests were all over the house," Suzanne replied. "The children were small and they'd put together a little play for the guests. That took place in the nursery on the third floor. We have a small art gallery on the second floor, near our bedroom. I believe all of our guests went and took a look at some of our newer acquisitions during the party. And Karl had just completed his theater suite, also on the second floor. He couldn't stop talking about it, and I know he took several of the guests up to show it to them. Any one of them could have gone back downstairs via a quick stop in our bedroom to empty our safe. I believe the combination was far too simple."

We'd used a mixture of our children's birthdays. Any of our friends could have guessed it."

Fenella frowned. "How sad that your friends couldn't be trusted."

"Some of our guests were dear friends. I never doubted any of them. There were really only ever a handful of proper suspects, but the police were never able to identify which of them was behind the theft."

"And the necklace disappeared," Fenella said.

"Oh, yes, of course. I'm fairly certain that it was taken apart and the stones were all sold individually. That was the only practical thing to do, really. The ruby would have sold for a fortune, of course. The sapphires were less valuable, but there were a considerable number of them. I still miss that necklace every single day."

"But you had copies made," Fenella said.

Suzanne sighed. "Which was not one of my better decisions. I was so upset about losing the necklace that I wasn't thinking clearly. Karl suggested that we get a copy made, so we went to see a jeweler. He was the one who suggested that we get the copy made with imitation stones. At first, I refused to even consider the idea, but he kept reminding me that someone had broken into our safe and stolen the original. He said that if we had another necklace that was exactly the same, the thief might do the same thing again."

"But surely you weren't going to keep the replacement necklace in the same safe," Fenella said.

"No, of course not, but that was also part of his argument. If I had a copy made with imitation stones, I could leave it lying around the house. It wouldn't have to be insured and no one would want to steal it."

"I thought I read that the copies were made with real gold and good quality imitation stones," Fenella said.

"Yes, of course. I wouldn't have accepted anything less, but we didn't bother to insure the copy that I kept."

“And you gave copies to two of your friends?” Fenella asked.

Suzanne made a face. “Louise and Janice and I were the closest of friends. They’d both been at the party, of course, which meant that they were both suspects in the theft, at least as far as the police were concerned. I knew that neither of them would have stolen from me, no matter how much they both admired the necklace. I thought that giving them copies would show them and the world that I trusted them.”

“Did it not work out that way?” Fenella asked.

“All it did was complicate things,” Suzanne replied. “Oh, Louise and Janice both loved the necklaces, but they very quickly found that they couldn’t wear them anywhere. Whenever they tried, people would ask rude questions, hinting that the copy was actually the real necklace and that they’d managed to get away with stealing it. When I wore my copy, it was much the same. People hinted that we’d faked the robbery to get the insurance money and that the necklace I was wearing was actually the real one. After a very short while, I stopped wearing the copy entirely, and I know that Louise and Janice wore theirs only very rarely.”

“So was Mattie wearing Louise’s copy?” Fenella asked.

“The police asked me the same question, but that’s a question for Louise, not me. All I can tell you is that I’ve no idea where my copy is now.”

Fenella tried to turn her gasp into a cough. “You’ve lost your copy?” she asked after an awkward moment.

Suzanne shrugged. “It’s probably around the house somewhere. As I said, I only wore it a few times before I felt that I needed to stop. I thought I put it in the safe with the other jewelry that I keep there, but it wasn’t there when the police asked me to look for it. We’ve searched the entire house, but thus far we’ve been unable to locate it.”

“So maybe someone stole the copy,” Fenella suggested.

“I can’t imagine why anyone would, but I suppose that’s a possibility. The last time I remember wearing it, I took it off

and left it on my dressing table when we returned home that evening. When I put the jewelry I'd worn in the safe the next morning, the necklace may have been there or it may not. I simply don't recall. Even if it did get put into the safe, though, it could have disappeared any time over the past eighteen to twenty years."

Fenella opened her mouth to ask another question, but Daniel put his hand on her knee. "We should be going," he said when she looked at him.

She nodded. "Thank you for tea," she said to Suzanne as she and Daniel got to their feet.

Suzanne stood up as well. "Thank you for coming. I'd be incredibly grateful if you'd give some thought to signing that paper for us."

"I'll think about it," Fenella replied, knowing that she'd never agree to sign.

"Congratulations on your upcoming wedding. I assume you're going to have some sort of honeymoon. Once you've returned, I'd enjoy an opportunity to get to know you better," Suzanne said.

"We're going to be gone for at least a year," Fenella said.

Suzanne frowned. "I was rather hoping you might co-chair one of my charity's events later this year."

"I'm terribly sorry, but I'm not going to be able to help this year," Fenella replied. "I hope the events all go well for you. I'm told your charity does a lot of good work."

"I try," Suzanne said. "It's the least I can do for my lost baby boy."

She walked them to the front of the house. The butler met them at the door and quickly opened it for Fenella and Daniel.

"Thank you, again," Fenella said.

"Thank you," Suzanne replied.

As she and Daniel walked down the stairs together, Fenella heard the large door shut behind them. She glanced backward

and then laughed.

“They might have waited until we were a bit farther away,” she said.

Daniel shrugged. “I’m just glad to be out of there.”

“It’s a very uncomfortable house.”

“I wouldn’t blame the house.”

Fenella looked up at the mansion. “Okay, the owners are uncomfortable to be around, but the house isn’t very warm or welcoming, either.”

“I’ll concede that the house is unattractive, that the rooms are too large and that they aren’t furnished in a way to make you want to spend time in them, but all of those things could be changed if someone else owned the property.”

They got into Mona’s car and Fenella started the engine. “What shall we talk about?” she asked as she slowly drove away.

“Let’s start with Kirk. Do you believe that he deliberately did things to get his parents to leave, or do you think that they’d planned for him to make an appearance?”

Fenella frowned. “Yes,” she said after a minute.

“That wasn’t a yes or no question.”

“I know, but either scenario seems equally likely. I can see Kirk manipulating them so that he could talk to us, but I can also see all three of them conspiring to make it happen. On balance, I think it’s more likely that they were all in on it together, because Kirk was ready to throw everyone under the bus, and I’m sure his parents were happy about that.”

Daniel nodded. “If you would have signed their piece of paper, we probably would have been spared the conversation with Kirk.”

“Ah, but I would have hated to miss that. He managed to give all seven of his friends a motive for Mattie’s murder in just a few short sentences.”

“Some of the motives were better than others, but he did find something for everyone.”

“And these are his closest friends.”

“Or maybe were his closest friends. Maybe none of them are still speaking to one another after everything that’s happened.”

“If I were any of them and I knew what Kirk had just done, I wouldn’t be speaking to him.”

“But none of them know what he’s just done. And I suspect they’d all appreciate that he was just trying to protect himself.”

“The time I saw them all together, they were trying to support one another. Now that Kirk has turned on them, maybe they’ll all start talking and throwing around accusations. That may be exactly what the case needs.”

“Indeed. I need to ring Arthur and tell him what happened at Eagle Crest.”

“Are there eagles on the Isle of Man?”

“I’ve no idea,” Daniel replied as he pulled out his phone.

Fenella drove them back to Douglas while he talked to Arthur. The conversation finished as she pulled into her parking garage.

“Now what?” she asked as they climbed out of the car.

“Now we have the rest of the day free to spend together,” he told her. “Should we go and get the wedding invitations sorted and then look at dresses?”

Fenella looked at her watch and then nodded. “We may not have time to look at dresses, but I can do that tomorrow. Let’s go and get the invitations, though.”

The small shop that printed wedding invitations was happy to do Fenella’s as a rush order for an extra fee. They left the shop an hour later with a small stack of invitations and envelopes.

“Now we just have to address them and take them to the post office,” Fenella said.

“Let’s get a takeaway from somewhere and then get the job done,” Daniel suggested.

Fenella texted Margaret to see if she wanted anything from the Indian restaurant.

“Margaret is out with Ted,” she told Daniel when she got the reply. “I guess that means she won’t be helping write out the invitations.”

Daniel laughed. “I assumed she’d find some excuse to get out of it.”

While they ate, they talked again about Kirk and the case. After dinner, Fenella dug ice cream out of the freezer for dessert.

“What about the necklace?” she asked Daniel. “I can’t help but feel as if it’s significant in some way.”

Daniel shrugged. “I shouldn’t tell you this, but none of the three women would admit to having lent Mattie the necklace she was wearing when she died. Neither Louise nor Janice was able to show Arthur her copy, either.”

Fenella stared at him for a minute. “I’m not even sure what that means,” she said eventually.

“Maybe it means that there never were any copies made,” Mona suggested as she appeared at the table next to Fenella.

Fenella jumped, sending a spoonful of ice cream into the air. As it passed through Mona, the ghost vanished, reappearing on the chair on the opposite side of the table as ice cream splattered all over the chair she’d previously occupied.

“Are you okay?” Daniel asked as Fenella got up to get paper towels to clean up the mess.

“Sorry, my hand slipped,” Fenella said. After cleaning up the ice cream, she sat back down and took a bite. “What if there never were any copies?” she said after she’d swallowed.

“What do you mean?” Daniel asked.

“I mean, what if Suzanne lied about the copies? What if she never had them made? What if they really did fake the theft for the insurance money and then told everyone that they’d had copies made so that she could keep wearing the necklace?”

Daniel frowned. “But why tell people that there were three copies? Her friends would have had to have known that the necklace was never actually stolen. Besides, there were pictures in the local paper of all three women wearing the copies.”

“But were there?” Mona asked. “Look again.”

“Where’s the paper?” Fenella asked. She got to her feet and crossed to the counter where she often left the most recent issue of the local paper. As she carried it back to the table, she opened it to the front page.

“There are lots of pictures of the three women wearing the necklace,” Fenella said as she studied the paper. “But none of them show them wearing them at the same time.”

Daniel frowned. “Let me see,” he said.

Fenella handed him the paper and then sat down and ate the rest of her ice cream. She was putting her bowl in the dishwasher when the phone rang.

“Hello?”

“Fenella? Ms. Woods? I hope I’m not bothering you.”

“I’m sorry, but who is this?”

“Oh, sorry about that. This is Ray, er, Ray Houston.”

“Good evening, Mr. Houston,” Fenella replied as she put the phone on speaker.

Daniel looked up from the newspaper and raised an eyebrow. Fenella shrugged.

“I’m really sorry to bother you,” Ray said again. “But I didn’t know what else to do.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Kirk is really angry with me. His parents are threatening to complain to the police about me for, well, I don’t even know what for. He’s blaming me for the party happening in the wrong place, even though I followed his directions, and he seems to be blaming me for Mattie’s death, even though she was absolutely fine when I left the party.”

“I’m sorry, but I’m not sure what I can do to help,” Fenella said, looking at Daniel. He shrugged.

“Can we meet somewhere tomorrow and talk?” Ray asked. “Damon and I are going crazy. We’re stuck on the island and we’re desperate.”

“I suppose so, but I don’t think I can do anything to help.”

“I’ve heard a lot about you in the past few days. You’ve been involved in murder investigations before. If I tell you all about the men and women who were at the party, you should be able to work out which one killed Mattie.”

“You need to talk to the police.”

“I did talk to the police. Now I want to talk to you.”

Fenella sighed. “We can meet somewhere for lunch,” she suggested.

Ray named a restaurant that Fenella knew was in the hotel where he’d said he was staying.

“I’ll be there at noon,” Fenella told him.

“Perfect. Damon and I will see you then.”

“I’m coming with you,” Daniel said as Fenella put down the phone.

“You’re more than welcome,” she replied. “Margaret might want to come, too. Mind you, if Elaine hears about the meeting, she’ll want to come along as well.”

Daniel shook his head. “I suggest you limit the guest list.”

“For tomorrow, but not for the wedding,” she replied with a laugh. “And speaking of guest lists, we should get started on those invitations.”

“We really should,” Daniel agreed.

“Before we do, we still haven’t agreed on which version of the prenup we’re going to use,” Fenella said.

Daniel sighed. “While I’d still rather sign the one that I had drafted, I’m willing to sign the second one that you had drawn up.”

“The less generous one.”

“The one that feels more than generous to me, even if it isn’t as generous as the other one.”

“What if the situation were reversed?” Fenella asked. “What if the money was yours? Which one would you sign?”

Daniel frowned. “I’d sign the more generous one. I’d want you to live well if we ever divorced.”

“So there you are. Sign the generous one. It will make me happy.”

