

The Strange Affair at Pootle Hall

by

Sal Bates

Here they are now, sitting together, all together in the dark, confirming what they already knew.

"We're really going to do this?"

"Hell yes!"

"Is everything ready?"

"I did the final checking this morning"

"I feel so sorry"

"Well it's a bit late now."

Chapter One

In Which We are Introduced to the Characters and it All Begins

He climbed

Climbed

Climbed

Climbed

A

Little

An endless meandering summer to come to an abrupt end with the the annual Pootel Hall Summer Gala. Abrasive excitement surged through the motionless parade as the villagers waited in line. His house shrinking in the distance, a large belly of a man walked determinedly down Main Street. Edward Albier could see her there waiting in line. Honey Potts, Honey Potts, Honey Potts, her name reverberated inside his head. He could see Honey, all blonde with legs and lips, he could smell Honey, that erotic perfume which lingered, and how he wished he could touch Honey.

“Darlings! Are we all in our correct places? You know Trev Trev gets cranky when things don’t go smoothly.” A tall, satsuma haired, slinky looking man, walking up and down, called out interrupting Edward’s daydream.

Trevor Stipe stopped dead. “Now Mrs Caruthers, you really need to switch on your hearing aid love, I said come as a bear,”

“Eh?” replied the elderly lady, who was conspicuous by her lack of clothing. Trevor summoned his assistant, “Robert love, please get Mrs Caruthers a blanket, for crying out loud, I don’t think Mr Staple could afford another heart attack!”

Pistol starting the villagers on their way up Main Street, the church clock struck ten in the morning. One by one they filed past Trevor, his organised eyes scanning as they passed. Each detail perfect, a tomato, a paintbrush and a fortune teller were among the many that filed by, and Trevor smiled, now was the perfect time to leave.

The unassuming tents punctuating Pootel Hall’s gardens were soon filled as the Gala’s participants became engrossed in their own activities. The day was an almost complete success. The almost was a blonde haired man, dressed as a vampire, complete with a face hiding mask who accused Orville Fltye of short changing him.

“Thieves and swindlers!” the No-Name Man proclaimed loudly as he stalked away from the book selling tent, a cut down version of Orville’s shop.

“Is everything ok Orville?” asked Edward wandering over from his own tent, where the brewing of many ales had come to fruition with its selling.

“All is well, Edward old chap. Just some random fellow, whose mathematical skills are not on par,” answered Orville, clasping his hands behind his rather large back and looking haughtily at Edward.

“Oh I see, been ripping people off again have we?” Edward retorted cattily.

“Certainly not!” came the indignant reply.

Apart from that one hiccup the day was a great success. Many people slowly became intoxicated on Edward’s homebrew and Charles announced that he intended to donate an extra ten thousand pounds to that year’s chosen cancer charity. It was a beautiful day and until Trevor discovered the dead body of Kylie Downs, everything was perfect.

He was shocked by how bloody the corpse of the village’s herbalist was. He searched her eyes for any sign of life, but the blood seeped over her body, covering every inch, snuffing out any light. Her marionette body frightened Trevor and he screamed instinctively, drawing the attention of everyone else.

Orville’s tent was closest and he came pounding over. The six defiant puncture wounds in her back, the alarming gash on the back of her head and the sheer amount of blood caused him to glance once, and then tear his eyes away from her.

“What happened?” Orville quickly asked.

“I, I, don’t know!” answered Trevor through measured sobs. “I came to get my reading done and there she was, all bloody.”

“I see,” said Orville, his eyes darting around the inside of the tent. “Well I can’t see a murder weapon.”

“I didn’t see anything when I came in, I just saw poor Kylie, on the floor, covered in, in, in blood,” on the last word he exploded into over the top crying.

“Ok, calm down,” bending his head around the tent he called out for Edward.

“What’s happened?” asked Edward in shock.

“I’ll make an announcement in a minute. I just need you to remove him, before he contaminates the crime scene. And could you organise someone to call the police.” And despite Orville’s instinctive instructions being betrayed by his shaky voice, Edward obeyed him without thought.

Eagerly waiting any news, a few minutes later a crowd had gathered outside the tent. Cutting a path through the masses, Charles Robinson, the Master of Pootle Hall, approached the tent quickly and stuck his head through the flaps.

“What has happened? Someone said that Kylie had died, it can’t be true, someone tell me that it is not true,” he said desperately.

Orville looked sadly back at Charles and shook his head.

“I’m so sorry, I know you were fond of Kylie, but I’m afraid it’s true. She’s gone,” he dropped his head, unable to look his old friend in the eye. Charles had been the one to invite both Kylie and her son Rob to come and live in the village. He owned all of the cottages about and she had signed a twenty year lease just six weeks previous.

“Has someone called the police?”

“I did Sir,” answered Edward.

“Good. Where is Rob?”

“He’s with Percy, I thought that that was best. They are particularly fond of each other as you know. He’s taken him to his cottage,” answered Orville.

“Right, well I guess everyone else should go up to the Hall. Can someone go over and bring Percy and Rob to the house and I’ll send the police up there when they get here. What a dreadful ending to a wonderful day,” said Charles miserably. When he’d planned today, it certainly wasn’t the ending he had had in mind and he knew for sure that today he had hosted the last ever Pootle Hall Summer Gala.

Chapter Two

In Which Things are Investigated and Khandi Explains

The forest who could spell
In many ways
Went all to pieces
Like measles and butteredtoast
Very carefully
From left to right

Appearing lost in such a grand room, the villagers sat in silence. They had all been in Pootel Hall before, inside the overstuffed, over decorated room, but never under such circumstances and never all together.

