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'I don't need make-up,' says Ron. He's in a straight-backed chair because Ibrahim told him you mustn't slouch on television.

'Do you not?' replies his make-up artist, Pauline Jenkins, taking brushes and palettes from her bag. She has set up a mirror on a table in the Jigsaw Room. It is framed by lightbulbs, and the glow bounces off her cerise earrings as they bob back and forth.

Ron feels the adrenalin pumping a little. This is the stuff. A bit of TV. Where are the others though? He told them they could come along 'if they fancied, no big deal', and he will be gutted if they don't show.

'They can take me as they find me,' says Ron. 'I've earned this face, it tells a story.'

'Horror story, if you don't mind me saying?' says Pauline, looking at a colour palette, and then at Ron's face. She blows him a kiss.

'Not everyone has to be beautiful,' says Ron. His friends know the interview starts at four. They'll be here soon surely?

'We're agreed there, darling,' says Pauline. 'I'm not a miracle worker. I remember you back in the day though. Handsome bugger, weren't you, if you like that sort of thing?'

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Ron grunts.

‘And I *do* like that sort of thing if I’m honest with you, right up my street. Always fighting for the working man, weren’t you, throwing your weight around?’ Pauline opens a compact. ‘You still believe in all that, do you? Up the workers?’

Ron’s shoulders go back a touch, like a bull preparing to enter a ring. ‘Still believe in it? Still believe in equality? Still believe in the power of labour? What’s your name?’

‘Pauline,’ says Pauline.

‘Still believe in the dignity of a day’s work for a fair day’s pay, Pauline? More than ever.’

Pauline nods. ‘Good oh. Then shut your mush for five minutes and let me do the job I’m paid to do, which is to remind the viewers of *South East Tonight* what a looker you are.’

Ron’s mouth opens, but, unusually for him, no words come out. Pauline starts on his foundation without further ado. ‘Dignity, my arse. Haven’t you got gorgeous eyes? Like Che Guevara if he worked on the docks.’

In his mirror, Ron sees the door to the Jigsaw Room open. Joyce walks in. He knew she wouldn’t let him down. Not least because she knows Mike Waghorn will be here. This whole thing was her idea, truth be told. She chose the file.

Ron notices that Joyce is wearing a new cardigan. She just can’t help herself.

‘You told us you weren’t going to have make-up, Ron,’ says Joyce. **Copyrighted Material**

‘They make you,’ says Ron. ‘This is Pauline.’

‘Hello, Pauline,’ says Joyce. ‘You’ve got your work cut out there.’

‘I’ve seen worse,’ says Pauline. ‘I used to work on *Casualty*.’

The door opens once again. A camera operator walks in, followed by a sound man, followed by a flash of white hair, the quiet swoosh of an expensive suit and the perfect, masculine yet subtle scent of Mike Waghorn. Ron sees Joyce blush. He would roll his eyes if he wasn’t having his concealer applied.

‘Well, here we all are, then,’ says Mike, his smile as white as his hair. ‘The name’s Mike Waghorn. The one, the only, accept no substitutes.’

‘Ron Ritchie,’ says Ron.

‘The same, the very same,’ says Mike, grasping Ron’s hand. ‘Haven’t changed a bit, have you? This is like being on safari and seeing a lion up close, Mr Ritchie. He’s a lion of a man, isn’t he, Pauline?’

‘He’s certainly something or other,’ agrees Pauline, powdering Ron’s cheeks.

Ron sees Mike turn his head slowly towards Joyce, slipping off her new cardigan with his eyes. ‘And who, might I ask, are you?’

‘I’m Joyce Meadowcroft.’ She practically curtsies.

‘I should say you are,’ says Mike. ‘You and the magnificent Mr Ritchie a couple, then, Joyce?’

‘Oh, God, no, my goodness, the thought, no, heavens no. No,’ says Joyce. ‘We’re friends. No offence, Ron.’

‘Friends indeed,’ says Mike. ‘Mike and Mike.’

‘Stop flirting, Mike,’ says Pauline. ‘No one’s interested.’

‘Oh, Joyce’ll be interested,’ says Ron.

‘I am,’ says Joyce. To herself, but just loud enough to carry.

The door opens once again, and Ibrahim pokes his head around. Good lad! Only Elizabeth missing now. ‘Am I too late?’

‘You’re just in time,’ says Joyce.

The sound man is attaching a microphone to Ron’s lapel. Ron is wearing a jacket over his West Ham shirt, at Joyce’s insistence. It is unnecessary, in his opinion. Sacrilegious, if anything. Ibrahim takes a seat next to Joyce and looks at Mike Waghorn.

‘You are very handsome, Mr Waghorn. Classically handsome.’