“I’ll think about it,” Daniel replied.

“I almost woke you when I got home last night,” Margaret said over breakfast the next morning.

“Oh? What happened?”

Margaret shrugged. “Nothing, really, but Ted told me something interesting about the case.”

“Tell me everything.”

“But you have to tell me what happened when you met Kirk’s parents.”

“You go first,” Fenella suggested.

Margaret laughed. “The necklace that Mattie was wearing was the original one, the one that was stolen over twenty years ago.”

Fenella stared at her for a minute. “Seriously? I don’t even know what to say to that. How did she get her hands on the stolen necklace? Did her parents steal it, then? Her mother had one of the copies, unless there weren’t actually any copies, but that’s another story. I’m so surprised that I’m babbling.”

“You are, rather.”

“Daniel and I were talking about the necklace and the copies last night. We were speculating that there never were any copies, which should have led me to the thought that Mattie was wearing the original, but then Daniel and I got busy with the wedding invitations and I sort of forgot all about the necklace and the copies and poor Mattie.”

“I saw the pile of invitations on the table near the door.”

“They are all ready to go, and they’re really just a formality. Everyone has already been invited via email or telephone, but I wanted to send proper invitations, too.”

“Ted and I talked a lot about the necklace last night, too. We talked a lot about the murder as well. He told me that none of the women have been able to find their copies of the necklace.”

“I don’t understand how you lose something like that. Even though the stones weren’t genuine, the copies were supposed to be valuable because they were made with real gold and good imitation stones. Surely, if you had something like that, you’d take good care of it.”

“I said the same thing, but Ted reminded me that all three women are very wealthy. It’s possible that they didn’t take particular care of the copies because the stones weren’t real.”

“Even if that’s true, I find it hard to believe that all three of them were lost and that none of the women ever noticed. There’s something odd about the whole story, and I thought that before I knew that the real necklace had turned up.”

“Ted and I reckon that either Mattie’s parents stole the necklace or that it was never actually stolen,” Margaret said. “The second explanation makes the most sense, though, especially if the story about the copies was made up.”

Fenella sighed. “None of it makes sense. Let me tell you what Daniel and I learned from Kirk’s parents.”

Half an hour later, she’d finished telling Margaret about the visit to Eagle Crest.

“It’s all very interesting, but I don’t know that it gets us any closer to working out who killed Mattie,” Margaret said when she was done. “And I don’t really care about the stupid necklace or the copies. I just want Mattie’s killer behind bars.”

Fenella nodded. “That is the most important thing, of course. The police and the insurance company can fight with Karl and Suzanne about the necklace forever. Insurance fraud is terrible, but murder is so much worse.”

“So what happens next?”

“I’m meeting Ray for lunch at his hotel. Daniel is coming along, and you’re more than welcome if you want to join us.”

“What are you hoping to learn from Ray?”

Fenella laughed. “I’m not hoping to learn anything. He called me and asked if we could meet. He’s upset that Kirk is blaming him for setting up the party in the wrong place. I think he’s afraid that I might make a complaint against someone.”

“I have a driving lesson this morning. I’ll be back before eleven.”

“I’m going to the post office, and then I’m going to come back and look for a wedding dress online. I know I’ll have to pay a fortune for extra fast shipping to get something here on time, but I’m running out of options.”

“We can go shopping after lunch. There are dress shops in Ramsey and we could try Tynwald Mills.”

“I’d like that, but I’m still going to look online.”

“Just be careful. You can’t tell anything about quality when you look at clothes online.”

Both women left the apartment at the same time. Fenella was carrying her stack of wedding invitations. Once they were safely in the hands of the post office, she wandered through town, looking at dresses in every shop she passed. She found a few lovely things, but none of them were exactly right for her special day.

“Mona? I’m going to need your wardrobe to help me out,” she said as she walked back into her apartment a few hours later. “I’m not optimistic about my chances online.”

Margaret was beaming when she returned.

“Good driving lesson?” Fenella asked.

“I passed my test.”

“Congratulations. I know I’ve been distracted with wedding plans, but did you tell me that you were taking your test today?”

Margaret laughed. "I didn't tell anyone. Mel said to treat it like a practice test, so I just kept telling myself that that was all it was. I did several practice tests with Mel and never bothered to mention them to anyone, so I didn't see any point in telling you about this one, either."

Fenella gave her a hug. "I'm so happy for you. Now you just have to learn to drive a stick shift so you can drive Mona's car."

"Mel gave me some lessons in that, too," Margaret told her sheepishly. "I passed my test in a manual and got a full license."

Fenella grinned. "Do you want to drive us to lunch in Mona's car?"

"I thought we'd walk."

"We can walk. It's not far. I just thought you might want to drive Mona's car."

"I do want to drive Mona's car, but it isn't worth taking it out for such a short journey. I'll drive us to Ramsey, though."

Fenella laughed. "In all the excitement, I forgot that we're going dress shopping this afternoon. The drive to Ramsey is wonderful in Mona's car."

As they were getting ready for lunch, Fenella's mobile buzzed.

"Daniel can't make it," she told Margaret before they left. "A builder was excavating a large field on the outskirts of town where they're building a new housing estate. He found some bones that he thinks might be human remains."

Margaret frowned. "How awful."

"Daniel said they might not be human and, even if they are, they might have been there for centuries, but obviously he has to investigate."

"And we should talk about more pleasant things."

They talked about dresses and what Fenella wanted as they walked to the hotel. Ray was waiting for them at a table for

four in the small restaurant. The man with him had dark hair and eyes and looked no more than sixteen to Fenella.

“Ah, hi,” Ray said as they approached the table. “This is Damon.”

The younger man nodded. “It’s nice to meet you both.”

“Call me Fenella,” Fenella said after giving up on Ray actually completing the introductions.

“And I’m Margaret.”

“Yup,” Damon replied.

The women sat down. Fenella picked up her menu. “Have you eaten here before?” she asked.

Damon and Ray both laughed.

“We eat here every day, breakfast, lunch, and dinner,” Ray said. “We don’t have a lot of choice, really. We’re stuck here.”

“Just because you can’t leave the island right now, doesn’t mean you can’t leave your hotel,” Fenella replied.

“Yeah, but we returned the hire car because it was costing us a fortune. Without that, we can’t go far,” Ray replied.

Fenella thought about arguing but decided not to bother. Instead, she read down the menu. When the waiter appeared a few minutes later, they all ordered.

“I’m not sure why you wanted to see me,” Fenella said as the waiter walked away.

“I need to know that you aren’t going to make a criminal complaint against me,” Ray said flatly.

“Against us,” Damon interjected.

Ray glanced at him and then nodded. “Yeah, that.”

“I’m not planning on filing any complaints against anyone,” Fenella said.

Ray frowned. “That isn’t what Kirk said.”

“What did Kirk say?” Fenella asked.

“He said that you were going to have us arrested and put into prison,” Ray replied. “He says that every time I try to get him to pay for the party.”

Fenella sighed. “I’m sure you must know by now that you shouldn’t trust Kirk.”

“He’s going to pay us eventually,” Ray said. “Assuming we don’t end up getting arrested.”

“Well, if you do get arrested, it won’t be because of me,” Fenella told him.

“Kirk also said that we’re suspects in the murder investigation,” Ray said. “He said that the police timed it, and we could have left the party and then one of us could have driven back and killed Mattie.”

Fenella frowned. “Everyone who was at the party is a suspect.”

“Told you,” Damon said.

Ray sighed. “But we didn’t have any reason to kill anyone. We didn’t even know Mattie.”

“Tell her about the knife,” Damon said.

“It was my knife,” Ray said.

“What was your knife?” Fenella asked.

“The murder weapon was my knife,” Ray told her.

“Oh?” Fenella tried not to act as shocked as she felt.

“I told you that we brought pizzas to the party. When it came time to eat them, they were cold, which was bad enough, but they also hadn’t been cut very well. Everyone was complaining, so I got out my knife and used that to cut up the pizzas.”

“You carry a knife with you?” Margaret asked.

He shrugged. “It was just a small kitchen knife. I’d actually bought it on the island earlier in the day because we don’t have a good knife in our apartment in London. It was

still in its packaging in the bag from the shop in the back of the car.”

“What happened to it after you cut up the pizzas?” Fenella asked as their food was delivered.

“That’s the million-dollar question, isn’t it?” Ray replied. “I cut up one of the pizzas and then left the knife with the pizzas on the bales of hay that we were using as a sort of counter and bar. I figured we’d need it to cut up the rest of the pizzas, but then no one really ate much of it anyway.”

“It was cold,” Damon said.

Ray shrugged. “It was cold, but it was still good.”

“So when did you notice that the knife was missing?” Fenella asked.

“That’s just it. I didn’t really notice. I left it with the pizzas and then, when Damon and I were ready to leave, we took the rest of the pizzas and the empty boxes with us. Kirk said that they’d clean up the rest, I promise you.”

Margaret frowned. “Did you see the knife as you were picking up the pizza boxes?”

Ray shook his head. “I just assumed it was inside one of the boxes. Okay, that isn’t actually true. I forgot all about it, but if I had thought about it, I would have assumed that it was inside one of the boxes.”

“And what did you do with the left over pizza when you got back here?” Fenella asked.

“We put it in our room,” Ray replied, his tone suggesting that that was the only logical thing to do.

“So when you did realize that the knife was missing?” Fenella asked.

Ray flushed. “When the police showed it to me in an evidence bag,” he said in a low voice.

“And they took the rest of pizza,” Damon said angrily.

“Which is why we’re having all of our meals here,” Ray said.

Fenella sighed. “Anyone could have picked up the knife. The fact that it was yours won’t make the police suspect you over anyone else.”

“I didn’t have a motive,” Ray said. “I didn’t even know the woman.”

“Everyone hated her,” Damon said.

“Damon,” Ray said warningly.

“It’s true, though,” Damon replied.

Ray looked at Fenella and Margaret. “She did argue with just about everyone at the party before we left. It doesn’t surprise me that she’d gone into one of the tents away from everyone to wait for the taxi back to Douglas. She seemed mad at the world, really.”

“She fought with everyone?” Margaret asked.

Ray shrugged. “She and Kirk had a huge fight, but Kirk kept telling me that it was all part of the story.”

“Do you know what they fought about?” Fenella asked.

“Kirk was hitting on all of the other women. At one point, he and Judy started making out. That was when Mattie lost it. She said something about not caring about the script, and that it wasn’t meant to give Kirk the chance to cheat on her. Kirk just laughed and said that whatever happened at the party wasn’t cheating, because he was just role-playing.”

“How awful,” Margaret said. “Mattie must have been angry with Judy, too.”

“Oh, yeah,” Ray replied. “She yelled at her, too. She said that she knew that Judy had always wanted Kirk but that Kirk wasn’t actually interested in her. He was just interested in having lots of sex on his birthday.”

“Ouch,” Margaret said.

“Judy got really angry and told Mattie that she’d known Kirk longer and that she understood him better, even if he was currently, um, having sex with Mattie. Mattie just laughed and said that Judy was delusional.”

“So she was mad at Judy and Kirk. Who else?” Margaret asked.

“The actress,” Damon said.

Ray nodded. “Della Sparks. Della made some comment about how acting was her entire life, not just something she did at parties. They were talking about role-playing and how interesting it was, pretending to be someone else. Anyway, Della made that comment and Mattie said they were all better actors than Della, and that she shouldn’t be bragging anyway because they all knew that Oscar had bought her her last two acting jobs.”

Margaret frowned. “Is that true?”

Ray shrugged. “I’ve no idea. At the time, no one questioned it, though. Della burst into tears and then called Mattie a bunch of horrible names. Oscar just sat there, looking amused, until Della told him to say something. He just sort of shrugged, which made Mattie laugh.”

“Does that mean that Mattie didn’t fight with Oscar?” Fenella asked.

“They fought later,” Ray said, “while Della was talking to Luke and Kirk near the bar. Oscar was sitting on the ground outside of one of the tents, talking to Judy and Sheila. Mattie went over and said something about how Oscar was attracting all of the women. He just laughed and then said that he’d never had all that much luck with women, at least not long-term. For some reason, that made Mattie angry. She got up and walked away without replying.”

“That’s Della, Judy, Kirk, and Oscar,” Margaret said. “Anyone else?”

“Doug,” Damon said.

“Oh, yeah, sort of,” Ray said. “He tried to say something while Mattie was attacking Judy, but Mattie just laughed at him and told him that Judy was never going to be interested in him and that he should find himself an actual girlfriend. Doug looked really angry, but he didn’t reply.”