"Have the police been informed?" Trevor asked.

"They are on their way, local bobby and some big wig detective, apparently," answered Edward.

"Do you think they'll find out who killed my mum?" asked Rob Downs through tears.

"Let's hope so," answered Gwendolyn Peach. "If we're not safe here, in the grounds of Pootel Hall, then are we safe in our own beds? I for one will not sleep a wink tonight, I just know it! What if this maniac likes killing ladies of, well of a certain age, I mean, what if I'm next?"

"Oh I think you'll be safe in *your* bed Gwen" said Edward mischievously.

The speculative talk was interrupted by the dark brown ornate doors creaking open and the entrance of Orville and a pair of opposites. Tall, thin and Roman nosed, Thackeray Williams was flanked by a short, fat, familiar man, Nicholas Spanish.

"Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen," Thackeray greeted the group superiorly, as his hooded eyes gazed intently at them one by one. "I am Detective Inspector Thackeray Williams, thank you for gathering here. You will of course, be subject to individual questioning, until then, you are not to vacate this room without my specific permission. I am hoping that after a thorough investigation I will discover the sinister perpetrator of this heinous misdeed and that the assassin responsible for the death of," pausing, he looked hopefully at his notebook and continued, "Mrs Charlene Crowns will be caught." He gazed at the audience expectantly and smiled, knowing that he had every detail correct.

Although nervous of contradicting his superior, Nicolas tapped Thackeray Williams on the shoulder and whispered,

“Excuse me Sir, but we can’t legally keep these people here, we’ll have to let them go and question them at a later date.”

“Well of course we can’t keep them here Constable Spanish. Please release them all immediately,” spluttered an importance puffed Williams.

“Erm ok Sir,” answered a puzzled Spanish.

Williams turned to Orville and declared, “You will take me to the murder scene please, I wish to peruse the evidence before it becomes contaminated by the forensic men.” He then turned back to the rest of the group.

“Constable Spanish and I will come see you all during the next couple of days. I suggest that no one leaves the village as that will almost certainly send you to the top of the suspects list.”

And with that veiled threat, Thackeray Williams followed quickly by Orville, left the room where the rest of group sat open mouthed.

“Well,” said Edward, letting out a deep breath, “that was that.”

Swarming around the crisp white tents, the thirty strong, investigative team were each consumed with their frenzied tasks. A striding Thackeray Williams, cut through the mass, with a scurrying Orville refilling his footsteps.

“It’s the one on your left Sir,” Orville directed.

An Amazon like woman, her long black hair fastened back sensibly in a long pony tail, emerged from the tent and introduced herself.

“It’s an honour to meet you Sir, your reputation precedes you, my name is Dr. Khandi Alexander. Would you please follow me?”

The three of them entered the tent and were confronted by the bludgeoned body of Kylie Downs.

“Nice to meet you Doctor, do we know the cause of death?” asked Williams swiftly.

“Blunt force trauma to the back of the head,” replied Khandi, “the poor darling was then knifed six times for good measure,” she continued and turned the body over to illustrate her point. “Look at this abrasion, the angle is such that it would only be possible if the killer was left handed, however, this other wound,” she pointed to the other side of the torso, “could only be administered by a right handed person.”

“Are you suggesting that there were *two* killers?” Orville asked in disbelief.

"It is far more complicated than that," continued Khandi. "This wound is more of a scratch than puncture, it has a depth of just two millimetres. Whereas in comparison, this wound is deep at five point three centimetres. They appear to have been inflicted at different times, see the puckering on this wound compared to the wound on the left?"

"Are you seriously suggesting, Doctor Alexander that there may be multiple killers, and if I am not mistaken, with varying strength?" Orville turned towards Doctor Alexander for confirmation of his surmising, and was rewarded with a nod of affirmation from her.

"You are quite correct Mr?" Doctor Alexander asked with a smile.

"Oh, I am Orville Flyte, I run the local bookshop,"

"Really? I love to read, I'll have to pop in while we're here."

"When you two have finished exchanging pleasantries, we're supposed to be investigating the death of poor Miss Downs," admonished Williams. "If there are no other details Doctor Alexander, then I shall call it a day for today. Could you send the autopsy results to Constable Spanish's office as soon as you've got it completed?"

"Absolutely Detective Williams," she replied firmly.

"Come on Spanish, I thought I passed a public house on the way here, I could do with a whiskey," said Williams leading Spanish and Orville out of the tent and as all three of them contemplated the events of the day, they were acutely aware that the hard work was yet to come.

Chapter Three

In Which the Suspects are Established and Orville Becomes a Third Wheel

Go back

Go on

And *bother!*

Walk

By the back door

And looked at him

Gazing optimistically out of his kitchen window for a glance of Chief Inspector Williams, the morning after the night before, Orville laid in wait, hoping that he'd be able to help him in the investigation. His patience was soon rewarded as the stalking figure of Thackeray cut through Ornsby, with the squashed figure of Nicolas Spanish trailing behind.

"Right, this murder must be solved as soon as possible, in a small community like this, these things have a tendency to spread," Williams stated. "Who is first on our list of suspects?"

"Orville Flyte, lives at The Chestnuts, runs the local bookshop, bit full of himself, with his books and his learning, but a decent chap," Spanish replied swiftly. "Ah here he comes now."

Orville, eager to get involved in the solving of the crime, hurried over to the approaching pair as fast as his short legs allowed.

"How can I help you fellows, I presume you'll want to speak to me at some point?" Orville asked rather over enthusiastically. "I was in my book selling tent the entire afternoon, I have some rarities that I only bring out at charity dos and I like to stay with them."

