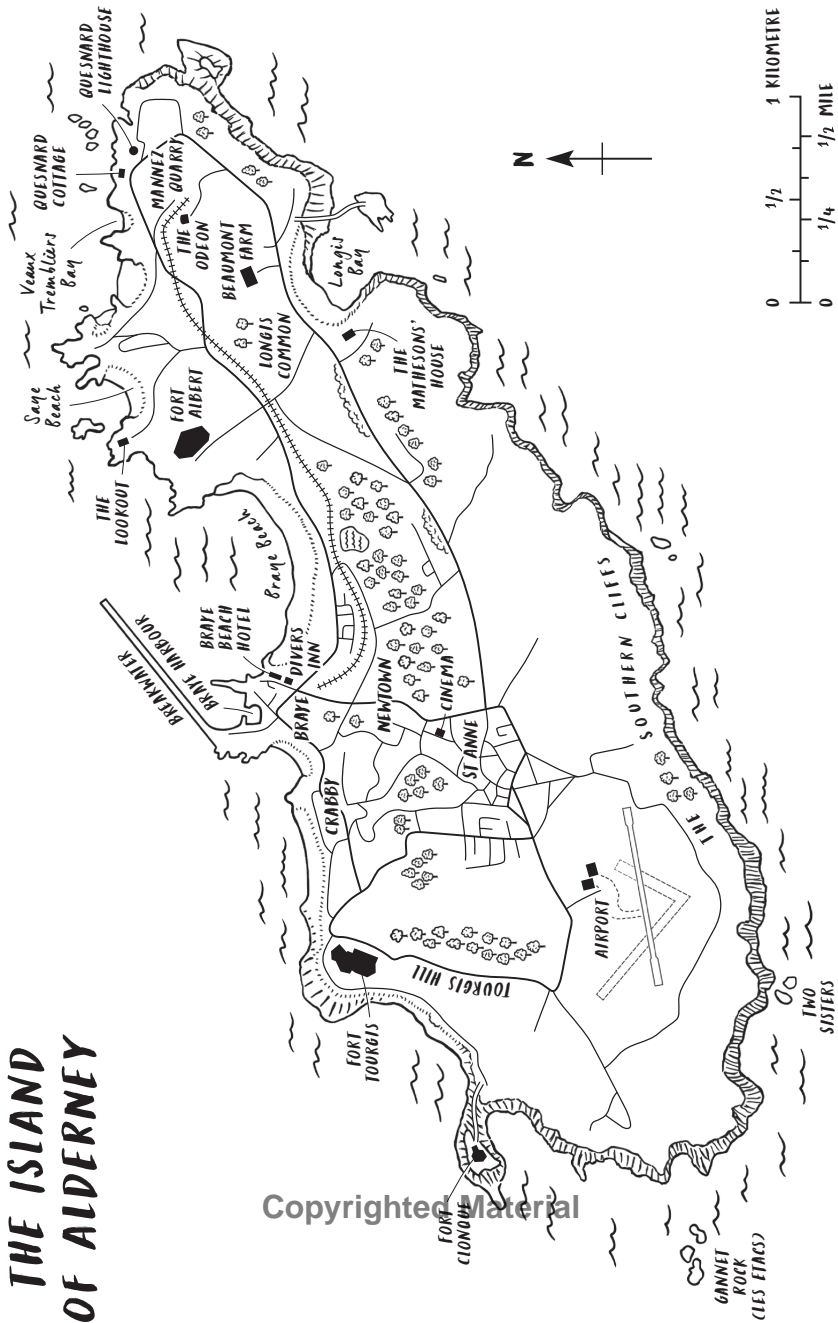


# THE ISLAND OF ALDERNEY



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# 1

## *An Invitation*



My publishers, Penguin Random House, have offices on the Vauxhall Bridge Road, the other side of Victoria. It's an odd part of London. Considering that the River Thames is at the top of the road and Tate Britain is just around the corner, it's surprisingly shabby and unattractive, full of shops that look as if they should have gone out of business decades ago and blocks of flats with too many windows and no views. The road itself is very straight and unusually wide, with four lanes for the traffic that rushes past like dust in the vacuum tube of a Hoover. There are side streets but they don't seem to go anywhere.

I don't get invited there all that often. Producing a book is a complicated enough business, I suppose, without the author getting in the way, but actually I look forward to every visit. It takes me about eight months to finish a book and in that time I'm completely alone. It's one of the

paradoxes of being a writer that, physically, there's not a huge difference between the debut novelist and the international best-seller: they're each stuck in a room with a laptop, too many Jaffa Cakes and nobody to talk to. I once worked out that I've probably written more than ten million words in my lifetime. I'm surrounded by silence but at the same time I'm drowning in words and it hardly ever leaves me, that sense of disconnection.