“Sheila,” Damon added.

Ray laughed. "Sheila fought with everyone. She hated the party, she hated the fact that she'd driven, so she couldn't drink. She hated Nation Zom. She hated everyone and everything."

"Did she have a fight with Mattie, or was she just unhappy with everyone?" Margaret asked.

"She and Mattie argued about her drinking," Ray said. "Mattie told her to go ahead and have a few drinks, that she'd sober up before she had to drive, but Sheila said she couldn't afford to get stopped again. Apparently, she'd been stopped for drink driving before, but she'd managed to get out of it with just a warning. Mattie didn't want to take no for an answer, though, and kept pushing her to drink."

"That's unfortunate," Fenella said. "Sheila was behaving responsibly."

Ray nodded. "Mattie tried to get me to have a drink or two, too, but I was working. She was pretty persistent, but eventually she got bored and left me alone."

"Is that everyone?" Margaret asked. "I think the only person you haven't mentioned is Luke."

"Oh, she had a fight with him, too," Ray said. "That was early in the evening, when everyone still seemed to be getting along. As they were screaming at each other about something, and I've no idea what, everyone else just laughed. Kirk told me that the two of them fought all the time, and that none of their fights mattered in the slightest."

"How odd," Fenella remarked.

Damon nodded. "It was odd."

"You don't know what they fought about?" Margaret asked.

"Like I said, it was early in the evening. I was pouring drinks and trying to sort out the story and the character assignments. I wasn't paying that much attention to the guests, not until after they'd started yelling, anyway," Ray replied.

“Did you hear what they were yelling?” was Margaret’s next question.

Ray frowned. “Mattie said something about Luke having terrible taste in everything. She said his character sucked and that no self-respecting zombie would behave in that manner. Luke laughed and told her that she didn’t know anything about zombies or Nation Zom and that she should keep her ill-informed opinions to herself.”

“They avoided each other,” Damon said.

Ray nodded. “After their shouting match, they did seem to be avoiding one another for the rest of the evening. I can’t promise it stayed that way after it got dark, though. I’ve no idea where anyone was once it got dark.”

“Surely everyone stayed together,” Fenella said.

“Not really,” Ray replied. “People were moving around all the time. A few of us had flashlights, but most people were relying on their phones for light and some people were trying not to use them in order to stay in character.”

“It was really dark,” Damon said.

“It was,” Ray agreed. “I sort of stayed still, at the bar, but the others were all over the site.”

“Where were you?” Margaret asked Damon.

He stared at her for a minute and then shrugged. “Bar or car.”

“He helped me at the bar until everyone had a few rounds, and then he went and sat in the rental car,” Ray explained. “Once things were underway, we didn’t both need to be there, but he didn’t want to leave me stranded.”

“So you missed some of the fights,” Fenella said.

Damon shrugged. “I wanted to stay out of the way.”

“He wasn’t drinking, either,” Ray said. “And it was the sort of party that would have been vastly improved with large quantities of alcohol.”

Margaret laughed. “I’ve been to a few of those.”

Ray smiled at her. “Most people find role-play easier when they’ve been drinking. I suspect Sheila would have enjoyed the party more if she’d been able to have a few drinks.”

“I assume the same goes for you,” Margaret said.

“I’m quite used to doing these kinds of parties sober,” Ray replied. “I don’t drink when I’m working, at least not usually. Sometimes, if I work until the very end of the night, I’ll have a drink after most of the guests have gone, but in this instance, we left while the party was still in full swing.”

“Was that unusual?” Fenella asked.

Ray and Damon exchanged glances.

“I don’t typically leave a party until it’s over, or at least nearly over,” Ray replied after a moment.

“We were told to go,” Damon said.

Ray nodded. “Kirk told us that we could go. He decided that they didn’t want to play any more games or do any of the activities, so he said we might as well go back to Douglas and get some sleep. He told us to take the rest of the pizza with us, as they didn’t want them.”

“And you didn’t argue?” Fenella asked.

Ray shrugged. “I made a token protest, but to be honest, I was happy to get out of there.”

“It was creepy,” Damon said.

“It was in the middle of nowhere, and I knew we had a long drive back to Douglas. It was cold and windy and there wasn’t anywhere to get out of the weather,” Ray explained. “Besides that, they didn’t need or want us there. We both felt as if we were in the way.”

“You said before that you left around midnight,” Fenella said.

“We did. It was nearly one o’clock by the time we got back to Douglas. We took a few wrong turns along the way and got a bit lost at one point,” Ray replied.

“We got really lost,” Damon said.

Ray laughed. “Yes, okay, we got really lost. Damon had a map app open in his phone, but he fell asleep. Unfortunately, I didn’t realize he was asleep until we were lost.”

“How did that happen?” Margaret asked.

“Damon told me to keep going straight until he told me otherwise and then he curled up on the backseat and went to sleep,” Ray explained. “I didn’t realize he was asleep, though. I kept driving, assuming I was going the right way, until I reached somewhere called Foxdale. That’s when I woke Damon.”

Fenella frowned as she tried to work out how someone could drive south from the Point of Ayre and end up in Foxdale by accident.

“It was dark. I was tired,” Ray said.

“What did you do when you finally got back to your hotel?” Margaret asked.

“We went to bed,” Ray said. “And when we got up the next morning, we called Kirk and asked him for the rest of our money. He said he’d meet us in a few hours to give us the check, but then he called back and said that there had been an accident and that we’d set up the party in the wrong place, and that I should stop worrying about my money and start worrying that Fenella Woods was going to have me thrown into jail.”

Fenella sighed. “And then you came and found me.”

Ray nodded. “I didn’t know what else to do. I asked the guy at the front desk here if he had any idea who you were. He not only knew who you were, but he knew where you lived. I rushed over there as quickly as I could.”

“So who do you think killed Mattie?” Margaret asked.

Both Damon and Ray looked surprised by the blunt question.

“Oscar,” Damon said after a minute.

Ray shook his head. “That’s crazy, man. Why would Oscar kill her?”

“He still loved her,” Damon replied.

“Then he should have tried to win her back,” Ray argued. “From what I could see, he was pretty hung up on Della, though. I don’t think he still had feelings for Mattie.”

“So who do you think killed Mattie?” Margaret asked.

Ray sighed. “I’ve no idea. Everyone was fighting with her, but all of the fights seemed pretty inconsequential. I can’t imagine anyone killing someone over any of the stupid things those people were arguing about.”

Fenella swallowed the last of her lunch and then took a sip of her drink. “I’m still not clear on why you wanted to talk to me,” she said as she put her glass down.

“We know all about you,” Damon said.

“What does that mean?” Fenella demanded.

Ray laughed. “He just means that we know that you’ve been involved in a lot of murder investigations. We thought that if we told you everything that we know that you’d be able to work out who killed Mattie.”

“It isn’t that easy,” Fenella said. “Besides, even if I thought I knew, the police have to be able to prove it.”

“Are you going to make a complaint to the police against us?” Damon asked.

Fenella shook her head. “No, of course not. You didn’t know you were in the wrong place. If I were going to complain to the police about anyone, it would be Kirk, who has admitted that he knew that you were in the wrong place, but didn’t tell you. Having said that, I have no intention of making any sort of complaint to the police. A mistake was made, and Kirk’s parents have offered to pay to have the site properly cleaned. That’s all I’m concerned about, aside from the police finding Mattie’s killer.”

Damon exhaled loudly. Ray grinned at him. “I told you she was reasonable.”

Fenella smiled. “Please don’t let Kirk worry you.”

“I won’t, now that we’ve talked to you. In fact, if we were allowed to leave, I think we’d just get on the next flight out of here and forget all about the money that Kirk owes us,” Ray said.

“Hotel and meals,” Damon said.

Ray nodded. “Kirk is supposed to be paying for our hotel and our meals, but now he’s saying that he only agreed to pay for two nights. It isn’t our fault that we’ve had to stay longer, though.”

“I’m not sure how it works when you have to stay somewhere because of a police investigation,” Fenella said.

“We’ll figure it out,” Ray said. “Sooner or later.”

Fenella looked at Margaret. “Ready to go?”

She nodded. Fenella looked around for the waiter. He quickly rushed over.

“Do you want pudding?” he asked.

Fenella shook her head. “Just the bill, please,” she said.

“We were going to charge it to our room,” Ray said.

“I’ll pay for lunch, just in case Kirk doesn’t settle your bill here,” Fenella told him.

“Pudding?” Damon asked hopefully.

Fenella laughed. “You two are welcome to have pudding,” she said. They quickly ordered and then Fenella settled the bill.

“Thank you for lunch,” Ray said as Fenella and Margaret got to their feet.

“You’re welcome. I hope the police solve the case soon so you can go home,” Fenella replied.

“Tell them who you think did it,” Ray suggested. “That should help.”

“I don’t know about that,” Fenella replied.

She and Margaret walked out of the hotel together. They were halfway back to their own building before either of them

spoke.

“That was interesting,” Margaret said. “It sounds as if everyone had a motive for killing Mattie.”

Fenella nodded. “We need to tell Daniel and Ted what Ray and Damon said.”

“I’ll tell Ted what Damon said. You can tell Daniel what Ray said,” Margaret offered.

Fenella laughed. “You aren’t getting away with a two-minute conversation to my hour-long one,” she told her.

Margaret sighed. “It was worth trying.”

Back in their apartment, the two women pulled out their phones. Fenella went into the kitchen with hers, getting Katie a snack while she talked to Daniel. Margaret paced back and forth across the living room during her conversation.

“That took far too long,” Fenella complained when she finally finished the call. Margaret had joined her in the kitchen a few minutes earlier, her phone nowhere in sight.

“Ted said that Ray didn’t tell him anywhere near that much,” she replied.

“Yeah, Daniel said something similar. He said that Ray insisted that he wouldn’t talk about his clients.”

“And Damon was even more monosyllabic with the police than he was with us.”

“I find that hard to believe,” Fenella laughed.

“I assume Daniel told you about tomorrow.”

Fenella sighed. “He did. He also said we don’t have to be there.”

“I’m going.”

“I assumed as much. I’m going, too, but mostly so I can see Daniel.”

Margaret laughed. “I hadn’t thought of that, but this will give me a chance to see Ted. Mostly, though, I want to see the reconstruction.”

“It’s going to be awful,” Fenella said with a shiver.

“They’ll either all start fighting or all try to protect one another,” Margaret predicted. “And neither thing will help solve the case.”

“I’m trying to stay optimistic,” Fenella said.

“You just said it was going to be awful.”

“It is, but that doesn’t mean it won’t get results.”

“Let’s go dress shopping,” Margaret suggested. “We can forget all about the murder and the reconstruction and everything except your wedding.”

“I really don’t feel like dress shopping right now, but I think we probably should go anyway.”

“We are running out of time.”

“Let me check the wardrobe. Maybe it’s come up with something.” Fenella walked into her bedroom and stood in front of Mona’s wardrobe. “Come up with something,” she pleaded before she opened the door.

“Well?” Margaret asked.

“What do you think?” Fenella asked, holding up the poison-green jumpsuit that had been hanging in the middle of the rack.

“That isn’t what I had in mind,” Margaret said after a minute.

“Yeah, me either,” Fenella said with a sigh.

“Which reminds me. What am I going to wear?”

Margaret walked into the bedroom with Fenella on her heels. “Come on, wardrobe, help me out,” she said, pulling open the doors.

“This is wonderful,” she said, taking out the soft pink dress that hadn’t been there a minute earlier. She held it up to herself and grinned. “It’s perfect, isn’t it?”

“It is,” Fenella agreed. “Now let’s go and find me something perfect since the wardrobe seems a bit confused as

to what I want.”

“That was a huge waste of time,” Fenella said several hours later.

“It got our mind off murder,” Margaret replied as she got behind the wheel of Mona’s car.

“And it gave you a chance to drive.”

“And I’m loving that.”

Margaret drove them back across the island to Promenade View. As she parked in the underground parking garage, she looked at Fenella’s other car. “I suppose I’ll have to drive that one once in a while, won’t I?”

“I’d appreciate it if you would,” Fenella replied. “It won’t be good for it to just sit for a year.”

“And it’s far more practical for things like grocery shopping.”

“But Mona’s car is far more fun. I totally understand.”

When they got back to their apartment, the message light on the answering machine was blinking.

“How about frozen pizza for dinner?” Fenella asked as Margaret pushed play on the machine.

