Moonflower Murders

'Absolutely loved it. So clever, just masterful stuff'
RICHARD OSMAN



ANTHONY HOROWITZ

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By the global bestselling author of *Magpie Murders*

WHAT READERS ARE SAYING ABOUT

Moonflower Murders

‘So clever, so well written
that five stars are not enough’

‘One of the most accomplished,
inventive authors going’

‘An enjoyable, satisfying and joyous read’

‘Kept me hooked from the beginning’

‘Excellent from start to finish’

‘Absolutely brilliant’



★★★★★

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PENGUIN BOOKS

Moonflower Murders

‘A beautiful puzzle: fiendishly clever and hugely entertaining. A masterpiece’
Lucy Foley

‘Absolutely loved it. So clever. Just masterful stuff’
Richard Osman

‘There is no mystery writer whose puzzles make me think “Ooh I can’t wait!” more than Anthony Horowitz. He is a master of the cunning plot device and brings zest and originality to the traditional mystery novel’
Sophie Hannah

‘So clever, a story within a story. A triumph’
Kate Mosse

‘A masterpiece by an author at the top of his genre’
Adam Hamdy

‘A wonderfully enjoyable read’
Ragnar Jónasson

‘A superbly intricate murder mystery; halfway through it I leapt to my feet and cried, “You’ve got to be kidding me!” ’
Bryan Appleyard, *Sunday Times*

‘A complex plot, a novel within a novel, where the reader gets to grapple with the whodunnit both in the main narrative and through an entirely separate detective story . . . They are both gripping reads’
Irish Times

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'Funny, profound and at times frightening, this is Horowitz at his very best. And the perfect jumping-on point for newcomers'
Sun, ★★★★★ Book of the Week

'A richly plotted, head-spinning novel . . . excellent fun'
Sarah Lyall, *New York Times*

'The extraordinarily prolific Horowitz is cleverer than you, and one can only marvel at the ingenuity of his solution'
New York Times, Best Thrillers of 2020

'In his latest books, Horowitz . . . showcases a cleverness and finesse that even Dame Agatha might envy'
Washington Post

'To borrow a make-believe blurb from *Atticus Pünd Takes the Case*: "I love a whodunnit with a real sucker punch and, boy, this absolutely delivers"'
Wall Street Journal

'The book is a page-turner where suspense keeps ramping up, as various figures experience threats'
New York Journal of Books

'Intricate, ingenious, and tremendous fun'
Minneapolis Star Tribune

'Horowitz strikes again with a tantalizing mystery within a mystery – and a tip of the hat to Agatha Christie'
People

'Horowitz . . . has never been better at surprising the reader and playing fair. This is a flawless update of classic golden age whodunnits'
Publishers Weekly, Starred Review

'Nostalgic and gentle . . . a masterful and muscular whodunnit; not just a cerebral murder mystery but one with a glorious sense of place'
Business Post

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'If you're looking for some holiday reading, I'd really recommend this very enjoyable crime novel'
Afterword

'A cracking read'
Women's Way

'We all want to go away on foreign holidays – but I was reading Anthony Horowitz's new book based in Greece, and oh my god I could taste the wine, I could see the sea, I could smell that dusky air . . . It's what I call Covid-friendly reading – it's simply going to entertain and puzzle you . . . It's so much fun, I'm absolutely loving it!'
Ryan Tubridy, *RTE Radio One*

'A mind-bending mystery to tie readers in knots'
BBC News Online

'Magnificent'
Phil Williams and Natalie Jamieson, *The Bestseller's Podcast*

'It's the second in the series; the other is Magpie Murders, and if you want to have a really good long weekend of reading, why don't you go and buy both of them'
The Hard Shoulder, *Newstalk*

'A brilliant work of art that will be a delectable treat to true fans of mystery novels. I dare you not to go back and reread *Atticus Pünd Takes the Case* upon finishing the book!'
Bookreporter.com

'Anthony Horowitz is one of the smartest writers working right now, and this sequel to his (in my opinion) classic *Magpie Murders* is every bit as good as the first one'
Aunt Agatha's

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Sherlock Holmes
House of Silk
Moriarty

James Bond
Trigger Mortis
Forever and a Day
With a Mind to Kill

Susan Ryland
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Detective Daniel Hawthorne
The Word is Murder
The Sentence is Death
A Line to Kill
The Twist of a Knife
Close to Death

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Moonflower Murders



ANTHONY HOROWITZ



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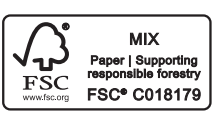
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For Eric Hamlish and Jan Salindar – with thanks for so many good times

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Agios Nikolaos, Crete



The Polydorus is a charming family-run hotel, located a short walk away from the lively town of Agios Nikolaos, one hour from Heraklion. Rooms cleaned daily, all with Wi-Fi and air con, some with sea views. Coffee and home-cooked meals served on our lovely terraces. Visit our website or find us on booking.com.

You have no idea how long it took me to write that. I was worried about so many adjectives bunching up together. Was 'lively' the right word to describe Agios Nikolaos? I'd started with 'busy' but then decided it might suggest the endless traffic and noise that were very much part of the place too. We were actually fifteen minutes from the town centre. Was that a 'short walk'? Should I have mentioned Ammoudi beach next door?

The funny thing is, I spent almost all my working life as an editor and I never had any problem dealing with writers' manuscripts, but when it came to a four-line advertisement on the back of a postcard I sweated over every syllable. In the end, I handed it to Andreas who read it in about five seconds

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and then just grunted and nodded, which, after all the trouble I'd taken, both pleased and infuriated me at the same time. That's something I've noticed about the Greeks. They're an incredibly emotional people. Their drama, poetry and music go straight to the heart. But when it comes to everyday business, to the little details, they prefer things to be '*siga siga*', which translates roughly as 'Who gives a damn?' It was a phrase I heard every day.

Examining what I'd written along with a cigarette and a cup of strong black coffee, two thoughts crossed my mind. We were going to put the cards in a rack beside the reception desk, but since tourists would already be in the hotel when they picked them up, what exactly was the point? And more pertinently, what the hell was I doing here? How had I allowed my life to come to this?

Just two years away from my fiftieth birthday, at a time when I had thought I would be enjoying all the comforts of life that come with a reasonable income, a small flat in London and a full social diary, I had found myself the co-owner and manager of a hotel that was actually much nicer than I'd managed to describe. Polydorus was right on the edge of the water, with two terraces shaded from the sun by umbrellas and cypress trees. It had just twelve rooms, a young, local staff who were always cheerful even at their most haphazard, and a loyal clientele. We had simple food, Mythos lager, an in-house musician and perfect views. The sort of travellers we encouraged wouldn't dream of arriving on one of those gigantic coaches I would watch inching along roads that had never been designed to accommodate them, on their way to the six-storey monstrosities on the other side of the bay.

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What we also had, unfortunately, was dodgy wiring, impossible plumbing and intermittent Wi-Fi. I don't want to slip into lazy Greek stereotyping and maybe I was just unlucky, but reliability was hardly a watchword amongst the people we employed. Panos was an excellent chef but if he argued with his wife, his children or his motorbike he would be a no-show and Andreas would have to take over in the kitchen, leaving me to host the bar and restaurant, which might be full but without any waiters or half-empty with too many of them. Somehow a happy compromise never seemed to materialise. There was always a faint possibility that a supplier might actually arrive on time but it would never be with the goods that we had actually ordered. If anything broke – and everything did – we would have hours of nervous tension waiting to see if the mechanic or engineer would show up.

For the most part our guests seemed happy. But we were running about like actors in one of those madcap French farces trying to make it all look seamless and by the time I collapsed into bed, often at one or two in the morning, I was so exhausted that I lay there feeling almost desiccated, like a mummy in a shroud. That was when I would be at my lowest, falling asleep with the knowledge that the moment I opened my eyes the whole thing would start all over again.