But everything changes the moment I walk through the swing doors with the famous Penguin logo up above. I'm always amazed how many people work there and how young so many of them seem to be. Like writing, publishing is a vocation as much as a career and I get a sense of a shared enthusiasm that would be hard to find in most other businesses. Everyone in the building, no matter what their level, loves books – which has to be a good start. But what do they all do? It embarrasses me how little I know about the actual process of publishing. What's the difference between a proofreader and a copy editor, for example, and why can't one person do both jobs? Where does marketing end and publicity begin?

I suppose it doesn't matter. This is where it all happens, where a thought that may have begun years ago in the bath or on a walk is finally turned into reality. When people talk about the 'dream factory' they usually mean Hollywood, but for me it will always be Vauxhall Bridge Road.

So I was happy to find myself there on a bright June morning, three months before my new novel, *The Word is*

*Murder*, was due to be published. I'd been asked to come in by my editor, Graham Lucas, who'd surprised me with a telephone call.

'Are you busy?' he had asked. 'We'd like to talk about publicity.' As always, he went straight to the point.

Advance proofs of the book had already gone out and apparently they had been well received – not that I'd have heard otherwise. Publishers are brilliant at keeping bad news from authors.

'What time?' I asked.

'Could you manage Tuesday? Eleven o'clock?' There was a pause and then: 'We also want to meet Hawthorne.'

'Oh.' I should have expected it, but even so I was surprised. 'Why?'

'We think he could make a serious difference to the sales. After all, he is the co-author.'

'No, he's not. He didn't write any of it!'

'It's his story. We see you as a team.'

'Actually, we're not that close.'

'I think the public will be very interested in him. I mean ... in the two of you together. Will you talk to him?'

'Well, I can ask him.'

'Eleven o'clock.' Graham hung up.

I was more than a little deflated as I put the phone down. It was true that the book had been Hawthorne's idea. He was an ex-detective who worked as a consultant to the police, helping them with their more complicated investigations.

He'd first approached me to write about him while he was looking into the murder of a wealthy widow in west London, but I'd been reluctant from the start, mainly because I preferred to make up my own stories. Certainly, I had never thought of the book as a collaboration and I wasn't sure I liked the idea of sharing the stage – any stage – with him.

But the more I thought about it, the more I realised that this could play to my advantage. I had now followed Hawthorne on two investigations – and 'follow' is the right word. Although I was meant to be his biographer, he never actually explained anything of what he was doing and seemed to enjoy keeping me several steps behind him, always in the dark. I had missed every clue that had led him to Diana Cowper's killer and because of my own stupidity I had almost got killed myself. I had made even more catastrophic errors on our next case, the murder of a divorce lawyer in Hampstead, and I wasn't entirely sure I could write the second book without making myself look ridiculous.

Well, here was a chance to redress the balance. If Graham Lucas was going to have his way, Hawthorne would have to enter my world: talks, signing sessions, interviews, festivals. It would all be new to him, but I'd been doing it for thirty years. Just for once, I'd have the upper hand.

I had met him that same afternoon. As always, we sat outside a coffee shop so that he could smoke.

'It's eleven o'clock next Tuesday,' I said. 'It'll only be half an hour. They just want to meet you and talk about

marketing. When the book comes out, you're going to have to gear yourself up for joint appearances at some of the major festivals.'

He'd looked doubtful. 'What festivals?'

'Edinburgh. Cheltenham. Hay-on-Wye. All of them!' I knew what mattered most to Hawthorne so I spelled it out for him. 'Look, it's very simple. The more books we sell, the more money you'll make. But that means getting out there. Do you realise that there are about a hundred and seventy thousand books published in the UK every year? And crime fiction is the most popular genre of all.'

'Fiction?' He scowled at me.

'It doesn't matter how they describe the book. We just have to make sure it's noticed.'

'You're the author. You go to the meeting!'

'Why do you have to be so bloody uncooperative all the time? Do you have any idea how difficult it is writing these books?'

'Why? I do all the work.'

'Yes. But it's a full-time job making you look sympathetic.'

He looked at me with eyes that were suddenly offended. I'd seen it before, that occasional flicker of vulnerability, reminding me that he was human after all. Separated from his wife and son, living alone in an empty flat, making Airfix models in some echo of a doubtless traumatic childhood, Hawthorne wasn't as tough as he pretended to be, and perhaps the most annoying thing about him was that, no matter

how difficult he was, I still found him intriguing. I wanted to know more about him. When I sat down to write, I was as interested in him as in the mysteries he set out to solve.

‘I didn’t mean that,’ I said. ‘I just need you to come to the publishers. It’s really not that much to ask. Promise me that you will.’

‘Half an hour?’

‘Eleven o’clock.’

‘All right. I’ll be there.’