“Perfect,” Margaret replied.

The first message was in response to one of the jobs for which Margaret had applied.

“We’d like to interview you tomorrow morning,” the message said. “I apologize for the very short notice, but we’re eager to get the job filled. Please ring us back if you can’t attend, otherwise, please be here at nine.”

Margaret made a face. “That doesn’t give me much time to prepare.”

“Or to worry.”

Margaret laughed. “Silver lining. You’re right.”

The second message was from their neighbor.

“Hi. It’s Elaine. I just spoke to Daniel. Such a nice man. He told me about the reconstruction tomorrow. Of course, I insisted that I should be there. I’ll meet you at one in the corridor so that we can all go up to the Point of Ayre together again. Unless you want to have lunch together first. That would be lovely. Ring me back.”

Fenella looked at Margaret. “Did you know that the police were inviting Elaine to the reconstruction?”

Margaret shook her head. “I’m not sure why she’s been invited. She wasn’t at the party.”

“Daniel said that I was being included because the party happened on my property.”

“And Ted invited me to come along to keep you company and also to help reconstruct what we found the next day.”

Fenella nodded. “Daniel said the same thing – that they wanted us to help reconstruct what we found the next day. He said they’ll be bringing lots of cups and bottles and pieces of paper so that we can try to re-create the mess we found.”

Margaret sighed. “And then we’ll get to pick it all up again.”

“I wonder if Doncan has been invited.”

“I wonder if Heather knows it’s happening.”

“She’s been awfully quiet lately,” Fenella said. “That’s worrying.”

“From what I’ve seen on the website and in the paper, she’s been harassing Kirk and the others and their families. She seems particularly interested in the necklace.”

Fenella nodded. “She seems convinced that the necklace was the motive behind Mattie’s killing.”

“Which makes no sense at all,” a voice said. A few fireworks exploded in the middle of the room before Mona appeared.

Fenella waved a hand to clear the smoke. “Why doesn’t it make sense?” she asked.

“Mattie was still wearing the necklace,” Mona replied. “If the killer wanted the necklace, he or she would have taken it after killing Mattie.”

“What if the killer just didn’t want anyone to know that it was the original necklace?” Margaret asked. Before anyone could reply, she held up a hand. “I know. I know. He or she would have taken the necklace. Leaving it with Mattie made it certain that everyone would find out that it was the original.”

“Maybe that was the goal,” Fenella suggested. “Maybe someone knew that it was the original and wanted the world, or at least the police, to find out.”

“You’re suggesting that someone killed Mattie to get Kirk’s parents into trouble,” Margaret said.

Fenella shrugged. “That seems as good a motive as any of the others I’ve heard.”

“It’s the only one that makes sense if Mattie was killed because of the necklace,” Mona said.

“Never mind that, though,” Fenella said. “I need a dress for my wedding.”

Mona shook her head. “I’m too distracted right now to worry about that. Once Mattie’s killer is safely behind bars, I’ll talk to the wardrobe and see what can be done.”

Fenella frowned. “What if the police don’t find the killer in time?”

“They will,” Mona said confidently. “Tomorrow’s reconstruction will make everything much clearer.”

The ringing of the telephone interrupted the conversation.

“Hello?”

“Ah, Fenella, it’s Suzanne Edwards. I was hoping you could do me a favor.”

Fenella sat down and put the phone into speaker mode. “Hello, Suzanne. What can I do for you?”

“I was hoping you could speak to Daniel on my behalf.”

“Daniel?”

“Yes, he was incredibly charming when he was here. He seems like a very nice and very reasonable man.”

“I think so.”

“Yes, of course. Because you are marrying him, aren’t you?”

“I am.”

“Which is why I’m quite certain he’ll listen to you.”

“I’m not certain of that at all.”

Suzanne laughed, but it sounded forced. “Let’s say that I hope he’ll listen to you.”

“Listen to me about what?” Fenella asked after an awkward pause.

“I don’t want to blame anyone.”

“For what?”

Suzanne sighed deeply. “Things were very different twenty or more years ago. You must know that.”

“Things?”

“Many, many things, but I was mostly referring to the way that women were expected to behave. I was a wife and a mother and my family, my friends, society even, expected me to behave in certain ways.”

“Okay.”

Suzanne sighed again. “My husband expected me to do as I was told. Actually, even now he still expects me to do as I’m told.”

“You have options.”

“You have money. Money gives you options. I have nothing. Oh, I inherited a great deal when my parents died, but of course, I gave everything to Karl. He invested it on our behalf. I can’t blame him if some of those investments haven’t done very well, can I?”

“I would.”

Suzanne laughed bitterly. “Yes, well, perhaps I could blame him, but what I can’t do is recover the money. None of this is relevant to why I rang, though.”

“So why did you ring?”

“Twenty or more years ago, if your husband told you to do something, you did it without question.”

“And Karl told you to pretend that your necklace had been stolen,” Fenella guessed.

“Exactly. We’d been traveling the world since our wedding, right up until our first child was born. Karl had spent a fortune showering me with gifts and his parents weren’t happy about it. When we moved back to the island, just before the baby arrived, they cut our allowance down to practically nothing.”

Fenella and Margaret exchanged glances. “How sad,” Fenella said after a long pause.

“They wanted Karl to sell some of my jewelry to help meet our expenses. He refused, of course, so they cut our allowance. We had limited options. Karl came up with the idea of pretending that my necklace had been stolen. Originally, we were only going to tell his parents that it was gone so that they would stop suggesting that we sell it. Unfortunately, when they heard the news, they insisted on going to the police.”

“I’m not sure how telling Karl’s parents that your necklace had been stolen would help your financial situation,” Fenella said.

“We thought they’d be sympathetic,” Suzanne replied. “We thought they’d restore Karl’s allowance. That was all that we wanted. Karl’s father was already in poor health. We knew that if we could get Karl’s allowance restored, we wouldn’t have too long to wait for a large inheritance.”

Fenella made a face. “How sad,” she said again.

“Oh, yes, of course. It was very sad, but we were trying to be practical. We had a baby to look after. We needed that income.”

“So you told them that the necklace had been stolen.”

“And they made us ring the police. And then we had to make an insurance claim because Karl’s parents still refused to help.”

“So rather than tell his parents that you’d lied, you committed insurance fraud,” Fenella said flatly.

“It sounds so terrible when you put it that way.”

Fenella looked over at Margaret and Mona. They were both clearly hanging on every word.

Suzanne sighed. “Okay, it was terrible, but you must understand that I was simply doing what Karl told me I had to do.”

“What about the copies?”

“Again, that was Karl’s idea. I loved that necklace. I hated that I couldn’t wear it any longer, so Karl suggested that we tell everyone that we’d had a copy made. I agreed, but then he decided that it would be safer if we pretended that we’d had three copies made.”

“Why?”

“I’ve no idea. Actually, I’ve a very good idea, but I’d rather not say.”

“What does that mean?”

“Louise had always admired the necklace and had asked more than once if she could borrow it. Once we’d told everyone that there were three copies, then I had to let Louise and Janice borrow the necklace from time to time.”

“I still don’t understand why you made up such an elaborate story.”

“Oh, didn’t I mention that Karl was having an affair with Louise? He knew I’d never let her borrow the necklace unless I absolutely had to, and he also knew that she’d be really grateful to him if she got a chance to wear it.”

“How awful.”

“It was rather awful, actually, but it was also a long time ago. I learned years ago not to allow myself to care who was sleeping with my husband. My life is easier that way.”

“I’m sorry that Karl talked you into doing things that you didn’t want to do, but I’m afraid there isn’t anything I can do about any of it,” Fenella said.

“You can convince Daniel not to have us arrested.”

“I’m afraid that decision isn’t Daniel’s to make. You probably need to speak to the Chief Constable.”

“I don’t care for myself,” Suzanne said. “But if I’m arrested, if I go to prison, my charity will be ruined. Everything I’ve worked so hard for will be gone in an instant.”

“I’m very sorry,” Fenella said.

“But you won’t help.”

“I’ll talk to Daniel if you want me to, but there truly isn’t anything he can do.”

“None of this would have happened if my son hadn’t taken the necklace out of my safe to lend to his girlfriend.”

“Is that what happened?”

“Of course, he thought it was a copy, but he still never should have taken it without asking.”

“You would have said no.”

“Of course I would have said no. There was no way I wanted anyone wearing that necklace.”

“Too bad Kirk didn’t know that.”

“Oh, he knew it. He just didn’t care.”

“I’m sorry.”

“At least someone has heard my side of the story,” Suzanne said. “I’ve no doubt that Karl will be vocal with his version.”

A loud click told Fenella that Suzanne had hung up.

“That was interesting,” Margaret said.

Fenella put the phone down and then pulled out her mobile. “And I have to call Daniel again.”

She told him everything that Suzanne had said. “I don’t suppose you’ll be able to have a drink with us later,” she said in the end.

“I wish I could, but we’re going to be up late working with Arthur on the reconstruction. There are a lot of moving parts to it, and we want to make certain we’re going to be able to keep track of all of them.”

“I understand Elaine has been invited.”

“That isn’t how I would have put it, but she is going to be there.”

Fenella laughed. “I have to call her back, actually. She wants to have lunch with us before the big event.”

“Suzanne was lying, of course,” Mona said after Fenella called Elaine and sorted out lunch plans.

“About what?” Margaret asked.

“Everything,” Mona replied. “She has always been the dominant partner in that marriage. There’s no doubt in my mind that faking the theft was her idea. Oh, pretending to have three copies made might have been Karl’s idea, especially if he truly was having an affair with Louise, but Suzanne would

have agreed only if she could see some clear gain for herself in the plan.”

“How would that have worked, though?” Margaret asked. “Surely the other two women must be aware that there is only one necklace. Neither of them was actually given anything, right?”

Mona shrugged. “I’m sure Suzanne gave them some sort of explanation. She might have even told them the truth. I can’t see either of those women being particularly concerned about a bit of insurance fraud, not if it meant they’d get a chance to wear that fabulous necklace now and again.”

“It’s a shame her charity is probably going to suffer when word gets out, though,” Margaret said.

“Maybe someone will do a proper audit of the charity’s accounts now,” Mona replied. “I suspect they may find some questionable accounting if they do.”

“She’s been stealing from the charity she set up after the death of her son?” Margaret asked, clearly shocked.

Mona shrugged. “Let’s just say that I had my doubts years ago. After a fairly significant donation in the early days, I never gave Suzanne another penny.”

Fenella sighed. “This entire case is extremely sad, and that’s before you even mention the poor dead woman.”

They ate their frozen pizza and then watched old movies until bedtime. Margaret had to be up early to get to her job interview, so Fenella had Katie sleep with Margaret so that she herself could sleep late.



When Fenella finally rolled out of bed, it was nearly nine.

“Katie had breakfast. Don’t let her tell you otherwise,” Fenella read from the note that Margaret had left her.

“Meroowww,” Katie said indignantly. She walked out of the kitchen, where she’d been shouting at her empty food bowl since Fenella had walked into the room.

Fenella laughed and then poured herself a bowl of cereal. Once that was eaten, she showered and got dressed and then spent some time trying to get the wardrobe to deliver the perfect dress. She gave up after she’d pulled out a fluorescent yellow dress that seemed to be made of latex, a red-and-white-checked skirt that looked like a repurposed tablecloth, and a floor-length evening gown in a vivid floral print that looked perfect for Shelly.

“Never mind. I know you’re trying,” she said, patting the wardrobe’s doors before walking into the living room and grabbing a book.

Margaret rushed in just minutes before they were due to leave for lunch.

“How was the interview?” Fenella asked as Margaret rushed toward her bedroom.

“I’ll tell you over lunch,” she replied.

Fenella drove them in her sensible car. They went to a favorite restaurant in Ramsey since they were heading north anyway.

“I had the strangest dream last night,” Elaine said after they’d ordered. “I was running across a field in the middle of nowhere and a tall man with glasses was chasing me.”

“At least none of the suspects we’re meeting in the middle of nowhere wear glasses,” Margaret said.

Fenella nodded. “But you were going to tell us about your job interview,” she said.

Margaret grinned. “I’ll keep it short. I got the job.”

“Congratulations,” Elaine and Fenella both said at the same time.

“But do you want the job?” Fenella asked.

“I wasn’t sure, based on the job listing, but the reason the interview took so long was because the owner had so much to tell me about the company. It’s a small business, with only a handful of staff, but they’re already doing great things. They’ve reached the point where they need a chemical engineer on staff, and I’m really excited to join them.”