I'm being too negative. Of course it was wonderful too. The Aegean sunset is like nothing you will see anywhere in the world and I would watch it every evening, staring in wonder. No wonder the Greeks believed in gods – Helios in his golden chariot blazing across that enormous sky, the Lasithiotika mountains transformed into strips of the thinnest gauze, first pink, then mauve, darkening and fading at the

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same time. I swam at seven o'clock every morning, washing away in the crystal sea the traces of too much wine and cigarette smoke. There were dinners in tiny tavernas in Fourni and Limnes with the smell of jasmine, the stars twinkling, raucous laughter, the clink of raki glasses. I'd even started to learn Greek, working three hours a week with a girl young enough to be my daughter who managed to take the stressed syllables and verbs that weren't just irregular but downright indecent and somehow make them fun.

But this wasn't a holiday for me. I'd come to Greece after the catastrophe that was *Magpie Murders*. It was the last book I'd worked on and it had led to the death of the author, the collapse of my publishing company and the end of my career … in that order. There had been nine Atticus Pünd novels, all of them bestsellers, and I had thought there would be many more. But that was all over now. Instead, I found myself starting a new life, and frankly too much of it was hard work.

Inevitably, this had had an effect on my relationship with Andreas. The two of us didn't quarrel – we weren't the quarrelling sort – but we'd developed a way of communicating that had become increasingly terse and wary, circling each other like two prize boxers who have no intention of starting the fight. In fact, a full-throttle punch-up might have done us both good. We had managed to drift into that awful arena, so familiar to the long-term married couple, where what was left unspoken was actually more damaging than what was said. We weren't married, by the way. Andreas had proposed to me, doing the whole diamond-ring-down-on-one-knee thing, but we had both been too busy to follow through, and

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anyway, my Greek wasn't good enough yet to understand the service. We had decided to wait.

Time had done us no favours. In London, Andreas had always been my best friend. Perhaps it was because we weren't living together that I had always looked forward to seeing him. We read the same books. We loved eating in … especially when Andreas cooked. We had great sex. But Crete had trapped us in an altogether different sort of arrangement and even though it had only been a couple of years since we had left the UK, I was already thinking about a way out, even if I wasn't actively looking for one.

I didn't need to. The way out arrived early one Monday morning with a smart-looking couple, obviously English, walking arm in arm down the slope that led from the main road. I could tell at once that they were rich and that they weren't here on holiday. He was wearing a jacket and long trousers – ridiculous for the morning heat – a polo shirt and a panama hat. She had on the sort of dress that was more suited to a tennis party than the beach, a proper necklace and carried a neat little clutch bag. Both had expensive sunglasses. I guessed they were in their sixties.

The man came into the bar and uncoupled himself from his wife. I saw him examining me. 'Excuse me,' he said in a cultivated voice. 'Do you speak English?'

'Yes.'

'I don't suppose … you wouldn't by any chance be Susan Ryeland?'

'That's me.'

'I wonder if I might have a word with you, Miss Ryeland? My name is Lawrence Treherne. This is my wife, Pauline.'

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'How do you do.' Pauline Treherne smiled at me but not in a friendly way. She didn't trust me and she hadn't even met me yet.

'Can I get you a coffee?' I phrased the question carefully. I wasn't offering to buy them one. I don't want to give the impression that I'm mean, but this was something else preying on my mind. I had sold my flat in north London and ploughed most of my savings into Polydorus, but so far I hadn't made any profit. Quite the reverse: although I'm not sure that Andreas and I were doing anything wrong, we had still managed to find ourselves almost ten thousand euros in debt. Our funds were leaking away and I sometimes felt that the distance between me and bankruptcy could be measured by the froth on a free cappuccino.

'No. We're all right, thank you.'

I steered them towards one of the tables in the bar. The terrace was already crowded, but Vangelis, who worked as a waiter when he wasn't playing his guitar, was managing fine and it was cooler out of the heat. 'So how can I help you, Mr Treherne?'

'Lawrence, please.' He took off the hat, revealing thinning silver hair and a scalp that had still managed to catch the sun. He placed the hat in front of him. 'I hope you'll forgive us for tracking you down. We have a mutual friend – Sajid Khan. He sends you his regards, by the way.'

Sajid Khan? It took me a moment to remember that he was a solicitor, living in the Suffolk town of Framlingham. He had been a friend of Alan Conway, the author of *Magpie Murders*. When Alan died, Sajid Khan was the one who had

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discovered the body. But I'd only met him a couple of times. I wouldn't have called him a friend, mutual or otherwise.

'Do you live in Suffolk?' I asked.

'Yes. We own a hotel near Woodbridge. Mr Khan has helped us on one or two occasions.' Lawrence hesitated, suddenly uncomfortable. 'I was speaking to him last week about a rather difficult matter and he suggested we talk to you.'

I wondered how Khan had known I was here in Crete. Someone else must have told him because I certainly hadn't. 'You came all this way to talk to me?' I asked.

'It's not really that far and we travel quite a bit anyway. We're staying at the Minos Beach.' He pointed in the direction of his hotel, which was on the other side of a tennis court, right next to mine. It confirmed my first opinion that the Trehernes were rich. The Minos Beach was a boutique hotel with private villas and a garden full of sculptures. It cost around three hundred pounds a night. 'I did think about ringing,' he went on. 'But it's not something I'd want to discuss over the phone.'

This was getting more mysterious – and, frankly, annoying – by the minute. A four-hour flight from Stansted. A one-hour drive from Heraklion. Getting here had hardly been a stroll. 'What is this about?' I asked.

'It's about a murder.'

That last word hung in the air for a moment. On the other side of the terrace, the sun was shining. A bunch of local children were laughing and shouting, splashing about in the Aegean. Families were packed together around the tables.

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I watched Vangelis go past with a tray laden with orange juice and iced coffee.

'What murder?' I asked.

'A man called Frank Parris. You won't have heard of him but you might know the hotel where the murder took place. It's called Branlow Hall.'

'And that's your hotel.'

'Yes. It is.' It was Pauline Treherne who answered, speaking for the first time. She sounded like a minor royal, cutting each word as if with a pair of scissors before allowing it to escape. And yet I got the feeling that she was as middle class as I was.

'He had booked in for three nights,' Lawrence said. 'He was killed on the second.'

A host of different questions were going through my mind. Who was Frank Parris? Who killed him? Why should I care? But I didn't say that. 'When did this happen?' I asked.

'About eight years ago,' Lawrence Treherne said.

Pauline Treherne set her clutch bag on the table, next to the panama hat, as if it was some agreed signal for her to take over. There was something about her – the way she used silence, her lack of emotion – that made me think she was always the one who made the important decisions. Her sunglasses were so dark that as she spoke to me I found myself almost transfixed by two images of myself listening.

'It might help if I tell you the entire story,' she said in that grating voice of hers. 'That way, you'll understand why we're here. I take it you're not too pressed for time?'

I had about fifty things I needed to be doing. 'Not at all,' I said.

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'Thank you.' She collected herself. 'Frank Parris worked in advertising,' she began. 'He'd just come back to England from Australia, where he'd lived for several years. He was killed very brutally in his hotel room on the night of June the fifteenth, 2008. I'll always remember the date because it coincided with the wedding weekend of our daughter, Cecily.'

'Was he a guest?'

'No. We'd never met him. We'd taken over a dozen or so rooms for the wedding. We put up close family and friends. The hotel has thirty-two rooms in total and we'd decided, against my better judgement – my husband, I'm afraid, did not agree – to stay open to the public. Mr Parris was in Suffolk visiting relatives. He'd booked in for three nights. He was killed late on Friday night, although the body wasn't discovered until Saturday afternoon.'

'After the wedding,' Lawrence Treherne muttered.

'How was he killed?'

'He was struck several times with a hammer. His face was very badly disfigured and but for his wallet and his passport, which was found in his safe, the police would have been unable to identify him.'