‘Thank you,’ says Mike, nodding in agreement. ‘I play squash, I moisturize, and nature takes care of the rest.’

‘And about a grand a week in make-up,’ says Pauline, putting the finishing touches to Ron.

‘I am handsome too, it is often remarked upon,’ says Ibrahim. ‘I think perhaps, had my life taken a different turn, I might have been a newsreader too.’

‘I’m not a newsreader,’ says Mike. ‘I’m a journalist who happens to read the news.’

Ibrahim nods. ‘A fine mind. And a nose for a story.’

‘Well, that’s why I’m here,’ says Mike. ‘As soon as I read the email, I sniffed a story. A new way of living, retirement communities, and the famous face of Ron Ritchie at the heart of it. I thought, “Yup, viewers will love a bit of that.”’

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It's been quiet for a few weeks, but Ron is delighted that the gang is back in action. The whole interview is a ruse. Designed by Joyce to lure Mike Waghorn to Coopers Chase. To see if he could help them with the case. Joyce sent an email to one of the producers. Even so, it still means that Ron is going to be on TV again, and he is very happy about that.

'Will you come to dinner afterwards, Mr Waghorn?' asks Joyce. 'We've got a table for five thirty. After the rush.'

'Please, call me Mike,' says Mike. 'And, no, I'm afraid. I try not to mix with people. You know, privacy, germs, whatnot. You understand, I'm certain.'

'Oh,' says Joyce. Ron sees her disappointment. If there is a bigger fan of Mike Waghorn anywhere in Kent or Sussex, he would like to meet them. In fact, now he really thinks about it, he wouldn't like to meet them.

'There is always a great deal of alcohol,' says Ibrahim to Mike. 'And I suspect many fans of yours will be there.'

Mike has been given pause for thought.

'And we can tell you all about the Thursday Murder Club,' says Joyce.

'The Thursday Murder Club?' says Mike. 'Sounds made up.'

'Everything is made up, when you really think about it,' says Ibrahim. 'The alcohol is subsidized by the way. They tried to stop the subsidy, but we held a meeting, a number of words were exchanged, and they thought better of it. And we have you on at seven thirty.'

Mike looks at his watch, then looks at Pauline. ‘We could probably do a quick supper?’

Pauline looks at Ron. ‘Will you be there?’

Ron looks at Joyce, who nods firmly. ‘Sounds like I will, yeah.’

‘Then we’ll stay,’ says Pauline.

‘Good, good,’ says Ibrahim. ‘There’s something we’d like to talk to you about, Mike.’

‘Which is?’ asks Mike.

‘All in good time,’ says Ibrahim. ‘I don’t wish to pull focus from Ron.’

Mike sits in an armchair opposite Ron and starts counting to ten. Ibrahim leans into Joyce.

‘He is testing the microphone level.’

‘I had worked that out,’ says Joyce, and Ibrahim nods. ‘Thank you for getting him to stay for dinner – you never know, do you?’

‘You never do know, Joyce, that is true. Perhaps the two of you will marry before the year is out. And, even if not, which is an outcome we must prepare for, I’m sure he will have plenty of information about Bethany Waites.’

The door opens once more, and Elizabeth enters the room. The gang is all here. Ron pretends he is not touched. Last time he had a gang of friends like these, they were being hospitalized by police riot shields at the Wapping print-workers’ strike. Happy days.

‘Don’t mind me,’ says Elizabeth. ‘You look different, Ron, what is it? You look . . . healthy.’

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Ron grunts, but sees Pauline smile. That's a cracking smile, to be fair to her. Is Pauline in his league? Late sixties, a bit young for him? What league is he in these days? It's been a long time since he'd checked. Either way, what a smile.

It can be hard to run a multimillion-pound drugs gang from a prison cell. But it is not, as Connie Johnson is discovering, impossible.

Most of the prison staff are on side, and why wouldn't they be? She throws enough money around. There are still a couple of guards who won't play ball, however, and Connie has already had to swallow two illegal SIM cards this week.

The diamonds, the murders, the bag of cocaine. She had been very skilfully set up, and her trial date has been set for two months' time. She is eager to keep things ticking over until then.

Perhaps she will be found guilty, perhaps she won't, but Connie likes to err on the side of optimism in all things. Plan for success, her mum used to say, although soon afterwards she died, having been hit by an uninsured van.

Above all it's good to keep busy. Routine is important in prison. Also, it is important to have things to look forward to, and Connie is looking forward to killing Bogdan. He's the reason she's in here and, eyes like mountain pools or not, he is going to have to go.

And the old guy too. The one who helped Bogdan set her up. She has a copyrighted material and his name is Ron

Ritchie. He'll have to go as well. She'll leave them until after the trial – juries don't like witnesses being murdered – but then she will kill them both.