“Hurray!” Elaine said.

Fenella got up and gave Margaret an awkward hug across the table. “How exciting for you.”

They talked about the job and about Margaret’s plans for the future while they waited for their food. After lunch, they walked back to the car.

“I’m not looking forward to this,” Fenella said as she started the engine.

“I am,” Elaine said. “I have a feeling the police are going to solve the case today. I think the guilty party is going to do something that gives him away. And I know the killer could be a woman, but I think it was a man, and you won’t change my mind.”

“I’m keeping my mind open,” Margaret said.

They were only a short distance from their destination when they had to stop because there were police cars blocking the road.

“Ah, Ms. Woods, you’re cleared to continue,” one of the uniformed men told her. “Give me a minute and I’ll move my car.”

She waited patiently while he slowly reversed far enough for her to drive through the roadblock. As she drove, she spotted another car in her rearview mirror. The police car honked and then began to pull forward as soon as Fenella was out of the way. The other car tried to speed up to get through before the police car was back in place, and very nearly got hit as the police car pulled into place.

“Heather,” Margaret said.

“Why am I not surprised?” Fenella replied.

“Now I’m surprised,” Margaret said a moment later. They’d pulled into the parking area outside of the cottage. Daniel, Ted, Mark, and Arthur were standing together. Ray and Damon were standing nearby, seemingly doing their best not to look at the police inspectors. Just beyond them, sitting in a small folding chair and wearing a smug smile, was Dan Ross.

“What’s he doing here?” Elaine hissed.

“I’ve no idea, but the inspectors don’t seem to mind,” Fenella replied.

She put the car into park and they all got out. Daniel crossed to them before they’d gone more than a few feet. He greeted Fenella with a quick kiss.

“Why is Dan Ross here?” she asked in a low voice.

“The Chief Constable suggested that we include a member of the press in the reconstruction. We want the island’s residents to know that we’re working hard to find Mattie’s killer. I suggest you stay away from him unless you want to be quoted in tomorrow’s paper,” Daniel replied.

“I’m more than happy to stay away from him,” Fenella replied.

Daniel laughed. “I suggested to Arthur that he was a better choice than Heather.”

“Oh, undoubtedly, but I still don’t like him.”

“What happens now?” Elaine asked.

“In a minute, when all of the cameras are ready, Damon and Ray are going to start setting up for the party,” Daniel told her.

Fenella looked over at the field. There were at least a dozen video cameras set up around its perimeter. Uniformed constables were in place behind each of them. She watched as a strong wind blew across the site, causing a few of the cameras to wobble on their tripods.

“Zephyrs again,” Elaine said.

“More than,” Margaret said.

“Right, I think we’re ready,” Arthur said as Fenella and the others joined him on the edge of the field. He looked at Ray and Damon. “Set everything up exactly as you did on the night of the party.”

Ray nodded and then he and Damon opened the trunk of the car they were standing near and began to unload bales of hay.

“We had more last time,” Ray said as they worked. “This is a smaller car.”

Arthur nodded. “Just do your best,” he said.

Everyone watched as the pair walked across the field and began to stack hay bales into a makeshift bar. Then they opened the doors to the back of the car and pulled out cases of beer and bottles of wine. Ray held up a large jug.

“This isn’t actually Zom Punch,” he said. “I didn’t bother to make another batch. I didn’t think you’d want us actually drinking today.”

“I do not,” Arthur replied.

Half an hour later, Fenella was shivering in the wind. Elaine had gone into the cottage to warm up, and Margaret was wearing Ted’s jacket.

“I wish I’d worn a jacket,” Daniel said as he stood next to Fenella. “I’d let you borrow it, of course, but then at least one of us would be warm.”

The sun was peeking out from behind the clouds when Ray finally stopped. “I think that’s about it,” he said, gesturing toward the field.

Fenella looked at the half-erected tents, the piles of bottles and cans, and the stack of pizza boxes and swallowed a sigh. *It doesn’t look much better than it did after the party*, she thought.

“That is not my idea of a party,” Margaret whispered.

Fenella nodded.

“Time for the guests, then,” Arthur said. He sent a text message. A few moments later, Fenella saw several cars approaching. They all pulled into the parking area in front of the cottage. The seven men and women who’d been at the party emerged from the cars slowly.

“Kirk arrived first,” Ray said.

Arthur nodded. “We’re going to compress the timeline a bit. Kirk, if you could try to re-create what you did and said when you arrived, I’d appreciate it.”

Kirk nodded and then looked around. “Everything looks about the same,” he said. “Of course, the first thing that I noticed was that Ray and Damon had set up in the wrong place. Unfortunately, with my guests due at any moment, I didn’t feel as if there was adequate time to move the party to the correct location.” He looked over at Fenella and winked.

“What did you do when you arrived?” Arthur asked.

“I got out of my friend’s car and walked over to Ray, who was standing at the bar,” Kirk said, his actions mimicking his words. “And then I said something like ‘Everything looks good,’ or maybe ‘Is everything ready?’ I don’t really remember what I said.”

“Pretend we aren’t here and try to re-create the conversation,” Arthur said.

Kirk stared at him for a moment and then laughed. “Now we role-play ourselves, role-playing someone else,” he said. “Hey, Ray, everything looks great,” he added as he turned to look at Ray.

“Thanks. We’re ready. We have a half dozen or so games ready to go once everyone arrives and we’ve gone over the script several times so we know what we have to do to keep the story flowing. We brought pizza and snacks along with a lot of beer, wine, and Zom Punch.”

Kirk nodded. “Great. Now we just have to wait for my guests.”

“What did you do while you were waiting?” Arthur asked.

Kirk shrugged. "I think I walked around a bit. I probably stuck my head into the tents, just out of curiosity. I really can't remember what I did."

"Where was the knife?" Arthur asked.

"In the rental car," Ray replied. "I didn't realize that we were going to need it."

Arthur nodded. "Who arrived next?"

"Della and Sheila," Kirk said.

Arthur nodded at the two women. "Try to re-create what you did and said on Friday night."

Sheila walked toward the men and then stopped and slowly looked around. "Where are the loos?" she demanded.

Fenella hid a smile as Sheila and Ray had a heated argument about the lack of bathrooms at the party. Kirk was at the bar, drinking with Della the entire time. Eventually, Sheila stopped and looked at Arthur.

"And then the others arrived," she said.

Arthur nodded and waved at the rest of the group to join the party. Judy took a few steps and then stopped and burst into tears.

"She should be here," she sobbed. "On Friday, she was right here, next to me, walking across the field, complaining about the dark and the mud. She should be here."

Doug put a hand on her shoulder. "We all miss her," he said softly.

"Someone doesn't," Judy snapped. "Someone killed her."

"But it wasn't one of us," Della said.

Judy stared at her. "Do you really believe that? Do you really believe that there was some random stranger out here, watching us, just waiting for most of us to leave so that he or she could kill Mattie? Do you honestly believe that?"

Della frowned. "You don't?"

“No, I don’t,” Judy replied. “I think someone here killed her.”

“Let’s get back to the reconstruction,” Arthur said loudly. “Try to re-create the conversations that you had as you arrived. Constable Walker is going to stand in for Mattie. Please tell her where to stand and include her in the conversations.”

Fenella smiled as Constable Walker, a motherly looking woman who appeared to be in her sixties, joined the group in the field. For several minutes people moved around and chatted, making small talk as they got drinks around the bar.

“And then we opened the pizzas,” Ray said. “But they weren’t cut properly.”

“Just carry on, doing whatever you did,” Arthur told him.

Ray nodded and then opened one of the pizza boxes.

“There’s real pizza,” Luke said.

Ray nodded. “The police paid for it. I’m afraid it’s probably cold, though.”

“We all ate cold pizza on Friday. We can do it again,” Oscar said.

“It isn’t cut all the way through,” Sheila complained as she tried to pick up a piece.

“I have a knife in my car,” Ray said.

“That isn’t right,” Sheila said. “You didn’t offer to get the knife right away. It took ages, actually, while we were all trying to tear off slices in the dark.”

Ray nodded. “Because I didn’t remember that I had a knife in the car right away. Actually, I think Damon reminded me.”

Damon shrugged. “Maybe.”

Ray walked over to his car and pulled out a shopping bag. The knife he pulled out of the bag was clearly plastic and non-lethal.

“We really could use a real knife,” Sheila said as Ray walked back. “This pizza isn’t cut any better than they were on

Friday.”

“Sorry, this is all I have,” Ray told her.

Fenella watched as the group chatted and ate pizza and drank together. Everyone seemed to be getting along reasonably well, which was at odds with what she’d been told had happened at the party. Eventually, Arthur spoke up.

“I’ve been told by several of you that there were quite a few arguments during the evening. When did those start?” he asked.

People exchanged glances. Eventually, Kirk shrugged.

“The thing is, Mattie was the one fighting with everyone. The rest of us were just trying to have a good time. We were eating and drinking and trying to pretend that we were in Nation Zom. It was a party.”

“Let’s try to pick up the pace, then,” Arthur said. “Keep doing what you’re doing, but let’s move through the night more quickly. I want you to point out every conversation with Mattie that took place.”

“Okay, well, let’s start with the first argument,” Kirk said. “I was talking to Judy, and Mattie got angry and started accusing me of cheating on her.”

“We were kissing,” Judy said. “But only because it was character appropriate.”

“And then what happened?” Arthur asked.

“Mattie shouted at me for a bit and then she wandered off and started talking to Oscar,” Kirk replied.

As the next hour slowly slipped past, Fenella and the others watched as the group re-created the party. Seeing each person at the party argue with Mattie was sad. Ray hadn’t been exaggerating when he’d said that she’d fought with everyone during the course of the evening.

“And then Damon and I left,” Ray said eventually.

Arthur nodded. “Go and stand next to your car,” he said. “What happened next?” he asked Kirk.

“Mattie said that she wanted to leave, but the rest of us were still having fun,” Kirk replied.

“And the taxi wasn’t due back to collect us until three,” Luke added. “We were pretty much stuck.”

“That’s when she went into the tent,” Kirk said.

Constable Walker went over and climbed into the nearby tent.

“And then what?” Arthur asked.

“We kept drinking and talking,” Kirk said. “Ray had some Nation Zom game ideas, but we were having fun without them. Everyone was drinking. Everyone was happy.”

“Except for Mattie,” Della said sadly.

“Was Mattie drinking?” Arthur asked.

Kirk laughed. “She’d had about half a jug of Zom Punch. She was more than a little drunk. That was one of the reasons why I went and checked on her after a little while.”

“So let’s continue with the reconstruction,” Arthur said. “About how long after Mattie went into the tent did you check on her?”

“Not long. I wanted to be certain that she wasn’t really angry with me,” Kirk replied. “We talked for a few minutes and then had a little cuddle before I left her to get some sleep. She said she was too tired to do anything else.”

“She told me the same thing,” Judy said. “I went in about ten minutes after Kirk. She said she just wanted to be left alone and that she’d find her own way home eventually.”

“And no one else went into the tent with her?” Arthur asked.

The others all shook their heads.

“So let’s get back to the party,” Arthur said. “I want to see where everyone was during the three hours after Ray left and before your taxi arrived.”

They did their best to re-create things, but after a while, it became obvious that people were just guessing where they'd been and when.

"Wasn't it about now that Oscar and Della disappeared?" Luke asked at one point.

"No, that was later," Kirk said. He frowned. "Or maybe it was earlier. It's all a bit muddled up."

"When did Doug go missing?" Oscar asked.

Doug shook his head. "I didn't go missing at all. I was here the entire time."

"It was Luke who disappeared for a while," Della said.

"I got bored and went for a stroll around the cottage," Luke said. "At the time, I thought that Kirk's family owned it and I was curious about it."

"I think it's safe to say that everyone disappeared at some point in the evening," Kirk said with a wave of his hand. "It was dark. We were all drinking. We were all wandering around, pretending to be zombies."

"I had to hunt for a place to wee," Judy said.

Kirk laughed. "I promise I won't ever have another party without proper facilities."

"I should hope not," Sheila said.

"And no one saw Mattie again once she'd gone into the tent?" Arthur asked.

Kirk laughed. "That's a good point. It was dark. She could have climbed out of the tent, wandered all around the field, and gone back inside the tent without anyone noticing."

"Did anyone see her?" Arthur asked.

A few people shook their heads.

