

Across the Pond

By Bill Newman

Chapter 1 - Leading from the Front

(Wednesday August 28, 2002)

Arlenton knocked on Inspector Louden's office door and entered without waiting for an acknowledgement.

Louden had been expecting her. "Sit down, Jane," he said.

Arlenton smiled. "Anywhere?"

Louden's office could be described as closet-like. The desk and filing cabinets occupied most of the space, and he had only one guest chair. A second visitor usually had to sit on a three-foot high steel cabinet in which Louden kept his sensitive material. Even that perch would have to be shared with Louden's coffeemaker.

Louden ignored Arlenton's sarcasm. "Looks like you won't be needed to testify in the McWatton murders case; she's pleading guilty. So I want you to be the lead field officer on a homicide that just came up."

"Is that a promotion, sir?"

"We'll see how you make out."

Arlenton had worked for Louden for only five months. He'd gone out of his way to get her onto his team of detectives, mainly because she'd shown she had bags of initiative and, when she had been a uniformed officer, had demonstrated that she understood the criminal mind, too. Louden liked to tell his peers he valued the fact that she had a law degree. But most of his colleagues joked that he'd picked her because he wanted to have a good-looking woman around. The green-eyed brunette met that criterion, too, even though she was too muscular to be a swimsuit model.

"I'm batting two-for-two on—"

"God, Arlenton, your ego is worse than some of the guys. And, yeah, your record is the reason I want you to take this job. You may have heard Napoleon's famous saying—"

"If you want to lead people, you have to stand behind them."

Louden smiled. "No, well, yes he did say that, but I was thinking of his observation that he preferred his generals to be lucky rather than skillful."

"Touché, sir, I'll keep my rabbit's foot in my purse."

"Good idea. On this case, however, Sergeant Patterson will not be part of the team."

Arlenton had worked with Patterson on her two previous murder cases. Around the division, it was common knowledge that they had an intimate relationship.

“Didn’t expect him to be, sir. Who *is* in charge?”

“Takahashi. You two seemed to work well together on McWatton case.”

“Yeah, I like Fred. Good guy.”

“I’ll get him in here,” Louden said. He picked up his phone.

Fred Takahashi arrived in less than a minute. With no chair available Takahashi had to plant his considerable bulk on the filing cabinet. He handed Arlenton a file. The name Anne Francis was printed on the front of it.

“What were the circumstances?” Arlenton asked.

“Murdered at home,” Takahashi said. “A neighbor found the door open. There had been no forced entry, but the place had been ransacked.”

“Robbery?”

“Doesn’t look like it. The crime-scene boys found her jewelry box untouched and about six hundred dollars in cash.”

“Perhaps the murderer was looking for drugs,” Arlenton said, although not really believing it; an addict would have taken the money.

“The victim was a middle-aged woman with not so much as a parking ticket on her record. Anyway, I’ll let you figure out what the perpetrator’s purpose was,” Takahashi said.

“What resources do we have?” Arlenton addressed the question to Inspector Louden.

“Usual major crimes team, plus as many uniformed guys as you need to do the routine legwork. Fred has requested that Dave Smythe join you again.”

“I’ve not been the official lead field officer before. How much freedom does that give me?”

“Fred will provide the direction,” Louden replied. “We know you do your best work in the trenches, so to speak. As, indeed, your last two homicide cases proved. And if you’ll forgive me for continuing with the military metaphor, I’m sure you can provide leadership from the front.”

Arlenton looked at Takahashi. He smiled but said nothing.

Chapter 2 - Heiress

Takahashi and Arlenton drove to Anne Francis’s home. Situated close to the St. Clair West transit station, the three-thousand square foot house had been built in the fifties. The lot had a long driveway, and two massive oaks that shaded the front yard, each one flanking the house close to the left and right property lines.

Even though the brown brick dwelling looked unspectacular, Arlenton reckoned that, in this neighborhood, the property would fetch a million and a half dollars.

Mrs. Francis's daughter, Mary, met them on the sidewalk at the front of the lot, outside of the yellow police tape that barred entry to civilians. The two officers introduced themselves.

Mary appeared to have rushed straight there. She wore a pair of faded jeans and the top half of a jogging suit. Her straw colored hair hung limply down to her shoulders, and she either never wore makeup or hadn't bothered to apply any before leaving home. However, the lack of attention to her appearance didn't detract from her pretty face, and the tight jeans revealed a slender figure.

The crime-scene officer, Harrington, chose that moment to exit the front door and join them. Takahashi showed him his badge.

"It's all yours," Harrington said. "I'll send my report to..."

"Dave Smythe is the file officer," Takahashi said.

"Right."

Harrington removed his disposable protective suit, placed it in the trunk of his car, and drove off.

"He'll find my DNA in there," Mary said.

"Yes ma'am, that's why he took a swab from you," Takahashi said. "I assume he did?"

"Earlier, yes, in the police van." She gestured towards the white crime-scene van parked in the driveway. "And my fingerprints."

Arlenton wondered if Mary's comments reflected a concern that she was a suspect. The woman didn't seem to be very upset or surprised that her mother had just been murdered. But Arlenton had seen relatives in these circumstances before. Disbelief, shock, relief, horror and debilitating grief, their reaction was not a reliable indicator of their involvement in the crime. Arlenton would have described Mary's reaction as cold, detached or indifferent, still at the first or second stage, in other words.

"Can you come in with us, Ms. Francis? I'd like to know what was disturbed and what might be missing," Takahashi said.

"Officer, can I ask you something and expect an honest reply?"

"I'll try," he replied.

"Am I a suspect?"

He acted surprised at the question by half opening his mouth then closing it again. "I don't know. Why would you want to kill your mother?"

"I didn't, and I had no reason to. It's just that I've seen enough TV cop programs to know you always suspect family first."

“We do.” Takahashi ducked under the tape and held it for Mary and Arlenton. “But not unless there’s a compelling motive.”

They walked up to the house and entered.

Arlenton could see no evidence the place had been ransacked until they reached the kitchen. Someone had opened every drawer and cupboard and emptied the contents onto the floor. The intruder had even emptied the fridge.

Arlenton looked at Takahashi. He nodded. On the drive to Anne Francis’s house they’d established the protocol of questioning. You’re the boss, Takahashi had told her. She weighed in. “Did your mother hide anything valuable here?”

“Not that I know of. She has a study upstairs where she keeps her computer and her filing cabinet. Anything valuable would be in there or in her bedroom, which is where she keeps her jewelry.”

Upstairs, the dead woman’s study had been given the same treatment the kitchen had received. “Any idea what your mother might have had that was so interesting?”

“No. That cabinet contains her documents,” Mary said, pointing to it.

“And they’re now on the floor,” Arlenton said. She gathered them up: bank, credit card, and stock portfolio statements; receipts; property records; income tax returns; and even a will. Arlenton opened the will.

“I have a copy,” Mary said. “It states that everything goes to me. I’m the only child. Daddy died two years ago.”

“How much do you inherit?”

“If you include the value of this house, about four million. Oh, plus the life insurance. Not sure how much that is.”

They wandered into Anne Francis’s bedroom. It, too, had been turned upside down. The perpetrator had obviously looked under the mattress and had pulled out the drawers from the closet. A diary lay on the floor.

“Sorry to ask these questions, Ms. Francis,” Arlenton said, mainly to remind herself that she was dealing with a daughter who just lost her only remaining parent.

“Don’t apologize. Anything I can do to help catch the bastard, officer. So ask away.”

“Where did your father’s money come from?”

“My father was a doctor and pretty frugal; he’d set himself the goal of retiring at fifty-five.”

“How old was he?”

“Fifty, about eight years older than Mom. He left me a half a million dollars in his will; Mom got the rest.”

“Good provider, your dad. Are you married? Kids?”

“No to both. I’m only twenty-one.”

“Oh, yes. Do you have any other family?”

“You mean blood relatives?”

“Yes.”

“I have an aunt, and some cousins, but they all live in England. That’s where my parents came from.”

“Still keep in touch with them?”

“Only Mom’s sister, my aunt Joan.”

Arlenton made a note of the name and the address Mary supplied for her aunt. She decided to stop there and give Mary some private time. “Is there anything I can do?”

Mary said there wasn’t. As they departed, Arlenton wondered how she’d get to interview Aunt Joan. Perhaps she’d come over for the funeral.

Chapter 3 - Fast Track

(August 29)

“What are you reading?” Patterson said. He’d come up behind Arlenton and peered over her shoulder as she sat at her desk. “But before you answer that, what’s with the voice mail canceling our date last night?”

She swiveled her chair so that she faced him. “Sorry, this homicide came up. I’m the head honcho on it.”

“What! Louden’s given you the lead in a major crime?”

“Not quite. Lead field officer.”

“It took me four years to get there.”

Jim Patterson and Arlenton had first met when she’d been assigned to assist him on the case of a man found dead in a downtown hotel. She had initially butted heads with Patterson, by insisting that the victim’s supposedly accidental death was in fact murder.

She smiled. “Remember who solved the Grebbs case?”

“Yeah, beginner’s luck,” Patterson said.

“But I was right in the end, and I caught the guy.”

“Even so, you’ve only been on the job...”

“Five months. I’m a quick learner.”

Patterson grunted, but then smiled. “Can you let me win an argument sometimes?” Arlenton was also his girlfriend, and their competitiveness, even with the lighthearted banter, kept them both wanting to have the last word.

“Anyway, did Louden say why he put you in the lead investigator position?”

“In a roundabout sort of way he did. Why don’t you ask him?”

“I know what he’ll say. Jane’s on the fast track.”

“Hey, it’s not my fault.” She knew he wasn’t jealous, just that he enjoyed teasing her.

Patterson shrugged. “So what’s going on?”

“I’m reading Harrington’s initial report on the crime scene. A woman was found dead in her house.”

“How did she die?”

“The coroner’s report isn’t in yet, but a bruise indicates she was knocked out by a blow to the jaw, and then asphyxiated by putting a garbage bag over her head and tying it with a bootlace. Her hands were bound behind her back with an identical bootlace, which Harrington speculated was done in case she regained consciousness before running out of oxygen.”

“Clinical,” Patterson said. “Almost professional.”

“The killer must have brought both the garbage bag and the pair of bootlaces with him, again, speculation on Harrington’s part, but they don’t match anything in the house.”

“Yeah, Harrington’s probably correct,” Patterson said. “The killer wouldn’t want to go rummaging around trying to find them, and they’re items that would slip easily into a pocket. Do you suspect someone close?”

“Not yet.”

“Any fingerprints on the garbage bag?” Patterson asked.

“No.”

“Had she regained consciousness?”

“Harrington concluded that she hadn’t, because of the position of the body.”

“Well, I suppose that’s something,” Patterson said.

“Huh?”

“Means she died without knowing what was going on. Any suspects so far?”

“Not really.”

Arlenton told him about Anne Francis’s daughter, Mary.

“Would she have committed murder in order to get her hands on the four million dollars?” Patterson asked.

“She doesn’t seem to be the type to have killed her mother that way. It was definitely a premeditated murder.”

“Well, she could have been planning it for some time. Not all family killings take place in the heat of the moment.”

Arlenton gave Patterson’s comment some thought. She scribbled a note to herself.

Patterson continued. "But she might have hired someone to do it for her, a lover, perhaps. Does she have one?"

"I don't know yet. I was just going to start on the dead woman's diary."

"Sorry, I—"

"No, you're not interrupting; it's useful to bounce ideas off you. You've already given me one extra possibility to pursue."

"Glad to be of service," he said, grinning. "I'll get out of your hair. But I'm in the office all day. Are you going to be around at lunchtime?"

"Yes, thanks for the offer to buy me lunch," Arlenton said.

"I don't recall I did."

"And you can fill me in on your caseload for a change," Arlenton said. "I'll give you some help with it."

Patterson laughed as he walked off.

She watched him go. Even in his working pants, she still found that his cute ass turned her on. The thought was guilt-free. She knew they both regarded the relationship as mainly-for-sex and not-yet-committed.

Chapter 4 - Dear Diary

Arlenton had removed various items from Anne Francis's house: the dead woman's keys, a diary, her wallet, address book, and day-planner. She had them tagged as evidence and then brought them back to her office, along with a large Colombian coffee. Feet on desk, in a most unladylike pose, she settled down to read the diary, sipping occasionally on the hot beverage.

The diary was a hardback notebook with numbered pages. On the front of it Anne Francis had written "Aug 2001 to." The crime scene report said they'd discovered five similar diaries in the house, starting with "January 1988 to March 1991." Inside the current diary, entries were dated but appeared to be made at random intervals, one to five days apart. She had dated the last one August 25, 2002—four days earlier.

Won the monthly tennis tournament today. My partner was Graham. Not played with him before but apparently he's the best player in the forty-to-fifty age group. After the tournament he asked me out for dinner (tomorrow). He's divorced, of course. Most of the men I meet are. I find that I'm still comparing them to Alan. But I won't settle for less. Thank God I have Mary. I

hope she gets married soon and has a family. But there's no man on her horizon yet.

Arlenton was about to turn back to the previous entry but noticed that the page numbers weren't in sequence. The entry she'd just finished reading was on page 174, but the next page was 177. She folded the covers of the journal back, cracking the spine. The remains of the missing page were just visible, as though someone had sliced out the page with a sharp knife.

By the time Arlenton had finished making notes on Anne Francis's diary entries, it was seven o'clock. Dave Smythe had gone to a pre-season parents' meeting for his son's hockey team. Takahashi pleaded starvation, so she met with him in the cafeteria.

She'd worked with Fred Takahashi on her previous case: a serial killer. Takahashi, a BC native, had followed his family east to Toronto where he'd studied law enforcement at community college. Now a ten-year veteran with the Toronto police, he'd been a detective for five of those years. Arlenton liked Sumo Fred, as he was known. Her comment to Loudon about wanting to work with Takahashi had been genuine. She knew that a team that worked well together got results.