Looking down at her phone, Connie sees that one of the men who works in the prison admin block is on Tinder. He is balding and standing next to what appears to be a Volvo of all things, but she swipes right regardless, because you never know when people might come in handy. She sees immediately that they are a match. Quelle surprise!

Connie has done a bit of research into Ron Ritchie. He was famous apparently, back in the seventies and eighties. She looks at the picture of him on her phone, his face like an unsuccessful boxer, shouting into a megaphone. Clearly a man who enjoyed the limelight.

Lucky you, Ron Ritchie, thinks Connie. You'll be famous again by the time I've finished with you.

One thing is for sure: Connie will do anything she can to remain in prison for as short a time as possible. And, once she is out, the mayhem can really begin.

Sometimes in life you simply have to be patient. Through her barred window Connie looks out over the prison yard, and to the hills beyond. She switches on her Nespresso machine.

Mike and Pauline have joined them for dinner.

Ibrahim loves it when the whole gang is together. Together, and with a mission in mind. Joyce had been adamant that they were to investigate the Bethany Waites case. Ibrahim was quick to agree. Firstly because it is an interesting case. An unsolved case. But mainly because Ibrahim has fallen in love with Joyce's new dog, Alan, and he is worried that if he upsets her, Joyce might restrict his access.

'You want a drop of red, Mike?' Ron asks, bottle raised.

'What is it?' asks Mike.

'How do you mean?'

'What wine is it?'

Ron shrugs. 'It's a red, I don't know the make.'

'OK, let's live dangerously, just this once,' says Mike, and lets Ron pour.

They have been very keen to talk to Mike Waghorn about the murder of Bethany Waites. It is assumed that he will have information that was not in the official police files. Mike doesn't know that yet, of course. He is just enjoying free wine with four harmless pensioners.

Ibrahim will be patient before he starts asking about the murder, because he knows that Joyce is excited to

meet Mike, and she has lots of other questions for him first. She has written them down in a notebook, which is in her handbag, in case she forgets any of them.

Now that Mike has a glass of unidentified red in front of him, Joyce clearly feels able to begin. 'When you read the news, Mike, is it all written down, or are you allowed to put it in your own words?'

'That's an excellent question,' says Mike. 'Perceptive, gets right to the heart of things. It is all written down, but I don't always stick to the script.'

'You've earned that right over the years,' says Joyce, and Mike agrees.

'Gets me into trouble from time to time though,' says Mike. 'They made me go on an impartiality course in Thanet.'

'Good for you,' says Elizabeth.

Ibrahim sees Joyce take a sneaky peek at the notebook in her handbag.

'Do you ever wear any special clothes when you read the news?' asks Joyce. 'Special socks or anything?'

'No,' says Mike. Joyce nods, a little disappointed, then takes another look at her book.

'What happens if you need the loo during a show?'

'For heaven's sake, Joyce,' says Elizabeth.

'I go before the show starts,' says Mike.

Fun though this is, Ibrahim wonders if it isn't time to kick off this evening's proceedings himself. 'So, Mike, we have a -'

Joyce places a hand on his arm. 'Ibrahim, forgive me, just a couple more things. What is a Member like?'

‘Who’s Amber?’ says Ron.

‘Mike’s co-host,’ says Joyce. ‘Honestly, Ron, you’re embarrassing yourself.’

‘I do that,’ says Ron. He says this directly to Pauline, who, in Ibrahim’s opinion, had very deliberately sat next to Ron at the start of dinner. Ibrahim usually sits next to Ron. No matter.

‘She’s only been there three years, but I am already starting to like her,’ says Joyce.

‘She’s terrific,’ says Mike. ‘Goes to the gym a lot, but terrific.’

‘She has lovely hair too,’ says Joyce.

‘Joyce, you should judge news presenters on their journalism,’ says Mike. ‘And not their appearance. Female presenters, particularly, have to put up with that a lot.’

Joyce nods, knocks back half a glass of white, then nods again. ‘I do take your point, Mike. I just think that you can be very talented *and* have lovely hair. Perhaps I’m shallow, but both of those things are important to me. Claudia Winkleman is a good example. You also have lovely hair.’

‘I’ll have the steak please,’ says Mike to the waiter now taking their orders. ‘Rare-to-medium rare, err on the side of rare. Though if you err on the side of medium, I’ll live.’

‘I had read you were a Buddhist, Mike?’ Ibrahim spent the morning researching their guest.

‘I am,’ says Mike. ‘Thirty-odd years.’

‘Ah,’ says Ibrahim. ‘I had been under the impression that Buddhists were vegetarians almost sure.’

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'I'm Church of England too,' says Mike. 'So I pick and choose. That's the point of being a Buddhist.'