"Ah yes, Mr Flyte, I have a couple of questions for you, you say you were in your tent the entire afternoon? Did anything unusual happen?"

"Well there was one thing. Some stranger, I'd certainly never seen him before, blonde man, six foot tall I'd say, well built. He accused me of short changing him."

"And did you?"

"Certainly not. Why would I rip people off? I want my customers to come back, I'm very specialised, it's not worth it."

"I see, and is there anything else you have to add?"

“Not from my perspective, but I can still help you, I know everything about everyone in this village. I could stick the kettle on if you like?” Orville offered.

“Some in depth knowledge of the community could be invaluable, so lead the way,” Williams thoughtfully conceded.

Once settled into the plainly decorated living room, filled with tea and biscuits, Orville finally began his dissection of the residents.

“We have a Pootle Hall Summer Gala every year,” he began. “Charles covers everyone’s costs, so all the money raised goes directly to charity. This year was particularly poignant as Charles’ Mother had passed away a few months earlier, from breast cancer.” Orville’s voice was no higher than a whisper, he paused and then continued.

“Charles, understandably thought it appropriate to donate all the money to the local cancer hospice.”

“I don’t understand what this has to do with the death of Miss Downs,” said a puzzled Spanish.

“It was a very personal event this year, extremely personal, to each and every one of the villagers, we all loved Lady Robinson. This suggests to me that whoever killed Kylie did it for personal reasons. To interrupt a day that had been organised specifically for one of us, well it had to be someone looking for revenge.”

“You don’t think it was someone from the outside then?” asked Williams.

“No I don’t. Someone from the outside would have had only a couple of weeks notice of the Gala, we don’t start advertising until a fortnight before the actual event. They would have had to find Kylie, find out about the Gala, look in to what was happening and make their plans accordingly. For things to have happened as smoothly as they did, the murderer or murderers would have had to have done plenty of planning.”

“Actually what you say makes a certain amount of sense. But I have one flaw in your surmising.”

“And that would be?”

“The blonde you didn’t short change.”

“I’d never seen him before yesterday afternoon. He walked around, came to my tent and then disappeared inside Kylie’s tent to get a reading I supposed. He was in there a while but he came out long before Trevor found Kylie’s bodies. He then left all together.”

“Can you say that for certain?”

“Yes, you notice outsiders what you live in a village, everyone else who was there, was either a villager or from the next village, Spoin Kop.”

“Are you saying that it was someone you know that killed Miss Downs then Mr Flyte?” asked Spanish, a little shocked.

“I hate to say it, but it must have been. I’ve known most of the villagers all of my life, some are close friends, others not so much, but I don’t know if any of them could be capable of murder.”

“Why don’t you let us be the judge of that,” said Williams a little snottily. “Can you give us a list of exactly who was there?”

“Of course,” Orville replied swiftly. “There was Edward Albier, the rather large chap who was selling ales, Gwendolyn Peach, she’s the frump who was running a flower stall, she’s a bit of a gossip so take anything she says with a rather large pinch of salt as she has a tendency to over exaggerate. Then there is Rob Down and Percy Swinelle, Percy is the local vet, lovely bloke, him and Rob and have been together for at least a year to my knowledge.”

“Together?” questioned Williams.”

“Together as in a couple, oh and Rob is Kylie’s son.”

“I see,” said Williams, as he scribbled a note on his pad.

“Edgar Burro was the rather surly looking bloke you saw, running the guess how many marbles are in this jar tent, not that he gave a damn. Lovely bloke, one of my closest friends, manic depressive so has his fair share of problems. And then of course there was Rodger Lapin, selling vegetables, does the same thing every year, people come to the Gala for his veg. He was the tall blonde man. He’s ok, bit of a know it all, but harmless.”

“Anyone else?”

“Only myself, oh and Trevor.”

“Trevor?”

“Trevor Stipe. He runs a local wedding business, organising and selling wedding things. He left as soon as the parade got started.”

Williams stood up. “Thank you for that concise analysis of the villagers, if we need anything more from you, we’ll be in touch.”

Orville also stood,

“Well if you’re sure,” he said disappointed that apparently he was being given the brush off.

“I am. We’ll work our way down this list. Come on Spanish, it looks like we have a lot to do,” and Williams walked smartly out of the room leaving a crestfallen Orville behind.

Chapter Four

In Which the Answers Are Given But the Questions Are Not Answered

A little song
Would rain
Half-way
But supposing
He hadn't
Said that

Gwendolyn Peach was a typical seventy one year old spinster. She lived alone, apart from her dog Batley, went to church twice a week and was on every committee for every activity which ran in the village. She was also a dreadful gossip. Unfortunately for Williams and Spanish, she was also on the top of their suspects list. Spanish knocked smartly on her door.

"Be warned Sir, Orville was right, she does have a tendency to over react and blow things out of proportions."

Gwendolyn opened the door and greeted them both with a wide smile,

"I was waiting for you to get around to me, I've put the kettle on, would you like a cuppa?"

"We've not long since had one thank you Miss Peach, we'd like to ask you a few questions, may we come in?" asked Williams smoothly. Gwendolyn's smile slipped just a little, but recovered herself,

"Of course gentleman, follow me," and led them through her house into her sitting room. Picking up a small ankle biting mongrel she sat down in a straight backed flowered pattered chair and placed the dog lovingly on her knee.

"Fire away," she said.

"Firstly, do you remember anything unusual about that day?" Williams asked.

"Not really, unless you count that obnoxious blonde man that thought he owned the whole village. I warned Maude that he'd be nothing but trouble. Why? Do you think that he killed poor Kylie?"