But he wasn’t.

I waited for him for ten minutes in the reception area until finally an intern arrived to take me up to a conference room on the fifth floor. I hoped I might find him there but when the door was opened and I was shown into a square, windowless room, there was no sign of him. Instead, four people sat waiting behind a long table with coffee, tea and ‘family favourite’ biscuits on a plate. They looked at me, then past me. They were unable to hide their disappointment.

My editor had been sitting at the head of the table but he got up when he saw me. ‘Where’s Hawthorne?’ His first words.

‘I thought he’d already be here,’ I said. ‘He’s probably on his way.’

‘I assumed you’d come together.’

Of course, he was right. We should have. ‘No,’ I said. ‘We agreed to meet here.’

Graham looked at his watch. It was quarter past eleven. ‘Well, let’s give him a few minutes. Take a seat ...’

I still wasn't sure what to make of Graham Lucas, who had only recently joined Penguin Random House as a senior editor. He was about fifty, slim, with a narrow beard that made him look like an academic. He was wearing a blazer and a roll-neck sweater that might have been cashmere and certainly looked expensive. He had a gold band on his fourth finger and as I sat next to him I detected the flowery scent of an aftershave that didn't really suit him. I think it's fair to say that we had a close relationship, but only professionally. I had no idea where he lived, what he did in his spare time, if he had children and – more importantly – if those children read my books. When we were together, all he ever talked about was work.

'Have you started the second book?' he asked now.

'Oh yes. It's going very well,' I lied. I'd already told my agent, Hilda Starke, that I would probably be late delivering.

She had arrived ahead of me but she hadn't got up when I came in. She was sitting at the table, puffing on one of those vape devices, which was odd because I could never remember her actually smoking cigarettes. I knew she didn't want to be here. She was sitting, bare-armed, with her jacket on the back of her seat, sipping coffee. She had left a bright red crescent moon on the side of the cup.

In a moment of weakness and without telling her, I had agreed to split the royalties fifty-fifty with Hawthorne. That was what he had demanded from the start and I'd found



myself acquiescing without consulting her first. Hilda was also annoyed because she had failed to persuade Hawthorne to let her represent him. They had spoken once on the telephone but she hadn't met him yet. So she was stuck with ten per cent of fifty per cent . . . which was a much smaller percentage than she would have liked.

Tamara Moore, sitting opposite her, was Random House's publicity director: a very intense and formidable woman in her early thirties. There was a laptop open in front of her and her eyes hadn't left the screen. At the same time, she was holding a fountain pen, twisting it in her slender fingers as if it were a weapon. Briefly, she looked up. 'How are you, Anthony?' she asked. Before I had a chance to answer, she introduced me to her assistant. 'This is Trish. She's just started.'

'Hello.' Trish was about twenty years old and looked tired. She had a wide face with frizzy hair and an easy smile. 'It's a pleasure to meet you. I loved *High Fidelity*.'

'That's the next meeting,' Tamara muttered, quietly.

'Oh.' Trish fell silent.

We spent the next ten minutes chatting but it was hard enough to make even the smallest of small talk when all of us were waiting for the door to open and for Hawthorne to appear. Inwardly, I was seething that he had let me down. Finally, Graham turned to me, tight-lipped. 'Well, there's not a great deal to talk about without Daniel here, but we might as well get started.'

‘Nobody ever calls him Daniel,’ I said. ‘He’s just Hawthorne.’ This was met with silence. ‘I could try his mobile, if you like,’ I added.

‘I don’t see that there’s any point.’

‘I have a lunch at twelve thirty,’ Hilda said, giving me no support at all.

‘We’ll get you a cab,’ Graham said. ‘Where to?’

Hilda hesitated. ‘Weymouth Street.’

‘I’ll see to it.’ Trish tapped the instructions into her iPad.

Tamara pressed a button on her keypad and an image of the front cover of *The Word is Murder* flashed onto a screen. It was a signal for the business to begin.

‘We can at least talk about our strategy for the end of the year,’ Graham said. ‘When can we expect proofs, Tamara?’

‘They’ll be in at the end of the month,’ Tamara replied. ‘We’ll be sending fifty copies to bloggers, reviewers and key customers.’

‘Radio? TV?’

‘We’re just making approaches ...’

‘What about festivals?’ I asked. ‘There’s Edinburgh, Harrogate next month, Norwich ...’ Everyone looked at me blankly so I went on: ‘I enjoy doing festivals. And if you really want people to meet Hawthorne, surely that’s the best way?’

Hilda sniffed and blew out a cloud of steam that instantly disappeared. ‘There’s no point doing festivals until you’ve got the book to sell,’ she said, stating the obvious.

‘And we can’t make any decisions about that until we’ve actually met Hawthorne,’ Graham added, pointedly.