'Cecily was most dreadfully upset,' Lawrence cut in. 'Well, we all were. It had been such a beautiful day. We had the wedding service in the garden and then lunch for a hundred guests. We couldn't have asked for better weather. And all the time, we were unaware that in a room actually overlooking the marquee, he'd been lying there in a pool of his own blood.'

'Cecily and Aiden had to postpone their honeymoon,' Pauline added, a tremor of indignation still there in her voice

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even after all these years. 'The police wouldn't allow them to leave. They said there was no question of it even though it was clear the murder had nothing to do with them.'

'Aiden is her husband?'

'Aiden MacNeil. Yes. Our son-in-law. They were meant to be leaving on the Sunday morning for Antigua, but in the end it was two weeks before they were allowed to go and by then the police had arrested the killer, so there was really no need for such a long delay.'

'So they knew who did it,' I said.

'Oh yes. It was all very straightforward,' Lawrence explained. 'It was actually someone we employed, a Romanian by the name of Stefan Codrescu. He was working as a general maintenance man and he lived in the hotel. He actually had a criminal record – we knew that when we employed him. In fact, it was rather the point, I'm afraid to say.' His eyes flickered downwards. 'My wife and I used to run a programme at the hotel. We employed young offenders – in the kitchen, cleaning, gardening – after they were released. We're great believers in prison reform and giving young men and women a second chance. I'm sure you're aware that the reoffending rate is astronomical. That's because these people don't get a chance to integrate themselves back into society. We worked closely with the probation service and they assured us that Stefan would be suitable for our programme.' He sighed heavily. 'They were wrong.'

'Cecily believed in him,' Pauline said.

'She knew him?'

'We have two daughters and they both work with us at the hotel. Cecily was the general manager when all this

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happened. In fact, she was the one who interviewed Stefan and employed him.'

'She got married at the same hotel where she worked?'

'Absolutely. It's a family business. Our staff are part of our family. She wouldn't think of having it anywhere else,' Pauline said.

'And she thought Stefan was innocent.'

'To begin with, yes. She insisted on it. That's the trouble with Cecily. She's always been far too good-natured, too trusting, the sort who believes the best in everyone. But the evidence against Stefan was overwhelming. I don't know where to begin. There were no fingerprints on the hammer . . . it had been wiped clean. But there was blood splatter on his clothes and on money – taken from the dead man – under his mattress. He was seen entering Frank Parris's room. And anyway, he confessed. When that happened, even Cecily had to admit that she was wrong and that was the end of it. She and Aiden went to Antigua. The hotel slowly returned to normal, although it took a long, long time and no one ever stayed in room twelve again. We use it for storage now. As I said, this all happened years ago and we thought it was behind us. But it seems not.'

'So what happened?' I asked. I was intrigued, despite myself.

Lawrence took over. 'Stefan was sentenced to life in prison and he's still behind bars. Cecily wrote to him a couple of times but he never replied and I thought she'd forgotten him. She seemed perfectly happy running the hotel and also, of course, being with Aiden. She was twenty-six when they got married. Two years older than him. She'll be thirty-four next month.'

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'Do they have any children?'

'Yes. A little girl. Well, she's seven now . . . Roxana.'

'Our first granddaughter.' Pauline's voice faltered. 'She's a lovely child, everything we could have ever wanted.'

'Pauline and I are semi-retired,' Lawrence went on. 'We have a house near Hyères in the South of France and we spend quite a bit of time down there. Anyway, a few days ago, Cecily rang us. I took the call. This would have been around two o'clock, French time. I could tell at once that Cecily sounded very upset. More than that, I'd say she was nervous. I don't know where she was calling from, but this was a Tuesday so she was probably at the hotel. We normally have a bit of banter but she got straight to the point. She said she'd been thinking about what happened—'

'The murder.'

'Exactly. She said that she had been right all along and that Stefan Codrescu was not responsible for the crime. I asked her what she was talking about and she said she'd come across something in a book she'd been given. "It was right there – staring me in the face." Those were her exact words. Anyway, she told me she'd already sent it to me and sure enough, it turned up the very next day.'

He reached into his jacket pocket and took out a paperback. I recognised it at once – the picture on the cover, the typeface, the title – and at that moment, this entire meeting began to make sense.

The book was *Atticus Pünd Takes the Case*, number three in the series written by Alan Conway that I had edited and published. I immediately recalled that it was largely set in a hotel, but in the county of Devon, not in Suffolk, and in

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1953, not the present day. I remembered the launch party at the German embassy in London. Alan had had too much to drink and had insulted the ambassador.

'Alan knew about the murder?' I asked.

'Oh yes. He came to the hotel and stayed a few nights, six weeks after it happened. We both met him. He told us that he had been a friend of the dead man, Frank Parris, and he asked us a lot of questions about the murder. He talked to our staff as well. We had absolutely no idea that he was going to turn the whole thing into an entertainment. If he'd been honest with us, we might have been more circumspect.'

Which was exactly the reason he wasn't honest with you, I thought.

'You never read the book?' I said.

'We forgot all about it,' Lawrence admitted. 'And Mr Conway certainly never sent us a copy.' He paused. 'But Cecily read it and she found something that cast new light on what had happened at Branlow Hall . . . at least, that's what she believed.' He glanced at his wife as if seeking her approbation. 'Pauline and I have both read the book and we can't see any connection.'

'There are similarities,' Pauline said. 'Firstly, nearly all the characters are recognisable, clearly based on people that Mr Conway met in Woodbridge. They even have the same names . . . or very similar ones. But what I don't understand is that he seems to have taken pleasure in twisting people so that they come out like horrible caricatures of themselves. The owners of the Moonflower, which is the hotel in the book, are clearly based on Lawrence and myself, for example. But they're both crooks. Why would he do that? We've never

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done anything dishonest in our lives.' She seemed more indignant than upset. The way she was looking at me, it was almost as if I was to blame.

'In answer to your question, we had no idea the book had been published,' she went on. 'I don't read murder mysteries myself. Neither of us does. Sajid Khan told us that Mr Conway is no longer alive. Maybe that's just as well because if he were, we might be very tempted to take legal action.'

'So let me get this straight,' I said. I had the sense of facts tumbling on top of each other, yet I knew there was something they hadn't told me. 'You believe that maybe, despite all the evidence, not to mention the confession, Stefan Codrescu did not kill Frank Parris and that Alan Conway came to the hotel and discovered – in a matter of days – who the real killer was. He then somehow identified that person in *Atticus Pünd Takes the Case*.'

'Exactly.'

'But that makes no sense at all, Pauline. If he knew the killer and there was an innocent man in prison, surely Alan would have gone straight to the police! Why would he turn it into a work of fiction?'

'That's precisely why we're here, Susan. From what Sajid Khan told us, you knew Alan Conway better than anyone. You edited the book. If there is something in there, I can't think of anyone more likely to find it.'

'Wait a minute.' Suddenly I knew what was missing. 'This all started when your daughter spotted something in *Atticus Pünd Takes the Case*. Was she the only one who read it before she sent it to you?'

'I don't know.'

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'But what was it she saw? Why didn't you just call her and ask her what she meant?'

It was Lawrence Treherne who answered my question. 'Of course we called her,' he said. 'We both read the book and then we rang her several times from France. Finally we got through to Aiden and he told us what had happened.' He paused. 'It seems that our daughter has disappeared.'

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Departure



I lost my temper with Andreas that evening. I really didn't mean to but the day had brought so many mishaps, one after another, that I was going to scream either at the moon or at him and he just happened to be nearer.

It had begun with that nice couple Bruce and Brenda from Macclesfield, who turned out not to be that nice after all, demanding a fifty per cent reduction in their bill or they were going to hit Tripadvisor with a list of complaints that they'd stacked up from the day they'd arrived and which, they assured us, would put anyone off ever coming anywhere near us again. And what was their problem? An hour without Wi-Fi. The sound of guitar music at night. The sighting of a solitary cockroach. What annoyed me was they had complained every morning, always with tight little smiles, and I'd known all along that they were going to try something on. I'd developed an antenna for the tourists who arrived with extortion as part of their holiday plans. You'd be amazed how many of them there were.