"We can't be sure of anything at this stage. Were you and the deceased close?"

"We were more acquaintances than actual friends, she didn't socialise with anyone really, bit of a stuck up piece if you ask me. Not that I had anything against the woman you understand, but we're a very close community here and she didn't seem to want to get involved. She wasn't one for mixing."

"I see."

"You can't think I had anything to do with it surely?"

"Like I said, we're not ruling anything out at this stage, where were you when she was killed?"

"I was in my florist tent and didn't leave it all day. I'll have you know that my creations have got our village into the semi finals of the "Villages in Flower" competition, twice!" Gwendolyn was affronted by the very suggestion that she could have been involved.

"Well thank you very much for all of your help," Williams shot Spanish a knowing look. "We'll be back if we have any more questions for you." And with that they left.

Walking through the village both of the men were lost in their own thoughts.

"Well hello gentleman" Trevor Stipe interrupted the daydreams with his cheery greeting.

"I take it that you'll be interviewing everyone over this dreadful matter?" he asked.

"If you mean the murder of Katie Frowns then yes, we will be interviewing everyone who took part in the Gala, with particular emphasis on those who hosted the varying activity tents," replied Williams.

"Right, well, I organised the parade, it set off from the church at ten o'clock precisely and made its way up Main Street to Pootle Hall. I unfortunately had to leave. I had an emergency appointment with a client whose wedding is this coming Saturday. You see, her dress hadn't arrived, and then the catering company I had hired had gone bust and then the photographer had got swine flu, all within a few days of each other. Well the poor darling was in pieces, so I promised her that I would be on my way to see her and so left as soon as the parade had set off," said Trevor, without a pause.

"So when the murder took place?"

"I was miles away in Great Tender with my client," Trevor smiled confidently.

"I see, and do you have a number for this lady?" asked Williams.

"I do," replied Trevor and gave the number to Spanish. "Her name is Rachel Yiddle. Is that all I can do for you fine gentlemen?"

"Well no doubt we'll be questioning you again. Come along Spanish, we have many inquiries to make," and with that the two men set off towards the village's main street.

Once out of ear shot, Spanish asked Williams,

"Do you believe him?"

"I don't know, we'll have to look into it. What do we have so far?"

“Orville Flyte never left his tent until he heard Trevor screaming. Gwendolyn didn’t leave her tent either, but she didn’t particularly get on with Miss Downs. Trevor claims he was miles away at the time, but that remains to be seen,” replied Spanish.

“Right who is next on the list then?”

“A Miss Honey Potts, Edward Albier, Percy Swinelle and Rob Downs. Miss Potts lives at The Six Pine Trees and Percy and Rob are both at Milne Cottage. Apparently Percy didn’t want to leave Rob alone,” answers Spanish.

“Right come on then, lead on McSpanish.”

Chapter Five

In Which Cricket is discussed and Access is Denied

By the time it
Had grown up
It did no run as it
Used to
It knew
There is no hurry

As Williams and Spanish entered The Six Pine Trees, the first thing they noticed was a couple of old fellows who were chatting animatedly. Caldicot and Charters were Sunday afternoon regulars. Sitting in their usual corner, the well worn table between them, cricket was their general subject of choice.

“Ar the world ignores cricket.” laments Caldicot.

“Too true my man, too true,” answered Charters.

“The youth of today just do not appreciate the game. They are far too busy on their computer games, they’re afraid of fresh air. ”

“You speak the truth yet again. But it’s not just their fault,” replies Charters.

“How so?” Caldicot asks.

“I blame the Government,” replies Charters

“Ah yes, the Government. How is it their fault again?”

“The funding man! The funding!”

“Oh yes, the funding, you are quite in order. If they provided more funding, then the youth of today would appreciate the game and consequently the players of today wouldn’t be so dire.”

“You my dear fellow, are a truth speaker and a gentleman,” and with that Charters raises his glass to Caldicot. And so the conversation continued. Their long time friendship and copious amounts of brandy cut the conversation into half-sentences.

“Can I help you gentlemen?” asked the curly haired blonde woman, who was leaning over the chipped bar. Tearing his eyes away from her ample bosom, Williams finally found the gaze of woman who faced him.

“We’re looking for Miss Honey Potts,” he managed to say.

"Why that's me," Honey smiled, unaware, as usual, of her affect on the men on the other side of the bar.

"Could we ask you a couple of questions about yesterday?"

"Oooh yes. Poor Miss Downs. Lovely lady she was. She always popped in here on a Sunday afternoon for a glass of white wine. Between me and you, most of the people in this village are not as welcoming as they could be. But Kylie, she always had a kind word for me. And when my cat was dying, she came with me to the vets and sat with me right until the end. Marvellous she was."

"Where were you when she was murdered?"

"I was enjoying the different tents. First I bought some ale from Eddie, I mean Edward," she blushed and then continued. "Then I went to Edgar's tent, he was running one of those guess how many whatevers are in the jar tents. I love those. I guessed one hundred and forty seven. I always feel so sorry for Edgar. Poor fella. Anyway, then I picked up the arrangement that I'd ordered from Gwendolyn and then had a sandwich and cup of tea sat under the trees."

"And did you see anything unusual?"

"Not really. There was a blonde bloke who caused a bit of trouble with Orville, but other than that everything was normal. Everyone was in their costumes just running their stalls as far as I could tell."

"And did you talk to anyone who could corroborate your whereabouts?" Spanish asked.

"Erm, now let me think. Ooo yes, Sir Charles came and sat with me for while."

"Well thank you Miss, we might be back to speak to you again."