"Guess what?" Takahashi said. "Nobody in the neighborhood had anything bad to say about the late Mrs. Francis. A few of them said she was a bit reserved, but they put that down to her being British."

"A well known fallacy," Arlenton said. "Had any of them ever been inside the house?"

"Yes, when her husband was alive, for dinner parties."

"I assume he died of natural causes?" she asked.

"He did, if being a workaholic counts as natural."

"What did he actually die of?"

"Brain hemorrhage caused by an aneurism. Not sure what that is exactly."

"If the wall of a blood vessel is weak, it can balloon out and then break,"

Arlenton said. "Probably exacerbated by high blood pressure, typical in workaholics."

Takahashi smiled. "Remind me to sign you up as the phone-a-friend if I'm ever stuck with a question on *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*. So not much chance of foul play there. Were you thinking that the daughter was getting revenge on mommy for killing daddy?"

"It had crossed my mind. The daughter struck me as something of a cold fish."

"Me too. Anything useful from the stuff you retrieved?"

“Her diary identifies a guy called Graham at the tennis club. Can you ask someone to track him down and have a word with him? And while they’re at it, see who her close friends were at the club.”

Takahashi put down the slice of pizza he was eating and made a note of this. “Is this Graham guy a possible suspect?”

“Maybe. But he’s the last person she mentions in her diary, although the page following the Graham entry is missing.”

“Well, he couldn’t have removed it,” Takahashi said. “Otherwise he’d have taken out the reference to him, too.”

“That’s true, I suppose,” Arlenton said, shaking her head. “But on the other hand, he’d know we’d find him anyway. Then we’d be suspicious about the missing pages.”

“Why not remove the diary itself?”

“Same argument. He’d have to take all of the diaries, but Mary knew they existed, so that’d be a problem, too. Let’s hear what Graham has to say.”

“Okay, anything else?” Takahashi asked.

“Anne’s key ring has one that looked like it might open a safe deposit box. I checked with her bank; she did rent a box.”

“I think Mary’s will have to be there. I’ll get Dave Smythe to rustle up the paperwork.”

“Thanks, Fred. Could you also ask him to check to see if Mary Francis was into Karate or any similar self-defense discipline?”

Takahashi scratched his nose. Arlenton knew this meant he wanted to know what her interest in this information was. “Think she killed her mother?”

“We first have to find out if she could.”

Chapter 5 - Pandora’s Box

Arlenton led Mary Francis to one of the small conference rooms at the station.

“How are you coping, Mary? Are you sure you’re okay to talk?”

“I’m fine. Are you any closer to catching the guy?”

Arlenton didn’t comment on Mary attributing her mother’s murder to a man. “Did she have any enemies? Or can you think of anything she might have done that would have seriously upset someone?”

“Mom?” Mary said, as though verifying that they were both talking about the same person. “No, of course not.”

“What work did she do?”

“She was a nurse. She trained in a Manchester hospital, in England. And carried on with it when they came here.”

“Is that how she met your father?”

“Yes. He was an orthopedic surgeon at the same hospital. He came to Toronto for a conference, and was offered a job at Sick Kids.”

Sick Kids’ real name was The Hospital for Sick Children. Arlenton wondered why it was named that way. Weren’t all children in a hospital likely to be sick?

“Did your mother work there, too?”

“No. She was at the Queen Victoria Hospital.

“Do you know if there were ever any malpractice charges against her?”

“I don’t think so, but you can check that with the hospital. She never mentioned it.”

“Can you think of anyone from her past life who might harbor a grievance?”

“Her past life in England?”

“Yes.”

“I doubt it. But that would have been twenty-three years ago. Before I was born.”

“Were you born in England?”

“No, Mom got pregnant after they arrived. She stayed at home until I was six, then worked part time at the hospital. She retired when Dad died. Didn’t need the money, did she?”

“No, I guess not. Would any of your relatives know anything about a vendetta against your mother?”

“Aunt Joan might know; she was closest to her. She often came to Canada and we’d go to England to see her every few years. Mom said Aunt Joan was heartbroken when they emigrated.”

“Was she annoyed with your mother?”

“Oh, no, she got over it. And, as I said, she regularly came to see us. Mom told me that Aunt Joan felt a bit deserted at first. But then she realized how easy it was to make the trip. She had plenty of money.”

It didn’t sound like Aunt Joan was a very credible suspect, and Arlenton was disappointed that Mary could think of no one who might bear a grudge. “I’ll have more questions, Mary, but first I’d like to get your permission to open your mother’s safe deposit box. We can get a court order, but it’s easier if I have your agreement, and that of the executor of your mother’s estate. We’ve already asked the executor and he’s signed the form.”

Arlenton showed the form to Mary.

“Where do I sign?”

“No, wait until we see what’s in the box. The items in there might be needed as evidence. Then you can sign the form and put your initials against each item I remove. Oh, and talking of evidence, did you know your mother kept diaries?”

“Yes, I did. If you’ve taken them, I’d like them returned as soon as possible.”

“Of course, when we’ve finished with them. Do you know what she wrote in them?”

“No, not exactly, but...” Mary’s face turned red.

Arlenton held up her hand. “I understand,” she said. “No need to explain.”

* * * *

At the bank, the manager gave them an empty office to use. Arlenton had taken a uniformed policewoman along with them as a witness.

Mary put the steel box on the desk and sat down. She pulled out the items one at a time, inspected them, and passed them to Arlenton, who had sat down beside her. First came various certificates: birth, marriage, and citizenship, as well as her father’s death certificate. Arlenton looked at Mary’s mother’s birth certificate. It identified her as Anne Edwards, born in 1959 in Portsmouth, Hampshire. Arlenton made a note of Anne’s birth name and birth date.

“What next?” Arlenton asked.

“Passports, one current, three expired. Oh, and a felt bag with...” She looked inside. “Her wedding ring and engagement ring.”

Arlenton wasn’t interested in the rings but flicked through Anne’s current passport. It contained entry stamps for the UK and the Dominican Republic.

“Dominican Republic? Was that a vacation?”

“Yes, their last vacation before dad died.” Mary’s eyes misted over. She blew her nose then continued to pull documents from the box like a conjuror would from a hat. “More boring stuff, house insurance, oh, and here’s her life insurance policy.”

Arlenton opened it to reveal another half a million dollars for the suddenly wealthy Ms. Francis. She handed it to Mary. “Don’t lose that; you’re the only named beneficiary.”

Mary had a quick look at it and put it back on the pile. “This is the last item, a paperback, *Goldfinger*. I didn’t know she read Ian Fleming. I wonder why she kept it locked up?”

“It may have been a gift or a memento of some special event,” Arlenton said.

“Yes, must be, otherwise why would it be here?” Mary opened it and turned the pages. “Oh!”

“What?”

Mary handed the book to Arlenton, open at the first page. Arlenton read it and scanned the next few pages. “I’ll keep this,” she said. On the evidence form she

wrote “Notebook—disguised with cover of the novel *Goldfinger*.” She passed the form to Mary. “Please sign it and initial where I’ve indicated, to verify that a single piece of evidence has been removed.”

Mary did as she was told.

Arlenton signed the form and passed it to the other officer to witness. She slid the rest of the items back across the table with a sweep of her arm. “These can go back in the box.”

Chapter 6 - Little Black Book

Arlenton put the latest piece of evidence in her bag and drove home to her two-bedroom Lakeshore condominium.

Her home could be described as being beyond her visible means. It represented the best 1500 square feet of Torontonion accommodation money could buy. “Can’t have you living in squalor,” her mother had said when she’d seen Arlenton’s first apartment. Arlenton had to admit that the twentieth floor lake view, twelve-foot ceilings, granite topped counters, and stainless steel European appliances were an improvement on her previous apartment. The fireplace was a bonus. Its simulated logs were gas-fired, of course, but still cozy to sit beside on a winter’s day.

The place came courtesy of Arlenton’s trust fund. Her parents had set it up when she had been born, with the proviso that it not be touched until she was eighteen. Even at that age, her parents had set a twenty-thousand dollar limit that could be drawn on it to pay for her education. Now, at twenty-nine, and free to spend it at her own discretion, she still drew modest amounts from it, enough to pay the mortgage on the condo.

Her parents’ money worried her sometimes, but what was she supposed to do? Live the life of a playgirl? The Toronto Police Service’s motto said it well, “To Serve and Protect.” She felt she was paying her way in society.

She made a pot of coffee and sat down with the book she’d liberated from Anne’s safe deposit box. The *Goldfinger* covers and spine had been pasted onto a pocket-sized notebook whose original covers had been removed. If someone wanted to hide the volume in plain sight in a bookcase, for example, the new cover provided an effective camouflage.

The notebook had once belonged to a man called John Jamison, who had written his name on the first page. He’d also added his address and phone number in Portsmouth, England. Underneath the address, a note in block capitals said that

upon return, a reward of £25 would be given to the finder of it. And to emphasize the point he'd added "No questions asked."

Curious, Arlenton Googled the 1979 currency conversion table. The reward came to about sixty-five dollars. In today's money it would be about three-hundred, she estimated. Was the information in the book that valuable to him?

She read on. The book catalogued John Jamison's conquests. Each woman occupied one page. Their descriptions included physical characteristics, ability in the sack, brainpower, and sense of humor, as well as age, address, and phone number. For each entry, he had added a paragraph that gave his assessment of the woman's suitability for marriage. It looked as though the "suitability for marriage" piece had been added later, because in most cases it had been written with a different pen. Presumably, Arlenton thought, after he'd tasted the fruits of that particular conquest. At the bottom of each page, he'd recorded the date.

Ursula had been his last and thirty-fifth woman. The entry for her had not been completed, because the assessment of her sexual ability and his assessment of her suitability as a possible spouse were missing. The page had not been dated, either.

Arlenton concluded Ursula must have been his girlfriend when Anne gained possession of the book. And who changed the cover: Jamison to prevent girlfriends from finding it, or Anne to hide the book after she'd acquired it? When was that? She turned back a page to the woman before Ursula. The date recorded was "22 May 79."

Anne Francis occupied the number thirty-three slot. Jamison had entered her under her maiden name, Anne Edwards. He had said about her, "My second virgin, and hence not that great in bed. Ambitious, clever, and appears to want kids, but overpoweringly bossy. Seemed to have severe case of PMS most of the time I was with her."

Not very flattering. Arlenton wondered why Anne hadn't burnt the notebook long ago. Or had it only recently come into her possession? Arlenton smiled. Perhaps Anne had planned to contact Jamison to collect the no-questions-asked reward. I doubt it. Twenty-five pounds wouldn't even pay for the wine in the eating establishments a multimillionaire like Anne would frequent.

Arlenton phoned Takahashi to ask him to look for any reference to John Jamison in Anne Francis's address book. Now that she was a widow, had she wanted to reestablish romantic contact with her former lover?

He called her back ten minutes later. "There's no Jamison. Give me his last known address, and I'll get hold of him."

* * * *

The following day, Arlenton and Takahashi reconvened in the cafeteria with Dave Smythe, the file officer.

“I’ll go first,” Takahashi said.

“Hold it a moment,” Arlenton waved a piece of paper. “While I remember it, I have to give Dave this. It’s the evidence form signed by Mary Francis.”

Arlenton handed it over.

Smythe studied it. “Notebook?”

“I’ll get to it when it’s my turn.”

Smythe slipped the evidence form into a folder then returned his attention to his cream cheese bagel.

Takahashi looked down at his notes. “Graham, the dead woman’s tennis partner, and erstwhile date, is Graham Sunderland, a sergeant over at 52-Division. He was on duty the night Anne died, so I think we can rule him out as a suspect. He said they’d only been out once, to dinner, and during it, she hadn’t revealed that anyone was gunning for her. I think he told me that tongue-in-cheek. His opinion of Anne was that she still mourned her dead husband. He said she’d spent most of the evening talking about him. Sunderland said he found it to be a complete turn-off, and hadn’t intended going out with her again.”

Arlenton frowned. “So much for that lead. What about Jamison?”

Takahashi continued. “I checked with the Brits. We can also rule him out as a suspect, because he’s dead. He was murdered, back in 1979.”

“Murdered!” Arlenton’s eyes widened. “Yikes, what are we getting into here?”

“Yeah, that’s what I thought.”

“Do you have the name of anyone I can talk to over there about the murder?”

“Yes, the cop I spoke to offered the name of Mick Painter. He’s retired now. He was the detective sergeant in charge of the case back then. He still lives in the same Portsmouth area where Jamison lived... and died. Oh, and Anne Edwards, as she was known then, went to school in a place called Havant. It’s part of the Portsmouth metro area. I called this Mick Painter guy and told him you’d be contacting him today.”

“I will, indeed.”

“In the meantime, we’ll keep plugging away at the people in the address book we found on her bedside table,” Takahashi said.

Smythe frowned. “If some fieldwork needs to be done in England, Fred, don’t volunteer me. My wife would leave me.”

“Mine, too,” Takahashi said. “She’s expecting a baby.”

Arlenton smiled. “Oh, yeah, so she is. Now where did I put my passport?”

Chapter 7 - Murder on the South Coast

Before making the transatlantic call to the retired detective in England, Arlenton thought she'd better brush up on her geography of the British Isles. She'd been to London before but hadn't ventured into the hinterland. Nothing annoyed her more than foreigners who didn't know anything about Canada. She assumed the Brits would show a similar irritation at this failing in visitors, especially ones from the Commonwealth.

She spent an hour studying the *Lonely Planet* guide to Britain and another ten minutes with a map of Southeast England. The map included the part of the south coast where the peninsula of Portsmouth protrudes into the English Channel, although technically Portsmouth is an island.

"Hello, is that Mr. Painter?"

"Yes."