Panos didn't show up. Vangelis was late. Andreas's computer had a glitch – I'd asked him to get it looked at – and it

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had managed to send two room requests into spam. By the time we noticed, the clients had booked elsewhere. Before we went to bed, we had a glass of Metaxa, the Greek brandy that only tastes nice in Greece, but I was still in a bad mood and it was when Andreas asked me what the matter was that I finally snapped.

'What do you think is the fucking matter, Andreas? Everything!'

I don't usually swear . . . at least, not at people I like. Lying in bed, watching Andreas getting undressed, I was annoyed with myself. Part of me wanted to blame him for everything that had happened since I'd come to Crete, while another part blamed myself for letting him down. But the worst of it was the sense of helplessness – that events had taken over and I was being steered by them rather than the other way round. Had I really chosen a life where complete strangers could humiliate me for a few euros and where my entire well-being could be decided by a lost reservation?

Right then I knew I had to go back to England and that actually I'd known it for some time, even if I'd tried to pretend otherwise.

Andreas cleaned his teeth and came out of the bathroom naked, which is how he slept, looking every inch like one of those figures – an ephebe or a satyr perhaps – that you might see on the side of an ancient vase. And it did seem to me that he had become more Greek in the past couple of years. His black hair was a little shaggier, his eyes a little darker and he had a sort of swagger that I'm sure he'd never displayed when he was teaching at Woodbridge School. He'd put on some weight too – or perhaps it was just that I noticed his

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stomach more now that he was out of a suit. He was still a handsome man. I was still attracted to him. But suddenly I needed to be away from him.

I waited until he got into bed. We slept under a single sheet with the windows open. We hardly got any mosquitoes right next to the sea and I preferred the night air to the artificial chill of the air conditioning.

'Andreas . . . ' I said.

'What?' He would have fallen asleep in seconds if I'd let him. His voice was already drowsy.

'I want to go back to London.'

'What?' He twisted round, propping himself up on his elbow. 'What do you mean?'

'There's something I have to do.'

'In London?'

'No. I have to go to Suffolk.' He was looking at me, his face full of concern. 'I won't be long,' I said. 'Just a couple of weeks.'

'We need you here, Susan.'

'We need money, Andreas. We're not going to be able to pay our bills if we don't get some extra finance. And I've been offered a great deal of money to do a job. Ten thousand pounds. Cash!'

*

It was true.

After the Trehernes had told me about the murder at their hotel, they had gone on to explain how their daughter had disappeared.

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'It's very unlike her to wander off without telling anyone,' Lawrence had said. 'And certainly to leave her daughter behind . . . '

'Who's looking after the child?' I asked.

'Aiden's there. And there's a nanny.'

'It's not "unlike" her.' Pauline gave her husband the most withering of scowls. 'She's never done anything like this in her life, and of course she wouldn't leave Roxana on her own.' She turned to me. 'We're worried sick, if you want the truth, Susan. And Lawrence may not agree, but I'm convinced it's got something to do with this book.'

'I do agree!' Lawrence muttered.

'Did anyone else know about her concerns?' I asked.

'I already told you that she telephoned us from Branlow Hall, so any one of a number of people could have overheard her.'

'I mean, had she talked about her suspicions with anyone else?'

Pauline Treherne shook her head. 'We tried several times to phone her from France and when she didn't answer we called Aiden. He hadn't rung because he didn't want to worry us, but it turned out that he had contacted the police the same day she disappeared. Unfortunately, they didn't take him very seriously . . . at least, not to begin with. They suggested the two of them might be having marriage difficulties.'

'And were they?'

'Not at all,' Lawrence said. 'They've always been very happy together. The police spoke to Eloise – she's the nanny – and she said the same. She never heard any arguments.'

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'Aiden's a perfect son-in-law. He's clever and he's hard-working. I only wish Lisa could find someone like him. And he's as worried as we are!'

All the time Pauline had been speaking to me, I'd thought she was fighting something. Suddenly she pulled out a packet of cigarettes and lit one. She smoked like someone who had just taken up the habit again after a long abstinence. She inhaled, then went on.

'By the time we got back to England, the police had finally decided to take an interest. Not that they were very much help. Cecily had taken the dog for a walk. She has a shaggy golden retriever called Bear – we've always kept dogs. She left the hotel at about three o'clock in the afternoon and parked the car at Woodbridge station. She often used to take the river path. That's the River Deben. There's a circular walk that takes you along the edge and to begin with it's well populated. But then it becomes wilder and more remote until you come to a wood and on the other side there's a road that takes you back through Martlesham.'

'So if someone attacked her—'

'It's not the sort of thing that ever happens in Suffolk. But yes, there were plenty of places where she would have been on her own, out of sight.' Pauline took a breath and went on. 'Aiden got worried when she didn't come home for dinner and quite rightly called the police. Two uniformed officers came round and asked a few questions, but they didn't raise the alarm until the next morning, which was much too late of course. By that time Bear had shown up, on his own, back at the station, and after that they took everything more seriously. They had people – and their own dogs – out searching the

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entire area from Martlesham all the way back to Melton. But it was no good. There are fields, woods, mudflats … a lot of ground to cover. They didn't find anything.'

'How long is it since she went missing?' I asked.

'The last time anyone saw her was last Wednesday.'

I felt the silence fall. Five days. That was a long time, an abyss into which Cecily had fallen.

'You've come all this way to talk to me,' I said, finally. 'What exactly do you want me to do?'

Pauline glanced at her husband.

'The answer is in this book,' he explained. '*Atticus Pünd Takes the Case*. You must know it better than anyone.'

'Actually, it's been quite a few years since I read it,' I admitted.

'You worked with the author, this man, Alan Conway. You knew how his mind worked. If we were to ask you to reread it, I'm sure there are things that might occur to you that we haven't noticed. And if you actually came to Branlow Hall and read the book in situ, so to speak, maybe you might see what it was that our daughter spotted and why she felt compelled to ring us. And that in turn might tell us where she is or what's happened to her.'

His voice faltered as he spoke those last words. *What's happened to her.* There might be a simple reason why she had vanished but it was unlikely. She knew something. She was a danger to someone. The thought was better left unsaid.

'Can I have one of these?' I asked. I helped myself to one of Pauline Treherne's cigarettes. My own pack was behind the bar. The whole ritual – pulling out the cigarette, lighting it, taking the first puff – gave me time to think. 'I can't come

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to England,' I said eventually. 'I'm afraid I'm too busy here. But I will read the book if you don't mind leaving me your copy. I can't promise anything will come to mind. I mean, I remember the story and it doesn't correspond quite with what you've told me. But I can email you—'

'No. That won't do.' Pauline had already made up her mind. 'You need to talk to Aiden and Lisa – and Eloise, for that matter. And you should meet Derek, the night manager. He was on duty the night Frank Parris was killed and spoke to the detective in charge. He's in Alan Conway's book too – although he's called Eric.' She leaned towards me, imploring. 'We're not asking you for a lot of your time.'

'And we'll pay you,' Lawrence added. 'We have plenty of money and we're not going to hold back if it helps find our daughter.' He paused. 'Ten thousand pounds?'

That drew a sharp look from his wife and it occurred to me that, without thinking, he had greatly increased, perhaps doubled, the amount they had intended to offer me. That was what my reluctance had done. I thought for a moment that she was going to say something, but she relaxed and nodded.

Ten thousand pounds. I thought about the replastering on the balcony. A new computer for Andreas. The ice-cream display chest that was on the blink. Panos and Vangelis, who had both been muttering about pay rises.

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'How could I say no?' This was what I told Andreas now in our bedroom, late at night. 'We need the money, and anyway, maybe I can help them find their daughter.'

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'You think she's still alive?'

'It's possible. But if she isn't, perhaps I can find out who killed her.'