"Are you certain she was in the tent when the taxi arrived?" Arthur asked.

"The taxi's headlamps lit up the site," Kirk said. "And then Sheila started her car, too. If Mattie had been anywhere other

than in the tent, we would have spotted her.”

“We all shouted at her,” Della added. “I think we all wanted her to come back to Douglas with us.”

“But she said she’d rather stay here alone than break into a shed full of Kirk’s favorite snacks,” Luke said.

Kirk stared at him. “How did you know that?” he asked.

Luke frowned. “You told us that she’d said she didn’t want to come with us to the raid on the compound.”

“But how did you know what was in the shed?” Kirk demanded. “I didn’t tell anyone what was in the shed except for Mattie. How did you know?”

The silence that followed Kirk's words seemed to stretch on for a very long time. Eventually, Luke shrugged.

"What else were you going to put in the shed?" he asked.

"When did Mattie tell you what was in the shed?" Kirk demanded as he crossed the field toward Luke.

"We talked a few times at the party," Luke replied. "It was probably after she was getting bored. She complained about the party and then said that going to break into the shed was going to be even worse."

"And then you killed her," Kirk said in a low voice.

Luke laughed shakily. "Of course I didn't kill her. None of us killed her. We know she was stabbed because we've all been questioned about the knife. If one of us killed her, he or she would have been covered in blood afterwards."

"It's interesting you should say that," Arthur said. "Stab wounds don't always bleed a great deal, especially not if the knife is left in the wound."

Luke shrugged. "So the killer didn't get covered in blood?"

"No comment," Arthur replied.

"You killed Mattie," Kirk said to Luke. "She's the only one who could have told you about what was in the shed."

“It was a party. I talked to everyone during the course of the evening,” Luke argued.

“But I told Mattie what was in the shed only after she went into the tent,” Kirk said. “I was trying to persuade her to come with us, so I told her what we were going to find in the shed. She laughed, but she insisted that she wasn’t interested in coming along.”

Luke shrugged. “So maybe I talked to her after that. Maybe she came out of the tent and I bumped into her. The entire night is a blur. I was pretty drunk.”

“You didn’t drink much while I was here,” Ray said.

Luke looked over at him and then sighed. “So now you’re all working together to frame me, are you?”

Kirk shook his head. “We don’t have to frame you. We know you killed Mattie.”

Fenella winced as Kirk’s fist struck Luke’s chin. Luke jumped backwards, his hand on his face. A pair of uniformed constables got between the two men before the fight could continue.

“I loved her,” Kirk shouted. “She was my whole world.”

“You didn’t love her and she certainly didn’t love you,” Luke spat back, rubbing his cheek. “She was going to marry you because she knew it would make her mother happy, but I’m the only man she ever truly loved.”

“You’re crazy,” Kirk snapped. “You and Mattie fought about everything.”

Luke laughed bitterly. “You and your stupid role-play game. Mattie and I were play-acting every time we were together. Her mother hates me so we had to pretend that we didn’t care for one another. Over time, over the years that we were in love and had to pretend otherwise, Mattie and I became good at the game. We could argue about anything, and we did argue about everything. And then, when no one was looking, we made love passionately and swore that we’d be together one day.”

“And then you killed her,” Kirk said quietly.

“She told me that we had to stop seeing each other,” Luke said. “She was afraid we were going to get caught. I loved her so much that I couldn’t stand to lose her.”

“But now you have,” Kirk said.

Luke shook his head. “She’s mine now. Always and forever.”

“How did you do it?” Sheila asked. “How did you kill her and not get covered in blood?”

Luke laughed. “I did get covered in blood,” he said. “But there wasn’t anyone around to see it.”

“You came back later,” Judy said.

“We agreed that she would insist on staying and that I would ride back into Douglas and then come back. We were going to have one last night together, in a tent in the middle of nowhere so that no one would ever know,” Luke said. “When we got back to Douglas, I drove back up here. As I was walking across the field, I tripped over the knife. It had fallen on the ground. I picked it up to show it to Mattie. I never meant to hurt her.”

“You don’t show someone a knife by sticking it into them,” Kirk said.

“I didn’t want to hurt her. I loved her,” Luke said.

Everyone was silent as a pair of constables escorted Luke into a waiting car.

“I’m going to need statements from everyone,” Arthur said as the car slowly drove away.

“You can use the cottage,” Fenella suggested, feeling both physically and emotionally numb from the day’s events.

By the time they left the Point of Ayre several hours later, Dan Ross had already filled the newspaper’s website with every detail of the story. Margaret skimmed the site while Fenella drove them back to Douglas.

“There isn’t anything here that we didn’t already know,” she said eventually.

“At least Mattie’s killer is behind bars,” Elaine said.

“And now Fenella can focus on her wedding,” Margaret said.

Fenella nodded. “I think I need a day to recover, first, though.”



The sun was shining and temperatures were predicted to be mild on the twenty-first of April. When Fenella woke up, she forgot for just a moment that it was her wedding day. When she remembered, she jumped out of bed and ran into the kitchen.

“I’m getting married today,” she told Margaret, who was making coffee.

“Yes, I know,” Margaret laughed. “Good morning.”

“Good morning. I’m all discombobulated and confused and terrified.”

“Do you love Daniel?” asked Margaret’s sister, Megan, who’d arrived the previous day.

“With all my heart.”

“Then keep reminding yourself of that. It’s really all that matters,” Megan said.

Fenella hugged her tightly and then took the cup of coffee Margaret offered. “I can’t believe I’m getting married today.”

“And tomorrow you leave for your honeymoon,” Margaret said.

“Tomorrow we leave for the first part of our honeymoon. We’ve only planned the first few months, but I’m excited to take Daniel and show him America. Of course, all of my brothers are here now, but once they get back to their homes, we’re going to visit them all.”

Megan grinned. "But you're starting in Hawaii."

Fenella grinned. "I've always wanted to visit Hawaii."

The morning seemed to fly past as experts came to do hair and makeup for all three women. Mona drifted in and out, not saying much, but seemingly keeping an eye on everything. Shelly and Elaine joined them for a catered lunch before it was time for Fenella to get dressed.

She walked into her bedroom and shut the door. The dress she'd bought two days earlier was hanging on a hook on the wall. She frowned at the light blue dress that was perfectly lovely, but not exactly what she'd wanted.

"But I still don't know exactly what I want," she muttered as she walked across the room. "And I'm out of time. It's now or never," she said to the wardrobe before grabbing the handles.

"Close your eyes," Mona said in her ear.

Fenella jumped and then looked at her aunt. "Close my eyes?"

"Close your eyes and then open the wardrobe."

Fenella shrugged. "Why not," she muttered as she shut her eyes. "Please be there," she whispered before she slowly pulled open the doors.

"Have a wonderful day," Mona said softly. "I'll see you later."

Fenella opened her eyes and then sighed. "I'm not entirely certain that that's exactly what I wanted," she said as she pulled the ivory lace dress out of the wardrobe. As she held it up to herself, a smile spread across her face. "Or maybe it is," she said excitedly. The dress was tea-length, and when she put it on it made her feel both bridal and beautiful. The matching shoes were unbelievably comfortable. Fenella stood in front of her mirror and then twirled slowly. "Okay, you win," she told the wardrobe. "This is exactly what I wanted."

Megan, Margaret, Elaine, and Shelly all gasped when Fenella walked back into the living room. Compliments filled

the air as they gathered their things and made their way down to the waiting limousine. Because they were getting married at a registry office, rather than a church, there wasn't an aisle for Fenella to be walked down. Her brothers had insisted that she needed them to escort her into the registry office, therefore.

"I feel like I'm in a parade," Fenella muttered as the four of them all tried to walk into the building with her at the same time.

When they all finally walked into the office, Daniel was waiting for her. Fenella felt a million times better as their eyes met. She took a step forward, but her oldest brother, John, stopped her.

"I really like him," he said. "We all do. Mum and Dad would be very proud of you today."

Fenella blinked hard. "Thank you," she said around the lump in her throat.

"Now don't keep him waiting," John added with a laugh.

The room wasn't very large, and it was very full. For a moment, Fenella wondered who was policing the island, because it seemed as if everyone from the entire constabulary was there. Her brothers and their wives and children took up several rows. Behind them were the large group of friends that she'd made since she'd been on the island. Her former boyfriend, Jack, and his new wife both waved as Fenella looked around. She smiled at them and at everyone before she turned her attention back to Daniel.

"Hi," he said softly when she reached his side.

"Hi," she replied.

"I signed the more generous one," he whispered.

She smiled brightly at him. "Thank you," she said, feeling a rush of happiness. She'd gone to bed the previous evening hoping that he'd sign the version of the prenup that she preferred, but she was prepared for him to sign either.

A few minutes later, they were married. Fenella had tears running down her cheeks and Daniel had had to wipe his eyes

once as well. Their friends and family members all cheered, and then everyone started taking pictures before the party moved to the Seaview.

“I love you, Mrs. Robinson,” Daniel said as they danced slowly together a few hours later.

“I love you, too,” Fenella replied. “And now we get to live happily ever after.”

“And you will,” Mona said in a whisper.

Fenella looked at her aunt, who was wearing a gorgeous dress with stunning jewelry. *I really think we actually might*, she thought.

Mona grinned at her. “It’s going to be a while before Margaret gets her happily ever after, though,” she said before she disappeared in a burst of white rose petals.



Across the room, Margaret was standing next to Ted when his phone buzzed.

“I’m afraid I’m going to have to go,” he said, frowning at the device.

“What’s wrong?”

“A developer has been working on a new housing estate near Douglas. He found some bones a while back that turned out to be animal bones. Now he’s unearthed an entire skeleton.”

Margaret frowned. “I assume a human skeleton.”

“Yeah, he’s pretty sure it’s human,” Ted said. “Tell Daniel and Fenella that I’m sorry I had to go, but obviously work comes first.”

Margaret nodded and then gave him a quick kiss. “Call me later and tell me everything.”

Ted laughed. “I won’t be able to tell you everything, but I will ring you later,” he promised.

“And then you can tell me everything,” Elaine said from behind Margaret as Ted walked away.

Margaret spun around. “I’ll tell you what I can,” she said.

“And then we can solve the case,” Mona said as she appeared next to Margaret.

Margaret laughed. “And then we can keep our noses out of the police investigation,” she said.

Mona and Elaine both laughed, and, even though they couldn’t see or hear one another, they spoke in unison.

“Or not,” they both said.



Fenella may be going on her honeymoon, but Mona isn’t going anywhere. Turn the page to read the first chapter of book one of her upcoming adventures with Margaret.

MURDER AT ATKINS FARM

A MARGARET AND MONA GHOSTLY COZY

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Margaret Woods is excited to be starting her new job on the Isle of Man. She's staying in her Aunt Fenella's luxury apartment on the promenade and her new boyfriend, Ted Hart, isn't far away. Living with a ghost is a bit unusual, but Margaret is confident that she'll get used to Mona's presence eventually.

While she's busy getting settled, Ted is working on a murder investigation. The skeleton that turned up on one of the island's farms had been buried for twenty years. Mona is eager to get involved in the investigation, even if Margaret would rather stay out of it.

As if that isn't enough for Margaret to worry about, her next-door neighbor, Elaine, is concerned about a missing friend. She and Ernie have only known each other for a few weeks, but his sudden disappearance could mean that something terrible has happened to the retired man.

Fenella has only been gone on her honeymoon for a few days and Margaret is already caught in the middle of a murder

investigation and a missing person case. Life on the Isle of Man isn't at all what Margaret had been expecting.

A SNEAK PEEK AT MURDER AT ATKINS FARM

A Margaret and Mona Ghostly Cozy

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Please excuse any typos or minor errors. I have not yet completed final edits on this title.

Chapter One

“Welcome to Park’s Fine Foods,” the woman behind the reception desk said, giving Margaret a bright smile. “How can I help you?” She appeared to be around sixty. Her short grey hair had been cut in a neat bob and she was wearing red glasses that matched her blouse perfectly.

Margaret smiled back. “I’m Margaret Woods. I’m supposed to start work today.”

The woman gasped. “I’m so sorry. I was off ill when you interviewed for the job, but I was expecting you. Welcome.”

“Thank you. I’m excited to be here.”

“You’re right on time, too, not that we worry too much about that. I’m saying that because Arthur isn’t here yet. He should arrive any minute, though, and then he can show you your office and get you started.”

Margaret nodded. “I didn’t get your name,” she said, feeling awkward.