"Sorry to bother you, sir, my name is Jane Arlenton. I'm a detective constable with the Toronto Police Service."

"Yes, I got word from my former colleagues that you'd be calling. It's about the Jamison case, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's right. Sir, is it okay if I ask you some questions about the case?"

"Are you the lead investigator?"

"Yes."

"You sound rather young. Or perhaps it's just your accent."

"Probably. Sir, what can—"

"Stop calling me sir, Jane; I'm retired. My name is Mick."

"Mick, what can you tell me about the Jamison murder?"

"1979, that's a long while ago. I was forty at the time. Anyway, the short answer is we never solved it."

"Who were the main suspects? Or weren't there any?"

"Oh yes, we had plenty of suspects but they all had alibis."

"Who, specifically?"

"I'd need to pull the file to get you their full names, but I remember a woman called Tina who'd got pregnant by him. He persuaded her to get an abortion. Unfortunately, the poor girl couldn't have kids after that. I interviewed her. She was pretty pissed off with him, to put it mildly."

Arlenton made a note of the name. "Who else?"

"Another suspect was called Denise. I clearly remember her because she was... Well, you don't need to know what she looked like."

Arlenton guessed that Painter held a picture of Denise in his head. Something he might not do unless she was strikingly attractive. "What was her motive?"

“Denise, God, what was her surname? Nineteen she was back then. She told us he’d asked her to marry him. They got engaged, and then he dumped her. Denise was absolutely stunning...” Painter seemed to be incapable of preventing himself from making this point. “So we figured this Jamison character must have been a picky sort of fellow, although obviously none of us ever met him. Then there was a bloke who claimed Jamison had pulled some shady business stunt on him.”

“Sounds like a soap opera,” Arlenton said.

“Yeah, just like *EastEnders*. Do you get that series over there?”

“I’ve seen a couple of episodes,” Arlenton said.

“So you know what I mean. But I haven’t told you the best yet. Jamison’s next-door neighbor claimed she saw a small guy call at the house the night he was killed. So we wondered whether or not Jamison was bi-sexual, and a male lover killed him. We asked around but no one could identify any boyfriends. One of his pals said to me, ‘When would he have time? He was too busy chasing women.’”

“Or had the neighbor devised the false lead to throw you off?”

“Yeah, we went down that road, too. She had a motive, of sorts. She told us Jamison had never screwed her.” Painter laughed at this as if it reminded him of a joke that had been doing the rounds at the station.

“But what you’re saying is that none of these people had a strong enough reason to make you suspect that one of them had murdered him.”

“That’s right.”

“So it was left open?”

“Unfortunately, yes, it was one of only four unsolved murders in my whole career.”

“Four sounds impressive,” Arlenton said.

Painter laughed. “Thanks. So why the sudden interest in the Jamison case? Do you have anything that would cause us to reopen it?”

“Us? I thought you’d retired.”

“Ha, you Canadians have a sense of humor, I see. Seriously, *us* old farts are called upon occasionally to help out on cold cases. We even get a stipend for it. But you avoided my question.”

“Oh yeah, sorry. One of John Jamison’s old girlfriends was murdered in Toronto. We thought there might be a connection back to him.”

“I know you might not be able to tell me, but I assume you have evidence to implicate this girlfriend?”

“Possibly. I didn’t even know Jamison had been murdered until a few hours ago. I’ll tell you everything I know, but I’d rather do it face-to-face.”

“Hey, just send the ticket and agree to pay my expenses, and I’ll be there,” Painter said.

“I meant I’d like to come to England.”

“Yeah, I know, just kidding. What’s your victim’s name?”

“Anne Francis, but you would know her as Anne Edwards.”

“No, doesn’t ring a bell, but as I said, I’d have to look at the file again.”

“If I come over, would you be available to go through it with me?”

“I’d be only too pleased to. The local lads will have to okay it if I’m going to get paid.”

“Great. I appreciate it.”

“Do you know where Portsmouth is?”

Arlenton laughed. “How could I not know; it’s famous for Nelson, his flagship, *Victory*, and that ship you salvaged from the harbor. The *Mary Rose* was it?”

“Correct. It sounds as if you’ve been reading the guidebook. And you know how to get here?”

“Yes, thanks, but first I have to get my boss to approve the travel expenses.”

“Want me to initiate something? We’re always keen to close the books on a cold case.”

“Oh, great, that would help. But before you go, one last question. Jamison was clean, I take it?”

“He was, indeed. No drugs or any other criminal activities. Nothing apart from the business associate’s complaint I mentioned, but that wasn’t official.”

“Good. I’m looking forward to meeting you, Mick.”

“Me too.”

* * * *

Arlenton and Takahashi drove to Mary Francis’s apartment, a kilometer north of the 401, the highway that slices across the top of Toronto and serves as a gigantic parking lot during the morning and evening rush hours. As in fact it did today, but fortunately for the two officers, it was not part of their route.

The small one-bedroom apartment surprised Arlenton. Given that Mary had inherited half a million dollars from her father, she’d expected something more palatial. Arlenton and Takahashi sat down in the living room on a battered black leather couch that might have been a discard from Mary’s mother’s house.

Mary still wore no make-up but had washed her hair, transforming it into a shiny, bouncy mane. She sat opposite them, slumped in an armchair, and wearing a face that looked as though she had given herself a botox injection.

Arlenton decided to feed her the snippet that her mother's former boyfriend had been murdered. The murder was, after all, a matter of public record, and Mary would eventually see Jamison's little black book.

"John Jamison? No, never heard of him; who is he?"

"An old friend of your mother. He predated your dad by about a year. Are you sure your mom never mentioned his death?"

"A murder? No, I'd have remembered something like that. Does *your* mother talk about her ex-boyfriends?"

Arlenton couldn't imagine her own mother discussing her former beaux with her. "No, I guess not."

"Mine, neither, but when I was sixteen, I asked Mom what it was like to lose one's virginity. It was on the evening of my first date. I was dressed up and ready to leave the house. I remember that I wanted to shock her. You know what girls are like with their mothers at that age?"

Arlenton sighed. Yes, she did know. She glanced across at Takahashi. He stared at Mary, giving Arlenton the impression that this dialogue regarding the mother-daughter relationship was all new to him. "So what was your mother's reply?"

"You never forget the first one, she told me."

"And you never asked who it was?"

"No, my question hadn't had the desired effect, and I didn't want to open the door for her to ask me anything about my date."

Arlenton smiled. Been there, she thought. "Perhaps it was this Jamison guy."

"Yeah, I assumed that's what you were getting at," Mary replied.

* * * *

Smythe was still at the station when Arlenton and Takahashi returned from Mary's place. Takahashi grabbed a chair from the next cubicle, offered it to Arlenton then sat on the corner of Smythe's desk.

Arlenton related the conversation she'd had with the retired British detective and the chat that she and Fred Takahashi had had with Mary Francis. "There seems to be a lot that revolves around Jamison," she said. "I'd say he's definitely the key. Did you get that feeling, Fred?"

"It looks that way," Takahashi replied.

"You're going to need to get yourself over there," Smythe said.

"We should ask Loudon right now," Takahashi said. "Are you sure you're okay with it?"

Arlenton knew she was more than okay with it, excited at the prospect, even. “You’re the boss, Fred,” she said. “I’ll go, provided you both don’t think I’d be off on a boondoggle.”

“I hardly think so,” Takahashi said. “We’ve not got anything like a hot lead here. We’ll obviously keep the pressure up, but at the moment, Mary is the only person we have.”

“What do you make of her?” Arlenton asked.

“From the interview we just had, I got the feeling that she knows more than she’s letting on. Dave and I will tail her for a week or so.”

“And the funeral,” Arlenton said.

“Yeah, we’ll keep you informed on who shows up,” Takahashi said. “Oh, yes, her Aunt Joan. Mary said her aunt and her mom were close, so she’ll probably come over.”

Arlenton paused to think about Aunt Joan. If she departed immediately, she could catch her in England before she came over for the funeral.

“If she shows up, we should tail her, too,” Smythe said.

Arlenton was still pondering the point when Patterson wandered by. “Ah, there you are. Solved it yet? It’s been...” He looked at his watch. “Almost forty-eight hours.”

She threw a punch at him, pulling it back at the last moment. “It’s an international conspiracy,” she said. “Not one of your simple gangland killings.”

Patterson laughed. “I’ll take that as a no.”

“Give me five minutes, I’ll drop in,” Arlenton said.

Patterson left them to it.

“Aunt Joan,” Smythe said. “If she had put out a hit on her sister, she might use the funeral as cover to pay the guy.”

Arlenton noticed the smile on Dave Smythe’s face. “I know you’re joking about that, but, yes, it’s a good idea to keep an eye on her as well,” Arlenton said.

Arlenton caught up with Patterson in the office he shared with two other detectives.

“Are we still on for Labor Day?” he asked.

“Yeah, but since I’m hoping to go to England on Monday—”

“You’re doing what? I thought you were in the middle of a case.”

Arlenton gave him the bare bones of the Anne Francis file.

“Sounds like you’ll be solving their case, not yours,” Patterson said.

“Yeah, that had occurred to me, but at least it means I’ll get some cooperation.”

“Spoken to Inspector Loudon yet?”

“Fred and I are seeing him in ten minutes. Any tips on how we should handle it?”

“The point you made about getting their cooperation is a good one. If the clues all lead to England, then I don’t see how he could object. But before you go; Labor Day, what should I wear, and should I bring some wine?”

“Ha! My parents don’t stoop to drinking the wine you or I would buy. And casual is fine but don’t wear shorts. Oh, and I didn’t finish what I was going to say. If I go to England on Monday, I thought it better that we see them on Sunday.”

“You’ve already informed them that you’re moving Labor Day forward?”

“Yeah, but I haven’t told them I hope to be winging my way to England on Monday; I’ll surprise them with that.”

Takahashi and Arlenton stood in Louden’s office.

“Jane needs to go to England, sir,” Takahashi said.

Louden’s short-cropped hair was actually gray, but his tanned pate made him look fair-haired. The gray had been well earned. He worried about the job, day and night, and Takahashi’s request from left field could only add to the depigmentation process. “Oh? And you’re going to give me a good explanation, I assume?”

“It looks as though the murdered woman is somehow mixed up in the murder of a man in England. Our suspicion, at the moment, is that she knew who killed this guy.”

“And was murdered to keep her quiet?” Louden asked.

Arlenton jumped in. “Yes. We’re speculating that if I can find out who her old associates were, then it’s likely they’ll lead me to her killer.”

“I take it you’ve ruled out leads here in Toronto or even the rest of Canada.”

“Not ruled them out, sir,” Takahashi replied. “Smythe and I will continue to look at several possibilities. But Anne Francis’s background in England seems to be considerably murkier than her squeaky-clean life as a nurse and doctor’s wife here in Toronto.”

“You make the case sound like something Sherlock Holmes would get involved in.”

“It makes sense to start over there, sir,” Arlenton said.

“Unfortunately, I have to agree with you. My main concern is the expense.”

“We might actually be saving money,” Takahashi said.

Louden puffed his cheeks out and let the air escape slowly, a gesture that Arlenton had seen before and knew meant he was skeptical. She was glad that Takahashi had made the point. “Oh yeah?” Louden asked.

“The Brits will be helping us. I don’t think we’ll have to pay them,” Takahashi said.

“Sounds as if they should be paying us. Jane will be helping them with a cold case. Those ones always stick in the craw of the department.”

“You’re okaying it then, sir?” Arlenton asked.

* * * *

“How did Loudon take it?” Patterson asked. He lay on his side facing a supine Arlenton. They’d just made love.

“Oh, I thought you were going to ask me something intimate. Like, how it is that I can bring you to an incredible orgasm?”

“I know how you do it. How about an encore?”

“Yeah, are you up for it?” she asked.

“No, I meant tomorrow.” Arlenton put her hands between his legs and gave his balls a gentle squeeze. “Hey, careful. I meant we should have one last fling before you disappear. Might be quite a while before I see you again.”

“Yes, when we get home from my parents’ place.”

“I’m surprised that I’m getting a second invitation,” Patterson said. “I thought your mother would have vetoed your relationship with a divorced cop.”

“I’m twenty-nine and this is the twenty-first century,” Arlenton said, her voice rising. “And anyway, Dad likes you.”

“But Mom doesn’t?”

“Ever since I was fifteen, Mom has disapproved of all my boyfriends. With no exceptions.”

“Weren’t they good enough for you?”

“Apparently not,” Arlenton said, in a resigned tone of voice. “I’d have to bring home a guy who was a combination of Wayne Gretzky, Bill Gates, and Prince William before she’d come close to liking him.”

“Well, I do play hockey but I’m not wealthy or have royal blood.”

“You have other qualities that I like,” Arlenton said. She let her hand slip between his legs again. She felt his penis harden in her hand. She knew he wouldn’t have another orgasm, but he was hard enough to give her one. “But I don’t think I’ll mention those things to Mom.”

Chapter 8 - Sunday Barbecue

(Sunday, September 1)

Jim Patterson lounged on Arlenton's sofa, waiting for her to come out of the bathroom. She emerged wearing a short denim skirt, sandals and a sleeveless black cotton top. As usual, she'd eschewed make-up, apart from a layer of suntan lotion.

"You look great," Patterson said, launching himself out of his semi-reclining position with a leap that one might see in a kung-fu movie.

"Eager to get going, are we?"

"Seeing you dressed like that, I'm more inclined to drag you into the bedroom."

"If we're late, and I arrive looking like a skank, Mom will guess what we've been doing."

Patterson laughed. "Oh, you mean to say your dad still behaves the same way?"

"He probably isn't allowed to these days."

Arlenton retrieved a potted plant from the balcony and picked up her bag.

"Let's go before I'm tempted to take you up on your offer."