Andreas sat up. He was wide awake now and he was worried about me. I felt bad that I had sworn at him. 'The last time you went looking for a killer, it didn't end very well,' he reminded me.

'This is different. This isn't personal. It's got nothing to do with me.'

'Which sounds to me like an argument for leaving it alone.'

'You may be right. But . . . '

I had made up my mind and Andreas knew it.

'I need a break anyway,' I said. 'It's been two years, Andreas, and apart from a weekend in Santorini we haven't been anywhere. I'm completely worn out, endlessly firefighting, endlessly trying to make things work. I thought you'd understand.'

'A break from the hotel or a break from me?' he asked.

I wasn't sure I had an answer to that.

'Where will you stay?' he asked.

'With Katie. It'll be nice.' I rested a hand on his arm, feeling the warm flesh and the curve of his muscle. 'You can manage perfectly well without me. I'll ask Nell to come in and look after things. And we'll talk to each other every day.'

'I don't want you to go, Susan.'

'But you're not going to stop me, Andreas.'

He paused and in that moment I could see him fighting with himself. My Andreas versus Andreas the Greek. 'No,' he said, finally. 'You must do what you have to.'

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Two days later, he drove me to Heraklion airport. There are parts of the road from Agios Nikolaos – as you pass Neapoli and Latsida – that are actually very beautiful. The landscape is wild and empty, with the mountains stretching into the distance and the sense that nothing very much has been touched for a thousand years. Even the new motorway after Malia is surrounded by gorgeous countryside and as you draw nearer you dip down and find yourself close to a wide, white sand beach. Maybe that was what gave me a sense of sadness, an understanding of what I was leaving behind. Suddenly I wasn't thinking of all the problems and the chores of running Polydorus. I was thinking of midnight and the waves and *pansélinos* – the full moon. Wine. Laughter. My peasant life.

When I'd been preparing to leave, I'd deliberately chosen my smallest bag. I'd thought it would be a statement to Andreas and to myself that this was just a brief business trip and that I would be home very soon. But going through my wardrobe, looking at clothes that I hadn't worn for two years, I found myself piling things up on the bed. I was going back to an English summer, which meant that it could be hot and cold, wet and dry, all in one day. I would be staying in a posh country hotel. They probably had a dress code for dinner. And I was being paid ten thousand pounds. I needed to look professional.

So by the time I arrived at Heraklion airport, I found myself dragging my old wheelie behind me, the actual wheels squeaking malevolently as they spun against the concrete floor. The two of us stood for a moment in the harsh air

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conditioning and the harsher electric light of the departure lounge.

He took hold of me. 'Promise me you'll look after yourself. And call me when you get there. We can FaceTime.'

'If the Wi-Fi isn't on the blink!'

'Promise me, Susan.'

'I promise.'

He held me with both hands on my arms and kissed me. I smiled at him, then trailed my suitcase over to the stout, scowling Greek girl in her blue uniform who checked my passport and boarding card before allowing me through to security. I turned and waved.

But Andreas had already gone.

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Cuttings



It was quite a shock being back in London. After so much time in Agios Nikolaos, which wasn't very much more than an overgrown fishing village, I found myself consumed by the city and I was unprepared for the intensity of it, the noise, the number of people in the streets. Everything was greyer than I remembered and it was hard to cope with the dust and petrol fumes in the air. The amount of new construction also made my head spin. Views that I had known all my working life had disappeared in the space of two years. London's various mayors, with their love of tall buildings, had allowed different architects to gouge their initials into the skyline with the result that everything was both familiar and alien at the same time. As I sat in the back of a black cab, being driven along the River Thames on the way from the airport, the cluster of new flats and offices around Battersea Power Station looked to me like a battlefield. It was as if there had been an invasion and all those cranes with their blinking red lights were monstrous birds, picking over carcasses lying unseen on the ground.

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I had decided to spend the first night in a hotel, which was, frankly, weird. A lifelong Londoner, I had somehow degenerated into a tourist and I hated the hotel, a Premier Inn in Farringdon, not because there was anything wrong with it – it was perfectly clean and comfortable – but because that was where I was forced to stay. Sitting on the bed with its mauve cushions and 'sleeping moon' logo, I felt perfectly miserable. I was already missing Andreas. I had texted him from the airport but I knew that if I FaceTimed him I would probably end up crying and that would prove he was right, I should never have gone. The sooner I was in Suffolk, the better. But I wasn't ready to make the journey yet. There were one or two things I had to do.

After an intermittent sleep and a breakfast – egg, sausage, bacon, beans – that looked identical to every breakfast ever served in a cut-price hotel chain, I strolled over to King's Cross to one of the storage depots built into the arches under the railway lines. When I moved to Crete, I had sold my flat in Crouch End and almost everything in it, but at the last moment I had decided to hang on to my car, a bright red MGB Roadster which I had bought in the moment of madness that had coincided with my fortieth birthday. I had never thought I would drive it again and storing it had been a crazy extravagance; I was paying £150 a month for the privilege. But I just couldn't bring myself to get rid of it and now, as it was wheeled out for me by two young men, it was like being reunited with an old friend. More than that. It was a part of my former life that I had back again. Just sinking into the cracked leather of the driver's seat with the wooden steering wheel and absurdly old-fashioned radio

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above my knees made me feel better about myself. If I did go back to Crete, I decided, I would drive there and to hell with the problems of Greek registration and left-hand drive. I turned the key and the engine started first time. I pumped the accelerator a few times, enjoying the growl of welcome that came from the engine, then drove off, heading down the Euston Road.

It was midmorning and the traffic wasn't too bad, which is to say that it was actually moving. I didn't want to go straight back to the hotel so I drove around London, taking in a few sights just for the hell of it. Euston Station was being rebuilt. Gower Street was as shabby as ever. I don't suppose it was coincidence that brought me into Bloomsbury, the area behind the British Museum, but without really thinking about it, I found myself outside Cloverleaf Books, the independent publishing house where I had worked for eleven years. Or what was left of it. The building was an eyesore, boarded-up windows and charred bricks surrounded by scaffolding, and it occurred to me that the insurers must be refusing to pay out. Perhaps arson and attempted murder hadn't been included in the policy.

I thought of driving out to Crouch End, giving the MG a good run for its money – but that would have been too dispiriting. Anyway, I had work to do. I put the car into an NCP in Farringdon, then walked back to the hotel. I didn't need to check out until noon, which gave me an hour alone with the coffee machine, two packets of complimentary biscuits and the Internet. I opened up my laptop and began a series of searches: Branlow Hall, Stefan Codrescu, Frank Parris, murder.

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These were the articles I found: a murder mystery stripped of its intrigue and told in just four indifferent chapters.

The *East Anglian Daily Times*: 18 JUNE 2008
MAN KILLED AT CELEBRITY HOTEL

Police are investigating the murder of a 53-year-old man after his body was discovered in the five-star hotel where he was staying. Branlow Hall, located close to Woodbridge in Suffolk, charges £300 a night for an executive suite and is a much sought-after venue for celebrity weddings and parties. It has also been used as a location for many television series, including ITV's *Endeavour*, *Top Gear* and *Antiques Roadshow*.

The victim has been identified as Frank Parris, a well-known figure in the advertising industry who won awards for his work on Barclays Bank and for the LGBT rights organisation, Stonewall. He rose to be creative director of McCann Erickson in London before moving to Australia to set up his own agency. He was unmarried.

Detective Superintendent Richard Locke, who is heading the investigation, said: 'This was a particularly brutal murder that would seem to have been carried out by a single individual with the motive of theft. Money belonging to Mr Parris has been recovered and we expect to make an arrest shortly.'

The murder took place on the night before the wedding of Aiden MacNeil and Cecily Treherne, whose parents, Lawrence and Pauline Treherne, own the hotel.

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The body was discovered shortly after the ceremony, which had taken place in the hotel garden. Neither of the couples was available for comment.