"Any time gentlemen. Now would you like a drink?" she asked, seemingly relieved that the interrogation was over.

"No, we won't stop, time is getting on, and we still have people to see. Could you direct us to Milne Cottage?"

"Of course, you go out of here, turn left and follow Main Street until you see the fork in the road and then turn right and Milne Cottage is the only house at the top of that lane."

Well thank you, we'll see you later Miss Potts, thank you so much for your help."

Ten silent minutes later, the two detectives were stood outside Milne Cottage.

"I think we'll make this the last for today and go back to the station. Doctor Alexander should have the autopsy results ready for us by now."

"Ok Sir. What did you think to the delectable Miss Potts."

"A bit obvious for my tastes, she certainly seemed to like Miss Downs anyway." Williams answered as he knocked on the dark green door. A small prematuring bald man answered.

"I was wondering if you'd be here today," said Percy, blocking the doorway.

"Could we come in and ask you a few questions?" asked Williams.

"Well it's not really convenient right now. I've just managed to persuade Rob to go to bed. He's been up all night poor lamb. The doctor has just been and given him a sedative. Well you can imagine what he's going through. Keeps blaming himself, says he could have done more."

"Could he?" asked Williams quickly.

"Of course not," Percy retorted.

"And what did Kirsty Clowns think of your, relationship with her son?" Spanish asked pointedly.

"Kylie Downs," said Percy pointedly, "was a very devoted mother, who loved her son and accepted me as part of their family," and with that he slammed the door shut.

"Did you hear his voice?" Spanish asked.

"I did, he sounded like a cross between an answering machine and an over rehearsed actress," Williams answered.

"That's what I thought. And what about Rob being in bed? Did you believe that?"

"I don't know. Let's go back to the station, and write up the entire case so far. We might get some answers we haven't seen yet."

"Lead the way Sir, and if you're lucky, I might even buy you a bacon butty."

"Bacon butty? I don't think so Sergeant. Bacon butty indeed." And with a withering look toward Spanish, Thackeray Williams made his way back down the lane to the waiting car with Spanish trailing in his wake.

Chapter Six

In Which Wires Are Crossed and the Book is Passed

He went into
a long walk
then he climbed
down again
across,
long before

“Why are we questioning these two together Sir?” asked Spanish a little puzzled. It was day two and they were on their way to Six Pine Trees, where they had arranged to speak to Edward and Rob.

“Because my simple friend, these two men are hiding something. Why else would they have stayed out of the way? That annoying Peach woman, beams at me every time I walk through the village and that pompous ass Flyte has phoned the station five times so far for updates, and Edgar and Rodger have both made statements at the station, while these two have been conspicuous by their silence. And I checked with the local doctor and he didn’t give Rob Downs a sedative yesterday,” replied Williams patiently as he steered the car in the car park.

“Percy was lying?” asked Spanish incredulously.

“Percy was lying. And there’s another thing. Doctor Alexander confirmed that more than one person killed Miss Downs.”

“And you think it was these two?”

“Well even if it’s not, it will be interesting to see them both together and how they react in front of each other.”

“Let’s go then boss,” said Spanish as he opened the door to pub.

They were ready for them, their eyes were watchful and they had their questions ready, Edward and Rob rose from their chairs as the two detectives entered.

“Good morning gentlemen,” opened Williams. “We’ve brought you here as we seem to have had difficulty getting hold of you the last couple of days,” he paused and looked pointedly at Rob, who had the grace to look away embarrassed.

“We actually have two questions for you,” said Spanish.

“What were your movements on the day of the Gala?” asked Williams.

"I was helping Percy in the animal tent. People were bringing their pets and livestock for a free check up. I was checking them in and out and taking notes for their records. Percy was with me all the time and I'm sure he'll tell you the same thing if you want to ask him." said Rob.

"And how was your relationship with your mother at the time of her demise?"

"We were fine. She'd accepted Percy as my partner and was even talking about arranging a civil partnership ceremony for us. We were becoming a proper family. We loved her. Not everyone did of course. A few people had grudges against her."

"Like who?" ask Spanish quickly.

"Edward here for one, he rescued me from drowning one day and Mum accused him of only doing it to get Charles' attention."

"Hey, that was a misunderstanding, we were close after that. She used to come to mine for tea every Wednesday and I would come to yours on Fridays," interjected Edward.

"Well yes you're right. And she was grateful that you saved me, I suppose, as I was. But Rodger never hid the fact that he hated newcomers and then there was Edgar who fancied her and she just ignored him," said Rob.

"Really? We got the impression that she didn't have any enemies," said Williams thoughtfully.

"In a village this small? Even that crabby cow Gwendolyn Peach didn't like her, had a thing for Edgar you see and he of course wasn't interested. Well if that's all gentlemen, I have a funeral to arrange." Rob rose from the table and left the two men sat open mouthed.

"Don't mind him, he's grieving. He understandably misses her more than any of us," said Edward kindly.

"And how about you? Where were you when she was killed?" asked Williams.

Edward leaned over the table and spoke in a low voice.

"Can I be frank with you fellows? Confidential like?"

"Unless it has a great impact on the case, your secret is safe with us Mr Albier," answered Williams.

"Well, I was in my tent, sampling my own homebrew, and I didn't leave it all day. I wanted to ask that delectable lady Miss Potts if she fancied allowing an older fella like myself taking her out for a meal sometime, and I was imbibing in some Dutch courage."

"And what did she say?" ask Spanish.

"Alas, poor Miss Downs was unfortunately murdered before I had the chance to ask," replied Edward sadly.

"I see," said Williams thoughtfully.