"The potted plant is likely to get lost in your parents' mansion, isn't it?"

"It's the thought that counts, believe it or not," Arlenton said. She noted the defensive tone in her own voice. She'd never really spent much money on presents for her parents. They were wealthy enough to have acquired every conceivable gadget, trinket, antique, and item of clothing that one could imagine. She knew they would have appreciated a gift of original art, but even that option was risky. "You know I don't like such-and-such an artist," her mother would say. On the other hand they didn't spend much on her either. She figured it was because they'd already been more than generous in setting up her trust fund.

Patterson drove them to Arlenton's parents' home in the Rosedale neighborhood, west of the Don Valley Parkway. In an already exclusive neighborhood, Arlenton's parents had purchased the adjacent lot to give themselves more breathing room. Patterson parked in front of the quadruple garage at the side of their house.

"Why doesn't your dad put the Ferrari in the garage?" Patterson asked.

"Don't know. He usually does. He's fussy about protecting it from the elements."

Patterson stood and gazed at it. "Yeah, I would be, too."

Arlenton grabbed his arm. "Stop drooling."

They walked around to the front door and rang the bell. Chloe, the Arlentons' live-in housekeeper, opened the door. She wasn't dressed in her normal starched uniform. Arlenton guessed that since this was a barbecue, her mother had allowed Chloe to dress in casual attire like the rest of them. She wore a pair of cut-off jeans and a tight white T-shirt bearing the words *Semper Fidelis*. "Hello, Jane," she said. "It's good to see you again, and... Jim."

“In the US Marines were you, Chloe?” Patterson asked.

“I believe the motto predates the marines, sir,” Chloe replied, slipping back into her habit of adopting a formal mode of address.

“Francis Drake’s era,” Arlenton said. She figured that Chloe wasn’t deferring to the US Marine Corps or Francis Drake but making a statement about her job. To Arlenton, it was the worst kind of occupation a woman could have, but she’d known her for a couple of years and come to the realization that Chloe did not have loftier ambitions.

Chloe’s Mona-Lisa-like smile seemed to indicate that she had read Arlenton’s mind. “Come through to the back; we’re all ready to go.”

Arlenton and Patterson followed Chloe into the house and out onto the patio. The patio matched the grandeur of the Arlentons’ expensive house. It covered an area the size of a tennis court, although an actual tennis court also occupied the backyard. The barbecue had a permanent look to it. Brick built, off to one side, it could easily have been designed to cook meals for a whole regiment. In the middle of the patio sat a circular glass-topped table big enough to seat eight, but there were only four chairs and four place settings. The table was shaded from the sun by an enormous sail-like awning, complete with rigging that held it in an almost horizontal position.

Ted and Bunny Arlenton put down their drinks and stood up as their daughter and Patterson made their entrance. Jane handed her mother the potted plant and received a cheek-to-cheek embrace.

“Ooh, thank you dear. I’ll have to think where to put it.” She gave the plant to Chloe but with no instructions as to its placement.

Chloe didn’t ask, either, instead taking Arlenton’s and Patterson’s orders for drinks.

“So since you were able to accept our invitation, I assumed you solved that other case, dear,” Bunny said.

“Yes, Mom. Didn’t you read about it in the paper?”

“No.”

“I think I did,” Ted said. “Was it the case of the female serial killer torturing men to death?”

“Yeah, that’s the one,” she replied.

Bunny Arlenton’s face turned white. “You never told me that,” she said, pointing an accusing finger at her husband. She turned back to her daughter. “You told me you were working on a missing persons case, Jane.”

“I was, but it turned out that the missing men had fallen into the clutches of a psychopathic woman. She was killing them one by one.”

“Pretty scary, wasn’t it?” her father asked.

“Not really.”

“Didn’t she have guns, knives, chainsaws, that kind of thing?” Ted asked. He sounded eager to hear the gory details.

“No. She posed as a dominatrix—S and M kind of stuff. She got her victims all trussed up—”

“Can we drop this,” Bunny said, adopting a tone of voice that turned the request into a command.

Ted was not to be deflected his wife’s plea. “How did you find her?”

“Nothing brilliant, just a lot of hard work following leads.”

“I’m sure you’re being modest, dear,” Ted said. “Isn’t she, Jim?”

“Modest? Jane?” He paused and smiled. Jane glared at him. “Yeah, she is. What she’s not telling you is that she confronted this murderer as she was in the act of killing off one of the victims. Saved his life.”

“Jim, don’t exaggerate,” Jane said, not minding that he had accurately represented the actual events.

Chloe arrived with their drinks, placed them on the table, and wandered over to the barbecue.

They all clinked glasses. “I hope your next case is a bit safer, Jane,” Bunny said.

Arlenton put her hand on her mother’s shoulder. “Stop clucking Mom. You sound like a worried mother hen.”

“You wait until you have kids. Then you’ll understand what I mean. Sometimes I think you are deliberately insensitive and like to get me going.”

It wasn’t that Bunny didn’t love her daughter but rather that her own childhood had not equipped her to be a well-rounded parent. Her mother had run off with an American soldier when Bunny was six. She had been raised by nannies and eventually by a stepmother who had thought she was a spoiled brat. The trauma of her childhood had meant that the normal mother-daughter relationship model hadn’t been imprinted upon her.

Chloe provided a distraction by placing a bowl of salad and a plate of antipasti on the table. “We’re having salmon and venison. Does everyone want both?” They all nodded.

“Seriously, Jane,” Bunny said, “what are you working on now? Just so I know it’s not another homicide.”

Jane sighed. She wondered which version to tell her mother, deciding to allay her mother’s fears by picking the least worrisome one. “I have to go to England to investigate the background of a woman who was murdered here in the city.”

“Why can’t the British police do that?”

“Because it’s our case. Otherwise what incentive do they have to put much

effort into it?”

“But how do you know where to start?” Bunny asked.

“Well...” Jane stopped herself from telling her mother there had been another murder in England linked with the victim in Toronto. Not a good way to make her mother feel the assignment was a safe one. Instead she continued, “... that’s where all her friends and relatives are. I’ll start by interviewing them.”

“And there’s a whole team looking for the killer in Toronto, Mrs. Arlenton,” Patterson said, taking Jane’s cue. “She’ll be out of the danger zone.”

“You be careful, Jane. England has lots of vicious criminals,” Bunny said. “They’ve many more than we have.”

“I know, but I’ll have all those British bobbies to protect me.”

Bunny frowned as though she couldn’t decide whether or not her daughter was still pulling her leg. “When you were born, I was pleased you were a girl because I thought that would mean I wouldn’t have to worry about the kind of stupid risks boys take. Now it seems your life is as dangerous as any man’s could be.”

“Sorry, Mom. It must be in my genes.”

* * * *

After the meal, Chloe cleared away the dishes and offered them coffee and liqueurs.

“Nothing for me and Jim,” Ted said. “Want to have a test drive in the F-machine, Jim?”

Chloe took the drinks orders from the two women. When she had gone, Bunny said, “Ted! Do you have to be so vulgar? And especially in front of Chloe.”

“The Ferrari, dear.”

“I know what you meant.”

Patterson’s eyes lit up as though the ten-year-old in him had suddenly been released. He came to Ted’s rescue. “Are you sure?”

“Of course.”

The two men rose from the table.

“Don’t get caught for speeding,” Bunny said.

“I don’t think you need to tell a police officer that, dear,” Ted replied.

He and Patterson excused themselves and departed. A few minutes later the women heard the unmistakable roar of the twelve-cylinder engine bursting into life. The engine settled down to a low burble as the car moved off down the driveway.

Bunny Arlenton remained silent. Chloe brought them their drinks and then made herself scarce when Bunny made a shooing-away gesture with her hand. *Semper fidelis*, Arlenton thought.

“They’ve gone,” Jane said. “What did you want to talk about?”

Bunny looked hurt by the remark. “That transparent, am I?”
She reached over and touched her mother’s hand. “Only in a nice way.”
Bunny made eye contact with her daughter and smiled. “You know me too well.”

“I should hope so.”

“I just wondered what your plans were. We don’t get much time alone to talk about it. You haven’t told me much about Jim.”

“I doubt I’ll marry him, if that’s what you mean. We’re just friends. And we share the love of the job, too. He’s pretty focused on that.”

“I see.”

Arlenton wondered if her mother did see. She could hardly tell her that the relationship with Patterson was sixty percent physical. The other forty percent comprised shared interests, leaving zero percent for emotional involvement. She was sure her mother would not understand the breakdown.

* * * *

“What was the Ferrari like?” Arlenton asked. Patterson had driven her back home. They sat in his car outside her condominium building. “Bit faster than this one, I imagine?”

“Somewhat. No problem getting rid of tailgaters, that’s for sure. And your dad seemed okay with me blasting off from the lights. Christ, we were up to a hundred in a few seconds.”

“With both of you screaming ‘yeeehaaaw,’ no doubt.”

Patterson laughed. “Haven’t you ever driven it?”

“No. My dad is a member of the women-can’t-drive school of thought.”

“But he’s okay with you apprehending psychopathic killers?”

“Yeah, exactly. I’m a bit insulted that he let you loose in it.”

“Oh, oh, I’d better change the subject. What time are you leaving in the morning?”

“I thought you wanted to stay over, tonight,” Arlenton said, deliberately misinterpreting his question.

“I do. I was waiting for the invitation to be confirmed. I take nothing for granted. You know me.”

“Come on up.”

Patterson parked his car in the visitors’ parking lot and they entered the building.

“I didn’t answer your question,” Arlenton said, on the way up in the elevator. “It’s an evening flight, leaves at ten. Which means we can—”

“I have to be in work early,” Patterson said.

“You can make tomorrow morning’s one a quickie if you like,” Arlenton said,

smirking.

“I’m never quick. I thought that was what you liked about me.”

“It is. So you’re okay to give me a ride to the airport?” The smile remained on her face as they exited the elevator.

“Sure, unless something urgent comes up.”

They entered her condo.

“Are you very busy?” she asked.

“Yes, even on Labor Day. That’s why I’m going in early.”

She closed the door and bolted it.

“Coffee?” she said. She placed one hand on his chest and started to undo the buttons of his shirt with the other.

When she reached the last button, he took hold of her belt, gave it a tug, and unbuckled it with the other hand. She wiggled the skirt to the floor. “Save the coffee for the morning,” he said.

Arlenton wondered why, after three months together they still treated sex as though they were a couple of adolescents. She assumed Patterson had a similar attitude to hers: a fear of commitment. At least he had an excuse; he’d been married before.

The following day, Patterson couldn’t free himself up from work, and Arlenton took a taxi to the airport, instead. She departed with no one to wish her bon voyage.

Chapter 9 - Flight in the Dark

(Tuesday, September 3)

Before leaving Canada, Arlenton had decided she wouldn’t rent a car until she reached Portsmouth. “You don’t want to get off the red-eye and have to drive on the left-hand side of the road, in a car that has its steering wheel on the right,” Loudon had told her. “And have you ever driven around one of their traffic circles?” She’d already come to the same conclusion and stuck to the travel itinerary she’d given to Mick Painter.

Arlenton avoided rail travel in Canada, but she’d been to Europe in her student days and knew it was different over there. She bought a ticket at Woking station and waited only ten minutes before the Portsmouth train arrived. The electric train accelerated out of the station as though time were of the essence. Or perhaps the driver knew he’d be stopping frequently. The stops were at places

with names that sounded odd to Arlenton. Names she'd never encountered in Canada: Godalming, Haslemere, Liss, Havant.

She watched the countryside fly by, feeling strange about being in a country where everything looked different but where the people and the language were the same. The fields were greener and smaller; there weren't as many trees; there were no rivers, only streams; and the trains rocketed along rather than trundled.

She arrived at the Portsmouth main station at two in the afternoon. A man stood by the ticket barrier as she wheeled her suitcase through.

"Miss Arlenton?" Mick Painter looked as she'd imagined him: tall, stocky, and with a gray military moustache that matched his hair. "Have a good trip?"

"It's never an easy flight."

"Overnight? No, although you're probably not tired now," he said.

"I caught a few zeds on the plane. What's on the agenda?"

"Check in at your hotel then I thought we'd find a quiet pub so you can eat, or we can just have a drink if you're not hungry. I'll have a pint and fill you in on the Jamison murder. Roger Schubert will join us later. HQ assigned him to you, apparently. He'll want you to open the kimono, so to speak."

"Does that mean the same in British English?"

Painter laughed. "Yes, Detective Schubert will want to know everything you know so he can claim the credit if, between the three of us, we solve the murder. But, a word to the wise, Roger is a bit of a one with the ladies."

Arlenton wondered how much of Painter's description of Schubert was true. "Thanks for warning me."

* * * *

Arlenton was pleased to see that the local people had found her a hotel on Southsea's main promenade, and they'd pulled strings to get her a room facing the sea. Not that she had time at that moment to admire the scenery. Mick Painter was waiting for her in the lobby.

Arlenton dumped her bag and dashed back down. She noticed he held on tightly to his briefcase, and she assumed it must contain something too valuable to be left in the car. The Jamison file, she guessed.

They drove a couple of blocks and parked on the seafront.

"First trip over here?" Painter asked, as they entered the Jack Tar pub.

"No, second time, but the first on official business."

Only one other couple occupied the lounge. They went over to the bar. "So you know we order at the bar?"

"Yeah, why is that?"

“Higher throughput and less waiting,” he replied with a smile. “Cheaper drinking, too. The landlord doesn’t have to pay waitresses and we don’t have to tip them.”

Arlenton couldn’t fault Mick’s logic, although she was fairly certain the Brits weren’t great tippers.

The bartender came over. “Oh, hi Mick. What can I get you?”

“Bert, this is Jane Arlenton from Canada. I’m showing her around.”

The bartender ran his eyes over her. He started at the waist and worked his way northwards, pausing at her breasts before making brief eye contact with her.