The woman just laughed. “I’m so sorry. After all these years, you’d think I’d be better at this job. I’m Joney Caine. I’m the office manager. That’s my official title, anyway. I’ve been here since Arthur started the company thirty-seven years ago. I was his secretary in those days.”

“In my experience, secretaries and office managers usually know everything there is to know about the company that employs them.”

Joney grinned. “I don’t know everything, but I know as much as Arthur does, anyway. I’ve been helping him build the company since the very first day.”

“And she usually does a better job than I do,” a voice said.

Margaret smiled as her new boss walked out of the door behind Joney. He’d already told her that he was sixty, but he looked a bit younger. His still full head of hair was mostly grey and his eyes were a bright blue that Margaret might have suspected came from colored contact lenses if he hadn’t mentioned them being a family trait during her job interview.

“The first thing you need to know is that the door behind me isn’t soundproof,” Joney said.

Arthur chuckled. “We added the walls and doors in here. When I bought the property, it was just a small warehouse. We divided the front into offices and built the reception area, hoping that one day we’d have customers. Then we added a soundproof wall between the offices and the production area. Sometimes I think we should add more soundproofing throughout the building, but it doesn’t usually get too bad.”

“I’m the noisy one,” another woman said as she walked into the lobby. She was a pretty blonde who looked no more than forty.

“Ah, Margaret, meet Rachel Bass. Rachel, this is Margaret Woods,” Arthur said. “Rachel is the company’s business manager.”

Rachel nodded. “Which means I get to do all the jobs that Arthur doesn’t want to do,” she said as she shook Margaret’s hand.

Margaret raised an eyebrow. "I hope they're jobs you enjoy," she said.

Rachel laughed. "I love my job almost all the time. I'm going to love it even more now that you're here."

"Oh?" Margaret wondered.

Arthur grinned. "Rachel used to have to deal with the company in the UK that did all of our chemical engineering work. We contracted it out, but as the business grew, so did our need for more and more engineering. Hiring you is going to save us some money and it should save Rachel a lot of time and effort."

"I hope so," Margaret said.

"I hope so even more," Rachel told her. "I also hope that you can explain things in plain English. I swear the company in London used to go out of its way to report everything in the most technical language possible."

"I'll do my best," Margaret promised.

"At least she'll be here to answer questions," Joney said. "And we won't have to pay her extra to get answers."

"They charged you extra when you had questions?" Margaret asked.

Rachel nodded. "Everything they did for us was billed on an hourly basis, including answering questions. To be fair, we were given an hour for questions after every report, but that wasn't usually enough."

"I think we need to stop complaining about Margaret's predecessors. She might have to reach out to them with questions once she gets started," Arthur said.

"What he means is that we should let you get settled in before we scare you away," Joney said, winking at Margaret.

"Let me show you to your office," Arthur said. "I've put copies of the most recent reports we've had from London on the products that we're currently manufacturing. You can read through them this morning. Hopefully that will give you some idea as to what we do and why we need you."

“And at midday, we’ll all go somewhere for lunch,” Joney said.

“I’d like that,” Margaret said.

“Right this way, then,” Arthur said, opening the door behind Joney.

“It was nice meeting you both,” Margaret said as she walked behind the desk.

“Likewise,” Rachel said.

“Meet us back out here at midday,” Joney told her. “And make sure that Arthur shows you where to get coffee to keep you going between now and then.”

Arthur nodded. “I hadn’t forgotten.”

“He totally had,” Rachel said with a laugh.

On the other side of the door was a short corridor that led to another door. Halfway along the corridor, a second hallway ran perpendicular to the first. Arthur turned left.

“My office is that far end. Rachel’s is on the opposite side of the hall,” he said, waving a hand toward the end of the corridor. “This is the staff loo. We only have the one, but there are only four of us out here. The production team in the back have their own facilities.”

Margaret nodded.

“And this is where to find coffee.” Arthur opened the door opposite the bathroom.

Margaret followed him into a small room full of comfortable-looking couches and chairs. A small coffee maker holding a full pot of coffee was sitting next to a small microwave oven on top of a mini refrigerator.

“My wife likes me to eat healthily, so she insisted on the microwave and the refrigerator. She packs leftovers for me most days, but I told her not to bother today. I knew Joney would want to us all to go out for lunch.”

“I’m looking forward to it.”

“So am I. I can get all the things my wife won’t let me have anymore. We have to get pudding, okay?”

Margaret laughed. “I’m never going to say no to pudding.”

“And you used the English word. Well done.”

“I’m trying to remember to use the English words, but it isn’t always easy. I’m sure I’ll get it wrong more often than not.”

“We all watch enough American television. We’ll be able to understand you if you say dessert. Do you want to get a cup of coffee to take to your office?”

Margaret hesitated for a moment and then nodded.

Arthur opened the small cupboard above the coffee machine and pulled out a mug.

“You can use any mug in this cupboard,” he told her. “If you’d prefer to bring in one of your own, you are welcome to do so. Just make sure that Joney knows it’s yours before you put it in the sink at the end of the day. She washes all the mugs every afternoon before she leaves for the day. She’ll put yours in your office once it’s washed so it’s ready for the next morning.”

“I’d hate to make extra work for her.”

“It isn’t a big deal, but it’s up to you.”

Margaret poured herself a cup of coffee and added a packet of sugar. She didn’t always add sugar, but today she felt as if she needed a bit of extra energy.

“On this side of the corridor, we have our conference room,” Arthur said as the tour continued across the hall. “That’s where I interviewed you.”

“I remember.”

“And then we have two more offices. I thought you should have the larger of the two, but you’re welcome to move into the other one if you like it better. They both have windows that look out at the road in front of the building, but

the larger one also has a window on the side wall that looks out into the neighbor's garden, which is lovely.”

Arthur opened both doors on the opposite side of the hall from the large conference room. Margaret stuck her head into the smaller office and then the larger one.

“If you're sure it doesn't matter, I'll have the larger office,” she said. “I love the view of the garden next door.”

“It will be even more spectacular in a month or so. Everything is just getting ready to bloom. By this time next month, there will be flowers everywhere out there.”

Margaret took another look out the window. In the bright sunshine of mid-May, it was obvious that the gardens were getting ready to explode with color.

“As Joney said, we've left you copies of all of our most recent reports. I hope reading through those will help you see where we're starting from.”

“I'm sure they'll be fascinating reading.”

“They'll probably be more interesting to you than they are to me,” Arthur laughed. “I don't understand most of what's in them.”

“I'd be happy to try to explain things to you.”

“I might take you up on that one day. For now, start going through them and let me know if you have any questions. You can come down to my office or just pick up the phone and press 'one' for me. Rachel is 'two' and Joney is 'three.'”

“Does that mean that I'm four?”

Arthur frowned. “Actually, you're 'six,' and I'm really sorry about that. It's an older phone system that was installed years ago. The conference room phone is 'four' and the empty office next to yours is 'five.' There might be a way to change that, though.”

“There's no need to change it on my behalf. I don't mind what number my phone has been assigned.”

“Good. So, ring me if you need anything, or just come over, whichever. If I don’t see you between now and then, I’ll see you at midday in the lobby.”

“Great,” Margaret said.

She watched as the man walked out of the room. He shut her office door behind himself. Margaret took a deep breath and then walked over to the desk that had been placed at an angle in one corner of the room. There was a large, overstuffed chair behind it. She sat down in the chair and then began to open and close the desk drawers.

“Pens, sticky notes, and paperclips,” she said as she looked in the top middle drawer. “Official letterhead paper and envelopes. Empty file folders and blank notebooks.” That covered the two drawers on the right side of the desk. The two on the left side were both empty.

Margaret slipped her purse into the bottom left side drawer and then pushed it shut again. There was a computer on the desk and a small green light told her that it was on. She wiggled the mouse and then frowned as the screen lit up.

“Password? I don’t have a password,” she muttered as she stared at the screen.

Next to the computer was a large pile of reports. Sighing, Margaret picked up the top one and opened it. After reading the first few pages, she grabbed a notebook out of the drawer and began to take notes.

An hour and four reports later, she got up to stretch. Her coffee had gone cold, but she felt as if she’d accomplished a lot. Feeling the need to stretch her legs, she walked back to the small break room and emptied her mug. Then she refilled it and carried it back to her office. After she sat back down, she pulled out her phone.

“Getting settled in. We’re going out for lunch,” she texted.

“Have fun. I’ll see you at half six.” The reply from Ted made her smile.

“I’m looking forward to it,” she sent back.

He replied with a heart emoji that made her smile even wider.

A few minutes before twelve, Margaret got ready for lunch. After a quick trip to the restroom, she grabbed her purse and walked back into the lobby. Rachel was already there, chatting with Joney.

“...third time in a month, so I told him that I didn’t want to see him again,” Rachel was saying as Margaret walked through the door.

“I don’t blame you. What was his excuse the third time?” Joney asked.

“Something to do with his sister,” Rachel replied. “I don’t believe he really has a sister, though.”

“Margaret is lost,” Joney said.

Rachel laughed. “We’re just talking about my latest sad and rather desperate attempt at dating,” she explained. “Joney enjoys hearing all about my love life, or rather, my lack of a love life. It reminds her of how lucky she is to have Ronald in her life.”

“Ronald is my husband,” Joney said. “We’ve been married for thirty-nine years. My mother met him at the grocery store and told him that I’d be perfect for him. I was appalled, of course, but she brought him home for dinner, so I had no choice but to meet him.”

“You could have sneaked out when no one was looking,” Rachel said.

Joney shrugged. “I was hungry. Besides, Ronald was cute. I didn’t mind, much, not really.”

“It sounds like it worked out well,” Margaret said.

Joney nodded. “He’s a good man. He’s an advocate now. He was still studying law when we met, but it was obvious that he was going to be very successful. I didn’t much care, though. I just thought he was cute.”

Rachel grinned. “He’s still pretty darn handsome. If he wasn’t so devoted to you...” She trailed off and winked at

Margaret.

“Ha! He’s twenty years too old for you and he knows it,” Joney laughed.

“Already having fun without me?” Arthur asked as he joined them.

“We were talking about my sad love life,” Rachel said. “I’m sure you’d rather not hear the stories.”

Arthur shrugged. “I don’t mind what we talk about, but let’s do it somewhere with food. I’m starving.”

They walked out of the building together. Arthur stopped to lock the door and then he turned to Margaret.

“There are two cafés within walking distance, and they both do decent food. We can eat at one of those, or go somewhere farther afield,” he said.

“I’m happy to walk somewhere nearby,” she replied.

“Left or right?” Joney asked.

Margaret shrugged. “Left?” she said questioningly.

The other three laughed.

“Left is a good choice,” Joney told her as they all began to walk down the sidewalk along the side of the road. “That’s the more expensive of the cafés, and today Arthur is buying.”

“Oh, I didn’t mean...” Margaret began.

“She’s just winding you up,” Rachel said. “Ignore her.”

“Winding me up?” Margaret repeated.

“Teasing,” Arthur said. “So much for a common language.”

They all laughed as they walked along the quiet street. It took them only a few minutes to reach the small café. Inside, Arthur led them to a table in the corner.

“Everything is good,” Joney said. “Especially the pies.”

The waiter took their drink order and then their food order. As they sat back with their drinks, Joney looked at

Margaret.

“Arthur got to meet you when he interviewed you, but when I asked him questions about you, he couldn’t answer any of them,” she said.

“I remember everything she said that was relevant to the business, which was really all that we discussed,” Arthur said. “I didn’t ask her personal questions.”

“So we’ll have to do that,” Rachel said. “We’ve heard a few rumors, but now we can get it straight from the source.”

“Rumors?” Margaret echoed. “About me?”

Joney nodded. “Because your aunt is Fenella Woods, right?”

“That’s right.”

“And Fenella Woods inherited Mona Kelly’s fortune,” Rachel said. “And everyone on the island knew Mona Kelly.”

“Not personally,” Joney said. “But we all knew who she was.”

“I got to meet her a few times,” Arthur said. “There was something magical about that woman.”

Margaret shrugged. “I never got to meet her.” *When she was alive*, she added silently.

“So, your aunt, Fenella, inherited Mona’s entire fortune,” Joney said. “And some people have said that it was a large fortune. Everyone knows that Maxwell Martin gave Mona jewelry and houses and cars, but no one knows for sure how much she was actually worth.”

Margaret shrugged. “I believe she left my aunt a considerable amount. Aunt Fenella is on her honeymoon now. She and her new husband, Daniel, are planning to travel for a year and she didn’t seem worried about how much the trip was going to cost before she left.”