"She's actually due to start work soon, so if you chaps have finished, I might just go to the bar and order myself a bit of Dutch courage and give it another go." And with that Edward winked at the two men and stumped over the bar.

"So, sir. What now?" asked Spanish.

"Well things need thinking through Spanish. We've got this woman, who did and didn't have any enemies, who did and didn't like the villager and who did and didn't accept her son's relationship, all according to the different people. I get the feeling that they're hiding something."

"You think they're all working together? Isn't that a bit conspiracy theory like for you?" asked Spanish mischievously.

"Maybe, but something really doesn't add up to me. Why would there be so many conflicting opinions?"

"Well isn't that just people anyway sir? No two people really ever have the same opinion."

"You might be right there, but there is definitely more to this case than meets eye. Let's go back to the station and go back over the statement and see if we can make any sense out of it all."

Chapter Seven

In Which There is Another Death and Clues Emerge

Instead of being
Didn't mind
The honey the bees
Always made him
Feel sorry
He wasn't thinking

Friday nights were Honey's least favourite night at work. Being on her own behind the bar was ok, it wasn't like they were overrun with customers. Charters and Caldicot were certainly harmless enough, but Edward came in every Friday and would turn on the charm. Ergh. That was something she could certainly do without. He just wouldn't get the message. She'd left her whole life behind to escape a bad relationship. She just wasn't ready another one just yet. Not that the men of Ornsby seemed to care what she thought or felt.

Falling off his stool, and landing on his coccyx, Edward struggled to get back on his feet, laughing.

"Are you alright Ed?" asked Rodger attempting to suppress his own laughter, whilst offering a hand.

"I'm fine, just fine," Edward answered, before falling back down. "I'm fine, but can someone tell this floor to stop moving about."

Coming round from behind the bar, Honey took Edward from under his arms and heaved him to his feet.

"I think you've both had enough," she said sternly.

"I thought at the time that one of us was drinking too much darling, but I didn't like to say," declared Rodger pompously. Edward giggled and toasted the air with the remainder of his drink.

"To you my friend,"

"And to you," Rodger toasted back.

"Right come on guys, time to leave," said Honey, picking up the phone and dialling.

"Hello Charles, can you come down here and pick up Edward and Rodger?" she asked into the phone.

"Yes, again. I know. Thanks Charles, I really appreciate it."

A few minutes later, Charles, a couple of friends and one of Rodger's relations, heaved the two drunk friends from the pub, into a waiting car. Charles shook his head.

"Silly old pair," he said.

Wiping down the bar for the last time that night, Honey sighed with relief. It wasn't often that she had to call Charles, but at least he was always there if she needed to. Such a gentleman. She walked over to the light switches and pressed them all down one by one.

She didn't hear the person come behind her. She didn't feel their breath on the back of her neck. She didn't feel the hammer as it struck her on the back of neck. Until it was far too late.

The next morning the rain that had interrupted the long run of fine weather was the last thing on Williams' mind. Two bodies in three days. And he was no closer to solving this case than when he'd given everyone his introductory speech.

"So Boss, any idea why she was killed?" asked Spanish tauntingly.

"No Spanish. You'll be surprised to hear that I don't have any idea. Miss Potts was apparently well liked, had no enemies and there were no witnesses. According to Gwendolyn Peach anyway. I've contacted her family, her parents are dead, there was a fiancé, but that ended acrimoniously just before she moved here, actually he was the reason she moved here. Her sister Pepper is going to arrive at Honey's cottage later on today. She's understandably upset. You know how to deal with female type women, you can go and see her. But first I want you to go and see Trevor Stipe. The phone number that he gave us doesn't appear to work. I'm going to go and see our vocal friend Mr Flyte, maybe he knows why Miss Potts was killed."

"How was she killed?"

"Blunt force trauma, just like Miss Downs, no knife wounds this time though."

"What do you think that means?"

"Maybe Doctor Alexander was right and Miss Downs was killed by more than one person, and maybe Miss Potts was killed by one of those. The head wounds are very similar."

"So whoever had a grudge against Miss Downs, also wanted rid of Miss Potts."

"Precisely, that or Miss Potts knew something about the killers of Miss Downs and didn't realise it yet," said Williams, thinking out loud. "Anyway, let's get on and meet back here this afternoon, after you've see Miss Potts' sister. Mr Brown, the owner of the place is keen to get it back up and running as soon as this afternoon, so we may be able to get some dinner at least. I'm going to go to see our friend Mr Flyte, he might know if there is a link between our two victims."

"Ok. I'll see you later sir," said Spanish.

He turned and walked away from his boss, and shook his head, female type women indeed! Sometimes that man lived in the dark ages. As he trudged through the rain across to Trevor Stipe's shop *Bridal Dreams*, Spanish dreaded facing its owner. He'd had dealings with him before, he'd cautioned him for disturbing the peace after an over noisy party one night. He pushed the door open and walked in, the little bell announcing his presence.

"Hello?" he called out. Trevor came out from the back, on shoes which looked suspiciously like high heels to Spanish.

"Oh hello darling, I mean constable, is there something I can help you with?" Trevor asked coquettishly.

"You can as a matter of fact. We tried to call that number you gave us for Miss Yiddle, and it didn't work."

"I expect the silly moo lost her phone again, if you hang on a min, I've got another number for her somewhere." He disappeared into the back room, shutting the door firmly behind him. Spanish wandered around the shop, gazing at the over priced goods. Why people got married he'd never know. He looked over the counter and could see an address reel. He wondered why Trevor just didn't get her number from there. He turned the pages over to the Y section. There she was, Rachel Yiddle. Glancing quickly at the door to the back, he whipped his notebook out of his pocket, swiftly wrote the number down, and stood back away from the counter. Just in time.