'I stand corrected,' says Ibrahim.

Mike has started on his second glass of red, and seems ready to hold court. This is perfect.

'Tell me about this Thursday Murder Club, then,' he says.

'It's fairly hush-hush,' says Ibrahim. 'But we meet up, once a week, the four of us, to look over old police files. See if we can solve anything they were unable to.'

'Sounds like a fun hobby,' says Mike. 'Looking into old murders. Keeps you busy I bet? The old grey cells ticking over? Ron, should we get another bottle of this red?'

'It's mainly been new murders recently,' says Elizabeth, laying the bait still further.

Mike laughs. He clearly doesn't think Elizabeth is being serious. Which is probably for the best. Don't want to frighten him off just yet.

'Sounds like you don't mind a bit of trouble here and there,' says Mike.

'I've always been a magnet for trouble,' says Ron.

Pauline tops up Ron's glass. 'Well, watch yourself, Ron, because I've always *been* trouble.'

Ibrahim sees Joyce give a tiny, secret smile at this. Ibrahim decides that, before they try to move the conversation, gently and slowly, on to Bethany Waites, he has a question of his own. He turns to Pauline.

'Are you married, Pauline?' he asks.

'Widow,' says Pauline.

‘Ooh, snap!’ says Joyce. Ibrahim notes that this evening’s combination of wine and celebrity is making her quite the giddy goat.

‘How long have you been on your own?’ asks Elizabeth.

‘Six months,’ says Pauline.

‘Six months? That’s no time at all,’ says Joyce, placing her hand on Pauline’s. ‘I was still putting an extra slice in the toaster at six months.’

Was it time? Here goes, thinks Ibrahim. Time to make small, subtle shifts in the conversation so they can start talking about Bethany Waites. A delicate dance, with Ibrahim as master choreographer. He has his first move all planned. ‘So, Mike. I wonder if you –’

‘I’ll tell you this for nothing,’ says Mike, ignoring Ibrahim, wine glass circling the air. ‘If you want a murder to solve, I’ve got a name for you.’

‘Go on?’ says Joyce.

‘Bethany Waites,’ says Mike.

Mike is on board. The Thursday Murder Club always get their man. Ibrahim notes, and not for the first time, that people often seem very willing to walk into their traps.

Mike takes them through the story they already know from the police files. They nod along, pretending it’s all new to them. The brilliant young reporter, Bethany Waites. The big story she was investigating, a massive VAT fraud, and, then, her unexplained death. Her car driving off Shakespeare Cliff in the dead of night. But there is nothing new Mike is currently showing them the

final message Bethany sent him, the night before she died: *I don't say this often enough, but thank you.* Touching, certainly. But also nothing they don't already know. Perhaps the biggest revelation they are going to get from this evening is that Mike Waghorn goes to the toilet before he goes on air. Ibrahim decides to chance his arm.

'What about messages in the few weeks before that? Anything out of the ordinary? Anything the police haven't seen?'

Mike scrolls back through his messages, reading some highlights. 'Do I fancy a pint? Have I watched *Line of Duty*? There's one about the story she was working on here, but from a couple of weeks before. Interested?'

'One never knows what might help,' says Elizabeth, pouring Mike another glass of red.

Mike reads from his phone.

'*Skipper* . . . that's what she used to call me.'

'Among other things,' says Pauline.

'*Some new info. Can't say what, but it's absolute dynamite. Getting closer to the heart of this thing.*'

Elizabeth nods. 'And did she ever tell you what the new information was?'

'She did not,' says Mike. 'I'll tell you what, this red is half decent.'

PC Donna De Freitas feels like someone has just punched a hole through the clouds.

She is flooded with heat and warmth, alive with a pleasure both utterly familiar but completely new. She wants to weep with happiness, and to laugh with the uncomplicated joy of life. If she has ever felt happier, she cannot immediately bring it to mind. If the angels were to carry her away this very moment – and if her heart rate was anything to go by that was a possibility – she would let them scoop her up, while she thanked the heavens for a life well lived.

‘How was it?’ asks Bogdan, his hand stroking her hair.

‘It was OK,’ says Donna. ‘For a first time.’

Bogdan nods. ‘I think maybe I can be better.’

Donna buries her head into Bogdan’s chest.

‘Are you crying?’ asks Bogdan. Donna shakes her head without lifting it. Where’s the catch here? Perhaps this is just a one-night thing? What if that’s Bogdan’s style? He’s kind of a loner, isn’t he? What if he’s emotionally unavailable? What if there’s another girl in this bed tomorrow night? White and blonde and twenty-two?