The *East Anglian Daily Times*: 20 JUNE 2008

MAN HELD IN WOODBRIDGE KILLING

Police have arrested a 22-year-old man in connection with the brutal murder of a retired advertising executive at Branlow Hall, the well-known Suffolk hotel. Detective Superintendent Richard Locke, who is in charge of the investigation, said: 'This was a horrific crime, committed without any scruples. My team has worked quickly and very thoroughly and I am glad to say that we have been able to make an arrest. I have every sympathy for the young couple whose special day was ruined by these events.'

The suspect has been remanded in custody and is due to appear at Ipswich Crown Court next week.

The *Daily Mail*: 22 OCTOBER 2008

LIFE IMPRISONMENT FOR 'HAMMER HORROR' SUFFOLK KILLER

A Romanian migrant, Stefan Codrescu, was sentenced to life imprisonment at Ipswich Crown Court, following the murder of 53-year-old Frank Parris at the £300-a-night Branlow Hall hotel near Woodbridge, Suffolk. Parris, described as 'a brilliant creative mind',

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had recently returned from Australia and had been planning to retire.

Codrescu, who pleaded guilty, entered the UK when he was twelve years old and quickly came to the attention of London police investigating Romanian organised crime gangs involved in cloned credit cards, stolen UK passports and false identity documents. Aged nineteen, he was arrested for aggravated burglary and assault. He was sentenced to two years in jail.

Lawrence Treherne, the owner of Branlow Hall, was in court to hear the sentence. He had employed Codrescu, who had been at the hotel for five months, as part of an outreach programme for young offenders. Mr Treherne said that he did not regret his actions. 'My wife and I were shocked by the death of Mr Parris,' he said in a statement outside the court. 'But I still believe that it is right to give young people a second chance and to try to integrate them into society.'

But sentencing Codrescu to a minimum term of twenty-five years, Judge Azra Rashid said: 'Despite your background, you were given a unique opportunity to turn your life around. Instead, you betrayed the trust and goodwill of your employers and committed a brutal crime for financial gain.'

The court had heard that Codrescu, now 22, had racked up debts playing online poker and slot machines. Jonathan Clarke, defending, said that Codrescu had lost touch with reality. 'He was living in a virtual world with debts that were spiralling out of control.

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What happened that night was a sort of madness … a mental breakdown.'

Parris was attacked with a hammer and beaten so badly that he was unrecognisable. Detective Superintendent Richard Locke, who made the arrest, said that this was 'the most sickening case I have ever encountered'.

A spokesperson for Screen Counselling, a Norwich-based charity, has called on the gambling commission to ban online betting with credit cards.

That was the story: the beginning, the middle and the end. But trawling through the Internet, I came across what might have been a coda to the whole affair, had it not actually pre-dated everything that had occurred.

Campaign: 12 MAY 2008

LAST CALL FOR SYDNEY-BASED SUNDOWNER

Sundowner, the Sydney-based advertising agency set up by former McCann Erickson supremo Frank Parris, has gone out of business. The Australian Securities and Investments Commission – the country's official financial watchdog – confirmed that after just three years the agency has ceased to trade.

Parris, who began his career as a copywriter, was a well-known figure in the London advertising scene for more than two decades, winning awards for his work on Barclays Bank and Domino's pizza. He created the controversial Action Fag campaign for Stonewall in 1997, promoting gay rights in the armed forces.

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He was himself completely open about his sexuality and was well known for his extravagant and flamboyant parties. It has been suggested that his move to Australia was prompted by a decision to tone down his public image.

In its first month, Sundowner picked up some significant accounts, including VonZipper sunglasses, Wagon Wheels and Kustom footwear. However, its early success took place against a subdued market that led to a significant shrinkage in consumer and advertising spending. Internet advertising and online videos are the fastest growing areas in Australia and it's clear that Sundowner, with its emphasis on traditional rather than digital media, had arrived too quickly at the last chance saloon.

So what was I to make of all this information?

Well, I suppose it was the editor in me that noticed that every single one of the reports had described the murder as brutal, as if anyone was ever murdered gently or with affection. The journalists had managed to sketch in the character of Frank Parris with what few details they had – award-winning, gay, extrovert, ultimately a failure. That hadn't stopped the *Mail* from characterising him as 'a brilliant creative mind', but then they would have been prepared to forgive him for almost anything. He had, after all, been murdered by a Romanian. Had Stefan Codrescu really been involved in gangs trading passports and credit cards, etc? There was no evidence of it and the fact that the police had been investigating Romanian gangs could have

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been entirely coincidental. He had, after all, been arrested for burglary.

As for the brilliant Frank Parris, there was something almost bizarre about his turning up in a hotel in Suffolk, particularly on the night of a wedding to which he had not been invited. Pauline Treherne had told me he was visiting relatives so why hadn't he stayed with them?

The mention of Detective Superintendent Richard Locke worried me. We had met following the death of Alan Conway and I think it's fair to say we had not got on. I remembered him – a big, angry police officer who had swept into a coffee shop on the outskirts of Ipswich, shouted at me for fifteen minutes and then left again. Alan had based a character on him and Locke had decided to blame me. It had taken him less than a week to identify Stefan as the culprit, arrest him and then charge him. Was he wrong? According to the newspaper stories and, for that matter, what the Trehernes had told me, the whole thing could hardly be more straightforward.

But eight years later, Cecily Treherne had thought otherwise. And she had disappeared.

There wasn't much more to do in London. It seemed obvious to me that I would have to talk to Stefan Codrescu, which meant visiting him in prison, but I didn't even know where he was being held and the Trehernes had been unable to help. How was I supposed to find out? I went back on the Internet but I didn't find anything there. Then I remembered an author I knew: Craig Andrews. He had come to writing late and I had published his first novel, a thriller set in the prison system. On first reading I had been impressed by the

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violence of his writing but also by its authenticity. He had done a lot of research.

Of course, he had another publisher now. Cloverleaf Books had rather let him down by going out of business and burning to the ground, but on the other hand the book had been a success and I had noticed a good review of his latest in the *Mail on Sunday*. I had nothing to lose so I sent him an email telling him that I was back in England and asking him if he could help me track down Stefan. I wasn't confident that he would reply.

After that, I packed up my laptop, grabbed my suitcase and rescued my MG from the car park, where it had already been charged a ridiculous sum of money for the grim, dusty corner where it had been housed. It still made me happy to see it. I got in and moments later I was roaring down the exit ramp and out onto the Farringdon Road, on my way to Suffolk.

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Branlow Hall



I could have stayed with my sister while I was in Suffolk but the Trehernes had offered me free accommodation at their hotel and I had decided to accept. The truth was that I felt uncomfortable about spending too much time with Katie. She was two years younger than me and with her two adorable children, her lovely home, her successful husband and her circle of close friends, she could make me feel painfully inadequate, particularly when I looked at the haphazardness of my own life. After everything that had happened at Cloverleaf Books she had been delighted that I had flown off to Crete for what she saw as some sort of domestic normality and I didn't want to explain to her why I was back. It wasn't that she would judge me. It was more that I would feel myself being judged.

Anyway, it made more sense to base myself at the scene of the crime where so many of the witnesses would still be gathered. So I skirted Ipswich and made my way up the A12, passing the right turn that would have brought me into Woodbridge. Instead, I continued another five miles until I came to an expensive-looking sign (black paint, gold lettering) and a

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narrow lane that took me between hedgerows and bright red flecks of wild poppies to a stone gate and, on the other side, the ancestral home of the Branlow family, standing in a fair old slice of the Suffolk countryside.

So much of what I have to write about had either taken place or would take place here that I must describe it carefully.

It was a beautiful place, something between a country house, a castle and a French chateau, very square, surrounded by lawns dotted with ornamental trees and thicker woodland beyond. At some time in its history it might have been swivelled round because the gravel drive came in from the wrong direction, heading rather confusingly towards a side elevation with several windows but no door, while the actual entrance was round the corner, facing the other way.