Joney nodded. “I suspected as much. Mona was smart. She never married Maxwell. I imagine he would have been far less generous to her if they had ever married. He probably

enjoyed the scandal that was their relationship, but poor Mona had her reputation ruined, in some of the island's social circles, anyway.”

Arthur shook his head. “Maxwell was too generous to the island's charities for that. Oh, a few people snubbed Mona, but most people were happy to ignore the fact that she and Maxwell weren't married. They were engaged once, briefly, but I always wondered why they never married.”

“But we were talking about you,” Joney said to Margaret. “You're obviously American. What made you decide to move to the island?”

“Aunt Fenella moved over when she found out that she'd inherited Mona's estate,” Margaret began. “At that point, she didn't know exactly what that entailed, but she was ready to change her life, so she quit her job and sold her house and moved here. Once she got settled in, she invited my sister and me to come and visit. I'm ashamed to say that it took us far too long to actually make the trip.”

“It's a long journey from America, though,” Rachel said. “And the island isn't exactly the easiest place to get to, either.”

“But Megan and I both fell in love with the island as soon as we arrived,” Margaret said. “It feels like home in ways I can't explain.”

“So you decided to move here?” Joney asked.

Margaret nodded. “I'd just quit my job and ended a long-term relationship. We'd been living together, so I was suddenly homeless and unemployed. It seemed like the perfect time to move halfway around the world.”

“Especially since you had somewhere to stay when you arrived,” Joney suggested.

“Oh, I don't think I would have done it if I hadn't had Aunt Fenella here. She was kind enough to let me stay in her apar, er, flat while I was getting settled.”

“And where are you living now?” Joney wondered.

Margaret felt herself blushing. “I’m still living in Aunt Fenella’s flat. She offered to rent me one of her other properties, but her flat is right on the promenade in Douglas, which is a wonderful location. As I said earlier, she’s going to be away for a year, and it seemed a shame to leave the flat empty. I’m paying rent, obviously, but I’m also there to keep an eye on things and to look after her cat.”

“A little bird told me that you’ve been seeing Ted Hart,” Rachel said.

Margaret’s cheeks burned brightly.

“You met over a dead body, didn’t you?” Joney asked.

“Not exactly, but we did meet during a murder investigation,” Margaret replied.

“He is a police inspector,” Rachel said. “I assume he is also friends with Daniel Robinson, Fenella’s new husband.”

“He and Daniel are friends,” Margaret said.

“He’s very handsome,” Rachel said. “And he’s very smart. I’d be tempted to get myself arrested by him if he were still available.”

“I don’t think that would be a good way to meet the man,” Joney said.

Rachel shrugged. “It has to be better than internet dating.”

They were all still laughing when the waiter delivered their food.

“So how are you finding the island so far?” Joney asked Margaret after everyone had taken a few bites.

“So far, I love it. Aunt Fenella took me around some of the historical sites, but I want to visit them all again. I’m fascinated by the island’s history and culture. Besides that, I love the slightly slower pace of life here. I’ve lived in a number of big cities. I don’t miss them.”

“If Fenella is your aunt, does that mean that she has brothers and sisters?” Rachel asked.

“Brothers, anyway,” Margaret said. “Aunt Fenella has four older brothers. My father is the second oldest.”

“I can’t imagine having four older brothers,” Rachel said.

“They’re quite a bit older,” Margaret told them. “Aunt Fenella is ten or eleven years younger than the next youngest. They were all in their teens or nearly when the family moved to the US. Aunt Fenella was only two, though.”

“I didn’t realize that your aunt was born on the island,” Arthur said.

Margaret nodded. “Her mother was Manx, but her father was American. Apparently, they were planning to move before Fenella was born, but then her mother got pregnant, so they waited until Fenella was two to go.”

“But you weren’t born here,” Rachel said.

“No, but my father was seventeen when they moved. He used to tell me and Megan stories about the island when we were children. That’s probably why it feels familiar, even though I’d never been here before. I’d heard about the castles and glens and other things before I ever saw them.”

“And since he’d lived on the island for seventeen years, he was able to give you Manx citizenship,” Joney said.

“And the right to work here, too,” Margaret said.

“Which is good for us,” Arthur said. “Although I’m pretty sure we could have secured a work permit for you if we’d needed one. There aren’t many people on the island with your qualifications.”

They finished eating and then ordered dessert.

“You’ve asked about me, but I don’t know anything about any of you,” Margaret said after the waiter had delivered their desserts.

“I’m Arthur Park. I started my little business thirty-seven years ago with a vague hope of not having to give up and beg for my old job back, at least not immediately. I’ve been married for forty years to my lovely wife, Gloria, who is doing

everything she can to keep me alive forever by feeding me nothing but vegetables and whole grains. I love her, anyway.”

They all laughed as he took a big bite of chocolate cake.

“The food is wonderful here,” Margaret said.

Arthur nodded. “It’s very good. But where was I? Oh, yes, Gloria and I have two sons, Alan and George. I’m a very proud father who could talk all day about my children, but I’ll try to keep this short. Alan is a veterinarian at Chester Zoo. He’s done everything from emergency surgery on a sea turtle to splinting a broken leg on a cheetah. He loves his job and I love hearing about it.”

“It sounds amazing,” Margaret said.

“Don’t get him started,” Joney said in a loud whisper, winking at Margaret.

Arthur chuckled. “I’ll stop there, but if you ever want to hear more, you know where to find me. Alan has a lovely wife called Jennifer and they have two boys, Josh, who is ten, and Brady, who is eight. Jennifer has been at home since Josh arrived, but she’s been talking about going back to work recently. She’s also a vet. They met in school, but she’s always worked with small domestic animals.”

“That seems safer than working with cheetahs,” Margaret said.

“But so less exciting,” Arthur told her.

“I’m not sure I want that sort of excitement in my life,” Margaret replied with a laugh.

“And then there’s George, who has a PhD in biochemistry and works for a pharmaceutical company,” Arthur continued. “That’s about all I can tell you about what he does. It’s all very complicated stuff. You’d probably understand more of it than I do.”

“Maybe,” Margaret said.

“He’s currently single. He was in a long-term relationship with a lovely man called Harvey, but Harvey had to move back to the US to help take care of his mother and George

didn't want to go with him. The last time we spoke, George told me that he's enjoying being single at the moment. We'll see how long that lasts."

"Am I next?" Joney asked as Arthur took another bite of cake.

He nodded.

Joney grinned. "I think I already told you some of this. I've worked for Arthur from the very beginning. My husband is Ronald and we've been together forever. We never had children. I sometimes wonder if we should have tried harder, but I don't really have any regrets. Ronald's brother had two kids, and we've always done our best to spoil them. That's just about it, really."

"Oh, me?" Rachel laughed. "I've been working for Arthur since I graduated from university. I went across to Liverpool to get my degree and when I left the island, I swore I was never coming back. After I finished though, I struggled to find a job. My mother convinced me to move back here for a year or two to get some experience. Arthur hired me as a sort of junior assistant manager right after I got back, and I've been here ever since."

"And you've never once regretted not going back across," Joney said.

"Staying here was the right decision. My mother fell ill not long after I returned. I'm very glad I was able to be with her during her final few years. Then it was my father's turn to have health issues. Fortunately, he recovered. Then he married his nurse, and they ran away to Portugal together."

"Wow," Margaret said.

Rachel chuckled. "They're very happy together, and I'm thrilled for them. Mum put Dad through a lot. He deserves to be happy again. I deserve to be happy too, but I make terrible choices when it comes to men."

"She does," Joney agreed.

Arthur nodded.

Rachel shrugged. “I’ve been married and divorced twice. My first marriage only lasted for three months. I came home from work one day and found him in bed with our next-door neighbor. She was more apologetic than he was, really. I still live next door to her, too.”

“I want to say wow again,” Margaret said.

“Rachel’s life is like that,” Joney said.

“I kicked him out, of course, and I decided to stay single. Two years later, I met my second husband.”

“We warned you,” Joney said.

“He was handsome and smart and funny and sophisticated,” Rachel said.

“And lying through his teeth about everything,” Joney added.

Rachel shrugged. “We had six amazing months together before it all came crashing down. It took me two years to pay off the bills he’d run up in my name. He tried to do a lot more than that, but it’s a small island. Too many people knew me and were looking out for me.”

“That’s good to hear,” Margaret said.

“I’ve been single ever since. That’s ten years, if anyone is counting,” Rachel said. “And ninety-nine percent of the time, I’m very happy being single. Just once in a while, though, I’d like to go out for a nice meal with an interesting man. It might be fun to go to a movie and hold hands with an attractive someone. I’m not interested in getting married again. I don’t want children. I’d just like to go out now and again with someone who makes me feel beautiful and alive.”

“I can understand that,” Margaret said. “Although I do want to get married and have children, too.”

Rachel shrugged. “And you have Ted. He might need some time, but I’m sure he wants a wife and children. We went out a few times twenty years ago. I could tell that about him back then.”

“You dated Ted?” Margaret asked, trying to keep her tone neutral.

“Just once or twice. It was never anything serious. I had already met the man who was going to be my first husband. We decided to stop seeing other people very quickly, so I ended things with Ted before they even got started. Of course, my future husband didn’t bother to end his other relationships, but I didn’t know that at the time.”

Joney put a hand on Margaret’s arm. “It’s a very small island. You’ll probably meet every one of Ted’s former girlfriends over the next six months.”

“And I don’t even count as a former girlfriend,” Rachel added. “We never got that far.”

“Life on a small island is going to be very different,” Margaret said.

“But you’re going to love it,” Joney told her.

After lunch they walked back to the office together. Margaret went back to reading reports for the rest of the afternoon. When it got to five o’clock, she walked down the hall to Arthur’s office.

“We finish at five, right?” she asked from the open doorway.

He nodded. “Or whenever. Don’t feel as if you have to stay at your desk every night until exactly five. I might not have much work for you right away.”

“I need to talk to you about that,” Margaret said. “I’ve finished reading the reports, and I have some questions and concerns about some of the findings. I’d like to run some of my own tests.”

“By all means, test whatever you’d like. I was hoping the reports would take you longer, really. I don’t have anything else for you to do this week.”

Margaret grinned. “I have plenty to do this week, based on what I’ve read.”

“Excellent. You can get started in the morning.”

Rachel had already left for the day. Margaret had a quick chat with Joney before she headed for her car. She'd driven Mona's fancy red sports car to work that day, but as she started the engine, she felt guilty for driving the fun but rare and very valuable car.

"Aunt Fenella asked me to drive both of her cars while she was away," she muttered under her breath as she headed toward home. "I should save this one for special occasions, though," she added as the little car seemed to fly along the road.

She parked it in the garage under her apartment building what felt like just moments later. When she got out, she patted the hood. "Maybe not tomorrow, but we'll go out again soon," she promised the little car. The quick honk had to have come from somewhere else in the garage, Margaret told herself as she headed for the elevator.

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[Aunt Bessie Meets](#)

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[Aunt Bessie Provides](#)

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[Aunt Bessie Remembers](#)

[Aunt Bessie Solves](#)

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[Aunt Bessie Understands](#)

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[Aunt Bessie Wonders](#)

[Aunt Bessie's X-Ray](#)

[Aunt Bessie Yearns](#)

[Aunt Bessie Zeroes In](#)

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[DEF](#)

[GHI](#)

[JKL](#)

[MNO](#)

[PQR](#)

[STU](#)

[VWX](#)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diana has been self-publishing since 2013, and she feels surprised and delighted to have found readers who enjoy the stories and characters that she imagines. Always an avid reader, she still loves nothing more than getting lost in fictional worlds, her own or others!

After being raised in Erie, Pennsylvania, and studying history at Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania, Diana pursued a career in college administration. She was living and working in Washington, DC, when she met her future husband, an Englishman who was visiting the city.

Following her marriage, Diana moved to Derbyshire. A short while later, she and her husband relocated to the Isle of Man. After ten years on the island, during which Diana earned a Master's degree in the island's history, they made the decision to relocate again, this time to the US.

Now living near Buffalo, New York, Diana and her husband live with their daughter, a student at the University at Buffalo. Their son is now living and working just outside of Boston, Massachusetts, giving Diana an excuse to travel now and again.

Diana also writes mystery/thrillers set in the not-too-distant future as Diana X. Dunn and Young Adult fiction as D.X. Dunn.

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