Right then, to my enormous relief, the door opened and the intern came back in, followed by Hawthorne himself. From his blank look and slightly quizzical smile, he seemed to have no idea that he was thirty minutes late. He was wearing his usual combination of black suit, white shirt and narrow tie. I suddenly felt shabby in my sweatshirt and jeans.

‘This is Mr Hawthorne,’ the intern announced. She turned to Graham. ‘Your wife has called twice. She says it’s important.’

‘I can tell her you’re in a meeting,’ Trish said, glancing from Tamara to Graham as if she needed a consensus.

‘No, it’s all right,’ Graham said. ‘Tell her I’ll speak to her later.’ He got to his feet as the intern left. ‘How do you do, Mr Hawthorne. It’s very good to meet you.’

‘The pleasure’s mine.’ Perhaps Hawthorne was sincere. Perhaps he was being sarcastic. It was impossible to tell. The two men shook hands. ‘It’s been a while since I was in this part of town,’ he went on. ‘I once busted a brothel in Causton Street – half a dozen sex workers from Eastern Europe. Just round the corner from the Lithuanian embassy. Maybe that’s where they got their visas ... not that we ever made a connection.’

‘How fascinating.’ Graham was immediately hooked. ‘It’s extraordinary what can happen right on your doorstep without you even knowing.’

‘Maybe Tony will write about it one day.’

‘Tony?’

‘That’s me,’ I said. ‘You’re half an hour late.’

Hawthorne looked astonished. ‘You told me half past eleven.’

‘No. I said eleven o’clock.’

‘I’m sorry, Tony, mate. You definitely said half past. I never forget a time or a place.’ He tapped the side of his head for the benefit of everyone in the room. ‘It’s my training.’

‘Well, there’s no need to worry about it,’ Graham said, giving me a sour look. ‘Let me introduce Tamara, who’s the head of publicity, and her assistant, Trish.’

Hawthorne shook hands with both of them, although I noticed that there was something about Tamara that puzzled him. ‘And you must be the amazing Hilda Starke,’ he said, sitting down next to her. ‘It’s great to meet you at last. Tony never stops talking about you.’

Hilda was not easily charmed but right then she was beaming. Hawthorne had this effect on people. I have described him often enough: his slight build, short hair cut to the scalp around the ears, the oddly searching eyes. But perhaps I have never done justice to the way he could dominate a room from the moment he entered it. He had an extraordinary presence that could be saturnine, threatening or magnetic, depending on his mood.

‘Congratulations on the book,’ Hilda said. Just like my editor, she seemed to have forgotten that I was the one who had written it. **Copyrighted Material**

‘I haven’t read it yet,’ Hawthorne said.

‘Oh?’

‘There’s not much point reading a whodunnit when you know the end.’

It was a line that he must have prepared in advance. At any event, they all nodded in agreement.

‘Aren’t you worried about how Tony has portrayed you?’ Graham asked.

‘It doesn’t bother me at all. So long as the book sells.’

Graham turned to me. ‘I hope you’re not going to write about us,’ he said. He made it sound like a joke.

I smiled. ‘Of course not.’

Trish offered Hawthorne coffee, which he accepted, and a biscuit, which he refused. He never ate in front of other people if he could avoid it. For the next five minutes Graham talked about the publishing business, current trends, his hopes for the book. ‘It’s never easy launching a new series,’ he said. ‘But we have a reasonable shot at the best-seller lists. There’s not much else coming out this September. There’s a new Stephen King, and of course Dan Brown will grab the top spot, but we deliberately chose a quiet week. How would you feel about doing some radio?’

The question was directed at Hawthorne, not me.

‘I’m OK with radio,’ Hawthorne said.

‘Have you had any experience of the media?’

‘Only *Crimewatch*.’

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Tamara, who didn't smile often, smiled at that. 'We've approached *Front Row* and *Saturday Live*,' she said, speaking to the room. 'They're waiting to read the book, but the fact that Mr Hawthorne actually worked for the police is definitely of interest.'

'And the fact that he got thrown out?' I was tempted to ask.

Tamara went back to her laptop. 'We were just talking about literary festivals,' she went on. 'And as a matter of fact, we have had an invitation.'

My ears pricked up at that. The truth is that literary festivals are the best thing in a writer's life. To start with, they get you out of the house, out of your room. You meet people: readers and writers. You get to visit beautiful cities like Oxford, Cambridge, Cheltenham, Bath. Better still, you might find yourself being whisked abroad – to Sydney, Sri Lanka, Dubai or Berlin. There's even a literary festival on board *Queen Mary 2*.

'So where is it?' I asked.

'It's in Alderney. They're launching a new festival in August and they'd love to have you both.'

'Alderney?' I muttered.

'It's a Channel Island,' Hawthorne told me, unhelpfully.