It was when you stood here, in front of the house, that you appreciated its magnificence: the main door with its arched portico, the Gothic towers and crenellations, the coats of arms, and the stone chimneys that must have been connected to a multitude of fireplaces. The windows were double height with plaster heads of long-forgotten lords and ladies poking out of the corners. A number of stone birds perched high up on the very edge of the roof, with an eagle at each corner, and above the front door there was a rather fine owl with its wings outstretched. Now that I thought about it, I had seen an owl painted on the sign outside. It was the hotel logo, printed on the menus and the notepaper too.

A low wall ran all around the building with a ha-ha on the other side and this gave it a sense of imperturbability, as if it had chosen to set itself apart from the real world. On the left,

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which is to say on the side opposite the drive, a set of discreet, more modern doors opened from the bar onto a very flat, beautifully maintained lawn, and this was where, eight years previously, the wedding lunch had taken place. On the right, set slightly back, were two miniature versions of the main house. One was a chapel and the other a granary that had been converted into a health spa, with a conservatory and indoor swimming pool attached.

Even as I parked the MG on the gravel it occurred to me that any writers wanting to set a murder in a classic country house would find all the material they needed here. And any killers wanting to get rid of a body would have hundreds of acres in which to do it. I wondered if the police had looked for Cecily Treherne in the grounds. She had said she was going for a walk and her car had been found at Woodbridge station, but how could anyone be sure that she had been the one who had driven it?

Before I had even turned off the ignition, a young man appeared and hauled the suitcase out of the boot. He led me into the entrance hall, which was square but gave the illusion of being circular with a round table, a round carpet and a ring of marble pillars supporting a ceiling decorated with a circle of very ornate stucco. Five doors – one of them a modern lift – led in different directions but the man escorted me into a second hallway with a reception desk tucked underneath an impressive stone staircase.

The stairs curved round on themselves and I could see all the way up to the vaulted roof, three floors above. It was almost like being inside a cathedral. A huge window rose up in front of me, some of the panes made of stained glass, although

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there was nothing religious about it. It was more like something you might find in an old school or even a railway station. Opposite, what I might describe as a landing ran from one side to the other, partly blocked off by a wall but with a semicircular opening cut into it so that if a guest walked past, they would almost certainly be seen from below. The landing connected two corridors that ran the full length of the hotel – the crossbar, if you like, in a large letter H.

A woman in a sharply cut black dress was sitting behind the reception desk, which was made of some dark, polished wood with mirrored edges. It looked out of place. I knew that much of Branlow Hall had been constructed at the start of the eighteenth century and all the other furnishings were deliberately traditional and old-fashioned. A rocking horse stood against the opposite wall, paint peeling and eyes staring. It reminded me of the famous horror story by D. H. Lawrence. There were two small offices behind the reception desk, one on each side. Later, I would learn that Lisa Treherne occupied one and her sister, Cecily, the other. The doors were open and I could see a pair of identical desks with telephones. I wondered if Cecily had made her call to France from here.

'Ms Ryeland?' The receptionist had been expecting me. When she offered me free accommodation, Pauline Treherne had said she would tell the staff I was helping her with a certain matter but not what it was. The girl was around the same age as the man who had met me; in fact, they could have been brother and sister. They were both fair-haired, slightly robotic, possibly Scandinavian.

'Hello!' I placed my handbag between us, ready to provide a credit card if asked.

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'I hope you had a good drive from London.'

'Yes, thank you.'

'Mrs Treherne has put you in the Moonflower Wing. You'll be very comfortable there.'

Moonflower. That was the name Alan Conway had given the hotel in his book.

'It's up one flight of stairs or you can take the lift.'

'I think I can manage the stairs, thank you.'

'Lars will take the case for you and show you the room.'

Definitely Scandinavian, then. I followed Lars up the staircase to the first-floor landing. There were oil paintings on the walls – family members from across the centuries, none of them smiling. Lars turned right and we continued behind the opening that I had seen from below. Resting against the wall, I noticed a table with two glass candlesticks and, on a stand between them, a large silver brooch. This was in the shape of a circle with a silver pin and there was a typewritten card, folded in half, describing it as an eighteenth-century figeen, which pleased me as it was a word I had never come across. There was a dog basket with a tartan blanket under the table and I was reminded of Bear, Cecily Treherne's golden retriever.

'Where's the dog?' I asked.

'He went for a walk,' Lars answered vaguely, as if he was surprised I had even asked.

Everything I have described so far was antique but when we reached the corridor, I noticed that electric key-card operators had been fitted to the doors and that we were being watched by a CCTV camera mounted in a corner. It must have been added long after the murder and perhaps as a

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response to it – otherwise the killer would have been seen. The first door we came to was number ten. Eleven was next door. But what should have been room twelve was blank and there was no room thirteen either, presumably for reasons of superstition. Was it my imagination or had Lars quickened his pace? I could hear the floorboards creaking under his step, the wheels on my suitcase still squeaking as they bumped over the joints.

After room fourteen, we came to a fire door that opened onto a corridor which was obviously new, part of an extension that jutted out towards the rear of the building. It was as if a second, modern hotel had been added to the first and I wondered if it had been like this eight years ago, when Frank Parris had checked in . . . and out. The carpet in the new section had one of those nasty patterns that you would never find in anyone's home. The doors were made out of wood that was both lighter and newer and they were closer together, suggesting smaller rooms on the other side. The lighting was recessed. Was this the Moonflower Wing? I didn't ask Lars, who was well ahead of me, my suitcase still squeaking as it followed him.

I had been given not just a room but a suite at the very end. Lars swiped the key to let us in and I found myself in a bright, comfortable space in various shades of cream and beige with a widescreen TV mounted on the wall. The sheets on the bed were expensive. A complimentary bottle of wine and a bowl of fruit sat, waiting for me, on a table. I went over to the window and looked out at the courtyard behind the hotel and a row of what might have been converted stables on the far side. The health spa with the swimming pool was

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over to the right. A driveway led up to a large, modern house set back from the hotel. I saw its name, BRANLOW COTTAGE, by the gate.

Lars put my case on one of those folding luggage racks that we would never have had at Polydorus because they took up too much space and also because they were ridiculous.

'Fridge. Air conditioning. Minibar. Coffeemaker . . . ' He showed me round the room just in case I couldn't find the way myself. He was polite rather than enthusiastic. 'The Wi-Fi code is on the table and if there is anything you want, you can dial zero for the front desk.'

'Thank you, Lars,' I said.

'Is there anything else you need?'

'Actually, I'd like to go into room twelve. Could I have a key?'

He looked at me peculiarly for a moment but the Trehernes had prepared the way. 'I'll open it for you,' he said.

He went over to the door and there was that nasty moment when I wasn't sure if I should tip him and wondered whether he was expecting it or not. In Crete we had a straw hat in the bar and anyone with any euros to spare threw them in there to be shared out equally among the staff. Generally, I don't like tipping. It feels old-fashioned, a throwback to the days when waiters and hotel staff were seen as belonging to a lower class. Lars didn't agree. He scowled, turned on his heel and left.

I unpacked with a growing sense of discomfort. Transported to an expensive wardrobe in an expensive room, my clothes didn't so much hang as droop. It was a reminder that I'd bought almost nothing new in two years.

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Outside, a black Range Rover drove past the stables and into the drive of Branlow Cottage, the wheels crunching on the gravel. I heard the slam of a car door and looked out of the window in time to see a youngish man wearing a padded waistcoat and a cap get out. There was a dog with him. At the same time, the door of the house opened and a young girl with black hair ran towards him, followed by a dark, slim woman carrying a shopping bag. The man scooped the girl up in his arms. I couldn't see much of his face but I knew that he must be Aiden MacNeil. The girl was his daughter, Roxana. The woman must be Eloise, the nanny. He spoke briefly to her and then they turned round and went back into the house.

I felt guilty, as if I had been spying on them. I turned away, snatched up my handbag with money, notepad and cigarettes and left the room, heading back through the fire door to the older part of the hotel and room twelve. It seemed the obvious place to begin. Lars had propped open the door with a wastepaper basket but I didn't want to be disturbed so I removed the basket and the door swung shut behind me.