What was he thinking? That was the one question she knew not to ask a man. They were almost always thinking nothing at all, or were they? The question, and

felt compelled to make something up. She'd still like to know though. What was going on behind those blue eyes? Eyes that could nail you to a wall. The pure blue of . . . wait a minute, is *he* crying?

Donna sits up, concerned. 'Are you crying?'

Bogdan nods.

'Why are you crying? What's happened?'

Bogdan looks at her through his gentle tears. 'I'm so happy you're here.'

Donna kisses a tear from his cheek. 'Has anyone ever seen you cry before?'

'A dentist once,' says Bogdan. 'And my mother. Can we go on another date?'

'Oh, I think so, don't you?' says Donna.

'I think so,' agrees Bogdan.

Donna rests her head on his chest again, comfortably settling on a tattoo of a knife wrapped in barbed wire. 'Maybe next time we do something other than Nando's and Laser Quest though?'

'Agreed,' says Bogdan. 'Next time perhaps I should choose instead?'

'I think that's for the best, yes,' says Donna. 'It's not my strong point. But you had fun?'

'Sure, I liked Laser Quest.'

'You really did, didn't you?' says Donna. 'That children's birthday party didn't know what had hit them.'

'It's a good lesson for them,' says Bogdan. 'Fighting is mainly hiding. It's good to learn that early.'

Donna looks over at Bogdan's bedside table. There is a body-builder's hand grip, a can of **Copyrighted Material** and the plastic

gold medal he won at Laser Quest. What has she found herself here? A fellow traveller?

‘Do you ever feel different from other people, Bogdan? Like you’re outside looking in?’

‘Well, English is my second language,’ says Bogdan. ‘And I don’t really understand cricket. Do you feel different?’

‘Yes,’ says Donna. ‘People make me feel different, I suppose.’

‘But sometimes you like to feel different maybe? Sometimes it’s good?’

‘Sometimes, of course. I’d like to choose those times myself. Most days I just want to blend in, but in Fairhaven I don’t get the chance.’

‘Everyone wants to feel special, but nobody wants to feel different,’ says Bogdan.

Just look at those shoulders. Two questions come to her at once: are Polish weddings like English weddings? And would it be OK if I rolled over and went to sleep?

‘Can I ask you a question, Donna?’ Bogdan suddenly sounds very serious.

Uh oh.

‘Of course,’ says Donna. ‘Anything.’ Anything within reason.

‘If you had to murder someone, how would you do it?’

‘Hypothetically?’ asks Donna.

‘No, for real,’ says Bogdan. ‘We are not children. You’re a police officer. How would you do it? To get away with it?’

Hmm. Is this **Copyrighted Material**? He’s a serial

murderer? That would be tough to overlook. Not impossible though, given those shoulders.

‘What’s happening here?’ asks Donna. ‘Why are you asking me that?’

‘It’s homework for Elizabeth. She wanted to know my thoughts.’

OK, that makes sense. What a relief. Bogdan is not a homicidal maniac; Elizabeth is. ‘Poison, I suppose,’ says Donna. ‘Something undetectable anyway.’

‘Yes, make it look natural,’ agrees Bogdan. ‘Make it look like not a murder.’

‘Maybe drive a car at them, late at night,’ says Donna. ‘Anything where you don’t have to touch the body, that’s where forensics will get you. Or a gun, nice and simple, one shot, *blam*, and get out quick, the whole thing away from security cameras. Plan your escape route of course, that’s essential too. No forensics, no witnesses, no body to bury, that’s how I’d do it. Phone off, or leave your phone in a cab, so it’s miles away when you’re committing the murder. Bribe a nurse, maybe get vials of blood from strangers and leave them on the body. Or . . .’

Bogdan is looking at her. Has she overshared there? Maybe move the conversation on.

‘What’s Elizabeth up to?’

‘She says someone got murdered.’

‘Of course she does,’ says Donna.

‘But murdered in a car, pushed off a cliff. Is not how I’d murder someone.’

‘A car over a cliff? OK, I can see that,’ says Donna. ‘Why is Elizabeth investigating it?’

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Bogdan shrugs. ‘Because Joyce wanted to meet someone off the TV, I think. I didn’t really understand.’

Donna nods – that sounds about right. ‘Were there any marks on the body? Like they’d been killed before the car went over the cliff?’

‘No body, just some clothes and some blood. The body was thrown from the car.’

‘That’s convenient for the killer.’ Donna was not used to this type of post-coital talk. Usually you had to hear about someone’s motorbike, or the ex whom they’d just realized they still loved. Or you had to give a reassuring pep-talk. ‘Spectacular though. If the killer wanted to send a message to someone. Difficult to ignore.’

‘I think it’s too complicated,’ says Bogdan, ‘For a murder. A car, a cliff, come on.’

‘And you’re an expert in murder now?’