'I know where it is. I didn't know they had a literary festival.'

'Actually, they have two.' Tamara tapped a few buttons, projecting the home page onto the main screen. It read: THE

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ALDERNEY LITERARY TRUST — SUMMER FESTIVAL.  
SPONSORED BY SPIN-THE-WHEEL.COM.

‘Who are Spin-the-wheel?’ I asked.

‘They’re an online casino.’ She obviously shared none of my misgivings. ‘Alderney is a world centre for online gambling. Spin-the-wheel sponsor a lot of things on the island.’ She brought up another page. ‘They have a historical fiction festival in March and it was so successful that they’ve decided to start another. So far they’ve invited Elizabeth Lovell, Marc Bellamy, George Elkin, Anne Cleary and ...’ she leaned closer to the screen ‘... Maïssa Lamar.’

‘I haven’t heard of any of them,’ I said.

‘Marc Bellamy is on television,’ Graham said.

‘He’s a cook,’ Hilda added. ‘He has a morning show on ITV2.’

‘I’m not sure,’ I began, although I was aware that I was the only person in the room who was being negative. ‘Alderney’s a tiny place, isn’t it? It seems a very long way to go ...’

‘It’s forty minutes direct from Southampton,’ Hawthorne said.

‘Yes, but—’ I stopped myself. *Hawthorne* had said that? I looked at him a second time.

‘I’m up for it,’ Hawthorne continued cheerfully as I stared at him in disbelief. ‘I’ve always had it in mind to visit Alderney,’ he went on. ‘It’s an interesting place. Occupied in the war.’

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‘But as Hilda just said, we won’t have any books to sell,’ I reminded everyone. ‘So what’s the point?’

‘It could be helpful with pre-orders,’ Graham said. ‘Hilda?’

Hilda looked up from her mobile, which was lying on the table beside her. ‘I can’t see any harm in it. We can look at it as a dry run, a chance for Anthony and Mr Hawthorne to get their act together. And if the whole thing is a complete disaster, there’s nothing lost.’

‘Well, that’s a vote of confidence,’ I said.

‘Then it’s agreed.’ Graham was in a hurry to move on. ‘What else?’

We spent the rest of the meeting talking about Hawthorne. Or rather, Hawthorne talked about himself, focusing mainly on his work. It was interesting how he could say so much and give away so little, something that had infuriated me when I was writing my first book about him. Shortly after twelve, Trish reminded Graham that he had another meeting and told Hilda that her car had arrived to take her to Weymouth Street. Tamara closed her laptop and Hilda drew on her jacket, heading off for her lunch. It was clear to me that all four of them were delighted with Hawthorne. It was smiles all round as they shook hands.

Even the security guard was beaming at him as we exited onto Vauxhall Bridge Road together. I was in a bad mood and didn’t bother to disguise it.

‘What’s the matter, mate?’ Hawthorne took out a cigarette and lit it.

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I jerked a thumb back at the office. ‘They were all over you! What was that all about?’

‘They seem like a nice bunch of people.’ Hawthorne contemplated the end of his cigarette. ‘And maybe you should be a bit more charitable. Your agent’s obviously worried about the results of her test.’

‘What test? What are you talking about?’

‘And Graham’s getting a divorce from his wife.’

‘He never said anything about that!’

‘He didn’t need to. He’s having an affair with the publicity director, and that girl, Trish, knows all about it. It can’t be too easy for her. Being a new mother and worried about her job.’

He did this every time we went anywhere new together and I knew he was baiting me. But I refused to play his game.

‘I don’t want to go to Alderney,’ I said. I began to walk back to Pimlico tube station. I didn’t care if he followed me or not.

‘Why not?’

‘Because the book won’t be out. There’s no point!’

‘I’ll see you there, then.’

The crime rate on Alderney is so low that it doesn’t even have a police force of its own. There is a police station with one sergeant, two constables and two special constables – but all of them have been seconded from the neighbouring island

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of Guernsey and there isn't very much for them to do. Recent offences included 'taking a conveyance without authority' and speeding. It's unclear if they were connected.

If you ignore the atrocities committed when the island was occupied during the Second World War, throughout the entire history of the place there hasn't been a single murder.

That was about to change.

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## 2

# *Departures*



Six weeks later, Hawthorne and I met at Waterloo Station on our way down to Southampton Parkway. It was the second time we had travelled together – the year before, we’d taken the train up to Yorkshire – and he was carrying the same suitcase with no wheels on the bottom that he had probably taken with him to school. He reminded me a little of those children evacuated during the war. He had the same lost quality.

It seemed to me that he was unusually cheerful. By now I knew him a little better, which is to say that although I had learned very little about his past history, I could at least gauge his moods, and I was certain he was keeping something from me. He’d made it clear that he had no interest in literary festivals, but he’d leapt at the chance to go to Alderney. He’d even known how long it would take to fly. He was clearly up to something; but what?