I found myself in a room that was actually half the size of the one I had been given. There was no bed and no carpet; presumably they had both been taken away, covered in blood. I've read in so many crime books that violent acts leave a sort of echo and I've never quite believed it, but there was definitely an atmosphere in that place . . . in the empty spaces where there should have been furniture, the faded paintwork on the walls showing where pictures had once hung, the curtains that would never be drawn. There were two trolleys

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heaped up with towels and cleaning equipment, a pile of boxes, an array of machines – toasters, coffeemakers – mops and buckets, all the junk you don't want to see when you check into a smart hotel.

This was where Frank Parris had been killed. I tried to imagine the door opening and someone creeping in. If Frank had been asleep when he was attacked, they would have needed an electronic key card, but then surely Stefan Codrescu would have had one already. I could tell where the bed must have stood from the position of the electric sockets on either side and I imagined Frank lying in the darkness. On an impulse, I opened the door again. The hinges made no sound but there would have been a buzz or a click as the electric lock disengaged. Would that have been enough to wake him? There had been few details in the newspapers and the Trehernes hadn't been able to add very much more. Somewhere there must be a police report that might tell me whether Frank had been standing up or lying down, what he was wearing, exactly when he had died. The storeroom, shabby and decrepit, told me very little.

Standing there, I was suddenly depressed. Why had I left Andreas? What the hell did I think I was doing? If it had been Atticus Pünd coming into Branlow Hall, he'd have solved the crime by now. Perhaps the position of room twelve or the dog basket might have given him a clue. What about the figeen? That was straight out of Agatha Christie, wasn't it?

But I wasn't a detective. I wasn't even an editor any more. I knew nothing.

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Lisa Treherne



Pauline and Lawrence Treherne had invited me to join them for supper on the first evening of my stay but when I entered the hotel dining room, Lawrence was sitting on his own. 'I'm afraid Pauline has a headache,' he explained. I noticed that the table was still laid for three. 'Lisa said she would join us,' he added. 'But we're to start without her.'

He looked older than he had in Crete, dressed in a check shirt that hung off him and red corduroy trousers. There were more lines under his eyes and his cheeks had those dark blotches that I've always associated with illness or old age. It was obvious that the disappearance of his daughter was taking its toll and I guessed that the same was true for Pauline, that her 'headache' had been caused by exactly the same thing.

I sat down opposite him. I was wearing a long dress and wedges but I wasn't comfortable. I wanted to kick off my shoes and feel sand beneath my feet.

'It's very good of you to have come, Miss Ryeland,' he began.

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'Please … call me Susan.' I thought we had been through all that.

A waiter came over and we ordered drinks. He had a gin and tonic. I went for a glass of white wine.

'How is your room?' he asked.

'It's very nice, thank you. You have a lovely hotel.'

He sighed. 'It's not really mine any more. My daughters run it now. And it's difficult to take very much pleasure from it at the moment. It was a life's work for Pauline and me, creating the hotel and building it up, but when something like this happens, you have to ask yourself if it was worth it.'

'When did you put in the extension?'

He looked puzzled, as if I had asked something odd.

'Was the hotel like this when Frank Parris was killed?'

'Oh … yes.' He understood. 'We did the renovation in 2005. We had two new wings added: Moonflower and Barn Owl.' He half smiled. 'The names were Cecily's idea. The moonflower blooms after the sun has gone down and of course the barn owl comes out at night.' He smiled. 'Actually, you may have noticed, we've put owls everywhere.' He picked up the menu and showed me an image stamped in gold on the cover. 'That was Cecily too. She noticed that "barn owl" is an anagram of Branlow and so she had the bright idea to make it our logo.'

I felt my heart sink. Alan Conway had also had a fondness for anagrams. In one of his books, for example, all the characters were jumbled-up versions of London Tube stations. It was a strange game he played with his readers and one that only undermined the quality of his writing.

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Lawrence was still talking. 'When we were doing the rebuilding, we added a lift for disabled access,' he explained. 'And we knocked down a wall to enlarge the dining room.'

That was the room we were sitting in. I had reached it from the circular entrance hall and had noticed the new lift on my way in. The kitchen was at the far end, stretching all the way to the back of the hotel. 'Can you get upstairs from the kitchen?' I asked.

'Yes. There's a service lift and a staircase. We put those in at the same time. We also converted the stables into staff quarters and added the swimming pool and the spa.'

I took out my notepad and jotted down what he had just said. What it meant was that whoever had killed Frank Parris could have arrived at room twelve by four separate paths: the lift at the front of the hotel, another at the back, the main staircase and a set of service stairs. If they had already been in the hotel, they could have come down from the second floor. There had been someone on the reception desk all night but it would still have been perfectly easy to get past without being noticed.

But in Crete Pauline Treherne had told me that Stefan Codrescu had been seen entering the room. Why had he been so careless?

'I don't suppose you've had any news,' I said. 'About Cecily.'

Lawrence grimaced. 'The police think she may have been caught on CCTV in Norwich, but that doesn't make a lot of sense. She doesn't know anyone there.'

'Is Detective Superintendent Locke handling the disappearance?'

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'Detective Chief Superintendent, you mean. Yes. I can't say I have a lot of faith in him. He was slow getting started – which was actually when it mattered most – and he doesn't seem to be particularly efficient now.' He glanced down gloomily, then asked: 'Have you had a chance to reread the book?'

It was a good question.

You would have thought it would be the first thing I would do – go through the book from cover to cover. But I hadn't even brought it with me. Actually, I didn't have any of Alan's books in Crete: they had too many unpleasant memories. I'd looked into a bookshop while I was in London, meaning to pick up a copy, and had been surprised to find they were out of stock. I could never decide if that was a good or a bad sign when I was in publishing. Great sales or bad distribution?

The truth was that I didn't want to read it yet.

I remembered it well enough: the village of Tawleigh-on-the-Water, the death at Clarence Keep, the various clues, the identity of the killer. I still had my notes somewhere, the email 'discussions' I had with Alan during the editorial process (I've added those inverted commas because he never listened to a word I said). The story held no surprises for me. I knew the plot inside out.

But you have to remember that Alan hid things in the text: not just anagrams, but acrostics, acronyms, words within words. He did it partly to amuse himself but often to indulge the more unpleasant side of his nature. It was already clear to me that he had used many elements of Branlow Hall for *Atticus Pünd Takes the Case*, but what he hadn't done was describe what had actually happened in June 2008. There was

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no advertising executive, no wedding, no hammer. If Alan, during his brief visit to the hotel, had somehow discovered who had really killed Frank Parris, he could have concealed it in a single word or a name or a description of something completely irrelevant. He could have spelled out the name of the killer in the chapter headings. Something had caught Cecily Treherne's eye when she read the book, but there was very little chance that it would catch mine – not until I knew a great deal more about her and everyone else at the hotel.

'Not yet,' I said, answering Lawrence's question. 'I thought it might be sensible to meet everyone and look round first. I don't know what Alan found when he came here. The more I know about the hotel, the more chance I'll have of making a connection.'

'Yes. That's a good thought.'

'Would it be possible to see the room where Stefan Codrescu was living?'

'I'll take you there after supper. It's being used by one of our other staff members. But I'm sure they won't mind.'

The waiter came over with the drinks and at the same time Lisa Treherne arrived. At least, I assumed it was her. I had seen photographs of her sister, Cecily, in the newspaper: a pretty woman with a rather babyish face, pursed lips, round cheeks. Apart from her fair hair, cut short in an old-fashioned style, this woman looked nothing like her. She was solid, unsmiling, wearing clothes that were deliberately business-like with cheap spectacles and sensible shoes. She had a scar on the side of her mouth and I found it hard to stop myself staring. It was a dead straight line about half an inch long: it could have been cut with a knife. If it had been me I would have softened

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