“Lucky man. Pleased to meet you, Jane.”

Painter turned to Arlenton. “I recommend the toad-in-the-hole at this place.”

“Okay, provided it’s not a real toad. And I’ll have a lager.”

“Good choice, but I’ll stick to my regular brew.”

They took their drinks and found a table in the corner. Painter produced a bulky file from his briefcase. “It’s the Jamison file,” he said. “But you probably guessed that much. Roger let me have it for the afternoon. He’ll reclaim it when he joins us. He didn’t need to be here while I gave you the basics. But he said he’d like to fill you in, too.” Painter opened the file. “Right then. Got your notebook ready? Just kidding, the blokes at the station made a copy of the important stuff for you: names, addresses, and phone numbers of those on the list of possible suspects. There were, are, six women and two men.”

Three sheets of paper, stapled together, lay on the top of the file. He handed them to Arlenton, who quickly ran her eyes down the list.

“While we wait for your food, I’ll give you an updated thumbnail of the whole story. You can use that list to make notes on the eight suspects. Oh, by the way, after refreshing my memory, I now remember your murdered woman, Anne Francis. Her maiden name was Edwards. She was interviewed, but she’s not one of the eight.”

Arlenton took a long drink from the pint glass of lager. It wasn’t warm, but not as cold as she was used to, either. It felt refreshing after her fifteen hours in transit.

Painter began his story. “Jamison lived in a small town, close to here, called Waterlooville. He had a house on a quiet cul-de-sac. We started by interviewing the neighbors. We thought we’d scored a lucky break when a woman called...” Painter consulted his notes.

Arlenton scanned the list of suspects. “Brenda Thurston,” she said. “The only one on the list who lives on Jamison’s street in Waterlooville. Assuming of course she hasn’t just moved there.”

“No, that would have been a bit of a coincidence.” He grinned at Arlenton. “You’re obviously not suffering from jet lag.”

“No, I’m okay. Coming this way across the Atlantic will make it hard for me to get up early in the morning.”

“Never had that problem, myself.”

Arlenton smiled as though the comment had gone over her head. Why were the Brits so fond of inserting innuendo into their conversation, or was Mick just a dirty old geezer? “What were you saying about Brenda?”

“Brenda was the person who reported Jamison’s death. But the lucky break we thought we’d stumbled onto was that she’d seen a small man entering Jamison’s house. Her kitchen has a good view of the path to Jamison’s front door, so that part of the story made sense. The victim was found dead in his bedroom, naked. He’d been stabbed in the back.”

“Murder weapon?”

“One of his own kitchen knives, wiped clean afterwards. He obviously knew his killer because there was no sign of forced entry into his house or of a struggle. He was lying on his stomach, face buried in the pillow.”

“Is that why you suspected a male lover?”

“Yeah, sort of.”

“He might have thought he was about to receive a massage,” Arlenton said.

“Yeah, that’s why we didn’t fixate on the gay angle. And, as I mentioned when you called a few days ago, we couldn’t find any substantive evidence that he was queer.”

The barmaid brought Arlenton’s toad-in-the-hole to the table. “What exactly is it? Although I think I can guess.”

“Pork sausages in Yorkshire pudding,” Painter replied. “Not easy to cook it just right.”

Mashed potatoes, cabbage, and rich, dark brown gravy supplemented the dish. “It looks appetizing,” Arlenton said, smiling. “Ideal for a gourmand.”

Painter frowned but he didn’t appear hurt by her remark. “It is, and very popular here. But back to the story. One of the consistent themes that kept cropping up as we interviewed people was Jamison’s fondness for women. Or rather, bedding them and then dumping them. We counted about a dozen women who claimed he had caused them emotional distress.”

Arlenton stopped eating. “You mentioned two of them, the scorned fiancée and the woman who couldn’t have kids after an abortion. Who else?”

“Those two had the biggest grievance against him, if you can call it that. Then there’s Brenda next door and a couple of school friends, Stella and Felicity.”

“Did you seriously suspect Brenda because her motive was that Jamison didn’t want to have sex with her? After all, you found Jamison’s body naked, which suggested that he was going to have sex with someone.”

“Good point, but the thinking at the time was that she might have gotten into his bedroom and then something happened to make her upset with him.”

“Like telling her she was a lousy lover?”

“Yeah, possibly. Not something a gentleman would do,” Painter said. The thin smile betrayed a lack of confidence that Painter knew how a gentleman might behave in those circumstances.

“Was one of the males on your list an associate of Brenda?” Arlenton asked.

“Yes, her boyfriend. For a while we thought she made up that story about a small guy because her boyfriend was large.”

“But if she had a boyfriend, what was the motive?”

“Oh, still the same. I should explain that the boyfriend had a criminal record for grievous bodily harm. We even speculated that she might have distracted Jamison with her body while her boyfriend, Jake Tollman, came in and stabbed him.”

“But it’s a rather large leap from GBH to what appeared to be premeditated murder.”

“Not that much. Anyway, we didn’t think we could make it stick because we had no physical evidence to pin on him. Nothing we could go to the prosecutor’s office with.”

“So, Brenda and boyfriend are still on the list?” Arlenton asked.

“Yes, depending upon what you’ve come up with.”

“I hope you’re not going to be disappointed,” Arlenton said. “Now tell me about the two school friends.”

Painter stood up. “Let me get another beer first. Want a refill?”

“Why not? It’s all on expenses.”

Painter returned with the drinks a few moments later. He sat down and quaffed back a third of his pint. “Okay, now we come to Stella and Felicity—buddies from Havant High School for Girls. They’d left school by this time but were still pretty immature. Just a couple of silly girls, was what I thought of them at the time. Stella admitted they’d thought of killing Jamison because he was a bastard.”

Arlenton smiled. “Now there’s a good reason.”

Painter laughed. “Yeah, that’s what we thought. I’d be dead several times over if being a bastard was the only excuse a woman needed for bumping me off.” His laughter subsided. “Stella and Felicity were playing a game of planning the

perfect murder. But the joke fell flat when he was actually murdered. Stella was hysterical when we interviewed her. Felicity was a bit calmer.”

“What did you read into that?” Arlenton asked. “One calm, the other hysterical, I mean?”

“Not a lot. In my experience, the guilty can sometimes rustle up a hefty dose of righteous indignation.”

“Playing the victim?”

“Yeah, that’s a better way of putting it.”

“But surely, the coincidence of them hatching a fake murder plot and—”

“That’s why they’re still on file,” Painter said.

Arlenton finished the last of her “toad” and picked up the second glass of lager. “That leaves two, a man and a woman.”

“Now that you’ve finished that sumptuous British delicacy, I should tell you its original name. It’ll give your boys at the station back home a laugh.”

“I think I’ve already worked that out,” Arlenton said. “Turd in the hole. The resemblance is striking.”

Painter almost choked on his beer. “Very good,” he said when he’d stopped coughing. “Now the final two, a husband and wife who had once been partners of Jamison.

Arlenton looked down at the notes. “Mr. and Mrs. McGavin?”

“Yes. They claimed that at the time of the murder they were having dinner together at a Chinese restaurant and paid in cash. A waiter vaguely remembered them. The alibi was a bit flakey but we were unable to break it.”

“And had Jamison actually cheated them?”

“There’s no doubt he did do something slightly unethical, but it was a long way from being illegal.”

“But would Jamison have let them into his house? Presumably, he knew they hated his guts.”

“You’ve probably figured by now that Jamison would shag anything in a skirt. Married, divorced, single, he didn’t care. He might have let the wife in if she hinted she wanted to jump into bed with him.”

“Hmm.” Arlenton decided to put them at the bottom of the list. They had nothing in common with Anne Francis.

“So where’s your head at?” Painter said. “Of the eight, who would *you* suspect?”

“Well, I haven’t met any of them yet. That’s kind of important.”

“You’ll have that opportunity,” Painter said. “Roger Schubert has arranged for you to meet them all.”

“Are they still living at the addresses you’ve given me?”

“Cold cases are stored in the HOLMES database. Every so often, the whereabouts of relevant people is updated in it...”

“Holmes as in Sherlock Holmes?”

Painter grinned at her. “H-O-L-M-E-S, it stands for Home Office Large Major Enquiry System. Bit contrived, I know; the bureaucrats have nothing else better to do.”

“So these are the current addresses?”

“Yes, and as you can see, most of the people on the list still live around here.”

“What about Anne Francis, for example, were you still keeping track of her?”

“I don’t think so. She wasn’t a suspect. Check with Roger when he arrives.”

Painter looked at his watch. “He should be here in a jiffy.”

Roger Schubert arrived five minutes later. He joined them at the table, a pint of beer in hand.

Arlenton had built up a mental picture of him based on watching a British TV series called *Godfrey of the Yard*. She’d imagined Schubert to be like Scotland Yard’s fictional Chief Inspector Godfrey, a slightly overweight, balding forty-something, who solved every crime laid on his plate. The flesh and blood Schubert couldn’t have been more different: thirty at the most, with fair, wavy hair, he had the lean muscular look of a running back. Although, she reflected, if he played a sport, it would be rugby not football.

“Ah, Jane Arlenton, nice to meet you. No one told me the Toronto cops were sending over Miss Canada.”

Arlenton internalized a groan. She decided to be gracious and accept the compliment. “Thanks.”

“Mick been looking after you?”

“Yes, the hotel is excellent, and I’m starting to grasp the complexities of the Jamison murder.”

“I never worked on it, of course. Like you, I was in primary school at the time.”

“It’s sometimes useful to get a fresh perspective on a cold case,” Painter said.

“Even a less experienced one.”

Arlenton wondered if this was a dig at her or Schubert, or both of them.

“Yeah, reading up on it, I got the impression that whoever did it took advantage of the fact that a lot of people would fall under suspicion,” Schubert said. “Bit like your typical whodunit where everyone has a reason to kill the guy. Not at all our usual fare.”

“What is the usual fare around here?” Arlenton asked.

“Probably the same as in Toronto: husband kills wife or a drug or gang related homicide. The Jamison case, from what I’ve seen in the file, has no suspects with criminal records.”

“Except Brenda Thurston’s boyfriend, Jake Tollman,” Painter said.

“Yeah, apart from him,” Schubert replied. “But he had no actual motive except by association with Brenda.”

He seems to have done his homework, Arlenton thought. She turned to Painter, then to Schubert. “So, guys, where do we go from here?”

“I’m on loan to you for a week, for starters anyway. Mick is available...” Schubert turned to Painter and raised an eyebrow.

“Yes, I’m going to be charging the constabulary on an hourly basis, so use me wisely,” Painter said.

“The rules are, Ms. Arlenton—”

“Jane.”

“The rules are, Jane, that you don’t interview anyone unless I’m with you. I’m sure it’d be the same if I were in Toronto.”

“Yes, understood,” Arlenton said. “But first let me give you this.” She extracted an envelope from her bag and gave it to him.

Schubert opened it.

“It’s a copy of Jamison’s little black book,” she said. “His girlfriends.”

Every pair of pages of the original had been photocopied onto an 8½ x 11 sheet, double-sided and stapled. The cover sheet consisted of the first page of Jamison’s book: his name, address, and reward notice. Schubert picked up his glass and started to read.

“My victim, Anne Edwards, is number thirty-three,” Arlenton said.

Schubert flipped forward and read Anne’s entry, folded the sheets at that point and handed them to Painter.

He read it slowly, Schubert studying him as he did so. “Christ!” he said. “Where did you get this?”

Arlenton gave them a quick summary of the Toronto end of the case.

“Mick, you said she wasn’t a suspect, right?” Schubert asked.

“Correct. No strong motive. And I seem to remember that she and a girlfriend were at the cinema. They both definitely saw the film because they were able to describe it in detail.”

“But they could have seen an earlier or later performance,” Arlenton said.

“Yes, but as I said, Anne Edwards had no motive,” Painter said. “Or, at least, none we could determine.”

“And aside from the minor detail that she’s dead, she still doesn’t have one,” Schubert said. He smiled. “I wouldn’t consider losing her virginity enough of a reason to make her commit murder.”

“But then you’re not a woman,” Arlenton said.

“What does that mean?” Schubert said. He looked worried that he’d missed some vital clue.

“She might have resisted, and he raped her. This was the late seventies. No-means-no didn’t carry the same weight as I assume it does now. Or is it different over here?”

“Of course not,” Schubert said quickly. “But Jamison gives no hint of rape in his journal.”

“I should hope not,” Arlenton said. “Even with the reward for its return, if someone found it and read that he raped a woman, they might be inclined to give it to the police.”

The two men nodded. Schubert downed the rest of his pint.

“Let me buy the next round, guys” Arlenton said. She stood up. “What was it?”

“Just tell him the usual,” Painter said. “He knows us.”

“When I get back let me know what you think about John’s entries for the other suspects.” She picked up the empty glasses and wandered over to the bar.

“Not from round here, are you?” the bartender said, as he pulled the pints for her.

“No, Canada.”

“With the RCMP?”

She grinned. “No, the unmounted police.”

The bartender looked annoyed that he could think of no quick comeback. She paid him and returned with the drinks.

Arlenton sat down again. “Does Jamison’s book add anything?”

Painter looked at Schubert, as if expecting the younger man to field the question. “I think you may be right, Jane. It certainly would make me want to take a closer look at the suspects and add Anne Edwards to the list. Mick?”

“Yeah, I agree. Someone might have known she’d killed him and was upset enough to want to murder her. A relative of Jamison, perhaps?” Painter paused. “Or she was killed because she knew who did it?”

“I’d lean towards the former,” Schubert said. “By virtue of her possession of the book. How did she come by it, Jane?”

“Don’t know. I’d like to chat with all existing suspects and try to find out,” Arlenton said. She was anxious that Schubert not jump to conclusions.