The train left on time and he took out a paperback copy of *The Little Stranger* by Sarah Waters. It's a fantastic ghost story and I guessed he was reading it for his book club. We weren't even out of the station before I'd tackled him. I couldn't wait any longer.

'All right,' I said. 'You're going to have to explain it to me.'

He looked up. 'What?'

'You know perfectly well. All that stuff you said at Random House. You told me that Graham was having an affair with Tamara, that Trish knew about it, that she'd just had a baby and that she was worried she was going to lose her job. You also said Hilda was waiting for test results.'

'That was weeks ago, mate!' He looked at me a little sadly. 'Have you been obsessing about it?'

'Not obsessing, but I would like to know.'

'You were in the room, Tony. You should have seen it all too.'

'Do me a favour, will you, and just tell me ...'

Hawthorne considered for a moment, then turned his book face down and laid it on the table. 'Well, let's start with Hilda. Did you see her arm?'

'She was wearing a jacket.'

'No. She'd taken it off and put it on the back of her chair. There was a little patch where the skin was a bit paler, right over the median cubital vein.'

'I don't even know what that is.'

‘It’s where the needle goes in for a blood test. She was nervous about something. She was puffing on that vape and she kept on looking at her phone like she was waiting for a text ... maybe from the doctor. And that lunch of hers in Weymouth Street. I bet she made it up. It’s just round the corner from Harley Street, which is where all the doctors hang out.’

‘What about Graham and Tamara?’

‘The intern – Trish – told him his wife had called twice and that it was important, but he didn’t even ask what it was about. It was obviously something that had been going on for a while. Trish didn’t even wait for him to make a decision, which is a bit strange when you think about it. *I can tell her you’re in a meeting*, she said. But she was looking at Tamara when she said it.’

‘That doesn’t necessarily mean they are having an affair.’

‘Didn’t you smell Tamara’s perfume?’

‘No. I didn’t.’

‘Well, I did. And it was all over Graham.’

I nodded slowly. I had thought it was aftershave. ‘What about Trish?’ I asked. ‘I didn’t notice any prams or baby photos.’

‘Well, something’s been keeping her awake at night. She looked worn out. And there was a stain on her left shoulder. The only way it could have got there was from burping a baby. You only have to do that until they’re seven or eight months old, so why hasn’t she taken the full twelve months’ maternity leave? She probably hasn’t been at the company that long ... she’s only about twenty. I imagine she got pregnant

quite soon after she arrived and although they can't fire her, she's come back as soon as she can because she's worried about her future.'

He made it all sound so easy but of course that was the whole point. He liked to remind me who was in charge. We didn't talk again after that. Hawthorne went back to his book and I took out my iPad and went through my emails.

From the moment my publishers had accepted the invitation to Alderney, I'd been bombarded with messages from the festival organiser, Judith Matheson, and already I was nervous about meeting her. She seemed quite formidable, chasing me for information and following up if she hadn't had a reply within a few hours. Would I be happy staying at the Braye Beach Hotel? Did I have any special dietary requirements? Did I want to rent a car? Would I be signing books? She had arranged the train and air tickets, booked my hotel room and made sure I had access to an up-to-date festival programme. Only the evening before, she had emailed me to say that a few of the invited writers would be congregating at the airport and that I should join them at the Globe Bar and Kitchen just before security and passport control. *You'll have time for a pub platter and a pint before you take off*, she wrote, even suggesting what I might eat.

I swiped across to the festival website and checked out the writers with whom I was going to be spending a long weekend.

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## Marc Bellamy

Marc needs no introduction, as anyone who has watched his Sunday-morning cookery show – *Lovely Grub* – on ITV2 will know. Marc isn't afraid of ruffling feathers with his no-nonsense approach to cuisine that he promises will be anything but 'haute'. Old-school favourites including steak pie, fried chicken and sticky toffee pudding are on the menu, and in the words of his catchphrase, 'It's cobblers to calories'. He'll be celebrating the launch of the *Lovely Grub Cookbook* on Alderney and has agreed to prepare a Saturday-night supper for the festival organisers and guests.

## Elizabeth Lovell

Born with diabetes, Elizabeth Lovell lost her eyesight just before her thirtieth birthday. At the same time, though, she realised that she had developed a unique gift to 'see' into the spirit world and to hear voices from the other side. Her story was told in her autobiography, *Blind Sight*, which sold two hundred thousand copies online. This was followed by *Second Sight* and her new book, *Dark Sight*, which continues her story. Elizabeth lives in Jersey with her husband, Sid. She gives talks all over the world and we are delighted to welcome her back to Alderney.