"Here we go, this should be her home number, but if it doesn't work, feel free to pop over anytime." Trevor smiled and handed Spanish a piece of paper.

"Well thank you. I'm sure this will help a great deal," said Spanish and left quickly. As soon as Spanish was out of sight, he pulled out his notebook and compared the numbers. They were different. The plot gets thicker and thicker thought Spanish.

Chapter Eight

In Which Lies are Uncovered and Tales are Told

He came out of his
morning as he wondered what
was nearest
rabbit and no rabbit
in the forest
strange

"So he was lying then? I can't say I approve of your methods Spanish, but that was nice bit of detective work. Well done," said Williams. "And he didn't see you take the number?"

"No I don't think so sir," replied Spanish

"And what happened when you rang?"

"Well he was half telling the truth, Rachel Yiddle was a client of his, but that was two years ago. She was holiday when he was supposed to be with her."

"I see, well we'll have to go back and question him later. Gwendolyn Peach rang me and said that she has vital information regarding Miss Potts. Did you see her sister?" asked Williams.

"I did. She is understandably distraught. She broke down in tears, so called I the doctor to give her a sedative. Sir, I promised her that we'd find out who killed her sister."

"And so we will. The fact that Stipe lied is interesting. He no longer has an alibi. Let's go and see what Miss Peach has to say and then we'll sit down and work out what we have so far."

Ten minutes later Williams and Spanish were sat in Gwendolyn's living room, where Spanish was desperately trying to ignore her dog being over friendly to his leg.

"Here we are gentlemen, a nice cup of tea. No Batley! Get off of the nice constables leg." She picked him up and placed him on her knee.

"You asked to see us Miss Peach," began Williams gently.

"Oh yes. Well now. I was walking down the side of the church, hidden by the foliage there, when I heard voices. It was Edward and Trevor arguing. I couldn't really hear the words they were saying but they were definitely arguing, I could tell, their arms were all over the

place. Edward pushed Trevor and then yelled at him 'she wasn't part of it and I loved her.' And then Edward stormed off, Trevor stayed for a bit and then left."

"Are you sure that's what Edward said?" asked Williams quickly.

Oh yes, I heard that quite clearly."

The men exchanged quick glances.

"Have I helped? Did Trevor or Edward kill Honey? Not Edward surely, the whole village knows that he was infatuated with her. She told me that he asked her out and she turned him down. Do you think he killed her as some sort of revenge? And what about Kylie, was he involved there too?" she looked eagerly at the men hoping for the answers to her questions. She was to be disappointed. Ignoring her questions the men rose and headed out the door.

"Well thank you Miss Peach," said Spanish, "if we have any more questions we'll be sure to come back" he said, as he closed the door behind them.

Williams and Spanish walked quickly through the village. The rain had stopped and the sun was sneaking its way through the clouds.

"Where are we going?" asked Spanish, struggling to keep up with the surprisingly spritely Williams.

"To Sanders Cottage, to see Mr Albier. I want to know more about this argument. I need to know if there is more to it than just gossip. Let's see if that Peach woman has got her facts straight for once."

Standing inside the rather warm kitchen of Edward Albier, Spanish was amused to see a whole wall dedicated to cookery books.

"Please tell me you're joking. You think I've got something to do with the death of Honey," said Edward angrily.

"Well, we do know that you asked her out, you told us that you were going to do that yourself," said Williams.

"And we know that she turned you down," added Spanish.

"No one would blame you for being angry, for wanting rid of her, so you didn't have to see her around the village after she humiliated you," said Williams.

"After all, Gwendolyn Peach knew, and we know that she isn't exactly the soul of desecration," finished Spanish.

"You're right. I did ask her out and yes she did turn me down. But it wasn't because she didn't like me. She even said that she thought that she loved me. But she'd left her ex just six months ago, she'd caught him cheating. She didn't trust anyone just yet. Don't you see, I

couldn't kill her? She was my future. I was going to marry her one day," Edward burst into sobs.

"Well answer me one thing. What did you mean by," pausing Spanish opened his notebook and read, "She wasn't part of it and I loved her."

Pulling his face out of his tissue, Edward asked, "What? I never said that."

"According to Miss Peach, you were in the grounds of the church and having an argument with Trevor Stipe."

"Well I was arguing with Trevor, but he was taking to the piss out of me for being so upset over Honey's death. He said I was being stupid. What I actually yelled was she didn't start it and I loved her. As in , she didn't start our relationship and I was willing to wait for her." Edward started crying once more.

"Thank you so much for your time, we can see that you're upset. We might be back later. Come on Spanish," and with that Williams led Spanish back out into the sunshine.

"Did you see his face after his last statement? He was watching our reactions," said Williams.

"You think he was lying" asked Spanish.

"I know he was. Come on. I think we've just cracked this case wide open."

"We have?" said a surprised Spanish.

"Yes, I have to go and have a quick word with Doctor Alexander, and Jeffery Wragg, Miss Downs' lawyer. Assemble everyone at Pootle Hall. I'll be there in two hours.

Chapter Nine

In Which They are Gathered and We Learn How Did It.

Hallo
he had never said
sounded funny
very kindly
she knew
he wanted as much

The eight people sat around the room looked at each other nervously, aware that someone was going to go to prison. They had been here before, in this room, waiting for information. The double doors opened and Thackeray Williams, Nicolas Spanish and Charles Robinson entered purposefully.