“Okay,” Schubert said. “Did Mick mention I called all of the key players and told them to expect us in the next couple of days?”

“Yes, thanks.”

“I suggest we start with Anne’s sister,” Schubert said. “She’s leaving tomorrow to attend Anne’s funeral.”

“Did anyone else say they were going to the funeral?” Arlenton asked. She looked down and consulted the notes again. “Stella and Felicity, for example.”

“No, and that in itself is a bit odd,” Schubert said.

“Things change over time,” Arlenton said. “Especially if the relationship was soured by Jamison’s murder.”

“Soured is putting it mildly.”

Arlenton laughed then looked at her watch. “Can we go and see the sister now?”

“Sure. Sup up,” Schubert said.

Arlenton cocked her head to one side, as though the expression meant nothing to her. Schubert held his glass in his hand and brought it to his lips. “Ah, yes,” she said.

Chapter 10 - Tea and Biscuits

Anne’s sister, Joan Claybury, lived only twenty miles away, in Southampton. On the drive from Portsmouth, Schubert and Arlenton agreed that they would make no mention of Jamison’s murder. Schubert suggested that raising it might cause Anne’s sister to clam up.

“If it comes up, that’s okay,” Schubert cautioned her. “But in spite of what I said earlier, you should handle the questioning. She knows you couldn’t possibly be involved in the Jamison investigation, and if she makes a connection between the two cases then that fact alone might tell us something.”

Arlenton had not made up her mind about Schubert. From his body language in the pub, she thought he might be an I’m-in-control kind of guy; after all, it was his turf and she was a woman. She decided to keep an open mind.

Aunt Joan and her husband owned a small detached house in an upscale development. The place looked fairly new, as did the car in the driveway.

“Excuse the mess. Just moved in,” Joan said. “We’ve downsized now that the kids are out of the nest.”

“Thanks for seeing us at short notice, Mrs. Claybury,” Schubert said. “Detective Arlenton is investigating the circumstances of your sister’s death.”

“Shouldn’t you be doing that in Toronto?”

“We are, ma’am,” Arlenton replied. “But some of the leads pointed to the Portsmouth area, so I was sent to follow them up.” She hoped she’d made it sound as if her role was peripheral to the main thrust of the investigation.

“I see. But I’m going to be in Toronto tomorrow evening. Couldn’t you have waited instead of coming three thousand miles to see me?”

“You’re not the only one I wanted to speak to in England. Your sister had a lot of friends in England, and her roots are here, of course.”

“Oh, yes, I suppose that’s true.”

Joan insisted on making a pot of tea for the three of them. The two detectives followed her into the kitchen. “Sit down,” she said. “I have some biscuits here somewhere.”

They took a seat at the kitchen table while Joan fussed around, making the tea.

“I’m very sorry about your sister, Mrs. Claybury,” Arlenton said.

“It’s poor Mary who deserves most of the sympathy. First her dad and now her mum.”

“Did you see Anne very often?”

“We’d alternate our visits. Every three or four years we’d go and see her family, and in between they’d come over here.”

“Did she keep in touch with any other family or friends?”

“Our brother, David, never went. He lives in Scotland so we hardly ever see him.”

“How about her friends?”

“One of them went over. Stella, it was. But only once, I believe.”

The kettle had boiled. Joan put the teapot, cups, saucers, and teaspoons on the table, then retrieved the milk from the fridge. “Did you say you do want biscuits?”

Schubert nodded his head.

“Not for me, Mrs. Claybury,” Arlenton replied. “Is that Stella Sutcliffe?”

“Yes, nice woman. The last time I saw her was at Anne’s house in Toronto. She was over there the same time as me.”

“No one else visited her?”

“No, Anne seemed to have lost contact with the rest of the gang. I’m not sure they’re going to be of much help to you.”

“Gang?”

“Yes, her high school friends. I was three years ahead of her but at the same school. That’s how I knew Stella. I left that school when I was seventeen, a year early. I’d got pregnant and stayed at home to have my first one. My husband and I got married a couple of years later, and we had a second when I was twenty.”

She laughed. “That’s one of the advantages of having kids early. You’re still relatively young when they’ve gone. It makes you suddenly feel rich... and free.”

Arlenton had no wish to enter a debate into the ideal age for a woman to bear children. “Getting back to the gang, Mrs. Claybury.”

Joan poured the tea. “Milk?” Arlenton and Schubert both nodded. “Help yourself to sugar and the biscuits. The gang, oh yes. Anne’s friends were Stella, Kate, and Felicity. Inseparable they were, even after they left school. Then Stella and Felicity got mixed up in something nasty. Anne moved up north to train as a nurse, met Alan, they got married and moved to Toronto.”

“Something nasty?” Arlenton said, hoping Joan would assume this was the first she’d heard about it. She knew it was risky. Would Joan realize that she was fishing in order to land something else?

“She refused to tell me the full story but it had something to do with one of Stella’s or Felicity’s ex-boyfriends. His name was John something-or-other. He was murdered.”

“When was this?”

“It happened...” She paused and started counting silently on her fingers. “In 1979, I think. I sometimes worried that Anne wanted to get away, a long way away, because she knew who the murderer was, and was frightened of him.”

“Him?”

“Him or her.”

“What makes you think she was running away?”

“Alan wasn’t that keen to emigrate. True, he’d been offered a fabulous job over there, but eventually he’d have been just as well off if they’d stayed here in England. Anne told me once that Alan saved every penny so that he could retire early and then visit England twice a year—Christmas and summer.”

“And she was okay with that?”

“Yes, as far as I know. She was okay with visits; she just didn’t want to live here. And anyway, her daughter Mary is Canadian, not British.”

“Could she afford to move back?” Arlenton said—another question to which she knew the answer.

“She told me they were multi-millionaires.”

“Were you in the will?”

“I don’t know. I’ll find out when I get to Toronto.”

“Are you expecting to be?”

“No, not really. Mary deserves to get it all.”

Arlenton noticed that Joan had answered without any change of inflection in her voice. She seemed genuinely neutral to the question of an inheritance from her

kid sister. “Now, going back to Anne being scared after the boyfriend’s murder—”

“I never said he was Anne’s boyfriend.”

Arlenton thought it best not to push this point. “No, sorry. Going back to Anne being scared after the murder, are you sure she never said who she might be afraid of? Or had she ever mentioned that someone had threatened her?”

“No to both of those. But if such a person exists, it’s likely that someone in her little gang would know who it is.”

“Or Mary?”

“I’m not even sure Anne had told Mary about the murder.”

Arlenton looked at Schubert. Frown lines showed. Was he becoming impatient and perhaps thinking she was making heavy weather of the interview? “One last question before we leave, unless my colleague has anything to add.” Schubert shook his head. “Did Mary and your sister have a normal mother-daughter relationship?”

Joan didn’t respond. She stared at Arlenton through narrowed eyes. After a moment of silence she said, “Get stuffed.”

* * * *

“Well?” Arlenton said, as they headed east along the M27, back to Portsmouth.

“Well what?” Then Schubert smiled. “Joan Claybury telling you to get stuffed?”

“Did I push her too far?”

“Yeah, not very kind, considering she’s just lost her sister,” he said.

“No, but I had to ask.” Schubert didn’t comment on her response, so she continued. “I think it’s odd that only two of Anne’s so-called gang are on Mick Painter’s list of suspects.”

“Me, too. D’you think one of them knows who killed Anne?”

“Or was Anne was running away from one of them? Odd that Mick Painter missed that clue,” Arlenton said.

“My guess is that, because Anne wasn’t on the list, he didn’t get informed about her move to Canada. Remember, by the time she left England the case was already pretty cold.”

“If we find out who she was trying to escape from, then we may have solved both murders at the same time,” Arlenton said.

Schubert made a chortling sound. “That would be nice.”

Chapter 11 - Roger Schubert

“That’s mine. The one with the crimson canopy,” Arlenton said. Schubert stopped at the main entrance to Arlenton’s hotel. The hotel mimicked the Victorian style of architecture and looked like it had been renovated to be a prop in a movie of a Charles Dickens novel. The white façade glowed pink in the setting sun, accentuating the image of a Hollywood movie set.

“If you’re not too tired from all your travels and the excitement, do you fancy having dinner with me tonight?”

“Sure, as long as you let me pay my way. I know you Brits are such gentlemen.”

“Assuming you’re not being sarcastic, I can tell you those days are over. I was rather hoping you could put it on your expense account.”

“I suppose—”

Schubert laughed. “I was kidding; going Dutch is fine. There’s a nice little French bistro just round the corner. It’s seven now. Pick you up at eight?”

“Okay, I’ll meet you in the lobby.”

Arlenton hopped out of Schubert’s car, crossed the sidewalk, and passed through the double doors into the lobby: a total of five yards. She felt good inside. They were making progress and the hunky British cop had invited her for some extra-curricular activity. Or did he just want to discuss the case?

The bistro made a half-hearted attempt to present itself as a French restaurant. Posters of the Eiffel Tower and the Palace of Versailles adorned the walls, and some of the clientele seemed to be smoking Gauloises cigarettes. Arlenton noticed the pungent smell immediately, but Schubert didn’t comment on the stuffy atmosphere.

“You think Anne was the murderer, don’t you?” Arlenton said. She thought she’d better start off as though the dinner meeting was purely professional.

“Yes, don’t you? How else would she have come to be in possession of Jamison’s little black book?”

Arlenton thought about this. Jumping to conclusions is okay, Inspector Loudon once told her. You need to have something to aim at, but make sure you follow up your suspicions with hard evidence. She thought Schubert would already be acquainted with this homily, so she didn’t insult him by repeating it. Instead she said, “Anne might have acquired it from one of the other thirty-four women.”

“Hmm, that would have to be one of her close friends, I assume,” Schubert replied.

The waiter came to take their order. He recognized Schubert and whispered, “Ah, detective, nice to see you again. And, of course, your charming guest.” He then raised his voice to its normal level. “Aperitif for you both?”

Arlenton ordered a margarita; Schubert a vodka and tonic. The waiter left after explaining the specials.

“I’d like to interview the other members of Anne’s gang, as her sister put it,” Arlenton said.

“I’ve already alerted them that we’ll be calling on them tomorrow: Felicity Smith, Stella Sutcliffe, and Kate Ralston.”

“Are they all living here in Portsmouth?”

“Sutcliffe and Ralston do, but not Smith. She’s divorced and lives in Ilford.”

“Where’s that?”

“It’s a London suburb. Unfortunately it’s on the northeast side—as far as you can get from here and still be in London

“So what’s the plan?”

“I told Stella and Kate to expect us in the morning. They’re both going to delay leaving for work. Then we’ll drive up to Ilford and catch Felicity. She said she’d leave work early and meet us mid-afternoon. I said we’d be there about two or three.”

“Thanks for organizing all of that so quickly,” Arlenton said.

Schubert picked up his menu. “You’re helping me, too, don’t forget. If we solve Jamison’s murder, it’ll look good on my record.”

Ah well, at least he’s honest about it, she thought. She studied him over the top of her menu. A slightly younger version of Jim Patterson, but he had high cheek bones and a broader jaw. His eyes were the same shade of blue as the background of his national flag. Overall, she put Schubert ahead of her boyfriend in the looks department. And he seemed more affable than she’d expected, as was Mick Painter. If the two men were a representative sample, it exploded the myth that British men were cold and aloof. Not that she believed the stereotype.

Schubert put down his menu. “The jet lag will make it difficult to get out of bed in the morning.”

“I know. I’ll need to set the alarm clock to extra-loud. What time do you suggest we start?”

“Kate and Stella want to see us as early as possible because they have to go to work.”

“How’s seven-thirty?” Arlenton said.

“Yeah, okay, if you’re sure. You realize that’s two-thirty in Toronto.”

“Don’t remind me. I’ll just grab a coffee and have breakfast later.”

Schubert laughed. “Actually, that’s perfect; your breakfast will be my lunch.”

Chapter 12 - Stella's Version

(Wednesday 4th Sept.)

After the meal with Schubert, Arlenton had taken a couple of sleeping pills and crashed out at nine-thirty. On the plane, the pills had made it possible to grab three hours of shut-eye. Using them now allowed her to recover all of the lost sleep. However, her digestive system still obeyed Toronto time and, as she had predicted, coffee was all she could manage before Schubert called to collect her.

“Good kip? You don't look like you're affected by jet-lag,” he said.

She grunted then smiled, happy that the compliment probably meant she didn't look like a hag with bags under her eyes. “Thanks. Where are we going?”

“Hayling Island.”

Hayling Island, east of Portsmouth, was mostly farmland and low density housing developments. Although the island's area was about the same as Portsmouth's, its much smaller population meant that it could only justify a single lifeline to the mainland, a narrow two-lane bridge.

Stella Sutcliffe lived in a detached house on the main road that ran north-south from the bridge to the beach. The house looked like Ann Hathaway's cottage but without the thatched roof. Arlenton noticed a motor boat parked along the side of the house. The boat was partly covered but Arlenton could see the outboard motor bearing the number 150. Hmm, twenty-two footer; expensive, she thought.

A man answered the door. “Mr. Sutcliffe?” Schubert said.

“Yes, you want Stella, don't you?”

Alec Sutcliffe looked to be in his mid-forties. He offered Arlenton his hand, a courtesy he did not extend to Schubert. His hand felt hard and powerful, which summed up Alec's appearance, too.

Stella Sutcliffe joined them at the front door. “Take my car today, Alec. I'm blocking you in.”

“Are you sure you don't want me to stay?” Alec's voice sounded protective, obedient.

“No, it's just a few routine questions. Isn't that what you said, officer?”

Schubert nodded. “We won't take long.”

Alec Sutcliffe stared at Schubert for a moment, as if sizing him up. “Okay, I'll leave you two to chat with my wife. Nice to have met you both.” He said it with a coldness that suggested otherwise.