‘I read a lot,’ says Bogdan.

‘What’s your favourite book ever?’

‘*The Velveteen Rabbit*,’ says Bogdan. ‘Or Andre Agassi’s autobiography.’

Maybe Bogdan could kill Carl, her ex? She’s fantasized about killing Carl a few times. Could Bogdan push Carl’s stupid Mazda over a cliff? But, even as the thought flashes through her mind, and she stretches like a cat finding a patch of sunshine, she realizes she no longer cares about Carl. Be the bigger person, Donna. Let Carl live.

‘She could have asked me and Chris to help,’ says Donna. ‘We’d have been able to take a look at it. Do you remember the **Copyrighted Material**

Bogdan shrugs. 'Bethany something. But they like to do these things by themselves.'

'Don't they just,' agrees Donna and throws her arm across his endless chest. Rarely has she felt so thrillingly puny. 'I like talking about murder with you, Bogdan.'

'I like talking about murder with you too, Donna. Although I don't think this was murder. Too convenient.'

Donna looks up, one more time, into those eyes. 'Bogdan, do you *promise* that's not the last time we're ever going to have sex? Because I'd really like to go to sleep now, and then wake up with you and do it again.'

'I promise,' says Bogdan, his hand stroking her hair.

This is how you're supposed to fall asleep, thinks Donna. How has she not known about this before? Safe and happy and sated. And murders and Elizabeth, and tattoos, and being different and being the same, and cars and cliffs and clothes, and tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.

Joyce

I will admit that the murder of Bethany Waites was my idea.

We were all looking through the files for a new Thursday Murder Club case. There was a spinster in Rye in the early eighties, for example, who had died, leaving three unidentified skeletons and a suitcase containing fifty thousand pounds in her cellar. That was Elizabeth's favourite and, I agree, it would have been quite jolly, but, as soon as I saw the name 'Bethany Waites' on another file, my mind was made up. I don't put my foot down often, but, when I do, it stays down. Elizabeth sulked, but the others knew not to argue. I'm not just here for tea and biscuits you know.

I remembered Bethany Waites, of course, and I had read a piece Mike Waghorn had written in the *Kent Messenger* about her murder, so I thought to myself, hello, Joyce, this looks suspicious, *and* you might get to meet Mike Waghorn.

Is that so wrong?

I have been watching Mike Waghorn on *South East Tonight* for as long as I can remember. If anyone gets murdered or ~~Copyrighted Material~~ in the South East,

Mike will be there, with that big smile on his face. Actually, he doesn't smile for the murders. Then he does a serious face, which he is also very good at. I actually prefer his serious face, so if there has been a murder, at least that's a silver lining. He looks a little bit like if Michael Bubl  were more my age.

Mike has done *South East Tonight* for thirty-five years now, but every five years or so they get a new woman to host it with him. Which is where Bethany Waites came in.

Bethany Waites was blonde and Northern and she died in a car that drove over Shakespeare Cliff, near Dover. (It's just off the A20, I looked it up, because I suspect we'll be going there at some point.) This must have been almost ten years ago. You would have thought it was just a suicide, cliffs and cars and what have you, but there were all sorts of other things. Someone had been seen in the car with her just beforehand, there were ambiguous messages on her phone, the waters were muddied. So the police called it murder and, looking through their files, we were inclined to agree.

It was very big news around here at the time. Not an awful lot happens in Kent, so you can imagine. They had a special tribute show and I remember Mike crying, and Fiona Clemence having to put an arm around him on air. Fiona was the new co-host by then.

Fiona Clemence is so famous now, lots of people don't realize she started on *South East Tonight*. I asked Mike if he watches her quiz *Stop the Clock*, but he said he doesn't. Which must make Copyrighted Material the country who

doesn't. Pauline – she's the make-up artist, and we will get back to her – said he's just jealous, but Mike said he doesn't watch TV.

I will be honest with you. I'd hoped that this evening I would flirt with Mike, and he would tell me how much he liked my necklace, and I would blush and giggle, and Elizabeth would roll her eyes.

But nothing doing, I'm afraid.

'All wag, no horn,' was how Ron put it. Mike gave me a peck on the cheek, and at one point he brushed my hand and there was electricity, but I think that was the combination of the deep carpet outside the restaurant and my new cardigan.

He interviewed Ron this afternoon: they're doing a piece about retirement living on *South East Today*. This was all Elizabeth's suggestion; she made me email one of the producers. If you want to lure someone, go to Elizabeth.

I have to admit Ron was actually rather good. He knows when to turn it on. He talked about loneliness and friendship and security, and I was very proud of him for being so open. You can see that Ibrahim rubs off on him. At one point he got distracted and started talking about West Ham, but Mike steered him back on course.