## George Elkin

George Elkin is Alderney's most famous historical writer. He was born and brought up in Crabby, where he still lives with his wife, and brilliantly described the German occupation of the Channel Islands 1940–45 in his first book, *The German Occupation of the Channel Islands 1940–45*. This was followed by *Operation Green Arrow* and *The Atlantic Wall*, both of which were shortlisted for the Wolfson History Prize. He will be talking about his next book, which examines the construction and running of the four labour camps built by the Germans on Alderney during the war. He is also a keen birdwatcher and amateur artist.

## Anne Cleary

Is there anyone under the age of ten who hasn't followed the adventures of Bill and Kitty Flashbang, the super-powered twins? Bill can fly, Kitty turns invisible and together they have saved the world from ghosts, dragons, mad robots and alien invaders! A former nurse, prison visitor and founder of the charity Books Behind Bars, Anne Cleary will be talking about the inspiration behind her work and there will be a special children's session at (appropriately!) St Anne's School, where young people will be encouraged to develop their writing and drawing skills.

## Daniel Hawthorne and Anthony Horowitz

You may have read detective stories, but here's your chance to meet a real detective. Daniel Hawthorne spent many years working at Scotland Yard in London before he became a private investigator. He works now as a special consultant on many high-level investigations, the most recent of which has been turned into a book (published later this year) by best-selling author Anthony Horowitz, who also wrote the Alex Rider series. The two of them will be interviewed by States member Colin Matheson and there will be plenty of opportunity for questions from audience members with a taste for true crime.

## Maïssa Lamar

We are very pleased to welcome Maïssa Lamar from France, where she has won great acclaim as a performance poet. Born and educated in Rouen, she writes and performs in Cauchois, a dialect spoken in the east of Normandy, which has led *Le Monde* newspaper to describe her as 'a leading light in the revival of Cauchois culture'. Maïssa is also an associate professor at the University of Caen and has published three collections of poetry. Her performance at the Alderney Summer Festival will be conducted partly in English and partly in French with English subtitles.

So that was it: an unhealthy chef, a blind psychic, a war historian, a children's author, a French performance poet, Hawthorne and me. Not quite the magnificent seven, I couldn't help thinking.

There were just three of them waiting for us at the Globe Bar and Kitchen when we finally arrived. George Elkin was presumably at his home in Crabby. Elizabeth Lovell and her husband, Sid, would be crossing by ferry from Jersey. But Marc Bellamy, Anne Cleary and Maïssa Lamar were already sitting round a table, chatting away as if they were old friends. It turned out that they had all come down on the train ahead of us, along with another young woman, Kathryn Harris, who introduced herself as Marc's assistant.

It's an incredible thought that there are more than three hundred and fifty literary festivals in the UK. I've been to many of them. Appledore, Birmingham, Canterbury, Durham . . . It wouldn't be difficult to travel the entire country from north to south, working my way through the alphabet at the same time. I think there's something wonderful and reassuring about the idea that in the rush of modern life people will still come together and sit for an hour in a theatre, a gymnasium or a giant tent simply out of a love of books and reading. There's a sort of innocence about it. Everyone is so friendly and I've hardly ever met a writer – no matter how big a best-seller – who's been difficult or stand-offish; on the contrary, many of them have become good friends.

Somehow, when I think of literary festivals (even Hay-on-Wye, where this is very rarely the case), the sun is always shining.

But I was uneasy as I sat down with the other guests in Southampton. Our surroundings didn't help. The Globe was an airport restaurant serving airport food. That was the best and the worst I could say of it. The bright lighting and open-plan configuration, spilling into the terminal, didn't help. We might just as well have been eating on the runway. Also, I still wasn't convinced that Alderney was a good idea. With just six weeks' notice, I hadn't had time to prepare and I still had no idea how Hawthorne would perform when he was put on a stage. Talking about Alex Rider or Sherlock Holmes was one thing, but having the subject of the book sitting next to me would put me well outside my comfort zone. And it wasn't just that. As I joined Marc, Anne and Maïssa at the table, I immediately felt that I was an outsider, that I didn't belong.

I recognised Marc Bellamy from the photograph I had seen of him on the festival website. He was even wearing the same clothes: a bottle-green jacket, an open-neck shirt with a double-sized collar and a pair of half-rim reading glasses on a gold chain around his neck. Like many of the television celebrities I had met, he was actually much smaller than he seemed on the screen and although his teeth were very white and his tan very deep, he didn't look well. Perhaps that went with his persona. After all, he specialised in

unhealthy food, railing against vegans, vegetarians and pescatarians ('the worst of the lot ... there's something fishy about them') on his show. Of course, he was only having fun, delivering his jokey insults with an exaggerated Yorkshire accent accompanied by a nudge and a wink. He was overweight – chubby rather than fat. His hair was swept back in waves with a little silver around the ears. His nose was a road map of broken blood vessels. I guessed he was about forty.