Arlenton made eye contact with Stella Sutcliffe. Her eyes matched the navy business suit she wore. Arlenton had noticed on her trip so far that almost all the Anglos had blue or green eyes. Stella's blue eyes radiated about the same amount of warmth as an iceberg.

“I’m glad you got here so early,” Stella said. She beckoned them in. Like Anne’s sister Joan, Stella offered them tea straightaway.

Schubert didn’t hesitate in accepting the offer. “One sugar,” he said. Arlenton figured she’d have to follow suit. And anyway, she was in need of more caffeine to bring her forward a few time-zones, “No sugar, please,” she said.

Stella showed them into the living room and returned with the tea a few moments later.

“This is about Anne, isn’t it?” Stella said, addressing Schubert. “When you called to say a detective from Toronto was coming with you, I immediately thought of Anne.”

“She’s been murdered.”

“I know; her sister Joan called me last night. She said you’d been there yesterday. I spent all last night awake thinking about her.”

“You know Joan Claybury?” Schubert asked.

“Yes, of course. Anne and I went to the same high school. Joan was a couple of years ahead of us. I also met her in Toronto when I was there on holiday.”

Ah, so that agrees with Joan’s story, Arlenton thought, always a good start.

“Detective Arlenton would like to ask you some questions about Anne.”

“Please do, and please help yourself to the cupcakes. I made them only yesterday so they’re still fresh.”

Schubert took one.

“You kept in contact with Anne, Mrs. Sutcliffe?” Arlenton said.

“Sort of. As I just mentioned, I visited her once in Canada. She clearly didn’t want to see me, but I was there anyway on vacation. We, that’s Alec and me, made the grand tour: New York, Niagara Falls, Toronto, Montreal, and Cape Cod, then back to New York for the flight home.”

“Why did you think she didn’t want to see you?”

“The Jamison thing. It left a bad taste in our mouths. I was a suspect, for heaven’s sake.” Stella looked straight at Schubert, but he didn’t confirm or deny her statement. He returned the stare.

“You were Jamison’s girlfriend at one time,” Arlenton said.

“Yeah, one of them, but that doesn’t mean I wanted to kill him. And you still haven’t caught the culprit.”

Arlenton noticed that she’d been lumped in with the Portsmouth police. She knew from reading the file that Stella didn’t have much of an alibi for the night Jamison died. “Did Jamison have any girlfriends who might have wanted to kill him?”

“Lots. One of them stole his little black book.”

Arlenton’s pulse quickened. *Christ! I thought I had it. Act dumb.* “His what?”

“Little black book,” Stella said, louder this time as though Arlenton was hard of hearing. “It was a sort of diary, but it only documented his conquests, like me.”

“So how did you come to see it?”

“The person who stole it showed it to me,” Stella said.

“Who was that?”

Stella ran her tongue over her top lip, as if preparing to clamp her teeth onto it. “Denise.”

Arlenton recognized the name as one of the original suspects: Denise, the jilted fiancée, the one whose pretty face Detective Painter had apparently not forgotten.

“You’re a friend of hers?”

“She wasn’t one of our inner circle: Kate, Anne, Felicity, and me. But we were friendly with her. She warned me off John.” Stella smiled. “At that age, the warning wasn’t likely to have much effect on me, other than make me want to go out with him even more.”

“Did she show you his notebook?” Arlenton asked.

“Yeah, she didn’t want to at first but then changed her mind. I guess she thought it would put me off him when I read what he’d written about all of those girls.”

“But you weren’t in the book?”

“No, not at that time, I wasn’t.”

“What did he write about Denise?”

Stella giggled. “I suppose it’s okay for me to say now. He said she was a bit of a dumb blonde, clingy, smoked too much, desperate to have kids, that kind of stuff. She was mad as hell about it.”

Arlenton thought it odd that Stella remembered John’s description of Denise in fine detail. “Was Denise really a dumb blonde?”

“She was blonde but not dumb. And in spite of the fact that he wrote that about her, he still asked her to marry him, so perhaps he wanted a woman who looked like a dumb blonde. Although, as I said, she definitely wasn’t stupid. She worked as a librarian when she left school but then went to Sussex University and got a degree in English lit. I think it more likely that John meant she was dumb in the quiet sense.”

Stella’s story didn’t add up. Arlenton knew that Denise was number twenty-five in Jamison’s book. If Denise had stolen it, that meant he must have started on a second book and reentered the information on all twenty-five women, a difficult task, requiring a good memory. “What happened to John’s journal? I imagine Denise would have been inclined to burn it?”

“She wanted to, but John threatened to go to the police and tell them she’d also stolen other stuff. So she ripped out her page and returned it to him. He wrote her back in.”

“How do you know he did?”

“She was trying to warn me off, remember. John had already asked me for a date, a euphemism for, well, you know. I found the book while he was in the bathroom. It was hidden in his shirt drawer. My name and address were in it at number twenty-eight, but he hadn’t written anything about me at that point.”

“How come you didn’t mention any of this when you were questioned originally?”

“I didn’t think it was relevant. Denise had already told me she was a prime suspect because he’d jilted her, and I didn’t want to make things worse for her.”

“Even though you were also a suspect?”

Stella looked Arlenton straight in the eye. “But I knew I didn’t do it. Besides, the police didn’t need his little black book to track down John’s girlfriends. Their phone numbers were also in a book he kept by his phone. He didn’t hide that.”

“When you were in Toronto, did you meet Mary Francis?”

“Of course. Mary was seventeen at the time and she asked me all about our life growing up in Portsmouth. It was really quite funny having your friend’s daughter ask you about the old days. Anne kept cutting her off saying stuff like, ‘Mary, don’t be so rude.’ Or ‘Mary, don’t pry into Stella’s personal life.’ I didn’t mind, because they were harmless questions. Well, that’s not true; some were a trifle awkward. Mary asked me if the four of us ever dated the same guy. Anne had a fit over that one.”

“Did Mary know about John Jamison?”

“No. That last question of Mary’s was the closest we got. Actually, Anne had taken me aside when I arrived and told me not to mention him. So when Mary asked about ex-lovers, I was prepared. But as I said, Anne interrupted, and we changed the subject.”

“Why do you think Anne asked you not to mention Jamison?”

“Because it was pretty unsavory. I figured she hadn’t told Alan about her fling with John.”

Arlenton paused while Schubert finished making notes. She took the opportunity to drink her almost cold tea. “Anne had nothing to be ashamed of. She hadn’t met her future husband at that stage,” she said.

“Yes, I agree, but I guess she wanted to erase it from her memory.”

Arlenton shrugged. It sort of made sense.

Stella had a thin smile on her face. “Anything else?”

Arlenton interpreted her smile as sign that Stella thought she'd gained the upper hand. "Earlier, you mentioned your inner circle: you, Kate, Felicity, and Anne. Reading back through the file, there is a reference to a plot to kill John Jamison." Arlenton inserted air-quotes around the word plot. "Can you tell me what that was all about?"

"It was just a stupid game. We were all into murder mysteries at the time and thought it would be fun. Each one of us had a reason to get back at him and we wanted to create the perfect murder plot."

"What did you intend to do with it?"

"Kate was going to write it up and enter it into a short story competition. She was the literary one in our group. Actually, Kate shared that interest with Denise. That was how we met Denise; Kate invited her to one of our parties."

"And were you planning to show Jamison the short story?"

"Yeah, we hoped it might scare him a bit."

Arlenton wondered if she was as silly at that age. She doubted she'd ever dream up something this crazy. It wasn't the kind of stunt one would want on one's résumé when trying to get into law school. "Okay, I now know why you concocted the plot; tell me exactly what it was."

Stella looked at her watch. "It's rather a long story, and I have to get to work. And besides, nothing's changed. You already have it in your files."

Schubert paused from taking notes and jumped in. He seemed eager to assert his authority. "This is a murder investigation, Mrs. Sutcliffe, two murders, in fact. If you'd prefer to come down to the station, we can accommodate you and your counsel there."

"Men are such bullies," Stella said to Arlenton, as though Schubert was not in the room.

"Bear with us, Mrs. Sutcliffe," Arlenton said, trying hard to sound placatory. "Something *has* changed; one of the members of your inner circle is now dead. If you relate the story again, then you won't have to protect anyone."

"Assuming I was before."

"Let us be the judge of that."

Stella sighed. "Okay." She paused, as though deep in thought. "Now where do I start?"

Chapter 13 - Class of '78

"It was January seventy-nine. On Friday nights we'd go to the Beach Place disco. Anne, Kate, Felicity and I would grab a table early and sit nursing our

vodka martinis and eyeing up the blokes. To entice them onto the dance floor, we'd get up and dance as a pair while the other two guarded our handbags and drinks."

"Did it work?" Arlenton asked. "The enticing part, I mean."

Stella chuckled. "Yeah, the rule was that you didn't refuse at least one dance even if the guy was a complete cretin. Otherwise, it would scare off the other men. Some of the men who looked a bit nerdy were actually good dancers. The ones you fancied were often lousy at it. Although you know what men are like? In those days they all thought they could dance like John Travolta." Stella chuckled again, as though the mental picture of young men gyrating to the tunes of the Bee Gees was exquisitely comical. "The Beach Place was a bit of a misnomer because it was located several blocks away from Southsea Beach. As you may have noticed, Ms. Arlenton, the beach itself is also poorly named, because it has no sand, only pebbles. The disco isn't there any more; they knocked it down and there's a block of flats where it used to be."

"I think we can do without the historical commentary, Mrs. Sutcliffe," Schubert said.

"It helps me set the scene in my mind," Stella said. "And anyway, Ms. Arlenton had probably never heard of Southsea before coming here."

Arlenton sensed Stella's increasing annoyance with Schubert. She wished he'd try to be more patient. She exchanged glances with him. "Okay, go ahead," he said.

"I next met John at the Beach Place sometime before Christmas. He and his friend, Henry, spent the night dancing with Felicity and me. Afterwards, I went back to John's house in Waterlooville for the obligatory cup of coffee, and I let it drop that I was on the pill."

"This was after the warning from his former fiancée not to go near him?" Arlenton asked.

"Denise, yes, but I had no regrets. John was certainly no slouch in the bedroom and he even knew the concept of foreplay and the finer points of the female anatomy. I mention this because at that time my boyfriends hadn't been very experienced."

Arlenton interrupted. "How old were you?"

"Nineteen. I hoped John wouldn't be a one-night stand; he was intelligent, attractive and held down a good job as a computer programmer at Texallas Data Processors, or TDP as it is known around here."

Schubert inhaled slowly, and audibly, through his nose. He'd stopped taking notes.

"The same TDP as the American company?"

“Yes, it’s a multinational outfit company based in Dallas, hence the name. As a sideline, John had a property company. His other important attribute was his relative maturity, eight years older than me. Although I hate to admit it now, I hoped he was the one.”

Arlenton noticed that Stella had become so engrossed in the story, she’d apparently forgotten about getting to work. “How long did you go out with him?”

“About a month or so. I should introduce the other two members of our gang: Felicity and Kate. Felicity, the Aries of the bunch among three Pisceans, was ringleader of our gang, all pals at the Havant High School. FF, we called her, short for ‘fucking Felicity’ because she possessed an appetite for sex that exceeded the rest of us put together. As an example, she had a penchant for making love in the open air, and on dates always wore a plastic raincoat. She always joked it was to keep her bum dry.”

Schubert shifted awkwardly in his chair. He had a glazed expression on his face as though a picture had suddenly popped into his head of Felicity lying on the wet grass with her raincoat unbuttoned and her legs apart.

“I’m getting off track. Where was I? Oh, yes, January. John came into the Beach Place with his pal, Henry...”

1979

“There’s John and Henry” I said, tilting my head towards the entrance.

Kate, Anne and Felicity all swung round to look. John performed a visual-sweep, for likely targets, I assumed. He spotted the four of us. Henry went to the bar, but John sidled over.

“Hi Stella, ladies. Like to dance, Stella?”

I should have told him to bugger off. I guessed he was probably after Anne but I got up out of my seat, and we walked onto the dance floor.

John was energetic, if unstylish, on the dance floor. He would prance around as if he had a football at his feet.

When the music switched from fast to slow, he pulled me into a close embrace for a smooch. “Feels like you’re hot for company tonight,” I said.

“I am. Want to come back afterwards?”

“You’ve got a bloody nerve. And anyway, I thought you’d be more interested in Anne, as she’s the only one of us who hasn’t inspected the bed sheets at your house.”

“Stella, you can be so cruel sometimes. I take it, that’s a no?”

“If you’re desperate, how could I refuse? But how about taking me for an Indian first?”

I was mercenary enough to consider it a good deal: getting laid and a meal. It wasn't as if he had bad breath and a hairy back like some men. You know, the ones who think that if they buy you a meal you'll jump into bed with them.

"Who are you dating at the moment?" I asked.

He pulled me even closer, and I could feel his rock-hard penis pressing against my stomach. I responded by rubbing my tits against his chest. "No one, of course," he said. "What do you take me for?"

"Huh! Don't get me started on that. Not found your *perfect* woman yet, then?"

"Meow. What makes you think I'm looking?" he replied.

As well as John's other attributes, he was always a good adversary in a verbal joust. I teased him by saying, "Twenty-seven—the clock's ticking."

"The clock ticks longer for a man," he said.

"But the sperm gets weaker."

"Where did you get that nonsense from? A woman's magazine?"

I couldn't think of a suitable comeback. Probably just as well because John possessed the ability to keep that kind of banter going all evening.

* * * *

Schubert appeared not to be able to contain himself. "How come you remember this conversation in such detail? It happened twenty-three years ago."

Stella's eyes watered. She looked at Arlenton. "Men just don't get it, do they?" She turned to Schubert. "Because I thought I was in love with him, you stupid dick. At nineteen, girls fall in love very easily."