What we really wanted out of this whole plan, though, was information about Bethany Waites, and Mike was certainly happy to chat. He was three sheets to the wind, and he told us a lot of things we already knew from the files, but he was

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The basic facts are these. Bethany had been investigating a huge VAT fraud. To do with importing and exporting mobile phones. The scheme had made millions.

A woman named Heather Garbutt had been behind it. She worked for a man named Jack Mason, a local crook, and it was widely believed that she was managing the operation on his behalf. Heather later went to jail for the fraud, but Jack Mason did not. Lucky Jack Mason.

One March evening, Bethany had sent Mike a text message, and Mike had expected to see her bright and breezy the next morning. But the next morning was never to come for Bethany.

That night she had been seen leaving her apartment building – we used to call it a block of flats, didn't we – at about ten p.m., and had then gone AWOL for several hours, no one knows where. She next reappeared on a CCTV camera near Shakespeare Cliff at nearly three a.m. She had an unidentified passenger in her car.

The next time the car is seen is at the bottom of Shakespeare Cliff, wrecked, and containing her blood and her clothes but not her body. Which makes me suspicious, but is apparently common, with the tides around there. A year later, without the faintest sign of her, and with her bank accounts having not been touched, a Presumption of Death certificate had been issued. Again, par for the course, but still you must ask yourself, where's the body? I didn't say that out loud to Mike, because you can tell Bethany Waites means a great deal to him.

He gave us one **Copyrighted Material** piece of information. A text

message Bethany had sent him. She had discovered some new evidence, something important. Mike never found out what it was.

Heather Garbutt was obviously the key suspect, with all the evidence Bethany had been gathering about her, but they couldn't link her to Bethany's death in any way. Try as they might, they couldn't link Jack Mason either. Soon enough, Heather Garbutt was in prison for the fraud, and everyone moved on to something else.

But Mike never moved on. The key questions, as Mike sees them, are:

What was the new evidence Bethany messaged him about? It was nowhere in the court documents, but had she kept a record somewhere? Would it link Jack Mason to the crime maybe? He is still a free man today. A very rich one too.

Why did Bethany leave her apartment at ten p.m. that evening? Was she going to meet someone? To confront someone? And why did it take her more than four hours to reach Shakespeare Cliff? She must have stopped somewhere, but where? Did she meet someone?

And finally, of course, who was the passenger in her car?

There's enough for us to be getting on with there. I could tell even Elizabeth was taking an interest by the end.

After that we all had a few more drinks. Pauline and Ron shared a dessert, which might sound normal to you, but I've never seen Ron willingly share food, let alone a Banoffee Pie. **Copyrighted Material**

Before we knew it, it was nearly eight p.m.! Alan was beside himself when I got in. I say ‘beside himself’: he was curled up on the sofa and raised an eyebrow at me that said, ‘What sort of time is this for my dinner, you dirty stop-out?’ You know how dogs can be. I had brought him back some steak though, so that soon changed his tune. He wolfed it down without a backwards glance. Alan is many things, but he is clearly not a Buddhist.

I am Googling Heather Garbutt and listening to the World Service. She is difficult to Google, because there’s also an Australian hockey player called Heather Garbutt, and most of the results are about her. I actually ended up quite interested in the hockey player, and I follow her on Instagram now. She has three very beautiful children.

Heather Garbutt is still in prison (not the hockey player, but you know that). In fact, it turns out she is in Darwell Prison, which might work out very nicely for all concerned. Because, of course, we already know someone in Darwell Prison. I’ve messaged Ibrahim with an idea that he will like very much.

They are talking about cryptocurrency on the World Service now, so I’m going to look that up too. Bitcoin, that’s the big one. It sounds very interesting, and it’s all the rage according to this programme, but quite risky. They just spoke to someone who made a million from it before his sixteenth birthday, and he was all in favour.

Gerry and I used to have some Premium Bonds, but that’s as far as I’ve experimented with money. Maybe I should live a little? Do something different? Be someone different? Different though, what? What am I?

Who am I? I'm Joyce Meadowcroft, and that will do me to be getting on with.

Night-time is for questions without answers, and I have no time for questions without answers. Leave that to Ibrahim. I like questions you can answer.

Who killed Bethany Waites? Now that's a proper question.

Morning has broken at Coopers Chase. From the window of Elizabeth's flat you can see the dog-walkers, and a few latecomers rushing to Over-Eighties Zumba. The air hums with friendly greetings, and the sounds of bird-song and Amazon delivery vans.

'Why you keep looking at your phone?' asks Bogdan. He is sitting across the chessboard from Stephen, but has been distracted by Elizabeth.

'I get messages, dear,' says Elizabeth. 'I have friends.'