'How do!' he exclaimed when he saw us. This was actually one of his catchphrases. 'You must be Anthony and Mr Hawthorne – or is it the other way round! Hawthorne and Mr Anthony.' He laughed at that. 'Don't be shy. Come and sit down. I'm Marc. This is my assistant, Kathryn. That's Maïssa, with two dots over the *i*, and I'm talking about her name, not her forehead. And Anne Cleary – rhymes with dreary, but she's anything but! Scribblers United ... that's what we should call ourselves. You've got time for a bite. Plane's on the runway, but they haven't finished winding the elastic.' He laughed again. 'Anyway, we've already ordered. What are you going to have?'

We took our places. Hawthorne asked for a glass of water. I went for a Diet Coke.

'Horrible stuff! Be a good girl and put in the order, will you?' These last words were addressed to his assistant. She was in her early twenties, slim and a little awkward, hiding behind a pair of glasses that covered most of her face. She

had been staring at her knees, trying not to be noticed, but now she stood up and hurried away. ‘She’s a good girl,’ Marc continued, speaking in a stage whisper, shielding his mouth with the back of his hand. ‘Only just joined me. Loves my show, which is just as well. It means I don’t have to pay her so much!’

There was something quite desperate about the way he talked, as if he was always searching for the next joke just around the corner but was afraid he would never quite reach it. I didn’t quite have Hawthorne’s deductive skills, but I’d have bet good money that he was a lonely man, probably on his own, possibly divorced.

‘Hello, Anthony.’ Anne Cleary greeted me as if she knew me and I felt my heart sink as although I knew who she was, I couldn’t remember having met her.

‘How nice to see you again, Anne,’ I said.

She scowled but without malice. ‘You’ve forgotten me,’ she said, reproachfully. ‘You and I had a long chat at the Walker Books summer party a couple of years ago. That was when they were still having summer parties.’

‘You’re with Walker Books?’ I asked. They published Alex Rider.

‘Not really. I just did a one-off for them. It was a picture book. *Hedgehogs Don’t Grow on Trees.*’

‘I ate a hedgehog once,’ Marc chipped in. ‘Roasted in clay. It was actually quite nice. Served up by a couple of Gypsies.’

‘I think you mean travellers,’ Anne said.

‘They can travel all they like, love. They’re still gyppos to me!’

Anne turned back to me. ‘We talked about politics ... Tony Blair.’

‘Of course. Yes. I remember.’

‘I bet you don’t, but never mind. Names and faces! I’m exactly the same. That’s the trouble with being a writer. You spend so much time on your own and then suddenly you get fifty people at once. But it *is* nice to see you again. I thought that when I saw your name on the programme.’

I remembered her now. We’d talked for about half an hour and we’d even swapped email addresses, although that had come to nothing. She had told me that she lived in Oxford, that her husband was an artist – a portrait painter – and that she had two grown-up children, one of them at university in Bristol. She was one of those Labour voters who had become disillusioned after the Iraq War and had gone on to join the Green Party. I was annoyed with myself and examined her more carefully, determined that I wouldn’t make the same mistake the next time we met. My first thought was that she reminded me of my mother, or somebody’s mother. There was something warm, even protective, about her. The round face, the black hair cut in a sensible way, not hiding the flecks of grey, the comfortable clothes.

‘What are you doing in Alderney?’ I asked. What I meant was, why had she accepted the invitation?

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‘I don’t get invited to many festivals these days. Not like you, I’m sure. Are you talking about Alex Rider?’

‘No. I’ve written a detective story ...’ I gestured at Hawthorne on the other side of the table ‘... about him.’

‘I’m Daniel Hawthorne.’ I had never heard him offer up his first name and, looking at him, I saw that he was actually in awe. ‘I’m pleased to meet you, Anne,’ he went on. ‘My son used to love your books. He’s a bit old for them now, but when he was seven and eight I used to read them to him.’

‘Thank you!’ She smiled.

‘*Flashbang Trouble*. That was the one with the pirates. It used to make us laugh out loud.’

‘Oh! That’s one of my favourites.’

‘Mine too.’

This was a completely different Hawthorne to the one I knew and it only reminded me how distant I still was from him. I had met his ex-wife once, very briefly. I had never seen his son. But he and Anne had bonded immediately and as the two of them continued to chat, I turned to the performance poet, Maïssa Lamar, and asked: ‘How come you’re here at the airport?’

‘I am here to take the plane to Alderney!’ She picked each word carefully with a French accent that was several coats thick. Or maybe it was Cauchois. She was looking at me as if I had said something ridiculous.

‘I just meant ... I thought you’d be coming from France.’

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