The pair glared at each other.

Arlenton suspected that Stella was being deliberately bloody minded, making them listen to the long drawn out reminiscences of a woman who'd lost her true love. Nevertheless, to Arlenton, the elaborate narration somehow made the story sound real. And the intricate details meant there was more to crosscheck with other witnesses, more opportunity to put someone on the spot. "I wouldn't mind a fresh pot of tea, Stella." Arlenton said. "It's the jet lag; I need the caffeine. And can I use your bathroom?"

"Oh, yes, go toward the front door and turn left. Want some chocolate biscuits? You haven't touched the cupcakes."

"Thanks, no biscuits but I'll have a cupcake when I get back."

Arlenton's maneuver meant that Schubert and Stella could cool down in separate rooms, while she could retreat to a neutral corner.

Suitably refreshed with caffeine and calories, the trio continued. Schubert opened his notebook, but before Arlenton could ask the next question, Stella said, "Getting back to John and me, I know now that our relationship would have been

an absolute disaster. How could you ever trust a man like that? But let's carry on. Where was I going?"

"I think you were about to explain John's relationship with Anne," Arlenton said. "What happened that night?"

1979

The music turned up-tempo again, and John decided he needed a drink. He wandered off to join Henry at the bar. I went back to my table to join the others.

Felicity spoke first. "Well?"

"Well what?"

"Getting back with him?" she asked.

"Or getting back at him?" Kate added with a smirk.

"Neither, we're going for a meal later."

Felicity didn't give up. "Oooo, sounds serious."

"Just platonic," I said. "He's a nice guy."

Anne kept a straight face, but Kate and Felicity collapsed with laughter. "I'm going to get a refill," Anne said. "Anyone else want one?"

We had a rule that, unlike guys, we didn't buy rounds of drinks. So Kate, Felicity and I dived into our purses for cash and gave our drink orders to Anne. She wandered off and stood next to John and Henry. John said something to her, fished into his wallet, then left.

The barman served Anne immediately, and she returned with three drinks, held precariously in her two hands. She put them down in front of us.

"Left yours at the bar?" I asked.

She looked sheepish. "No I thought I'd leave now. John asked me if I wanted to go somewhere quiet."

"What! Have you forgotten everything the three of us have said about him?"

She reached for her purse. "It's not as if I don't know him, is it?"

It was true. We'd all first met John at a party, some time in the autumn after we left high school. We had chatted with him there, Anne included. He told us he and Denise had recently become "disengaged." But by now Anne was the only one of us who'd not succumbed to his charms, although he'd never actually asked her for a date, either.

Kate, Felicity, and I would never articulate it in so many words, but we considered Anne to be the shrinking violet in our group. Odd, really, because she was always the star in the school plays. But I suppose actors are shy, and theater is a way of overcoming it.

Anne didn't do much to enhance her appearance, either. She had straight, dark brown hair cut fairly conservatively. And adding to her somewhat bookish appearance, she wore glasses. On that night, however, she'd put her contact lenses in, but spoiled the effect by wearing an unstylish turtleneck sweater. We figured she dressed like that because of her shyness. Her small tits and the fact that she was still a virgin made matters worse. All of which hampered her dating potential. We repeatedly told her she could easily remedy one of those concerns, and hell, she was no less pretty than the rest of us.

Anne scurried off. We figured that she didn't dally, because she knew we'd try to persuade her out of it. If she'd been going off with anyone else but John, I would have been happy for her. When she'd gone, Kate said to me, "I thought you said John had asked *you* for a meal and a frolic tonight."

I held up my hands, one with a balled fist, the other with two fingers splayed. "Rock blunts scissors; virgin wins over whore."

Kate frowned at me. "Whore?"

"Yeah, you just said it; he was going to buy me a meal in exchange for a screw."

Then Felicity said something quite out of the blue, and that was the start of our troubles. "Let's get even with him."

* * * *

Arlenton took a deep breath; Stella had finally gotten to the point. "The idea for the plot to kill him came from Felicity?"

"Yes, if memory serves me correctly. I know it wasn't me."

"But it didn't matter because it wasn't serious," Arlenton said.

"Yeah, that's right. We were just kids fooling around."

"So what did you do? How did you set about it?"

"Well, we added Anne to the conspiracy, if you can call it that."

"In spite of her relationship with Jamison?"

"Ha! You must be joking. He'd had his virgin and dumped her. I think it lasted a week. When we met at my apartment, we could tell she was pretty disillusioned. As I said, at school she'd been the actress among us, starring in the school plays, but on this occasion, her acting skills deserted her. Floods of tears, miserable as hell, I remember her asking, 'Why do men do that?'"

"How upset was she?" Arlenton asked picking up her cup of tea.

"Logic says she shouldn't have been too upset because she'd achieved one of her goals. But along the way, she'd fallen in love with John."

Arlenton almost choked on her tea. "Along the way? She'd only been going with him a week!"

“It might have been two weeks, but that was John. He had that effect on a girl. Anyway, she got over it and seemed to be quite eager to join the Class of ’78’s plot to murder him.” Stella chuckled. The caper obviously amused her. “We even had a mission statement. It said something like, ‘We will strive to prevent further emotional carnage among Portsmouth’s female population.’ You must think we were mad?”

Schubert’s face had shown increasing perplexity as Stella’s story progressed, as though it lacked anything solid for him to latch onto. “Let me get this straight, Mrs. Sutcliffe, were you or were you not planning to kill Mr. Jamison?”

Stella turned to Schubert. “Of course not. If I showed you a photograph of us in 1979, you’d see what an innocent collection of girls we were.”

“Looks can be deceiving, believe me,” he said.

“True, but we were just playing a childish game. It made us feel better.”

Schubert persisted. “Were you going to tell Jamison?”

“Yeah, that was the general idea.”

“That in itself is a crime. Threatening someone by telling them you’re going to kill them is a serious offence.”

“But we never went through with it and never told him; so your point is moot.”

Schubert harrumphed.

Arlenton wondered why only two of the four ended up as suspects, but she was anxious not to lose momentum. “Okay, Mrs. Sutcliffe, now tell us about the mechanics of your plan.”

“Our scheming took place at the one-bedroom apartment that Kate and I shared, all we could afford at the time. Actually, our parents subsidized us. My mum and dad were pleased to have the house to themselves again, if you know what I mean.” Stella smiled. “Kate and I shared a double bed but not as lovers, just sleepers. In the winter, the extra warmth came in handy.” Arlenton thought Stella seemed keen to make this point clear. “Kate suggested poison. She said it was easiest. Kate, I should add, liked to play the dumb blonde. John had written that about her, too. But in Kate’s case, it was true that she certainly liked to create the impression of dumbness. She said men liked the combination. I’ve no doubt they did. In our gang of four, Kate’s career aspirations were modest. She worked in a flower shop.”

Arlenton noted that the dumb blonde theme had surfaced again. It seemed to be one of Stella’s bugaboos. “Why poison?”

“Yeah, we asked Kate that. She explained that the combination of certain herbs and alcohol could be lethal. She worked with plants and seemed to know what she was talking about. Actually, Anne verified that what Kate had said. Foxglove plus alcohol could induce a heart attack, she told us.”

“And when did the plan call for you to do this?” Arlenton asked.

“That was the problem. We were all on his reserve list now, to be called up only when he had no girlfriend and his sperm count had reached uncontrollable levels. Felicity said she could always get invited into his bedroom if she said she was desperate for sex. With John, willing sex partners were the first ones to be called up, provided there were no strings attached.”

“So Felicity was going to administer the poison?”

“Look, you keep coming back to this plot as though it were real.” Stella’s voice sounded strained. “How many more times do I have to say it? It was a joke!” Stella was almost shouting by the time she’d ended the sentence. She clenched her left fist and bit into the knuckle.

“Okay, Mrs. Sutcliffe, don’t get upset. I had to phrase it that way,” Arlenton said. “After all, you did say you were going to tell him about the plot.”

Stella relaxed and leaned back in her chair. “Felicity could have got him drunk, then slipped the poison into his booze and departed. She could have told the police he was okay when she left him.”

“The perfect crime,” Arlenton said. “Except that a heart attack in a healthy person is always suspicious.”

“Yes, but coincidentally, John’s father had died of a heart attack. And the foxglove we’d planned to use is impossible to detect.”

Schubert frowned. “Not now, it isn’t.”

“But in 1979, as far as I know, the effect of it combined with alcohol hadn’t been documented,” Stella replied. The look on her face said “clever dick” as effectively as if she’d poked her tongue out at him.

“And you had a supply of foxglove?” Arlenton asked.

“We could have acquired it, yes. It grows wild around here.”

“How did the plotting session end that evening?”

“We all felt a lot better because we were getting back at John. We hadn’t quite worked out how we were going to communicate the plot to him, but that was a minor detail. However, events overtook us, as you know.”

“What I don’t understand,” Arlenton said, “is why you revealed this plot to the police. If it was a harmless prank, what was the compulsion to mention it?”

“That was my fault. A detective and a policewoman came round to see me. I think his name was Sergeant Painter. The policewoman kept quiet the whole time.”

“You remember the detective’s name?” Schubert said. His voice betrayed a tone of disbelief.

“Yes, this was my first brush with the law, so it’s still pretty fresh in my memory, and I was to see a lot of Sergeant Painter in the following weeks. He

said he wanted to speak to Kate and me. Kate wasn't in but he interviewed me anyway. He seemed surprised that I knew John was dead."

"How *did* you know?" Arlenton asked.

"From Brenda, John's neighbor. But she didn't supply any details. At this point I wasn't panicking; I had no reason to. But then Sergeant Painter said something like, 'We have reason to believe you might not have been very well disposed towards Mr. Jamison.' Well, that freaked me out. I thought someone had mentioned our stupid plot. I was a naïve young girl. I didn't realize cops always pulled a stunt like that to unnerve you."

"But it worked. You told him the whole sorry story?"

"Yes, more or less the same way I just told you. Then he asked me when I'd last seen John. I said at the disco."

"The night he picked up Anne?"

"No, a few weeks later. We continued to go there, of course. It was our regular haunt, and John's, too. Then the detective asked if I knew anyone else who might have had a grudge against John."

"Anyone else?" Arlenton put the emphasis on else. "He implied that you were a suspect?"

"Yeah, that didn't escape me. I couldn't sleep that night, and for many more nights. I eventually had to get my doctor to prescribe some sleeping pills."

"Did you point Detective Painter in the direction of anyone?"

"No, I didn't. John's a nice chap, I told him. Why would anyone want to kill him?"

Schubert decided to enter the interrogation again. He'd been following the script of Stella's original statement and hadn't taken many notes. "But Detective Painter did ask the question: Do you know anyone who might have been upset with Jamison?"

"Yes, I believe he did. I gave the same answer I just gave you. I mean, who really thinks one human being could kill another? I must admit that later I thought, well, if I'm a suspect, then what about so-and-so? However, I wasn't going to implicate anyone else because I knew my anger at John had been temporary, and I assumed it was the same for the other girls. And besides, if there were others like me, I was sure the detective would find them."

"Yes, Mrs. Sutcliffe," Arlenton said. "But Detective Painter didn't ask who you thought might have wanted to kill John; he merely asked you who might have had a grudge against him."

"Yeah, but what I heard was the former, not the latter."

"What else did he ask you?"

“Had I been intimate with John? That was easy: yes. Then he asked if John was gay. I said I thought not. He finished the interview by saying he wanted to come back and talk to Kate.”

Schubert closed his notebook and made eye contact with Arlenton. “I think we’d better let you get to work now, Mrs. Sutcliffe.”

Arlenton had one final question. “You mentioned a 1979 photograph of the four of you. Could I borrow it?”

“Yes, I think I can find a copy somewhere.”

Stella disappeared. They heard her climbing the stairs.

“Why do you want the photo?” Schubert whispered.

Arlenton lowered her voice, too. “Just to give us a picture of what they looked like to Mick Painter. He must have seen something in two of them, otherwise they’d not still be on the suspect list.”

Stella rejoined them in less than a minute. “It was right on top.” She handed the picture to Arlenton. “From the left, that’s me, Felicity, Anne, and Kate. We were on holiday in Majorca in 1978. Our parents had paid for it as a present for passing our A-level exams.”

Arlenton studied the face of the youthful Stella Thomlinson: beautiful, blonde, and happy. “So you’d all be eighteen in this picture?”

“Yes. Four wild girls in Spain,” Stella said and laughed.

Arlenton gave the photograph to Schubert. He glanced at it. “We might be back, Mrs. Sutcliffe, but I’ll give you a bell first,” he said.

Arlenton translated bell into ring and then into phone call. An odd coincidence, she mused, that bell in North America is associated with the inventor of the telephone.

Schubert unlocked the car door for Arlenton and handed her the photograph. “On the drive to Kate Ralston’s place you can tell me what you see in their eighteen-year-old faces.”

He backed the car onto the main road, a dangerous maneuver that prompted an oncoming motorist to blast them with his horn for a couple of seconds. Schubert looked in his rear view mirror as the car disappeared in the opposite direction. Arlenton wondered if he had memorized the details of it, for later retribution.

“What did you think of her?” Schubert asked.

Arlenton had been studying the photograph and looked up. “Amazing story. It makes me wish I’d actually met the guy. But didn’t you think the narration sounded rehearsed?”

“Yeah, and either she was making up some of that stuff, or she has an incredible memory.”

“Usually it’s a bit of both,” Arlenton said. “I had to attend a lecture on the subject when I was at law school, and—”

“You were a lawyer?”

“Well, no, I applied to join the police as soon as I’d graduated.”

“Impressive. Sorry. I interrupted you.”

“The essence of the talk was that over time a person tends to embellish the actual facts with details that are culled from other experiences. Thus the whole story becomes a lot easier to remember.”