'You only get messages from Joyce,' says Bogdan. 'Or me. And we are both here.'

Stephen makes a move. 'There you go, champ.'

'He's quite right,' says Joyce, sipping from a mug. 'Is this tea Yorkshire?'

Elizabeth gives a 'How on earth would I know?' shrug, and goes back to the documents laid out in front of her. Evidence from the trial of Heather Garbutt. Readily available to the public if you're happy to wait three months or so. Or readily available in a couple of hours if you are Elizabeth. She must stop looking at her phone. The last message had read:

You can't ignore me forever, Elizabeth. We have a lot to speak about.

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She has started receiving threatening messages, from an anonymous number. The first had arrived yesterday, and it read:

Elizabeth, I know what you've done.

Well, you could narrow it down a bit, she had thought. More had come through since. Who was sending her these messages? And, more importantly, why? No point worrying about it now though. No doubt all would become clear eventually, and, in the meantime, she has the murder of Bethany Waites to solve.

'I really think it is Yorkshire,' Joyce again. 'I'm almost sure. You must know?'

Elizabeth continues to look through the documents. Financial records, dense and unyielding. Paper trails showing non-existent mobile phones leaving the docks at Dover, and the same non-existent phones coming back weeks later. Reams and reams of VAT claims. Bank statements totalling millions. Money disappearing to offshore accounts, and then nothing. Bethany Waites had uncovered the lot. You had to admire it.

'Never mind,' says Joyce. 'You're busy. I'll take a look in the cupboard.'

Elizabeth nods. This paperwork was enough to get Heather Garbutt convicted of fraud. But did it also contain a clue to Bethany Waites's death? If it did, no one had yet found it. Elizabeth didn't fancy her own chances either, not really her area, all this. So what to do? She has a thought.

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‘Yes, it’s Yorkshire,’ shouts Joyce from the kitchen. ‘I knew it.’

Joyce had been insistent that she was coming round to visit. And it doesn’t matter how high up one might have been in MI5 or MI6, it doesn’t matter how many times you’ve been shot at by a sniper, or met the Queen, you won’t stop Joyce once she has her mind set on something. Elizabeth had acted quickly.

Stephen’s dementia is getting worse, Elizabeth knows that. But the more he slips from her grasp, the tighter she wants to hold him. If she is looking at him, surely he can’t disappear?

Stephen is at his very best when Bogdan comes around to play chess, so Elizabeth has invited Bogdan over, and taken the risk with Joyce. Perhaps he will be on fine form. And perhaps that will be enough to keep the charade going for another few weeks. She has given Stephen a shave and washed his hair. He no longer finds this unusual. Elizabeth looks over to the chessboard.

Bogdan has his chin in his hands, contemplating his next move. There is something different about him.

‘Are you using a different shower gel, Bogdan?’ Elizabeth asks.

‘Don’t put the boy off,’ says Stephen. ‘I have him in a funk here.’

‘I used an unperfumed body scrub,’ says Bogdan. ‘Is new.’

‘Hmm,’ says Elizabeth. ‘That’s not it.’

‘It’s very feminine,’ says Joyce. ‘It’s not unperfumed.’

‘I play chess,’ says Bogdan. ‘No distractions please.’

'I feel like you're keeping a secret,' says Elizabeth. 'Stephen, is Bogdan keeping a secret?'

'Lips are sealed,' says Stephen.

Elizabeth returns to the documents. Something here got Bethany Waites killed. By Heather Garbutt? Elizabeth doubts it very much. Heather Garbutt's boss, Jack Mason, is ostensibly a scrap-metal dealer, but in reality is one of the most well-connected criminals on the South Coast. Heather Garbutt seems like a soldier, not a general. So was Jack Mason the General? Is his name somewhere in these papers? Time for her plan B.

'How's Joanna, Joyce?' Elizabeth asks. Joanna is Joyce's daughter.

'She's doing a Skydive for Cancer,' says Joyce.

'Be lovely to catch up with her,' says Elizabeth.

Joyce sees straight through this. 'Do you mean, it would be lovely for her to take a look through those documents, because you don't understand them?'

'Wouldn't do any harm, would it?' Joanna, and her colleagues, will get through this stuff in no time, Elizabeth is sure. Maybe turn up a name or two.

'I'll ask her,' says Joyce. 'I'm in her bad books because I said I didn't see the point of sushi. Why *do* you keep looking at your phone, by the way?'

'Don't be tiresome, Joyce,' says Elizabeth. 'You're not Miss Marple.'

On cue, Elizabeth's phone buzzes. She doesn't look. Joyce nails her with the minutest raise of an eyebrow, then turns to Stephen, with a much gentler look.

'It's very nice to see you, Stephen,' says Joyce.