"I have gathered you all here back in Pootle Hall, with the kind permission of Sir Charles," Thackeray Williams nodded towards Charles, "as I now know who killed both Miss Downs and Miss Potts." Williams settled himself into a chair and began to speak again.

"This has been a most interesting case for me. Never before have I encountered such a case. According to Miss Potts, Miss Downs was well liked, but when I spoke to you Rob, you insisted that she had a problem with most of the village. It was also amazing how everyone appeared to have a perfect alibi as you were all conveniently busy in your own tents, which you never left. And then there was the mysterious blonde man, who everyone saw but nobody knew. Miss Downs' injuries caused another problem with a thump to the head which didn't kill her, and the six knife wounds in her back. Very fitting for Miss Downs it seems, being knifed in the back. But it wasn't just the number of wounds she received that persuaded me who the killers are."

"Did you say killers?" asked Gwendolyn nervously.

"Yes Miss Peach, there was certainly more than one killer. As I was saying, it wasn't just the number of wounds. My investigators went over the entire scene and found some really interesting clues. Round the back of the tent they found several different sets of foot prints. They also found the costume that you all have said the blonde man was wearing, in the woods next to the Pootle Hall grounds. It was buried. There was also a blonde wig. Now why would someone who just came for the day to look around a Gala go to all the trouble of dressing up and then dump the costume, albeit not very successfully, in the woods?"

"You're the detective, why don't you tell us?" said Rodger snidely.

"Oh I am going to. The Parade took place and everyone went to their tents. The blonde man showed up as an outsider and was really loud to get attention, even accusing Mr Flyte here of short changing him. That never took place incidentally, I checked up on your shop Mr Flyte and you have an impeccable reputation, for book selling at least. I digress. He then went to get his reading done and was seen leaving by both Miss Potts and Mr Albier here. Our blonde man then left quietly." Turning towards Trevor, Williams continued.

"You never left for your imaginary appointment. We checked. You did indeed arrange Mrs Yiddles wedding for her, however that was over a year ago. So I wondered why you would need a fake alibi and then I figured it out. You came back to the fair wearing the blonde man's costume. You then went into Edward's tent and swapped costumes."

"Why are you dragging me into this? I already told you that I love Honey and wouldn't kill her."

"And indeed you didn't Mr Albier, but you certainly *were* involved in the death of Miss Downs," said Williams and Edward sat back down.

"You bastard, you killed my mother!" cried out Rob.

"I would be quiet if I was you," said Spanish pointedly.

"Thank you Spanish, as I was saying. Trevor and Edward swapped costumes and then as the blonde man, wearing the wig, you went into the tent, through the front, as if you were going for a reading and then hit her over the head. She fell to the floor, and you took off your costume and knifed her in the back. You then get back into costume, which hides any sign of blood. You then left out of the back of the tent and it appeared that Kylie is still busy reading palms. You went back into your tent and swapped costumes with Trevor, who then goes to the next murderer's tent and repeats this until you all had your turn. Trevor then went into Kylie's tent through the back and has his turn and left out of the front wearing the blonde's costume."

"Oh I did did I? Then prove it darling!" Trevor snapped.

"Oh I did, before I came here, we searched your home, and we found the trainers you were wearing that day, they were a forensic match for a footprint we found at the back of Kylie's tent. Not only that, we found the exact same foot print outside The Six Pine Trees. You thought that the rain had covered your footprints, but it just so happens that the milk man came that morning and put a milk crate over the foot print, which protected the print from the rain. So we will be arresting you for the murder of Miss Honey Potts too. But you won't be going alone. You Edgar Burro, have been very quiet throughout this entire investigation

and today I finally learned why. I had been told that you were in love with Miss Downs, and indeed you were, thirty years ago, before she fell pregnant with your son and left you. She didn't think you could be a father to Rob did she? That made you mad didn't it?"

"Yes it did. She kept my son from me, she had no right to judge if I'd be a good dad or not!" blasted Edgar.

"Be quiet, you fool," said Rodger.

"Ah yes Mr Lapin, you didn't like outsiders at all did you. You made an exception for Trevor, but only because he allowed you buy into his thriving business. You tried to make friends with Miss Downs, but as Miss Peach here so eloquently put it, she wasn't one for mixing. And as for you pair," Williams said turning to Percy and Rob who were sat together holding hands.

"What about us! Are you going to say that I killed my own Mother?" said Rob.

"You did. You see I made a little visit to your mum's solicitor before I came here, and he told me something very interesting. Not only did Kylie leave the cottage that Charles had gifted her a few weeks before, she wasn't renting, she was also covered by life insurance and was worth a million pounds, dead. Now the most interesting thing for me were the six wounds we found in Kylie's back," said Williams

"What does the number of wounds have to do with anything," asked Orville curiously.

"You see My Flyte, according to Doctor Alexander, each of the wounds were as such, that they could have *only* have been done by six different people. So, Mr Edward Albier, Mr Percy Swinelle, Mr Rob Downs, Mr Edgar Burro, Mr Rodger Lapin and finally Mr Trevor Stipe, I arrest you for the murder of Miss Kylie Downs, and Mr Trevor Stipe also for the murder of Miss Honey Potts. Take them away men," said Williams satisfied that the case was finally over.

As the suspects were being escorted out, Spanish leaned over and whispered into Williams' ear.

"Just one thing Sir. Why did you keep getting Kylie Downs' name wrong whenever we were in front of a suspect?"

"Oh I always do that. Never show people just how smart you are, if they think you're stupid, they are more likely to let their guard down," said Williams smugly. "Now I believe you owe me a whiskey constable."

And the two friends walked down to the pub to celebrate the ending of a very strange case indeed.